



# Iowa

## Overall Rank

#9

Iowa made the biggest leap in overall education freedom this year, moving from #22 overall to #9. Most notably, Iowa climbed 17 spots in the transparency category.

## Education Choice Rank

#4

Iowa ranks #4 for education choice, up five spots from 2022. Iowa does exceptionally well in empowering families to choose among private schools and district schools, as well as other learning environments. This year, Iowa enacted a K-12 education savings account (ESA) -style policy that will be available to all families within three years. Additionally, Iowa respects the autonomy of homeschooling families. Iowa could improve its ranking by allowing families to use the ESAs without being enrolled in a private school, 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

#16

In 2023, Governor Kim Reynolds (R) signed a proposal<sup>1</sup> creating a parent bill of rights. The law says: “A parent or guardian bears the ultimate responsibility, and has the constitutionally protected right, to make decisions affecting the parent’s or guardian’s minor child, including decisions related to the minor child’s medical care, moral upbringing, religious upbringing, residence, education, and extracurricular activities.” The law says that says school officials may not address a child “using a name or pronoun that is different than the name or pronoun assigned to the student in the school district’s registration forms or records” without notifying parents. School personnel may not “knowingly give false or misleading information to the parent or guardian of a student regarding the student’s gender identity or intention to transition to a gender that is different than the sex listed on a student’s official birth certificate.” (Governor Reynold’s signature occurred after the cut-off date for the data gathering on this report, so Iowa’s score change will be reflected in next year’s report.) Iowa lawmakers have adopted a provision<sup>2</sup> that prohibits the use of the racist ideas that are inseparable from critical race theory. But the provision also may prohibit certain instructional content and does not address the important issues of academic transparency and prohibiting compelled speech.

## Teacher Freedom Rank

#30

Iowa ranks 30th in terms of teacher freedom among states. Just 2 percent of teachers in the Hawkeye State are alternatively certified, finding their way into the K-12 classroom through an option other than a traditional university-based college of education. Iowa does not have full reciprocity of teacher licensure. Although half of its school districts with more than 15,000 students employ a “chief diversity officer,” only two school districts in the state enroll more than 15,000 students. The state does not use Common Core-aligned tests. Iowa can improve its teacher freedom ranking by significantly increasing the number of aspiring teachers who have access to alternative teacher certification options, or ending certification requirements altogether, allowing full reciprocity of teacher licensure, and stopping the growth of non-teaching administrative staff, such as chief diversity officers.

## Return on Investment Rank

#25

Iowa ranks 25th overall in return on investment (ROI) for education spending. Iowa spends the 22nd-most per pupil among states, spending \$15,568 in cost-of-living-adjusted terms annually. Iowa ranks 14th in its combined fourth-grade and eighth-grade math and reading average NAEP score. The Hawkeye State employs 0.86 teachers for every non-teacher in its public schools. Iowa’s unfunded teacher pension liability represents 4.1 percent of its state GDP. Iowa can improve its ROI ranking by lowering per-pupil spending, stopping growth in non-teaching staff, and lowering its unfunded teacher pension liabilities.

### Iowa: One-Year Rank Changes (2022–2023)

OVERALL	EDUCATION CHOICE	TRANSPARENCY	TEACHER FREEDOM	RETURN ON INVESTMENT
▲ 13	▲ 5	▲ 17	▼ 2	▲ 1

#### NOTES:

- <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/publications/LGE/90/SF496.pdf>
- <https://legiscan.com/IA/text/HF802/id/2338142>