

Making the Grade



A Guide to In-Demand Teaching Careers

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Teacher Shortages

Teaching is always an in-demand profession, but the teacher shortage in Alabama is particularly troubling. Turnover in the profession is high and the retirement rate is steady. The employment of high school teachers, according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) (BLS), is expected to rise 8 percent by 2026, but particular teaching specializations are in even greater demand. For example, in 2016 the state began its school year with a [shortage of 93 math teachers](#).

According to [Marketwatch](#)'s Jacob Passy, "Back in 1975, more than one-fifth (22 percent) of college students majored in education — a higher share than any other major. By 2015 though, fewer than one in 10 Americans pursuing higher education devoted their studies to education." The rate of female college students studying education has dropped from 32 to 11 percent in the past 40 years. Forty-eight states and the District of Columbia report shortages of math teachers, alone.

In 2016, Alabama Sen. Del Marsh [declared the state's shortage a crisis and wrote](#) "If the demand is there, why can't we keep teachers?"

Many areas experiencing teacher shortages are attempting to attract teachers with signing bonuses. This was spurred by a [2015 report](#) on Alabama's teacher shortages, which included findings that shortages are acute in the most rural and most urban areas of Alabama. In 2015, one Tuscaloosa district was offering a \$5,000 bonus for math teachers. The report also called for a paid teacher mentorship program that offers a \$1,000 stipend to senior teachers who mentor teachers new to the classroom.

Across the country, teachers have been rallying for greater support, better pay and more generous legislation from state and local governments. A sea change is on the horizon for the profession.

Specializations in Need

Certain specializations in the teaching field are more in need than others. Here are some examples of specializations that frequently experience shortages:

Special Education

Special education teachers work with students who have a range of disabilities and disorders. In addition to teaching academic subjects, they may also teach basic skills like communication and life skills. The 2017 median pay for special education teachers was \$58,980, according to the [BLS](#), and there will be an increase of 8 percent in employment by 2026. Some subspecialties in special education require additional training and certification.

Teacher Leader

Also called instructional coordinators, teacher leaders oversee curricula and teacher standards in the school. They develop instructional material and often serve as a liaison between a group of teachers (a department, for example) and the administration. Teacher leaders tend to have a measure of seniority and typically a master's degree or more. [The median pay](#) for a teacher leader in 2017 was \$63,750 and the need for teacher leaders is expected to grow by 11 percent by 2026.

Early Childhood

Kindergarten and elementary school teachers are in high demand. Often these teachers work in teams. Early childhood teachers tend to teach all the basic subjects—like math, science, reading and writing. Sometimes early childhood teachers specialize in a subject, like art, and serve the whole school. In 2017, the median income of a kindergarten or elementary school teacher was \$56,900, according to the [BLS](#).

High School Specializations in Demand ---

As previously mentioned, some specializations have a higher demand in Alabama. Students who prepare for the following specializations can walk out of graduation with a teaching contract in hand.

According to the BLS, there were 15,610 people employed as teachers in Alabama in 2017. The median pay in the state was \$49,790. Subject-matter teachers tend to work 10 months out of the year. During the summer months, most teachers are expected to devote some time to professional development and classroom/curriculum prep.

The following subject matters are the most in demand:

Physical Education

Are you passionate about sports? Are you interested in helping others live a healthy lifestyle? Alabama needs PE teachers. The state is known for its passion for high school and college sports. Many PE teachers also coach sports teams and are expected to give lessons on health and hygiene.

Math and Science

Teachers specializing in STEM or STEAM (science, technology, engineering—sometimes the arts—and math) subjects are expected to be some of the highest in demand as technology and science rapidly evolves. STEAM subjects include math at all levels, chemistry, biology, computer science, physics, statistics, and all of the fine arts.

Social Sciences

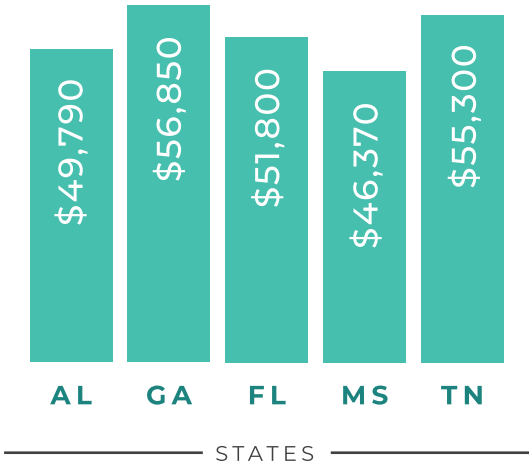
Social science teachers teach classes that study human society and social relationships. Those classes include economics, history, politics, psychology, geography and others. While some social science teachers teach several subjects, others specialize.

