

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Early Childhood Education Career Pathway Guide

Early Childhood Education

Preschool Teacher

Kindergarten Teacher

Elementary School Teacher



Early Childhood Education Degree Overview

The Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education at GCU is a faith-integrated teacher-preparation degree built around one goal: getting you in front of young learners as a licensed educator. From your first practicum hours to your final student teaching placement, the program is designed to help prepare you to work with children from birth through third grade.

103,800

Projected openings for kindergarten and elementary teachers each year from 2024 through 2034¹

\$62K+

Median annual wage for kindergarten and elementary school teachers, May 2024²

3

Distinct classroom career pathways from one foundational degree

What You'll Study

- **Child Development, Birth to Age Eight** — the developmental milestones young learners move through, and how to recognize and respond to typical and atypical patterns
- **Early Literacy and the Science of Reading** — phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary and comprehension strategies that carry a learner from first sounds to fluent reading
- **Instructional Planning and Classroom Management** — standards-based lesson design and the day-to-day routines that keep a classroom running smoothly
- **Assessing Young Learners** — traditional and authentic assessment tools used to track and report student progress
- **Supporting Diverse Learners** — foundational strategies for English language learners and children with exceptionalities
- **Christian Worldview Integration** — faith-based values and character education woven into teacher preparation coursework

¹ COVID-19 has adversely affected the global economy and data from 2020 to 2023 may be atypical compared to prior years. Accordingly, data shown is effective September 2025, which can be found here: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, [Kindergarten and Elementary School Teachers](#), retrieved June 2026.

² The earnings referenced were reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), [Kindergarten and Elementary Teachers](#), as of May 2024, retrieved June 2026. Due to COVID-19, data from 2020 to 2023 may be atypical compared to prior years. BLS calculates the median using salaries of workers nationwide with varying levels of education and experience. It does not reflect the earnings of GCU graduates as Elementary Teachers, nor does it reflect the earnings of workers in one city or region of the country or a typical entry-level salary. Median income is the statistical midpoint for the range of salaries in a specific occupation. It is very unlikely that a median salary will reflect an entry-level salary. It represents what you would earn if you were paid more money than half the workers in an occupation, and less than half the workers in an occupation. It may give you a basis to estimate what you might earn at some point if you enter this career. Grand Canyon University can make no guarantees on individual graduates' salaries. Your employability will be determined by numerous factors over which GCU has no control, such as the employer the graduate chooses to apply to, the graduate's experience level, individual characteristics, skills, etc. against a pool of candidates.

CORE COMPETENCIES YOU'LL BUILD

- Standards-based lesson planning
- Classroom management and child guidance
- Early literacy and numeracy instruction
- Authentic and traditional assessment methods
- Family and community communication
- Supporting children with exceptionalities and English language learners



Individualized support helps every learner build core literacy and writing skills

Three Career Pathways

One Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education degree can point toward three different classrooms. The pathway you lean into shapes which age group you'll spend your days with, what a typical lesson looks like and which part of this program's coursework and field placements will matter most to you. Within this program, classroom preparation centers on the 15-week student teaching placement spanning birth through grade three.

PATHWAY 01 • THE EARLIEST LEARNERS

Preschool Teacher

Preschool teachers work with children younger than kindergarten age, using play, hands-on exploration and routine to build early language, motor and social skills. This pathway focuses on child development coursework and practicum hours completed in a birth-through-preschool setting.

TYPICAL AGE GROUP

Birth through age 5 (pre-kindergarten)

PATHWAY 02 • THE BRIDGE YEAR

Kindergarten Teacher

Kindergarten teachers sit at the hinge point between early childhood and formal schooling — introducing the foundational literacy, numeracy, and classroom routines that carry into elementary grades. This pathway draws heavily on the program's instructional planning and early literacy coursework.

