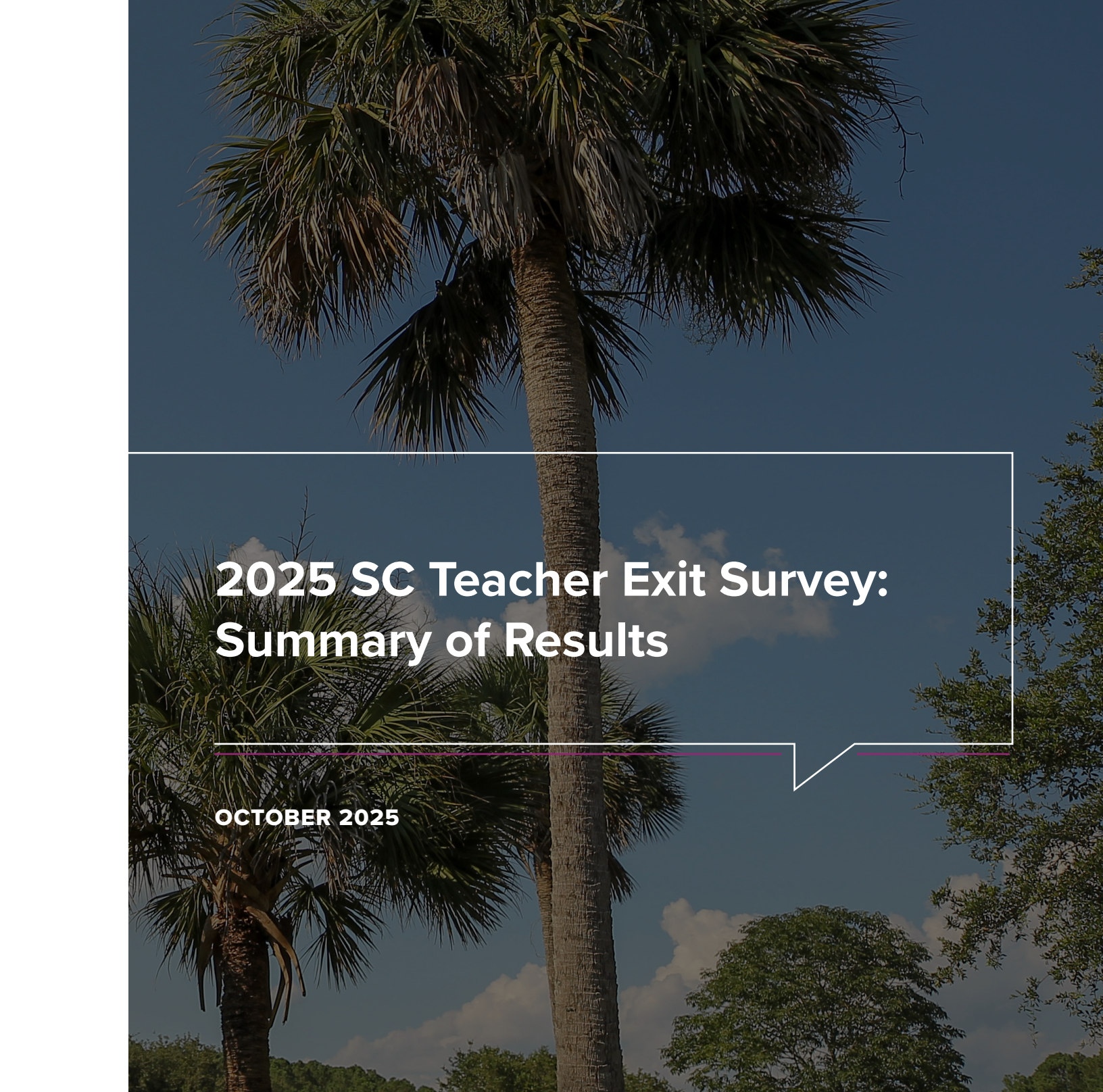


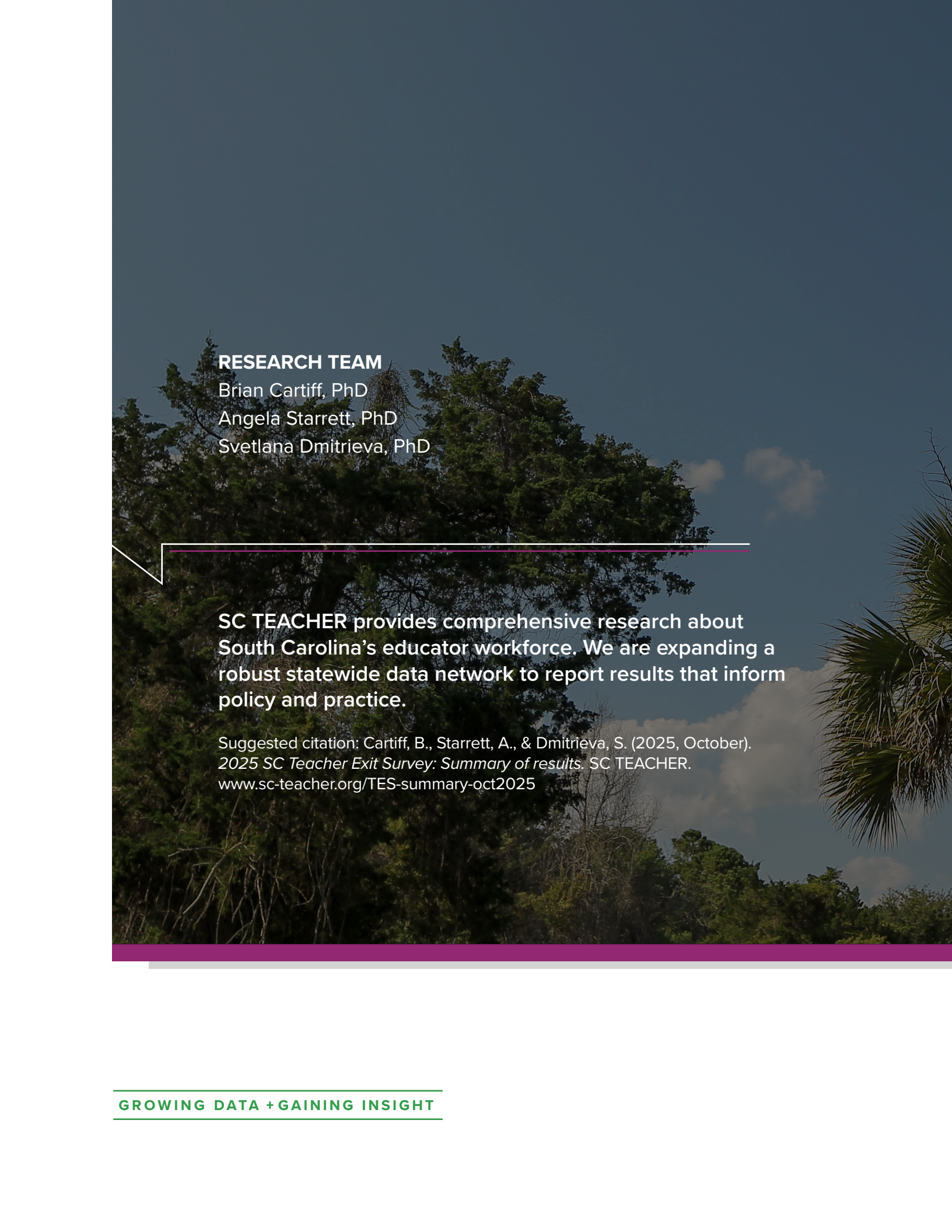


2025 SC Teacher Exit Survey: Summary of Results

OCTOBER 2025



TEACHER EXIT SURVEY



RESEARCH TEAM

Brian Cartiff, PhD

Angela Starrett, PhD

Svetlana Dmitrieva, PhD

SC TEACHER provides comprehensive research about South Carolina's educator workforce. We are expanding a robust statewide data network to report results that inform policy and practice.

Suggested citation: Cartiff, B., Starrett, A., & Dmitrieva, S. (2025, October). *2025 SC Teacher Exit Survey: Summary of results*. SC TEACHER. www.sc-teacher.org/TES-summary-oct2025

Table of Contents

1 HIGHLIGHTS

2 INTRODUCTION

4 Key Questions

5 Survey Administration

6 Data, Variables, and Analyses

12 KEY QUESTION 1:

What are the characteristics of South Carolina teachers leaving their current positions, and how can their movement best be described and classified?

12 Demographic Characteristics

12 Years of Experience and School Tenure

13 Subject Areas Taught

14 Exit Type Classification

15 KEY QUESTION 2:

What are the main reasons South Carolina teachers are leaving their positions? Are there meaningful differences in the motivating factors of those leaving to teach in other public school districts in the state (i.e., lateral movers) compared to those leaving public schools altogether (i.e., leavers)?

15 Nonvoluntary Leavers

15 Reasons for Leaving Among Voluntary Leavers

16 Comparisons Between Leavers and Lateral Movers

17 Reasons for Lateral Movers Choosing a New District

18 KEY QUESTION 3:

What factors might influence teachers' decisions to return to public schools in South Carolina?

20 CONCLUSION

21 GLOSSARY

23 REFERENCES

24 TECHNICAL APPENDIX: DETAILED TECHNICAL ANALYSIS RESULTS



SC Teacher Exit Survey: Summary of Results

+ HIGHLIGHTS

Each year, SC TEACHER administers the SC Teacher Exit Survey to public PK–12 classroom teachers who are leaving their current classroom or district. The survey is designed to offer insights into how working conditions and other factors relate to teachers' decisions to leave their positions and their plans moving forward. This report highlights the SC Teacher Exit Survey results for the 2024–25 academic year.

The SC Teacher Exit Survey categorizes teachers into different exit types based on their professional choices and circumstances.

- **Lateral movers:** teachers who will continue teaching but have moved to a different public school district in South Carolina
- **Leavers:** teachers who exited public education in South Carolina, transitioning to a private or homeschool setting, teaching in another state, or leaving the profession entirely
- **Nonvoluntary leavers:** teachers whose contracts were not renewed due to various circumstances (e.g., position eliminated, school closure)
- **Retirees:** teachers who met the qualifications for retirement and chose to retire at the end of the academic year
- **Role-changers:** teachers who will remain in the public education field in South Carolina but have transitioned to nonteaching roles, such as instructional coaching or administrative positions
- **Undecided:** teachers who exited their positions without providing definite plans for future employment

