

South Carolina Alternative Route Teacher Pipeline Report for 2023–24

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EDUCATOR PIPELINE RESEARCH



RESEARCH TEAM

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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.

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Alternative Route Teacher Pipeline

+ HIGHLIGHTS

This report presents a detailed analysis of South Carolina’s alternative route teacher workforce for the 2023–24 academic year, with a focus on preparation and retention. As part of SC TEACHER’s ongoing commitment to providing statewide educator workforce profiles, this publication, along with SC TEACHER’s broader research, offers timely, actionable data to inform educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders.

The findings presented here are based on educator-level data provided by the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) for 2023–24, along with longitudinal data from the 2019–20 through 2022–23 academic years. The 2023–24 analyses reflect a sample of 5,079 educators affiliated with state-approved alternative certification programs. With a focus on alternative route teachers, these findings may support the development of data-informed strategies to strengthen the overall educator pipeline, improve retention, and enhance recruitment pathways across the state.

Key Findings From South Carolina’s Alternative Route Teacher Pipeline

- The majority of alternative route teachers in South Carolina are certified in high-need subject areas, including science, mathematics, and special education.
- The Program of Alternative Certification for Educators (PACE) remains the largest alternative certification program in the state. However, enrollment numbers have increased in recent years across approved district-administered, national, and university-based programs.
- Of those newly enrolled in 2019–20, approximately 70% of alternative route candidates had earned professional certification by 2023–24. A greater percentage of candidates recruited from within the educator workforce (74%) earned professional certification compared to those recruited from outside (66%).
- For alternative route teachers from 2020–21 through 2023–24, 1-year retention rates were consistent with the overall South Carolina teacher workforce: approximately 90% at the state level, 81–85% at the district level, and 72–82% at the school level.
- For alternative certification program completers from 2020–21 to 2023–24, 1-year retention rates were 5–10 percentage points higher than those of candidates enrolled in a program.

+ INTRODUCTION

Understanding the Landscape of Alternative Certification Pathways

Teachers play a vital role in shaping student learning and development, and fully staffing schools with qualified, effective educators remains a critical priority for public education systems. While widespread assertions of national teacher shortages may oversimplify a complex issue, some districts do face persistent challenges in recruiting and retaining certified teachers (Nguyen et al., 2024). In part, these staffing pressures have contributed to the expansion of alternative certification programs over the past 2 decades (Cohen-Vogel & Smith, 2007; Kwok & Cain, 2023). Proponents of these programs cite their potential to reduce barriers to entry into the teaching profession (e.g., cost and time; Bowen & Williams, 2024) and to diversify the educator workforce (Redding, 2021).

A previous SC TEACHER report (Cartiff et al., 2024) outlined the emergence and evolution of alternative certification programs across the United States. While early studies suggested that alternatively certified teachers were less effective than those prepared through traditional programs, as measured by student achievement outcomes, subsequent research has yielded mixed findings (e.g., Sass, 2015). Similarly, findings about the demographic (e.g., age, gender) and academic backgrounds of those in alternative certification programs have differed across studies (Hammerness & Reininger, 2008), pointing to variation in both programs and the people they serve.



Research on the retention of alternatively certified teachers is also inconclusive. Some studies have found that traditionally certified teachers remain in the profession at higher rates (Redding & Smith, 2016), while others report the opposite (Allen, 2005). Scholars have cautioned that such contradictions may result from aggregating highly variable program types into a single category (Grissom, 2008; Hammerness & Reininger, 2008; Will, 2024). Alternative certification programs differ considerably in their missions, entry requirements, training structures, levels of support, and duration. These differences influence both teacher outcomes and overall program effectiveness.

Teacher retention is especially important to examine, as educator effectiveness tends to improve substantially over the first few years in the profession, regardless of certification pathway (Kane et al., 2008).

The Need for Finer-Grained Analyses

Given the heterogeneity in alternative certification programs, there is value in disaggregating alternative route teachers by program type and structure. Doing so may help identify which program models or features are most effective in preparing teachers for specific school contexts (Zeichner & Hutchinson, 2008). Similarly, examining retention across program types can reveal which forms of preparation and support may be associated with sustained employment. Teacher retention is especially important to examine, as educator effectiveness tends to improve substantially over the first few years in the profession, regardless of certification pathway (Kane et al., 2008).



Understanding the professional and experiential backgrounds of alternative route teachers also adds important context. Although many programs aim to recruit individuals from outside the traditional education labor pool (Woods, 2016), some candidates have previous experience in education-adjacent roles (Humphrey & Wechsler, 2007; NCES, 2022). In fact, certain programs specifically recruit paraprofessionals and other school-based staff into teaching roles (Hammerness & Reininger, 2008). Prior experience in schools may offer important contextual knowledge and contribute to both program completion and long-term retention. However, empirical research exploring these associations remains limited.

Alternative route teachers continue to serve as a critical segment of the educator workforce in South Carolina. As such, there is a need to move beyond broad categorizations and toward finer-grained analyses that consider specific program features, candidate characteristics, and district contexts. (Youngs et al., 2025). This report represents a step in that direction by providing a detailed portrait of South Carolina's alternative route teacher workforce and examining multiyear trends in recruitment, preparation, and retention.

Snapshot of the South Carolina Alternative Route Teacher Population

The number of state-approved alternative certification programs in South Carolina has grown in recent years, with 15 programs in operation as of 2023–24. These programs differ in structure, size, and years in operation, presenting challenges for making direct comparisons across individual programs. To facilitate analysis, this report groups the 15 programs into four categories based on the provider or administrative entity, following the typology proposed by Grossman and Loeb (2008). The Program of Alternative Certification for Educators (PACE), South Carolina's largest and longest-running alternative certification program, is reported as its own category due to its unique role and scale. PACE was initially established in 1984 (SCDE, 2025a).



