

South Carolina Teacher Attrition, Mobility, and Retention Report for 2024–25

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RESEARCH TEAM

Angela Starrett, PhD

Svetlana Dmitrieva, PhD

Brian Cartiff, PhD

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

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Teacher Attrition, Mobility, and Retention in South Carolina

+ HIGHLIGHTS

This report takes a comprehensive look at teacher retention and mobility in South Carolina’s public schools during a period of post-pandemic stabilization. Data show that by the 2024–25 academic year, teacher retention at the state, district, and school levels had largely returned to pre-pandemic numbers, reflecting renewed workforce stability across much of the state.

At the same time, retention and mobility remain important workforce and policy considerations. Understanding where teachers move within the system—and where retention challenges persist—can help ensure instructional continuity, preserve institutional knowledge within schools, and support the long-term return on public investments in teacher preparation and professional development.

By examining teacher retention at the state, district, and school levels, this report provides policymakers and education leaders with a clearer picture of both statewide trends and local variation to support informed decisions about where targeted strategies may be most effective in sustaining a strong and stable educator workforce.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Statewide teacher retention has rebounded to pre-pandemic levels.** State, district, and school retention rates in 2024–25 are comparable to those observed in 2019–20.
- **Retention patterns differ by organizational level.** High schools demonstrate the most consistent school-level retention, while middle schools show the greatest variability. Elementary schools, though relatively stable, have recovered more slowly from post-pandemic declines.
- **School context remains closely associated with retention.** Title I schools consistently experience lower retention than non-Title I schools, and charter schools continue to show lower retention than traditional public schools, though the charter/traditional gap narrowed in 2024–25.
- **Teacher retention varies substantially by certification level and pathway.** Educators holding professional certificates exhibit the highest and most stable retention, while those entering on temporary, initial, or CTE induction/pre-professional certificates show lower and more variable retention.
- **Novice teachers experience lower retention and greater mobility at the state, district, and school levels.** State-level retention rates for novice teachers are typically 2–4 percentage points lower than those of the overall workforce, and novice teachers exhibit higher rates of interdistrict movement.

+ INTRODUCTION

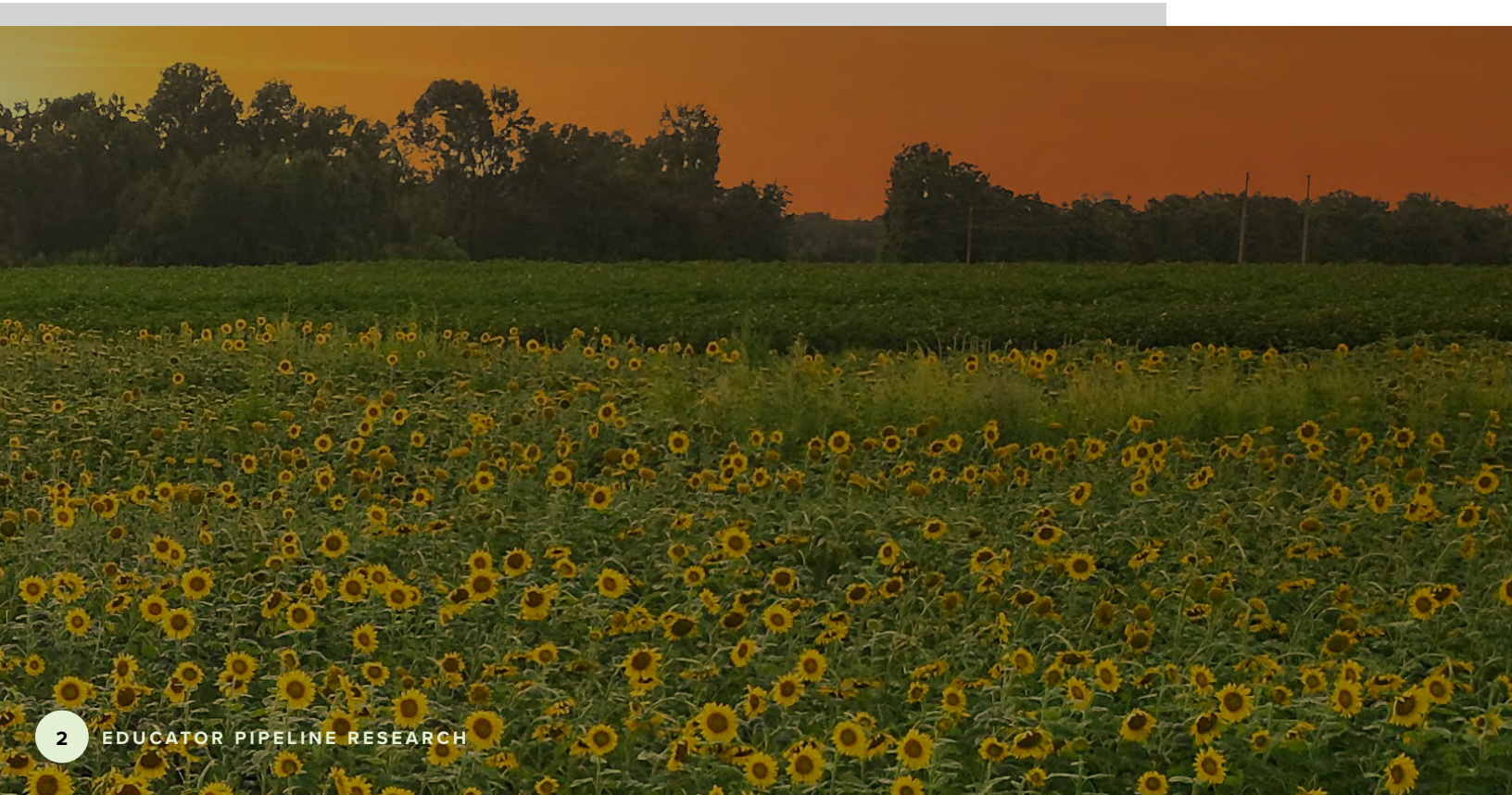
Teacher retention is a critical issue for public education, influencing student learning, school stability, and the efficient use of public resources. Although recent evidence suggests that retention rates are returning to pre-pandemic levels (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2025), ongoing concerns about teacher shortages underscore the need to examine the factors that influence retention.

Distinguishing between attrition and mobility is essential because each reflects a different pressure point in the educator workforce. *Attrition* refers to teachers exiting South Carolina public school teaching positions, including those who retire, move out of state, shift to private or home schools, transition to nonteaching roles, or leave the profession entirely. *Mobility* refers to movement within the state public school system, including interdistrict transfers and intradistrict transfers between schools within a district. Attrition and mobility combine to constitute *turnover*, defined as the rate at which teachers leave their positions.

STATE, DISTRICT, AND SCHOOL PIPELINES

Teacher retention can be assessed at the state, district, and school levels, with each providing distinct insights that can inform education policy and practice.

State-level retention reflects whether teachers remain employed in a teaching role in any South Carolina public school from one year to the next. Because teachers are counted as retained even if they change districts or schools, state-level retention is influenced only by attrition. These rates can help policymakers evaluate statewide initiatives, such as compensation and certification policies, and guide recruitment and retention strategies for Educator Preparation Providers (EPPs), school districts, and other agencies and organizations.



District-level retention measures whether teachers return to the same district in a teaching role the following year. This metric is shaped by both attrition and interdistrict mobility and has important implications for hiring practices, leadership, incentives, and the financial costs associated with turnover. However, district-level data can mask substantial movement among schools within the same district.

