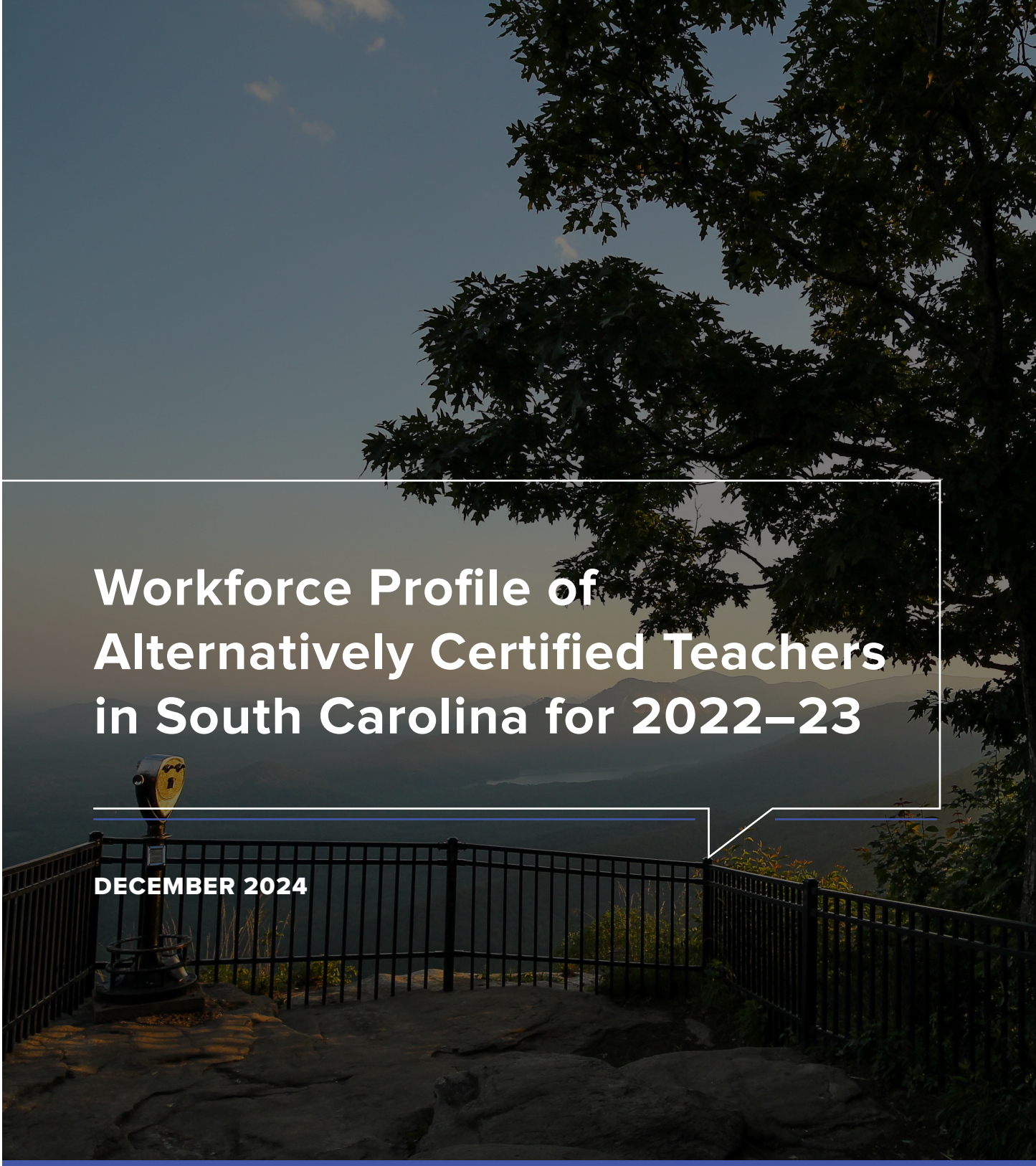
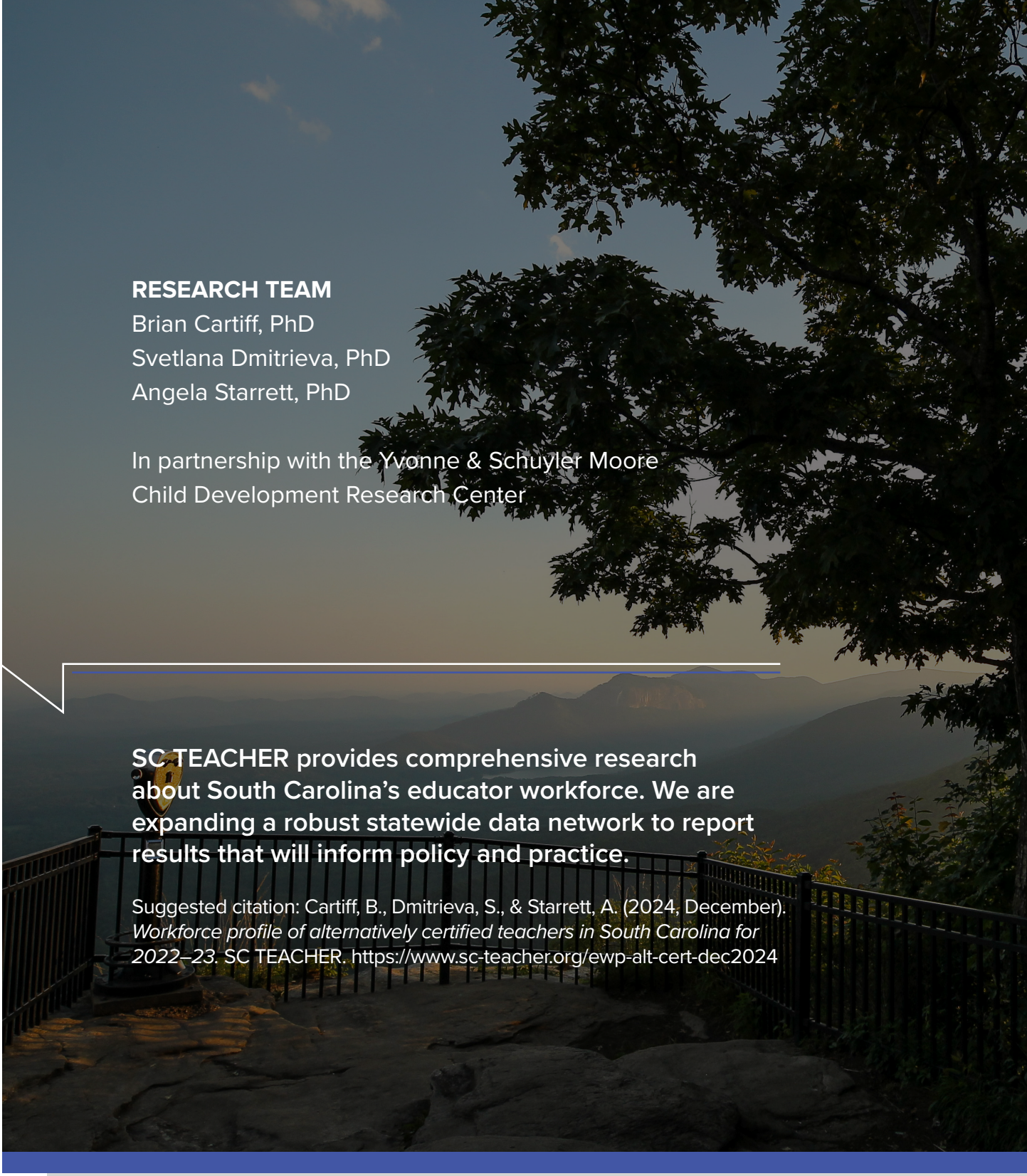


Workforce Profile of Alternatively Certified Teachers in South Carolina for 2022–23

DECEMBER 2024

SC TEACHER | EDUCATOR WORKFORCE PROFILE



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

Suggested citation: Cartiff, B., Dmitrieva, S., & Starrett, A. (2024, December). *Workforce profile of alternatively certified teachers in South Carolina for 2022–23.* SC TEACHER. https://www.sc-teacher.org/ewp-alt-cert-dec2024

GROWING DATA + GAINING INSIGHT

Table of Contents

Workforce Profile of Alternatively Certified Teachers

+ HIGHLIGHTS

Alternatively certified teachers constitute a growing portion of public school educators in the US. This is a trend that is expected to continue, due to the declining enrollment in traditional teacher preparation programs across recent years.