Table 1. Approved Alternative Certification Programs in South Carolina by Type

Administered by a College or University	Administered by a National Program	Administered by a School District	Program of Alternative Certification for Educators (PACE)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative Pathways to Educator Certification (APEC) Program at Coker University • Alternative Pathways to Educator Certification (APEC) Program at Columbia College • Carolina Collaborative for Alternative Preparation (CarolinaCAP) • Converse Alternative Certification in Art Education (CACAE) • Network for Alternative Preparation in Teaching (NetAPT) at Winthrop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Board • Teach For America (TFA) • Teach Right USA • Teachers of Tomorrow (ToT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charter Inspire Alternative Certification Pathway • Greenville Alternative Teacher Education (GATE) Program • Lowcountry Educator Alternative Pathway (LEAP) • TeachCharleston • TeachFlorence1 	

Note. In a previous report (i.e., Cartiff et al., 2024), TeachSC was included as an approved alternative certification program. The SCDE has since reclassified TeachSC as a support and guidance organization, so the program was not analyzed in this report.

In 2023–24, a total of 5,079 public school teachers in South Carolina were either enrolled in or had previously completed one of the state’s alternative certification programs listed in Table 1 (though not all these programs were represented in the data). For the purposes of this report:

- *Alternative route teachers* refer to all individuals affiliated with alternative certification programs (candidates and completers).
- *Candidates* are individuals currently teaching under a temporary alternative route certificate as they work toward completion of an alternative certification program.
- *Completers* are individuals who have successfully fulfilled alternative certification program requirements and advanced to a professional certificate.

The demographic profile of South Carolina’s alternative route teacher workforce indicates greater diversity compared to the state’s overall teacher population. In 2023–24, male educators made up 33.2% of alternative route teachers compared to 20.2% of all teachers in the state (Starrett et al., 2025). The percentages of Black (28.4%) and Hispanic (3.6%) alternative route teachers also exceeded those found in the broader teacher population (16.9% and 2.5%, respectively). These findings are consistent with national trends (NCES, 2022; Feistritzer, 2011; King & Yin, 2022).

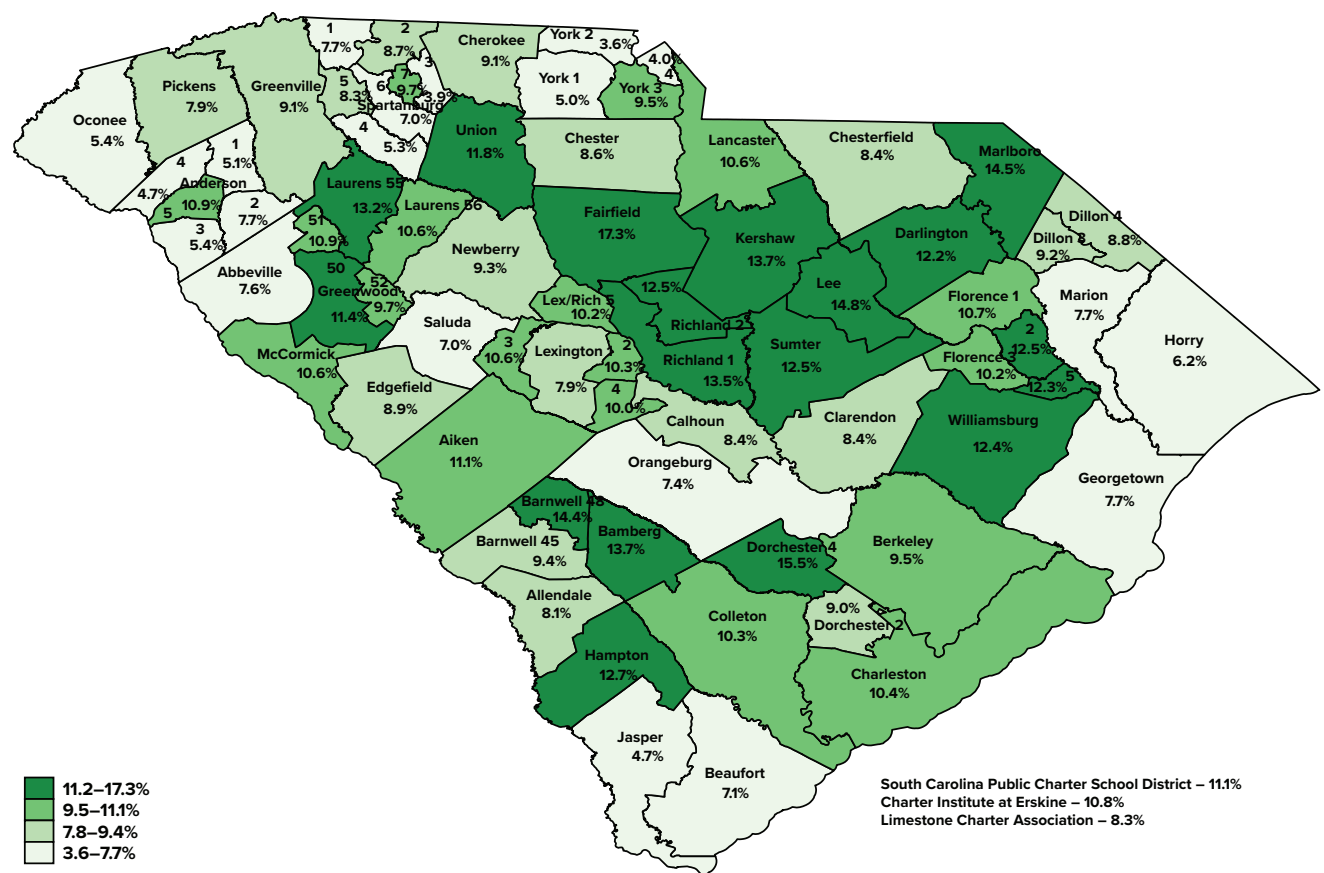


Of alternative route teachers with available undergraduate degree data, 64.4% earned their bachelor's degree from a South Carolina institution, 33.1% from institutions in other US states, and 2.4% from institutions outside the US. After South Carolina, the states awarding the most bachelor's degrees to alternative certification educators were North Carolina (236), Georgia (153), Virginia (114), Florida (98), Arizona (88), New York (84), Pennsylvania (77), Tennessee (72), Ohio (65), and California (63). It is important to note that these data do not distinguish between in-person and online degree attainment.