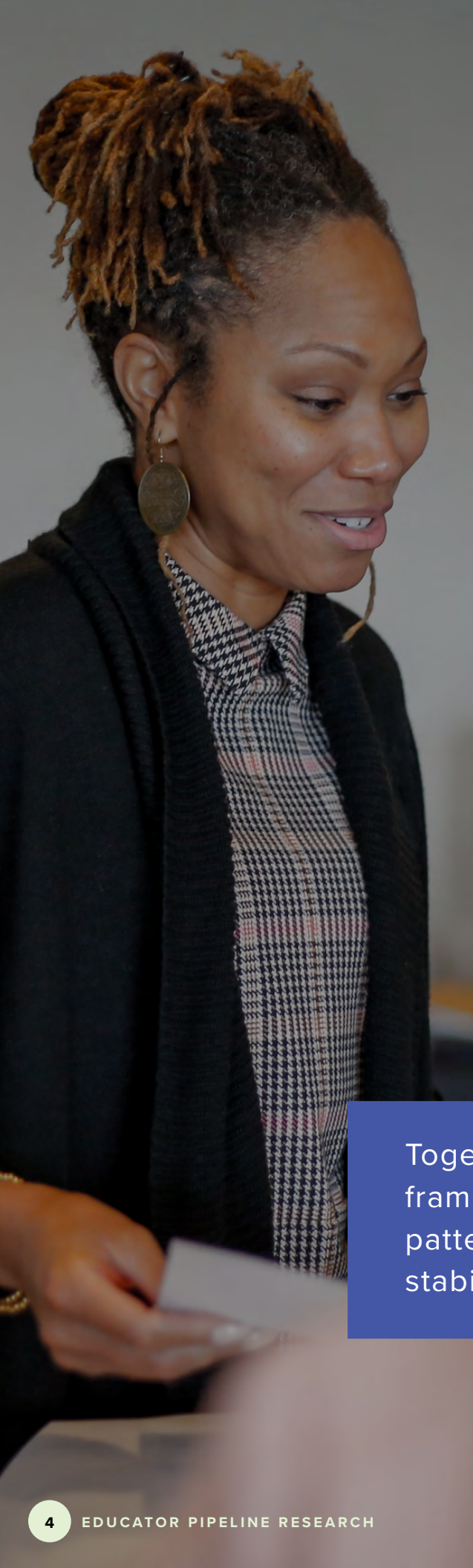
School-level retention captures whether teachers remain in the same school, making it sensitive to attrition as well as both interdistrict and intradistrict mobility. Because it reflects the cumulative effects of staffing stability within a specific organizational context, school-level retention often has the most immediate and locally visible effects on students, families, and communities. Over time, teachers who remain in the same school build institutional knowledge, including an understanding of school policies, community expectations, and local challenges. This continuity supports the development of professional relationships, shared instructional practices, and coordinated school improvement efforts—conditions that research has consistently linked to improved student outcomes.

FACTORS THAT CAN INFLUENCE RETENTION

To promote teacher retention across all three levels, it is essential to identify and study factors that can influence teachers' decisions to move to another school or district, pursue a nonteaching role within education, or leave the state workforce or profession entirely. In addition to the individual teacher characteristics (e.g., gender, race, experience, certification areas) and their perceptions of working conditions that we have reported on elsewhere (e.g., Cartiff et al., 2025; Gao et al., 2025), school contexts and features may also influence teacher retention and mobility.

Research has shown that retention is largely an organizational issue, and school structures can differ systematically across levels (Ingersoll, 2001). High schools are typically larger and organized into subject-specific departments where students rotate, while elementary schools generally use self-contained classrooms where one teacher provides instruction across most subjects. Middle schools often employ interdisciplinary team structures. These organizational models, along with developmental differences among students, contribute to variation in teacher retention across school levels. For example, Kraft et al. (2016) found higher turnover in middle schools than in elementary or high schools, and Nguyen et al. (2019) reported similar patterns in a broader national context. These findings highlight the importance of analyzing organizational levels separately, as earlier studies commonly grouped middle and high schools together (Borman & Dowling, 2008).





Organizational differences between traditional public and charter schools may also influence teacher retention. Charter schools operate with greater autonomy from district oversight and utilize performance contracts that outline specific expectations. While these differences are intentional, they may also lead to unintentional differences in working conditions (Ni, 2012). Several studies have reported lower retention in charter schools than in traditional public schools in states such as Arizona (Pivovarova & Powers, 2022), Connecticut (Miron & Applegate, 2007), and Florida (Harris, 2007). However, much of this research is more than a decade old, and some national explanations may not apply in South Carolina.

Higher school-level poverty is also associated with increased teacher turnover, and many teachers who leave high-poverty schools transition to schools with lower poverty levels (ERS, 2025). Although working conditions moderate this relationship (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Simon & Johnson, 2015), examining poverty-related patterns remains important. While much previous research has used the pupil in poverty metric, this report compares Title I and non-Title I schools. Under Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act), funds are allocated to districts with high concentrations of low-income students (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2026). Because local education agencies determine allocation rules, not all eligible schools receive Title I funds. In this report, schools receiving Title I allocations are designated as Title I schools, and all others are designated as non-Title I schools.

Together, these factors provide the framework for examining how retention patterns are shifting as the workforce stabilizes post-pandemic.



THE ROLE OF NOVICE TEACHERS IN THE TEACHER PIPELINE

Novice teachers represent a critical entry point into South Carolina’s public school workforce and are central to the long-term stability of the state’s teacher pipeline. Decisions made during the *early-career stage* of teaching (i.e., whether to remain in the classroom, move to another school or district, or exit the profession) shape both local staffing conditions and statewide supply. Because early-career teachers historically experience higher turnover rates, examining their retention and mobility patterns offers insight into how well current recruitment, induction, and support structures are functioning (Ingersoll, 2001). Understanding these patterns is essential for identifying opportunities to strengthen early-career supports and reduce avoidable attrition.

In this report, *novice teachers* are defined as educators in the early-career stage of their professional practice who hold an entry-level teaching certificate appropriate to their preparation pathway. This designation typically applies to teachers in their first three years of teaching and includes alternative route enrollees holding alternative certificates, traditionally prepared teachers holding initial certificates, and other combinations of certification pathways and levels prior to attainment of professional certification.

KEY QUESTIONS

In this report, we examine the following key questions:

1. What are the trends in teacher retention rates across South Carolina?
2. How do trends in South Carolina teacher retention rates differ by school organizational level?
3. What are the retention and mobility patterns of novice teachers within the South Carolina teacher pipeline?

In addressing these questions, it is important to recognize that teacher movement reflects a range of circumstances, not all of which are voluntary or discretionary. Contract nonrenewals, district-initiated reassignments, time-limited employment arrangements (such as international teaching visas), and transitions into nonteaching roles all shape observed retention and mobility patterns. Although educators who move into nonteaching roles are not included in teacher retention calculations, their transitions remain an important component of workforce dynamics and district staffing capacity.



DATA, VARIABLES, AND ANALYSES

The analyses in this report draw on educator-level data provided by the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) spanning seven consecutive academic years (2018–19 through 2024–25). For each year, the primary variables included district, school, and educator position codes. Teachers were defined as those with position codes 3–9, which include PK–12 classroom teachers (i.e., prekindergarten, kindergarten, classroom), special education teachers (i.e., self-contained, resource, itinerant), and retired teachers returning to teach. All other positions were classified as nonteaching.

Using unique educator identifiers, we linked records across adjacent years to determine whether educators returned to teach in South Carolina public schools and, if so, whether they remained in the same school, district, or position. These longitudinal links allowed us to construct individual-level indicators of retention, mobility, and attrition. In addition, teachers were classified as novice based on their certification level and pathway, consistent with the definition outlined earlier in this report. Retention outcomes are reported for the beginning of each school year. For example, linking the 2018–19 and 2019–20 records generated retention indicators for the start of 2019–20. Because retention is measured year to year, the seven years of educator data yielded six years of retention indicators.

After creating these indicators, we aggregated results at the school, district, and state levels. Retention and mobility rates were calculated using the total number of educators in each respective category. At the school level, each teacher/school combination was treated as a distinct case, meaning educators working in multiple schools contributed multiple observations. For district-level analyses, each teacher/district pairing was counted separately to account for educators serving in more than one district. At the state level, each teacher was counted once, regardless of the number of schools in which they worked.

All longitudinal and cross-sectional comparisons presented in this report are descriptive, as the dataset reflects the full population of South Carolina public school teachers rather than a sample. To examine how retention varies across school contexts, we incorporated data from the South Carolina School Report Cards and Title I Reports, categorizing schools by Title I status rather than by continuous poverty indices. This approach aligns with the policy-relevant distinctions discussed earlier in the report.



A woman with short, dark hair, wearing glasses, a black blazer, a black top, a chunky gold chain necklace, and large hoop earrings. She is looking down at a stack of papers and a notebook on a table. Her right hand is holding a pen over the notebook. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a meeting or conference setting with other people and tables.

