

2026 SC Teacher Exit Survey

SEPTEMBER 2026

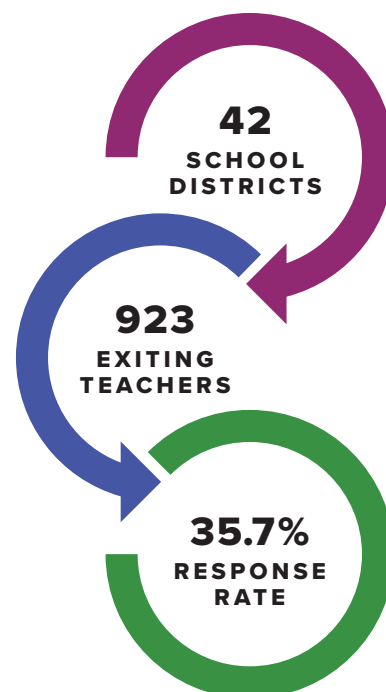
SC TEACHER administers the annual SC Teacher Exit Survey to teachers leaving public PK–12 classroom positions in South Carolina. Collected at the end of the academic year from teachers in participating districts, these survey data help distinguish types of teacher exits occurring across the state, including those retiring, changing roles, moving districts, or leaving public education. The survey also investigates factors contributing to teachers' decisions to leave and conditions that might encourage their return.

This overview captures key findings from the 2026 SC Teacher Exit Survey. Read the full report at www.sc-teacher.org/TES-results-sept2026.

Survey Administration

The 2026 SC Teacher Exit Survey was conducted from May 11 to June 19, 2026. Responses came from 923 exiting teachers across 42 South Carolina school districts—a 35.7% response rate.

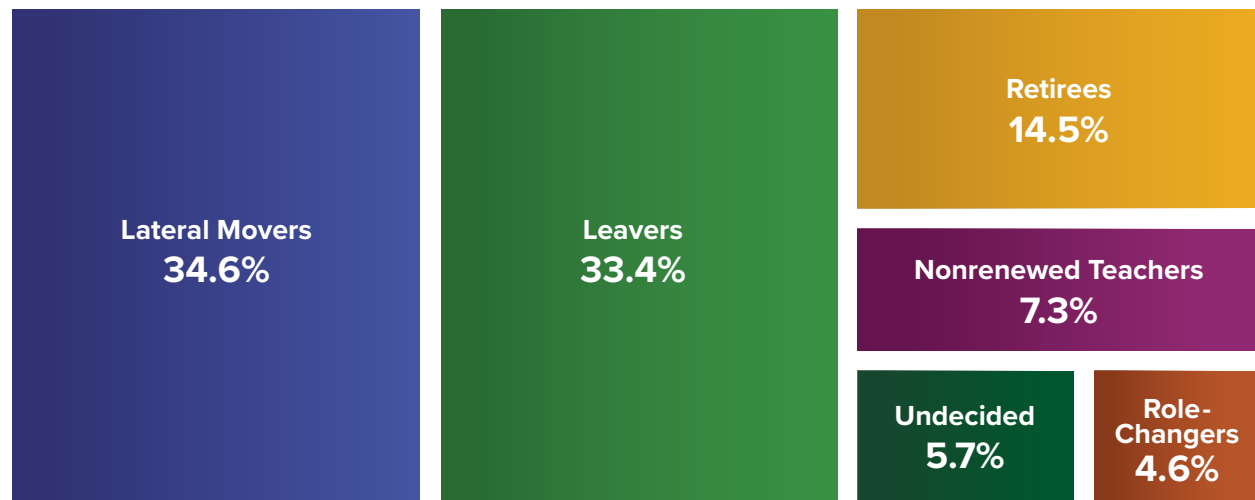
The total pool of eligible respondents consisted of 2,584 exiting teachers from 43 districts. Participating districts identified teachers who were leaving their classroom positions at the end of the 2025–26 academic year, whether by choice or because their contracts were not renewed. Survey data were matched with administrative data from the South Carolina Department of Education for additional context regarding participant demographics.



Exiting Teacher Types

Based on their survey responses, participating teachers were grouped into exit types. Lateral movers and leavers were the largest groups, each equating to approximately one-third of survey participants.

Of nonretiring respondents, 45.8% were in the lateral movers or role-changers categories. This means that nearly half continued to work in South Carolina public education, even as they left their 2025–26 positions.



Lateral Movers and Leavers

As the two largest groups of exiting teachers, comparing reasons for leaving among lateral movers (34.6%) and leavers (33.4%) can inform tailored strategies for substantial segments of the exiting teacher population.