As such, this report examines the profiles of alternatively certified teachers working in South Carolina public schools (those currently enrolled in alternative certification programs and those who have completed them). The analysis delves into the demographics and placements of these teachers and explores how their employment correlates with teacher attrition rates. Altogether, it offers preliminary insights into the roles of alternatively certified educators in the teacher pipeline.

In 2022–23, South Carolina employed 4,757 alternatively certified teachers, including in all 73 traditional school districts, spread relatively evenly across the state's regions. The analysis revealed that most were employed in middle or high schools, rural or suburban areas, and low- or moderate-poverty contexts.

Main Findings Around the 2022–23 Alternatively Certified Teacher Workforce

- Alternatively certified teachers made up about 10% of public school teachers in South Carolina.
- On average, alternatively certified teachers in the state had approximately 7 years of teaching experience.
- More than 50% of alternatively certified teachers possessed an advanced degree.
- About 45% of alternatively certified teachers worked in high schools. The subject areas with the highest number of certifications were science, English, and social studies.
- Districts' 1-year and 3-year attrition rates had significant positive relationships with their percentages of alternatively certified teachers in their workforce. This means that districts with higher attrition rates employed higher numbers of alternatively certified teachers.
- In the academic years from 2020–21 to 2022–23,
    - The number of alternatively certified teachers in the state increased by more than 10%.
    - Approximately 80% of alternatively certified teachers consistently worked in low- or moderate-poverty schools.
    - The percentage of alternatively certified teachers working in elementary schools increased from around 10% to 13%.

+ INTRODUCTION

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Gardner et al., 1983). This report was critical of many aspects of American public schools and led to many state and federal reforms. The decline in the number of college students pursuing teaching as a career helped motivate the publication of the report, which contributed to the subsequent establishment of alternative certification pathways (Hansen, 2024). Recent reports about falling enrollments in traditional preparation programs (e.g., Partelow, 2019; Schaeffer, 2022; Will, 2022) mirror these concerns from 40 years ago. These declining numbers, along with concerns about teacher attrition (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2023; Ramos & Hughes, 2020), have led many states, including South Carolina, to increasingly hire individuals pursuing teaching through nontraditional pathways, such as alternative certification.

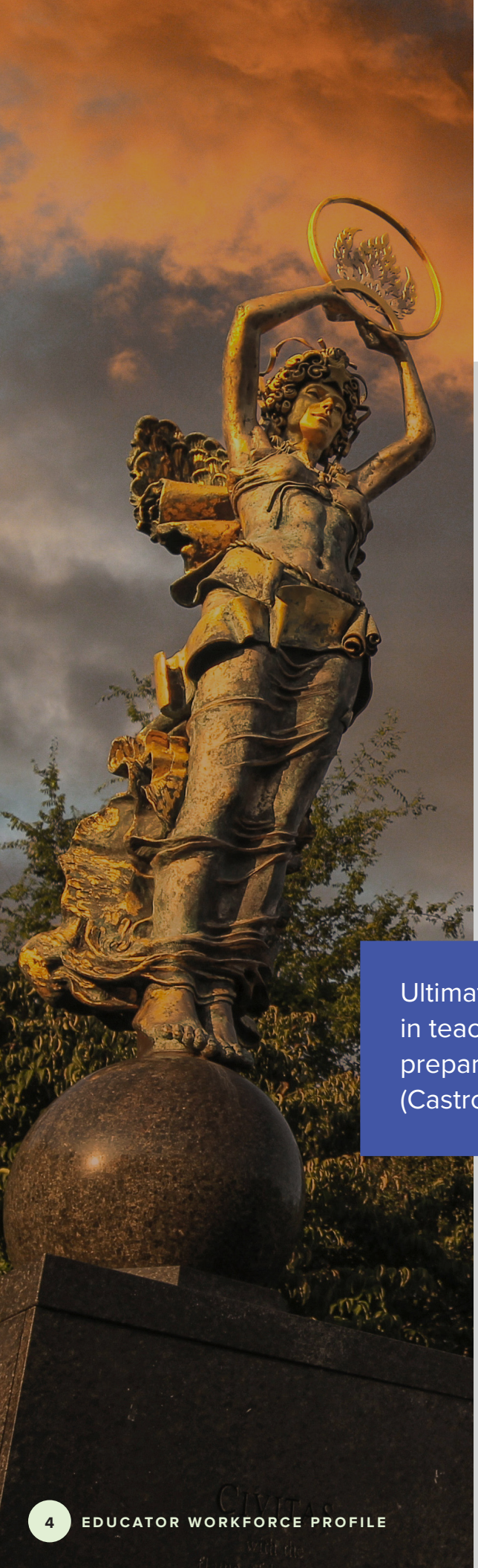
THE ADVENT OF ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS AND EARLY RESEARCH

Alternative certification programs (i.e., non-college-based programs) were established in the US in the 1980s to address anticipated teacher shortages. By 1990, programs were established in 30 states (Darling-Hammond, 1990). The popularity of alternative certification programs continued to spread rapidly. They existed in 40 states by 1995 (Stoddart & Floden, 1995). When the expected teacher shortages predicted for the early 1990s (Feistritzer, 1993; Lutz & Hutton, 1989) did not occur, the programs were deemed successful (Feistritzer, 1993). Stakeholders also expressed the hope that providing abbreviated pathways to PK–12 teaching would attract individuals with a wide variety of vocational experiences and contribute to the diversification and improvement of the teacher workforce (Stoddart & Floden, 1995).

Scholars of some early studies (e.g., Adelman, 1986) reported largely positive findings, noting that participants had diverse job experience and superior educational backgrounds compared to traditionally trained teachers. In contrast, other researchers (e.g., Shen, 1997) found that lower percentages of alternatively certified teachers had baccalaureate and master's degrees than those traditionally trained. These contradictory results were based on small samples in some cases (e.g., Adelman, 1986) and contaminated datasets in others (i.e., traditionally certified teachers labeled as alternatively certified; Ballou, 1998). The inconclusive nature of this early research was further complicated by the lack of consensus on what constituted alternative certification (Humphrey & Wechsler, 2007).

Despite this absence of clearly defined criteria and the ambiguous nature of initial findings, prominent stakeholders began to argue that alternative certification programs could provide equivalent training to traditional paths (Cohen-Vogel & Hunt, 2007; Neumann, 1994). These advocates continued to promote and foster the growth of these programs into the 21st century (Cohen-Vogel & Smith, 2007). One major step in this growth was The National Center for Education Information founding The National Center for Alternative Certification in 2003, with funding provided by the US Department of Education (US Department of Education, 2004). From the US Department of Education, *Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge: The Secretary's Third Annual Report on Teacher Quality* (2004) also included a section on alternative certification programs and discussed how these routes lessened bureaucratic obstacles and other barriers to achieving a teaching career.

