South Carolina Administrator Workforce Profile for 2023–24

MAY 2025

SC TEACHER

RESEARCH TEAM

Brian Cartiff, PhD

Svetlana Dmitrieva, PhD

Angela Starrett, PhD

In partnership with the Yvonne & Schuyler Moore
Child Development Research Center

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

GROWING DATA + GAINING INSIGHT

Table of Contents

Administrator Workforce Profile

+ HIGHLIGHTS

This report details South Carolina's public school administrator workforce for the 2023–24 academic year. SC TEACHER publishes educator workforce profiles each year, covering public school teacher and administrator populations. Alongside the full breadth of SC TEACHER's research, these profiles share information and insights with educators, policymakers, community members, and other stakeholders.

The analysis in this report draws on statewide data to examine the demographic characteristics of South Carolina's principal and assistant principal workforce. Findings are based on data from 1,380 principals and 2,280 assistant principals employed in South Carolina public schools during 2023–24. The report also incorporates data from recent years outside of 2023–24 to track longitudinal trends, offering insight into patterns of workforce experience, tenure, and evaluation. These findings can support data-informed strategies to strengthen administrator retention, which in turn may contribute to broader efforts to improve the stability of South Carolina's teacher workforce.

Main Findings From the 2023–24 South Carolina Administrator Workforce

- South Carolina's school administrator workforce in 2023–24 was predominantly female (61.6%) and White (63.4%). Black administrators made up more than one-third of principals and assistant principals—more than twice the percentage of Black teachers in the state.

- Principals in South Carolina had extensive experience, averaging more than 20 years in public education. Assistant principals averaged just less than 18 years.

- Personal and professional demographics varied by school level. Elementary school principals included the highest proportion of female principals and the highest average years of experience. Combined-level school principals had the lowest average years of experience and the lowest percentage of doctoral degrees.

- Longitudinal analysis showed stability in average years of principal tenure and public education experience. Elementary school principals consistently had the highest averages in both categories from 2020–21 to 2023–24. High school principals had the lowest average tenure.

- Approximately 40% of principals statewide received an *Exemplary* PADEPP rating, though this varied by school level. Elementary principals were more likely to earn *Exemplary* ratings than middle or combined-level school principals.

- District-level variation in principal tenure highlighted the importance of local context in interpreting workforce data, especially in districts with few schools at a given organizational level.

+ INTRODUCTION

Principals and assistant principals play a central role in the operation of schools. Research indicates that school administrators influence working conditions for teachers and learning environments for students (Grissom, 2011). They are responsible for implementing school policies (Leithwood et al., 2004), supporting teacher development (Boyd et al., 2011), overseeing instruction, and managing the provision of instructional resources (Levin & Bradley, 2019). Administrators also contribute to shaping the school's overall climate and culture (DeMatthews et al., 2022).

Evidence suggests a link between principal turnover and increased teacher departures, indicating that administrator loss may affect school stability (Buckman, 2021; DeMatthews et al., 2022). Nationally, principal turnover remains a concern, with the average tenure lasting approximately 4 years (Levin & Bradley, 2019). About 20% of principals leave their positions annually, and more than half of those exiting leave the profession entirely (Taie & Lewis, 2023). Schools with a greater need for leadership, such as high-poverty or low-performing schools, often experience higher rates of administrator turnover (Levin & Bradley, 2019).

Understanding the current composition and distribution of South Carolina's school administrators is essential for informing workforce planning and policy decisions. Statewide data on principal and assistant principal demographics can support the identification of trends and inform resource allocation. Targeted support and development opportunities for school administrators may contribute to improved workforce stability and school effectiveness.

CONSIDERING SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR DEMOGRAPHICS

Nationally, over the past several decades, the principal workforce has been predominantly female and White. The percentage of female principals has increased since the late 1980s (Grissom et al., 2021). However, numbers continue to lag behind the percentage of female teachers (Hussar et al., 2020; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023; Taie & Lewis, 2022). While the racial and ethnic diversity of school leaders has grown, the principal workforce remains less representative of the student population (Crawford & Fuller, 2017; Grissom et al., 2021).

> Research indicates that limited diversity in school leadership may influence outcomes for both teachers and students in underrepresented groups (Grissom et al., 2021).

Data on the educational attainment and experience levels of administrators also provide useful context. Nationally, the proportion of principals holding a master's degree (about 60%), a doctoral degree (about 10%), or an education specialist degree (about 30%) has remained relatively stable over the past 40 years (Grissom et al., 2021). However, the average years of experience as a principal has decreased, falling from around 10 years to less than 7 years (NCES, 2025). Similarly, the average length of time principals remain at their current school has declined from more than 6 years to approximately 4 years (Grissom et al., 2021).
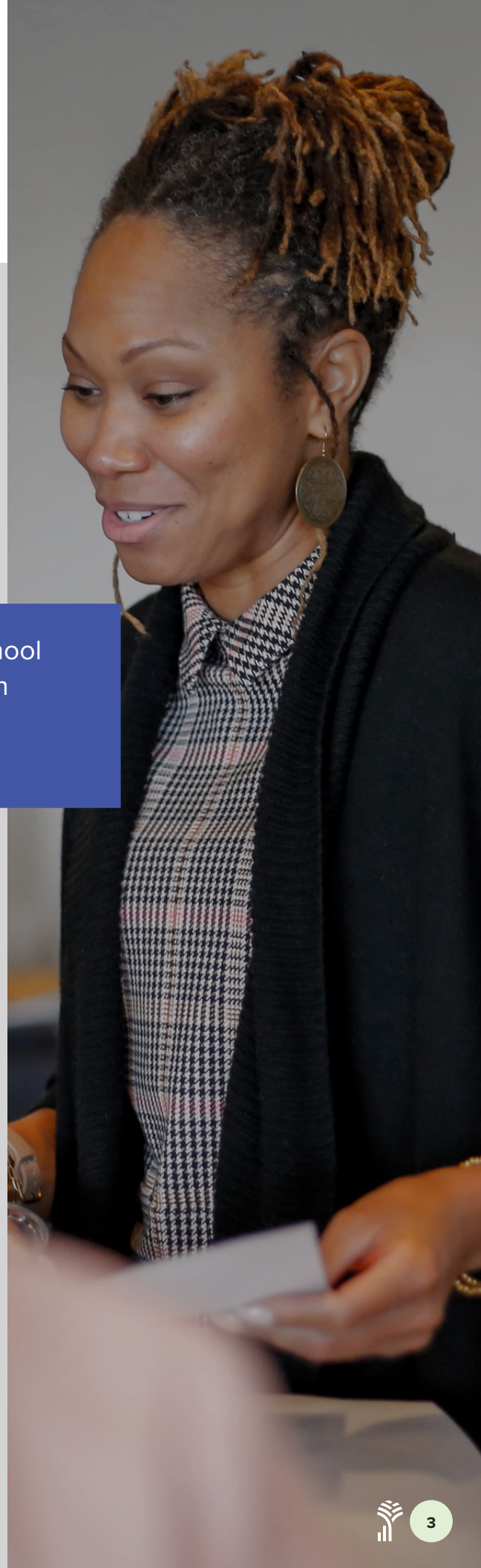
Findings on whether advanced degrees or years of experience are directly associated with administrator effectiveness have been mixed (Grissom et al., 2021). However, there is consensus that principals and assistant principals at different career stages may benefit from differentiated support. Early-career administrators may require induction programs and direct guidance to strengthen foundational leadership skills, while more experienced leaders may benefit from targeted professional development aligned with self-identified areas of growth or career advancement (Yan, 2019). Providing role-appropriate support may contribute to improved administrator retention, which has been linked to school performance and teacher retention (Grissom et al., 2021). Similar supports may be beneficial for assistant principals, though this group has received comparatively less attention in the research literature (Cohen & Schechter, 2019; Goldring et al., 2021).