Education Requirements

To be a teacher in Alabama, you need a bachelor’s degree and certification that involves both coursework and student teaching.

Teacher testing in Alabama is handled by [the Alabama Educator Certification Assessment Program \(AECAP\)](#). Three basic skills assessments (applied mathematics, reading for information, and writing) and the Praxis II exams for subject proficiency are required. There are over 90 different tests ranging from agriculture to world languages. If you test in Alabama, your score report will be automatically sent to the state department of education.

A Visual Look at Salaries



The Importance of a PE Teacher

Teaching students how to care for their bodies with good nutrition, regular activity, good hygiene and other self-care strategies is becoming increasingly important in this age of rising childhood obesity and screen time replacing play time.

According to data from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), the percentage of U.S. children and adolescents affected by obesity has more than tripled since the 1970s. Data from 2015–2016 show that nearly 1 in 5 school-age children and young people (6 to 19 years) in the United States has obesity.

The organization identifies the following main causes of childhood obesity:

- Genetics
- Metabolism—how your body changes food and oxygen into energy it can use.
- Community and neighborhood design and safety.
- Short sleep duration.
- Eating and physical activity behaviors

The CDC also recommends that schools develop a policy that students get 60 minutes of physical activity daily, but the [“death of recess”](#) is happening all over the country with recess time being eroded by the demand for time to prep for standardized tests.

So, with recess disappearing, PE class may be the only consistent opportunity that students have for regular rigorous activity. In class you can help them offset the hours spent on computers and phones and teach them the benefits of teamwork and sportsmanship.

Most PE programs are about more than fitness and sports. Nutrition, sex education, and even mindfulness are other subjects covered in gym class.

Physical activity has proven to reduce stress. As students are increasingly pushed to perform on standardized tests and are given copious amounts of homework, the outlet provided in gym class could be a welcome chance to unwind a bit.

Physical Education Teacher Duties

PE teachers in elementary school teach activities that will help the growing children improve coordination, teach teamwork, inspire a love of physical activity and sports, and teach good habits.

PE teachers of older students tend to work as part of a department where each teacher has different skills and experience. So, rather than teaching general sports and fitness, you'd be

teaching those sports and skills that are your choice, strong point or assignment. Many teachers also serve as a coach of school sports. Academics of health and nutrition also factor in to older students' PE education.



Payscale reports that the median pay for a PE teacher is **\$42,673**, nationwide.

All PE teachers work with administrators to implement school policies and procedures. They also communicate with parents when there are questions or concerns about a student's work in class.

The role of a PE teacher is important beyond the field or gym because [studies have proven](#) that active students are better students. After 20 minutes of physical activity, students tested better in reading, spelling and math. Students with regular physical activity are 20 percent more likely to earn an A in math and English.

With the “death of recess” it's possible that for some students, PE class is the only time they are active, including students who do not live in safe neighborhoods or who are over-scheduled with sedentary activities.

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Job alternatives for physical education teachers include:

- Exercise physiologist
- Recreational therapist
- Physical therapist
- Nutrition and health technician
- Athletic trainer/gym instructor
- Home healthcare aid
- Fitness trainer
- Aerobics or kinesiology instructor

A Credentialed PE Teacher

Many schools hire PE teachers with a background in education but not one that specializes in PE. Or they repurpose a classroom teacher to serve as a PE instructor.

However, bachelor's and master's degrees specifically targeted to physical education are available. In those programs, you will learn the latest in educational theory, best practices and curriculum planning. Also included are courses on first aid and safety (in the gym and on the playing field), health, psychology and educational development, and special education.

In Alabama, you are required to have a teaching certificate and a teaching license that must be renewed every five years.