Select studies in the early 2000s were able to illustrate the potential benefits of existing alternative certification programs. Decker et al. (2004) and Humphrey and Weschler (2007), for example, found that specific programs (e.g., Teach for America) drew higher percentages of participants from highly competitive universities than were found in random samples of novice traditional-route teachers. Decker et al. (2004) also found that K–12 students randomly assigned to a Teach for America teacher scored higher on a mathematics achievement test than peers randomly assigned to a traditionally trained teacher in the same elementary school. These were encouraging findings, though scholars still cautioned that research both endorsing and criticizing alternative certification programs was thin and that there was significant variance in the effectiveness of different programs (Humphrey et al., 2008).



EFFICACY AND EVOLUTION OF ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

Congress's latest reauthorization of the Higher Education Act in 2008 included stipulations that teacher preparatory programs, both traditional and alternative alike, must report several metrics to the states they are operating within. The states, in turn, report these metrics to the federal government (Yin & Partelow, 2020). Unfortunately, the data do not always distinguish between alternative certificate program enrollees and completers (Partelow, 2019). This lack of distinction and other limitations in the reported metrics continue to complicate accurate assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of alternative certification programs. For example, Sass (2015) found that alternatively certified teachers were more effective in their instruction than traditionally prepared teachers and that teachers on paths that required no coursework had the most prominent effects on student achievement. Von Hippel et al. (2016), however, cautioned that findings along these lines mainly were the results of "noise" (p. 29).

Ultimately, the question of whether differences in teacher quality can be attributed to the type of preparation or licensure program remains open (Castro & Edwards, 2021).

What is not in question is that alternative certification programs continue to flourish. Most states in the US currently have at least one approved alternative route (Partelow, 2019). The main commonality among these programs is that they typically allow candidates with at least a bachelor's degree to follow a streamlined certification path that requires less training time than traditional, university-based preparation (Humphrey et al., 2008). Beyond that shared trait, alternative certification programs can differ in myriad ways, contributing to the challenges of evaluating and comparing them (Walsh & Jacobs, 2007). For instance, the organizational structure can vary significantly as programs may operate at national, state, or local levels. Some programs are affiliated with colleges or universities, whereas others operate independently from institutes of higher education (Partelow, 2019). They can also be nonprofit or for-profit enterprises. Certification opportunities can differ, with some programs offering certification only in single subject areas (e.g., art) or at one organizational level (e.g., elementary), while others provide training in many subjects across all levels of PK–12. Programs can also deviate in their eligibility requirements, length of time within the program, instructional modalities (e.g., online, hybrid, face-to-face), coursework, and support provided.

The proportion of teachers entering the workforce through alternative certification appears likely to continue to grow. More research is needed on specific programs and the candidates they are producing to assess the programs' instructional effectiveness, as well as to determine the types of support and resources these educators need when they begin teaching in the classroom. As a preliminary step toward this greater goal, it is essential to create a clearer picture of the individuals enrolled in these programs and the schools in which they are teaching.

ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS IN SOUTH CAROLINA

Currently, 16 alternative route programs have been approved in South Carolina (South Carolina Department of Education [SCDE], 2024a). Some of these programs have been pathways to certification in the state for years. Others have been approved recently. Figure 1 lists the programs approved by the state, and details about them can be found on the SCDE website (https://ed.sc.gov/educators/alternative-certification/). The SCDE (2024b) provides specific guidance for potential educators who meet program eligibility criteria and want to obtain certification.

Figure 1. *Approved Alternative Certification Programs in South Carolina*

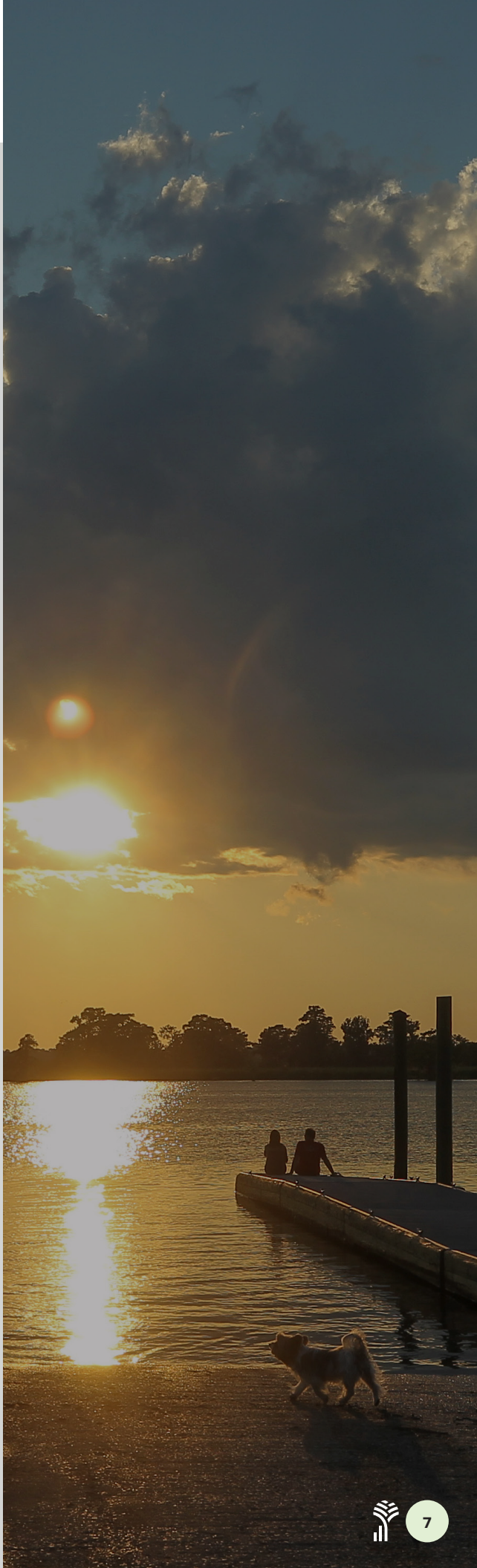
Administered by a National Program or the State	Administered by a School District	Administered by a College or University
• American Board • Program of Alternative Certification for Educators (PACE) • Teachers of Tomorrow (ToT) • Teach for America (TFA) • Teach Right USA • TeachSC	• Charter Inspire Alternative Certification Pathway (Charter Inspire) • Greenville Alternative Teacher Education Program (GATE) • Lowcountry Educator Alternative Pathway (LEAP) • TeachCharleston Alternative Certification Program • TeachFlorence1	• Alternative Pathways to Educator Certification Program (APEC Coker College) • Alternative Pathways to Educator Certification Program (APEC Columbia College) • Carolina Collaborative for Alternative Preparation (CarolinaCAP) • Converse Alternative Certification in Art Education (CACAE) • Network for Alternative Preparation in Teaching (NetAPT Winthrop)

Each of these 16 programs offered in South Carolina has a distinct origin and focus. Established in the 1980s by the SCDE, The Program of Alternative Certification for Educators allows individuals with a bachelor's degree to begin teaching immediately while completing a 3-year program for full certification. Teach For America focuses on placing recent college graduates in rural school districts, where they undergo a summer training institute and continue their preparation while teaching. Authorized in 2017, South Carolina Teachers of Tomorrow provides an online certification route for individuals with at least a bachelor's degree but no prior teacher preparation (SCDE, 2024b).

Four approved alternative certification programs are administered by individual school districts, including Greenville Alternative Teacher Education Program, Lowcountry Educator Alternative Pathway, TeachCharleston Alternative Certification Program, and TeachFlorence1. The Greenville Alternative Teacher Education Program is designed specifically for candidates in the Greenville area, offering pathways in early childhood, elementary, middle level, and secondary education. Similarly, TeachCharleston allows Charleston residents to become certified teachers through a structured program involving coursework and classroom teaching experience (SCDE, 2024b).