CONSIDERING LOCAL CONTEXTS

Administrator labor markets can vary by context. This report provides data on the state administrator workforce and individual district workforces. More local-level information can assist district leaders in understanding particularly relevant factors regarding administrator preparation and retention in their schools. Policymakers can utilize this information alongside knowledge of their local contexts to guide informed decision-making and improve school administrator workforce stability and effectiveness.

CLARIFYING WORKFORCE TERMINOLOGY

In examining this administrator workforce, it is important to clearly define terminology, as definitions may vary across different studies and reports. This research specifically focuses on public school administrators in South Carolina. Key terms used throughout the report are defined for consistency and transparency and are listed in the glossary beginning on p. 20.

KEY QUESTIONS

This report describes the school administrator workforce in South Carolina during the 2023–24 school year. It presents detailed information on the personal and professional characteristics of principals and assistant principals and examines how these characteristics vary by school organizational level. The report includes longitudinal data from 2020–21 to 2023–24 to examine patterns in workforce stability. Additionally, it analyzes average principal tenure at administrators' current schools across all districts to provide context for local leadership planning. These analyses are intended to support data-informed decision-making and may be used alongside other SC TEACHER reports to guide district- and state-level strategies aimed at strengthening the educator workforce.

This report addresses the following key questions:

1. What are the characteristics of South Carolina's principals and assistant principals relative to personal demographics, educational attainment and experience, and evaluation results?

2. How do administrator characteristics compare across organizational levels (i.e., elementary, middle, high, and combined-level schools) in South Carolina?

3. How does the average length of time principals have served at their current school (i.e., principal tenure) vary by organizational level (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school) in districts across South Carolina?

DATA, VARIABLES, AND ANALYSES

Data for the 2023–24 academic year were provided by the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) through a memorandum of understanding with SC TEACHER. The SCDE also provided administrator-level data for the 2020–21 through 2022–23 school years to support longitudinal analysis. Principal tenure data from 2020–21 to 2023–24 were obtained from the South Carolina School Report Cards and represent the length of time principals had served at their current school in the given academic year.

This study draws on data from 3,629 administrators employed by South Carolina public school districts during the 2023–24 academic year. The term administrator includes individuals serving as principals, assistant principals, career and technical education (CTE) directors, and CTE assistant directors. For reporting purposes, principals and CTE directors are grouped together and referred to as principals. A small number of charter school directors were included in the principal group because their roles share the same SCDE Professional Certified Staff position code used to identify principals, bringing the total number of principals in the analysis to 1,380. Similarly, assistant principals and CTE assistant directors are referred to as assistant principals, with 2,280 individuals serving in those roles. The total number of role assignments (3,660) exceeds the number of unique administrators (3,629) due to some individuals holding multiple positions during the school year (e.g., an assistant principal who was promoted to principal during the school year).

Because the data include the full population of public school administrators rather than a sample, the analyses focus on descriptive trends and patterns rather than inferential statistics. Differences in administrator characteristics across school organizational levels (elementary, middle, high, and combined-level) were examined using data from the South Carolina School Report Cards. For Key Question 2, Spearman Rho correlations were used to assess associations between overall school report card ratings and principal tenure, given the ordinal nature of the principal tenure variable.

In cases where data were missing for certain administrators, percentages were calculated using only available data. Some variables may reflect duplicate counts when administrators served at multiple schools or in combined-level schools. For example, if a principal served 5 years at a K–8 school, their tenure was included in both the elementary and middle school district-level calculations. These instances are noted throughout the report where applicable.

Our Key Questions

+ KEY QUESTION 1:

What are the characteristics of South Carolina's principals and assistant principals relative to personal demographics, educational attainment and experience, and evaluation results?

To address Key Question 1, we examined data from 2023–24 to determine the percentages and averages related to several demographic variables for South Carolina principals and assistant principals, including gender, race/ethnicity, degree attainment, and years of experience in public education. For principals, we also examined their tenure as principal at their current school and principal evaluation ratings (i.e., Expanded Program for Assisting, Developing, and Evaluating Principal Performance [PADEPP]). Data for tenure are not available for assistant principals, and assistant principals are not evaluated using the PADEPP system.

Characteristics of South Carolina Principals

Analysis of 2023–24 data shows that 61.6% of principals in South Carolina were female. This figure is higher than the national percentage of female principals (56.0%) (Taie & Lewis, 2022) but lower than the percentage of female teachers in the state (79.8%) (Starrett et al., 2025). In terms of race and ethnicity, 63.4% of principals in South Carolina were White, 35.7% were Black, and 0.5% were Hispanic. The percentage of Black principals was more than twice that of Black teachers in the state (16.9%), while the percentage of Hispanic principals was one-fifth the percentage of Hispanic teachers (2.5%) (Starrett et al., 2025). Nationally, the principal workforce is approximately 77% White, 10% Black, and 9% Hispanic (Taie & Lewis, 2022).

In 2023–24, 17.4% of South Carolina principals held a doctoral degree, and principals had an average of 22.1 years of experience in education, including time spent in teaching, administration, and other instructional roles. On average, principals had 5.1 years of tenure at their current school, and 14.1% had served 10 or more years in their current principalship. Evaluation data from the PADEPP system showed that 42.8% of principals received an *Exemplary* rating in 2023–24.

Characteristics of South Carolina Assistant Principals

Most demographic characteristics of assistant principals in 2023–24 were similar to those of principals. Female assistant principals made up 61.7% of the population, a proportion nearly identical to that of female principals. White assistant principals represented 63.0% of the group, and Black assistant principals accounted for 35.2%, both values closely matching principal demographics. The percentage of Hispanic assistant principals was 1.2%, a relatively small share, though more than double the percentage observed among principals.

Assistant principals had an average 18.0 years of experience in education, approximately 4 years less than principals. Additionally, 10.0% held a doctoral degree, about 7 percentage points less than the percentage among principals. These differences are consistent with a career trajectory in which assistant principals gain experience and pursue advanced degrees as part of their pathway to principal roles.

How do administrator characteristics compare across organizational levels (i.e., elementary, middle, high, and combined-level schools) in South Carolina?

For Key Question 2, the analysis examined characteristics of principals and assistant principals in 2023–24 to assess whether notable differences existed across organizational levels. In addition to gender and race/ethnicity, several indicators of workforce stability, including principal tenure at their current school, years of experience in education, and PADEPP evaluation ratings over time, were compared across elementary, middle, high, and combined-level schools.