Postbaccalaureate attainment was also common. Nearly half (49.7%) of alternative route teachers held a master's degree, and 4.4% held a doctoral degree. By comparison, 63.8% of all teachers in South Carolina held an advanced degree during the same period (Starrett et al., 2025).

The distribution of alternative route teachers varied considerably across school districts. In some districts, they represented less than 5% of the overall workforce, while in others, they accounted for more than 15%. Figure 1 (reproduced from Starrett et al., 2025, p. 22) shows the percentage of alternative route teachers in each South Carolina school district in 2023–24.

Figure 1. Percentage of Alternative Route Teachers by District in 2023–24



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



Subject area certification also differed among alternative route teachers. As shown in Table 2, the most common certification areas included business education, science, English, social studies, and special education.

Table 2. *Number of Alternative Route Teachers by Subject Area Certification in 2023–24*

Subject Area Certification ^a	Number Certified in 2023–24 ^{b,c}
Business education	731
Science	610
English	533
Social studies	435
Special education	431
Mathematics	274
Foreign language	179
Fine arts (outside of music)	175
Physical education and health	131
Elementary	62
Music	59
English as a second language (ESL)	54
Early childhood	39
Other subject areas	37
Family/consumer science	32
Agricultural education	12
Computer science	9
Guidance	6

^a953 alternative route teachers held certifications in multiple subject areas.

^b1,678 candidates in the analysis had not yet finished their alternative certification process and did not have subject area certification. Therefore, they were not included in these numbers.

^c683 alternative route teachers who had finished their alternative certification program were missing data.



Clarifying Workforce Terminology

As with any SC TEACHER analysis of educator pipeline data, it is important to clearly define terminology, as definitions can vary across different studies and reports. This research specifically focuses on alternative route teachers in South Carolina and state-approved alternative certification programs. All key terms used throughout the report are defined in context and in the Glossary beginning on p. 21.

Key Questions

This report describes the composition and characteristics of the alternative route teacher workforce in South Carolina during the 2023–24 school year. It presents data on teacher enrollment in four categories of alternative certification programs and includes longitudinal analysis from 2019–20 to 2023–24. These analyses explore patterns in recruitment, preparation, and retention, offering insight into the stability of this segment of the workforce. Findings resulting from the research can support data-informed decision-making and may be used in concert with 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 preparation backgrounds of alternative route teachers in South Carolina, and what are the related trends over time?
2. What percentage of alternative route teachers attain professional certification within 5 years? Does this percentage differ by recruitment path?
3. What percentage of alternative route teachers are retained over time? How do 1-year retention rates differ over time between program completers and program candidates?

Data, Variables, and Analyses

This report is based on data from 5,079 alternative route teachers employed by South Carolina public school districts during the 2023–24 academic year. Teacher-level data were provided by the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) through a memorandum of understanding with SC TEACHER. Variables included in the analysis encompassed district, gender, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, location of bachelor’s degree-granting institute, alternative certification program, certification level (i.e., alternative route certification for candidates, professional certification for completers), certification area (for program completers), and position code. For longitudinal analysis, alternative route teachers were identified using SCDE datasets from 2019–20 through 2023–24. A small number of records were excluded from the analysis due to data inconsistencies, such as mismatches between certification levels and program pathways.

Educator records were linked across consecutive academic years using unique identifiers. For Key Question 1, new alternative route candidates were identified as individuals not enrolled in an alternative certification program during the prior academic year. Candidates were further categorized based on prior employment: those recruited from within the South Carolina public school system (e.g., paraprofessionals or other nonteaching staff) and those recruited from outside the system (i.e., not previously employed in South Carolina public schools).



To address Key Question 2, alternative route candidates employed during the 2019–20 school year were tracked through 2023–24 to assess their yearly progression to professional certification and continued employment in the state. Analyses included comparisons of certification attainment and retention outcomes based on the type of alternative certification program and the recruitment path.

Key Question 3 focused on 1-year retention rates from 2020–21 to 2023–24. Analyses were restricted to individuals serving as teachers of record (i.e., position codes 3–9). Retention was assessed at the state, district, and school levels. An alternative route teacher was considered retained at the state level if they remained employed as a public school teacher in South Carolina the following year. At the district level, retention required continued employment as a classroom teacher in the same district, regardless of school assignment. For school-level retention, individuals had to remain as classroom teachers at the same school for consecutive years. Comparisons were also made between candidates and completers to examine differences in retention outcomes.

All analyses presented in this report are descriptive in nature. Because the dataset includes the full population of alternative route teachers employed in South Carolina during the specified years, no inferential statistics or generalizations beyond the population were applied.



+ KEY QUESTION 1:

What are the preparation backgrounds of alternative route teachers in South Carolina, and what are the related trends over time?

To address Key Question 1, we examined the distribution of alternative route teachers across South Carolina public school districts in 2023–24, including a breakdown by each program type. We also reviewed 5 years of data to assess trends in new alternative route candidates, both statewide and by recruitment source. Candidates were categorized as recruited from inside the educator workforce (e.g., paraprofessionals or aides) or outside (i.e., individuals not previously employed in South Carolina public schools). Program-level differences in enrollment patterns were also analyzed.