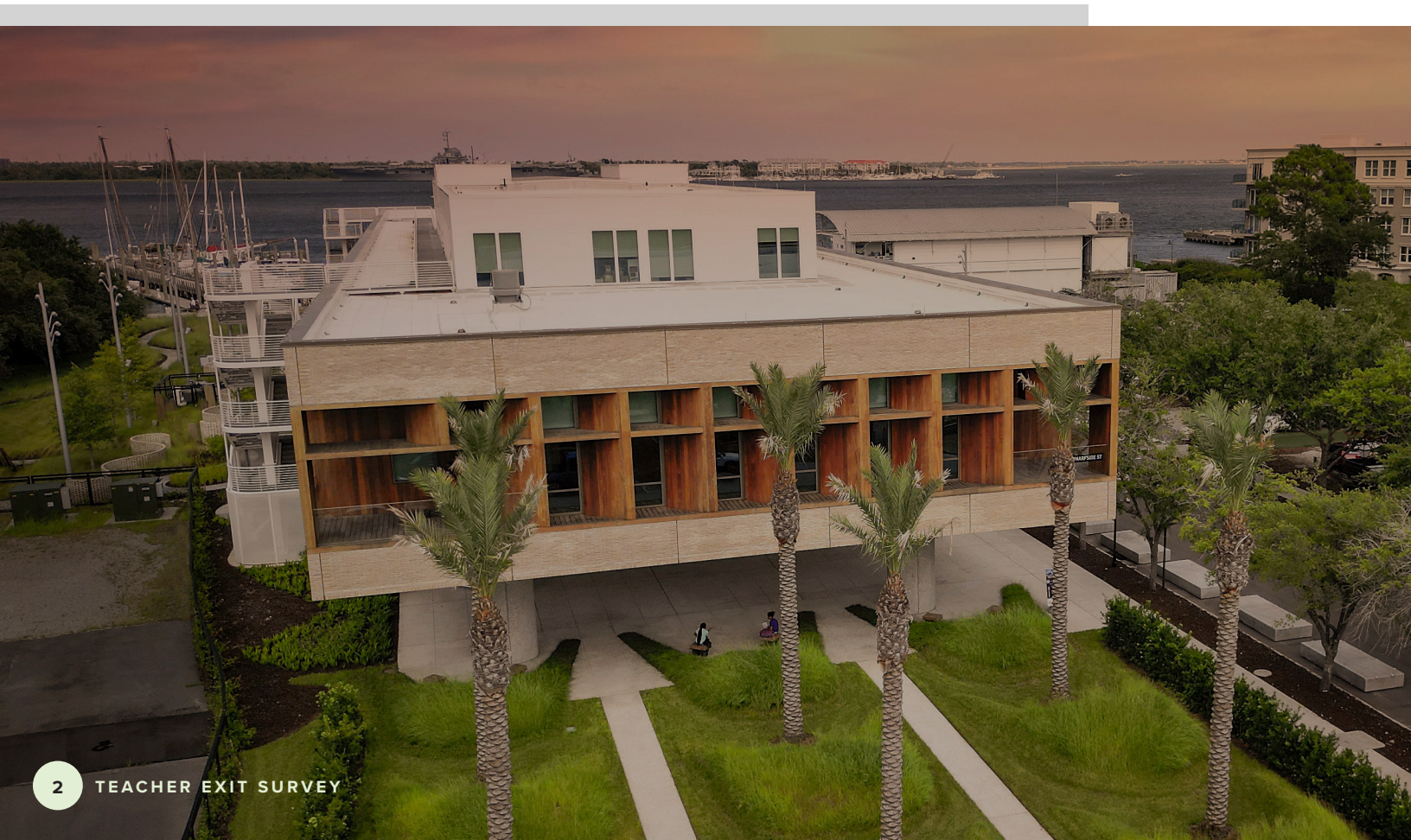
Main Findings

- Lateral movers were the largest exiting group in 2025, accounting for 36% of survey respondents. Leavers made up 32%, and retirees accounted for 16%.
- Among nonretiring teachers, nearly half either moved to another South Carolina public school district or took a nonteaching role in public education, indicating that many exiting teachers continue to serve in the state's public school system.
- A better work-life balance was the most frequently cited reason for leaving among all voluntary leavers, except retirees.
- Lateral movers and leavers differed in their motivations for exiting. Lateral movers noted proximity to home and access to job resources as more important, while leavers cited policy dissatisfaction, relocation, and work-life balance.
- Lateral movers most often chose their new district based on school or district culture, the reputation of leadership, and alignment with their educational philosophy.
- More than 40% of respondents not planning to teach in South Carolina public schools in 2025–26 said they might consider returning. Protected planning or break time, salary increases, and smaller class sizes were the incentives most strongly linked to a possible return.

+ INTRODUCTION

Teachers play a critical role in student learning and development. They bring specialized pedagogical and content knowledge, as well as a strong personal commitment to student success. Even for those who view teaching as a calling, it is not uncommon to step away from a particular position or the profession. Understanding why educators leave their current roles can help inform local and state strategies aimed at improving retention and supporting the return of experienced teachers.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to temporary increases in teacher turnover across the United States (Camp et al., 2023; Gillani et al., 2022), recent data suggest that teacher retention has stabilized in many areas, including South Carolina (Dmitrieva et al., 2025; Wething, 2024). Still, districts across the state continue to face localized staffing challenges. These shortages are shaped by both recruitment pipelines and retention patterns. For districts that struggle to recruit qualified educators, retaining current staff becomes even more essential.



Teachers leave their positions for a variety of reasons. Some exit the profession entirely or retire after many years of service. Others remain within the South Carolina public school system but move into nonteaching roles (i.e., role-changers) or transfer to other districts to teach (i.e., lateral movers). In some cases, teachers may be uncertain about their next step or may not leave voluntarily.

Exit surveys offer insights that are not captured in administrative data alone.

Understanding teacher movement patterns is important, and it is equally critical to examine the reasons behind these decisions. Exit surveys offer insights that are not captured in administrative data alone. For instance, if a district is experiencing high rates of retirement, offering part-time roles may help retain experienced teachers who are seeking more flexibility. If teachers are transferring to other districts in search of stronger support or resources, district leaders may be able to target efforts that address those needs directly.

Prior research identifies a range of factors associated with teacher turnover. These include working conditions, like administrative support and student behavior (e.g., Bryant et al., 2023; Toropova et al., 2021), compensation or advancement opportunities (e.g., Sun et al., 2017), and the policy environment (e.g., Gilliani et al., 2022). Personal and family considerations also influence such decisions (McFeely, 2018). However, less is known about how these factors vary by type of exit, such as leaving the profession entirely or moving to another school or district. Exit surveys help to fill this gap by capturing self-reported motivations directly from teachers and can provide clarity for effective strategies aimed at increasing retention (Wackwitz, 2020).



This report presents findings from the 2025 SC Teacher Exit Survey, describing the exit types (classification of movement from their current position) reported by teachers, their stated reasons for leaving, and the incentives that might influence their decision to return. The analysis also compares the responses of two key groups: teachers who left the South Carolina public school system entirely (leavers) and those who transferred to teach in other public school districts within the state (lateral movers). These findings can support more informed, context-specific strategies to strengthen the educator workforce across South Carolina.

Key Questions

This report addresses the following key questions about South Carolina public school teachers who left their positions at the end of the 2024–25 academic year and participated in the 2025 SC Teacher Exit Survey:

1. What are the characteristics of South Carolina teachers leaving their current positions, and how can their movement best be described and classified?
2. What are the main reasons South Carolina teachers are leaving their positions? Are there meaningful differences in the motivating factors of those leaving to teach in other public school districts in the state (i.e., lateral movers) compared to those leaving public schools altogether (i.e., leavers)?
3. What factors might influence teachers' decisions to return to public schools in South Carolina?

Key terms used throughout this report are defined for clarity and listed in the Glossary beginning on p. 21.



Survey Administration

The 2025 SC Teacher Exit Survey was designed to capture a variety of factors that may influence educators' decisions to leave their teaching positions. The survey incorporated branching logic to distinguish between voluntary and nonvoluntary departures. Teachers who reported leaving voluntarily were directed to additional items organized into broad categories. These included personal reasons, career and policy considerations, job demands, and resource availability that may have contributed to their decision to exit.

In early April 2025, SC TEACHER contacted district leaders from all public school districts, inviting them to participate in the SC Teacher Exit Survey. Of the 73 traditional districts, three charter districts, and six specialty districts and schools, 44 districts^a provided emails for teachers who were not renewing their contracts (or whose contracts were not renewed). Eligible teachers received their initial survey invitation email between May 12 and June 20, 2025. Nonrespondents received several reminder emails before the survey closed.

^aThe term *districts*, when used regarding the number of entities that participated in the 2025 SC Teacher Exit Survey, encapsulates the 40 traditional districts, two charter districts, and two specialty districts and schools that submitted exiting teacher emails for survey participation.

Data, Variables, and Analyses

DATA

A total of 3,010 teachers from the 44 districts across South Carolina were identified as eligible to participate in the 2025 SC Teacher Exit Survey. Of these, 914 teachers from 41 districts^b completed the survey, representing an overall participation rate of 30%. Respondents with incomplete data were included in the analyses to reflect survey results as accurately as possible. For transparency, the number of participants who responded to each individual item is reported throughout the findings.

Survey data were supplemented with individual-level demographic data for PK–12 teachers provided by the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE). These data were merged with exit survey teacher responses using teacher certificate numbers and reflect the 2023–24 academic year. As a result, demographic information of exiting teachers who entered the South Carolina public education system for the first time in 2024–25 was not included in this report.

^b41 includes 38 traditional districts, two charter districts, and one specialty district.



VARIABLES

The 2025 SC Teacher Exit Survey asked teachers to report the number of years they had taught at the school they were leaving and the total number of years they had worked as a teacher in South Carolina. Respondents also identified the subject areas they taught during the 2024–25 academic year.

Teachers were then asked whether they were leaving their current position voluntarily. Based on their responses and future employment plans, participants were grouped into one of six exit types:

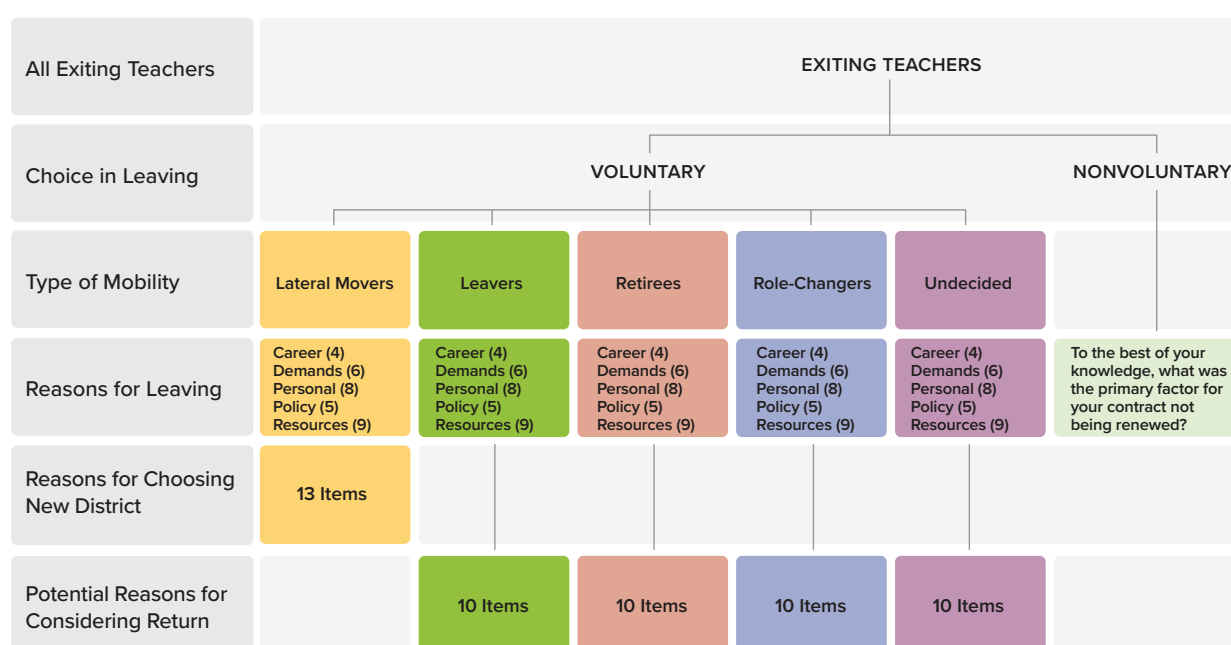
- Lateral movers: teachers who will continue teaching but have moved to a different public school district in South Carolina
- Leavers: teachers who exited public education in South Carolina, transitioning to a private or homeschool setting, teaching in another state, or leaving the profession entirely
- Nonvoluntary leavers: teachers whose contracts were not renewed due to various circumstances (e.g., position eliminated, school closure)
- Retirees: teachers who met the qualifications for retirement and chose to retire at the end of the academic year
- Role-changers: teachers who will remain in the public education field in South Carolina but have transitioned to nonteaching roles, such as instructional coaching or administrative positions
- Undecided: teachers who exited their positions without providing definite plans for future employment

Outside of those classified as retirees or undecided, respondents were asked whether they had already accepted a new position. Those who answered “yes” were also asked how the compensation in their new role compared to their previous position.



