



Overall Rank

#5

Iowa continued to make strides in overall education freedom this year, moving from #9 to #5. It also continued to hold the #4 spot in education choice and made improvements in every other category.

Education Choice Rank

#4

Iowa ranks fourth for **education choice**. Iowa does exceptionally well in empowering families to choose among private and district schools, as well as other learning environments. In 2023, Iowa enacted a K-12 education savings account (ESA)-style policy that will be available to all families within three years. Additionally, Iowa respects the autonomy of homeschooling families. Iowa could improve its ranking by allowing families to use the ESAs without being enrolled in a private school, making it easier for charter schools to open and operate, and giving families a choice of traditional public schools beyond their assigned school.

Transparency Rank

#13

Iowa ranks 13th in **academic transparency**. In 2023, Governor Kim Reynolds (R) signed a proposal¹ creating a parent bill of rights. The law says: "A parent or guardian bears the ultimate responsibility, and has the constitutionally protected right, to make decisions affecting the parent's or guardian's minor child, including decisions related to the minor child's medical care, moral upbringing, religious upbringing, residence, education, and extracurricular activities." The law says that says school officials may not address a child "using a name or pronoun that is different than the name or pronoun assigned to the student in the school district's registration forms or records" without notifying parents. School personnel may not "knowingly give false or misleading information to the parent or guardian of a student regarding the student's gender identity or intention to transition to a gender that is different than the sex listed on a student's official birth certificate." Iowa lawmakers have adopted a provision² that prohibits the use of the racist ideas that are inseparable from critical race theory. But the provision also may prohibit certain instructional content and does not address the important issues of academic transparency and prohibiting compelled speech.

Teacher Freedom Rank

#28

Iowa ranks 28th in terms of **teacher freedom** among states. Just 2 percent of teachers in the Hawkeye State are alternatively certified, finding their way into the K-12 classroom through an option other than a traditional university-based college of education. Iowa does not have full reciprocity of teacher licensure. Educators in Iowa are required to pass the Praxis test, a teacher certification exam administered by the Educational Testing Service. Seventy-five percent of its school districts with more than 15,000 students employ a "chief diversity officer." The state does not use Common Core-aligned tests. Iowa can improve its teacher freedom ranking by significantly increasing the number of aspiring teachers who have access to alternative teacher certification options or ending certification requirements altogether, allowing full reciprocity of teacher licensure, eliminating the Praxis requirement, and stopping the growth of non-teaching administrative staff, such as chief diversity officers.

Return on Investment Rank

#21

Iowa ranks 21st in **return on investment (ROI)** for education spending. Iowa spends the 23rd-most per pupil among states, spending \$16,937 in cost-of-living-adjusted terms annually. Iowa ranks 14th in its combined fourth-grade and eighth-grade math and reading average NAEP score. The Hawkeye State employs 2.08 teachers for every non-teacher in its public schools. Iowa's unfunded teacher pension liability represents 1.9 percent of its state GDP. Iowa can improve its ROI ranking by lowering per-pupil spending and stopping growth in non-teaching staff.

Iowa: One-Year Rank Changes (2023–2024)

OVERALL	EDUCATION CHOICE	TRANSPARENCY	TEACHER FREEDOM	RETURN ON INVESTMENT
▲ 4	0	▲ 3	▲ 2	▲ 4

NOTES:

- <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/publications/LGE/90/SF496.pdf>
- <https://legiscan.com/IA/text/HF802/id/2338142>