



California

Overall Rank

#26

California remains in the middle of the pack in overall education freedom and is now ranked #26, up three spots from last year. However, the state had the largest decline in teacher freedom, dropping seven spots.

Education Choice Rank

#40

California ranks #40 for education choice, down nine spots from 2022, as lawmakers in other states expanded education choice options in 2023, while officials in California did not. California does fairly well in allowing families to choose among charter and district schools but could do much more to expand private education choice. California generally respects the autonomy of homeschooling families. California could improve its ranking by enacting a K-12 education savings account (ESA) policy and making it easier for charter schools to open and operate.

Transparency Rank

#5

California lawmakers have neither adopted proposals that reject the prejudice caused by the application of critical race theory in schools, nor addressed the threats to minor-age children from the teaching of “gender” in place of biological sex. While California law¹ allows parents to “examine the curriculum materials of the class or classes in which their child is enrolled,” lawmakers should make this provision more specific to include homework assignments and materials (such as worksheets and videos) that the teacher chooses to add to the curriculum.

Teacher Freedom Rank

#43

The Golden State has an unfriendly environment for fostering teacher freedom, ranking 43rd among states. Although about 25 percent of its teachers made their way to the classroom through alternative teacher certification programs, that is where the good news ends. California does not allow full reciprocity of licensure for out-of-state teachers, 29 percent of its school districts with more than 15,000 students have “chief diversity officers,” and the state still uses Common Core-aligned tests. To improve the state’s teacher freedom score, state policymakers should allow full reciprocity of teacher licensure, or end certification requirements altogether, end the practice of hiring “chief diversity officers,” and exit the Common Core national tests.

Return on Investment Rank

#22

California ranks 22nd overall for return on investment (ROI) in education spending. California spends the 31st-most per pupil among states, spending \$14,122 in cost-of-living-adjusted terms annually. California ranks 37th in its combined fourth-grade and eighth-grade math and reading average NAEP score. The Golden State employs 0.80 teachers for every non-teacher in its public schools. California’s unfunded teacher pension liability represents 9.2 percent of its state GDP. California can improve its ROI ranking by lowering per-pupil spending, improving academic outcomes on the NAEP, stopping growth in non-teaching staff, and addressing its considerable unfunded teacher pension liabilities.

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

OVERALL	EDUCATION CHOICE	TRANSPARENCY	TEACHER FREEDOM	RETURN ON INVESTMENT
▲ 3	▼ 9	▲ 9	▼ 7	▲ 14

NOTE:

1. https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=EDC§ionNum=51101