Branching logic was used to route respondents to specific item sets based on their exit type (see Figure 1). Teachers who indicated that their departure was not voluntary were asked to identify the primary reason they believed their contract was not renewed. All other respondents answered additional sets of items in five areas related to potential contributing factors for their leaving: (a) career reasons, (b) job demands, (c) job resources, (d) personal reasons, and (e) policy reasons. They answered these items on a 5-point scale indicating the importance of the individual reason (i.e., 1 = *Not at all important*, 2 = *Slightly important*, 3 = *Somewhat important*, 4 = *Very important*, 5 = *Extremely important*). For reasons that they indicated were very or extremely important, they were additionally asked to indicate the most important reason overall for their decision.

Figure 1. Survey Flow Diagram for Different Categories of Exiting Teachers



Note. The numbers in parentheses regarding reasons for leaving represent the number of items on the survey related to that factor.

Teachers categorized as lateral movers responded to 13 items (on the same 5-point scale previously discussed) related to their reasons for choosing a new district. Teachers in the leaver, retiree, role-changer, and undecided categories were asked whether they would consider returning to teach in South Carolina public schools. Those who responded affirmatively were then asked to rate the importance of several factors that might influence their decision to return, including guaranteed planning or break time, salary increases, and other working conditions. As with previous items, respondents rated each factor on a 5-point importance scale. For any factor rated as very or extremely important, teachers were prompted to select the single factor that would play the largest role in their decision to return.



ANALYSES

Descriptive statistics were used to address each of the three key questions. For items related to career reasons, job demands, job resources, and policy reasons, composite scores were calculated by averaging the items within each category. In contrast, items related to personal reasons did not align statistically with a single underlying construct. As a result, these items were analyzed individually rather than as a combined scale.

To address Key Question 2, additional statistical tests were conducted to examine mean differences between lateral movers and leavers, the two largest respondent groups. These comparisons helped reveal how different motivating factors might contribute to teachers either moving to a new district or leaving public education in South Carolina.

For all three key questions, the results are summarized alongside relevant contextual information to support interpretation. Additional details about the survey items, variables, factors, and analyses are provided in the Technical Appendix on page 24.

A woman with short brown hair, wearing glasses, a black blazer, a chunky gold chain necklace, and large hoop earrings, is leaning over a table. She is holding a pen and writing in a notebook. In the foreground, there is a blurred object with blue and white stripes. The background is a blurred indoor setting with warm lighting.

Our Key Questions



+ KEY QUESTION 1:

What are the characteristics of South Carolina teachers leaving their current positions, and how can their movement best be described and classified?

One goal of this report is to describe the characteristics of South Carolina teachers who left their positions at the end of the 2024–25 academic year. This section presents summary information on respondents’ demographics (i.e., gender and race/ethnicity), teaching experience, school tenure, subject areas, and exit type. Where applicable, comparisons are made to the overall South Carolina public school teacher population to provide context.

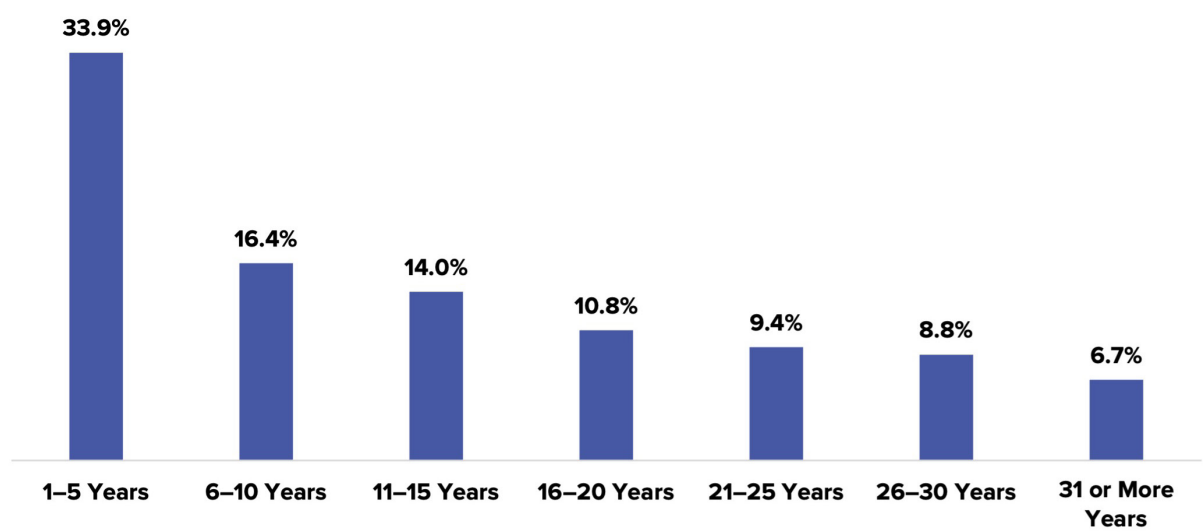
Demographic Characteristics

Of the teachers who responded to the survey, 84.8% were female, compared to 79.8% of the overall state teaching workforce (Starrett et al., 2025). In terms of race and ethnicity, the survey sample closely reflected the broader teacher population. Specifically, most respondents identified as White (79.0%), slightly higher than the state percentage of 77.4% (Starrett et al., 2025). Similarly, 16.8% of respondents identified as Black (compared to 16.9% of the teacher population), and 2.3% identified as Hispanic (compared to 2.5% of the teacher population). Additionally, 1.7% of the participants identified as Asian, which also mirrors representation within the state’s teaching workforce.

Years of Experience and School Tenure

The average total teaching experience among survey respondents was 14.2 years, with a range spanning from less than 1 year to 54 years. Figure 2 shows the distribution of respondents by years of experience. More than one-third (33.9%) of respondents were in their first 5 years of teaching. Another 16.4% had between 6 and 10 years of experience, and 14.0% had between 11 and 15 years. These results are consistent with national findings that suggest approximately one-third of teachers leave the profession within their first 5 years (Darling-Hammond et al., 2023).

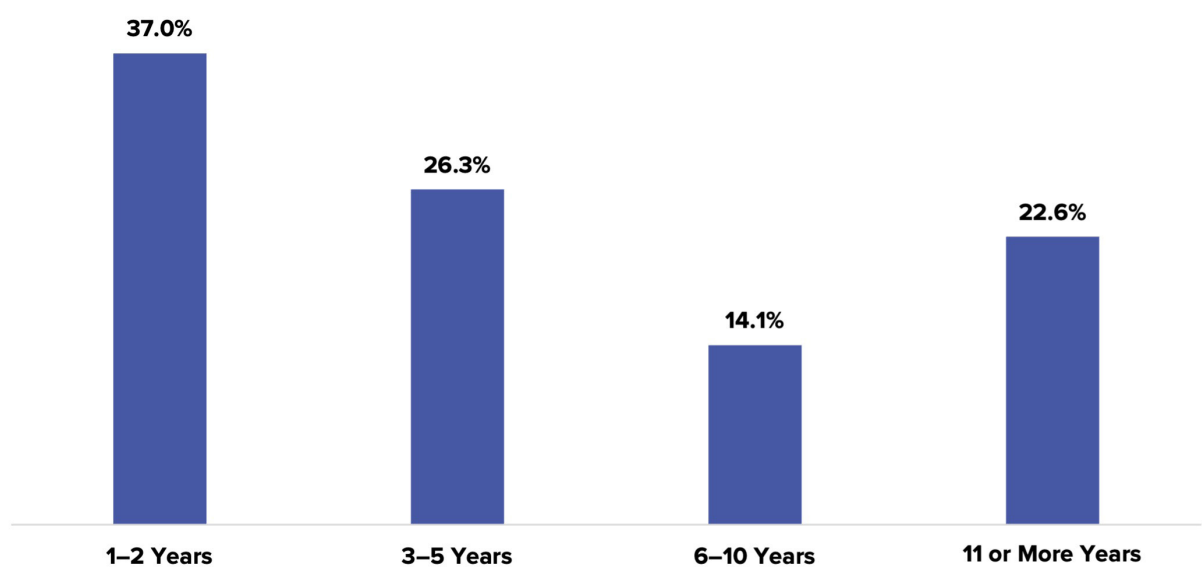
Figure 2. Distribution of Exiting Teachers by Years of Experience



Note. n = 914.

Participants were also asked how long they had taught at their current school. As shown in Figure 3, more than half had been at their school for 5 years or less, with 37.0% in their 1st or 2nd year. These data offer additional insight into school-level stability and turnover.

Figure 3. *Distribution of Exiting Teachers by Years at Current School*



Note. $n = 911$.

Subject Areas Taught

Respondents reported the subject areas they taught during the 2024–25 academic year. The most common subject was elementary education, with 19.2% of respondents indicating this assignment. Early childhood (9.9%) and special education (9.8%) were also frequently cited, followed by mathematics (8.2%) and reading (6.5%).

It is important to interpret these percentages with caution. Although elementary teachers represent the largest group of respondents, this aligns with the broader workforce, where more than 40% of teachers in South Carolina were assigned to elementary grades in 2023–24 (Starrett et al., 2025). In other words, elementary teachers make up a large portion of the overall teaching workforce, so they represent a large share of those exiting. These percentages do not, by themselves, indicate instability in any specific subject area.

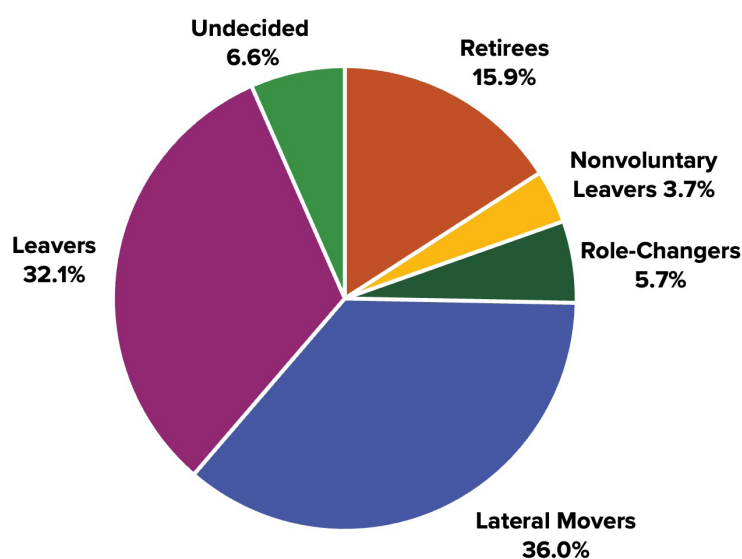
Because the SC Teacher Exit Survey represents a subset of teachers from participating districts, the data should not be viewed as a precise reflection of statewide subject-area trends. Rather, these results illustrate the types of certification areas represented among those who responded to the survey.

Exit Type Classification

Survey responses were used to classify teachers into six categories based on whether they left voluntarily and their plans following departure (see Figure 4). Lateral movers and leavers each represented roughly one-third of respondents. Retirees comprised the next largest group, followed by those who reported being undecided about their next steps, and then role-changers. The smallest group (3.7%) reported they were not returning because their contracts were not renewed (i.e., nonvoluntary leavers).

