



South Carolina Teacher Workforce Profile for 2023–24

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RESEARCH TEAM

Angela Starrett, PhD

Brian Cartiff, PhD

Svetlana Dmitrieva, PhD

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

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

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Teacher Workforce Profile

+ HIGHLIGHTS

This report details South Carolina’s public school teacher workforce for the 2023–24 academic year as part of SC TEACHER’s mission to publish annual educator workforce profiles. These reports, along with SC TEACHER’s full breadth of research, share information and insights with educators, policymakers, community members, and other stakeholders.

The analysis in this report uses statewide data from 2023–24 and the most recent publicly available data from other sources to compare the demographics of South Carolina’s teacher workforce to other southeastern states and the nation. Results from 2023–24 are based on the analysis of data from 54,923 South Carolina teachers with positions categorized as classroom teachers (PK–12 grades), special education teachers (self-contained, resource, or itinerant), and retired teachers returning to teach. This report also provides a longitudinal view of state trends by examining data over the last several academic years. Findings should help guide data-informed strategies to improve teacher retention, enhance recruitment efforts, and strengthen the overall teacher pipeline in South Carolina.

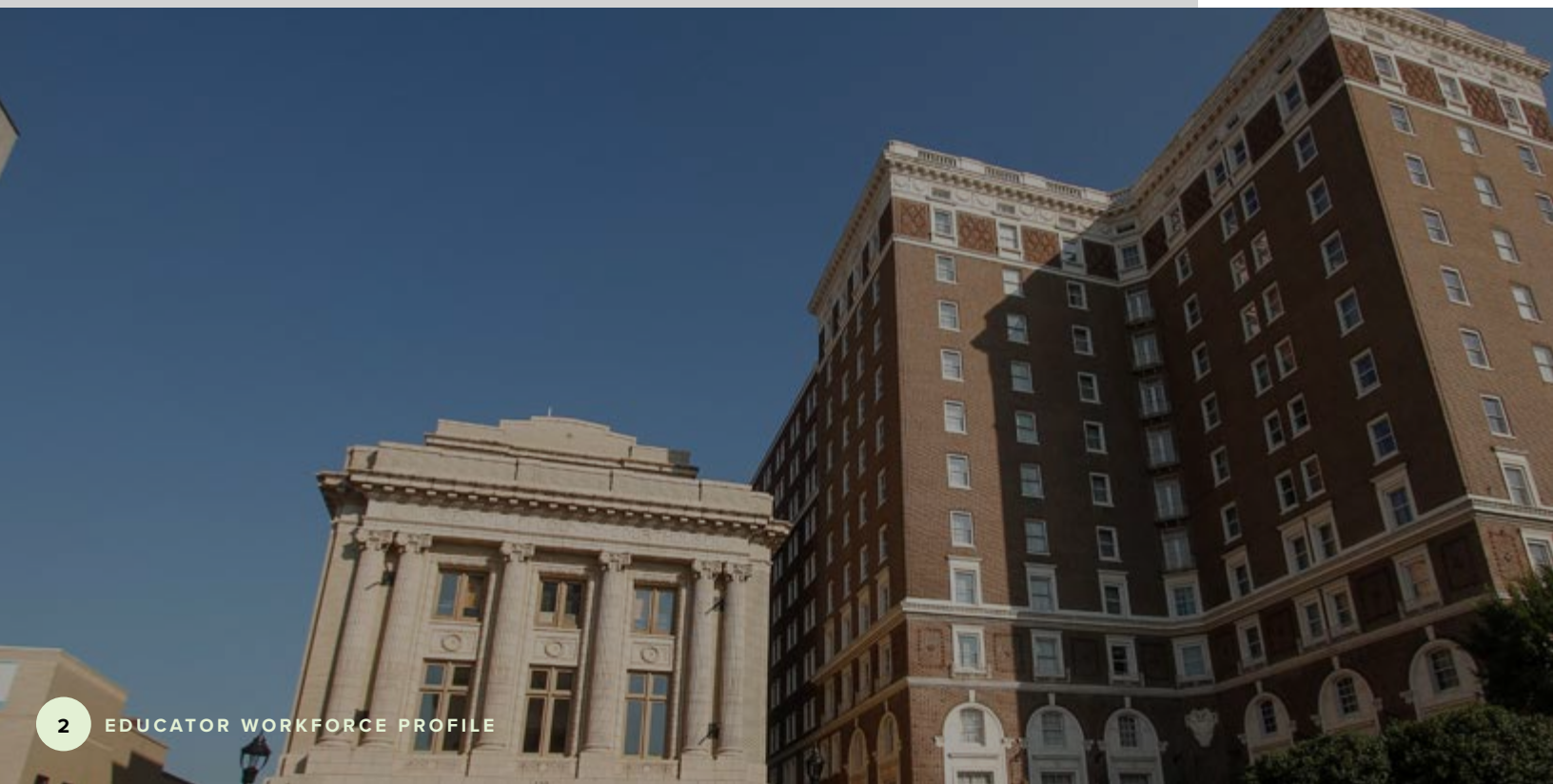
Main Findings From the 2023–24 South Carolina Teacher Workforce

- Regarding gender and race/ethnicity demographics, South Carolina’s teacher workforce closely mirrors national patterns. The state has a higher percentage of Black teachers and a lower percentage of Hispanic teachers compared to national averages.
- Elementary schools employ the highest percentage of female teachers. Middle schools employ the highest percentage of Black teachers.
- The percentage of South Carolina teachers working in charter schools has continued to increase, reflecting a broader national trend of expanding charter school enrollment.
- Middle and high schools employ higher percentages of alternatively and internationally certified teachers than elementary schools, suggesting these certification pathways may play a critical role in secondary staffing.
- The number of teachers hired with an initial certificate has varied over the past 5 years. Notable increases in 2020–21 and 2021–22 likely reflect pandemic-related attrition and increased hiring needs, followed by more recent stabilization.
- The percentage of teachers hired through reciprocity agreements has increased, particularly in districts bordering North Carolina. This growth coincides with South Carolina’s average teacher salary surpassing that of North Carolina.

+ INTRODUCTION

Public schools in South Carolina serve as key institutions within their communities, and teachers play a critical role in student learning outcomes. Research consistently demonstrates the significant impact educators have on students' academic performance and future opportunities, particularly as educational expectations evolve.

The teacher workforce itself is dynamic and continuously changing in response to multiple factors (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020). Understanding its composition and characteristics is essential for effective policymaking and practice. Accurate data regarding workforce demographics and distribution can help inform decisions related to professional development, mentorship programs, and other strategies to enhance teaching effectiveness and workforce stability. At a fundamental level, workforce demographic data provide insights into broader trends within the profession and highlight potential areas for targeted professional support and resource allocation.

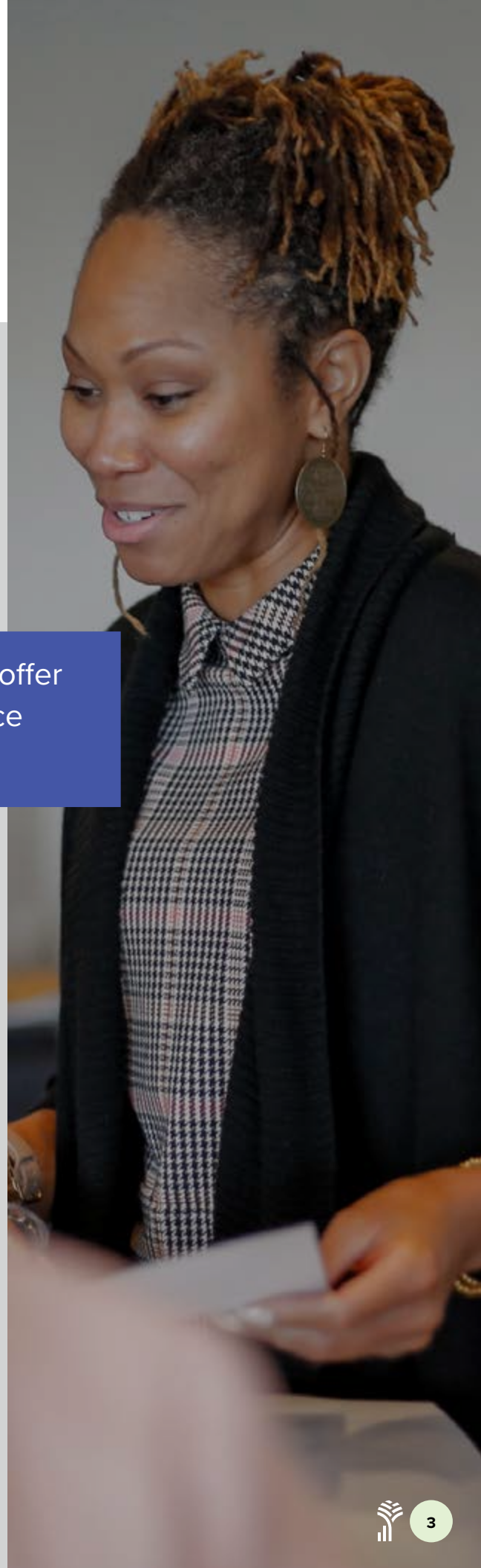


CONSIDERING TEACHER DEMOGRAPHICS

Historically, the national teacher workforce has been predominantly female and White (Ingersoll et al., 2021). Research suggests that having diverse teacher populations can positively impact all students, enhancing the educational environment and fostering inclusive practices (Nevarez et al., 2019; Rafa & Roberts, 2020). Examining demographic data provides insights into the composition of the teacher workforce, allowing for a deeper understanding of trends and patterns across districts.