Distribution of Alternative Route Teachers

Table 3 shows the distribution of alternative route teachers in 2023–24 by program type. The majority (approximately 70%) were affiliated with PACE. National programs accounted for slightly more than 20% of alternative route teachers, while college- and university-based programs, also referred to as institutes of higher education (IHE) programs, had the smallest number of affiliated teachers. That relatively low number may be attributed to the recent state approval and implementation of IHE programs.

Table 3. *Alternative Route Teachers per Program Type in 2023–24*

Program Type	Number in 2023–24	Percentage in 2023–24
PACE	3,487	68.7%
National program	1,030	20.3%
District program	313	6.2%
College or university program	248	4.9%

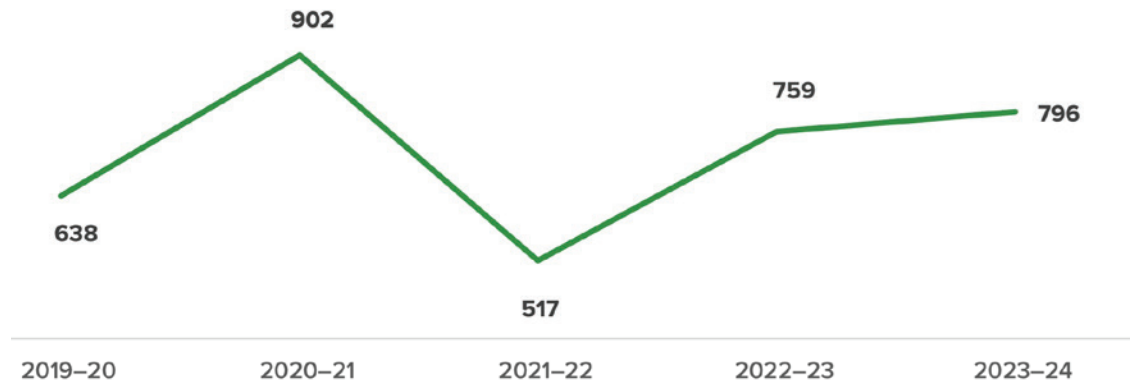
Note. The numbers and percentages presented in this table include both teachers who had completed alternative certification programs (i.e., completers) and those currently enrolled in them (i.e., candidates).

Local context plays a role in the distribution of alternative route teachers by program type. Being the oldest program in the state, PACE was the most common type of alternative certification program in most districts, based on the number of affiliated teachers. National programs were the second most common, while a small number of districts, specifically Charleston County School District and Greenville County Schools, had more teachers affiliated with locally administered district programs. Additionally, as more college and university programs have emerged in recent years, several districts now show these programs as the most common type, suggesting growing reliance on higher education providers. In some cases, multiple program types were tied as the most common within a district, which may indicate a shift toward districts drawing on a broader mix of alternative certification providers as more options become available.

Trends in Newly Enrolled Alternative Route Candidates

Figure 2 presents the number of newly enrolled alternative certification program candidates employed in South Carolina public schools from 2019–20 through 2023–24. Annual enrollment ranged from approximately 500 to 900 candidates, with the highest number occurring in 2020–21 and the lowest number in 2021–22. These fluctuations likely reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the last 2 years, enrollment has stabilized at approximately 800 new candidates per year.

Figure 2. Trends in Number of Newly Enrolled Alternative Route Candidates



Note. The values presented in this figure may differ from those in previous SC TEACHER reports as the data here are not restricted to educators in position codes 3–9.

Figure 3 compares the numbers of new candidates entering programs from inside or outside the South Carolina educator workforce. Each year, more candidates entered from outside the workforce. However, both groups exhibited similar longitudinal patterns, with increases in 2020–21, declines in 2021–22, and relative stability in subsequent years

Figure 3. Trends in Number of Newly Enrolled Alternative Route Candidates From Inside and Outside the South Carolina Public School Workforce

