

Educational Occupancy - Group E

2025 California Building Code §305 - K-12 education and qualifying child care

Purpose. Group E covers buildings or portions used by more than six persons at one time for educational purposes through the 12th grade, plus qualifying child-care uses.

1. Core Group E Classification

- K-12 classrooms and school instructional areas where more than six persons are present for educational purposes.
- Group E child-care facilities generally serving more than six children 36 months of age and older for less than 24 hours per day.
- Certain infant/toddler child-care arrangements can also be Group E when the specific California location/egress conditions are satisfied.
- A residence used to home-school only the children who normally live there remains residential rather than becoming Group E.

Code reference: 2025 CBC §§305.1-305.2

2. Important Exceptions and Related Classifications

- Religious educational rooms and religious auditoriums accessory to a place of worship with occupant loads below 100 per room are generally classified with the applicable A-3 provisions rather than Group E.
- A child-care facility with five or fewer children can be classified as part of the primary occupancy; in a dwelling unit, it can remain R-3/California Residential Code as allowed.
- Child-care occupants who cannot respond to an emergency without staff assistance can require Group I-4 classification unless a specific Group E allowance applies.
- Colleges, universities and education above 12th grade are generally Group B rather than Group E.

Code reference: 2025 CBC §§305.1.1, 305.2.1-305.2.3; §308.5

3. California Fire/Life-Safety Focus

- Group E fire-alarm requirements are more restrictive than many ordinary business occupancies and can require emergency voice/alarm communication based on the applicable conditions.
- Classroom and corridor decorative-material limits, clothing storage, seasonal decorations and exit visibility are common inspection items.
- Door locking, egress, occupant loads, emergency lighting and exit signage receive particular attention in school occupancies.
- Child-care room locations and direct-exit provisions can affect whether a facility is Group E or I-4.

Code reference: 2025 CBC/CFC §907.2.3; 2025 CFC Chapter 8

4. Fire & Life-Safety Review Considerations

- Verify the actual use of each room, tenant space and outdoor/rooftop area; a building can contain more than one occupancy group.
- Determine occupant load and means-of-egress requirements under CBC Chapter 10.
- Evaluate automatic sprinkler and fire alarm requirements under CBC/CFC Chapter 9.
- Check allowable building height/area, construction type and occupancy separation requirements under CBC Chapters 5 through 7.
- Maintain required fire department access, water supply, addressing, key-box access and fire protection equipment access as applicable.
- Changes in use or occupancy can trigger a new code analysis even when little or no construction work is proposed.

Code reference: 2025 CBC Chapters 5-10; 2025 CFC Chapters 5, 9 and applicable occupancy/hazard chapters

Primary References

References: 2025 California Building Code §305 - Educational Group E; 2025 California Fire Code §203.4 - Educational Group E; 2025 CBC/CFC Chapter 9 - fire protection and alarm systems; 2024 International Building Code Chapter 3

Final requirements depend on the actual use, occupant load, building size and construction, mixed occupancies, hazardous materials and fire-protection systems. The fire/building code official makes the final occupancy-classification determination.