
# Educators may be able to claim 2 deductions for 2026 classroom expenses

Teachers and other educators often spend their own money on books, supplies, equipment and other classroom needs. For 2026, eligible educators may have two ways to deduct qualifying unreimbursed expenses. One deduction is available whether or not they itemize, and a new deduction under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) is available to itemizers.

**The long-time deduction for nonitemizers and itemizers**

Eligible educators can deduct some of their unreimbursed out-of-pocket classroom costs under the educator expense deduction. This is an “above-the-line” deduction, which means you don’t have to itemize to claim it and it reduces your adjusted gross income (AGI), which has an added benefit: AGI-based limits affect a variety of tax breaks, so lowering your AGI might help you maximize your tax breaks overall.

To be eligible, taxpayers must be kindergarten through grade 12 teachers, instructors, counselors, principals or aides. Also, they must work at least 900 hours a school year in a school that provides elementary or secondary education as determined under state law.

For 2026, up to $350 of qualified expenses paid during the year that weren’t reimbursed can be deducted. (The deduction limit is $700 for married couples filing a joint return if both spouses are eligible educators, but they can't deduct more than $350 each.) The limit is annually indexed for inflation and was $300 for 2025. But it typically doesn't go up every year.

Examples of qualified expenses include books, classroom supplies, computer equipment (including software), other materials used in the classroom, and professional development courses. For courses in health and physical education, the costs for supplies are qualified expenses only if related to athletics.

**The new deduction for itemizers**

The OBBBA made permanent the Tax Cut and Jobs Act's (TCJA's) suspension of miscellaneous itemized deductions subject to the 2% of AGI floor. This had included unreimbursed employee business expenses such as teachers' out-of-pocket classroom expenses. The suspension had been in place since 2018.

But the OBBBA created a new miscellaneous itemized deduction for educator expenses. And this deduction isn't subject to the 2% of AGI floor or a specific dollar limit. The new deduction is available for eligible expenses incurred after December 31, 2025.

This is in *addition* to the $350 above-the-line deduction. So educators eligible for both deductions can first claim the above-the-line deduction and reap the benefits of reducing their AGI and, if they have eligible expenses in excess of $350, claim the itemized deduction for those excess expenses. (Educators can't claim *both* deductions for the *same* expenses.)

Who is eligible and what expenses qualify are a little broader for the itemized deduction than for the above-the-line deduction. For example, interscholastic sports administrators and coaches are also eligible. And, for courses in health and physical education, the supplies don't have to be related to athletics.

Before deciding to claim the itemized deduction, you need to determine whether itemizing makes sense for you overall. Taxpayers can choose to itemize this and certain other deductions (such as mortgage interest, property tax and charitable donations) or to take the standard deduction based on their filing status.

Itemizing deductions saves tax only when the total is greater than the standard deduction. The OBBBA made the nearly doubled standard deductions under the TCJA permanent, so fewer taxpayers benefit from itemizing. For 2026, the standard deduction is $16,100 for singles and married taxpayers filing separately, $24,150 for heads of household and $32,200 for married couples filing jointly.

**Keeping good records**

Do you expect to qualify for one or both of these deductions? Be sure to track your qualifying expenses carefully. Save your receipts to document the date and amount of each purchase, and note the purpose. Good records are especially important now that there are two educator deductions with differing rules. Contact us to discuss which educator expenses you can deduct and how the deductions may affect your 2026 taxes and planning strategies.