



Alabama

Overall Rank

#13

Alabama ranks #13 in overall education freedom, with top-20 ranks in every category, including #6 in return on investment.

Education Choice Rank

#18

Alabama ranks #18 for education choice, up nine spots from 2022. Alabama does fairly well in allowing families to choose among private schools, especially since it expanded eligibility for its tax-credit scholarship policy this year, but it could still do more to expand education choice. Alabama generally respects the autonomy of homeschooling families. Alabama could improve its ranking by enacting a K-12 education savings account (ESA) policy, expanding eligibility for and boosting participation in its private education choice policy, 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

#15

In 2023, Governor Kay Ivey (R) signed a parent bill of rights.¹ Under the new provisions, lawmakers recognize that “[the] liberty protected by the due process clause includes the fundamental right of parents to direct the education, upbringing, care, and control of their children” and that “[the] government may not burden the fundamental right of parents to direct the education, upbringing, care, and control of their child unless the government demonstrates that the application of the burden is narrowly tailored to a compelling state interest and the government uses the least restrictive means possible to further that interest.” (Gov. Ivey’s signature occurred after the cut-off date for the data gathering on this report, so Alabama’s score change will be reflected in next year’s report.)

While state lawmakers have not approved academic transparency legislation, nor a prohibition on compelled speech, in 2021, the Alabama State Board of Education adopted a resolution² that rejects the use of “concepts that impute fault, blame, a tendency to oppress others, or the need to feel guilt or anguish to persons solely because of their race or sex” because they “violate the premises of individual rights, equal opportunity, and individual merit and therefore have no place in professional development for teachers, administrators, or other employees of the public educational system.” Alabama state officials should also apply the ideas from this resolution and consider provisions from The Heritage Foundation’s model proposal³ that rejects the application of critical race theory in K-12 classrooms to protect students and teachers in the state from racial prejudice.

Teacher Freedom Rank

#18

Alabama ranks 18th among all states in terms of teacher freedom. That ranking is the result of a few primary factors: An estimated 19 percent of teachers in Alabama are alternatively certified; however, Alabama does not have full reciprocity for out-of-state teachers. Twenty-two percent of Alabama school districts with more than 15,000 students have a “chief diversity officer,” but the Yellowhammer State is not using restrictive Common Core assessments. In order to improve education freedom in the state, Alabama should end the practice of hiring superfluous administrative staff, such as chief diversity officers, and allow full teacher licensure reciprocity, or end certification requirements altogether.

Return on Investment Rank

#6

Alabama ranks sixth for return on investment (ROI) in education spending. Alabama spends the 40th-most per pupil among states (meaning the 11th least per-pupil), spending \$12,706 in cost-of-living-adjusted terms annually. Although Alabama ranks a low 45th in its combined fourth-grade and eighth-grade math and reading average NAEP score, the Yellowhammer State employs 1.22 teachers for every non-teacher in its public schools. Alabama’s unfunded teacher pension liability represents 8.4 percent of its state GDP. To improve its ROI ranking, Alabama should focus on improving academic outcomes on the NAEP and lower its unfunded teacher pension liabilities.

Alabama: One-Year Rank Changes (2022–2023)

OVERALL	EDUCATION CHOICE	TRANSPARENCY	TEACHER FREEDOM	RETURN ON INVESTMENT
▲ 3	▲ 9	▲ 2	▼ 3	▼ 1

NOTES:

- <https://www.legislature.state.al.us/pdf/SearchableInstruments/2023RS/HB6-enr.pdf>
- <https://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/news/education/2021/08/12/alabama-board-education-bans-critical-race-theory-teaching-public-schools/5543324001/>
- <https://www.heritage.org/protecting-k-12-students-discrimination>