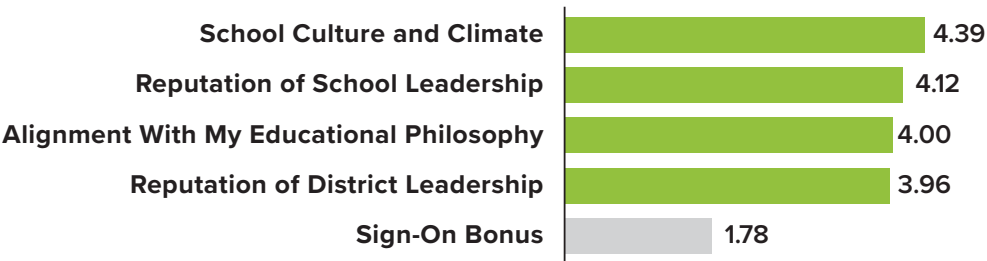
One construct and four individual items related to personal reasons (not able to be analyzed as a single construct) showed statistically different averages of importance for leavers and lateral movers.



While both groups rated work-life balance as their most important reason for leaving, it held significantly greater importance for leavers. Lateral movers rated having a job closer to where they lived as significantly more important than leavers did—the largest difference observed between the two groups.

Moving to a New District

Lateral movers and nonrenewed teachers who indicated they had accepted new teaching positions were asked what influenced their choice of school district. They rated school culture and climate first. School leadership, alignment with educational philosophy, and district leadership followed. Of all the options, sign-on bonuses were rated as least influential in their decision.



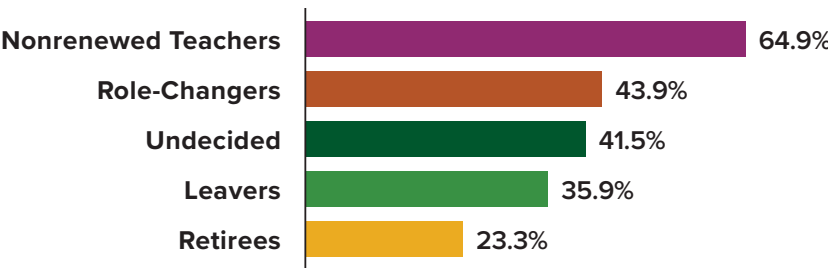
This figure highlights the four highest-rated reasons along with the least influential reason. Read the report for averages of importance for all factors.

Potential to Return

In addition to assessing why teachers leave, the survey asks whether exiting teachers would return and what factors might encourage them.

WILLINGNESS

Nonrenewed teachers were the most likely to report they would consider returning. Notable proportions of leavers, role-changers, and those undecided about the future also indicated a potential to reenter the state teacher workforce.



MOTIVATIONS

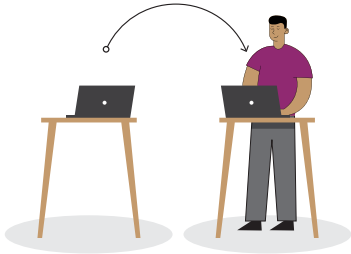
Those who indicated a willingness to return (responding *Neutral*, *Agree*, or *Strongly Agree*) were then asked to rate conditions that could influence their decision. On average, leavers rated nearly all conditions as more important than retirees did, except for part-time teaching positions. These differences are descriptive and were not tested for statistical significance.

Top Potential Motivations for Leavers	Top Potential Motivations for Retirees
Protecting Planning or Break Time	Protecting Planning or Break Time
Salary Increase	Salary Increase
Smaller Class Sizes	Part-Time Teaching Positions
Increased Special Education Support	Smaller Class Sizes
Revised Grading or Student Promotion Policies	Increased Special Education Support

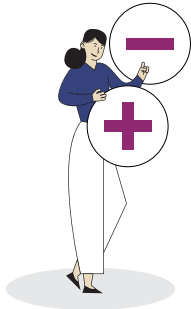


Exit Type Matters

Exiting teachers are not a monolith to be addressed with a one-size-fits-all strategy. Findings focused on exiting teacher pathways can build a better understanding of the workforce and tailored strategies for retention.



Of nonretiring respondents, nearly half (46%) were classified as **lateral movers** or **role-changers**, meaning they continued to work in SC public education.



Leavers and **lateral movers**—the largest groups of exiting teachers—both rated work-life balance as their most important consideration for leaving.

- **Leavers** rated work-life balance as more important than lateral movers, along with personal health, childcare, and policy concerns.
- **Lateral movers** placed greater importance than leavers on obtaining a position closer to home.



Lateral movers and **nonrenewed teachers** who had accepted a new teaching position rated school culture/climate as the most important reason for choosing the new district and sign-on bonuses the lowest.



Nearly two-thirds of **nonrenewed teachers** and more than a third of **role-changers**, **leavers**, and those **undecided** indicated they would consider returning to teach in SC public schools.

For **leavers** and **retirees** open to returning, protected planning/break time and increased salary were among the most influential factors.



ABOUT SC TEACHER

SC TEACHER provides comprehensive research, visualized data profiles, and compelling stories to communicate impact of educator pipeline policies and promote transformative practices that inform policymakers, educators, and communities who care about education scaling economic opportunity.