



Arkansas

Overall Rank

#4

Arkansas ranks #4 in overall education freedom, moving up nine spots since last year. Its score was bolstered by major improvements in education choice and transparency.

Education Choice Rank

#6

Arkansas ranks #6 for education choice, up 12 spots since 2022. Arkansas does exceptionally well in allowing families the freedom to choose among private, charter, and district schools, as well as other learning environments, especially since it enacted a K-12 education savings account (ESA) policy this year that will be available to all Arkansas families within three years. Additionally, Arkansas generally respects the autonomy of homeschooling families. Arkansas could improve its ranking by 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

#10

In 2023, Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders (R) signed the Given Name Act¹, which says that school personnel must use the child’s name and pronouns that correspond with the student’s birth certificate unless they receive express permission from parents to do otherwise. Such proposals protect parents’ rights and help families and medical personnel to identify the causes prompting a child’s confusion about their sex. Arkansas lawmakers adopted a proposal that rejects the application of critical race theory to so-called diversity training for educators (and other state employees) in 2021. The proposal says² that state agencies, such as the department of education “shall not teach, instruct, or train any employee, contractor, staff member, or any other individual or group, to adopt or believe” ideas that violate the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Teacher Freedom Rank

#10

Arkansas ranks 10th among states in teacher freedom. While a substantial 35 percent of its teachers benefitted from alternative teacher certification, the state does not allow full reciprocity of teacher licensure. Moreover, a quarter of its school districts with more than 15,000 students employ a “chief diversity officer.” The state has, however, rejected Common Core-aligned assessments. To improve its teacher freedom score, the Natural State should allow full reciprocity of teacher licensure, or end certification requirements altogether, and limit continued growth in non-teaching administrative staff, such as chief diversity officers.

Return on Investment Rank

#18

Arkansas ranks 18th overall for return on investment (ROI) in education spending. Arkansas spends the 34th-most per pupil among states, spending \$13,653 in cost-of-living-adjusted terms annually. Arkansas ranks 44th in its combined fourth-grade and eighth-grade math and reading average NAEP score. The Natural State employs 1.01 teachers for every non-teacher in its public schools. Arkansas’s unfunded teacher pension liability represents 7.5 percent of its state GDP. Arkansas can improve its ROI ranking by limiting increases in per-pupil spending, improving academic achievement on the NAEP, and lowering its unfunded teacher pension liabilities.

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

OVERALL	EDUCATION CHOICE	TRANSPARENCY	TEACHER FREEDOM	RETURN ON INVESTMENT
▲ 9	▲ 12	▲ 8	0	▼ 1

NOTES:

- <https://www.billtrack50.com/billdetail/1579941>
- <https://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/Bills/FTPDocument?path=%2FBills%2F2021R%2FPublic%2FSB627.pdf>