Distribution of Principals and Assistant Principals Across Organizational Levels

Figure 1 shows the distribution of principals across school organizational levels in South Carolina during the 2023–24 school year. The largest number of principals served in elementary schools (596). Similar numbers were employed in middle schools (239) and high schools (246). Combined-level schools employed 154 principals, followed by early childhood schools (56). The remaining 89 principals worked in other settings, such as alternative school programs or career and technical centers.

Figure 1. *Percentages of South Carolina Principals by Organizational Level in 2023–24*
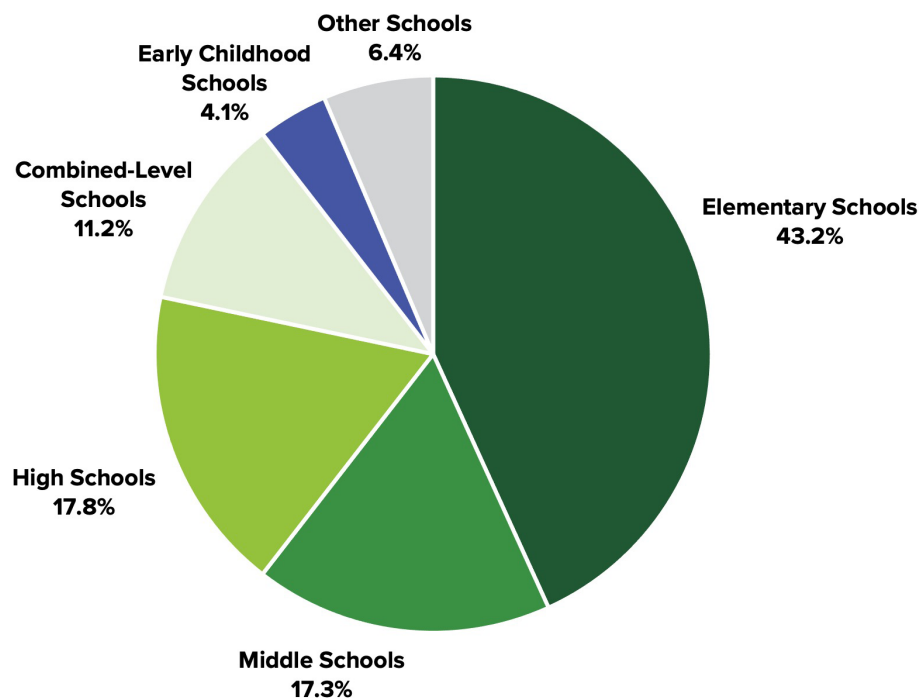
A demographic analysis of principals working across organizational levels revealed some differences in principal composition depending on context (Table 1). Female principals were most heavily represented in elementary schools, while high schools were the only level where male principals constituted the majority. Racial and ethnic demographics were generally consistent across levels, although middle and high schools employed slightly higher percentages of Black principals compared to elementary and combined-level schools. Approximately 20% of principals in middle, high, and combined-level schools held a doctoral degree, while the percentage among elementary school principals was about 5 percentage points less. The average years of experience in education was close to 20 years across all levels, with slightly higher averages among principals in elementary and high schools.

Table 1. *Demographics of South Carolina Principals by Organizational Level in 2023–24*

	Elementary Schools	Middle Schools	High Schools	Combined-Level Schools
Female	72.7%	53.6%	41.7%	64.4%
White	66.2%	60.9%	59.4%	66.7%
Black	32.6%	38.3%	39.7%	33.3%
Hispanic	0.9%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Holding a Doctoral Degree	14.6%	19.7%	19.8%	19.4%
Average Years of Experience in Education	22.9	20.9	22.3	18.9

Note. Principals working in early childhood schools and other school settings (e.g., alternative schools) were not included because of the small number of principals working in those contexts.

We also examined the distribution of assistant principals across organizational levels in South Carolina in 2023–24 (Figure 2). This analysis revealed that more assistant principals worked in elementary schools (751) than in other contexts. The number of assistant principals employed in high schools (685) was notably higher than that of middle schools (515). Combined-level schools employed the next highest number (185). The smallest number of assistant principals worked in early childhood schools (49). There were 95 assistant principals employed in other settings (e.g., alternative school programs or career and technical centers).

Figure 2. *Percentages of South Carolina Assistant Principals by Organizational Level in 2023–24*
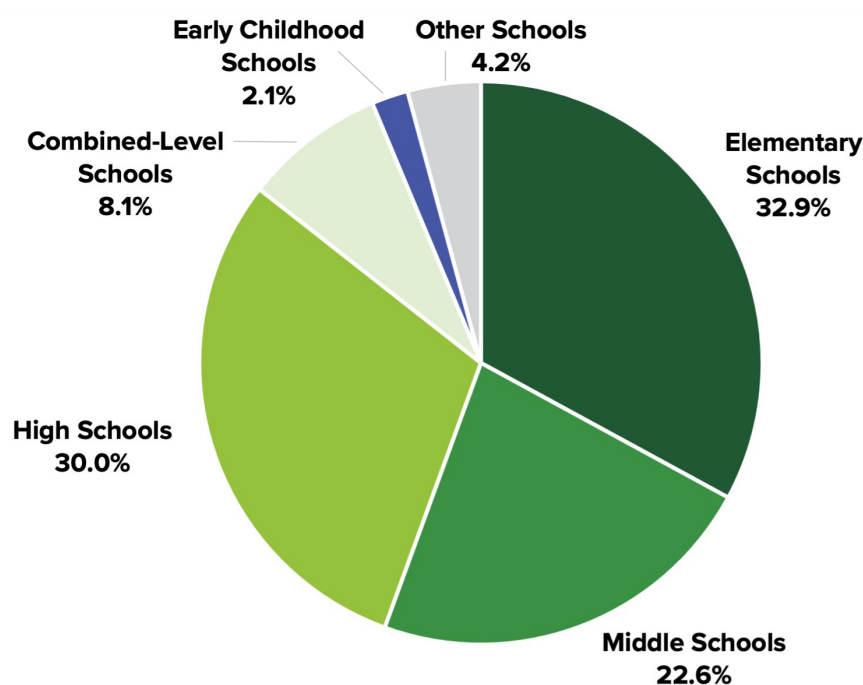
The demographics of assistant principals across organizational levels (Table 2) were similar to those of principals. Female assistant principals were most heavily represented in elementary schools, followed closely by combined-level schools. While male assistant principals were most prevalent in high schools, their representation was still lower than that of male high school principals. Racial and ethnic demographics were similar across levels, though middle, high, and combined-level schools had higher percentages of Black assistant principals than elementary schools.

Approximately 9% of assistant principals in elementary, middle, and combined-level schools held a doctoral degree, while the percentage was slightly higher among high school assistant principals at nearly 12%. The average years of experience in education ranged from 17 to 18 years across all four organizational levels.

Table 2. *Demographics of South Carolina Assistant Principals by Organizational Level in 2023–24*

|	Elementary Schools	Middle Schools	High Schools	Combined-Level Schools
Female	74.3%	54.6%	49.6%	71.4%
White	67.7%	59.3%	61.9%	60.1%
Black	31.1%	38.7%	36.1%	38.3%
Hispanic	0.8%	1.0%	1.5%	1.1%
Holding a Doctoral Degree	9.3%	9.3%	11.6%	8.7%
Average Years of Experience in Education	17.9	17.7	18.1	17.0

Note. Assistant principals working in early elementary schools and other school settings (e.g., alternative schools) were not included because of the small number of assistant principals working in those contexts.