Several alternative certification programs are also administered through institutions of higher education. For example, The Carolina Collaborative for Alternative Preparation (CarolinaCAP) is a partnership involving South Carolina school districts, the University of South Carolina, and Mira Education (formerly the Center for Teaching Quality) that offers a nondegree pathway to full licensure. The Alternative Pathways to Educator Certification, offered through Columbia College, supports working adults with coursework, classroom experiences, and mentoring (SCDE, 2024b).

With the continued growth of these South Carolina programs and the growth of their graduates in South Carolina school districts, establishing a better understanding of alternatively certified teachers specific to our state is critical to understanding the overall teacher workforce.



KEY QUESTIONS

To gain a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the profile of alternatively certified teachers working in South Carolina public schools, we looked at data from the academic year 2022–23 and trends across time from 2020–21 to 2022–23. Specifically, we examined the following key questions:

1. What are the demographics of South Carolina teachers completing alternative certification programs?
2. What does the distribution of alternatively certified teachers look like across the state? How does their placement vary across geographic locales, school poverty levels, and school organizational levels?
3. How does employing alternatively certified teachers relate to teacher attrition in South Carolina districts?

DATA, VARIABLES, AND ANALYSES

The findings presented in this report are primarily based on the analysis of 4,757 alternatively certified teachers employed by South Carolina public school districts during the 2022–23 academic year. The data analyzed came from three sources. Teacher-level data for PK–12 classroom and special education teacher positions were provided by SCDE. Positions held by classroom teachers include the professional certification positions of special education (itinerant, self-contained, and resource), prekindergarten, kindergarten, classroom, and retired teachers returning to teach. Data related to district and school level were obtained from the 2022–23 South Carolina School Report Cards, except for school locale data, which came from The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Data collected from all three sources were merged before analysis. Teacher-level variables in the analysis included gender, race/ethnicity, years of experience, and certification area. School-level data included district, organizational level (i.e., elementary, middle, and high), poverty level, and geographic locale (i.e., urban, suburban, town, and rural). District-level data included teacher attrition rates. These were calculated by subtracting the teacher retention rate provided in the school report cards from 100%.

School poverty level was based on each school's percentage of pupils-in-poverty (PIP). This continuous variable was used to construct a three-level categorical variable. High-poverty schools were designated as those in the highest quartile (i.e., top 25%) of PIP of all the public schools in the state in 2022–23. Schools in the lowest quartile (i.e., bottom 25%) of PIP were classified as low poverty. Schools in the middle two quartiles (i.e., 25–75%) were categorized as moderate poverty.

Updated geographic locale designations for schools were obtained from public records provided by the NCES (US Department of Education, 2023). These codes are based on population density and proximity to an urban area (i.e., city) or an urbanized cluster (i.e., town).

The analyses conducted for this report were primarily descriptive in nature. Correlation coefficients were calculated to examine relationships between district-level teacher attrition and the district's percentage of alternatively certified teachers. We also analyzed longitudinal trends from the 2020–21 academic year through the 2022–23 academic year to determine if there were any notable, short-term trends in the demographics and placements of alternatively certified educators. The same three data sources and variables were used for the 2020–21 and 2021–22 academic years in the longitudinal analyses.

Our Key Questions

+ KEY QUESTION 1:

What are the demographics of teachers completing alternative certification programs in South Carolina?

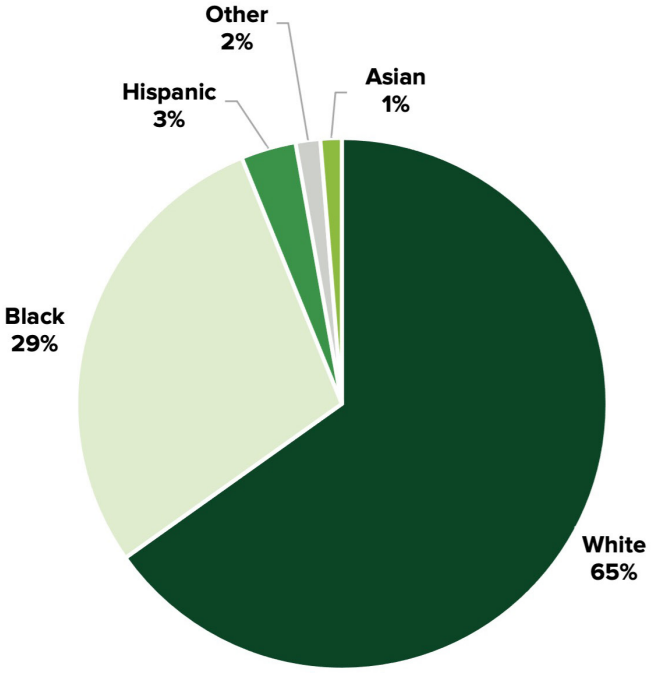
To address Key Questions 1 and 2, we examined the profiles of all South Carolina's employed PK–12 classroom teachers and special education teachers (i.e., itinerant, resource, and those working in self-contained classrooms) holding an alternative certification or working toward alternative certification. There were 4,757 teachers meeting these criteria working in 969 schools in South Carolina during the 2022–23 academic year.

Demographics of Alternatively Certified Teachers in 2022–23

In South Carolina public schools, the teaching experience of alternatively certified teachers varied widely, ranging from a minimum of 0 years (i.e., 2022–23 was their 1st year teaching) to as many as 46 years. The average level of teaching experience was approximately 7.1 years.

Alternatively certified teachers were predominantly female (66.3%). Almost two thirds of the population identified as White, and a little less than a third identified as Black. More specific racial demographics related to this teacher population are shown in Figure 2.

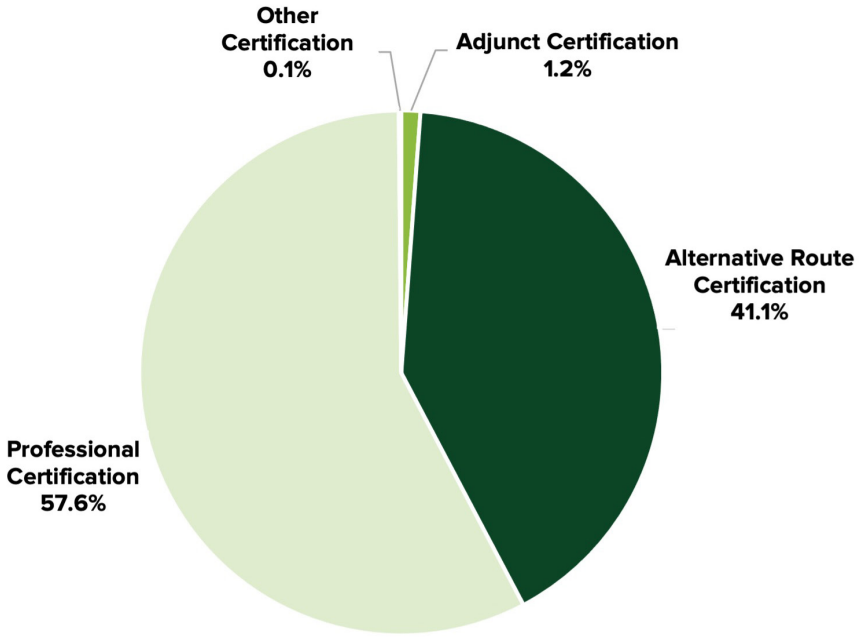
Figure 2. *Race and Ethnicity Demographics of Alternatively Certified Teachers in 2022–23*



Note. The *Other* category includes alternatively certified teachers identifying as Native American, Pacific Islander, and two or more races.

