



South Dakota

Overall Rank

#21

South Dakota now ranks #21 in the nation for education freedom. It ranks in the top 10 in transparency and return on investment, but the state ranks only #31 in education choice and #39 in teacher freedom.

Education Choice Rank

#31

South Dakota ranks #31 for education choice, down seven spots from 2022, as lawmakers in other states expanded education choice options in 2023, while officials in South Dakota did not. South Dakota does fairly well in allowing families to choose among district schools but could do more to expand education choice. South Dakota generally respects the autonomy of homeschooling families. South Dakota could improve its ranking by enacting a K-12 education savings account (ESA) policy, expanding eligibility for and boosting participation in its existing private education choice policy, and enacting a charter school policy.

Transparency Rank

#7

Governor Kristi Noem (R) signed an executive order¹ in April 2022 that says: “The Department of Education shall not direct or compel department employees, students, teachers, or school district employees to personally affirm, adopt, or adhere to inherently divisive concepts.”

Teacher Freedom Rank

#39

South Dakota ranks 39th in teacher freedom. No teachers entered the classroom through alternative teacher certification routes in the Mount Rushmore State and South Dakota does not allow reciprocity of teacher licensure with other states. Only the Sioux Falls School District enrolls more than 15,000 students, and it does not employ a “chief diversity officer.” South Dakota continues to use Common Core-aligned tests. The state can improve its teacher freedom score by allowing aspiring teachers to enter the classroom through alternative teacher certification routes, allowing reciprocity of teacher licensure with other states, or by eliminating teacher certification requirements altogether. The state should also end its involvement with Common Core.

Return on Investment Rank

#7

South Dakota ranks seventh overall in return on investment (ROI) in education spending. South Dakota spends the 38th-most per pupil among states, spending \$13,207 in cost-of-living-adjusted terms annually. South Dakota ranks sixth in its combined fourth-grade and eighth-grade math and reading average NAEP score. The Mount Rushmore State employs 0.97 teachers for every non-teacher in its public schools. South Dakota’s unfunded teacher pension liability represents zero percent of its state GDP. South Dakota can improve its ROI ranking by continuing to improve academic outcomes on the NAEP and stopping growth in non-teaching staff.

South Dakota: One-Year Rank Changes (2022–2023)

OVERALL	EDUCATION CHOICE	TRANSPARENCY	TEACHER FREEDOM	RETURN ON INVESTMENT
▼ 16	▼ 7	▼ 4	▼ 1	▼ 1

NOTE:

1. <https://governor.sd.gov/doc/GovNoem-K12CRT-E0.pdf>