



DISTRICT SUPPORT SERIES

Budgeting With Insight: Using Data to Guide Resource Allocation

The Case for Data-Driven Budgeting

Data give leaders clarity and confidence to invest where it truly counts, aligning resources to the realities educators face every day. Many districts reference zero-based budgeting, and grounded zero-based budgeting begins with evidence. Data reveal where limited funds can be most effective and where old spending patterns may not match today's educator workforce needs. Prioritizing relevant data in decision-making for resource allocation can move districts to budgeting for impact, not tradition.

Whether districts struggle with teacher retention, administrator burnout, or overlapping initiatives that compete for time and attention, district-specific findings related to educator recruitment, mobility, attrition, and overall experiences can help explain the why behind the numbers. Data such as these illuminate patterns and point to smarter investments—mentoring programs to reduce turnover, administrator supports to prevent burnout, or streamlined initiatives that free up time for teaching and learning.

Ultimately, retaining the teachers you have is the surest way to attract the ones you need. When districts invest in the conditions that help educators stay—time, trust, collaboration, and support—they safeguard the return on every dollar spent and sustain the human capital that drives student success.



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STEPS TO BUDGETING FOR IMPACT

1. Expand Your District’s Data Lens

South Carolina districts have access to some of the most comprehensive educator data in the nation—data that reveal not just who is in the workforce, but why they stay, where they move, and how they experience and perceive their daily work. By broadening the data lens beyond a single indicator, district leaders can uncover deeper patterns that explain both success and strain across the system.

Synthesizing information from the SC Teacher Working Conditions Survey (SCTWCS) and the SC Teacher Exit Survey, along with mobility trends, alternative certification pathway data, and the forthcoming SC Administrator Working Conditions Survey (SCAWCS), allows districts to view their workforce as an interconnected ecosystem. Each dataset adds dimension—capturing experiences, movements, and motivations that, considered together, can guide smarter and more equitable budgeting and resource allocations.

DATA SOURCE	PURPOSE	BUDGET IMPLICATIONS
SC Teacher Working Conditions Survey	Captures teacher workplace experiences and perspectives across job demands and resources and outcomes related to job satisfaction	Can guide decisions about professional learning, administrative support, planning time, and other resources that directly improve working conditions
SC Teacher Exit Survey	Captures and provides insight into why teachers left their position, what influenced their departures, and whether they might return	Can identify and address root causes for attrition—such as workload or lack of leadership support—rather than defaulting to costly recruitment campaigns
Annual SC TEACHER report on teacher attrition, mobility, and retention	Offers state- and district-level trends and demographics on leavers, new hires, and movement among roles	Can reveal high-mobility schools and inform targeted supports, stipends, and incentives where turnover is most concentrated
Alternative certification pathway data (August 2025 SC TEACHER report or internal district data)	Tracks longitudinal entry routes into the profession through nontraditional programs	Can support decision-making for differentiated mentoring, induction, and professional development aligned to teachers’ preparation pathways
SC Administrator Working Conditions Survey (starting in 2026)	Provides statewide data on how school leaders experience their roles, addressing their job demands and resources	Can guide budgeting for leadership development, administrative support staffing, and mentoring structures that sustain leaders

Taken together, these data sources offer a powerful foundation for understanding the educator experience—from classrooms to school leaders’ offices—to better inform financial decisions.

SC TEACHER findings alone are not enough. Districts achieve the greatest insight when they broaden their lens even further to include data sources around student achievement, attendance, discipline, and community demographics, forming a more comprehensive picture of local needs and priorities.

ALIGNING DATA SOURCES WITH PURPOSE

SCTWCS + EXIT SURVEY + MOBILITY FINDINGS

→ compare perceptions of working conditions and movement patterns

EXIT SURVEY + ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION PATHWAYS + SCAWCS

→ identify alignment between teacher entry/supports and leadership conditions

SCTWCS + SCAWCS + BUDGET CODES

→ connect job demands and resources experienced by teachers and school administrators to spending priorities

2. Layer Data for Precision

Data are most powerful when they move beyond charts and spreadsheets to spark meaningful dialogue and informed decision-making. Layering multiple sources can help districts translate insight into action.