Notably, when focusing only on nonretiring teachers ($n = 756$), nearly half (49.6%) were either lateral movers or role-changers. This means that 1 out of every 2 nonretiring teachers who left a classroom position remained in the South Carolina public school system, either by moving to another district or transitioning to a nonteaching role. This finding underscores the importance of distinguishing among types of exits, as many departing teachers continue to serve in public education within the state.

Figure 4. Percentages of Exiting Teachers by Exit Type



Note. $n = 899$.

Among nonretiring respondents who had already made future employment plans, 80.0% reported having accepted a new position. Of these, approximately half expected the compensation in their new role to be somewhat or much higher than their previous position. The proportion of exiting teachers expecting higher compensation was largest among role-changers (55.5%), followed by lateral movers (47.3%). In contrast, 26.0% of leavers expected their new positions to offer somewhat or much lower pay than their previous role.

+ KEY QUESTION 2:

What are the main reasons South Carolina teachers are leaving their positions? Are there meaningful differences in the motivating factors of those leaving to teach in other public school districts in the state (i.e., lateral movers) compared to those leaving public schools altogether (i.e., leavers)?

Because nonvoluntary leavers were not administered the full set of survey items related to motivation, their responses were analyzed separately. The remaining respondents, including lateral movers, leavers, retirees, role-changers, and those undecided about their next steps, were grouped as voluntary leavers. Statistical analyses were used to explore meaningful differences in reported reasons between the two largest groups of voluntary leavers: lateral movers and leavers.

Nonvoluntary Leavers

A total of 33 respondents indicated that their contracts had not been renewed. These participants did not complete the full set of items related to their motivations for exiting. Instead, they were asked to identify the primary factor they believed led to the nonrenewal of their contract. Five respondents cited teacher evaluation system factors, five reported a failure to obtain certification, and three noted that their positions were eliminated. There were 17 who selected “other” factors. Open-ended responses in this category were highly individualized and, in many cases, unclear (e.g., “uninvited,” “school”).

Reasons for Leaving Among Voluntary Leavers

For respondents who voluntarily left their positions, we calculated the overall averages for career reasons, job demands, job resources, policy reasons, and the individual averages for the items related to personal reasons. The top five reasons for each group are shown in Table 1. Each group of respondents endorsed “other personal reasons” as one of their top five reasons. However, an analysis of open-ended responses revealed that most of these “other” reasons closely aligned with the closed-ended items already included in the survey.

Table 1. *Top Five Reasons for Leaving Position by Exit Type*

Rank	Lateral movers	Leavers	Retirees	Role-changers	Undecided
1	Better work-life balance	Better work-life balance	Other personal reasons	Better work-life balance	Better work-life balance
2	Other personal reasons	Other personal reasons	Better work-life balance	Other personal reasons	Other personal reasons
3	To take a job more conveniently located close to where I live	Job demands	To receive the maximum retirement benefit ^a	Career reasons	Job demands
4	Job demands	Moving or planning to move	Job demands	To take a job more conveniently located close to where I live	Personal health problems
5	Job resources	Career reasons	Caregiving for an adult family member	Job demands	Policy reasons

^aThis item was open only to those respondents who were retiring.

For four of the five groups, “a better work-life balance” was the top-rated reason for leaving. Among retirees, it was the second most commonly endorsed reason. Job demands appeared in the top five reasons for all groups, ranking third among both leavers and undecided respondents. Job resources were among the top five only for lateral movers, and policy reasons were rated in the top five only by undecided teachers. Lateral movers and role-changers also emphasized proximity, with many selecting “to take a job more conveniently located close to where I live” as a key influence in their decision to move.

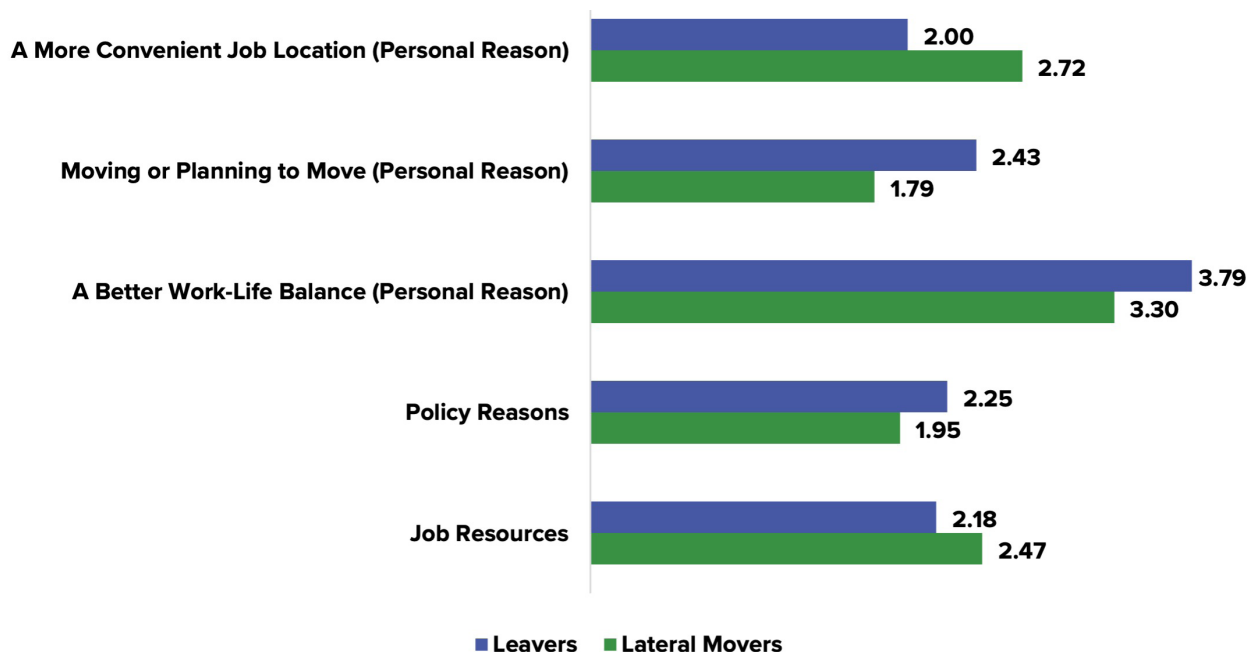
Overall, when asked to endorse the single most important reason (i.e., individual item) driving their decision to leave their position, almost 40% of respondents opted to write in a reason. However, an analysis of these open-ended responses revealed that most entries closely mirrored existing survey items. For example, many respondents mentioned retirement or familial responsibilities as their primary motivation, both of which align with the closed-ended personal reason items. Others cited issues related to job demands, such as excessive workload, or the lack of job resources, such as inadequate administrative support. As a result, the analysis did not identify any frequent or unique themes beyond those already captured by the closed-ended response options.

The most frequently endorsed closed-ended items were “a better work-life balance” or “moving or planning to move,” which were each selected by about 10% of the respondents. The top two nonpersonal reasons were “insufficient administrative support” (a job resource reason; 6.7%) and “wanting or needing a higher salary and/or better benefits” (a career reason; 5.0%).

Comparisons Between Leavers and Lateral Movers

To better understand the differences between the two largest subgroups of exiting teachers (leavers and lateral movers), we conducted statistical tests comparing the average ratings of career reasons, job demands, job resources, and policy reasons, as well as individual items for personal reasons. No statistically significant differences were found in the average ratings for career reasons or job demands. Several personal reasons also showed no meaningful difference between the groups. The averages for statistically different reasons are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. *Reasons With Statistically Different Averages of Importance for Leavers and Lateral Movers*



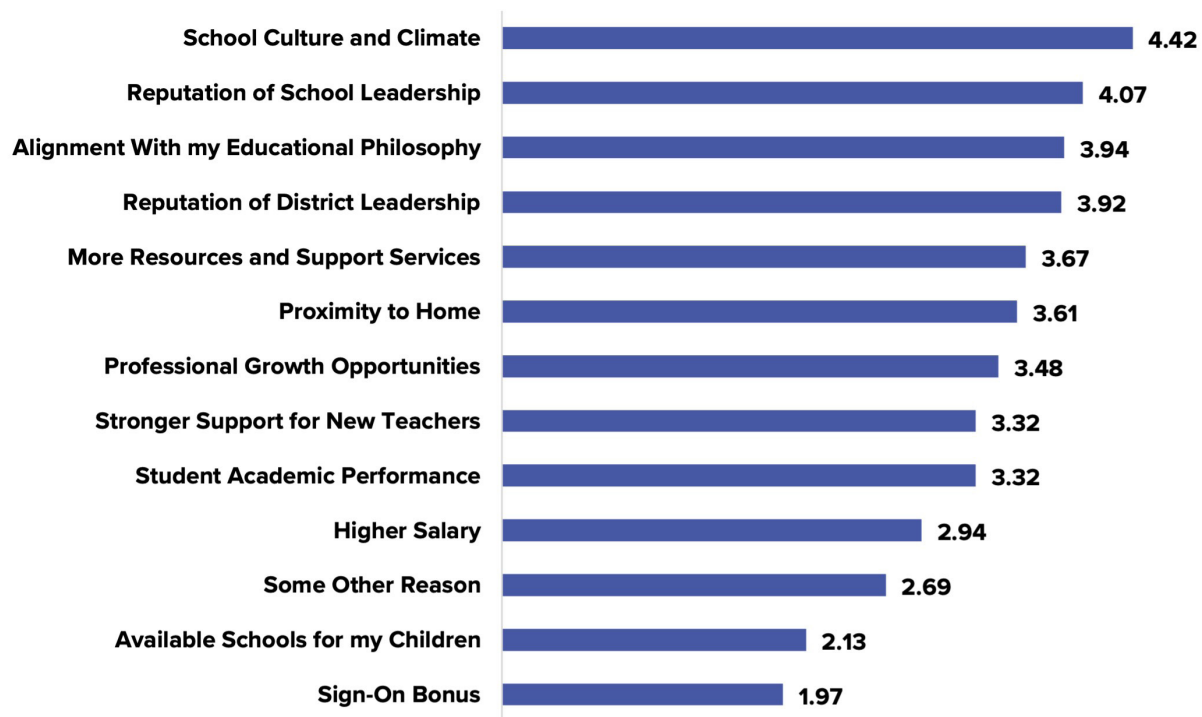
Note. Respondents could indicate the relative importance of each reason using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all important, 2 = Slightly important, 3 = Somewhat important, 4 = Very important, and 5 = Extremely important). All differences are significant at $p \leq .001$ with $.30 \leq \text{Cohen's } d \leq .46$.

The three reasons with the largest differences between the two groups were all personal reasons. A more convenient job location was rated as more important for lateral movers. Moving or planning to move and a better work-life balance were rated more important by leavers. Policy reasons were rated as more important by leavers, while job resources were rated more important by lateral movers. Although these differences were statistically significant, effect sizes were small to medium, suggesting limited practical distinctions between the two groups.

Reasons for Lateral Movers Choosing a New District

Lateral movers responded to an additional set of 13 items related to their selection of a new district. Figure 6 presents the average importance ratings for each of these factors. Respondents most strongly endorsed the school culture and climate of their new district as an important influence. Other highly rated factors included the reputation of school and district leadership and the alignment between the new district's and the teacher's educational philosophies. In contrast, receiving a sign-on bonus was the least endorsed reason for selecting the new district.

