



Arkansas

Overall Rank

#6

Arkansas ranks #6 in overall education freedom, moving down two spots since 2023. The state fell from the top 10 in teacher freedom and transparency.

Education Choice Rank

#5

Arkansas ranks fifth for **education choice**, up one spot since 2023. Arkansas does exceptionally well in empowering families 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 in 2023 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 more charter schools to open and operate, and by giving families more choices among traditional public schools beyond their assigned school.

Transparency Rank

#12

Arkansas ranks 12th in **academic transparency**. In 2023, Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders (R) signed the Given Name Act,¹ which says that school personnel must use a 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 his or her 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

#12

Arkansas ranks 12th among states in **teacher freedom**. While a substantial 42 percent of its teachers benefitted from alternative teacher certification, the state does not allow full reciprocity of teacher licensure. Educators in Arkansas are also required to pass the Praxis test, a teacher certification exam administered by the Educational Testing Service. 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, limit continued growth in non-teaching administrative staff, such as chief diversity officers, and eliminate the requirement to take the Praxis exam.

Return on Investment Rank

#23

Arkansas ranks 23rd for **return on investment (ROI)** in education spending. Arkansas spends the 38th-most per pupil among states, spending \$14,520 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 1.89 teachers for every non-teacher in its public schools. Arkansas's unfunded teacher pension liability represents 5.7 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 (2023-2024)

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

NOTES:

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