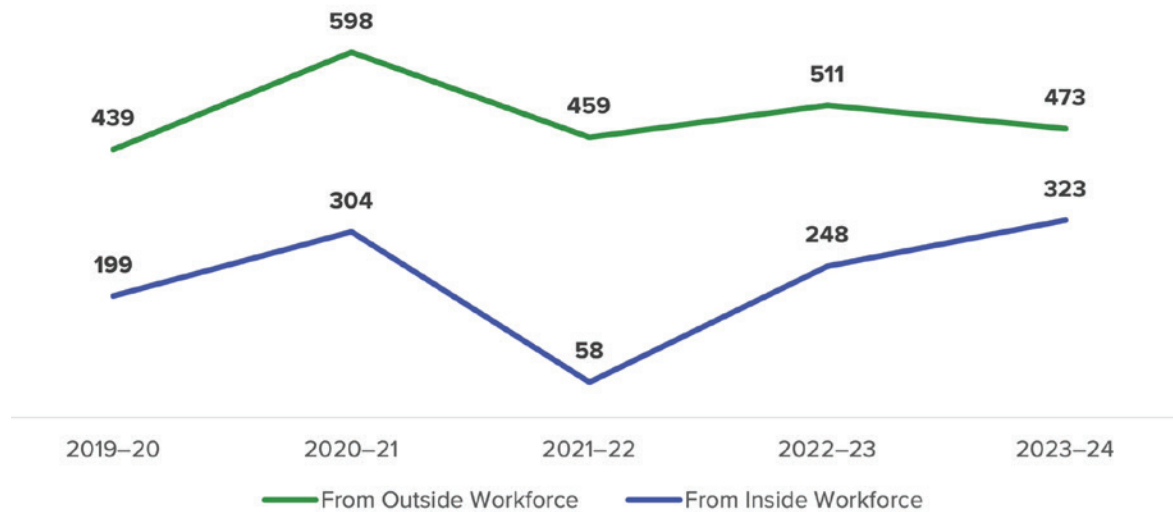
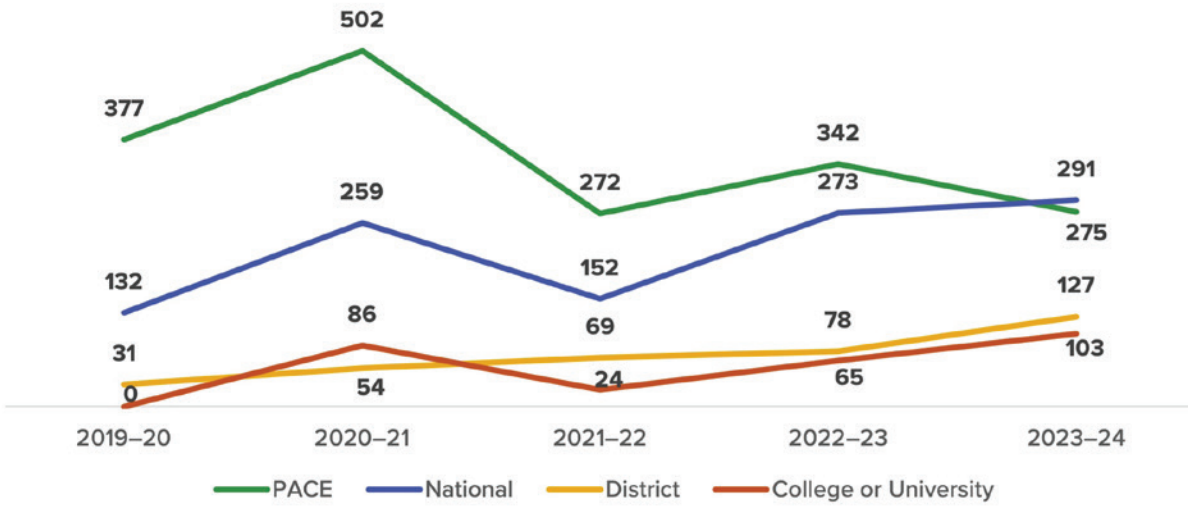


Figure 4 shows the annual number of new candidates by program type. The most substantial variation occurred during and immediately following the pandemic. District-administered programs demonstrated consistent, incremental growth over the 5-year period. In 2023–24, national programs collectively surpassed PACE in the number of new candidates for the first time. Despite this shift, PACE remained the largest individual program in the state.

Most new candidates each year served as teachers of record (i.e., in position codes 3–9). A few, however, served in other roles such as aides (i.e., position codes 90–94), librarians (i.e., position code 10), and career specialists (i.e., position code 23).

Figure 4. Trends in Number of Newly Enrolled Alternative Route Candidates by Program Type



Note. During the analyzed time frame, several alternative certification programs were approved by the SCDE and began enrolling candidates.

Summary of Trends in Alternative Route Teacher Preparation Backgrounds

Alternative route teachers serve critical roles in districts across South Carolina. In recent years, the number of candidates entering from within the educator workforce has increased, while the number entering from outside the workforce has remained relatively stable. District-administered, IHE, and national programs have all experienced growth in enrollment over the past 2 years. PACE experienced a decline in enrollment in 2023–24 relative to the previous year, yet it continues to enroll more candidates than any other individual program. Continued longitudinal analysis will help determine whether the fluctuations observed during the 2020–21 and 2021–22 school years reflect temporary disruptions due to the pandemic or signal more lasting shifts in the teacher preparation landscape.

+ KEY QUESTION 2:

What percentage of alternative route teachers attain professional certification within 5 years? Does this percentage differ by recruitment path?

To address Key Question 2, the analysis followed a cohort of 638 educators who began an alternative certification program in South Carolina during the 2019–20 academic year. These individuals were tracked through 2023–24 to determine whether they attained professional certification and remained teaching in the public school workforce. Outcomes were disaggregated by program type and recruitment path (i.e., recruited from inside vs. outside the educator workforce).

In South Carolina, alternative route candidates are generally expected to earn their professional certification within 3 years. However, due to disruptions related to COVID-19, the SCDE allowed extended timelines for candidates enrolled in 2020–21 and 2021–22 (SCDE, 2025b). In addition, some candidates may have received individual extensions due to extenuating personal circumstances. As a result, this analysis considers certification attainment within a 5-year window.

Attaining Professional Certification and Continuing to Teach

Of the 638 educators who began an alternative certification program in 2019–20, 439 (68.8%) earned a professional certificate by 2023–24. The distribution of certification attainment by year was as follows: 37 in 2020–21, 51 in 2021–22, 252 in 2022–23, and 99 in 2023–24. The majority of these completers have since remained in the profession; 403 of the 439 (91.8%) were still teaching in South Carolina public schools in 2023–24. Those who were no longer teaching may return, as their professional certificates remain valid for up to 5 years.

The remaining 199 educators (31.2%) had not earned a professional certificate by 2023–24. These individuals may have exited their programs voluntarily, failed to meet certification requirements (e.g., Praxis exams), or experienced nonrenewal of employment contracts. A small number of candidates remained employed in schools but had not yet completed certification, indicating a possible break in their service as a classroom teacher or an extended enrollment period.

Certification Outcomes by Program Type

To explore whether certification outcomes differed by program type, we analyzed the 540 educators from the 2019–20 cohort with complete program data to determine if they had attained a professional certificate by 2023–24. Of these, 377 were enrolled in PACE, 132 in a national program, and 31 in a district-administered program. No college- or university-based alternative certification programs were state-approved in 2019–20.