Our Key Questions

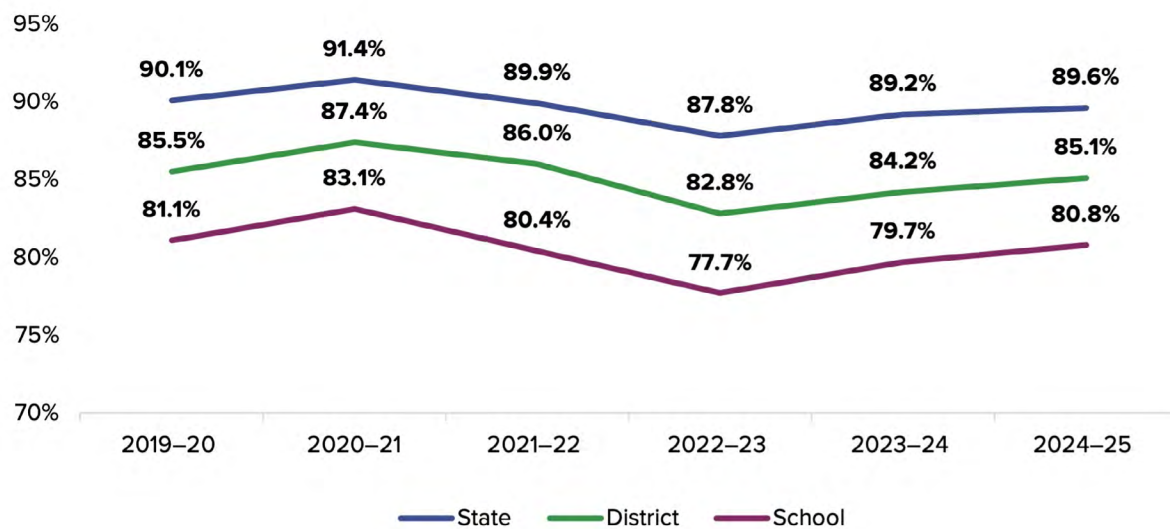


+ KEY QUESTION 1:

What are the trends in teacher retention rates across South Carolina?

To examine retention trends in public PK–12 schools in South Carolina, we calculated 1-year retention rates over the last six years (i.e., from 2019–20 to 2024–25). These rates are presented at three levels—state, district, and school—to capture important nuances in teacher mobility that otherwise would be obscured. These rates are shown in Figure 1. Across all three levels, retention declined following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and has steadily increased over the past two school years, returning to levels comparable to those observed prior to 2020.

Figure 1. *Teacher Retention Rates Across South Carolina*



State-Level Retention

State-level retention represents the proportion of classroom teachers who remain employed in any South Carolina public PK–12 school from one year to the next. Teachers who change districts or schools within the state are still considered retained if they continue in teaching roles. To calculate the 2024–25 rate, we identified all teachers who taught in 2023–24 and remained in a South Carolina public school in 2024–25, then divided that number by the total teacher workforce in 2023–24. Retention was approximately 90% in 2019–20, followed by a temporary increase during the first full year of the COVID-19 pandemic and a subsequent decline. In recent years, rates have rebounded, and the 2024–25 level is comparable to 2019–20. This pattern implies that even under relatively stable conditions, the state must recruit and onboard approximately one-tenth of its teaching workforce each year to maintain staffing levels.

District-Level Retention

District-level retention reflects the proportion of classroom teachers who return to teach in the same district the following year. Teachers who remain in their school or move to another school within the district are counted as retained if they continue in teaching roles. To calculate the 2024–25 district-level rate, we identified teachers employed in 2023–24 who continued teaching in the same district in 2024–25. Over the past six years, district-level retention has ranged from roughly 83% to 87%. The difference between state- and district-level rates primarily reflects interdistrict mobility, with approximately 5% of teachers transferring to a different district in a typical year.

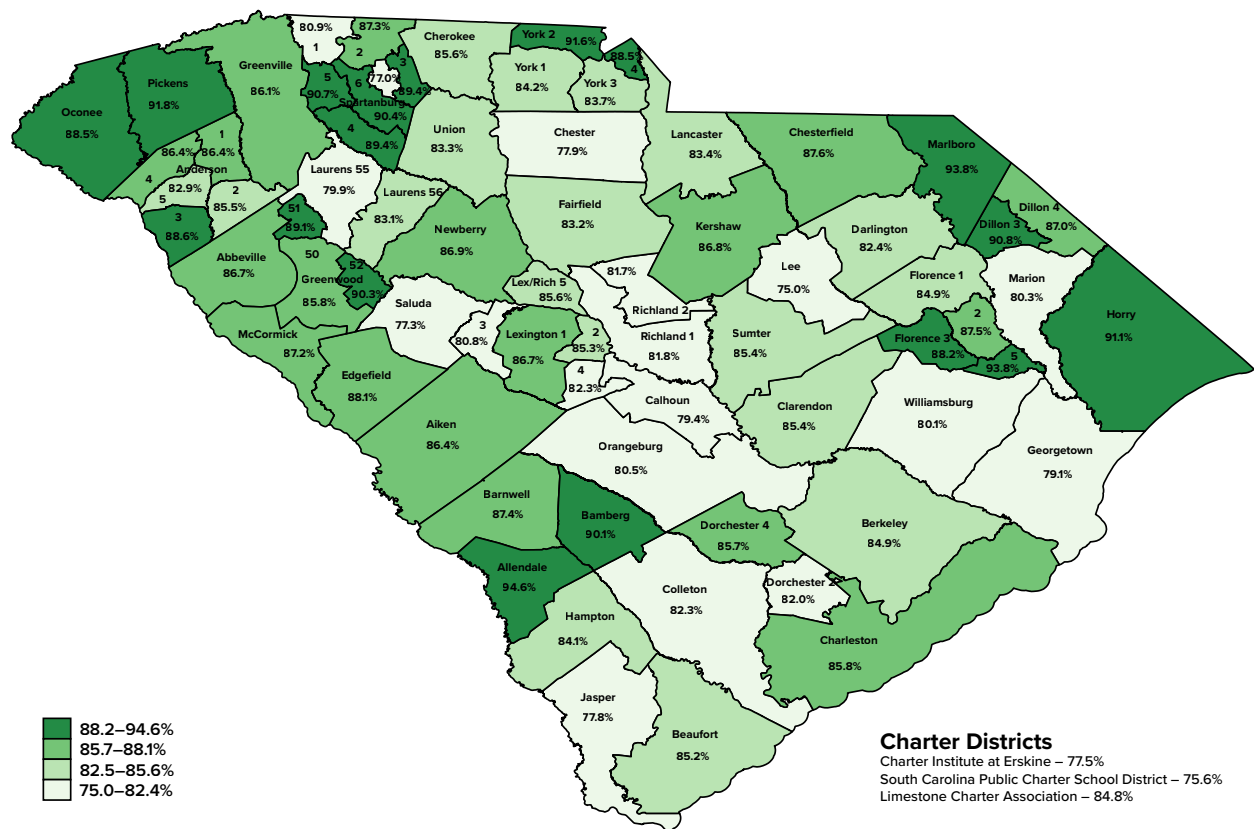
School-Level Retention

School-level retention provides the most detailed perspective on workforce stability, capturing only those teachers who remain in the same school from one year to the next (or who are reassigned to a designated successor school in cases of closures or mergers). Because school-level retention captures both voluntary and involuntary movement within districts, it reflects staffing stability at the level most directly experienced by students and school leaders. Teachers who transfer to another school—whether within the same district or elsewhere—or who exit the profession are not counted as retained. To calculate the 2024–25 school-level rate, we identified teachers who taught in 2023–24 and continued teaching in the same school in 2024–25. Over the past six years, school-level retention has ranged from approximately 78% to 83%. These lower rates, compared with district-level retention, indicate that approximately 5% of teachers typically move among schools within their district each year.

Individual District Retention Rates Throughout the State

The district-level retention rates shown in Figure 1 represent statewide figures, indicating, for example, that 85% of South Carolina teachers remained in the same district from 2023–24 to 2024–25. Because districts vary in context and hiring conditions, it is also important to examine retention at the individual district level. To calculate each district’s 1-year retention rate, we identified all teachers who taught in that district in 2023–24 and continued teaching there in 2024–25. These district-specific percentages are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Individual District Retention Rates for 2024–25