Data on teacher experience levels also offer valuable information regarding workforce stability (Walker, 2016).

Districts with larger proportions of novice teachers might prioritize professional development focused on classroom management and instructional support (Sparks, 2025), while those with predominantly more experienced teachers might consider professional development in leadership skills or specialized training formats like micro-credentials (Will, 2017). Mentorship programs can also address specific professional development needs within districts (Pomerance & Walsh, 2020).





ANALYZING THE ROLE OF CERTIFICATION PATHWAYS

Educational attainment and certification pathways further shape teacher preparedness. Over time, an increasing number of teachers have earned bachelor's and master's degrees (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023a). Although the relationship between advanced degrees and teaching effectiveness is complex (Chang et al., 2020; Rivkin et al., 2005), teachers with advanced degrees in specific content areas typically require less support in content-specific professional development.

Alternative certification pathways have become increasingly prevalent in teacher preparation (García & Weiss, 2019; King & Yin, 2022). Although evidence regarding the instructional effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers compared to traditionally certified teachers is mixed (Castro & Edwards, 2021; Von Hippel et al., 2016), alternatively certified teachers often report feeling less prepared for classroom management and differentiated instruction (Bowen & Williams, 2020). Districts employing alternatively certified teachers might consider targeted professional development to address their identified needs, while also recognizing and utilizing their unique professional experiences (Tigchelaar et al., 2010).

International teachers and teachers certified through reciprocity similarly bring valuable experience and skills while also likely benefitting from distinct professional supports. International educators typically require assistance with cultural adaptation (Dunn, 2013), which districts can facilitate through structured support networks. Teachers from other states typically need professional development focused on South Carolina's specific educational standards and assessment requirements.

Understanding the pathways through which educators achieve certification and enter the teacher workforce can help districts better support new and novice teachers. Each certification pathway may highlight new hires' specific strengths or indicate particular needs for professional development. Information on these pathways can also assist districts in evaluating the effectiveness of their recruitment efforts and identifying areas where further outreach may be beneficial.



CONSIDERING LOCAL CONTEXTS

Teacher labor markets tend to vary by local community context. This report provides data on the state teacher workforce, as well as individual district workforces, which can help school leaders better understand retention and recruitment, supply and demand, educator preparation, and the impact of policies and practices. Policymakers and practitioners can utilize this information alongside knowledge of local contexts to guide informed decision-making and improve teacher workforce stability and effectiveness.

CLARIFYING WORKFORCE TERMINOLOGY

In examining the teacher workforce, it is important to clearly define terminology, as definitions may vary across different studies and reports. This research specifically focuses on public school teachers in South Carolina. Key terms used throughout the report are explicitly defined for clarity in use and in the glossary on p. 26.

KEY QUESTIONS

This report describes South Carolina’s public school teacher workforce for the 2023–24 school year. Specifically, it provides detailed information on the personal and professional demographics of the workforce and how these characteristics differ among organizational levels. The report also presents information about longitudinal trends in the certification pathways of new hires from 2019–20 to 2023–24. Finally, it discusses the distribution of all public school teachers by specific certification route across districts in 2023–24.

This information, used in conjunction with findings from other SC TEACHER reports, can inform localized and statewide strategies aimed at improving South Carolina’s educator workforce.

This report addresses the following key questions:

1. What are the characteristics of South Carolina’s teacher population relative to personal demographics, educational attainment and experience, certification pathway and level, and teacher evaluation results? How do these characteristics compare to national data and data from other southeastern states?
2. How do teacher characteristics differ among organizational levels (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school) in South Carolina?
3. A. What are the longitudinal trends of newly hired teachers in South Carolina from different certification pathways and levels?
B. What is the relative distribution of all teachers in South Carolina by certification level?



DATA, VARIABLES, AND ANALYSES

This study is primarily based on data from 54,923 teachers employed by South Carolina public school districts in the 2023–24 academic year. The term *teacher* here includes any educators employed as PK–12 classroom teachers, special education teachers (including resource, itinerant, or self-contained positions), and retired teachers returning to the classroom. Through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with SC TEACHER, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) provided 2023–24 teacher-level data. The SCDE also provided data for 4 previous academic years (2019–20 through 2022–23) to allow for longitudinal analysis.

Rather than making statistical predictions or generalizations, all comparisons presented in this report describe trends and patterns. This is because the data include every public school teacher in South Carolina, rather than a smaller sampled group. To explore differences in teacher characteristics across school levels (elementary, middle, and high schools), we used related school-level data from South Carolina School Report Cards.

Some of the data used in this report were incomplete or missing for certain teachers. When calculating percentages for these variables, we only included teachers with available data. For analyses involving teachers' positions, the total count may exceed the actual number of teachers as some individuals held more than one position.



A woman with short brown hair, wearing glasses, a black blazer, a black top, a chunky silver chain necklace, and large hoop earrings, is looking down at a stack of papers. She is holding a pen in her right hand. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a meeting or conference setting with other people and lights.

Our Key Questions



+ KEY QUESTION 1:

What are the characteristics of South Carolina’s teacher population relative to personal demographics, educational attainment and experience, certification pathway and level, and teacher evaluation results? How do these characteristics compare to national data and data from other southeastern states?

To address Key Question 1, the analysis included calculating percentages of South Carolina teachers by personal characteristics (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity) and professional characteristics (i.e., highest degree attained, certification credentials, years of teaching, and teacher evaluations). We also examined the distribution of teachers across traditional public schools and public charter schools. Where data were available, comparisons were made to the national teacher workforce and other southeastern states (i.e., Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee). However, some of the comparative data were from previous years and may not fully reflect current trends.

South Carolina Teacher Characteristics

In considering teacher positions, classroom teachers in grades 1–12 constituted the majority of public school teachers in the state in 2023–24 (80.8%). Special education teachers, who can have one of three positions (i.e., resource, self-contained, and itinerant), collectively made up the next largest group at 10.8%. Kindergarten and prekindergarten teachers made up 6.7% of teachers. The remainder of the teachers examined (1.7%) were retired teachers who had returned to the classroom.

Demographic analysis revealed that the personal and professional characteristics of South Carolina’s teacher workforce were largely similar to the national workforce and those of other southeastern states. These comparisons are shown in Table 1. The demographics for South Carolina have remained largely unchanged in recent years (see Cartiff et al., 2024).

Table 1. Percentages of South Carolina Teacher Characteristics Compared to Other Southeastern States and National Percentages

	South Carolina	North Carolina ^a	Georgia ^a	Tennessee ^a	US ^b
Female Teachers	79.8	70.1	79.4	78.4	76.8
White Teachers	77.4	75	66	75	79.9
Black Teachers	16.9	18	28	12	6.1
Hispanic Teachers	2.5	NA	2.7	1.7	9.4
Postbaccalaureate Degree	63.8	32.8	64.4	65.1	61.0
10 Years or More Teaching	56.8	59.8 ^c	57.0 ^d	61.4 ^c	63.6

^aPercentages for North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee reflect data from 2022–23 provided by the Southern Regional Education Board (n.d.) except where otherwise noted.

^bNational data from 2020–21 were provided by Taie & Lewis (2022).

^cThese data from 2020–21 were provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.).

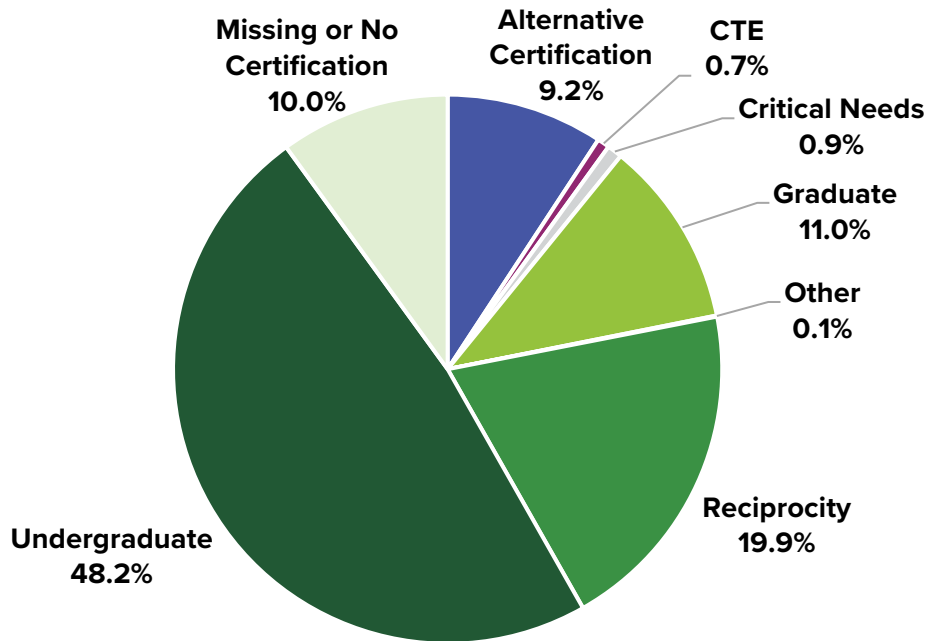
^dThese data from 2021–22 were provided by Flamini & Wang (2024).