This report examines all alternatively certified teachers in public education in South Carolina, including those who have completed their training and those currently enrolled in a program. As shown in Figure 3, of the 4,757 alternatively certified teachers in the state, approximately 58% (739 teachers) possessed a professional certificate, indicating they had completed a program. About 41% (1,955 teachers) held an alternative route certification, indicating they were still in training. A small percentage of alternatively certified teachers held adjunct, critical needs, and interim certificates.

Figure 3. *Certification Levels of Alternatively Certified Teachers in 2022–23*



Note. Other Certification includes critical needs and interim certificates.

More than 50% of alternatively certified teachers in South Carolina held a master's or doctorate degree. They were certified in 42 distinct subject areas. For simplicity, in Table 1, we present the number of teachers certified in subject areas with similar disciplinary subjects combined (e.g., the social studies category includes teachers certified in social studies, history, government, geography, and psychology).

Table 1. *Number of Alternatively Certified Teachers by Subject Area Certification in 2022–23*

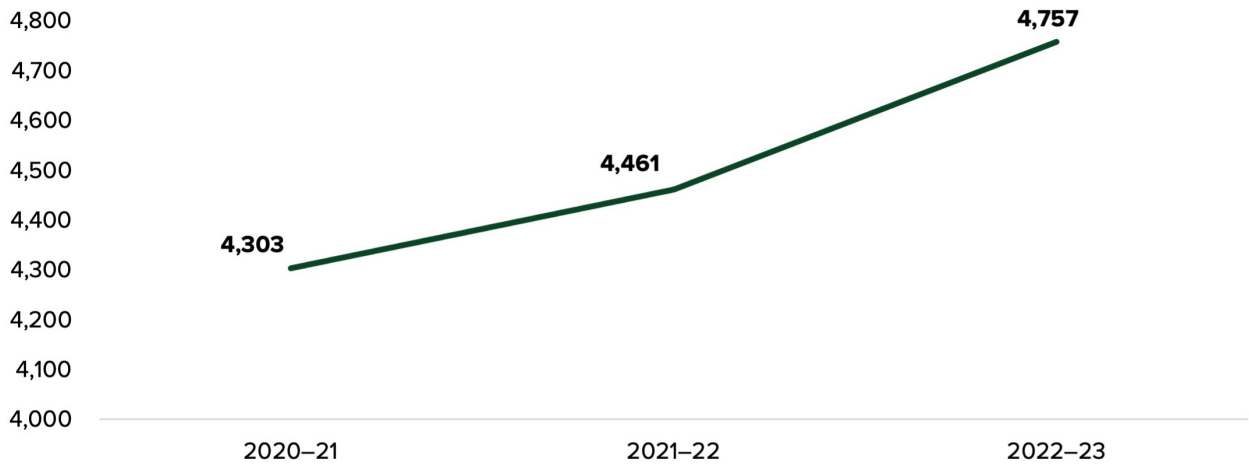
Subject Area[a]	Number of Teachers Certified[b]
Science	579
English	518
Social studies	348
Foreign language	261
Fine arts (outside of music)	257
Mathematics	243
Physical education and health	213
Elementary	176
Music	105
Early childhood	102
Family/consumer science	42
Agricultural education	23
Business education	14
Computer science	12
Guidance	12
Other	11

[a]Some teachers held certifications in multiple subject areas.
[b]Many teachers in the analysis had not yet finished their alternative certification process and therefore are not included in these numbers.

Longitudinal Trends in Demographics of Alternatively Certified Teachers

The numbers of alternatively certified teachers in the state for the three most recent academic years are shown in Figure 4. Overall, the number of alternatively certified teachers working in South Carolina schools increased by approximately 4% from the 2020–21 to the 2021–22 academic year. This number increased by 6% from 2021–22 to 2022–23.

Figure 4. *Number of Alternatively Certified Teachers by Academic Year*



Over this 3-year period, the composition of alternatively certified teachers by gender and race/ethnicity remained relatively stable. The population was consistently about two-thirds female. A similar proportion identified as White, with exact percentages ranging from 62.7% in 2020–21 to 65.2% in 2022–23. Alternatively certified teachers identifying as Black consistently made up about 30% of the population throughout this timespan. The proportions of those identifying as Hispanic (between 3.3–3.4%) and Asian (1.1%) were also stable.

Regarding years of experience, there was a small shift across this period. For alternatively certified teachers in South Carolina, average years of experience dipped slightly from a high point of 7.7 years in 2020–21 to 7.1 years in 2022–23.

+ KEY QUESTION 2:

What does the distribution of alternatively certified teachers look like across the state? How does their placement vary across geographic locales, school poverty levels, and school organizational levels?

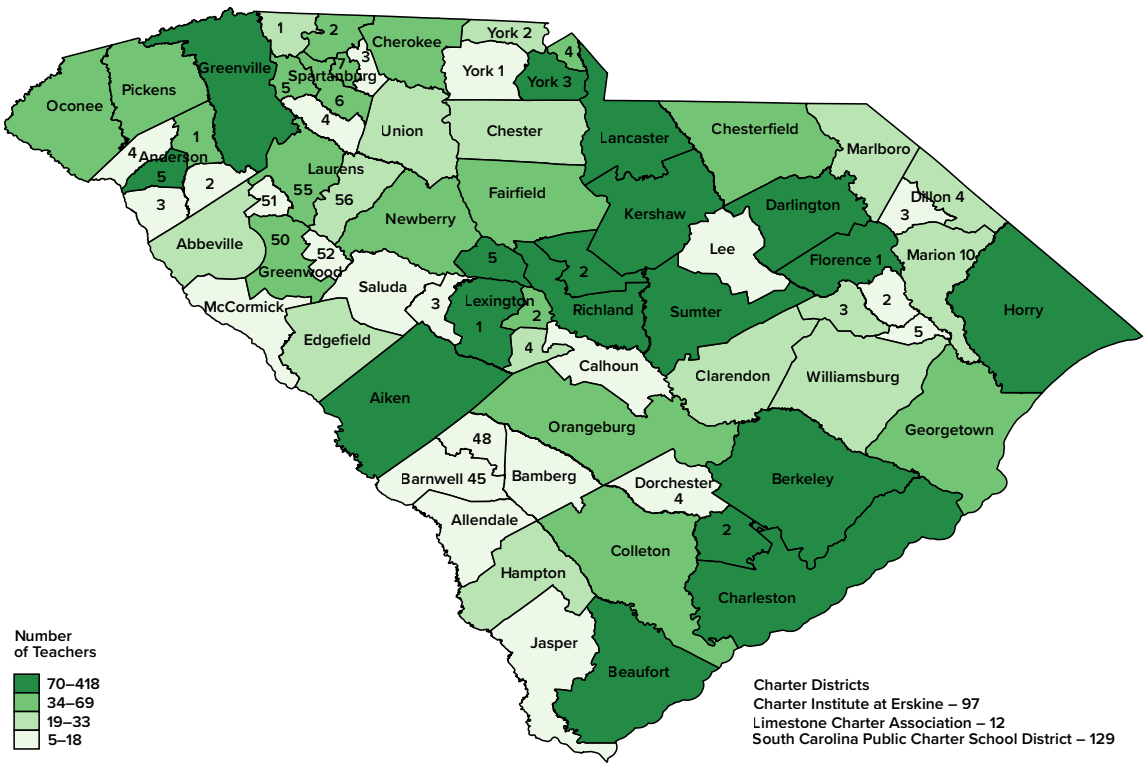
To address Key Question 2, we extended our analysis of the 4,757 alternatively certified teachers from Key Question 1 and examined their distribution across the state.