Differences in Principal Characteristics Across Organizational Levels Over Time

We examined several variables across organizational levels over time, including principals' PADEPP evaluation ratings, years of experience in education, and tenure at their current school. This longitudinal review provides insight into the stability of the principal workforce in the state. The variables of interest were largely unavailable for assistant principals, so this analysis only included principals.

First, we examined the percentage of principals earning *Exemplary* ratings on PADEPP evaluations (Figure 3). Several studies have found that principal evaluation ratings are positively associated with student achievement (e.g., Grissom et al., 2018; McCullough et al., 2016; Owings et al., 2005). These studies do not demonstrate a causal nature of the relationship, but they point to the potential broader benefits of strong administrative leadership for school performance.

Figure 3. *Percentages of South Carolina Principals Receiving* Exemplary *PADEPP Evaluations Across Organizational Levels Over Time*
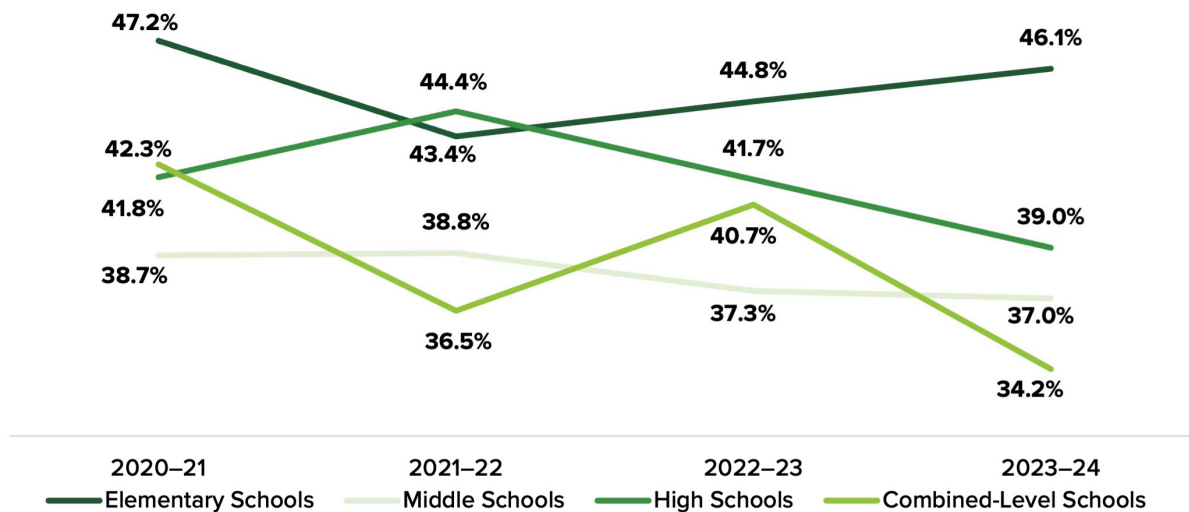

Note. A small number of principals moved between organizational levels during some academic years. When this occurred, their PADEPP evaluation rating was included for both levels.

The percentage of South Carolina principals receiving an *Exemplary* rating on PADEPP evaluations remained close to 40% across all organizational levels between 2020–21 and 2023–24. Middle and combined-level school principals were the least likely to receive *Exemplary* ratings during this period, with the percentage for combined-level school principals showing greater variability across years. Elementary and high school principals were more likely to receive *Exemplary* ratings overall. Notably, the percentage of high school principals declined, while the percentage of elementary school principals increased over time.

The analysis also examined principals' years of experience in education (Figure 4), including time in teaching and administrative roles. From 2021–22 to 2023–24, the average years of experience remained relatively stable across organizational levels, following a brief decline after 2020–21. This dip may reflect a temporary increase in principal attrition following the COVID-19 pandemic, a trend consistent with patterns observed in other states (Fuller & Pendola, 2023).

Figure 4. *Average Years of Educational Experience of South Carolina Principals Across Organizational Levels Over Time*
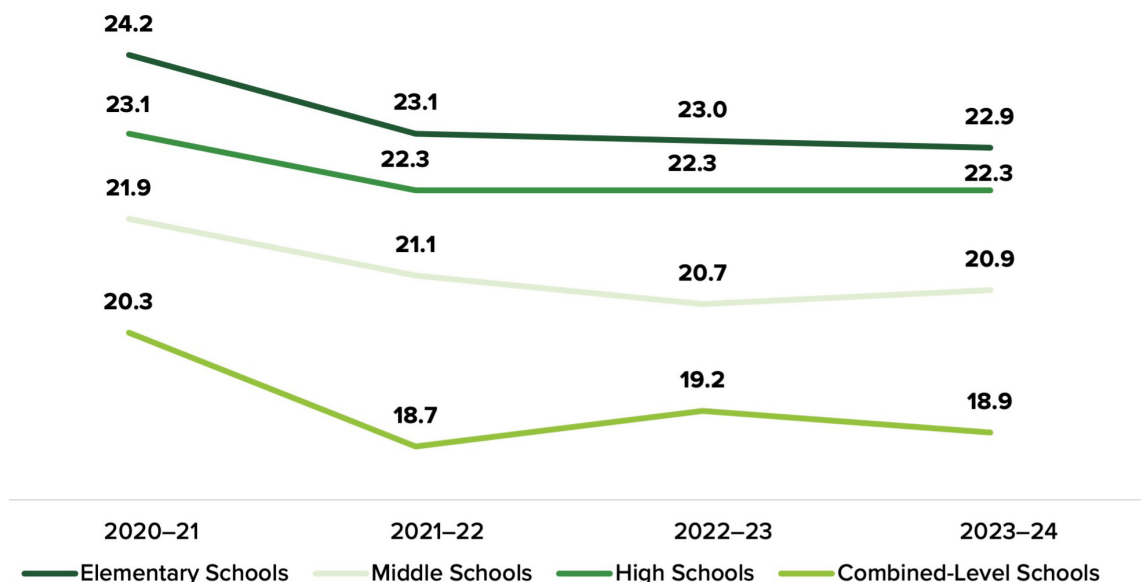
Across all years examined, elementary school principals had the highest average years of experience in education, while combined-level school principals had the lowest. The averages for all organizational levels remained consistently close to 20 years, indicating a highly experienced principal workforce overall.