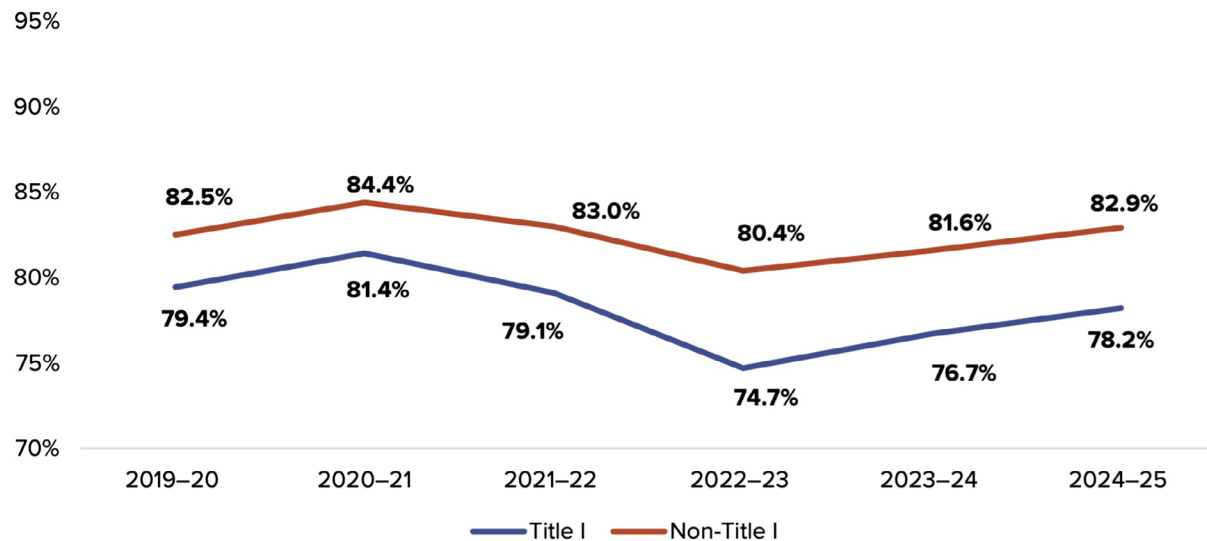


District-level retention rates in 2024–25 were more tightly clustered than in prior years, reflecting reduced variation across districts and greater overall consistency statewide, while still underscoring the importance of interpreting district trends within their local context. For smaller districts, it is important to note that even a single teacher’s movement can produce noticeable year-to-year shifts in retention percentages.

Title I and Non-Title I School Retention

School context also plays a role in teacher retention. Prior analyses have examined the relationship between retention and school poverty levels using the Pupils-in-Poverty percentage from the South Carolina School Report Cards (Dmitrieva et al., 2025). National research similarly shows that Title I schools tend to have lower retention rates than non-Title I schools (Bryant et al., 2023; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). School-level 1-year retention rates for South Carolina are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. School-Level Retention Rates for Title I and Non-Title I Schools

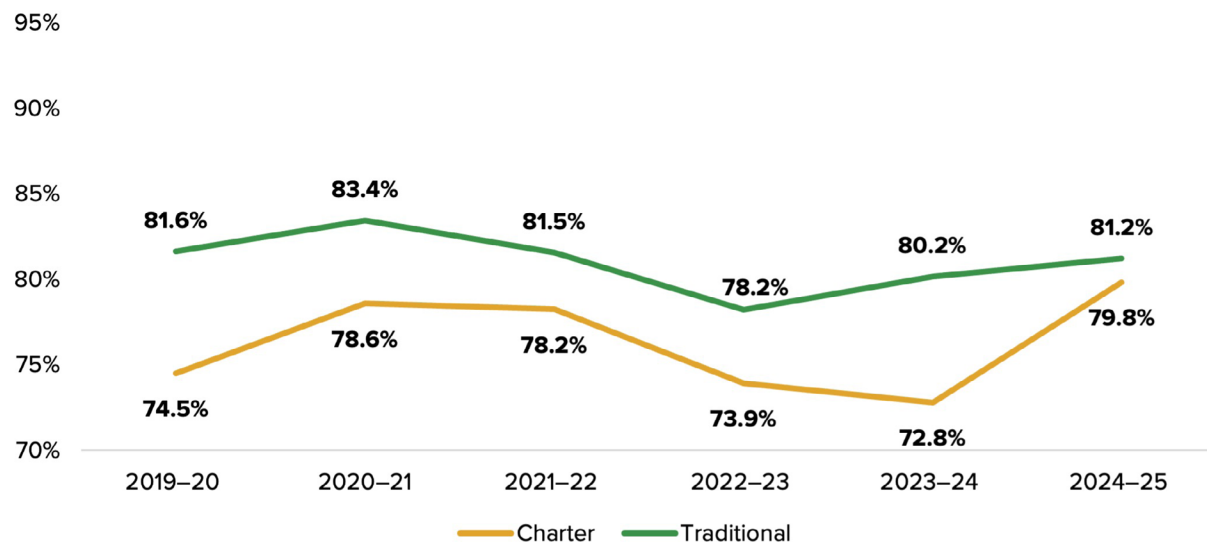


These findings indicate that Title I schools consistently face greater challenges in retaining teachers. Retention rates in non-Title I schools are typically 3–6 percentage points higher. The persistence of these gaps highlights the importance of examining school-level supports and working conditions alongside staffing outcomes.

Traditional and Charter School Retention

As the number of charter schools in the state continues to grow, understanding retention patterns within these schools becomes increasingly important. Figure 4 presents school-level retention rates for traditional public and charter schools in South Carolina. Historically, traditional public schools have had 1-year retention rates 3–8 percentage points higher than charter schools, although the gap narrowed to less than 2 percentage points in 2024–25. Charter schools appear to have experienced a slower recovery from the post-COVID decline in retention, but the most recent data suggest improvement.

Figure 4. School-Level Retention Rates for Traditional and Charter Schools



Several factors contribute to greater workforce instability in South Carolina's charter schools. These schools employ higher proportions of inexperienced and uncertified teachers, groups that consistently exhibit higher turnover than their more experienced and certified peers. School-level differences, including differing perceptions of working conditions, may also explain retention gaps between traditional public and charter schools (Wei et al., 2014). In addition, higher turnover in charter schools partly reflects the instability of the schools themselves. Traditional public schools rarely close and typically do so only through lengthy district and community approval processes, whereas charter schools operate under performance contracts that allow for more streamlined nonrenewal or revocation. Consistent with this, Harris and Martinez-Pabon (2022) found that annual charter school closure rates were more than five times as high as those of traditional public schools, contributing to lower observed retention.

+ KEY QUESTION 2:

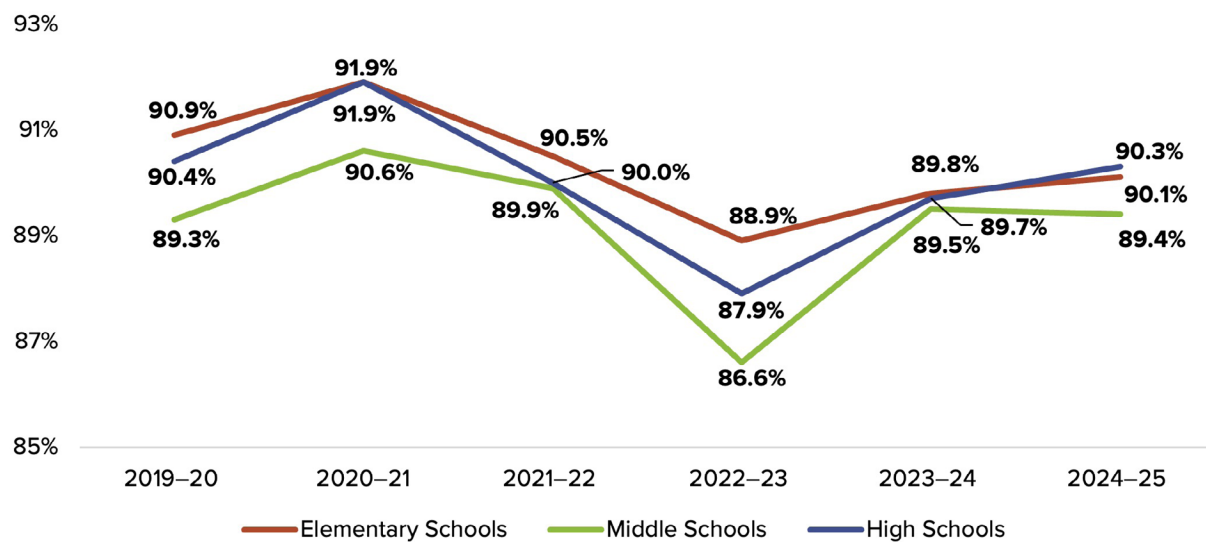
How do trends in South Carolina teacher retention rates differ by school organizational level?

This section examines how teacher retention varies across organizational levels in South Carolina. Understanding these patterns—and how organizational level interacts with other school characteristics—can help inform policies and practices aimed at improving retention. We calculated 1-year retention rates for elementary, middle, and high schools at both the state and school levels from 2019–20 through 2024–25. Standalone early childhood centers and combined grade schools were excluded due to small sample sizes. We further examined how these patterns differ between Title I and non-Title I schools within each organizational level.

State-Level and School-Level Retention Rates by Organizational Level

To calculate state-level retention rates, we identified teachers at each organizational level who continued teaching in any South Carolina public school the following year and divided that number by the total teachers in that level during the initial year. Although some educators may shift between organizational levels (e.g., from middle to high school), such movements are relatively uncommon due to certification requirements. One-year state-level retention rates for elementary, middle, and high schools are presented in Figure 5.

