



South Carolina

Overall Rank #20

South Carolina ranks #20 in overall education freedom. The state dropped spots in the education choice and return on investment categories.

Education Choice Rank #20

South Carolina ranks 20th for **education choice**, down five spots since 2023. South Carolina does exceptionally well in empowering families to choose among private and charter schools, as well as other learning environments, especially after enacting a K-12 education savings account (ESA) policy last year. South Carolina could improve its ranking by expanding eligibility for and boosting participation in its existing private education choice policy, funding ESAs via the state education funding formula, making it easier for more charter schools to open and operate, removing excessive regulations on homeschooling families, and giving families more choices among traditional public schools beyond their assigned school.

Transparency Rank #28

South Carolina ranks 28th in **academic transparency**. In 2021, South Carolina lawmakers prohibited¹ the use of taxpayer spending for the teaching of critical race theory. As written, the proposal appropriately rejects the application of critical race theory and its racially discriminatory ideas, but the provisions may ban even the discussion of certain subjects. State officials should use The Heritage Foundation’s model proposal² and prohibit compelled speech. In 2024, lawmakers considered proposals that provide more academic transparency and create a parental bill of rights, but the proposals did not advance.

Teacher Freedom Rank #10

South Carolina ranks 10th in **teacher freedom**. Twenty percent of aspiring teachers in the Palmetto State made their way to the K-12 classroom through alternative certification routes. South Carolina does not have full reciprocity of teacher licensure with other states. Educators in South Carolina are required to pass the Praxis test, a teacher certification exam administered by the Educational Testing Service. However, just 13 percent of the state’s school districts with more than 15,000 students employ a “chief diversity officer,” and the state does not use Common Core-aligned tests. South Carolina can further improve its teacher freedom score by enabling more alternative pathways to the K-12 classroom and allowing full reciprocity of teacher licensure or eliminating certification requirements altogether, along with eliminating the Praxis mandate.

Return on Investment Rank #19

South Carolina ranks 19th in **return on investment (ROI)** in education spending. South Carolina spends the 29th-most per pupil among states, spending \$15,497 in cost-of-living-adjusted terms annually. South Carolina ranks 37th in its combined fourth-grade and eighth-grade math and reading average NAEP score. The Palmetto State employs 2.17 teachers for every non-teacher in its public schools. South Carolina’s unfunded teacher pension liability represents 9.2 percent of its state GDP. South Carolina can improve its ROI ranking by improving academic outcomes on the NAEP and addressing its significant unfunded teacher pension liability.

South Carolina: One-Year Rank Changes (2023–2024)



NOTES:

- <https://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/local/south-carolina/2021/07/01/critical-race-theory-sc-schools-not-taught-what-is-budget/5303357001/>
- <https://www.heritage.org/protecting-k-12-students-discrimination>