Figure 6. *Averages of Importance for Reasons Lateral Movers Chose Their New District*



+ KEY QUESTION 3:

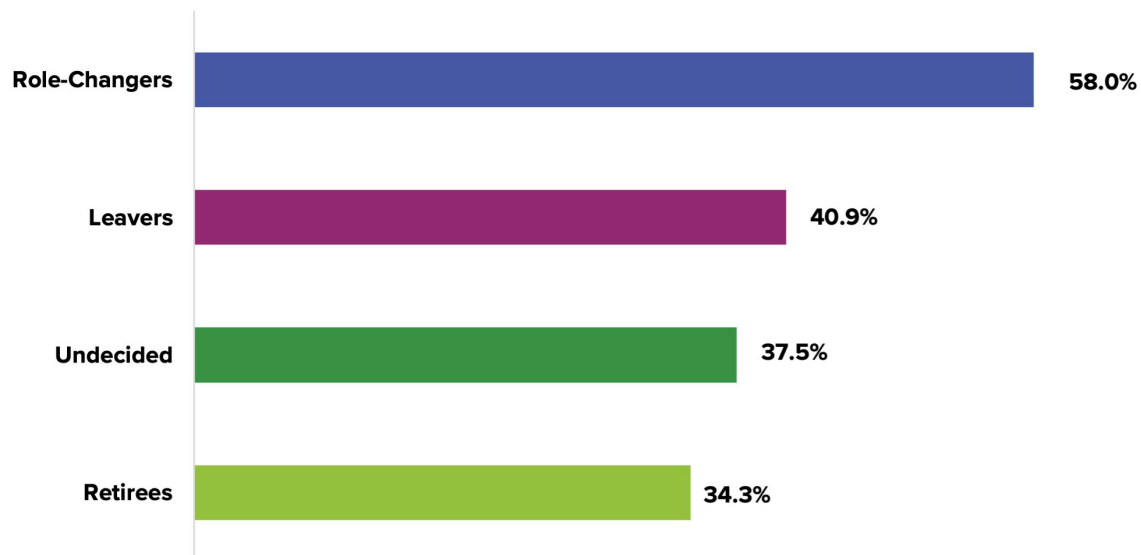
What factors might influence teachers' decisions to return to public schools in South Carolina?

One of the primary goals of the SC Teacher Exit Survey is to understand whether teachers who leave the public education workforce in South Carolina might consider returning. To address this question, survey respondents classified as leavers, retirees, role-changers, or undecided were asked whether they would consider returning to teach in a South Carolina public school. These individuals were also asked to rate the importance of various factors in potentially influencing their decision to return.

Figure 7 presents the percentage of respondents in each group who either *Agreed* or *Strongly agreed* that they might consider returning to the public school teacher workforce in South Carolina. A majority of role-changers (58.0%) indicated a willingness to return to teaching, which may be expected given that they continue to work within the education system in nonteaching roles. Among leavers, slightly more than 40% expressed openness to return to teaching, which closely aligns with previous research showing eventual reentry for a similar percentage of leavers (Grissom & Reininger, 2012).

Smaller but still notable percentages of undecided respondents (37.5%) and retirees (34.3%) indicated they would consider returning to teaching. These findings suggest that a significant portion of exiting educators remain a potential resource for filling future vacancies in South Carolina public schools.

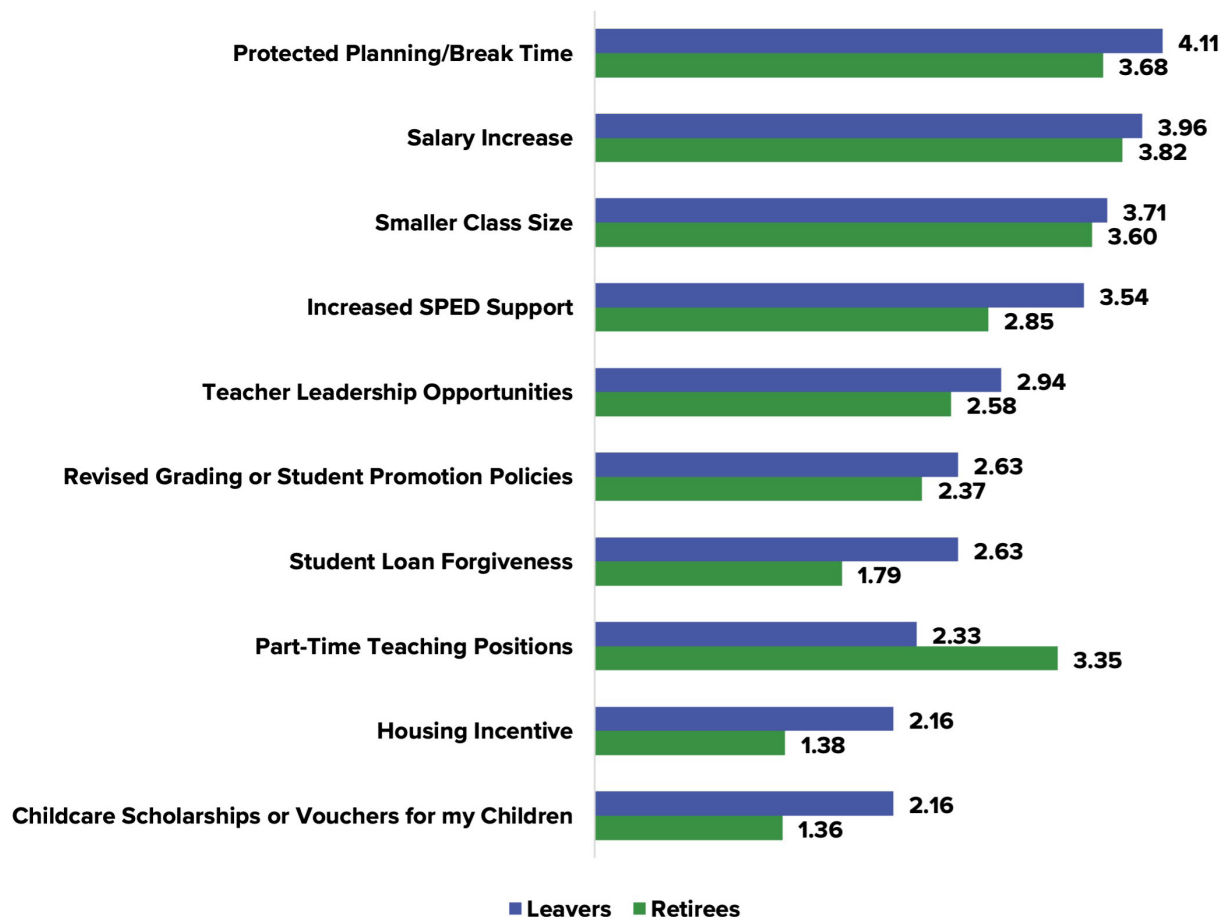
Figure 7. Percentages of Role-Changers, Leavers, Undecided Respondents, and Retirees Who Might Consider Returning to Teach in South Carolina Public Schools



To better understand the conditions under which leavers and retirees, the two largest respondent groups, might return, we calculated the average importance ratings for incentive-related factors (see Figure 8). Leavers reported higher average ratings across all factors except for the availability of part-time teaching roles, which was rated as more important by retirees.

Despite this difference, the top three factors were consistent across both groups: increased salary, protected planning or break time, and smaller class sizes. Leavers placed the greatest emphasis on protected time, while retirees rated salary increases as most influential. In contrast, incentives such as housing assistance and childcare scholarships or vouchers were rated as less important by both groups and are unlikely to serve as strong stand-alone incentives to encourage their return.

Figure 8. *A Comparison of the Averages of Importance for Reasons Leavers and Retirees Might Return to Teach*



+ CONCLUSION

This report summarizes findings from the 2025 administration of the SC Teacher Exit Survey, offering a statewide view of the characteristics of teachers who left their positions at the end of the academic year. In addition to describing exit patterns, including retirement, movement to another district, or leaving the public education system entirely, the report presents data on the factors teachers identified as influencing their decisions. The analysis also includes insight into why lateral movers selected new districts and which incentives may influence teachers to return to the workforce.

Teachers with 1–5 years of experience represented the largest share of respondents, accounting for 33.9% of all exiting teachers in 2025, an increase from 25.2% in 2024. At the more experienced end, teachers with 26–30 years (8.8%) and 31 or more years (6.7%) comprised the smallest groups. This marks a notable shift from the 2024 survey, when mid-career teachers were the least represented among those exiting. The most common teaching assignments among respondents (in order of largest to smallest percentages) were in elementary education, early childhood education, special education, and mathematics.

Teachers moving to teach at a school in another district (i.e., lateral movers) made up the largest group of respondents (36.0%). Teachers leaving public schools in the state (i.e., leavers) made up the next largest group (32.1%). Retirees were the third largest group (15.9%). Nonvoluntary leavers (3.7%) made up the smallest group.

Comparative analyses showed that the reasons driving lateral movers differed in meaningful ways from those reported by leavers. Lateral movers were more likely to cite job resources and proximity, such as a more convenient location, as influential factors. These findings suggest that many lateral movers may hope to improve their working conditions or reduce commute times without leaving the profession. In contrast, leavers placed greater emphasis on personal life transitions, such as relocating out of the area, as well as the desire for improved work-life balance and policy-related concerns. For these teachers, a move to another district may not have been seen as a viable solution.

Taken together, these findings can support districts in developing targeted retention strategies and identifying potential opportunities to reengage former educators. Districts that participate in the SC Teacher Exit Survey and meet the minimum response threshold receive a customized report with aggregated results specific to their district, which can inform decision-making in their local context.

For a more comprehensive understanding of educator recruitment and retention across the state, findings from the SC Teacher Exit Survey can be interpreted alongside other SC TEACHER resources, including the annual mobility report (Dmitrieva et al., 2025) and results from the SC Teacher Working Conditions Survey (Gao et al., 2025). Districts that participate in both surveys can utilize aligned content across instruments, offering a more complete picture of teacher experiences and workforce dynamics. SC TEACHER's District Support Series guide, *Layering Data for Deeper Decision-Making*, helps outline this process for districts working with survey results and a variety of data sources.

+ GLOSSARY

The following definitions and clarifications address how terms are used in the context of this report and all SC TEACHER reports. Reports and resources published prior to 2025 may use terms differently. SC TEACHER works continuously to establish consistent terminology for the most accurate understanding of our research.

Career Reasons

Factors related to professional advancement, compensation, or job change preferences that may influence a teacher's decision to leave their current position.

Demands (Job Demands)

The physical, social, psychological, and organizational aspects of a job that require sustained effort and are associated with psychological or physiological costs.

Exit Type

A classification assigned to teachers based on their self-reported employment plans after leaving their position. Categories include lateral mover, leaver, retiree, role-changer, nonvoluntary leaver, and undecided.

Lateral Mover

A teacher who will continue teaching in a public school in South Carolina but has moved to a different district.

Leaver

A teacher who exited public education in South Carolina, transitioning to a private or homeschool setting, teaching in another state, or leaving the profession entirely.

Nonvoluntary Leaver

A teacher whose employment was ended due to contract nonrenewal or other involuntary circumstances. Examples include position elimination, certification issues, or school closure.

Personal Reasons

Factors related to life circumstances, such as family responsibilities, health, relocation, or work-life balance, that may contribute to a teacher's decision to leave their current position.

Policy Reasons

Factors related to teachers' dissatisfaction with local, state, or federal education policies, which may contribute to their decision to leave their current role.

Position Code

A numerical designation assigned by the state or district to categorize an educator's role within the school system (e.g., classroom teacher, instructional coach, administrator). Teachers of record are those with position codes 3–9, which include PK–12 classroom teachers, special education teachers (i.e., self-contained, resource, itinerant), and retired teachers returning to teach.