Among PACE candidates, 288 of 377 (76.4%) attained professional certification by 2023–24. Of these, 272 (94.4%) remained employed in South Carolina public schools. For national program candidates, 78 of 132 (59.1%) earned professional certification, with 69 (88.5%) still teaching in 2023–24. Lastly, among district-administered program candidates, 20 of 31 (64.5%) attained professional certification. All 20 remained in the public school workforce as of 2023–24. While certification attainment rates varied across program types, retention rates among those who completed certification were consistently high.

Certification Outcomes by Recruitment Path

Alternative certification programs often aim to attract candidates from outside traditional education roles. In the 2019–20 cohort, 439 candidates (68.8%) entered from outside the educator workforce. Of these, 291 (66.3%) earned professional certification by 2023–24, and 270 (92.8%) remained in the workforce.

By contrast, 199 candidates entered a program from inside the educator workforce (e.g., paraprofessionals). This group had a higher certification attainment rate, with 148 of 199 (74.4%) candidates earning professional certification. Of those, 133 (89.9%) were still employed in 2023–24.

Several factors may contribute to this difference. Individuals already working in schools may have greater familiarity with instructional environments and expectations, as well as access to support networks that facilitate persistence and success in certification programs. However, retention rates following certification were comparable across both groups.

Considerations for Measuring Success

Attaining professional certification within the required timeframe is a key benchmark for alternative route teachers, as it is a prerequisite for continued employment in South Carolina public schools. Retention following certification is equally important for building a stable and experienced workforce. Examining patterns of certification attainment and employment across program types and recruitment paths may help identify features that support teacher persistence. Additionally, understanding which program components (e.g., mentorship, coursework, field support) are most influential in helping candidates meet certification requirements may inform future improvements in program design and policy.

+ KEY QUESTION 3:

What percentage of alternative route teachers are retained over time? How do 1-year retention rates differ over time between program completers and program candidates?

To address Key Question 3, we examined 1-year retention rates for alternative route teachers employed in South Carolina public schools from 2019–20 through 2023–24 at the state, district, and school levels. We also analyzed 1-year retention rates of alternative route completers over those years and compared them to the retention rates of candidates still enrolled in those programs. We restricted these analyses to individuals serving as teachers of record (i.e., position codes 3–9).

Levels of Retention

State-level retention refers to the percentage of alternative route teachers who continued teaching in any South Carolina PK–12 public school from one year to the next, regardless of school or district changes. Alternative route teachers who exited the profession or moved into a nonteaching role were not considered retained at the state level.

District-level retention reflects the percentage of alternative route teachers who remained in the same district the following academic year. Those who changed districts, exited the profession, or moved into a nonteaching role were not considered retained at the district level.

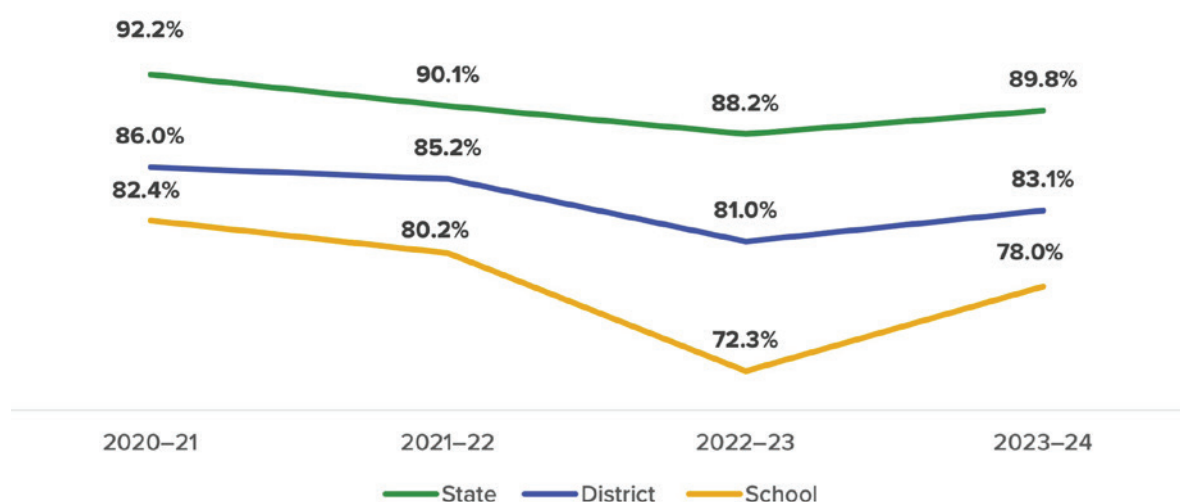
School-level retention refers to the percentage of alternative route teachers who remained in the same school the following academic year. Those who moved to a different school, even within the same district, were not included in the retained count. In cases of school closures or consolidations, alternative route teachers reassigned to a designated successor school were considered retained. Those who changed schools, exited the profession, or moved into a nonteaching role were not considered retained at the school level.

Trends in 1-Year Retention for All Alternative Route Teachers

As shown in Figure 5, about 90% of alternative route teachers stayed in public schools in South Carolina each year over the 5-year period. Another 5–7% changed districts but kept teaching in the state. Additionally, 4–9% moved to a different school within the same district. Overall, most alternative route teachers stayed in the profession from one year to the next.

These patterns generally reflect statewide teacher workforce trends, including a temporary decline in retention following the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent recovery by 2023–24 (Dmitrieva et al., 2025).