The analysis also examined the average tenure of principals at their current schools, defined as the number of years they have served in the principal role at that school. This measure does not include prior service in other roles, such as teacher or assistant principal, at the same location. Longitudinal results are presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5. *Average Principal Tenure in Years at the Current School Across Organizational Levels Over Time*
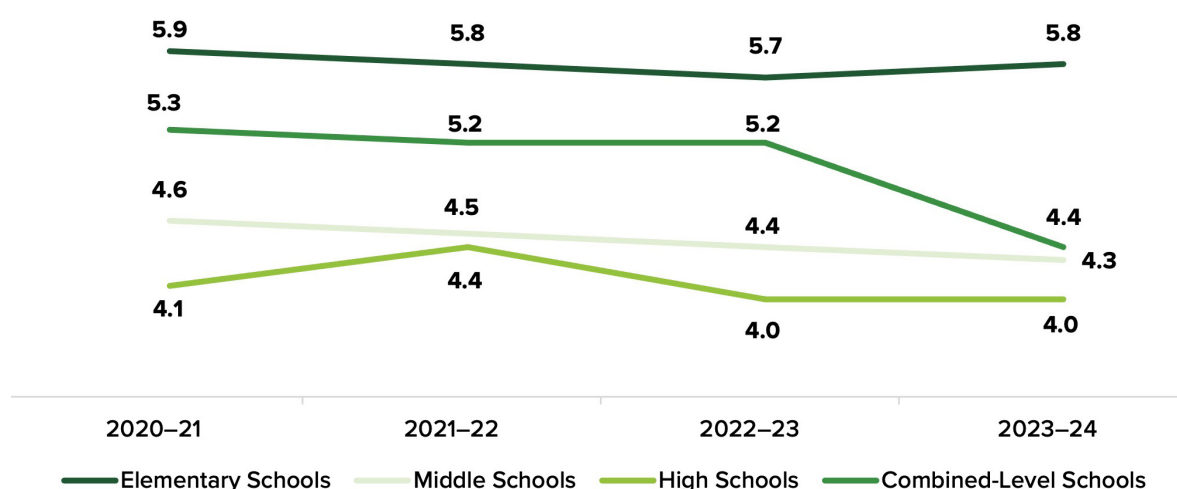
From 2020–21 to 2023–24, elementary school principals had the highest average tenure at their current schools, while high school principals had the lowest. Principal tenure in elementary, middle, and high schools remained relatively stable throughout the period, whereas principal tenure in combined-level schools declined by 0.8 years in 2023–24, having remained steady in earlier years.

Principals do not always have a choice to stay in their positions. Sometimes, their contracts are not renewed; other times, district leaders may move them to other schools (Edwards et al., 2018) or to the central office (Yan, 2019). Research indicates that principals contribute to school performance through multiple mechanisms, such as retaining effective teachers and fostering supportive learning environments, and that these impacts often require time to develop (Bartanen et al., 2019; Mascall & Leithwood, 2010).

Associations Between Principal Tenure and School Ratings

Given this context, the analysis also examined correlations between principal tenure and overall school ratings across organizational levels in 2023–24. In all four school contexts, the correlations were statistically significant and positive, indicating that longer principal tenure was associated with higher school ratings. The correlation was strongest for middle schools (0.33) and combined-level schools (0.27), followed by elementary (0.17) and high schools (0.14). These results do not establish causation. It is possible that longer-tenured principals have had more time to implement improvement strategies, or, alternatively, that principals at higher-performing schools are less likely to be replaced (Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). Additional research would be needed to better understand the underlying dynamics of these relationships.

+ KEY QUESTION 3:

How does the average length of time principals have served at their current school (i.e., principal tenure) vary by organizational level (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school) in districts across South Carolina?

In Key Question 3, the analysis examined the average length of time principals had served at their current schools in 2023–24, disaggregated by organizational level across South Carolina districts. Principal tenure can serve as one indicator of school stability, as administrators often require time to establish strong school cultures. These averages should be interpreted in the context of individual districts, particularly where a district operates only one school at a given organizational level.

Tenure data were sourced from the 2023–24 South Carolina School Report Cards, which report principal tenure by school site. In this dataset, combined-level schools are disaggregated into their component levels. For example, a principal at a school with grades 6–12 is counted as both a middle school principal and a high school principal. To remain consistent with this reporting structure, the tenures of principals at combined-level schools were included in multiple organizational-level averages (i.e., elementary, middle, and high) rather than treated as a separate group. Career and technical center directors were excluded from this analysis, as they are not included in the South Carolina School Report Card dataset.

Principal Tenure Across Organizational Levels

Figure 6 displays the average principal tenures per district in elementary schools across South Carolina. The range of averages is notable. While some districts reported an average tenure of 1.0 year, one district reported an average of 18.0 years, reflecting the tenure of a single principal at the district's only elementary school. This example illustrates the importance of interpreting averages in the context of district size and structure. In larger districts with multiple elementary schools, averages may reflect underlying trends, but additional information—such as district policies on principal rotation or local staffing practices—is often necessary to interpret these data meaningfully.