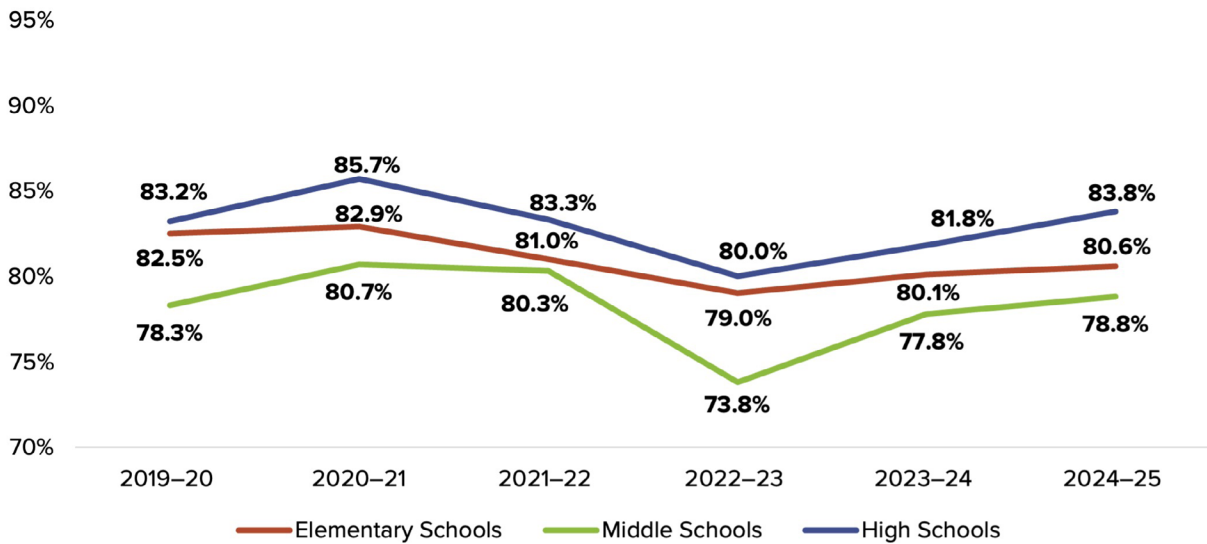
Figure 5. State-Level Retention Rates Across Organizational Levels



State-level retention rates across all three organizational levels followed similar trends: a two-year post-COVID decline, followed by a recent recovery. Although middle schools have historically exhibited lower state-level retention than elementary and high schools, the 1-year rates converged around 90% across elementary, middle, and high schools in 2023–24 and remained at that level in 2024–25.

To calculate school-level retention, we identified teachers within each organizational level who remained in the same school from one academic year to the next and divided that number by the total teachers in that level statewide during the initial year. For example, the 2024–25 high school retention rate reflects the proportion of high school teachers in 2023–24 who continued teaching in the same high school in 2024–25. These school-level retention rates are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. School-Level Retention Rates Across Organizational Levels



High schools have demonstrated the greatest stability in school-level retention over the period examined, while middle schools have shown the most variability. By 2024–25, both middle and high schools had returned to pre-COVID school-level retention rates, whereas elementary schools remained lower than pre-pandemic levels.

The differences between school- and state-level retention rates in Figure 5 reflect mobility among schools. This mobility is partly influenced by the number of schools operating at each organizational level. For instance, the state has fewer high schools than elementary or middle schools, which may limit opportunities for high school teachers to transfer. However, because elementary schools outnumber middle schools, school availability alone does not fully explain observed patterns of school mobility.

Retention of Title I and Non-Title I Schools Across Organizational Levels

We also examined school-level retention in Title I and non-Title I schools across elementary, middle, and high schools in South Carolina. Figure 7 presents school-level retention patterns for elementary schools by Title I status. Elementary schools serving Title I and non-Title I populations followed distinct post-pandemic trajectories: retention in non-Title I schools remained relatively stable over time (approximately 82–85%), while Title I schools experienced a sharper decline and a more gradual recovery.

Figure 7. School-Level Retention Rates of Title I and Non-Title I Elementary Schools

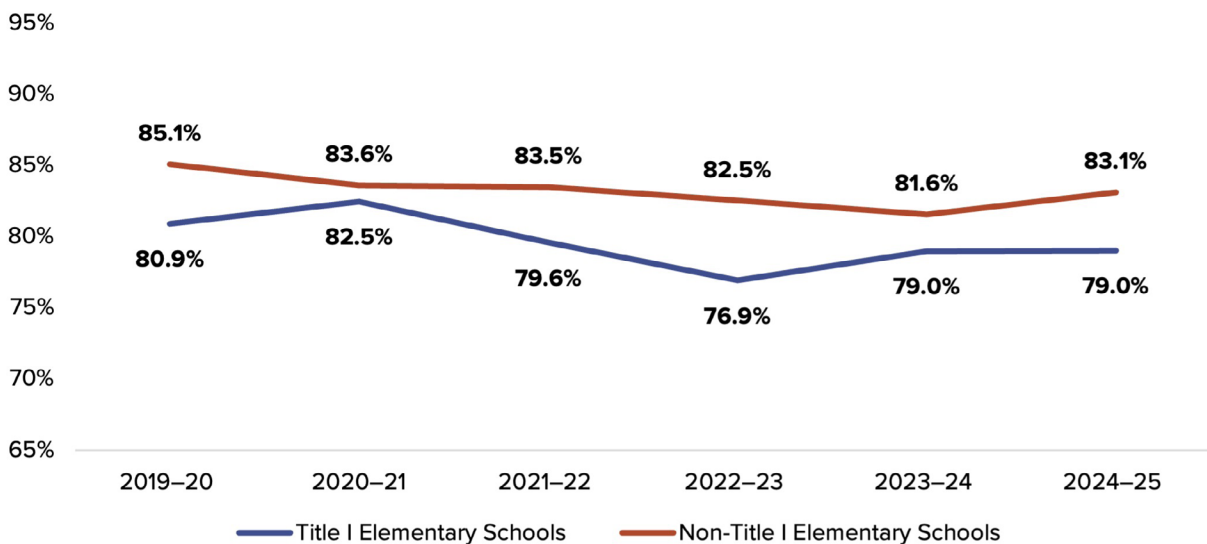


Figure 8 displays retention rates for Title I and non-Title I middle schools. As with elementary schools, non-Title I middle schools have consistently recorded higher retention rates than their Title I counterparts. The gap widened substantially during the post-COVID decline, reaching nearly 10 percentage points in 2022–23. Both groups have since returned to pre-pandemic levels, though a difference of approximately 7 percentage points remained between Title I and non-Title I schools in 2024–25.

Figure 8. School-Level Retention Rates of Title I and Non-Title I Middle Schools

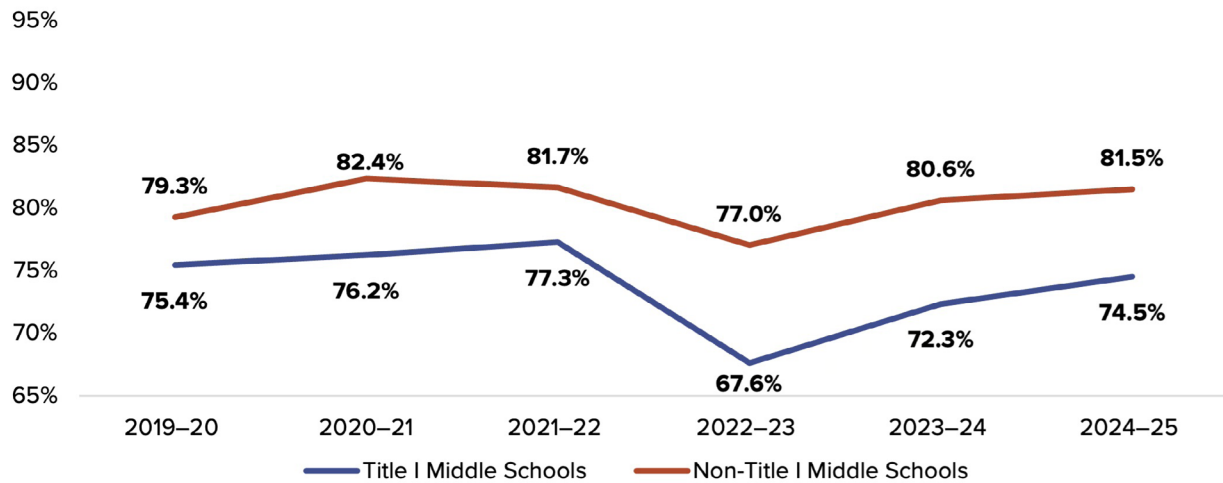
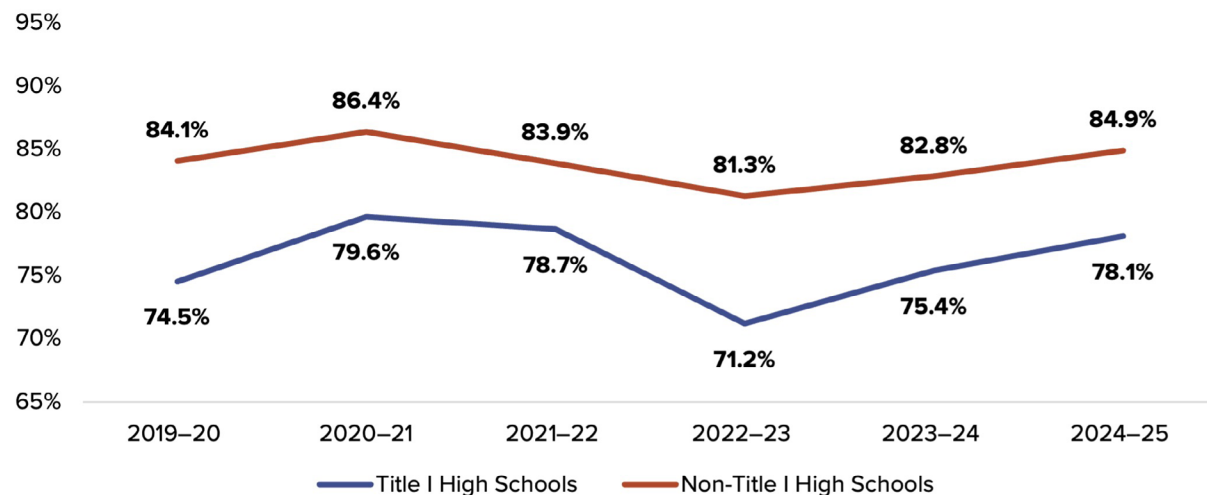