Figure 5. *Alternative Route Teacher 1-Year Retention Rates at the State, District, and School Levels*

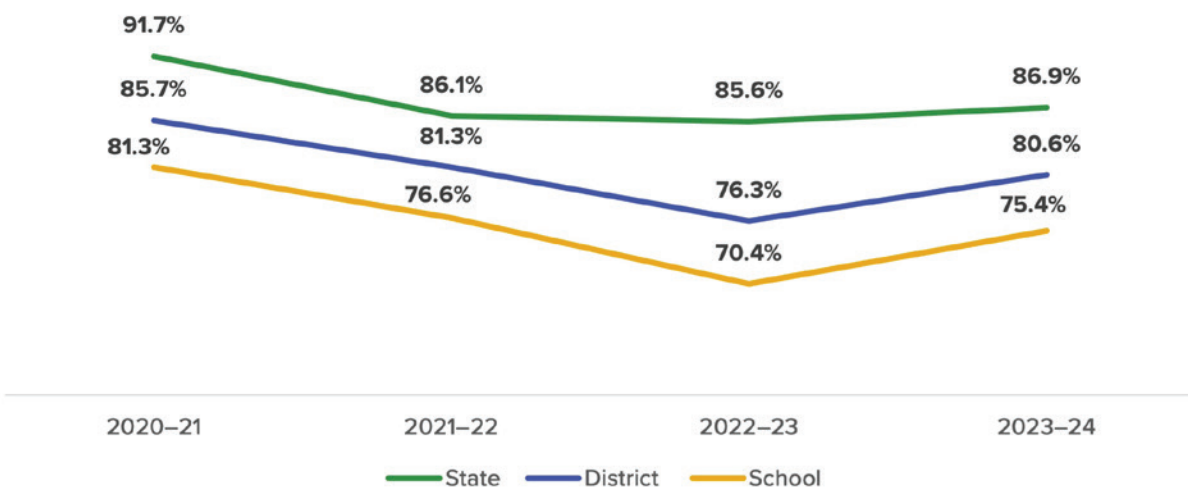


It is important to interpret these data in context. Teacher mobility may be driven by a range of factors, including district-initiated transfers, nonrenewal of contracts, budgetary constraints, and structural changes such as school closures or consolidations. As such, retention metrics reflect both individual decisions and broader organizational or policy shifts.

Retention Rates by Certification Status for Candidates and Completers

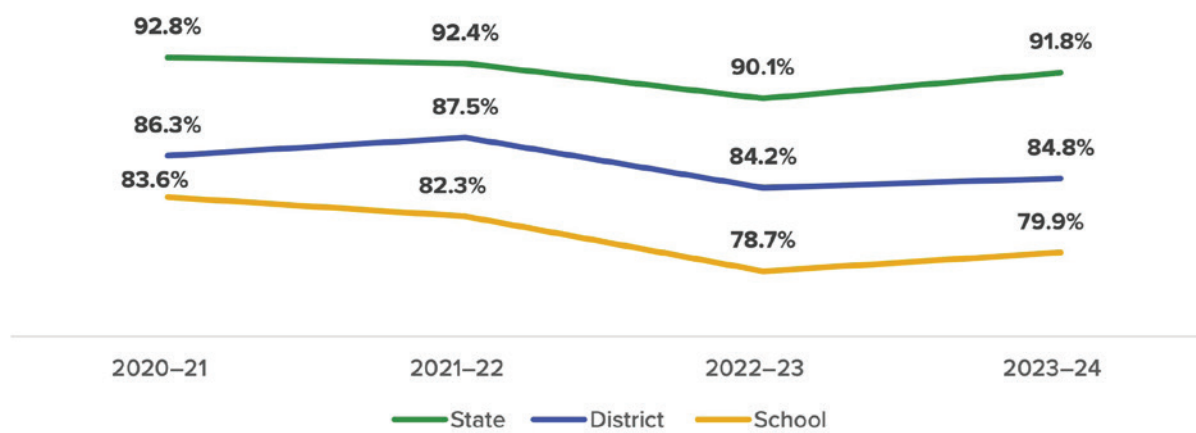
For program candidates, 1-year retention rates are presented in Figure 6. Candidates consistently had lower retention rates than completers across all years and levels of analysis. (See Figure 7.) Retention rates for candidates were between 2 and 8 percentage points lower than those of the general teacher population in South Carolina (Dmitrieva et al., 2025). These findings align with existing literature showing that early-career teachers, regardless of preparation pathway, are more likely to leave the profession within the first 3 to 5 years (Zhang & Neller, 2016).

Figure 6. Program Candidate 1-Year Retention Rates at the State, District, and School Levels



For program completers, 1-year retention rates are presented in Figure 7. Completers exhibited consistently high 1-year retention rates, exceeding 90% in each year analyzed at the state level. These rates were slightly higher than the overall teacher population (Dmitrieva et al., 2025). Approximately 5% of completers each year moved to a different district while remaining in the workforce, and another 5% transferred to a different school within the same district. The high retention among completers may reflect the increased commitment and institutional support associated with having earned a professional certificate.

Figure 7. Program Completer 1-Year Retention Rates at the State, District, and School Levels



Patterns of Attrition and Retention for Alternative Route Teachers

Overall, 1-year retention rates for alternative route teachers in South Carolina closely parallel those of the general teacher workforce. While some national studies have indicated that alternatively certified teachers are more likely to leave the profession than traditionally certified peers (Ingersoll & May, 2011), the data from South Carolina do not reflect such a trend at present.

Program candidates demonstrated higher attrition rates than completers, a pattern that may be attributable to their earlier stage of career development, limited time in the profession, or incomplete access to professional supports. Additionally, candidates may still be navigating certification requirements such as the Praxis exams, which completers have already satisfied.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This report examines the characteristics of alternative route teachers employed in South Carolina public schools during the 2023–24 academic year. It presents trends in enrollment across alternative certification program types, differences in recruitment pathways, patterns of professional certification attainment, and 1-year retention outcomes.