A teacher must be well-versed in the four content standards for PE that were established by the [Alabama Department of Education in 2009](#):

- **Skill Development:** Demonstrates competency in motor skills and movement patterns needed to perform physical activities
- **Cognitive Development:** Demonstrates an understanding of movement concepts, principle strategies, and tactics in relation to the performance and learning of physical activities
- **Social Development:** Exhibits responsible personal and social behavior and values physical activity for challenge, social expression, enjoyment, health, and self-expression
- **Physical Activity and Health:** Participates regularly in physical activity and achieves a health-enhancing level of physical fitness

Bridging the Gap: --- Technology and Special Education

Every student can benefit from a personalized approach to their education, especially for students who require special education services. Technology is now making it easier for teachers and students to deliver an education that works with each student’s unique needs.

Nationwide, the number of 6- to 21-year-old students classified as having autism rose 165 percent between the 2005-06 and 2014-15 school years. according to [EdWeek](#). (Wyoming did not report numbers for 2014-15.)

Students with other health impairments—a category that can include attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, health issues such as epilepsy or mobility impairments, or mental-health issues such as bipolar disorder—increased by about 51 percent over that same 10-year span.

Those two categories now account for a little more than 1 in 5 school-age children covered under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act nationwide.

At one time, autism was considered a “low incidence” disability, John Eisenberg, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Student Services at Virginia Department of Ed told Edweek. Now, those students make up the fourth-largest disability category in the state.

“What we’re seeing is that about half of that population are kids with pretty severe disabilities, major behavior issues, medical issues; they’re probably some of the most complicated issues that school divisions face,” said Eisenberg, who served as president of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education. “The costs associated with educating kids with disabilities has significantly increased.”



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Differentiated learning, which can oftentimes allow for a student with special needs to remain in a mainstream classroom, saving the school significant costs, is increasingly made possible with advancements in technology.



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According to [the International Society for Technology in Education](#) (ISTE) integrating students with disabilities into mainstream classes with the use of technology has positive outcomes for the students, typically. “These capabilities allow students with special needs to learn without a special curriculum. They can consume — and learn — the same materials as their peers, which helps prepare them for the same assessments. Additionally, being on the same timeline and curriculum as their peers can help ensure that students with special needs develop positive self-esteem and the skills they need to succeed after graduation.”

Technology and Special Education

Text-to-speech programs

Many web browsers have text-to-speech capabilities. Text-to-speech is helpful not only for those who are blind or have low vision, but also for a variety of other learners, including those who struggle with decoding and those who prefer to listen to audio.

They can also be helpful for students with learning disabilities, like dyslexia, that slow them down as readers and make them fall behind in their classwork.

Some nonverbal students can also use text-to-speech to communicate.

Dictation programs

On the other end of the spectrum from text-to-speak, many programs allow you to dictate content while the program transcribes your words. These programs would be helpful for a student with motor skills impairment, for example, and any other disability that prevents a student from using a typewriter or pen.

Touchboards/touchscreens

Adaptive apps paired with tablets can help students communicate and learn. They're highly portable, lighter than most laptops and usually less expensive than a laptop, too.

The ISTE blog described how a tablet helped a nonverbal third-grade student named Lilly finally attend classes with other third-graders.

“In one of our introductory meetings with Lilly, my colleague Rachael sat next to her with an augmentative communication system on a tablet, demonstrating to the family how we might be able to support Lilly’s communication,” Robin Pegg, assistive technology consultant at Eaton Regional Education Service Agency, told the ISTE. “Lilly was craning her neck, trying to see what Rachael was doing. Rachael then handed Lilly the device, and in that first meeting, Lilly created sentences. Nobody knew she could do that.”

Virtual learning

Nowadays, classrooms are no longer restrained to schools. You can have a classroom anywhere you have an internet connection. Students with disabilities that cause them to miss school don't need to fall behind on their schoolwork or feel detached from their classes. Whether it's as simple as Skyping in to their class or watching YouTube videos of missed lectures or the use of dedicated software created specifically for distance learning, students who have to work from home or from a hospital can still stay on track with their schooling.

Education Requirements

The [Alabama Department of Education's Office of Teaching and Leading](#) provides information about the requirements for working as a special educator in Alabama. The ALSDE requires teachers to have completed a bachelor's degree and a teacher preparation program, which can be done concurrently at select institutions. All degrees and certificates earned must be from accredited institutions.

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