Figure 9 shows retention rates for Title I and non-Title I high schools. As with other organizational levels, non-Title I high schools have consistently demonstrated higher retention rates than their Title I counterparts. High schools exhibited the largest and most persistent disparities between Title I and non-Title I schools; in 2024–25, the gap was approximately 7 percentage points, similar to that observed among middle schools.

Figure 9. School-Level Retention Rates of Title I and Non-Title I High Schools



Across organizational levels, teacher retention patterns reveal both common trends and notable distinctions. Elementary, middle, and high schools all experienced a post-COVID decline followed by a recent recovery, with state-level retention rates converging around 90% in 2023–24 and 2024–25. However, differences emerge when examining stability at the school level. High schools consistently demonstrate the strongest school-level retention, while middle schools show the greatest variability. Elementary schools exhibit comparatively stable patterns but have not fully returned to pre-pandemic school-level retention rates. These differences highlight how organizational structures and contexts may shape teachers’ decisions to remain in their schools.

+ KEY QUESTION 3:

What are the retention and mobility patterns of novice teachers within the South Carolina teacher pipeline?

This section examines how teacher retention varied by experience, certification level, and certification pathway—factors that research has consistently linked to retention outcomes (e.g., Nguyen et al., 2019; Farahmandpour & Voelkel, 2025). Novice teachers, in particular, tend to have lower retention rates than their more experienced peers, making this group a central focus of the analysis.

Retention Rates Across Certification Pathway and Level

There were six distinct teacher groups that had populations large enough for separate analysis. The first group included alternative-route teachers on temporary certificates, who are generally in their first three years of teaching. The second group consisted of alternative-route teachers who had completed their programs and earned a professional certificate. A third group comprised novice teachers entering the workforce on an initial certificate after completing an approved undergraduate or graduate educator preparation program either in South Carolina or through reciprocity.

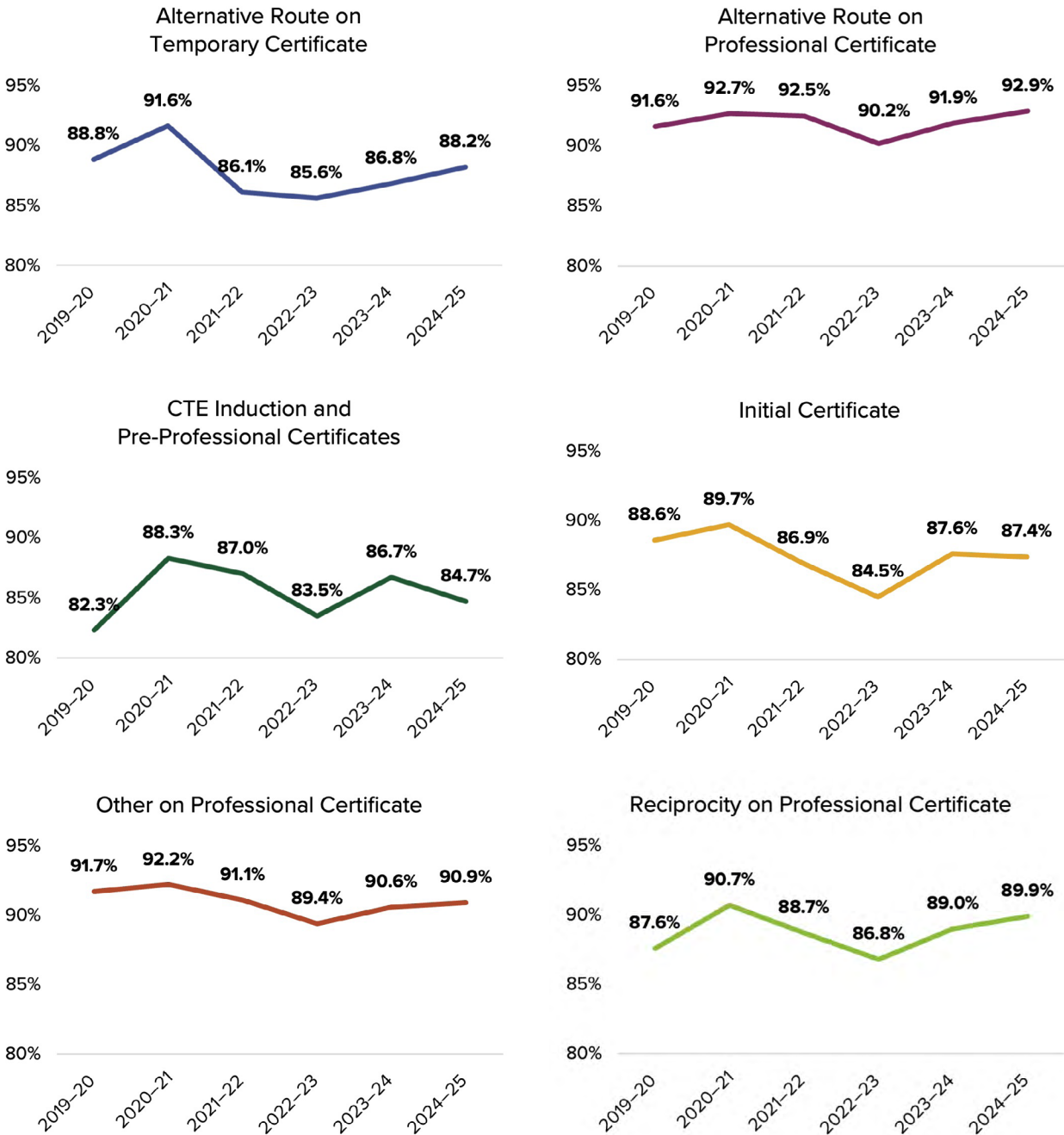
Career and Technical Education (CTE) teachers were grouped together during the induction and pre-professional stages of certification. This group included individuals holding a CTE induction certificate, issued to industry professionals beginning a two-year certification process, or a CTE pre-professional certificate, typically held during years three through five as they progress toward professional certification.

The fifth distinct group consisted of teachers who entered the South Carolina workforce with prior teaching experience and were issued a professional certificate through reciprocity.

The final group included all other teachers holding professional certificates, including those who advanced from an initial certificate after completing an approved undergraduate or graduate educator preparation program in South Carolina, as well as CTE teachers who attained professional certification.