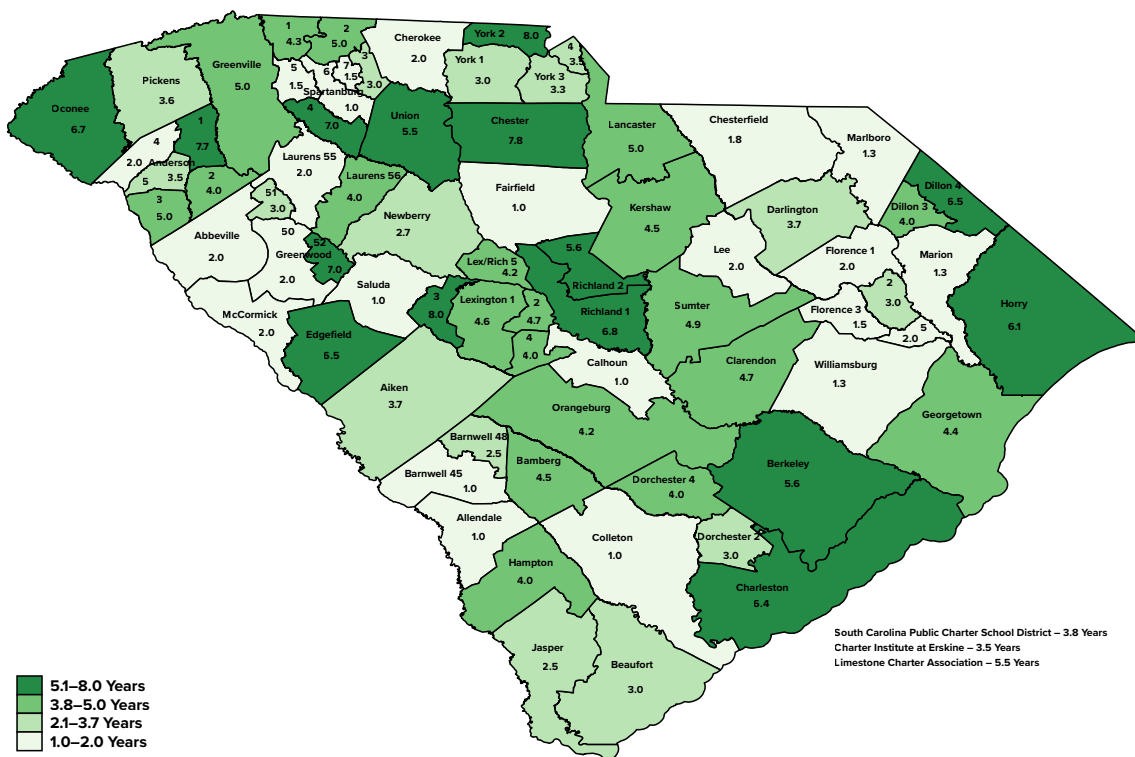**Figure 6.** *Average Principal Tenure in Elementary Schools Across South Carolina Districts in 2023–24*
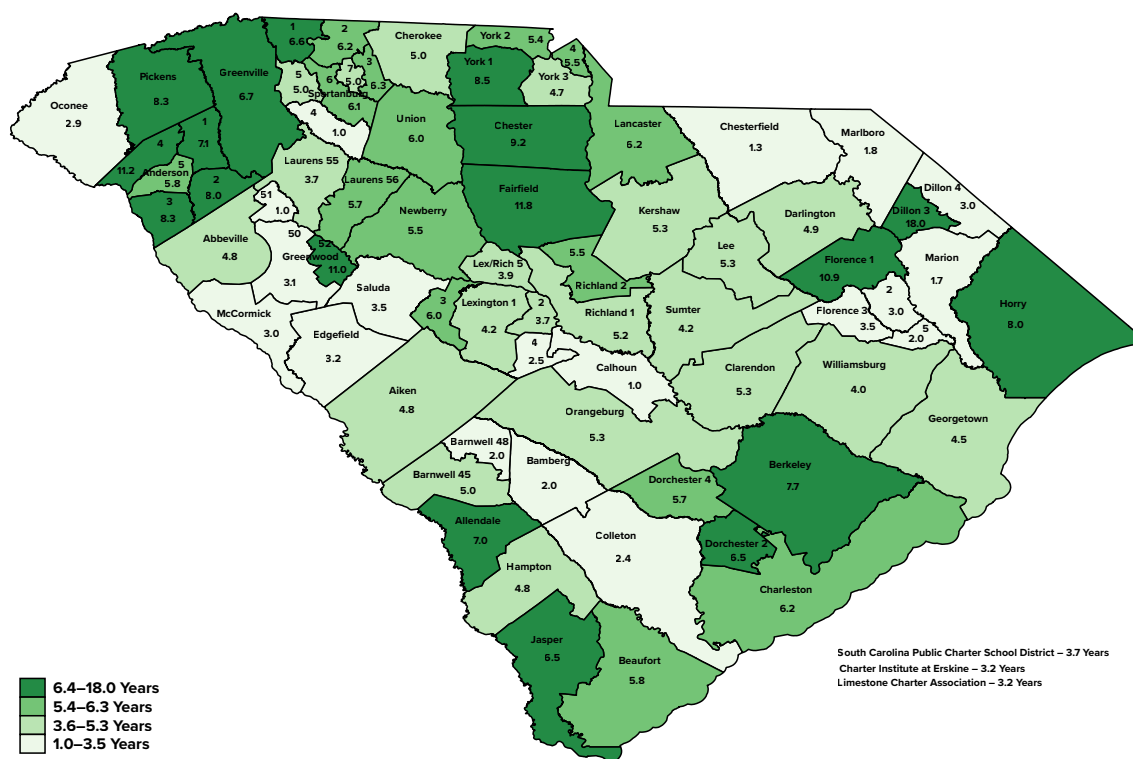
Note. Districts are grouped into quartiles based on the overall range of values, with darker shades indicating higher quartiles.

A low average principal tenure in a district reflects that elementary school principals were relatively new to their current school assignments. This does not necessarily imply limited leadership experience, as some principals may have extensive administrative backgrounds gained in other schools or districts. In districts with only one elementary school, a recent leadership change, such as the retirement of a long-serving principal, can result in a low average tenure, even though the change does not reflect broader workforce instability. Additionally, principals with short tenures may have previously served in the same school in other roles, such as assistant principal or teacher, and may already be well integrated into the school community. These examples highlight why district-level variation in tenure should be interpreted alongside contextual information rather than viewed as isolated indicators of turnover or instability.

Figure 7 displays the average principal tenures per district in middle schools across South Carolina. Compared to elementary schools, the range of averages is narrower, with some districts reporting 1.0 year at the low end and a few approaching 8.0 years at the high end. Prior research in other states, including Missouri and Tennessee, has found that middle school principals are often the least stable in their positions (Baker et al., 2010; Grissom & Bartanen, 2019). While this may align with patterns observed in South Carolina, additional contextual information is necessary before drawing conclusions about workforce stability based solely on average tenure values.
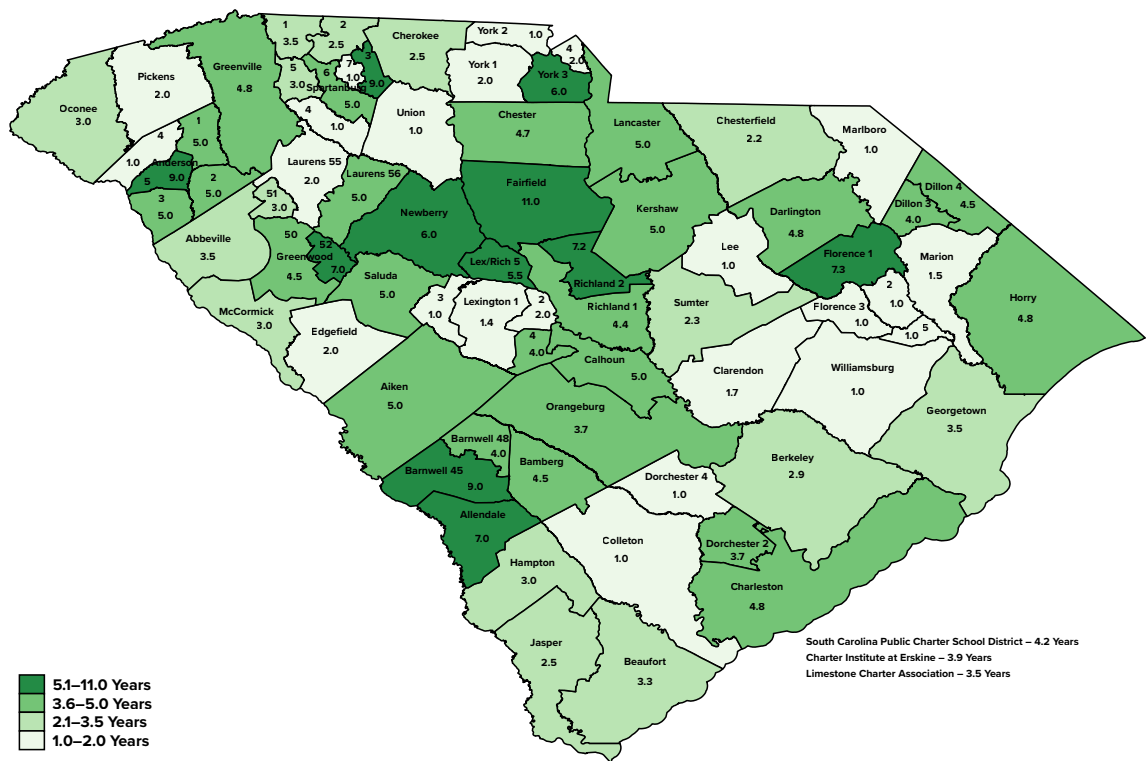
Figure 7. *Average Principal Tenure in Middle Schools Across South Carolina Districts in 2023–24*

Note. Districts are grouped into quartiles based on the overall range of values, with darker shades indicating higher quartiles.