In the 2023–24 school year, the majority of teachers in South Carolina were female (79.8%), similar to national trends (76.8%) and patterns in other southeastern states. South Carolina had the highest proportion of White teachers (77.4%) among the four southeastern states analyzed, though this percentage was slightly less than the national average (79.9%). Approximately 17% of South Carolina teachers identified as Black, similar to North Carolina (18%). This percentage is higher than the national average (6.1%) and that of Tennessee (12%) but lower than that of Georgia (28%). Percentages of Hispanic teachers in South Carolina (2.5%), Georgia (2.7%), and Tennessee (1.7%) were all significantly lower than the national average (9.4%). Comparable data for North Carolina were unavailable.

The educational background of teachers in South Carolina closely resembled that of teachers in Georgia and Tennessee, with approximately two-thirds having earned more than a bachelor's degree. This finding was consistent with the national average but notably higher than in North Carolina, where about one-third of teachers held postbaccalaureate degrees. Over half of South Carolina's public school teachers (56.8%) had 10 or more years of educational experience in 2023–24. This was marginally lower than the other three southeastern states and the national average. However, the national average is based on data from 2020–21, and studies have indicated notable shifts in the workforce since the country emerged from the pandemic (Southern Regional Education Board, 2023). Additionally, these South Carolina data should be viewed with some caution as the years of educational experience do not solely indicate years teaching (e.g., years as a teaching aide also count toward this figure).

Certain workforce characteristics are important for a complete understanding of South Carolina's teacher population but may not be directly comparable to other states. In South Carolina, a teaching certificate pathway refers to how a teacher enters the profession, while a certificate level indicates where they are in the certification process. Specifically, the pathway describes the route a teacher takes to become certified. Figure 1 provides the distribution of teachers across these certification pathways in 2023–24. The largest category of teachers followed the undergraduate pathway (48.2%), having completed a traditional teacher preparation program at a college or university. Others entered the profession through alternative certification programs, such as the Program of Alternative Certification for Educators (PACE) or Teach For America, which provide nontraditional routes into the classroom. In the 2023–24 school year, 9.2% of teachers in South Carolina were alternatively certified, reflecting a moderate increase over recent years (Cartiff et al., 2024b). A third category consists of teachers certified in another state who transferred their credentials to South Carolina through reciprocity (19.9%).

Figure 1. Percentages of South Carolina Teachers by Certification Pathway in 2023–24

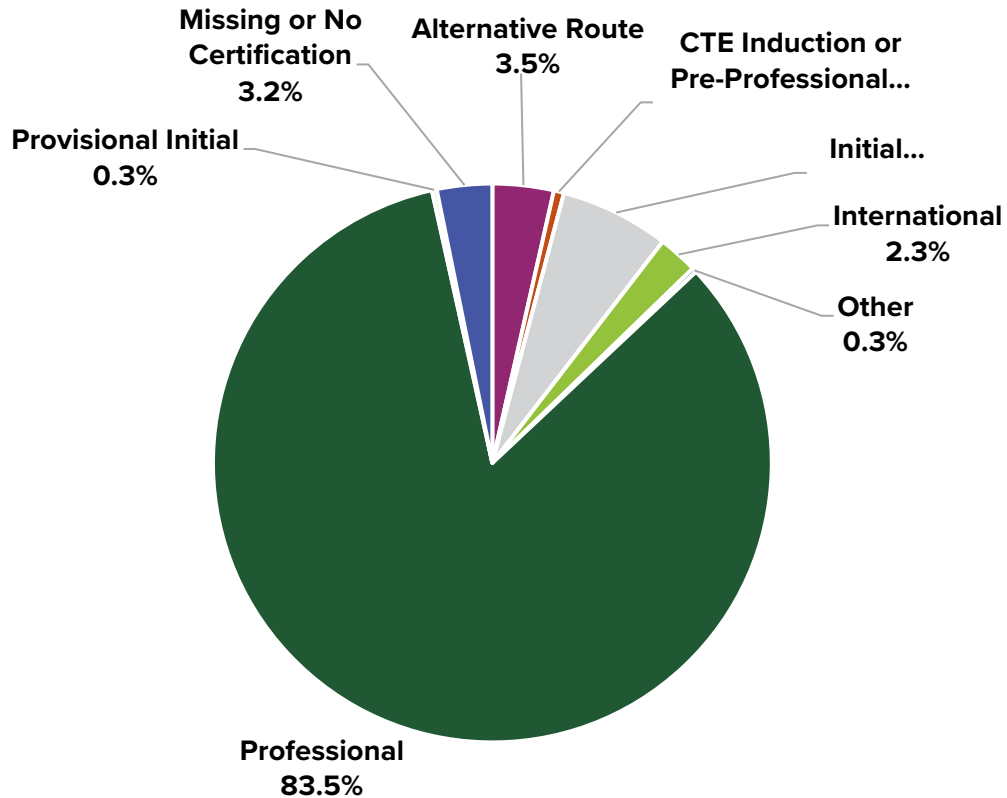


Note. The Other category includes adjunct, advanced fine arts, and Montessori certification pathways, which represent specialized alternative certifications (SCDE, 2018). CTE stands for career and technical education.

Regardless of the pathway, all teachers are assigned a certificate level based on their stage in the certification process. Initial certification is the starting point for new teachers graduating from an educator preparation program (EPP) at a college or university. To advance beyond this initial certification level, they must meet the following requirements: complete 3 years of teaching, participate in South Carolina’s induction and mentoring program, and receive a successful formative and summative performance evaluation. Once they fulfill these conditions, they obtain a professional certificate, which indicates full certification. Figure 2 presents the distribution of teachers across the different certification levels in 2023–24. A majority of teachers (83.5%) held a professional certificate, followed by 6.3% of teachers with an initial certificate. Approximately 2.3% of the state’s teachers held an international certificate and worked on temporary visas, a figure that has remained stable in recent years (Starrett et al., 2024).

In South Carolina, alternative certification serves as both a pathway and a certificate level, though these terms describe different aspects of a teacher’s credentials. As a pathway, alternative certification refers to a nontraditional route into teaching. As a certificate level, the temporary alternative route certification level indicates that a teacher is actively enrolled in an alternative certification program but has not yet met the requirements for a professional certificate. This candidate is still working toward full certification and must complete their program and additional state requirements before advancing. Once they fulfill these requirements, they can obtain a professional certificate, similar to teachers pursuing other pathways. Figure 2 illustrates that 3.5% of the state’s teachers are currently enrolled in an alternative certification program.

Figure 2. Percentages of South Carolina Teachers by Certification Level in 2023–24



Note. The Other category includes the following certificate levels: adjunct, critical needs, interim, internship, limited professional, provisional initial, regular, retired, special subject, and warrant. CTE stands for career and technical education.

Regarding performance evaluations, 40.3% of teachers received the highest possible evaluation rating, *Exemplary*, based on Student Learning Objectives (SLOs). In South Carolina, all teachers receive an annual goal-based evaluation centered on SLOs, which are educator-designed goals for student growth. These reflective tools are monitored throughout the year and assessed by designated evaluators. Based on their SLO performance, teachers receive ratings of *Exemplary*, *Proficient*, *Needs Improvement*, or *Unsatisfactory*. Measurement of these objectives is a significant component of the overall teacher evaluation system (SCDE, 2025).

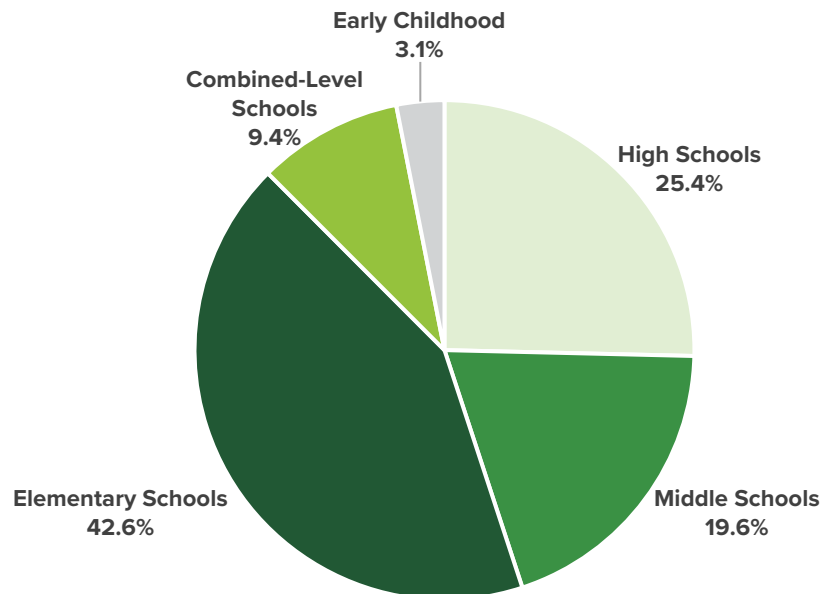
Finally, 6.2% of South Carolina public school teachers worked in charter schools during the 2023–24 school year, increasing from 5% in 2020–21 (Cartiff et al., 2024a). This percentage aligns closely with the national average of approximately 6% (Schaeffer, 2024). In recent years, both state and national data have indicated a trend of increasing percentages of teachers working in charter schools (Cartiff et al., 2024a; NCES, 2023b).