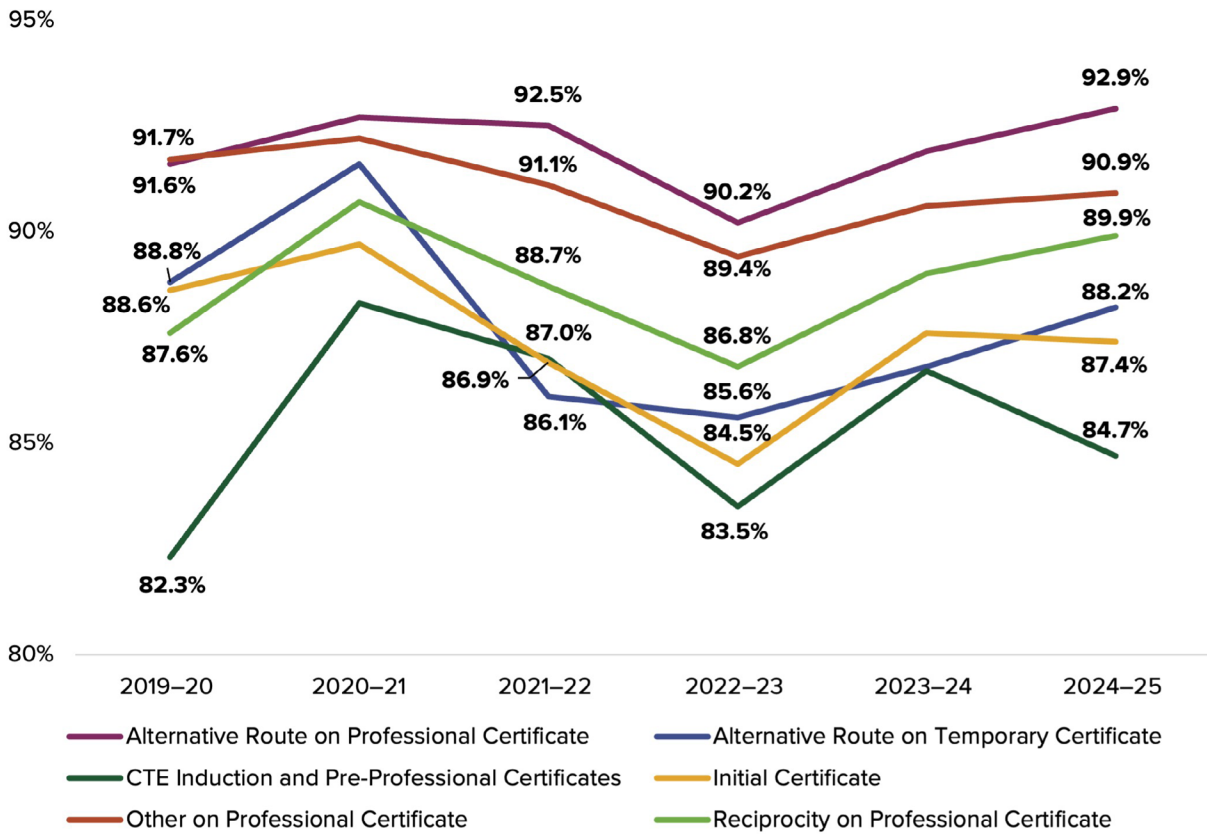
For each of these groups, we calculated 1-year state-level retention rates for South Carolina teachers across certification levels and pathways from 2019–20 through 2024–25. Teachers were counted as retained if they remained in a teaching position in the state the following year, regardless of whether their certification level changed. For example, a teacher in an alternative route program on a temporary certificate who continued teaching from 2019–20 to 2020–21 was classified as retained, even if they advanced to a professional certificate in 2020–21. In subsequent years, that teacher was included in the population of alternative route teachers holding a professional certificate. The 1-year retention rates for all six groups are shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10. State-Level Retention Rates by Certification Pathway and Level



All six groups exhibited similar overall patterns across the period examined: a peak in retention during 2020–21, followed by a two-year decline and a subsequent rebound. Despite these shared trends, baseline retention levels differed across groups. A comparison across all certification levels and pathways in a single representation, shown in Figure 11, highlights these differences.

Figure 11. State-Level Retention Rates Across All Certification Levels and Pathways

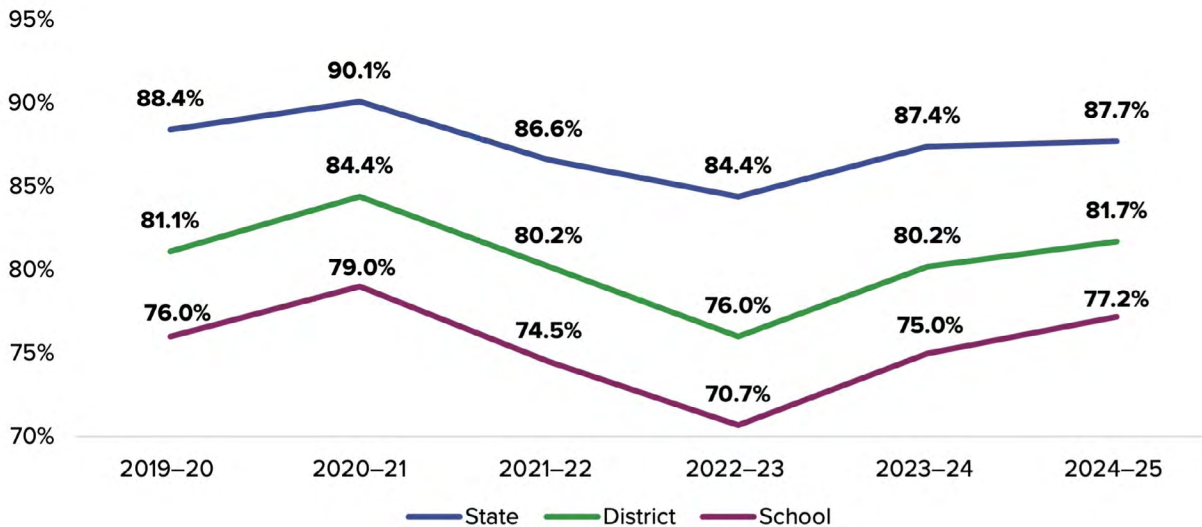


As shown in Figure 11, teachers holding professional certificates consistently demonstrated the highest retention rates and the greatest stability across years. In contrast, the three groups on temporary or entry-level certificates—typically novice teachers—exhibited lower retention throughout the period examined. These patterns align with prior research and underscore the importance of examining retention during the early stages of teachers’ careers.

Novice Teacher Retention

To examine novice teacher retention more closely, we identified novice teachers in each year of the analysis and calculated 1-year retention rates from 2019–20 through 2024–25. As in the broader analysis presented in Key Question 1, these rates are reported at the state, district, and school levels. Results are shown in Figure 12.

Figure 12. *Novice Teacher Retention Rates Across South Carolina*



The retention patterns for novice teachers closely mirrored those of the broader South Carolina teacher workforce. State-level retention rates for novice teachers have typically been 2–4 percentage points lower than those for all teachers. For example, in 2024–25, statewide retention was 90%, compared with 88% for novice teachers. This difference indicates a greater likelihood that novice teachers exit the South Carolina teaching workforce, whether by leaving the state, moving to another education sector (e.g., private schools), or leaving the profession altogether. These findings are consistent with research showing that early-career teachers are more vulnerable to factors influencing attrition (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; NCES, 2024).

There is also a larger gap between state and district retention levels for novice teachers than for the overall teacher workforce, indicating heightened interdistrict mobility among early-career educators. The difference between district-level and school-level retention—representing intradistrict mobility—is similar to that of the overall teacher population. Taken together, these patterns suggest that novice teachers experience greater movement within South Carolina’s public school system than their more experienced peers, consistent with national trends (NCES, 2024). Such movement may reflect efforts to find school environments that align with their professional needs and growth. Working conditions can be especially influential for early-career teachers, who are still adapting to both the profession and their specific school contexts (Simon & Johnson, 2015). In some cases, novice teachers may also be reassigned by district leadership, as these adjustments may be viewed as less disruptive to school operations than moving more established educators (Kraft, 2015; Redding & Henry, 2018).

+ CONCLUSION

South Carolina’s teacher workforce shows encouraging signs of stabilization after the pandemic disruptions that contributed to two consecutive years of declining retention. By 2024–25, state, district, and school retention rates had returned to levels comparable to 2019–20, signaling a broader recovery in workforce stability. At the same time, statewide improvement obscures important variation across school contexts, organizational levels, and educator characteristics that warrant continued attention in policy and practice.

Retention patterns differ meaningfully among elementary, middle, and high schools. Middle schools show the greatest instability, and elementary schools have not fully regained pre-pandemic school-level retention levels. Each year, a higher percentage of elementary and middle school teachers switch schools than do high school teachers. This mobility can disrupt instructional continuity and create localized staffing pressures, even when teachers continue to work in the same district.

