

It's Time to Go to School

Formal education is a luxury. Learning how to read might be important, but it's not as important as eating, finding shelter, or simply surviving. In the early days of America, proper schooling was an extravagance that many people couldn't afford to have. A determined few learned how to read and write on their own time. Most people accepted that the fact that education wasn't in their cards, and concentrated on building a life that would enable their children to become educated.

As hard as times often were, it wasn't long before formal schooling was a part of daily life in the United States. The first publicly supported secondary school was Boston Latin School, founded in 1635 (*remember, the very first English settlement, Jamestown, was only in 1607, and the Pilgrims landed in 1620*). One year later, Harvard College was started just down the road. Harvard College, of course, became Harvard University, which is today one of the most respected educational institutions in the world.

The creation of Boston Latin School and Harvard College were certainly steps in the right direction, but it was a long time before graduating high school and attending college was considered ordinary. That phenomenon didn't take place until the 20th century. In fact, in 1900 (*well over two centuries after the start of Boston Latin School*) only six percent of teenagers graduated high school. By the year 2000, about eighty-five percent of teenagers were graduating. The same went for college education. In 1900, about two percent people in the United States between the ages of 18 and 24 were attending college. Now, about sixty percent are.

The change is a result of the standard of living in the United States, as well as the individual nature of the schools. The first secondary schools were often very focused – and very difficult. Education now focuses on providing a broad range of knowledge at a young age, and specific fields of study don't come into play until the college years.

An Extra Tid-Bit about Boston Latin School

*The Boston Latin School, founded in 1635 as the first secondary school in the United States, has had its share of impressive attendees. Among those that studied there are the key founders of the nation, including **Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Adams, and John Hancock.***