+ KEY QUESTION 2:

How do teacher characteristics differ among organizational levels (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school) in South Carolina?

For Key Question 2, South Carolina public schools were grouped by organizational level. In the 2023–24 school year, most teachers worked in elementary schools (22,716), followed by high schools (13,564) and middle schools (10,434). Additionally, there were 4,993 teachers working in combined-level schools and 1,643 teachers in early childhood settings. Teachers employed at more than one school level were counted in each category. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of teachers across these organizational levels. The distribution has remained consistent in recent years (Cartiff et al., 2024a).

Figure 3. Percentages of South Carolina Teachers by Organizational Level in 2023–24

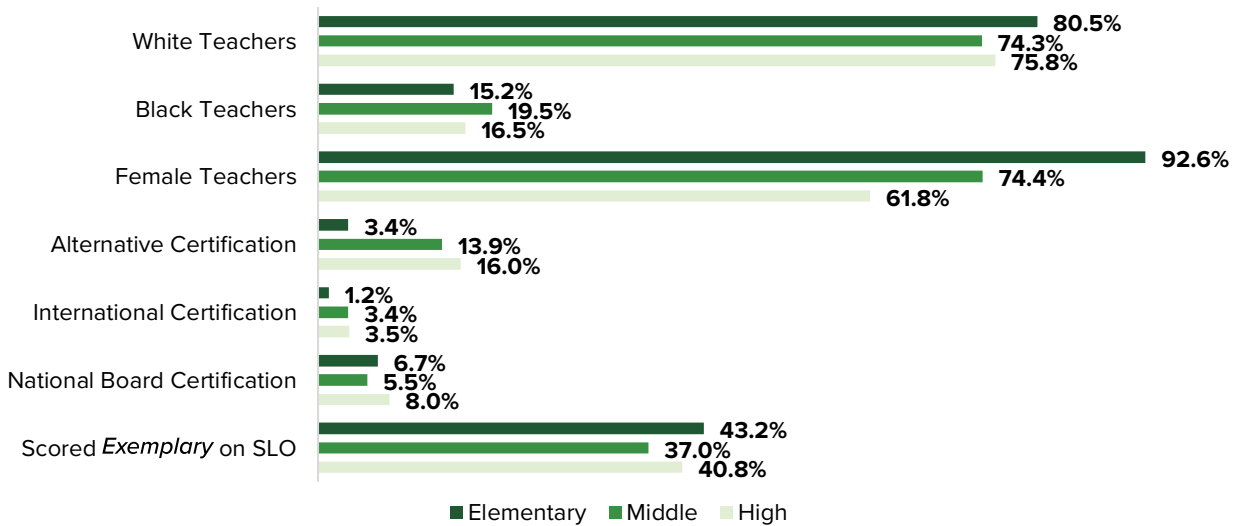


In this analysis, the personal and professional demographics of teachers were compared across elementary, middle, and high school levels. The comparison did not include combined-level schools and early childhood settings due to their smaller teacher populations.

Differences in Teacher Characteristics Across Organizational Levels

Figure 4 compares teacher characteristics across elementary, middle, and high schools in South Carolina for the 2023–24 school year. The analysis showed similarities in teacher race and ethnicity across school levels, with elementary schools (80.5%) having slightly higher percentages of White teachers compared to middle schools (74.3%) and high schools (75.8%). Middle schools (19.5%) had slightly higher percentages of Black teachers compared to elementary schools (15.2%) and high schools (16.5%).

Figure 4. Differences in South Carolina Teacher Characteristics Across Organizational Levels in 2023–24



The percentage of female teachers making up the elementary school workforce (92.6%) was notably higher than the percentage in middle schools (74.4%), which in turn was higher than that of high schools (61.8%). These percentages align closely with previous years' data (Cartiff et al., 2024a) and national trends (Schaeffer, 2024).

Alternatively certified teachers were more frequently employed in high schools (16.0%) and middle schools (13.9%) compared to elementary schools (3.4%). Similarly, international teachers made up larger proportions of the workforce in high schools (3.5%) and middle schools (3.4%) compared to elementary schools (1.2%).

High schools had the highest percentage of teachers with National Board Certification (8.0%), followed by elementary (6.7%) and middle schools (5.5%). Elementary school teachers (43.2%) had the highest percentage of Exemplary SLO evaluation ratings, followed by high school teachers (40.8%) and middle school teachers (37.0%). Lastly, high school teachers had, on average, the most years of experience (14.1 years), slightly ahead of middle school (13.1 years) and elementary school teachers (12.9 years).

Differences in Teacher Characteristics by Organizational Level Over Time

Teacher characteristics at elementary, middle, and high school levels over the past 4 academic years (2020–21 to 2023–24) were analyzed to identify workforce trends and stability. As illustrated in Figure 5, elementary school teachers consistently had the highest percentages of Exemplary SLO evaluation ratings, while middle school teachers consistently had the lowest. Notably, the proportion of teachers earning Exemplary ratings decreased by 2.1–4.0% across all school levels in the 2023–24 academic year.

Figure 5. Trends in Percentages of South Carolina Teachers Earning Exemplary SLO Ratings by Organizational Level

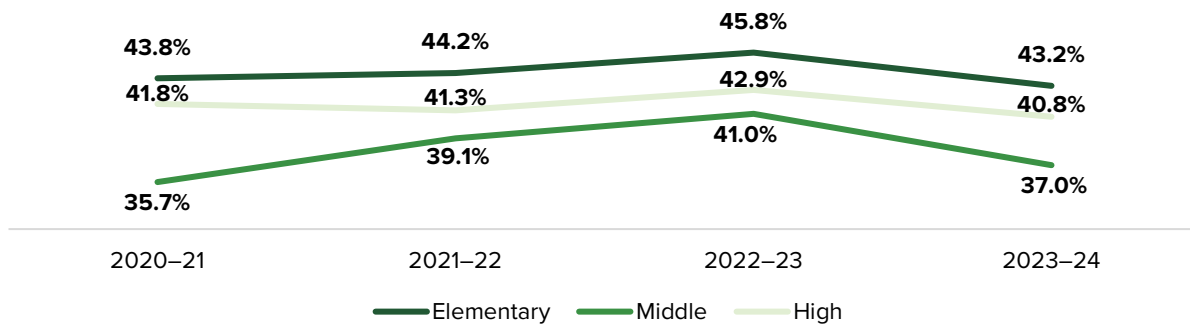


Figure 6 illustrates longitudinal trends in the percentages of internationally certified teachers at each school level. Elementary schools maintained a relatively stable percentage until a slight decrease occurred in 2023–24. In contrast, the percentages at both middle and high school levels increased slightly over this period, becoming nearly identical in recent years.

Figure 6. Trends in Percentages of South Carolina Teachers With International Certification by Organizational Level

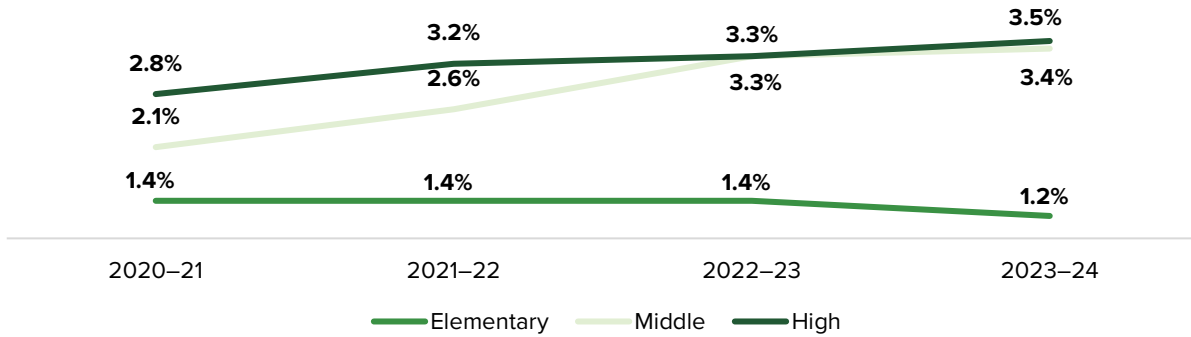


Figure 7 shows trends in the percentage of alternatively certified teachers by school level. The percentage in elementary schools remained relatively low compared to middle and high schools but increased from 2.0% to 3.4% over the analyzed period, representing a 70% increase. High schools consistently had a higher percentage of alternatively certified teachers, rising by 1.5 percentage points over the past 4 years. Middle schools experienced more stable percentages, with a slight decrease observed from 2022-23 to 2023-24.

