



South Carolina

Overall Rank #16

South Carolina ranks #16 in overall education freedom. The state improved its standing in every category, most notably an 18-spot jump in education choice, the second-largest gain in the nation.

Education Choice Rank #15

South Carolina ranks #15 for education choice, up 18 spots from 2022. South Carolina does exceptionally well in giving families the freedom to choose among private schools and charter schools, as well as other learning environments, especially after enacting a K-12 education savings account (ESA) policy this year. South Carolina could improve its ranking by expanding eligibility for and boosting participation in its existing private education choice policy, making it easier for charter schools to open and operate, removing excessive regulations on homeschooling families, and giving families a choice of traditional public schools beyond their assigned school.

Transparency Rank #30

In 2021, South Carolina lawmakers prohibited¹ the use of taxpayer spending for the teaching of critical race theory. As written, the proposal appropriately rejects the application of critical race theory and its racially discriminatory ideas, but the provisions may ban even the discussion of certain subjects. State officials should use The Heritage Foundation’s model proposal² and prohibit compelled speech. Lawmakers should also consider proposals that provide more academic transparency and create a parent bill of rights.

Teacher Freedom Rank #11

South Carolina ranks 11th among states in terms of teacher freedom. Just 20 percent of aspiring teachers in the Palmetto State made their way to the K-12 classroom through alternative certification routes, largely going instead to university-based colleges of education. South Carolina does not have full reciprocity of teacher licensure. However, just 13 percent of the state’s school districts with more than 15,000 students employ a “chief diversity officer,” and the state does not use Common Core-aligned tests. South Carolina can further improve its teacher freedom score by enabling more alternative pathways to the K-12 classroom and allowing full reciprocity of teacher licensure, or by eliminating certification requirements altogether.

Return on Investment Rank #14

South Carolina ranks 14th overall in return on investment (ROI) in education spending. South Carolina spends the 29th-most per pupil among states, spending \$14,316 in cost-of-living-adjusted terms annually. South Carolina ranks 37th in its combined fourth-grade and eighth-grade math and reading average NAEP score. The Palmetto State employs 1.19 teachers for every non-teacher in its public schools. South Carolina’s unfunded teacher pension liability represents 11.9 percent of its state GDP. South Carolina can improve its ROI ranking by improving academic outcomes on the NAEP and addressing its significant unfunded teacher pension liability.

South Carolina: One-Year Rank Changes (2022-2023)

OVERALL	EDUCATION CHOICE	TRANSPARENCY	TEACHER FREEDOM	RETURN ON INVESTMENT
▲ 7	▲ 18	▲ 2	▲ 1	▲ 8

NOTES:

- <https://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/local/south-carolina/2021/07/01/critical-race-theory-sc-schools-not-taught-what-is-budget/5303357001/>
- <https://www.heritage.org/protecting-k-12-students-discrimination>