



Illinois

Overall Rank #34

Illinois ranks #34 overall, two spots lower than the previous year’s ranking. The state made significant gains in teacher freedom but lost ground on return on investment.

Education Choice Rank #34

Illinois ranks 34th for **education choice**. Previously, Illinois had done well in empowering families to choose among private schools, but in 2023, the legislature did not extend the state’s tax-credit scholarship policy, allowing it to sunset. Illinois generally respects the autonomy of homeschooling families. Illinois could improve its ranking by enacting a K-12 education savings account (ESA) policy, 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 #37

Illinois ranks 37th on **academic transparency**. Illinois lawmakers have not adopted proposals to increase academic transparency, create a parental bill of rights, or that reject the prejudice caused by the application of critical race theory in schools.

Teacher Freedom Rank #3

Illinois ranks third in the nation for **teacher freedom**. Just 6 percent of its teachers are alternatively certified. However, the state does allow full reciprocity of teacher licensure, and does not use Common Core-aligned assessments. Educators in Illinois are also not forced to take the Praxis test, a teacher certification exam administered by the Educational Testing Service. A significant 90 percent of its school districts with more than 15,000 students employ a “chief diversity officer.” Illinois can improve its teacher freedom score by ending the continual hiring of non-teaching administrative staff, particularly chief diversity officers, allowing alternative teacher certification through routes into the K-12 classroom other than university-based colleges of education, or by ending certification requirements altogether.

Return on Investment Rank #50

Illinois ranks 50th in **return on investment (ROI)** for education spending. Illinois spends the 10th-most per pupil among states, spending \$20,583 in cost-of-living-adjusted terms annually. Illinois ranks 19th in its combined fourth-grade and eighth-grade math and reading average NAEP score. The Prairie State employs 1.53 teachers for every non-teacher in its public schools. Illinois’s unfunded teacher pension liability represents 21.3 percent of its state GDP. Illinois can improve its ROI ranking by lowering per-pupil spending, improving academic outcomes on the NAEP, and addressing its significant unfunded teacher pension liabilities.

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

OVERALL	EDUCATION CHOICE	TRANSPARENCY	TEACHER FREEDOM	RETURN ON INVESTMENT
▼ 2	0	▲ 1	▲ 18	▼ 14