Geographic Distribution of Alternatively Certified Teachers in 2022–23

In the 2022–23 academic year, alternatively certified teachers were employed by all of South Carolina's 73 traditional public school districts, as well as by the three state charter school districts. Alternatively certified teachers also worked in three nontraditional districts/schools (i.e., Palmetto Unified, South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice, and South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind) and in 14 career and technical centers throughout the state.

Figure 5 shows the distribution of alternatively certified teachers by district across the state. The population of alternatively certified teachers was spread relatively evenly across regions of South Carolina, with the most in the Midlands (1,542 teachers), followed by the Upstate (1,197 teachers), the Lowcountry (991 teachers), and the Pee Dee (805 teachers). Additionally, 238 alternatively certified teachers were employed by charter districts.

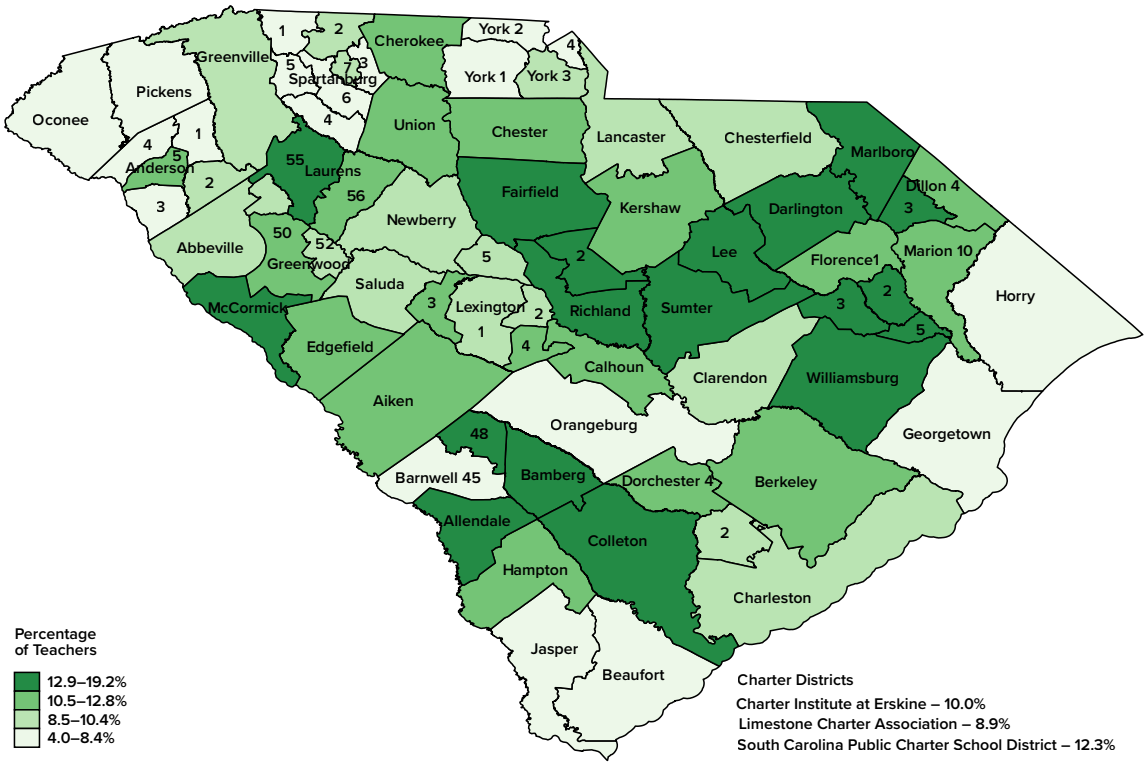
Figure 5. *Number of Alternatively Certified Teachers by School District in 2022–23*



Note. Alternatively certified teachers employed in nontraditional districts or career and technical centers are not pictured on this map.

For each district, we also considered the proportion of alternatively certified teachers employed relative to the total number of teachers (i.e., PK–12 classroom and special education). Figure 6 illustrates the distribution of alternatively certified teachers as a percentage of the overall teacher population within each district. Several districts in the highest quartile (i.e., the top 25% of districts with the highest percentages of alternatively certified teachers) were in each of the state's four regions.

Figure 6. *Percentage of Alternatively Certified Teachers by School District in 2022–23*



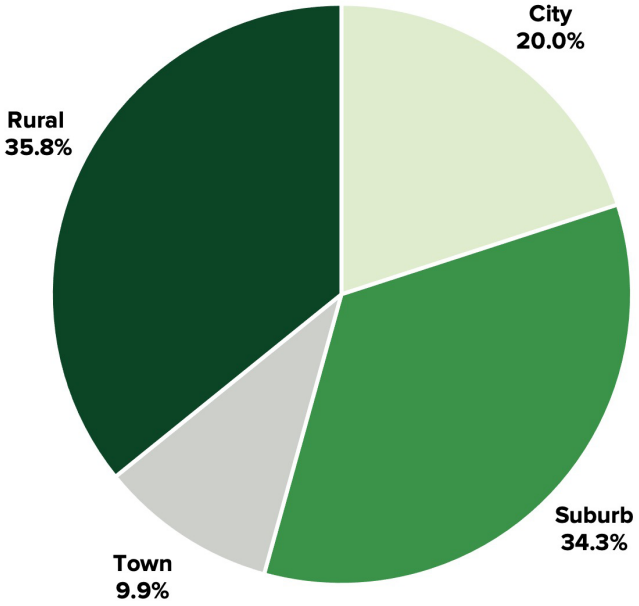
Note. Alternatively certified teachers employed in nontraditional districts or career and technical centers are not pictured on this map.

Categories of Schools Employing Alternatively Certified Teachers in 2022–23

For this key question, we also explored the contexts of the schools where alternatively certified teachers were employed by examining their schools' geographic locale (i.e., city, suburban, town, or rural), poverty level, and organizational level (e.g., elementary).

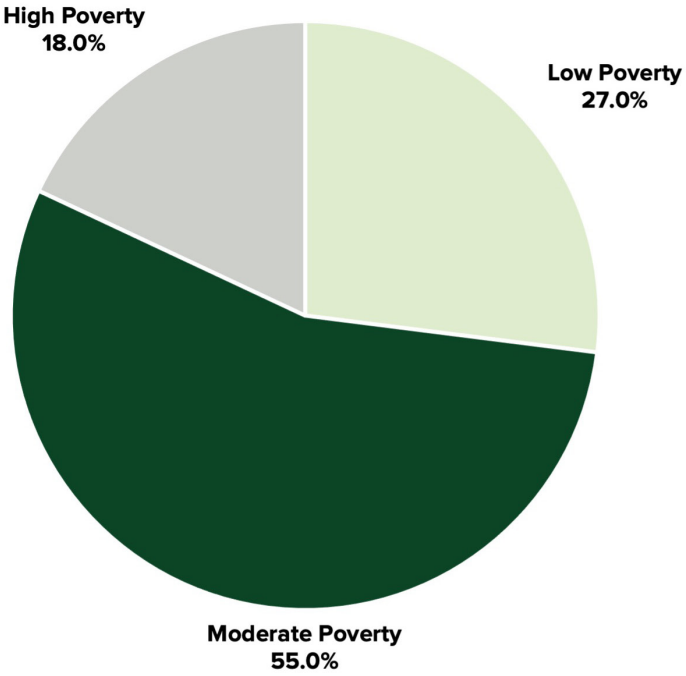
As shown in Figure 7, the distribution of alternatively certified teachers closely reflected the distribution of all teachers in schools across the state. In 2022–23, urban schools comprised 17% of all schools, with 20% of all state-employed alternatively certified teachers working in urban areas. Suburban schools made up 30% of all schools, and 34% of alternatively certified teachers were employed in these settings. Town schools accounted for 12% of all schools, with 10% of alternatively certified teachers in that context. Rural schools represented 41% of all schools and employed 36% of alternatively certified teachers. This similarity in distribution indicates that alternatively certified teachers were proportionally represented across all different school geographic locations, aligning with the overall distribution of South Carolina teachers.