Figure 8 presents the average principal tenures per district in high schools across South Carolina. The range of average tenure values spans from 1.0 to 11.0 years, wider than the range observed for middle schools but narrower than that of elementary schools. Recent national data indicated that high school principals have the lowest average tenure among organizational levels, at 4.2 years (Taie & Lewis, 2022). While some studies have found that middle schools experience greater principal turnover (Baker et al., 2010; Grissom & Bartanen, 2019), others have identified higher rates of instability in high schools, such as in Illinois and North Carolina (Gates et al., 2006). Research from Utah found that high school principals were less likely to move to another school, but more likely to transition into nonprincipal roles, compared to elementary and middle school principals (Ni et al., 2015). The South Carolina data used in this report do not include principal transition and mobility patterns. Examining these dynamics could add important insight into administrator labor dynamics in the state.

Figure 8. *Average Principal Tenure in High Schools Across South Carolina Districts in 2023–24*

Note. Districts are grouped into quartiles based on the overall range of values, with darker shades indicating higher quartiles.

Principal tenure offers one piece of data linked to school stability, and its correlation to school rating indicates it can be an important one. (See Key Question 2.) With that, a variety of dynamics, such as new school openings, district-initiated administrative movement, and principals retiring, changing roles, changing schools, or leaving the education field, can affect principal tenure data in different ways. These multiple possibilities point to other research avenues that, if explored, could further contribute to a greater understanding of the workforce dynamics of public school administrators in South Carolina.

+ FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This report studies key characteristics of South Carolina's public school administrator workforce during the 2023–24 academic year, with a focus on demographic trends, longitudinal patterns, and workforce distribution. The analysis includes indicators of administrator preparation and retention, offering insights that can support efforts to maintain a stable and effective leadership pipeline across the state.

Findings show that South Carolina's administrator workforce reflects many national patterns. In 2023–24, the majority of principals and assistant principals were female, though the ratio of female-to-male administrators was lower than that of the state's teacher workforce. Most administrators were White, with Black administrators representing more than one-third of the workforce. Notably, the percentage of Black principals was more than double the percentage of Black teachers. Administrators across the state had significant experience in public education: principals averaged more than 20 years, and assistant principals averaged just less than 20 years.

Analyses by school level revealed key differences. Female administrators were most prevalent in elementary schools, where they made up more than 70% of principals, while high schools had a higher proportion of male administrators. Middle and high schools employed greater percentages of Black principals than elementary and combined-level schools, a trend consistent with assistant principals, as well. Elementary school principals had the highest average years of experience in public education but were the least likely to hold a doctoral degree. Among assistant principals, those in combined-level schools had slightly lower levels of educational attainment and experience, though differences across school levels were modest.

Longitudinal analyses indicated that average years of experience and principal tenure remained stable across most organizational levels between 2020–21 and 2023–24. Elementary school principals consistently had the highest averages for both measures, while combined-level school principals had the lowest average years of experience and high school principals had the lowest average tenure. The percentage of principals receiving *Exemplary* PADEPP ratings varied across years and levels, with elementary principals more frequently earning *Exemplary* ratings. Middle and combined-level school principals were less likely to receive these ratings, though middle school percentages remained relatively consistent while combined-level school percentages fluctuated.

District-level analysis of average principal tenure revealed the widest range in elementary schools and the narrowest in middle schools. While these data can offer insight into workforce stability, they should be interpreted with district-specific context in mind. Factors such as district size, school reassignments, retirements, and administrative movement can affect tenure data and should be considered in future analyses.

Future research could enhance understanding by examining changes in district-level average principal tenure over time. The snapshot values included in this report provide important information regarding stability, but they may be challenging to interpret. Examining changes over time would enhance the clarity of the data. Additionally, investigating administrator movement, in a manner similar to SC TEACHER's recent report on teacher mobility (i.e., Dmitrieva et al., 2025), could reveal important nuances, such as whether significant movement in the workforce is due to more experienced principals being promoted to roles in district-level administration (Yan, 2020). These insights into workforce dynamics could then be leveraged to inform practice and policies for building an increasingly sustainable and effective administrator pipeline.

Finally, incorporating administrators' perspectives on their working conditions would also provide valuable context. Previous studies have linked administrators' perceptions of their work environment to retention outcomes (Conrad & Rosser, 2007; Levin & Bradley, 2019; Yan, 2020). Research has also demonstrated the influence of school leaders on teachers' perceptions of their own working conditions and job satisfaction (Burkhauser, 2017; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Johnson et al., 2012). SC TEACHER is currently developing a working conditions survey for school administrators. Comparing results from that survey to the existing SC Teacher Working Conditions Survey will offer additional insight into how school context and leadership support retention across these educator roles and can support local and state efforts to strengthen leadership pipelines, improve retention, and promote long-term school stability.

+ GLOSSARY

Note: 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.

Assistant Principal
An educational leader who assists the principal in the overall administration of a school, taking on various roles, including operational management, student discipline, instructional leadership, and teacher/student support. In South Carolina, assistant principals are designated with a position code of 2.

Career and Technical Education Center Director
An educational leader who oversees the planning, development, and implementation of a career and technical education center. Those in this role ensure compliance with regulations and coordinate with other departments and agencies to prepare students for careers and post-secondary education. In South Carolina, career and technical education center directors are designated with a position code of 13. In this report, these directors have been analyzed alongside principals and referred to as principals because they share similar responsibilities and evaluation requirements with traditional principals.

Career and Technical Education Center Assistant Director
An educational leader who assists the director in the overall administration of a career and technical education center. In South Carolina, career and technical education center assistant directors are designated with a position code of 14. In this report, these assistant directors have been analyzed alongside assistant principals and referred to as assistant principals because they share similar responsibilities with traditional assistant principals.

PADEPP (Expanded Program for Assisting, Developing, and Evaluating Principal Performance)
The required annual evaluation process for principals and career and technical education center directors in public schools in South Carolina. The evaluation includes nine standards, each with separate criteria approved by the General Assembly. Principals receive a rating of *Unsatisfactory, Improvement Needed, Proficient,* or *Exemplary* on each standard with a final rating determined by the evaluator. In some circumstances, more than one evaluator is part of the process. When this is the case, evaluators must reach a consensus on the ratings.

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). For this report, administrators are those with position codes 1 (principal), 2 (assistant principal), 13 (career and technical education center director), and 14 (career and technical education center assistant director). For the sake of simplicity, administrators in positions 1 and 13 are referred to throughout the report as principals and those in positions 2 and 14 are referred to as assistant principals.

Principal
An educational leader and administrative head of a school responsible for overseeing daily operations, managing staff, implementing policies, and ensuring a productive and safe learning environment for students, teachers, and staff. In South Carolina, principals are designated with a position code of 1.

Principal Tenure
The length of time in years that a principal has served in the role of principal at their current school.