Figure 7. Trends in Percentages of South Carolina Teachers With Alternative Certification by Organizational Level

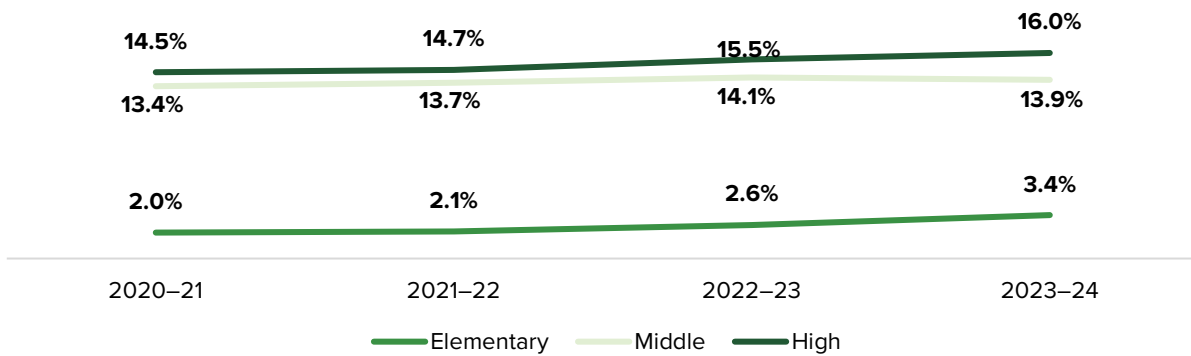
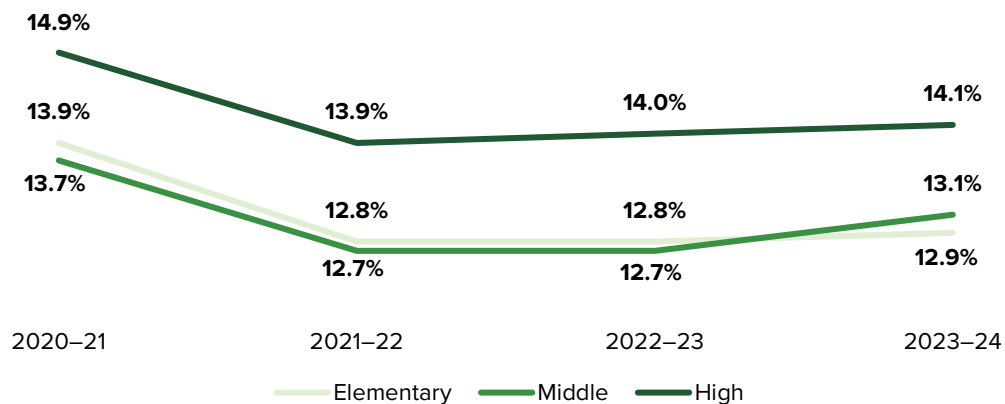


Figure 8 shows that average years of teaching experience declined across all three school levels immediately after the pandemic. Averages then remained stable over the following 3 years. High school teachers consistently had the highest average experience level, at approximately 14 years, while elementary and middle school teachers averaged about 1 year less.

Figure 8. Trends in Average Years of Teaching Experience for South Carolina Teachers by Organizational Level



+ KEY QUESTION 3A:

What are the longitudinal trends of newly hired teachers in South Carolina from different certification pathways and levels?

For Key Question 3A, we analyzed trends in the certification pathways and levels of newly hired teachers in South Carolina from the 2019–20 school year through the 2023–24 school year. The analysis included 1 additional year beyond the time period covered in Key Question 2 to capture potential impacts of the pandemic on recruitment and staffing. Examining these longitudinal trends can offer insights into teacher hiring patterns and shifts over time.

In Key Question 1, we discussed the separate distributions of how teachers entered the profession (certificate pathway) and where they were in the certification process (certificate level) as of the 2023–24 academic year. In Key Question 3A, we considered the certificate pathway and level of new hires. For example, a recent college graduate with a bachelor’s degree from a university EPP entering the classroom for the first time would hold an initial certificate through the undergraduate pathway. In contrast, an experienced teacher moving from another state might enter through the reciprocity pathway and be awarded a professional-level certificate if they meet South Carolina’s requirements. Understanding both the pathway and certificate level helps clarify a newly hired teacher’s qualifications and experience within the state’s education system.

This analysis included the four largest categories of newly hired teachers: (a) those trained in South Carolina holding initial teaching certificates, (b) those hired on professional certificates through reciprocity, (c) those holding non-reciprocity professional certificates, and (d) those actively enrolled in alternative certification programs.

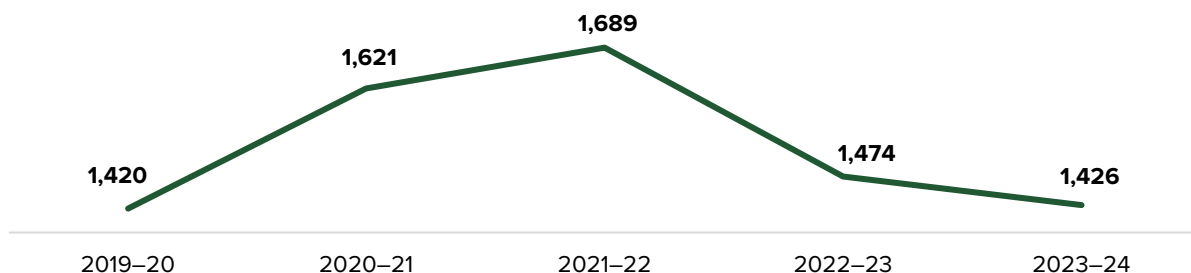
Longitudinal Trends in Newly Hired Teachers by Certification Pathway and Level

NEW HIRES WITH INITIAL CERTIFICATION

To start, we determined the number of newly hired teachers holding initial teaching certificates for each of the past 5 years. Initial teaching certificates are credentials valid for up to 3 academic years, typically granted to teachers who recently completed approved undergraduate or graduate EPPs. These certificates are usually awarded to beginning teachers or educators returning after an absence. To specifically analyze trends related to teachers trained within South Carolina, newly hired educators who had moved from out of state were excluded from this analysis.

Figure 9 illustrates the longitudinal trend in the number of South Carolina-trained teachers hired on initial certificates, the largest category of new hires in this analysis. The noticeable increase in 2021–22 aligns with a statewide decline in teacher retention following the pandemic (Dmitrieva et al., 2025), suggesting that higher attrition rates may have influenced the spike in new hires. However, 2020–21 had the second-highest number of new hires on initial certification, which coincided with the highest retention rate in recent years. These observations indicate that the relationship between general attrition rates and teachers newly hired with initial certificates is complex and should be interpreted cautiously. To fully understand these hiring patterns, it will be important to triangulate these findings with data on enrollment trends in teacher preparation programs across the state.

Figure 9. *Trend in New Hires With Initial Certification*



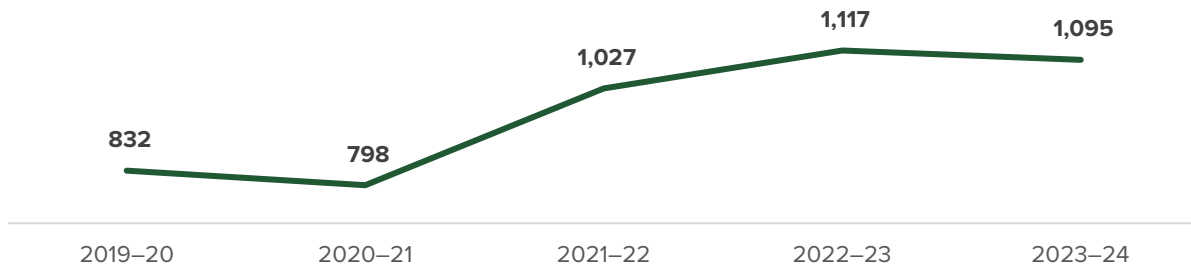
Note. In a previous SC TEACHER report (Dmitrieva et al., 2025), we calculated 1,942 new hires on initial certification in 2023–24. That value included some educators on initial certificates via reciprocity who were trained out of state. The numbers reported here are solely those who completed an EPP in South Carolina.

NEW HIRES WITH RECIPROCITY PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION

Another key trend for analysis included new hires holding professional certificates through reciprocity. These teachers come to South Carolina with standard educator credentials from other states recognized in South Carolina through an interstate agreement coordinated by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC). Figure 10 shows the longitudinal trend for reciprocity teachers hired with professional certificates.