Figure 7. *Percentage of Alternatively Certified Teachers by Geographic Locale in 2022–23*



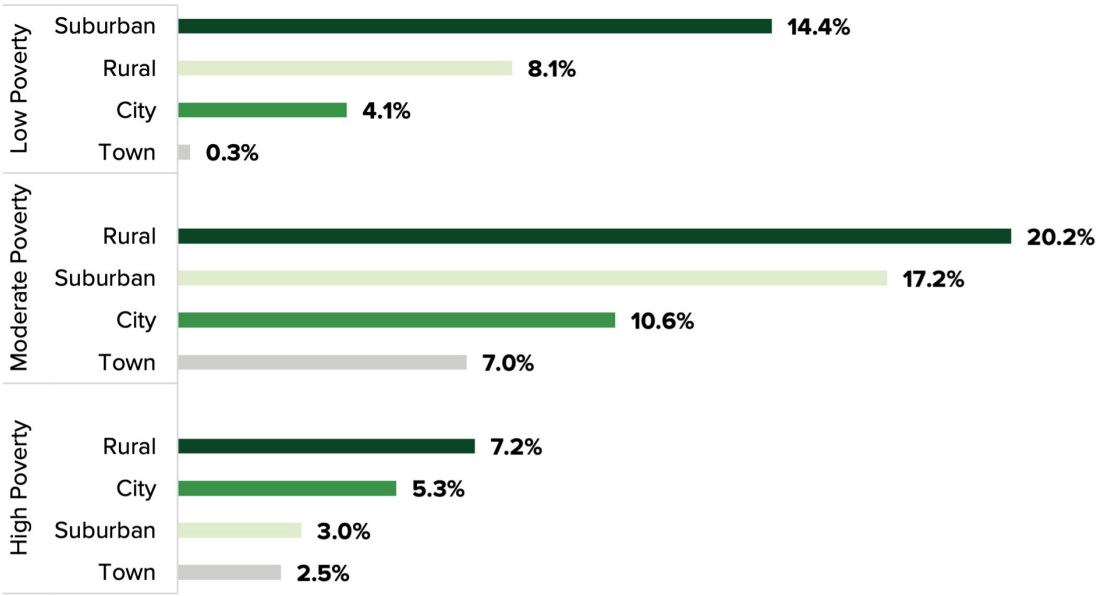
For school poverty level, most alternatively certified teachers worked in moderate- and low-poverty schools, with less than 20% working in high-poverty schools. More specifically, the PIP indices of schools employing alternatively certified teachers varied between 7.6% and 100%, with a mean of 64.2% and a median of 65.9%. Figure 8 shows the distribution of alternatively certified teachers across schools with different poverty levels. Again, this distribution indicates that alternatively certified teachers were proportionally represented across different school poverty levels, aligning with the overall distribution of all teachers (see Starrett et al, 2023).

Figure 8. *Percentage of Alternatively Certified Teachers by Poverty Level in 2022–23*



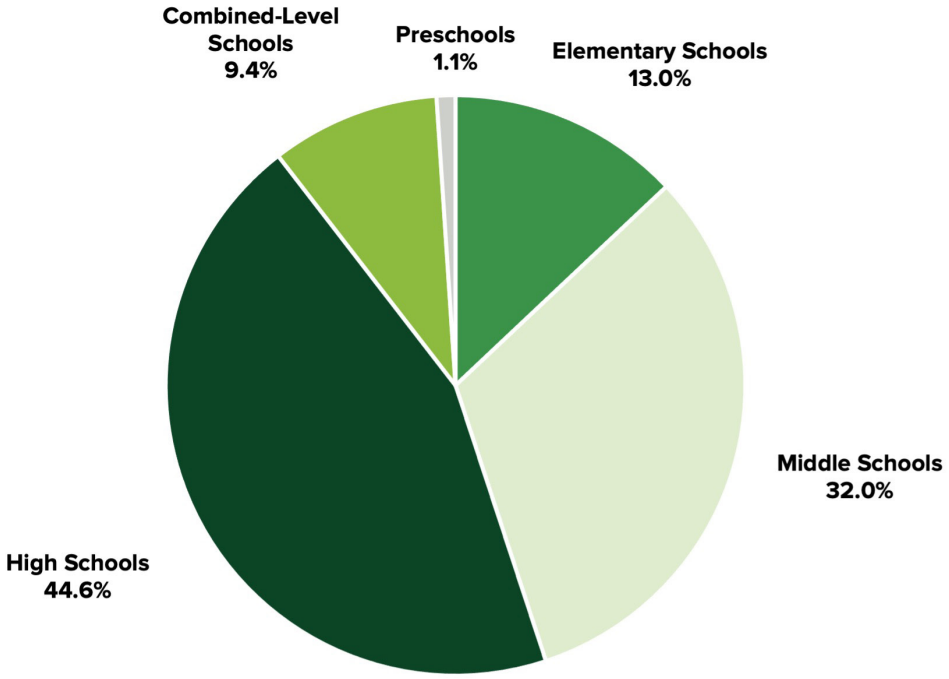
Taking both poverty level and geographic locale into account, the largest percentage of alternatively certified teachers (20.2%) worked in rural schools of moderate poverty, followed by suburban schools of moderate poverty (17.2%). Figure 9 presents a more nuanced distribution of alternatively certified teachers by both poverty level and geographic locale.

Figure 9. *Distribution of Alternatively Certified Teachers by Geographic Locale Across Poverty Levels in 2022–23*



Alternatively certified teachers in South Carolina during the 2022–23 academic year were primarily employed at the secondary level, with about 75% working in either middle or high schools. About 13% taught in elementary schools. The total distribution of alternatively certified teachers based on organizational level is shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10. *Percentage of Alternatively Certified Teachers by Organizational Level in 2022–23*



Longitudinal Trends in Distribution and School-Level Factors for Alternatively Certified Teachers