Contextual factors continue to shape workforce stability. Title I schools face consistently lower retention rates—typically 3–6 percentage points below non-Title I schools—highlighting persistent inequities associated with concentrated poverty. Charter schools also exhibit lower retention than traditional public schools, though the gap narrowed in 2024–25. Together, these patterns highlight the importance of context-sensitive approaches to retention that consider school structure, resources, and student needs.

Teacher preparation pathways and certification levels also influence retention. Educators holding professional certificates experience the highest and most stable retention, while those entering on temporary, initial, or CTE induction/pre-professional certificates exhibit substantially lower and more variable retention. These groups largely represent novice teachers—educators who remain 2–4 percentage points below the state’s overall retention rates and who show higher levels of both interdistrict and intradistrict mobility. Early-career instability may be compounded in school contexts that already experience lower retention, such as Title I and charter schools, where novice teachers may be more likely to begin their careers.

A holistic perspective is essential for understanding why teachers leave their positions. Novice teachers, for example, are often assigned lower performing students or placed in schools with more challenging working conditions (Guarino et al., 2006), factors that can hinder their professional growth and contribute to decisions to exit the classroom.

Additionally, while research consistently demonstrates that working conditions strongly influence job satisfaction and retention (Gao et al., 2025; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Toropova et al., 2021), the specific conditions that matter most may vary by organizational level. Borman and Dowling (2008), for instance, found that elementary teacher retention was more sensitive to administrative support, whereas secondary teacher retention was more strongly related to workload and student behavior.

These nuances highlight the importance of using multiple data sources to diagnose retention challenges and develop effective, context-responsive strategies.

Administrative staffing data provide essential insight into patterns of movement and stability, but they are most informative when paired with teachers’ reported experiences. When combined with findings from SC TEACHER’s annual SC Teacher Exit Survey and biennial SC Teacher Working Conditions Survey, these data offer a more comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping retention and can support more targeted, evidence-based efforts to strengthen South Carolina’s educator workforce.

+ GLOSSARY

Alternative Route Enrollee

An individual hired on a conditional alternative route certificate based on their enrollment in one of South Carolina's approved alternative route certification programs. By definition, these teachers 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.

Attrition

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

Boomerang Teacher (Boomerang)

An individual who previously worked as a public school teacher in South Carolina, exited the state's public school teaching workforce for at least one full academic year, and later returned to a classroom teaching position. Boomerangs may include retirees who returned to teaching or educators who left the profession temporarily before reentering.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Certification

A 5-year certification process through which classroom teachers can be hired, designed for those with industry work experience in specific career and technical fields. During the first two years, the educator is issued a CTE induction certificate. During years 3 through 5, the educator holds a CTE pre-professional certificate. Upon successful completion of the CTE certification process, the educator is eligible to advance to a standard 5-year renewable certificate.

Career Stage

A phase in a teacher's professional journey reflecting patterns of experience, expertise, professional identity, engagement, and responsibility. Career stages describe common developmental tendencies rather than fixed timelines or uniform, linear progression. Teachers may move through stages in different ways depending on context, role, setting, and individual circumstances. Stages are often described as early-, mid-, and late-career.

Early-Career Stage

A phase in which a teacher is building professional experience and consolidating foundational knowledge, skills, and identity in practice. This stage often involves ongoing learning, adaptation to institutional contexts, and increasing confidence in instructional decision-making. Teachers in this stage may draw on formal or informal supports as they develop their professional approach.

Initial Certificate

An educator credential valid for 3 school years, issued to individuals who have completed an approved undergraduate or graduate educator preparation program. This certificate is primarily granted to beginning educators or those returning to teaching without recent experience. An out-of-state certified educator who meets all South Carolina certification requirements but has less than 27 months of qualifying teaching experience in the last 7 years in their previous state will also be issued this certificate type.

International Teacher

A teacher hired from outside the United States through specific visiting visa programs (i.e., J-1, J-2) and issued an international certificate. Such teachers typically fill positions on a temporary basis, bringing diversity and cultural exchange to classrooms but also contributing to attrition when visa terms expire.

Late-Career Stage

A phase marked by substantial professional experience and accumulated knowledge of practice and context. Teachers in this stage may demonstrate sustained effectiveness and a well-developed professional identity. Some may assume formal or informal leadership, mentoring, or advisory roles, while others continue to focus primarily on classroom practice. Contributions at this stage can take multiple forms depending on individual goals and institutional settings.

Lateral Mover

A public school teacher who moved from one South Carolina public school district and/or school to another.

- **Interdistrict Lateral Mover:** A public school teacher who moved from a school in one district to a school in a different South Carolina district.
- **Intradistrict Lateral Mover:** A public school teacher who moved between schools within the same South Carolina district. In cases where districts may reassign teachers without their choice, teachers are classified as *nonvoluntary intradistrict lateral movers*.

Leaver

A teacher who has left public school teaching in South Carolina. Such teachers may have retired, relocated to teach in another state or country, moved to a private or home school, or left the profession for other reasons.

Mid-Career Stage

A phase characterized by growing experience and a strengthening sense of professional judgment and autonomy. Teachers in this stage often deepen and refine their instructional practices and may expand their roles in varied ways, such as contributing to collaborative initiatives, supporting colleagues, exploring new areas of expertise, or taking on additional responsibilities. Professional trajectories during this stage are diverse and context-dependent.

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.

Nonrenewal

A district's decision not to renew a teacher's contract for various reasons (e.g., performance, budgetary constraints). Although leading to a form of attrition, the decision may be viewed as beneficial in cases where it aligns with performance improvement goals or decreased student enrollment.

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.

Novice Teacher

A teacher in the early-career stage of their professional practice, holding an entry-level certification appropriate to their preparation pathway. This designation, which typically applies to teachers in their first three years, can include alternative route enrollees who hold an alternative certificate, traditionally prepared teachers who hold an initial certification, and other combinations of pathways and levels prior to attainment of professional certification.

Other Educator Reentering

An educator who returned to South Carolina public schools after not being employed in any role in public education during the 2022–23 school year. This group includes individuals who worked in nonteaching positions or had undefined roles in South Carolina public schools between 2017–18 and 2021–22. Due to limited data from previous years, it is unclear whether these individuals had prior teaching experience in South Carolina or held other positions, distinguishing them from boomerang teachers.

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, teachers are those with position codes 3–9, which include PK–12 classroom teachers (i.e., prekindergarten, kindergarten, classroom), special education teachers (i.e., self-contained, resource, itinerant), and retired teachers returning to teach.

Pre-Initial Certificate

A category of teaching certificate that includes provisional initial certificates (given to individuals that have completed all requirements of an approved, traditional educator preparation program but have not earned a passing score on one or more required certification exams) and internship certificates (given to individuals that have completed all requirements of an educator preparation program with the exception of student teaching and have earned passing scores on all required certification exams).

Reciprocity

A process that streamlines hiring for districts and enables qualified teachers to move more seamlessly between systems across state lines. SCDE, through the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) Interstate Agreement, recognizes valid, standard teaching credentials from other states, provided they meet specific criteria. If the out-of-state credential reflects completion of an approved educator preparation program (traditional or alternative route) and is a standard (not temporary, emergency, or provisional) certificate, South Carolina will issue a comparable certificate, if one exists.

Reciprocity Professional

A teacher hired in a South Carolina public school having entered the state via reciprocity and received a professional teaching certificate. These individuals hold valid, standard educator credentials from other jurisdictions recognized through South Carolina's participation in the NASDTEC Interstate Agreement, provided the credentials meet specified requirements.

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 (e.g., classroom aide) into teaching.

SC Teacher Exit Survey

An annual survey administered by SC TEACHER to collect information from teachers who leave their current South Carolina public school teaching position. The survey aims to reveal reasons for attrition and inform potential policy or programmatic responses to reduce turnover.

SC Teacher Working Conditions Survey (SCTWCS)

A biennial survey administered by SC TEACHER to gather data on South Carolina public school teachers' perceptions of resources (e.g., administrative support), demands (e.g., student behavior), and other factors influencing teacher satisfaction and retention.

Teacher

Any public school educator in South Carolina assigned a position code of 3–9. This includes PK–12 classroom teachers (prekindergarten, kindergarten, classroom), special education teachers (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. It includes new teachers (e.g., recent graduates, out-of-state hires), returning educators (e.g., retirees, boomerangs), and those leaving or moving between schools and districts.

Teacher Turnover

The rate at which educators leave their current teaching positions within South Carolina public schools during a defined time period. Turnover includes transfers to another school or district (i.e., mobility), movement into nonteaching roles within the public school system, and exits from the South Carolina public school teaching workforce (i.e., attrition). Turnover can serve as a broad indicator of workforce stability.

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EDUCATOR PIPELINE RESEARCH