TYPICAL AGE GROUP

Kindergarten, generally age 5–6

MEDIAN WAGE

\$61,430/year, May 2024²

JOB OUTLOOK

Reported jointly with elementary teachers, about 103,800 openings projected each year, 2024–2034¹

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Elementary School Teacher

Elementary school teachers plan instruction across core subjects, track progress with formal assessment, and manage a classroom of students who are starting to work more independently.

TYPICAL AGE GROUP	Grade one through grade three within this program's scope, although some elementary teachers teach through grade 8
MEDIAN WAGE	\$62,340/year, May 2024 ²
JOB OUTLOOK	About 103,800 openings projected each year, 2024–2034 ¹

Quick Comparison Table

FACTOR	PRESCHOOL TEACHER	KINDERGARTEN TEACHER	ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER
Typical Age Group	Birth–age 5	Age 5–6	Grade 1–3 (program scope)
Median Annual Wage, May 2024	—	\$61,430 ²	\$62,340 ²
Job Outlook, 2024–2034	—	Combined w/ elementary, about –2% ¹	Combined w/ kindergarten, about –2% ¹
Annual Openings	—	~103,800/year, combined ¹	~103,800/year, combined ¹
Field Experience Emphasis in This Program	Birth-through-preschool practicum	Early literacy & transition coursework	15-week student teaching placement

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Where You'll Work

Common Work Settings

- **Public Elementary Schools** — the largest employer of early childhood educators. Teach foundational literacy, numeracy and social-emotional skills to young learners
- **Private & Faith-Based Schools** — independent and religious schools serving preschool through early-elementary grades, often valuing a faith-integrated approach to teaching
- **Head Start & Early Learning Programs** — federally funded programs serving children from birth through preschool age, with a strong focus on school readiness and family engagement
- **Charter Schools** — schools serving early childhood through elementary grades, often built around specialized instructional models
- **District-Run Preschool Programs** — school-district-operated early childhood programs, frequently coordinated with special education and early-intervention services
- **Online & Hybrid Elementary Programs** — virtual or blended elementary programs that apply the same instructional planning and assessment skills in a remote setting



From Head Start classrooms to elementary schools, GCU graduates teach across many settings

Licensure

State Licensure: Critical Reminder

Licensure requirements for early childhood and elementary educators vary by state and are subject to change. While GCU's program is designed to build the academic and clinical foundation many states require, it is your responsibility to verify current licensure requirements with your state's department of education before entering the classroom. Review the program's State Disclosures page for state-specific notes. Requirements differ in areas including:

- Minimum practicum and student-teaching hours for initial licensure
- Required state and national certification exams (for example, Praxis)
- Fingerprint clearance and background-check requirements
- Continuing education requirements for licensure renewal
- Reciprocity rules for teaching across state lines
- How “early childhood” and “elementary” licensure bands are defined in your state

Key Organizations & Resources

- **NAEYC** (National Association for the Education of Young Children) — naeyc.org · Sets professional standards for early childhood education and offers program accreditation and professional development resources
- **AAQEP** (Association for Advancing Quality in Educator Preparation) — aaqep.org · The programmatic accreditor for GCU's College of Education teacher-preparation programs
- **Your State Department of Education / Licensing Board** — find state-specific certification requirements, required exams and renewal rules — required reading before you student teach
- **Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)** — exceptionalchildren.org · Professional resources for educators supporting children with exceptionalities

TYPICAL INITIAL LICENSURE REQUIREMENTS

- Bachelor's degree from an accredited teacher-preparation program
- Completion of required practicum/field-experience hours
- Completion of a supervised student teaching placement
- Passing score on required state certification exam(s)
- Fingerprint clearance/background check
- Institutional recommendation from GCU

Your Path to Licensure Checklist

Earning your teaching licensure starts well before your student teaching placement. Use this checklist to stay on track from your first semester through your first day in front of your own classroom.