+ REFERENCES

Baker, B. D., Punswick, E., & Belt, C. (2010). School leadership stability, principal moves, and departures: Evidence from Missouri. *Educational Administration Quarterly,* 46(4), 523–557. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X10383832

Bartanen, B., Grissom, J. A., & Rogers, L. K. (2019). The impacts of principal turnover. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis,* 41(3), 350–374. https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737198550

Boyd, D., Grossman, P., Ing, M., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2011). The influence of school administrators on teacher retention decisions. *American Educational Research Journal,* 48(2), 303–333. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831210380788

Buckman, D. G. (2021). The influence of principal retention and principal turnover on teacher turnover. *Journal of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies,* V, 1–26. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1342371.pdf

Burkhauser, S. (2017). How much do school principals matter when it comes to teacher working conditions? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis,* 39(1), 126–145. https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373716668028

Cohen, R., & Schechter, C. (2019). Becoming an assistant principal: Mapping factors that facilitate or hinder entering the role. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation,* 14(1), 99–112. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1218851.pdf

Conrad, T. L., & Rosser, V. J. (2007). Examining the satisfaction of educational leaders and their intent to pursue career advancement in public school administration. *Journal of School Leadership,* 17(5), 570–600. https://doi.org/10.1177/105268460701700502

Crawford, E. R., & Fuller, E. J. (2017). A dream attained or deferred? Examination of production and placement of Latino administrators. *Urban Education,* 52(10), 1167–1203. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085915602537

DeMatthews, D. E., Knight, D. S., & Shin, J. (2022). The principal-teacher churn: Understanding the relationship between leadership turnover and teacher attrition. *Educational Administration Quarterly,* 58(1), 76–109. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X211051974

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

Edwards, W. L., Quinn, D. J., Fuller, E. J., & Pendola, A. (2018). *Impact of principal turnover* (Policy Brief 2018–4). University Council for Educational Administration.

Fuller, E., & Pendola, A. (2023). *Did principal attrition increase after the pandemic?* The cases of Pennsylvania, Texas, and Nebraska (Research Brief 2023–4). Penn State Center for Education Evaluation & Policy Analysis. https://ceepablog.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/ceepa-research-brief-2023-4-_-did-principal-attrition-increase-after-the-pandemic-patxne.pdf

Gates, S. M., Ringel, J. S., Santibañez, L., Guarino, C., Ghosh-Dastidar, B., & Brown, A. (2006). Mobility and turnover among school principals. *Economics of Education Review,* 25(3), 289–302. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2005.01.008

Geiger, T., & Pivovarova, M. (2018). The effects of working conditions on teacher retention. *Teachers and Teaching,* 24(6), 604–625. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2018.1457524

Goldring, E., Rubin, M., & Herrmann, M. (2021, April). *The role of assistant principals: Evidence and insights for advancing school leadership.* The Wallace Foundation. https://wallacefoundation.org/sites/default files/2023-10/the-role-of-assistant-principals-evidence-insights-for-advancing-school-leadership.pdf

Grissom, J. A. (2011). Can good principals keep teachers in disadvantaged schools? Linking principal effectiveness to teacher satisfaction and turnover in hard-to-staff environments. *Teachers College Record,* 113(11), 2552–2585. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811111301102

Grissom, J. A., & Bartanen, B. (2019). Principal effectiveness and principal turnover. *Education Finance and Policy,* 14(3), 355–382. https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp_a_00256

Grissom, J. A., Blissett, R. S. L., & Mitani, H. (2018). Evaluating school principals: Supervisor ratings of principal practice and principal job performance. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis 40*(3), 446–472. https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373718783883

Grissom, J. A., Egalite, A. J., & Lindsay, C. A. (2021). *How principals affect students and schools: A systematic synthesis of two decades of research.* The Wallace Foundation. https://wallacefoundation org/report/how-principals-affect-students-and-schools-systematic-synthesis-two-decades-research

Gulosino, C., Ni, Y., & Rorrer, A. K. (2019). Newly hired teacher mobility in charter schools and traditional public schools: An application of segmented labor market theory. *American Journal of Education, 125*(4), 547–592. https://doi.org/10.1086/704096

Harris, D. C. (2007). Should I stay or should I go? Comparing teacher mobility in Florida's charter and traditional public schools. *Peabody Journal of Education, 82*(2–3), 274–310. https://doi.org/10.1080/01619560701312970

Hussar, B., Zhang, J., Hein, S., Wang, K., Roberts, A., Cui, J., Smith, M., Bullock Mann, F., Barmer, A., and Dilig, R. (2020). *The condition of education 2020* (NCES 2020-144). US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020144.pdf

Johnson, S. M., Kraft, M. A., & Papay, J. P. (2012). How context matters in high-need schools: The effects of teachers' working conditions on their professional satisfaction and their students' achievement. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education, 114*(10), 1–39. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811211401004

Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning.* The Wallace Foundation. https://wallacefoundation.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/How-Leadership-Influences-Student-Learning.pdf

Levin, S., & Bradley, K. (2019). Understanding and addressing principal turnover: A review of the research. National Association of Secondary School Principals. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/nassp-understanding-addressing-principal-turnover-review-research-report

Louis, K. S., Wahlstrom, K. L., Michlin, M., Gordon, M., Thomas, E., Leithwood, K., Anderson, S. E., Mascall, B., Strauss, T., & Moore, S. (2010). *Learning from leadership: Investigating the links to improved student learning.* The Wallace Foundation.

Mascall, B. & Leithwood, K. (2010) Investing in leadership: The district's role in managing principal turnover. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 9(4), 367–383. https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2010.493633

McCullough, M., Lipscomb, S., Chiang, H., & Gill, B. (2016). *Do principals' professional practice ratings reflect their contributions to student achievement? Evidence from Pennsylvania's Framework for Leadership* (Working Paper 46). Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED568706.pdf

National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). Characteristics of public and private school principals. *Condition of education.* US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cls

National Center for Education Statistics. (2025). *Preliminary public school principal restricted-use data file, 2017–18.* US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/tables/ntps1718_19110505_a1s.asp

Ni, Y., Sun, M., & Rorrer, A. (2015). Principal turnover: Upheaval and uncertainty in charter schools? *Educational Administration Quarterly,* 51(3), 409–437. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X14539808

Owings, W. A., Kaplan, L. S., & Nunnery, J. (2005). Principal quality, ISLLC standards, and student achievement: A Virginia study. *Journal of School Leadership,* 15(1), 99–119. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/105268460501500105

Starrett, A., Cartiff, B., & Dmitrieva, S. (2025, April). *South Carolina teacher workforce profile* for 2023–24. SC TEACHER. https://sc-teacher.org/EWP-teacher-workforce-apr2025/

Sun, M., & Ni, Y. (2015). Work environments and labor markets. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 52*(1), 144–183. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x15616659

Taie, S., and Lewis, L. (2022). *Characteristics of 2020–21 public and private K–12 school principals in the United States: Results from the National Teacher and Principal Survey first look* (NCES 2022-112). US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2022112

Taie, S., and Lewis, L. (2023). *Principal attrition and mobility. Results from the 2021–22 Principal Follow-up Survey to the National Teacher and Principal Survey* (NCES 2023-046). US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2023/2023046.pdf

Wei, X., Patel, D., & Young, V. M. (2014). Opening the "black box": Organizational differences between charter schools and traditional public schools. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 22*, 3. https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v22n3.2014

Yan, R. (2019). Principal turnover: How can we improve working conditions to keep our principals? *Indiana Business Review,* 94(2), 1–5.

Yan, R. (2020). The influence of working conditions on principal turnover in K–12 public schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly,* 56(1), 89–122. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x19840391