

2025 SC Teacher Exit Survey: Summary of Results

OCTOBER 2025

SC TEACHER administers the annual SC Teacher Exit Survey to teachers leaving their current public PK–12 classroom positions in South Carolina. These data, collected from teachers at the end of the academic year, help clarify different types of teacher exits across the state, including who is retiring, changing roles, moving districts, or leaving public education entirely. The 2025 survey also explored teachers' reasons for leaving and the factors that might influence their return to the classroom.

This overview highlights key findings from the 2025 SC Teacher Exit Survey. For the full summary of results, read the report at www.sc-teacher.org/TES-summary-oct2025.

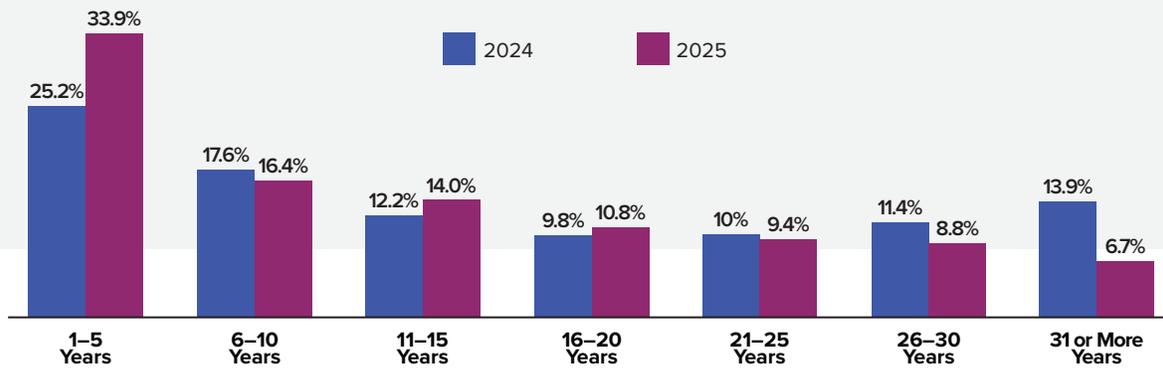
Survey Administration



The 2025 SC Teacher Exit Survey was conducted from May 12 through June 20, 2025, with responses from 914 teachers across 41 South Carolina school districts. Eligible teachers were identified by participating districts as not renewing their teaching contracts after the 2024–25 academic year. The total pool consisted of 3,010 exiting teachers across 44 districts, including two charter school districts and two specialty districts and schools, resulting in a 30% response rate. Survey data were matched with administrative data from the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) for additional context regarding participant demographics.

Experience Levels of Exiting Teachers

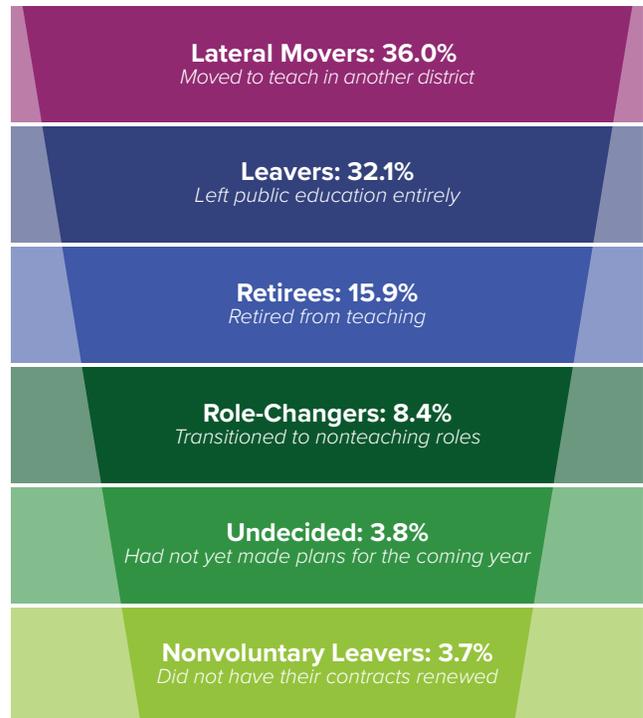
Survey results were combined with SCDE data to examine the total years of teaching experience for departing teachers. On average, exiting teachers had 14.2 years of experience, compared to 16.0 years in 2024. Overall, experience levels ranged from less than 1 year to 54 years. As found in previous years of survey administration, beginning teachers with 1–5 years of experience comprised the largest group of respondents. This category accounted for 33.9% of all exiting teachers in 2025, an increase from 25.2% the prior year. At the higher end of experience levels, teachers with 26–30 years (8.8%) and 31 or more years (6.7%) represented the smallest percentages. This pattern marks a notable shift from the 2024 survey, where mid-career ranges had the lowest percentages of exiting teachers.