Freshman & Sophomore Year

- ☒ Connect with your student services counselor to map out your general education and major coursework
- ☒ Begin foundational coursework in child development and the early childhood teaching profession
- ☒ Start your state's fingerprint clearance and/or background-check process early, since several practicum courses require it
- ☒ Join a future-educators club or similar student organization to start building a professional network
- ☒ Start a teaching portfolio to collect lesson plans, reflections and other artifacts from coursework
- ☒ Begin completing the embedded practicum/field-experience hours required in several major courses

Junior Year

- ☒ Confirm your target state's licensure requirements and exam expectations with your advisor
- ☒ Seek field placements in more than one setting (for example, a preschool and a kindergarten classroom) to broaden your experience
- ☒ Start building relationships with cooperating teachers and faculty who may later serve as references
- ☒ Review the program's State Disclosures page to confirm your state aligns with this licensure pathway



From day one, every classroom experience adds to your teaching portfolio

Senior Year — Student Teaching & Licensure

- ✓ Complete required prerequisite coursework before your student teaching placement
- ✓ Confirm your 15-week student teaching placement in a preschool-through-grade-three classroom
- ✓ Register for and complete any state-required certification exams
- ✓ Request your institutional recommendation from GCU once student teaching is complete
- ✓ Apply for your state teaching certificate/licensure through your state's department of education
- ✓ Begin your job search, using real job descriptions to confirm you meet each district's specific requirements

WHAT MAKES A STRONG CANDIDATE

- Documented practicum hours across more than one early childhood setting
- Strong references from cooperating teachers and faculty
- A teaching portfolio with sample lesson plans and reflections
- Experience working with English language learners or children with exceptionalities
- Clear fingerprint clearance/background check on file
- A clear, grounded answer to “why early childhood education?”

Questions To Ask Before You Enroll

Choosing a teacher-preparation program shapes the next several years of your training and the classroom you'll eventually lead. Come prepared with questions — it signals to university counselors that you're a serious, informed applicant, and it gets you better answers.

About the Program & Curriculum

- What is the program's current accreditation status, and when is it next reviewed?
- How are practicum and field-experience hours distributed across the curriculum?
- Does the program align with my state's specific licensure and endorsement requirements?
- What grade bands and settings will my student teaching placement cover?
- How does the program integrate character education or faith-based values into coursework?

About Field Placements

- How are field placements and student teaching sites selected, and do students have input?
- Will I complete placements in more than one setting (for example, preschool and elementary)?
- Is fingerprint clearance required before certain courses, and how far in advance should I apply?
- What support is available if a placement isn't going well?

About Outcomes & Support

- What is the program's pass rate on required state certification exams, if available?
- What academic advising and tutoring support are available to education majors?
- Is there a formal mentorship program connecting students with current teachers or alumni?
- How does the college support students who may need accommodations during practicum or student teaching?

About Finances & Timeline

- What is the total cost of attendance, including any fees tied to fingerprint clearance or exams?
- Are scholarships available specifically for education majors?
- How does enrollment status (full-time vs part-time) affect time to completion?
- What financial aid options are available, and how do I apply?

RED FLAGS TO WATCH FOR

- Program cannot confirm current accreditation status
- Vague or evasive answers about licensure exam pass rates
- Field placements limited to a single grade band or setting
- No dedicated academic advisor for education majors
- Unclear answers about whether the program meets your specific state's licensure requirements

BEFORE YOU APPLY

- Confirm your state's licensure requirements on your state department of education's website
- Review the program's State Disclosures page at gcu.edu
- Talk with a university counselor about your transfer credits and timeline
- Start your fingerprint clearance/background-check process early, since it's required before several courses

TALK IT THROUGH

Your university counselor can help you confirm your state's licensure requirements, map your timeline to student teaching and answer any remaining questions about the Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education.

READY TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP?

Find Your Purpose

Connect with a university counselor to learn more about the Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education and how to prepare for a career teaching young learners.

1 **Web:** <https://www.gcu.edu/early-childhood-education>

2 **Phone:** 1-855-GCU-LOPE

Find your purpose at Grand Canyon University

Private. Christian. Affordable. Visit [gcu.edu](https://www.gcu.edu)