Notably, the lowest number of reciprocity hires on professional certificates occurred in the 2020–21 school year, contrasting with a higher rate of initial certification hires that same year. While retention rates were high overall during 2020–21, external factors like the pandemic may have influenced teachers' desire or ability to relocate, resulting in fewer out-of-state educators entering the South Carolina workforce. Consequently, districts may have relied more heavily on South Carolina-trained teachers entering the profession for the first time. Although these explanations are speculative, they highlight the complexity of interpreting hiring trends, as well as potential interactions among different aspects of the teacher workforce.

Figure 10. *Trend in New Hires With Reciprocity Professional Certification*



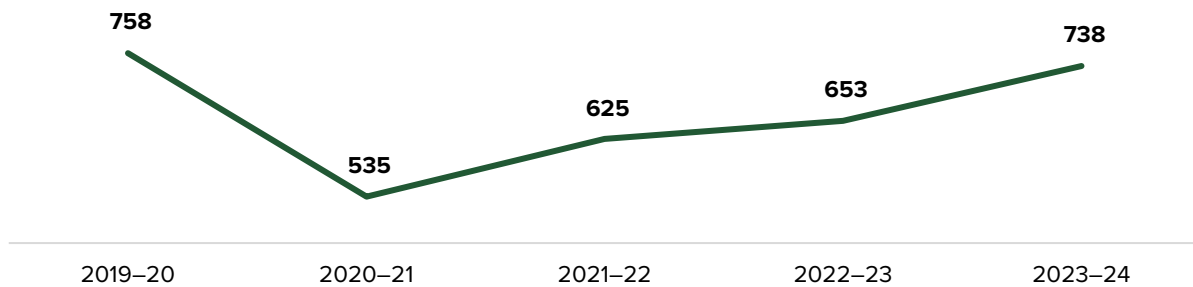
Note. The number of new hires reported in this figure differs slightly from a previous SC TEACHER report (Dmitrieva et al., 2025). In the earlier report, educators returning to teach in South Carolina after an absence—referred to as *boomerang teachers*, a mobility term used to describe this group—were reported separately and not included in the count of possible reciprocity hires. However, for this workforce profile report, boomerang teachers were classified based on their certification pathway. If a boomerang teacher from a reciprocity pathway held a professional certificate level, they were categorized as a reciprocity professional, rather than as a teacher educated in South Carolina. This classification resulted in a different total count of new hires.

NEW HIRES WITH PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION (NON-RECIPROCITY)

New hires holding South Carolina-issued professional certificates (i.e., non-reciprocity) were also analyzed. Teachers with this certificate level either completed a traditional EPP in South Carolina, originally received an initial certification, and fulfilled the necessary requirements for professional certification; or they completed an alternative certification program, earned a conditional certificate, and subsequently met the qualifications for a professional certificate. Per this definition, all individuals had at least a 1-year gap in teaching before returning to the workforce.

Figure 11 illustrates the trend for new hires with professional certificates in South Carolina. As was shown with reciprocity hires, a decline occurred in new professional certificate hires during 2020–21, followed by an increase. While the number of reciprocity new hires slightly declined in 2023–24, the number of those on non-reciprocity professional certificates continued to increase.

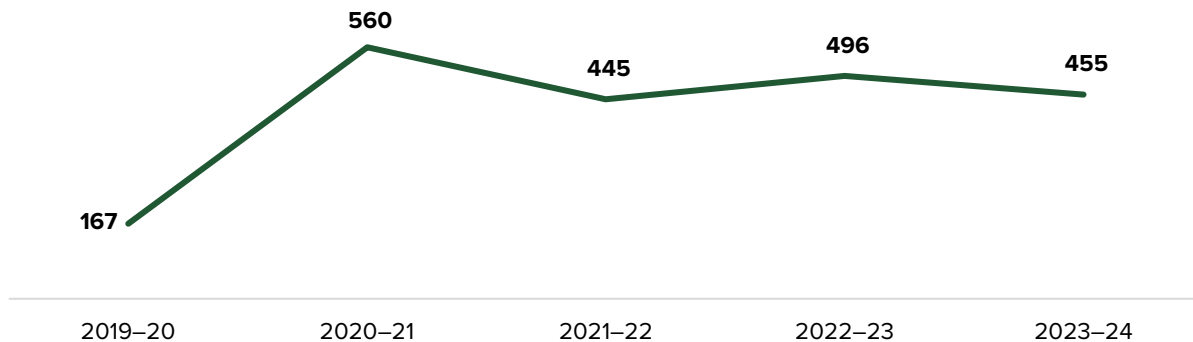
Figure 11. *Trend in New Hires With Professional Certification (Non-Reciprocity)*



NEW HIRES ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

Finally, the longitudinal trend was examined for new hires actively enrolled in alternative certification programs at the time of hire. These educators hold temporary alternative route certificates, which must be renewed annually while they complete certification requirements. Figure 12 illustrates the trend in hires from this pathway, showing a general increase over time. This increase aligns with the growth in approved alternative certification programs in South Carolina, which currently total 16. The highest number of hires through alternative certification programs occurred in 2020–21, which differs from the patterns observed in other certification pathways.

Figure 12. *Trend in New Hires Enrolled in Alternative Certification Programs*



Collectively, these longitudinal trends provide valuable insights into how teacher recruitment continues to evolve over time and how various hiring pathways are utilized in South Carolina. Hiring experienced educators from other states or those returning with professional certificates brings immediate expertise to schools. At the same time, newly certified teachers from traditional and alternative certification programs are critical for the long-term stability and growth of the teacher workforce. Continuous analysis of these trends is essential for determining whether recent changes were temporary effects of the pandemic or reflect enduring shifts in recruitment and staffing patterns. Additionally, these hiring trends should be considered alongside enrollment trends in EPPs to fully understand their implications for teacher supply. This information can be instrumental in shaping future policies and strategies aimed at strengthening teacher preparation and recruitment efforts across the state.

Higher percentages of initial certificate teachers can indicate several factors. One possibility is higher teacher attrition in recent years, which would require additional hires to replace departing educators. Examining district-level retention rates (see Dmitrieva et al., 2025) can provide further insight into whether this is the case. Alternatively, a high percentage of initial certificate teachers may reflect successful recruitment efforts, particularly from in-state EPPs. Some research shows that newly certified teachers often begin their careers near their EPP or in the district where they student-taught (Goldhaber et al., 2021). However, Figure 13 does not present the highest concentrations of initial certificate teachers near districts with the largest producers of education graduates, suggesting that factors beyond geographic proximity to EPPs are influencing hiring patterns. This may align with research that indicates teachers tend to remain near their hometowns rather than their preparation programs when seeking employment (Edwards et al., 2024; Reininger, 2012). Still, if districts with high percentages of initial certificate teachers are not located near in-state EPPs, these numbers could indicate particularly effective recruitment strategies. Lastly, a higher percentage of novice teachers may reflect districts experiencing student population growth, requiring them to hire more educators to meet increasing demand.

Low percentages of initial certificate teachers can also have multiple explanations. A low percentage may indicate workforce stability, where high retention rates reduce the need for new hires. However, in cases where recent attrition rates are high, a low percentage of initially certified teachers could signal recruitment challenges, suggesting that the district is struggling to attract new educators. To accurately interpret these figures, district leaders would benefit from including other data points and contextual factors related to attrition and recruitment.

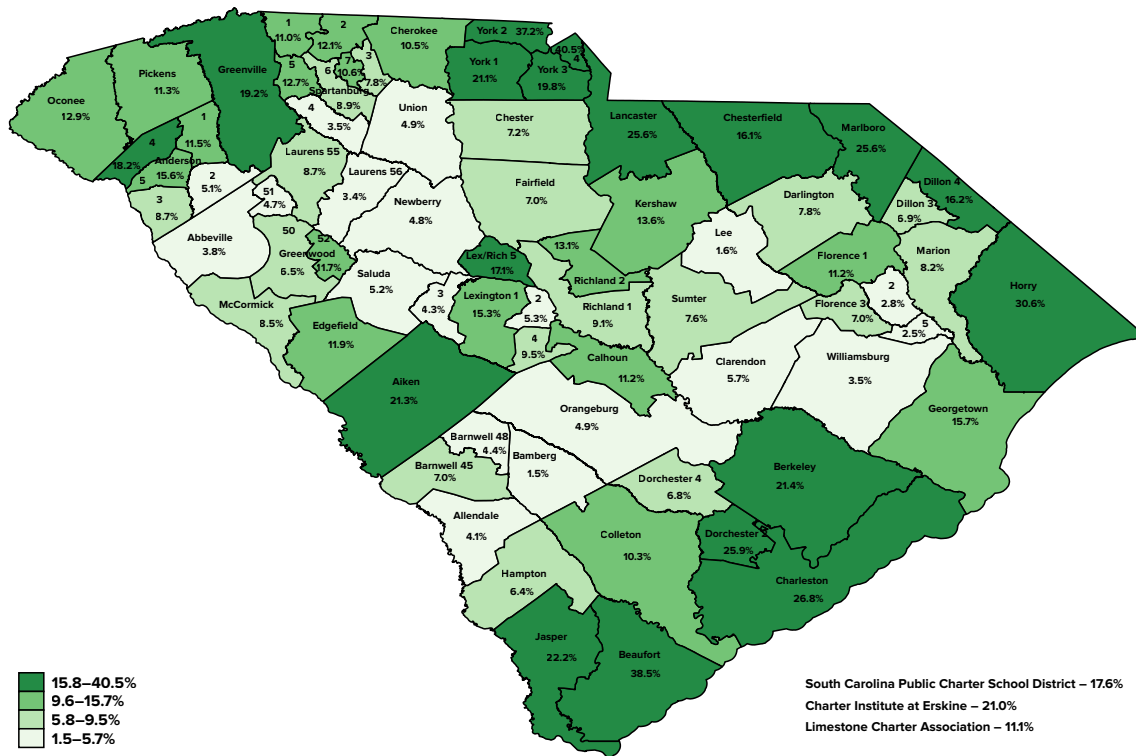
TEACHERS WORKING TOWARD OR WITH COMPLETED ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION

In response to geographic and supply-related workforce challenges, alternative certification programs have emerged as one strategy to broaden access to teaching and help address imbalances in teacher distribution (Mitchell & Romero, 2010). Figure 14 presents the percentage of South Carolina teachers with an alternative certification background in 2023–24. This group includes teachers currently enrolled in an alternative certification program and holding a temporary alternative route certificate, as well as those who completed an alternative certification pathway and have since earned a professional certificate. Given the range of experience within this category, support needs may vary. Teachers still enrolled in alternative certification programs likely require mentoring and structured professional development, while those who have transitioned to a professional certificate may benefit from ongoing career support tailored to their continued growth in the profession.

Over the past 4 years, South Carolina policymakers have made substantial salary investments, increasing the minimum starting teacher salary by \$9,000. Since 2021–22, South Carolina’s average teacher salary has surpassed North Carolina’s, with the gap continuing to grow (National Education Association, n.d.). While research suggests that cross-state mobility can be challenging due to seniority rules and pension structures (Goldhaber et al., 2015), South Carolina’s streamlined reciprocity process and competitive salaries may outweigh these concerns for many educators.

Additionally, several high-growth areas with an influx of out-of-state residents, including Aiken and coastal districts like Beaufort and Charleston (United States Census Bureau, 2024), also had relatively high percentages of teachers on reciprocity professional certificates in 2023–24. This suggests that broader migration trends and economic development may also contribute to teacher mobility patterns in the state.

Figure 15. *Percentage of Teachers With Reciprocity Professional Certification 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.

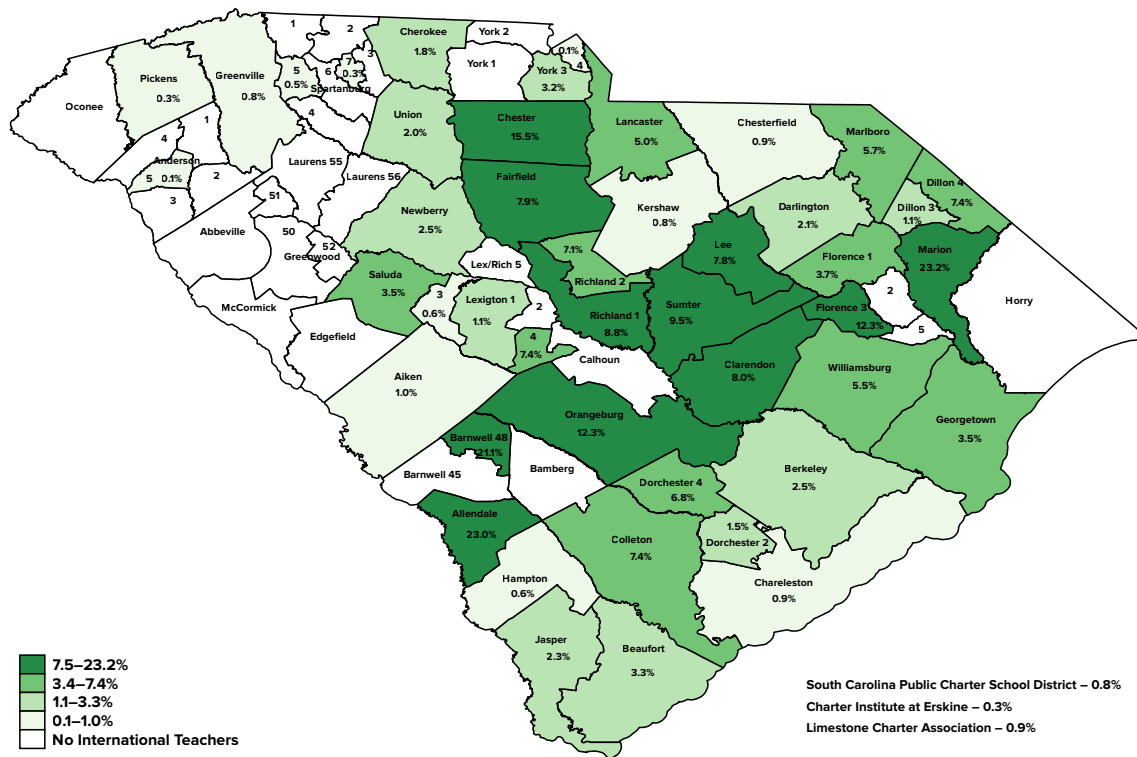
Teachers hired through reciprocity certification represent an important source of experienced educators entering the workforce. These veteran teachers bring valuable expertise from other states and may not require the same level of support and mentoring as novice teachers. However, a high reliance on out-of-state hires could also signal that EPPs in South Carolina, including both traditional and alternative certification pathways, are not producing enough teachers to meet workforce demands. Understanding these trends can help inform state-level policies and strategies to strengthen South Carolina’s teacher pipeline, maintaining a balance between recruiting experienced educators and supporting homegrown talent.

TEACHERS WITH INTERNATIONAL CERTIFICATION

For visiting international teachers, Figure 16 shows the percentage of teachers in each district holding international certificates in 2023–24. These educators bring extensive teaching experience to their South Carolina schools (Starrett et al., 2024) and can contribute cultural enrichment and diverse perspectives to their classrooms. Higher percentages of international teachers may reflect districts prioritizing these experiences as part of their instructional approach.

At the same time, a higher reliance on international teachers may indicate challenges in recruiting educators from other certification pathways. Examining Figure 16 alongside the previous figures can provide a more complete picture of teacher supply and demand in different districts. Additionally, it is important to recognize that employing international teachers comes with unique workforce considerations. For instance, having a J-1 or J-2 visa allows them to teach in the United States for 3 years, with a possible 2-year extension, after which they must return to their home country for at least a year. While international teachers contribute meaningfully to the workforce, their retention beyond a certain point is largely determined by visa regulations rather than local staffing decisions.

Figure 16. Percentage of Teachers With International Certification 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.

Overall and across certification levels and pathways, these percentages should be interpreted within the broader context of each district’s teacher workforce. In particular, in districts with small numbers of teachers, even minor shifts in hiring patterns can lead to large percentage changes. Additionally, differences in teacher recruitment across districts may be influenced by factors such as geographic location, school funding, and student population growth, all of which shape workforce needs and hiring strategies.

When viewed collectively and alongside other workforce data (e.g., teacher attrition, mobility trends, supply of new educators from in-state preparation programs), the findings presented here can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of teacher recruitment and staffing patterns. These insights can help district leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders identify both challenges and effective strategies in building and sustaining a well-supported teacher workforce.

+ FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This report examines key characteristics of South Carolina’s public school teacher workforce for the 2023–24 academic year, providing insights into demographic trends, certification levels and pathways, and workforce distribution. The analysis highlights patterns in teacher recruitment, retention, and workforce stability, with comparisons to available data from other southeastern states and national trends.

Findings indicate that South Carolina’s teacher workforce closely reflects regional and national patterns in some respects while diverging in others. The state continues to have a higher percentage of Black teachers compared to the national average, though the percentage of Hispanic teachers remains lower. Similar to national trends, South Carolina’s teacher workforce remains predominantly female and White. The representation of male teachers is notably higher in high schools.

The analysis of teacher characteristics by school level (elementary, middle, and high school) revealed several key differences. Female teachers comprised the majority of the workforce at all levels, but their representation was highest in elementary schools, where they made up more than 90% of teachers. Additionally, Black teachers were most likely to be employed in middle schools, a pattern consistent with previous years. These differences may reflect hiring needs, teacher preferences, or workforce challenges unique to each school level. For instance, middle and high schools employed a higher percentage of alternatively and internationally certified teachers than elementary schools. This could suggest a greater reliance on these pathways to fill vacancies, particularly in high-need subject areas such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and special education.