Recruitment

The process of bringing new teachers into the public school workforce. From the state perspective, this may include hiring recent graduates of traditional or alternative preparation programs, teachers from other states or countries, or teachers returning to the classroom. From a district perspective, recruitment also encompasses bringing in teachers from other South Carolina districts.

Resources (Job Resources)

The physical, social, psychological, and organizational aspects of a job that support employees in reaching their work goals, promoting their growth, and, in some cases, reducing their job demands.

Retention

When a teacher remains in the South Carolina public school teaching profession from one year to the next. Retention can be analyzed at multiple levels:

- **State-Level Retention:** When a teacher continues to teach in a South Carolina public school, regardless of district or school changes.
- **District-Level Retention:** When a teacher continues to teach in the same district, even if they switch schools within that district.

Retention can also be analyzed at the school level in many cases, but SC Teacher Exit Survey results are not disaggregated by school level.

Retiree

A teacher who met the qualifications for retirement and chose to retire at the end of the academic year

Role-Changer

A public school educator who changed positions within South Carolina public schools from one year to the next. This includes moving from teaching to a nonteaching role (e.g., administrator, instructional coach) or moving from a nonteaching role into teaching. For the purpose of the SC Teacher Exit Survey, the category includes only those leaving teaching for nonteaching positions.

SC Teacher Exit Survey

An annual statewide survey administered by SC TEACHER to gather data from South Carolina public school teachers who are not renewing their teaching contracts. The survey collects information about exit type, motivations for leaving, and conditions that might influence a return to the profession.

Teacher

Any public school educator in South Carolina assigned a position code of 3–9. This includes PK–12 classroom teachers, special education teachers (i.e., self-contained, resource, itinerant), and retired teachers returning to teach.

Undecided

A teacher who reported leaving their position in a South Carolina public school but had not yet made a definitive decision about their future employment plans at the time of survey completion.

Voluntary Leaver

A teacher who leaves their position in a South Carolina public school by choice, rather than as a result of contract nonrenewal or other involuntary factors.

+ REFERENCES

- Bryant, J., Ram, S., Scott, D., & Williams, C. (2023). *K–12 teachers are quitting. What would make them stay?* McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/k-12-teachers-are-quitting-what-would-make-them-stay#/>
- Camp, A., Zamorro, G., & McGee, J. B. (2023). *Teacher turnover during the COVID-19 pandemic* (EDRE Working Paper 2023-02). Education Reform Faculty and Graduate Students Publications. <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/edrepub/143>
- Cohen J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences*. Routledge Academic.
- Darling-Hammond, L., DiNapoli, M. A., Kini, T., & McKenna, B. (2023). *Policymakers should ring in the new year with action to end teacher shortages*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/policymakers-should-ring-new-year-action-end-teacher-shortages>
- Diliberti, M. K., & Schwartz, H. L. (2023). *Educator turnover has markedly increased, but districts have taken actions to boost teacher ranks: Selected findings from the sixth American school district panel survey*. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA956-14.html
- Dmitrieva, S., Starrett, A., & Cartiff, B. (2025, February). *South Carolina teacher attrition, mobility, and retention report for 2023–24*. SC TEACHER. <https://www.sc-teacher.org/EPR-teacher-retention-feb2025>
- Gao, R., Starrett, A., Cartiff, B., & Dmitrieva, S. (2025, June). *The 2025 SC Teacher Working Conditions Survey*. SC TEACHER. <https://www.sc-teacher.org/TWC-survey-report-june2025>
- Gillani, A., Dierst-Davies, R., Lee, S., Robin, L., Li, J., Glover-Kudon, R., Baker, K., & Whitton, A. (2022). Teachers' dissatisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic: Factors contributing to a desire to leave the profession. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, Article 940718. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.940718>
- Grissom, J. A., & Reiningier, M. (2012). Who comes back? A longitudinal analysis of the reentry behavior of exiting teachers. *Education Finance and Policy*, 7(4), 425–454. https://doi.org/10.1162/EDFP_a_00075
- McFeely, S. (2018, March 27). *Why your best teachers are leaving and 4 ways to keep them*. Gallup. <https://www.gallup.com/education/237275/why-best-teachers-leaving-ways-keep.aspx?version=print>
- Starrett, A., Dmitrieva, S., & Cartiff, B. (2025, April). *South Carolina teacher workforce profile for 2023–24*. SC TEACHER. <https://www.sc-teacher.org/EWP-teacher-workforce-apr2025>
- Sun, M., Saultz, A., & Ye, Y. (2017). Federal policy and the teacher labor market: Exploring the effects of NCLB school accountability on teacher turnover. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 28(1), 102–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2016.1242506>
- Toropova, A., Myrberg, E., & Johansson, S. (2020). Teacher job satisfaction: The importance of school working conditions and teacher characteristics. *Educational Review*, 73(1), 71–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2019.1705247>
- Wackwitz, J. (2020, January 23). *Using teacher exit surveys to improve teacher retention*. Institute of Education Science. <https://ies.ed.gov/learn/blog/using-teacher-exit-surveys-improve-teacher-retention>
- Wething, H. (2024). *Today's teacher shortage is just the tip of the iceberg: Part I*. Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/blog/teacher-shortage-part1/>

+ TECHNICAL APPENDIX: DETAILED TECHNICAL ANALYSIS RESULTS

This appendix describes the data analysis procedure for this report. All relevant statistical methods, measures, and results for the report are addressed herein.

DATA SOURCES

SC TEACHER emailed invitations for SC Teacher Exit Survey participation to district leaders in all public school districts in the state in April 2025. A total of 44 districts, including two charter school districts and two specialty districts and schools, provided emails for teachers who were not renewing their contracts or whose contracts were not being renewed. Within these participating districts, there were 3,010 exiting teachers. We received survey responses from 914 teachers in 41 districts, including two charter districts and one specialty district. This constituted an overall survey participation rate of 30%. Some participants responded to only a subset of questions. When presenting results, we provide totals to indicate the number of responses to each item.

Data from the exit survey included several sets of variables. We asked survey participants about their total years of teaching experience in South Carolina public schools, their years of experience in the school they were leaving, and the subject areas they were responsible for during the 2024–25 academic year. The next set of questions focused on future plans. Respondents were asked to choose one of the 17 options describing their plans after leaving. These response options were used to assign each teacher to one of the six categories: (a) lateral movers, (b) leavers, (c) nonvoluntary leavers, (d) retirees, (e) role-changers, and (f) undecided teachers who did not indicate definite future plans for employment. Further, we inquired if lateral movers, leavers, nonvoluntary leavers, and role-changers had accepted a new position and, if so, how the compensation level in the new position compared to their previously held teaching position.

These data from the exit survey were supplemented with data provided by the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) on individual-level demographics (i.e., gender and race/ethnicity) for PK–12 teachers. The two data sources were merged based on teacher certification information. It should be noted that SCDE data were available only for the 2023–24 academic year. Therefore, the analyses presented in this technical appendix do not include demographic characteristics of the teachers who joined and left the South Carolina teacher workforce in 2024–25.

MEASURES

There were three measures within the 2025 SC Teacher Exit Survey implementation. The Reasons for Leaving Position scale was developed in alignment with the job demands-resources (JD-R) model. It comprises five subscales reflecting the following types of reasons for leaving:

- Career reasons (four items; e.g., wanting a new challenge)
- Job demands (six items; e.g., frequency with which students lacked engagement)
- Job resources (nine items; e.g., insufficient communication with the principal)
- Personal reasons (eight items; e.g., moving or planning to move)
- Policy reasons (five items; e.g., dissatisfied with the student grading and promotion policies)

The items on these five subscales largely resembled the items on the 2024 survey, though several career reasons were changed for the most recent version to be more specific. Additionally, one item regarding the desire to teach other grades or subject areas was shifted from the personal reasons subscale to the career reasons subscale in the 2025 survey.

There were also differences in which groups of participants answered specific subscales. In the 2024 administration, retirees and role-changers did not see many of the items in these subscales. Retirees were asked a unique question about which factors led to their decision to retire, and role-changers were asked about their new position and their primary reason for taking it. Only leavers who were not planning to teach anywhere were asked to respond to all the subscale items. Lateral movers and leavers planning to teach outside of South Carolina public schools did not get routed to items about career reasons motivating their decisions. This was updated in the 2025 survey administration, where all voluntary leavers (i.e., lateral movers, leavers, retirees, role-changers, and undecided) were asked to provide responses to all of the subscale items making up the Reasons for Leaving Position scale (i.e., career reasons, job demands, job resources, personal reasons, and policy reasons). In both survey administrations, nonvoluntary leavers were asked to respond to a single question about reasons for their contract not being renewed (e.g., failure to obtain teacher certification).

In this measure, respondents rated the importance of each item on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Not at all important*, 2 = *Slightly important*, 3 = *Somewhat important*, 4 = *Very important*, 5 = *Extremely important*). Cronbach's alpha was used as a measure of construct reliability and provided support for using the constructs of career reasons ($\alpha = 0.673$), job demands ($\alpha = 0.862$), job resources ($\alpha = 0.892$), and policy reasons ($\alpha = 0.781$). For these four constructs, we calculated and used average scale scores in the analysis. The Cronbach's alpha for the personal reasons subscale ($\alpha = 0.428$) was below the acceptable level, so we analyzed data for each item within the personal reasons construct separately.

The second measure, Reasons for Choosing New District, was developed to understand how different reasons contributed to the decision of lateral movers to choose their new school district. This scale was not part of the 2024 SC Teacher Exit Survey administration. It included 13 items (e.g., reputation of district leadership) on the same 5-point Likert scale as the Reasons for Leaving Position measure and an optional open-ended question for respondents to state some other reason for their choice.

The third measure, Potential Reasons for Considering a Return, was offered to leavers, retirees, role-changers, and undecided exiting teachers. These respondents also answered a single preceding question asking them to indicate their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale about whether they would consider returning to teach in South Carolina public schools. This item was different than a related item on the 2024 survey, which only allowed for a yes/no response. The Potential Reasons for Considering a Return scale consisted of ten items relating to incentives (e.g., salary increase) or resources (e.g., increased special education support in the classroom). Teachers were asked to rate the importance of the items in a potential decision to return to a teaching position in South Carolina public schools. The items were measured on the same 5-point Likert scale as the two other measures. This scale largely resembled one used in the 2024 survey, with an additional item related to opportunities for teacher leadership.

The updates to the 2025 survey, in both item content and respondent routing, limit the comparability of certain results with those from the 2024 administration. However, these changes were made to improve clarity, the standardization across exit types, and the overall ability to act on findings.

DATA ANALYSIS

To address Key Question 1, we conducted a descriptive analysis of teacher demographic characteristics and career-related variables to understand the sample of exiting teachers. Descriptive statistics were calculated and reported for the full sample, as well as disaggregated by exit type: lateral movers, leavers, nonvoluntary leavers, retirees, role-changers, and undecided.

To address Key Question 2, we examined teacher-reported reasons for leaving their current positions. Analyses focused on differences among the five voluntary exit groups. For each group, we calculated average scores for the four composite subscales from the Reasons for Leaving Position scale: career reasons, job demands, job resources, and policy reasons. We also examined item-level means for the eight items related to personal reasons, which were not aggregated due to low internal consistency. In addition, we rank-ordered responses to the item asking respondents to select the single most important reason for leaving. Open-ended responses for "other personal reasons" and for those who selected and supplied another major reason for their leaving were reviewed and coded to identify recurring themes and to supplement the interpretation of closed-ended results.

