



Kentucky

Overall Rank

#36

Kentucky ranks #36 in overall education freedom. The state continues to rank poorly on education choice and return on investment.

Education Choice Rank

#45

Kentucky ranks 45th for **education choice**, down two spots since 2023. Previously, Kentucky had done well in empowering families to choose among private and district schools, but in 2022 the state supreme court struck down the state’s innovative K-12 education savings account (ESA) policy. Kentucky generally respects the autonomy of homeschooling families. Kentucky could improve its ranking by passing a constitutional amendment to allow ESAs and other education choice policies, 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

#17

Kentucky ranks 17th in **academic transparency**. In 2023, Kentucky lawmakers adopted a law¹ that requires public school officials to allow parents to review school curricula and classroom assignments, and to allow parents to opt out of school requirements that the parents deem not age-appropriate. The law also says that “a local school district shall not require school personnel or students to use pronouns for students that do not conform to that particular student’s biological sex.”

Teacher Freedom Rank

#17

Kentucky ranks 17th for **teacher freedom**. Approximately 34 percent of the state’s teachers made their way to the classroom through alternative certification routes, but the Bluegrass State does not allow full reciprocity of teacher licenses with other states. Educators in Kentucky are required to pass the Praxis test, a teacher certification exam administered by the Educational Testing Service. Half of Kentucky school districts with more than 15,000 students employ a “chief diversity officer,” but the state does not use Common Core-aligned tests. To improve its ranking, Kentucky should limit growth in non-teaching administrative staff, such as chief diversity officers, allow full reciprocity of teacher licensure, eliminate the Praxis requirement, and continue to increase the number of teachers who have alternative routes to the K-12 classroom, or end certification requirements altogether.

Return on Investment Rank

#43

Kentucky ranks 43rd in **return on investment (ROI)** for education spending. Kentucky spends the 31st-most per pupil among states, spending \$15,357 in cost-of-living-adjusted terms annually. Kentucky ranks 30th in its combined fourth-grade and eighth-grade math and reading average NAEP score. The Bluegrass State employs 2.06 teachers for every non-teacher in its public schools. Kentucky’s unfunded teacher pension liability represents 16.2 percent of its state GDP. Kentucky can improve its ROI ranking by improving academic outcomes on the NAEP, stopping growth in non-teaching staff, and addressing its significant unfunded teacher pension liabilities.

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

OVERALL	EDUCATION CHOICE	TRANSPARENCY	TEACHER FREEDOM	RETURN ON INVESTMENT
▲ 1	▼ 2	▲ 3	▲ 5	▲ 2

NOTE:

1. <https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/recorddocuments/bill/23RS/sb150/bill.pdf>