TOTAL YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE

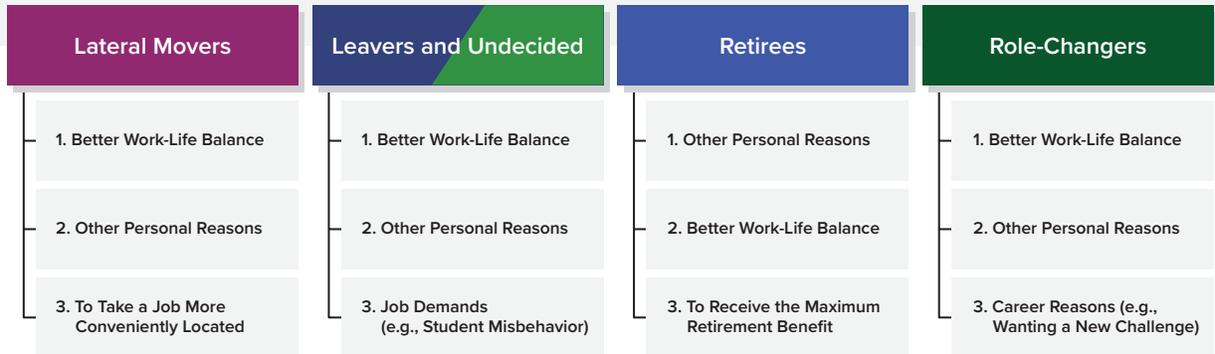
Exiting Teacher Mobility Patterns

Teachers were grouped into exit types based on their survey responses. Compared to 2024 results, the percentages of lateral movers and leavers remained consistent, while the percentage of retirees decreased notably (from about 25% to just less than 16%). The fact that nearly half of all nonretiring teachers exiting their positions remained in South Carolina public schools, either by moving districts or changing roles, underscores the importance of distinguishing between teachers leaving the profession entirely and those who continue to contribute to the state’s education system.



The Top Reasons Teachers Left

Teachers who voluntarily exited their positions were asked to rate the importance of different factors in their decision to leave. Across all voluntary exit groups, a better work-life balance consistently ranked among the top two reasons for leaving. “Other personal reasons” (an open-ended response option) also appeared frequently, with answers reflecting individual circumstances such as family responsibilities. In this figure, the leaver and undecided exit types were combined as their top reasons for leaving were the same.



Note. Teachers’ decisions to leave were organized into five constructs: career reasons, job demands, job resources, personal reasons, and policy reasons. Because the personal reasons category included a wide range of items (e.g., better work-life balance), those reasons were analyzed individually rather than combined as a scale. This figure reflects that approach. See the full report for additional details on the analysis.

Lateral Movers’ Choice of District

Findings from the 2025 survey suggest that teachers’ relocation decisions are influenced more by workplace culture and leadership than by short-term financial incentives. School culture and climate, the reputation of school and district leadership, and alignment with teachers’ educational philosophies were the strongest reported influences. In contrast, sign-on bonuses and available schools for their children played only a small role in teachers’ decisions to relocate.

TOP REASONS FOR Choosing a New District

1. School Culture and Climate

2. Reputation of School/District Leadership

3. Alignment With Educational Philosophy



Would Teachers Consider Returning to the Classroom?

WILLINGNESS TO RETURN

- A willingness to return was reported by 58% of role-changers and more than 42% of leavers. More than one-third of those undecided (38%) and retirees (34%) also indicated they would consider teaching again.

INFLUENTIAL FACTORS

- Similar to 2024, protected planning time, salary increases, and smaller class sizes were the top reasons cited by both retirees and leavers for considering a return.

DIFFERENCES IN MOTIVATIONS

- Retirees would be most influenced by salary increases as a factor to return, the same as reflected in 2024 survey results.
- Leavers again emphasized the importance of protected planning and break time in their potential decisions.

Opportunities for Addressing Teacher Mobility

Findings from the 2025 SC Teacher Exit Survey offer insight into why educators are leaving their classroom roles and what might encourage their return. These data, when combined with broader workforce trends, can inform policy and strategy decisions aimed at increasing teacher stability and addressing persistent staffing challenges across districts.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- **Exit types should influence retention strategies.**
Lateral movers and leavers cited different primary reasons for leaving. Tailored retention efforts driven by longitudinal trends, such as improving supports for early-career teachers, will likely be more effective than one-size-fits-all solutions.
- **District culture and leadership influence mobility decisions.**
Among teachers who moved to new districts, the most influential factors were school culture, leadership reputation, and philosophical alignment. Investing in strong leadership development and inclusive school environments may help retain teachers at both the school and district levels.
- **Former teachers represent a viable recruitment pool.**
A significant portion of exiting teachers, especially role-changers and leavers, indicated they would consider returning to teaching. Clear pathways for reentry, particularly those that include flexible scheduling, planning time, and improved compensation, may help districts tap into this existing talent supply.
- **Exit survey results are most actionable when paired with working conditions data.**
Districts that participate in the SC Teacher Exit Survey, the SC Teacher Working Conditions Survey, and the SC Administrator Working Conditions Survey can use the aligned content across these tools to identify opportunities for more expansive improvements and track the effects of changes over time.



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.