Findings suggest that enrollment in district-administered, national, and college- or university-based alternative certification programs has gradually increased in recent years. Despite this growth, PACE remains the largest alternative certification program in the state. Among the 2019–20 cohort, a higher percentage of PACE candidates attained professional certification and remained in the South Carolina teaching workforce through 2023–24 compared to their counterparts in national or district-run programs. Although a majority of 2019–20 candidates were recruited from outside the educator workforce, those who entered from within the educator workforce attained professional certification within 5 years at higher rates.

For alternative route teachers as a whole, 1-year retention rates have remained generally consistent with those observed for the statewide teacher workforce. In addition, program completers maintained higher retention percentages from one year to the next compared to candidates, highlighting the potential importance of achieving professional certification as a factor in workforce stability.

This study reflects an effort to examine alternative certification programs and alternative route teachers using a more granular approach. While direct comparisons among individual programs may be ideal, variation in program size and the timing of state approval limited the feasibility of such comparisons. As a result, programs were grouped into broader categories based on provider type (i.e., national, district, or college/university). It is important to note, however, that substantial variation exists within these categories. For example, although both Teach For America and Teachers of Tomorrow are classified as national programs, they differ considerably in structure, selectivity, and program design. Teach For America is a highly selective nonprofit organization that requires a 2-year teaching commitment, whereas Teachers of Tomorrow is a for-profit provider that offers fully online coursework with flexible timelines.

These differences suggest that alternative classification frameworks, such as those based on recruitment strategies, preparation models, or responsiveness to labor market needs, may be useful for future research (Grossman & Loeb, 2008). Employing such typologies could help identify specific program features associated with teacher success, certification attainment, and long-term retention.

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.

Alternative Route Certificate

An educator credential and certification level that may be issued to an eligible candidate participating in a South Carolina-approved alternative route teacher preparation program. This certificate is valid for 1 school year. With continued employment in a South Carolina public school and successful progress toward completion of the specific preparation program, it may be renewed annually for a defined period as allowed by state and federal statutes and regulations. Upon successful completion of all requirements of the program within the certification period, the educator is eligible for advancement to a renewable professional certificate.

Alternative Route Candidate (Candidate)

An individual hired on a conditional alternative route certificate based on their enrollment in one of South Carolina's 15 approved alternative route certification programs. By definition, these individuals have also (a) obtained a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited university, (b) not participated in student teaching in a traditional education preparation program, and (c) not participated in another state-approved alternative route certification program.

Alternative Route Completer (Completer)

An educator who has successfully fulfilled all requirements of a state-approved alternative certification program and has advanced from a temporary alternative route certificate to a professional teaching certificate. This status indicates that the individual has completed all coursework, assessments (e.g., Praxis exams), and other program- and state-specific requirements necessary for full certification to teach in South Carolina public schools.

Alternative Route Teacher

An educator affiliated with one of South Carolina's 15 approved alternative certification programs, including both alternative route candidates and alternative route completers. This term refers to individuals who entered the teaching profession through a nontraditional pathway—typically without completing a traditional student teaching experience—and who either hold a conditional alternative route certificate while completing program requirements (candidate) or have fulfilled all program and state certification requirements and advanced to a professional teaching certificate (completer).

Attrition

When a teacher leaves the classroom teaching profession in South Carolina public schools. This includes retirement, moving to teach out of state, leaving to teach in private or home schools, switching to a nonteaching role, or exiting the profession entirely.

Educator Pipeline

A conceptual model that illustrates how individuals enter, move within, and exit the broader public school workforce across various educational roles. It encompasses not only teachers but also paraprofessionals, instructional aides, support staff, and administrators. The model includes new entrants (e.g., recent graduates, career changers), individuals transitioning into different roles (e.g., paraprofessionals becoming teachers), returning personnel (e.g., retirees, former educators reentering the workforce), and those exiting or shifting among schools, districts, or positions.

Mobility

Any movement of teachers between classroom teaching positions within South Carolina public schools, including interdistrict and intradistrict transfers.

New Hire

A teacher who did not work in the state's public education system in any position code (i.e., teaching or nonteaching) during the previous academic year.

Nonteaching Role

Any position in a public school that does not involve direct classroom teaching responsibilities (e.g., administrator, instructional coach, guidance counselor). Moving to one of these roles typically removes an individual from the teacher category (see *teacher* definition) unless they later return to a teaching position.

Paraprofessional

A school-based employee (position codes 90–94) who provides instructional or support services under the supervision of a certified teacher or other licensed education professional. Paraprofessionals may assist with classroom instruction, student supervision, special education services, or administrative tasks.

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. In this report, analysis for Key Questions 1 and 2, also included aides (position codes 90–94), librarians (position code 10), and career specialists (position code 23).

Professional Certificate

A teaching certificate level and standard educator credential valid for a period of 5 school years, which may be renewed by meeting continued professional learning requirements established by the State Board of Education. An educator who has advanced to a professional certificate must earn 120 renewal credits during that 5-year period to renew the certificate.

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.

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.
- **School-Level Retention:** When a teacher continues to teach in the same school.

Role-Changer

A public school educator who changes 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.

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.

Teacher Pipeline

A conceptual model depicting how teachers enter, move within, and exit the public school workforce. The model captures new teachers (e.g., recent graduates, out-of-state hires), returning educators (e.g., retirees, those who previously left the profession), and those leaving or moving among schools and districts.

Teaching Certificate Level

A level that indicates where teachers are in the certification process. Levels include pre-initial, initial, conditional alternative route, and other annual or temporary certificate levels that lead to a professional certificate once all requirements have been met. Some certificate levels, like international certificate, cannot lead to a professional certificate.

Teaching Certificate Pathway

Teaching certificate information which describes the route a teacher takes to become certified. Pathways include undergraduate, graduate, alternative certification, career and technical education, critical needs, and reciprocity.

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