



Tennessee

Overall Rank

#8

Tennessee ranks #8 in overall education freedom and #3 for return on investment.

Education Choice Rank

#19

Tennessee ranks 19th for **education choice**, down two spots since 2023. Tennessee does well in empowering families to choose among private and charter schools, as well as other learning environments, but could do more to expand education choice. Additionally, Tennessee offers K-12 education savings accounts (ESAs) that families can use to customize the education of eligible students, and generally respects the autonomy of homeschooling families. Tennessee could improve its ranking by expanding eligibility for and boosting participation in its private education choice policies, funding ESAs via the state education funding formula, and eliminating unnecessary regulations on participating private schools, including the state test mandate. Tennessee could also improve its ranking by 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

#11

Tennessee ranks 11th in **academic transparency**. Tennessee lawmakers have adopted provisions that prohibit the teaching of certain concepts, including the ideas of critical race theory, in K-12 classrooms. These provisions,¹ however, do not address the *application* of critical race theory to school activities, and may allow educators to apply racially prejudiced concepts to school activities and classroom content by renaming the material and not calling the information “critical race theory.” On academic transparency, in 2021, Tennessee lawmakers approved H.B. 1513,² which states that “textbooks adopted by a local education agency (LEA) or public charter school for which there is an electronic version available must have the electronic version of the textbook stored on an electronic database maintained by, and accessible to the public at, each public university’s main campus library...” In 2024, Tennessee legislators adopted H.B. 2165,³ a proposal containing provisions similar to those of The Heritage Foundation’s proposed Given Name Act. The proposal would also prohibit public school employees from giving “false or misleading information to the parent of a student regarding the student’s gender identity or the student’s intention to transition to a gender that differs from the sex listed on the student’s official birth certificate.” Lawmakers should expressly state that educators cannot address a child by a name or pronoun that does not correspond to the child’s birth certificate without permission from the child’s parents.

Teacher Freedom Rank

#16

Tennessee ranks 16th in **teacher freedom**. A full 25 percent of teachers in the Volunteer State made their way to the classroom through alternative teacher certification routes. However, Tennessee does not have full reciprocity of teacher licensure with other states. Educators in Tennessee are required to pass the Praxis test, a teacher certification exam administered by the Educational Testing Service. Forty-four percent of school districts in the state with more than 15,000 students employ a “chief diversity officer.” Tennessee does not use prescriptive Common Core-aligned assessments. Tennessee can improve its teacher freedom score by allowing full reciprocity of teacher licensure or by eliminating teacher certification requirements altogether, and by stopping the growth in non-teaching administrative staff. It should eliminate the Praxis test mandate.

NOTES:

1. <https://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/BillInfo/Default.aspx?BillNumber=HB0580>
2. <https://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/112/Bill/HB1513.pdf>
3. <https://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/BillInfo/default.aspx?BillNumber=HB2165&ga=113>

Return on Investment Rank

#3

Tennessee ranks third in **return on investment (ROI)** for education spending. Tennessee spends the 44th-most (meaning the seventh-least) per pupil, spending \$13,027 in cost-of-living-adjusted terms annually. Tennessee ranks 28th in its combined fourth-grade and eighth-grade math and reading average NAEP score. The Volunteer State employs 2.87 teachers for every non-teacher in its public schools. Tennessee's unfunded teacher pension liability represents 0.1 percent of its state GDP. Tennessee can improve its strong ROI ranking by improving academic outcomes on the NAEP and stopping growth in non-teacher staff.

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

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