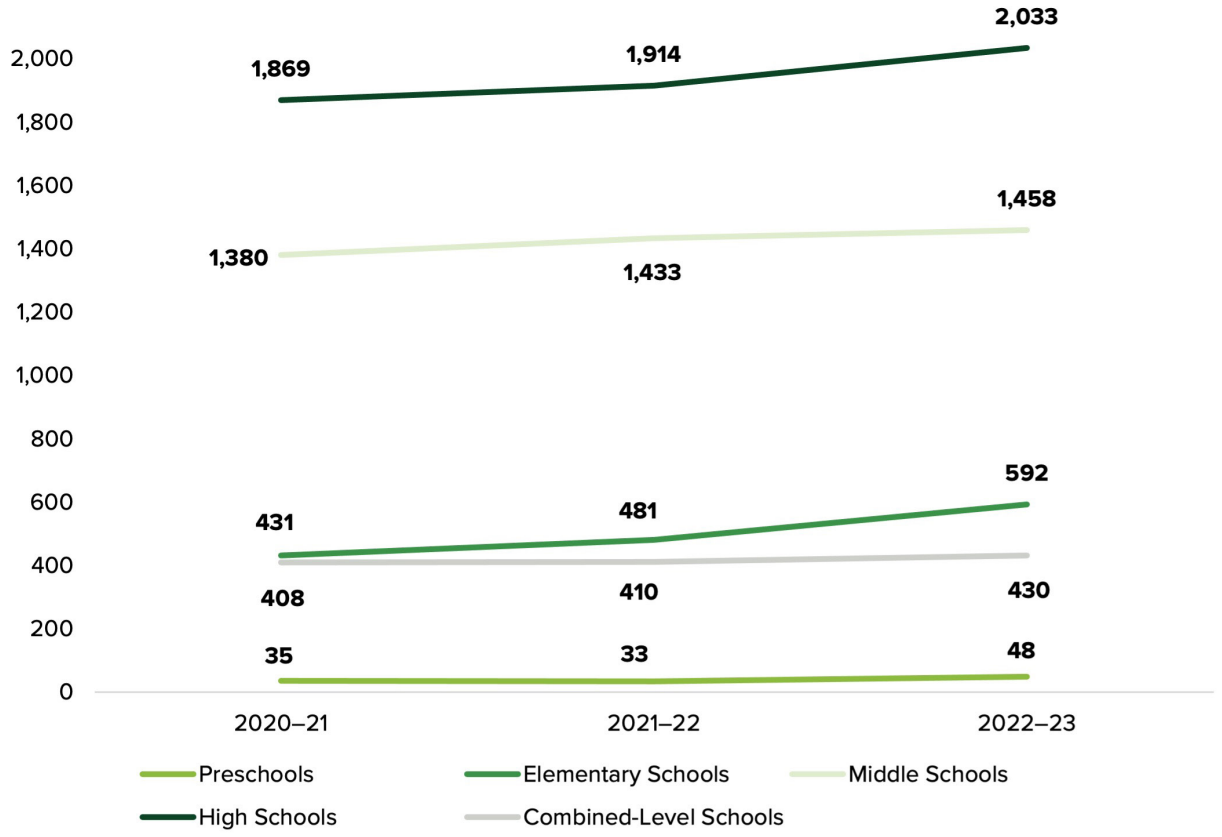
Alternatively certified teachers, on average, made up about 8.0% of the total teaching staff in 2020–21, about 8.4% in 2021–22, and 9.9% in 2022–23.

The distribution of alternatively certified teachers across the four locales of city, suburban, town, and rural schools remained stable over the 3 academic years. Consistently, 35–36% of state-employed alternatively certified teachers worked in rural schools during each academic year, followed by about 33–34% in suburban schools. Approximately 20% of these educators taught in city schools, and 10–11% worked in town schools.

An examination of the data by school poverty level shows that the percentages of alternatively certified teachers working in low- and high-poverty schools decreased slightly from 2020–21 to 2022–23, and the percentage in moderate-poverty contexts increased. Specifically, the percentage of alternatively certified teachers in low-poverty schools decreased by 2.2% across the 3 years, and by 1.6% in high-poverty schools. During that same period, the percentage of alternatively certified teachers in moderate-poverty schools rose by 3.8%.

Across all school organizational levels (Figure 11), there was an increase in the number of employed alternatively certified teachers, as the number of alternatively certified teachers employed in the state has grown each subsequent year. The highest percentage of teachers worked in high school contexts, consistently around 45% over the 3-year period. The percentage of alternatively certified teachers in the state working in middle schools has been the second highest over this span, though the percentage decreased slightly by 1.5%. This dip corresponded with a slight increase in the percentage of alternatively certified teachers working in elementary schools, which increased by 2.6%.

Figure 11. *Longitudinal Comparisons of Alternatively Certified Teachers Across Organizational Levels*



+ KEY QUESTION 3:

How does employing alternatively certified teachers relate to teacher attrition in South Carolina districts?

To address Key Question 3, we examined Pearson correlation coefficients between districts' percentages of employed alternatively certified teachers and their 1-year teacher attrition rates. We similarly examined correlation coefficients between districts' percentages of employed alternatively certified teachers and their 3-year teacher attrition rates. The 3-year rate is important to examine as it is not as susceptible to random fluctuations as the 1-year rate. Correlation values capture the strength of the relationships and range between -1 and 1. A value of 0 indicates no relationship, and larger values (regardless of sign) indicate more robust relationships. We considered values with magnitudes of .30 and higher to reflect a substantive relationship between the teacher attrition rate and the percentage of alternatively certified teachers in a district.

Relationships Between Employing Alternatively Certified Teachers and Teacher Attrition in 2022–23

The correlation between districts' percentages of alternatively certified teachers and districts' 1-year teacher attrition rates in 2022–23 was substantive (.46). The correlation between districts' percentages of alternatively certified teachers and their 3-year attrition rates was also notably higher than the above mentioned threshold (.40). These correlations indicate that districts that employed higher percentages of alternatively certified teachers also had higher attrition rates. However, the exact nature of this relationship is undetermined. The correlations may signify that districts with high attrition rates hired alternatively certified teachers as a strategy to address vacancies. Alternatively, it may indicate that many alternatively certified teachers left their positions quickly, contributing meaningfully to higher attrition rates. Further research, such as comparing the retention rates of traditionally trained and alternatively certified teachers, is needed to identify the phenomena leading to these substantive correlations.

Longitudinal Trends in Relationships Between Employing Alternatively Certified Teachers and Teacher Attrition

Over the 3 academic years from 2020–21 to 2022–23, relationships between districts' teacher attrition rates and percentages of employed alternatively certified teachers were relatively stable. Districts with higher percentages of alternatively certified teachers had higher 1-year and 3-year attrition rates. The strength of the relationship with 3-year attrition rates was relatively high across the 3-year span, ranging between .326 and .487. The strength of the relationship with 1-year attrition rates varied more dramatically, dropping from .311 in 2020–21 to .180 in 2021–22 before increasing to .464 in 2022–23. In the years surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, 1-year attrition rates may have been affected by those unusual circumstances. Continuing to monitor the relationship between the percentage of alternatively certified teachers and attrition rates in the next few years should help clarify the relationship between values. While we may not yet fully understand what this indicates, the substantive relationships between 3-year teacher attrition rates and the percentages of alternatively certified teachers employed by districts are an indicator that districts with higher rates of attrition hired more alternatively certified teachers.

+ CONCLUSIONS

In this report, we have presented a preliminary description of alternatively certified teachers employed in South Carolina. Educators moving into the field through alternative certification programs will likely continue to be significant contributors to the state's workforce, so building upon this initial snapshot will provide valuable information about the teacher pipeline.

The observed correlations between district attrition rates and the percentages of alternatively certified teachers employed in a district may suggest that districts are turning to alternatively certified teachers as one potential response to retention challenges. However, the underlying factors contributing to these correlations remain unclear based on the data used in this analysis. Further investigation is needed to better understand these dynamics and to inform policy and practice more effectively.

The analysis in this report should be viewed in conjunction with other SC TEACHER reports to identify areas that need further analysis. For example, Cartiff et al. (2024) found that the retention rate in elementary schools in the state increased in 2022–23. In this report, we found that the percentage of elementary teachers who were alternatively certified in 2022–23 was higher than in previous years. While these two phenomena may be unrelated, continuing to compare retention rates of traditionally trained and alternatively certified teachers over the next few years may shed more light on any underlying trends. Additionally, comparing traditionally trained teachers' perceptions of working conditions with those of alternatively certified teachers should reveal whether these populations need similar or different resources from their schools. Moving forward, this research likely will have increasing relevance, as alternatively certified teachers are anticipated to continue to comprise a growing proportion of the educator workforce in the state.

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