To more specifically investigate differences between lateral movers and leavers, the two largest exit groups, we conducted a series of independent sample *t*-tests. Exit type was used as the independent variable, and scale average scores served as dependent variables. Prior to analysis, we assessed the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance. When the assumption of equal variances was not met, Welch's *t*-test was used as a nonparametric alternative. To account for multiple comparisons, we applied a Holm-Bonferroni correction to control the family-wise error rate. For each comparison, Cohen's *d* was calculated to assess effect size, with values of 0.20, 0.50, and 0.80 interpreted as small, medium, and large effects, respectively (Cohen, 1988).

To further explore what influenced lateral movers to choose a specific new district, we conducted a descriptive analysis of responses to the Reasons for Choosing New District scale. Means, standard deviations, and response distributions were calculated for each of the 13 items on the scale.

To address Key Question 3, we analyzed responses to the Potential Reasons for Considering a Return scale. Descriptive statistics were generated for each of the ten items, and responses to the follow-up item asking participants to select the most important factor influencing a potential return to teaching were rank ordered.

RESULTS

Teacher Demographic Data

First, we examined respondents' overall teaching experience and years at the current school as reported by survey participants. Their overall teaching experience ranged from less than a year to a maximum of 54.0 years, with a mean of 14.2 years. The distribution was bimodal, with the highest peak at 3.7 years and the second, lower peak at 28.1 years. Most likely, this reflects two distinct populations of exiting teachers: novice teachers leaving their positions and retirees.

Teachers in their first 5 years of experience represented the largest group in the sample, slightly more than a third of all the survey respondents (Table A1). The second largest group of exiting teachers was in the category of 6–10 years (16.4%). Each subsequent group with more years of experience had a smaller proportion of exiting teachers, with teachers who had 31 or more years of experience having the smallest number of exiting teachers and representing 6.7% of the sample.

Table A1. *Total Years of Experience for Exiting Teachers*

	Count	Percent
1–5 years	310	33.9%
6–10 years	150	16.4%
11–15 years	128	14.0%
16–20 years	99	10.8%
21–25 years	86	9.4%
26–30 years	80	8.8%
31 or more years	61	6.7%
Total	914	100.0%

The range for the number of years spent teaching at the current school was narrower, with the low end at less than a year and the high at 42.0 years. The mean was 7.4 years. The largest group included teachers who had taught at their current school for only 1 to 2 years (Table A2). More than 63% of the exiting teachers in our sample were in their first 5 years of teaching at their current school when they left their teaching position.

Table A2. *Experience at the Current School for Exiting Teachers*

	Count	Percent
1–2 years	337	37.0%
3–5 years	240	26.3%
6–10 years	128	14.1%
11 or more years	206	22.6%
Total	911	100.0%

Data on gender were available for 790 survey respondents (86.4%). For these complete cases, 84.8% of the exiting teachers were female. Data on race and ethnicity were available for 775 exiting teachers (84.8%). The majority of those for whom race data were available were White (79.0%), followed by Black (16.8%), Hispanic (2.3%), and Asian (1.7%) teachers.

Teachers were asked to list all the subject areas in which they taught during the year (Table A3). A total of 806 survey participants responded to this question, with 238 teachers providing more than one response. Thus, the total number of responses exceeded the survey sample size and constituted 1,197 responses. All the percentages were calculated based on the total number of responses. The three largest subject areas taught were elementary education (19.2%), early childhood (9.9%), and special education (9.8%).

Table A3. *Percent of Teachers Exiting by Subject Area Taught and Total Years of Experience*

	Total	1–5 years	6–10 years	11 or more years
Elementary education	19.2%	23.8%	17.0%	17.1%
Early childhood	9.9%	11.6%	8.5%	9.2%
Special education	9.8%	9.5%	10.2%	9.8%
Mathematics	8.2%	6.3%	7.7%	9.6%
Reading	6.5%	7.4%	6.4%	6.0%
English	5.0%	5.6%	3.4%	5.3%
Career and technical education	4.7%	3.2%	6.0%	5.1%
Gifted and talented	4.2%	2.4%	5.5%	4.8%
Fine arts	3.8%	3.7%	4.3%	3.6%
Social studies	3.8%	4.0%	3.8%	3.6%
Middle level math	3.7%	3.4%	3.4%	3.9%
Literacy	3.7%	4.0%	3.8%	3.4%
Science	3.4%	4.5%	3.8%	2.6%
Other	14.1%	10.6%	16.2%	16.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note. This table includes only the largest subject areas for which the percentage of respondents was more than 3%. The Other category includes subject areas that had fewer than 3% of exiting teachers.

Teacher Exit Types

We categorized the respondents into one of six exit types based on their responses to the survey questions about whether they were leaving their positions voluntarily and their future plans. For the five categories of exiting teachers leaving voluntarily, Table A4 maps responses for their future plan options. The nonvoluntary leaver exit type was determined solely based on the question regarding whether the respondent was leaving voluntarily.

Table A4. Exit Type Classification

Exit type	Left voluntarily	Survey response options
Lateral mover	Yes	Teaching at a public school in South Carolina
Leaver	Yes	Teaching at a public school in another state
		Teaching outside of the United States
		Teaching at a postsecondary institution (e.g., community college)
		Pursuing further education in the field of education
		Pursuing further education outside the field of education
		Pursuing a teaching-related position outside the field of education (e.g., training)
		Pursuing a different career outside the field of education
		Homeschooling
		Teaching at a private school
		Taking a career break
Retiree	Yes	Retiring from working
Role-changer	Yes	Working in school administration within South Carolina public education
		Working in district administration within South Carolina public education
		Working in instructional support/coaching within South Carolina public education
		Working in another nonteaching role within South Carolina public education
Undecided	Yes	Undecided
Nonvoluntary leaver	No	N/A

Table A5 shows the number of respondents in each exit type. Lateral movers ($n = 324$) made up the largest group in the survey sample. Leavers ($n = 289$) represented the second largest group, with almost every third teacher in the sample assigned to this category. The top three response options for leavers were to “pursue a different career outside the field of education” (26.6%), “teach at a public school in another state” (21.5%), and “take a career break” (19.0%). Role-changers ($n = 51$) represent a category of note because they continue working in South Carolina public schools. Two role-changers said they would be working in district administration, 13 were going into school administration, 16 were moving into instructional support or coaching roles, and 20 were switching into another nonteaching role in South Carolina public schools.

Notably, if we considered the sample of nonretiring teachers ($n = 756$), the two exit types describing teachers who chose to stay in South Carolina public schools, lateral movers and role-changers, would constitute 49.6% of the sample. In other words, 1 out of every 2 nonretiring teachers who left their teaching position chose to stay in South Carolina public schools.

Table A5. Counts and Percentages for Different Exit Types

	Count	Percentage
Lateral movers	324	36.0%
Leavers	289	32.1%
Retirees	143	15.9%
Undecided	59	6.6%
Role-changers	51	5.7%
Nonvoluntary leavers	33	3.7%
Total	899	100.0%

For nonvoluntary leavers ($n = 33$), the top response option cited for their contract nonrenewal was “other” ($n = 17$). Some examples of “other” factors included budget reasons or frequent absences due to personal reasons. Few teachers reported their contract was not being renewed due to “evaluation system factors (e.g., ADEPT or similar district evaluation)” ($n = 5$) or “failure to obtain teacher certification” ($n = 5$).

When asked if they had accepted a new position, 80.0% of exiting teachers (excluding retirees and undecided teachers) responded “yes.” For these survey participants, we also asked how their new compensation compared to the compensation for the teaching position they were leaving. Table A6 summarizes the distribution of responses for each exit type separately, as well as for all the survey participants who responded to this question ($n = 453$). Overall, about 50% of survey participants indicated that their compensation would be “somewhat higher” or “much higher.” Among the four groups, lateral movers had the smallest percentage of teachers with a combined “somewhat higher” or “much higher” compensation (47.3%). Role-changers had the greatest percentage of such responses (55.5%). On the other hand, leavers had the greatest percentage of responses with the combined options of a “much lower” or “somewhat lower” compensation (26.0%). Survey participants who chose to leave the South Carolina public education sector completely were more likely to be moving into a new position with a lower salary compared to those in other exit types.

Table A6. *Distributions for Compensation in the New Position*

	Much lower	Somewhat lower	About the same	Somewhat higher	Much higher
Lateral movers	2.7%	15.6%	34.4%	29.3%	18.0%
Leavers	9.3%	16.7%	22.2%	19.4%	32.4%
Nonvoluntary leavers	0.0%	11.1%	33.3%	33.3%	22.2%
Role-changers	4.8%	19.0%	38.1%	16.7%	38.1%
Overall	4.4%	16.1%	30.2%	25.8%	23.4%

Reasons for Leaving

Table A7 provides averages for reasons to leave for each group, with the exception of nonvoluntary leavers. Only averages for items related to personal reasons exceeded the 3.0 value (*Somewhat important*). For every group, except for retirees, the reason with the highest average was “a better work-life balance.” Excluding the individual items comprising the personal reasons category, job demands had the highest importance for every group, except for role-changers. As might be expected, the latter group gave the highest rating to career reasons. Lateral movers, retirees, and role-changers all gave the lowest ratings to policy reasons, while leavers assigned the lowest ratings to job resources. For undecided teachers, career reasons, job resources, and job demands all had similar average scores.

Table A7. Descriptive Statistics for Reasons to Leave by Exit Type

	Lateral movers		Leavers		Retirees		Role-changers		Undecided	
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>
Career reasons	2.44 (0.98)	298	2.40 (1.02)	283	1.54 (0.71)	140	2.81 (0.97)	48	2.21 (0.95)	53
Job demands	2.60 (1.22)	289	2.77 (1.16)	277	2.33 (1.10)	134	2.28 (1.12)	46	2.88 (1.24)	50
Job resources	2.47 (1.07)	289	2.18 (1.06)	278	1.66 (0.84)	137	2.23 (1.21)	47	2.24 (1.03)	50
Policy reasons	1.95 (0.97)	289	2.25 (1.03)	276	1.85 (0.90)	134	1.89 (1.19)	45	2.26 (1.04)	50
Personal reason one	1.55 (1.18)	294	1.67 (1.23)	282	2.24 (1.53)	138	1.83 (1.42)	48	2.06 (1.39)	53
Personal reason two	1.74 (1.41)	294	2.00 (1.54)	282	1.91 (1.46)	137	1.96 (1.47)	48	2.17 (1.54)	53
Personal reason three	2.02 (1.42)	296	2.11 (1.41)	280	2.21 (1.42)	139	2.04 (1.37)	48	2.47 (1.46)	53
Personal reason four	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.51 (1.59)	138	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Personal reason five	2.72 (1.71)	297	2.00 (1.42)	281	1.20 (0.77)	120	2.38 (1.65)	48	1.64 (1.04)	53
Personal reason six	1.79 (1.44)	295	2.43 (1.77)	279	1.25 (0.84)	138	1.69 (1.26)	48	1.70 (1.35)	53
Personal reason seven	3.30 (1.60)	298	3.79 (1.51)	282	2.66 (1.64)	139	3.46 (1.47)	48	3.77 (1.41)	53
Personal reason eight	2.92 (1.92)	252	3.20 (1.84)	242	2.87 (1.81)	128	3.02 (1.88)	43	3.16 (1.83)	51

Note. Personal reason one refers to “caregiving for an adult family member.” Personal reason two refers to “caregiving for a child/children.” Personal reason three refers to “personal health reasons.” Personal reason four refers to “to receive the maximum retirement benefit.” Personal reason five refers to “to take a job more conveniently located close to where I live.” Personal reason six refers to “moving or planning to move.” Personal reason seven refers to “a better work-life balance.” Personal reason eight refers to “other personal reasons.”