These examples are designed to help leaders think about how they can identify patterns, pinpoint root causes, and connect resource allocations directly to the conditions that shape educator satisfaction, stability, and performance. When used as discussion tools, such combinations of data sources may help shift budgeting conversations from what's been done historically to what the data show could have the greatest impact.

When data are used in concert with one another, budgets evolve from static financial plans into strategic, evidence-informed blueprints for improvement. As districts begin translating these layered data insights into concrete actions, the next step is ensuring that funding decisions across all sources work together in support of those same priorities.

Explore more steps for layering data at sc-teacher.org/dsr-layering-data-sept2025.

3. Sustain the Cycle

Effective budgeting doesn't end when the plan is adopted. It evolves through continuous monitoring, communication, and refinement. Districts that sustain this cycle are best positioned to ensure that every dollar stays aligned with changing needs and priorities.



Monitoring helps determine whether investments are producing the intended outcomes, reaching the schools, staff, and students who need them most. Track the impact of budget decisions throughout the year using both financial and human-centered indicators. Reviewing educator working conditions data, turnover rates, and participation in professional learning alongside fiscal reports can provide valuable insights in this process.

Communicating how financial decisions are linked to data builds trust among educators, board members, and the public. Budgets should tell a clear and credible story. Sharing results makes the connection between dollars and outcomes visible and reinforces accountability. When stakeholders understand why resources were allocated in certain ways, they become partners in sustaining those efforts.

Refining allocations each budget cycle offers an opportunity to learn. Use midyear reviews and post-survey analyses to evaluate whether current initiatives are moving the needle. Adjustments—whether scaling successful strategies, repurposing funds from underperforming initiatives, or responding to emerging needs—signal a commitment to learning and improvement.



Insights in Action

Charleston County School District is taking an intentional, data-informed approach to addressing teacher retention—one that extends beyond the innovative equity-based salary increases already provided through its weighted student funding model. Its Teacher Retention Task Force analyzes data from the SCTWCS, the SC Teacher Exit Survey, and other SC TEACHER resources, including state-level research of South Carolina’s alternative certification route teachers, to better understand the factors most influential in teachers’ decisions to stay or leave the district.

To further this work, Charleston invited SC TEACHER to host an on-site workshop with district leaders, sharing how their survey results align with and diverge from state averages, highlighting specific areas where targeted investments could strengthen retention. By layering their local data with statewide data, Charleston’s leadership team is demonstrating how financial decisions can be grounded in both student and staff experiences. This approach positions the district to sustain improvement, attract and retain high-quality educators, and continue modeling how thoughtful budgeting drives meaningful change.

Mr. Bill Briggman, Chief Human Resources Officer for Charleston County School District, shares team experiences on a panel at the 2025 SC TEACHER Insights Symposium.



Moving Your District Toward Data-Informed Resource Allocation

A district’s budget is the clearest reflection of its priorities and values. Integrating SC TEACHER research and other datasets ensures every allocation is intentional, equitable, and based on evidence.

Districts that participate in the SC Administrator Working Conditions Survey, the SC Teacher Exit Survey, and the SC Teacher Working Conditions Survey...

- Receive district-specific data to inform resource allocation when they meet necessary participation thresholds.
- Can send leadership teams to workshops digging deeper into data application for strategic planning (with a minimum 50% response rate in working conditions surveys).
- Access all of these services free of charge.

Through the budgeting process, the goal is not simply to fund programs. Funding what works, supported by data, is the game-changer. By following this outlined process, leadership teams can help ensure every available dollar is directed toward improving the daily conditions that support effective teaching, school leadership, and high-quality learning for all students.