



Alabama

Overall Rank

#7

Alabama ranks #7 in overall education freedom, with top-20 ranks in every category, including #7 in return on investment.

Education Choice Rank

#17

Alabama ranks 17th for **education choice**, up one spot since 2023. Alabama does very well in empowering families to choose among private schools, especially since it enacted an education savings account (ESA) policy that will be open to all K-12 students after three years. Additionally, Alabama generally respects the autonomy of homeschooling families. Alabama could improve its ranking by boosting participation in its private education choice policy, allowing families to save their unspent ESA funds for future educational expenses, making it easier for more charter schools to open and operate, and giving families more choices among traditional public schools beyond their assigned school.

Transparency Rank

#10

Alabama ranks 10th in **academic transparency**. In 2024, Alabama lawmakers adopted a proposal¹ that requires public school districts to make K-12 curricular material available online. In 2023, Governor Kay Ivey (R) signed a parental bill of rights.² Under the new provisions, lawmakers recognize that “[the] liberty protected by the due process clause includes the fundamental right of parents to direct the education, upbringing, care, and control of their children” and that “[the] government may not burden the fundamental right of parents to direct the education, upbringing, care, and control of their child unless the government demonstrates that the application of the burden is narrowly tailored to a compelling state interest and the government uses the least restrictive means possible to further that interest.” (Governor Ivey’s signature occurred after the cut-off date for the data gathering on this report, so Alabama’s score change will be reflected in the 2025 report.)

While state lawmakers have not prohibited compelled speech specifically in the context of required assignments affirming critical race theory, in 2021, the Alabama State Board of Education adopted a resolution³ that rejects the use of “concepts that impute fault, blame, a tendency to oppress others, or the need to feel guilt or anguish to persons solely because of their race or sex” because they “violate the premises of individual rights, equal opportunity, and individual merit and therefore have no place in professional development for teachers, administrators, or other employees of the public educational system.” Alabama state officials should also apply the ideas from this resolution and consider provisions from The Heritage Foundation’s model proposal⁴ that rejects the application of critical race theory in K-12 classrooms to protect students and teachers in the state from racial prejudice.

Teacher Freedom Rank

#9

Alabama ranks ninth among all states in **teacher freedom**. That ranking is the result of a few primary factors: An estimated 21 percent of teachers in Alabama are alternatively certified; however, Alabama does not have full reciprocity for out-of-state teachers. Educators in Alabama are required to pass the Praxis test, a teacher certification exam administered by the Educational Testing Service. Eleven percent of Alabama school districts with more than 15,000 students have a “chief diversity officer,” but the Yellowhammer State is not using restrictive Common Core assessments. To improve education freedom in the state, Alabama should end the practice of requiring prospective teachers to take the Praxis, and allow full teacher licensure reciprocity, or end certification requirements altogether.

NOTES:

1. <https://www.legislature.state.al.us/pdf/SearchableInstruments/2024RS/SB48-int.pdf>
2. <https://www.legislature.state.al.us/pdf/SearchableInstruments/2023RS/HB6-enr.pdf>
3. <https://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/news/education/2021/08/12/alabama-board-education-bans-critical-race-theory-teaching-public-schools/5543324001/>
4. <https://www.heritage.org/protecting-k-12-students-discrimination>

Return on Investment Rank

#7

Alabama ranks seventh for **return on investment (ROI)** in education spending. Alabama spends the 43rd-most (meaning the eighth-least) per pupil, spending \$13,478 in cost-of-living-adjusted terms annually. Although Alabama ranks a low 45th in its combined fourth-grade and eighth-grade math and reading average NAEP score, the Yellowhammer State employs 3.00 teachers for every non-teacher in its public schools. Alabama's unfunded teacher pension liability represents 8.9 percent of its state GDP. To improve its ROI ranking, Alabama should focus on improving academic outcomes on the NAEP and lowering its unfunded teacher pension liabilities.

Alabama: One-Year Rank Changes (2023-2024)

OVERALL	EDUCATION CHOICE	TRANSPARENCY	TEACHER FREEDOM	RETURN ON INVESTMENT
▲ 6	▲ 1	▲ 5	▲ 9	▼ 1