For teachers entering as new hires from 2019–20 through 2023–24, the analysis revealed shifts in certification pathways over time. The number of teachers hired with an initial certificate fluctuated, with notable increases in 2020–21 and 2021–22, possibly linked to pandemic-related attrition and increased vacancies. To fully understand this trend, hiring data should be considered alongside EPP enrollment to assess whether the supply of new teachers is keeping pace with workforce demands. Hires through reciprocity agreements have risen in recent years, particularly in districts bordering North Carolina. This growth aligns with South Carolina’s average teacher salary surpassing that of North Carolina. Additionally, the proportion of teachers entering the workforce through alternative certification pathways has remained steady since the pandemic, indicating a continued reliance on these programs to address workforce needs. Overall, these trends reflect shifting teacher recruitment strategies, with districts utilizing multiple certification pathways to fill vacancies. The increase in reciprocity hires suggests that higher salaries may be drawing educators from neighboring states, while the growth in alternative certification pathways highlights ongoing efforts to expand access to teaching careers for nontraditional candidates.

The analysis of teacher distribution across districts by certification level and pathway reveals variations in recruitment and retention strategies at the local level. Higher percentages of initial certificate teachers in some districts may indicate recent workforce turnover or successful recruitment efforts from in-state EPPs. In contrast, districts with a high proportion of alternatively certified teachers appear to heavily rely on alternative pathways, suggesting difficulties in recruiting traditionally certified educators. Teachers certified through reciprocity are more concentrated near state borders and in high-growth areas, reflecting a combination of cross-state mobility and broader population shifts. Together, these findings underscore the necessary complexity of successful teacher recruitment and retention strategies across districts, as they likely rely on multiple pathways. Recognizing these district-specific patterns can help inform targeted strategies to strengthen the teacher pipeline and improve staffing stability across South Carolina.

In conclusion, 2023–24 South Carolina teacher workforce data reflect both continuity and change in teacher recruitment, retention, and certification trends. While the overall workforce composition remains largely consistent with prior years, shifts in hiring pathways—particularly the increasing reliance on reciprocity and alternative certification—highlight evolving recruitment strategies. Differences across districts, school levels, and certification routes suggest that teacher workforce dynamics are shaped by both local and statewide factors, including salary adjustments, educator preparation pipelines, and policy decisions. Moving forward, these findings should be examined alongside other SC TEACHER reports on retention and working conditions to provide a more comprehensive, data-informed approach to strengthening South Carolina’s educator workforce. Addressing teacher supply, support, and retention holistically is essential for ensuring a stable and effective teacher workforce that meets the needs of students across the state.

+ GLOSSARY

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

Adjunct Certificate

A specialized alternative certification pathway and level requested by the hiring school or district for the certification of either (a) a locally identified content area expert or (b) an eligible candidate for the Program of Alternative Certification for Educators (PACE).

Advanced Fine Arts Certificate

A specialized alternative certification pathway requested by the hiring school or district and designed for individuals with a degree and professional experience in a fine arts field who wish to pursue a professional teaching certificate. This certification is available only as an initial certification pathway for noncertified educators. Candidates must demonstrate at least 2 years of successful professional experience in their fine arts discipline and obtain a passing score on the required content area assessment(s) approved by the State Board of Education for certification purposes.

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 Enrollee

An individual hired on a conditional alternative route certificate based on their enrollment in one of South Carolina's 16 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

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.

Boomerang Teacher (Boomerang)

An individual who previously worked as a public school teacher in South Carolina, left the state's teaching workforce, and later returned. For this report, the teacher must have departed during or after the 2017–18 school year and reentered by 2023–24. Boomerang teachers may include retirees who returned to the classroom or teachers who took temporary leave.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Certification

A nontraditional certification pathway to classroom teaching designed for individuals with industry work experience in specific career and technical fields, who may not have completed a standard educator preparation program. This certificate provides eligibility to teach grades 9–12 in South Carolina public school districts in career and technical fields such as health sciences, automotive technology, welding, and other vocational areas.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Induction Certificate

A certificate level issued to industry professionals allowed to begin teaching while completing certification requirements through a 2-year process. In the 1st year, teachers must complete two required courses and earn a passing score on a basic skills examination. In the 2nd year, teachers must complete two more required courses, earn a passing score on required certification exams, and receive a successful formative or summative evaluation of their teaching performance.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Pre-Professional Certificate

For those in the career and technical education field, a certificate level issued during a teacher's 3rd through 5th years as they work toward obtaining a professional certificate. During this time, teachers must earn a passing score on all sections of a basic skills examination, complete 6 hours of professional education coursework, and receive a successful summative evaluation of their teaching performance.

Critical Needs Certificate

An educator certificate level and pathway for participants in the Program of Alternative Certification for Educators (PACE) who have passed the required Praxis II content area exam(s) and participated in the 10-day pre-service program. The South Carolina Department of Education no longer issues this type of certificate.

Critical Needs Teacher

A teacher working in a subject area or geographic region identified by the South Carolina Department of Education as experiencing persistent shortages of qualified educators. Critical needs subject areas include fields with high vacancy rates, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; special education; world languages; and career and technical education. Critical needs geographic regions are school districts, often in rural or high-poverty urban areas, that face challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers. Educators in these roles may qualify for loan forgiveness, salary incentives, and alternative certification pathways to help address workforce shortages and ensure students have access to highly qualified teachers.

Graduate Pathway

A certificate pathway where teachers hold a bachelor's degree in a noneducation field and need to complete additional coursework to earn certification. These teachers must complete the required coursework through either a Master of Arts in Teaching program or a post-baccalaureate teacher certification program, complete student teaching as part of their program requirements, and earn passing scores on required certification exams. After graduation, they are eligible for an initial teaching certificate.

Initial Certificate

A certificate level and 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 fewer than 27 months of qualifying teaching experience in the last 7 years in their previous state will also be issued this certificate type.

Interim Certificate

An educator certificate level issued to participants in the Program of Alternative Certification for Educators (PACE) who have not passed the required Praxis II content area exam(s) and/or have not participated in the pre-service program. This certificate is renewed annually. The South Carolina Department of Education no longer issues this type of certificate.

International Certificate

A temporary teaching certificate and level designed for educators from countries outside the United States who participate in visiting visa programs (e.g., J-1, J-2). Teachers must have completed at least a bachelor's degree with a major in the teaching field. The certificate is initially issued for up to 1 year and can be renewed annually for up to 3 years at the request of the employing school district. Renewal is contingent upon the teacher demonstrating content competency, either through a review of official transcript evaluations or by meeting certification examination requirements.

International Teacher

A teacher hired from outside the United States through specific visiting visa programs (e.g., J-1, J-2). 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.

Internship Certificate

An educator certificate level given to individuals who 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.

Limited Professional Certificate

A certification level and advancement option for educators who hold a South Carolina initial certificate and are employed in eligible, nonregulated educational entities, such as accredited private schools, certain public charter schools, and higher education institutions with approved teacher preparation programs. These entities operate outside of the State Board of Education's regulations for teacher evaluation. To qualify, educators must have at least 3 years of experience in a relevant certification area within the last 7 years, while maintaining a valid initial certificate and undergoing an employer-approved performance evaluation.

Mobility

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

Montessori Certification

A specialized certification pathway available for various educational levels, including early childhood (3K–5K), elementary I (grades 1–3), elementary II (grades 4–6), and middle level (grades 5–8). Individuals without prior teaching certification can pursue Montessori certification by completing a state-approved Montessori educator preparation program. This pathway leads to an initial teaching certificate in Montessori education. Certified educators can add a Montessori endorsement to their existing teaching certificate by completing an approved Montessori training program and fulfilling any additional state requirements.

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.

Novice Teachers

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 (i.e., a *new hire*) who was employed on an initial certificate in the most recent school year. In this report, that refers to the 2023–24 academic year.

Other Educator Reentering

An educator who returned to South Carolina public schools in the most recent school year (i.e., 2023–24 for this report) after not being employed in any role in public education during the previous school year (i.e., 2022–23 for this report). For this particular study, the defined 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 all SC TEACHER reports, teachers 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.

Pre-Initial Certificate

A category of teaching certificate that includes provisional initial certificates and internship certificates.

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.

Provisional Initial Certificate

An educator certificate level given to teachers who 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.

Reciprocity

A process that streamlines hiring for districts and enables qualified teachers to move more easily across state lines. The South Carolina Department of Education, 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 National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (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.

Retired Certificate

An educator certificate level and credential awarded to an individual who retired from a South Carolina public school and is hired for the purpose of substituting only.

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.

Special Subject Certificate

An educator certificate level issued to individuals who have expertise in a subject taught in public schools. It is renewed at the request of the district. The South Carolina Department of Education no longer issues this type of certificate.

Student Learning Objectives (SLOs)

A tool for actionable reflection used in teacher evaluation systems as a measure of student growth. SLOs are monitored over the duration of time the students are with the teacher for instruction, which may be a full academic year, a semester, or a quarter (depending on the context in which the teacher leads instruction).

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. 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.

Teaching Certificate Level

A level which 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 for full certification 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.

Undergraduate Pathway

A certificate pathway where teachers earn a bachelor's degree in education from an approved educator preparation program at a South Carolina college or university, complete student teaching as part of their degree requirements, and earn passing scores on required certification exams. After graduation, they are eligible for an initial teaching certificate.

Warrant Certificate

An educator certificate level issued to teachers who have not passed the required teaching exams or the required professional education courses. The South Carolina Department of Education stopped issuing this type of certificate in 1976.

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