When asked about the single reason that played the largest role in the decision to leave their current position, almost a quarter of the survey respondents chose some other reason that was not given as one of the response options in the Reasons for Leaving Position scale (Table A8). In their decisions, exiting teachers were mostly driven by personal reasons. Every personal reason, with the exception of “personal health reasons” and “to receive the maximum retirement benefit,” was among the top ten items chosen as the single most important reason in the decision to leave. Additionally, the ten most frequently mentioned reasons included one career item (“wanting or needing a higher salary and/or better benefits”), one job demands item (“frequency with which students misbehaved”), and one job resources item (“insufficient administrative support”). Overall, out of the 33 possible response options for the single most important reason, 29 items were mentioned at least once. The four reasons that were not mentioned by a single respondent included two job resources items (“insufficient relevant professional development provided by my school/district” and “insufficient physical resources [e.g., textbooks, computers]”) and two policy items (“dissatisfied with the minimum salary schedule [step increases]” and “dissatisfied with the teacher evaluation procedures”).

Table A8. *Counts and Percentages for the Most Frequently Endorsed Primary Reason to Leave*

	Count	Percent
Other major reason you are leaving your current position	177	24.5%
Personal reason: Other personal reasons	97	13.4%
Personal reason: A better work-life balance	74	10.3%
Personal reason: Moving or planning to move	73	10.1%
Job resources reason: Insufficient administrative support	48	6.7%
Career reason: Wanting or needing a higher salary and/or better benefits	36	5.0%
Personal reason: To take a job more conveniently located close to where I live	32	4.4%
Job demands reason: Frequency with which students misbehaved	27	3.7%
Personal reason: Caregiving for an adult family member	27	3.7%
Personal reason: Caregiving for a child/children	20	2.8%
Remaining 19 items combined	111	10.4%
Total	722	100.0%

The analysis of the open-ended responses provided when a respondent answered affirmatively to the question, “Beyond the reasons you indicated were important in your decision to leave, are there other major reasons why you are leaving your current position?” or selected “other personal reasons” for leaving revealed some frequent answers that mirrored closed-ended items. For example, a notable number of respondents mentioned retirement or family issues as reasons driving their decisions to leave. Some respondents also indicated the role that job demands (e.g., excessive workload) or the lack of job resources (e.g., administrative support) played in their decisions. Therefore, even though many of the participants selected these “other” reasons, the analysis did not reveal any unique motivating factors beyond those already captured in the closed-ended items.

Lateral Movers and Leavers

Ten independent sample *t*-tests were conducted for the average scores related to career reasons, job demands, job resources, and policy reasons, as well as six personal reasons. We did not conduct the comparison for the following personal reasons: “to receive the maximum retirement benefit” (personal reason four) and “other personal reasons” (personal reason eight). The homogeneity of variance assumption was not met for the scores on personal reasons two (“caregiving for a child/children”), five (“to take a job more conveniently located close to where I live”), six (“moving or planning to move”), and 7 (“a better work-life balance”). In these four cases, we conducted Welch’s *t*-test, as it provides a robust solution for comparing means when variances are unequal.

The differences in means between lateral movers and leavers were statistically significant for job resource reasons, policy reasons, and three personal reasons (Table A9). On average, compared to leavers, lateral movers rated the importance of job resources higher ($p < .001$, $d = .27$). On the other hand, leavers ascribed higher importance to policy reasons ($p < .001$, $d = .30$). The two most pronounced differences in terms of the effect size were regarding “to take a job more conveniently located close to where I live” (personal reason five) and “moving or planning to move” (personal reason six). As expected, the reason associated with a more convenient job location was more statistically significantly important for lateral movers ($p < .001$, $d = .46$) while “moving or planning to move” played a larger role for leavers ($p < .001$, $d = .40$). The two groups also differed in their ratings of the item relating to “a better work-life balance,” with leavers ascribing higher importance to that personal reason ($p < .001$, $d = .32$). For all the statistically significant results, the effect sizes were small to medium.

Table A9. Results Comparing Lateral Movers' and Leavers' Reasons for Leaving

	Lateral movers		Leavers					
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Career reasons	2.44	0.98	2.40	1.02	579	0.39	.695	.03
Job demands	2.60	1.22	2.77	1.16	564	-1.74	.082	.15
Job resources	2.47	1.07	2.18	1.06	565	3.26	.001	.27
Policy reasons	1.95	0.97	2.25	1.03	563	-3.55	<.001	.30
Personal reason one	1.55	1.18	1.67	1.23	574	-1.22	.223	.10
Personal reason two	1.74	1.41	2.00	1.54	564.69 ^a	-2.13	.033 ^b	.18
Personal reason three	2.02	1.42	2.11	1.41	574	-0.71	.479	.06
Personal reason five	2.72	1.71	2.00	1.42	566.78 ^a	5.58	<.001	.46
Personal reason six	1.79	1.44	2.43	1.77	535.67 ^a	-4.71	<.001	.40
Personal reason seven	3.30	1.60	3.79	1.51	578.00 ^a	-3.87	<.001	.32

Note. Personal reason one refers to “caregiving for an adult family member.” Personal reason two refers to “caregiving for a child/children.” Personal reason three refers to “personal health reasons.” Personal reason five refers to “to take a job more conveniently located close to where I live.” Personal reason six refers to “moving or planning to move.” Personal reason seven refers to “a better work-life balance.”

^a*df* were calculated based on Satterthwaite’s approximation formula due to unequal variances.

^bThe mean difference for personal reason two was not statistically significant after applying the Holm-Bonferroni correction.

Reasons for Choosing a New District

The results of the descriptive analysis of the responses to the Reason for Choosing New District scale are shown in Table A10. Among thirteen items on the scale, the average scores for “school culture and climate” and “reputation of school leadership” exceeded the 4.0 threshold (*Very important*). The standard deviation value for the “school culture and climate” item was the lowest (*SD* = 0.93), indicating that lateral movers were more consistent with assigning their rating to this item. In fact, 85.5% of lateral movers rated this item as being very or extremely important in their decision. The next two most highly endorsed items, “reputation of district leadership” and “alignment with my educational philosophy,” had averages (*M* = 3.9) just under this threshold. The reasons associated with “higher salary” (*M* = 2.9), “available schools for my child(ren)” (*M* = 2.1), and “sign-on bonus” (*M* = 2.0) received the lowest ratings.

Table A10. Descriptive Statistics for Items Regarding Lateral Movers Choosing a New District

	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>
School culture and climate	4.42 (0.93)	277
Reputation of school leadership	4.07 (1.15)	277
Alignment with my educational philosophy	3.94 (1.12)	277
Reputation of district leadership	3.92 (1.21)	277
More resources and support services	3.67 (1.27)	277
Proximity to home	3.61 (1.36)	278
Professional growth opportunities	3.48 (1.29)	277
Stronger support for new teachers	3.32 (1.44)	277
Student academic performance	3.32 (1.30)	277
Higher salary	2.94 (1.41)	278
Other	2.69 (1.88)	200
Available schools for my child(ren)	2.13 (1.58)	277
Sign-on bonus	1.97 (1.25)	277

Returning to Teaching

Survey participants, with the exception of lateral movers and nonvoluntary leavers, were asked if they would consider returning to teach in South Carolina public schools. The averages and the percentages of teachers who responded with *Agree* or *Strongly agree* are presented in Table A11 for all relevant survey participants and for teachers in each exit type separately.

Overall, slightly more than 40% of those who responded to the question said they agree or strongly agree that they would consider returning to teaching. The average for the item ($M = 3.05$) was between the *Neutral* and *Agree* response options. Role-changers showed the highest level of agreement with the statement, with 58.0% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they would consider a return to teaching in South Carolina public schools. For these teachers, the transition to return to teaching may seem more plausible since they continue to work in public education in the state. Although retiring teachers had the lowest percentage among those who would consider going back to teaching, it should be noted that more than 1 in 3 retirees agreed or strongly agreed with the statement about a potential return.

Table A11. Descriptive Statistics for Items Related to Returning to Teach

	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>Percentage of Agree or Strongly agree responses</i>
Leavers	286	3.08 (1.32)	40.9%
Retirees	143	2.88 (1.25)	34.3%
Role-changers	50	3.34 (1.30)	58.0%
Undecided	56	3.16 (1.25)	37.5%
All survey participants	536^a	3.05 (1.30)	40.3%

^aThe total n for leavers, retirees, role-changers, and undecided teachers does not equal n in the all survey participants row because one teacher who responded to the question had a missing value for exit type. This total also does not include lateral movers and nonvoluntarily leavers, as they were not asked this question.

Table A12 shows summarized averages for the ten factors that could influence teachers' decisions to return to teaching in the future. Averages are presented for all the teachers who responded to the questions ($n = 354$), while also looking separately at the responses of teachers in the two largest exit type groups: leavers ($n = 189$) and retirees ($n = 85$). Retirees ascribed the highest level of importance to "salary increase" ($M = 3.82$), "protected planning/break time" ($M = 3.68$), and "smaller class size" ($M = 3.60$). The same three reasons were ranked highest by leavers, though the rank order was different, with "protected planning/break time" receiving the highest average rating ($M = 4.11$), followed by "salary increase" ($M = 3.96$), and "smaller class size" ($M = 3.71$). Compared to retirees, leavers ascribed a higher level of importance to all the factors, with the exception of the item regarding "availability of part-time teaching positions." For instance, although the mean for the "salary increase" factor was the second highest for leavers and the highest for retirees, leavers still assigned, on average, a higher level of importance to this item.

Table A12. *Descriptive Statistics for Factors That Could Influence Exiting Teachers Returning to Teach*

	All respondents		Leavers		Retirees	
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>
Salary increase	3.86 (1.19)	354	3.96 (1.14)	189	3.82 (1.27)	85
Smaller class size	3.67 (1.27)	354	3.71 (1.24)	189	3.60 (1.33)	85
Availability of part-time teaching positions	2.68 (1.58)	354	2.33 (1.51)	189	3.35 (1.45)	85
Housing incentive	1.88 (1.29)	354	2.16 (1.40)	189	1.38 (0.84)	85
Student loan forgiveness	2.49 (1.70)	354	2.63 (1.69)	189	1.79 (1.44)	85
Child care scholarship/voucher for my child(ren)	1.91 (1.43)	353	2.16 (1.57)	189	1.36 (0.99)	84
Revised grading and/or student promotion policies	2.56 (1.42)	353	2.63 (1.43)	189	2.37 (1.40)	84
Increased special education support in the classroom	3.33 (1.49)	353	3.54 (1.45)	189	2.85 (1.48)	84
Protected planning/break time	3.99 (1.26)	354	4.11 (1.15)	189	3.68 (1.42)	85
Teacher leadership opportunities	2.93 (1.38)	354	2.94 (1.37)	189	2.58 (1.29)	85

When asked about the single reason that would play the largest role in their decision to return to teaching, almost 45% of leavers chose the "salary increase" item. The second and third most frequently chosen items were "smaller class size" (13.6%) and "increased special education support in the classroom" (10.1%). Although the "protected planning/break time" item had the highest average score, only 8.3% leavers chose it as the single largest reason for a potential return to teaching. For retirees, the frequency counts for the reasons relating to "salary increase" (28.8%) and "availability of part-time teaching positions" (27.3%) were almost identical, indicating that the availability of part-time positions for this group of exiting teachers has the same high importance as the increase in salary. The "student loan forgiveness" (10.6%) and "smaller class size" (10.6%) items both came in as the third most frequently chosen reason.



TEACHER EXIT SURVEY





[SC-TEACHER.ORG](https://www.sc-teacher.org)