



Workforce Profile of International Teachers in South Carolina for 2022–23

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RESEARCH TEAM

Angela Starrett, PhD

Brian Cartiff, PhD

Svetlana Dmitrieva, PhD

Ruiqin Gao, 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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IMPORTANT CONTEXT AROUND INTERNATIONAL TEACHERS

International teachers in the US primarily fall into two categories: those on J-1 or J-2 visas under the Exchange Visitor Program and those holding employment visas, such as H-1B, EB-2, or EB-3. J-1 and J-2 visas are aimed at cultural and educational exchange. Those who receive them are authorized under the Fulbright-Hays Act of 1961 to teach for up to 5 years with a short-term international teaching certificate before returning to their home countries. Employment visas (H-1B, EB-2, or EB-3) are for specialty occupations, advanced degree holders, or those filling a labor shortage, respectively. International teachers with this visa type are on paths to permanent residency and begin teaching in South Carolina with an initial teaching certificate. From these two categories, J-1 and J-2 visa holders represent the predominant group of international teachers.

Given that context, this report offers an in-depth examination of educators possessing an international teaching certificate (i.e., teaching under J-1/J-2 visas) in South Carolina, herein referred to as *international teachers*. The analysis delves into the demographics and placement of these teachers, alongside exploring how the employment of international teachers correlates with teacher turnover rates. We acknowledge that the study of this workforce subset may not encompass all international teachers in the state.

+ HIGHLIGHTS

In 2022–23, South Carolina districts employed 1,209 teachers with an international teaching certificate. Analysis revealed that international teachers, primarily from non-White backgrounds, were significantly represented in rural and high-poverty schools. The analysis also showed that districts employing a higher percentage of international teachers experienced greater attrition. This may be a result of districts hiring international teachers to address retention challenges and/or the result of international teachers' temporary status. These findings underscore the need for further research to fully understand the international teacher program's impact on teacher workforce stability, in addition to cultural exchange and educational outcomes.

Main Findings Around the International Teacher Workforce for 2022–23

- International teachers were employed in 46 of South Carolina's 73 traditional public school districts and the three charter school districts, representing 65% of these districts. The lowest number of international teachers was hired in the Upstate region.
- On average, international teachers had approximately 11 years of teaching experience. Almost 50% taught in one of four areas: mathematics (13.5%), elementary education (12.9%), special education (12.0%), and Spanish (10.8%).
- More than 1 in 3 international teachers taught in high schools. However, middle schools employed an increasing percentage.
- In the academic years from 2020–21 to 2022–23, approximately 90% of international teachers taught in moderate- or high-poverty schools, compared to about 70% of all teachers in the state.
- About 60% of international teachers worked in nonmetropolitan schools (i.e., town or rural locations), compared to about 45% of all teachers in the state.
- The 3-year teacher attrition rate for South Carolina districts was strongly related to the percentage of international teachers employed by districts.

+ INTRODUCTION

In recent years, globalization has profoundly influenced the educational landscape, highlighting the importance of incorporating international perspectives into the classroom (Lam, 2006; Nieto, 2014). This trend has led educational institutions across the United States and in South Carolina to adopt innovative strategies addressing the nuanced challenge of teacher shortages, exacerbated by factors like specialized teaching needs and geographic disparities. Among these strategies, employment of international teachers through the United States' international program (BridgeUSA), established by the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 (the Fulbright-Hays Act), stands out as a key initiative aimed at enriching students' educational experiences through cultural diversity and pedagogical variety.

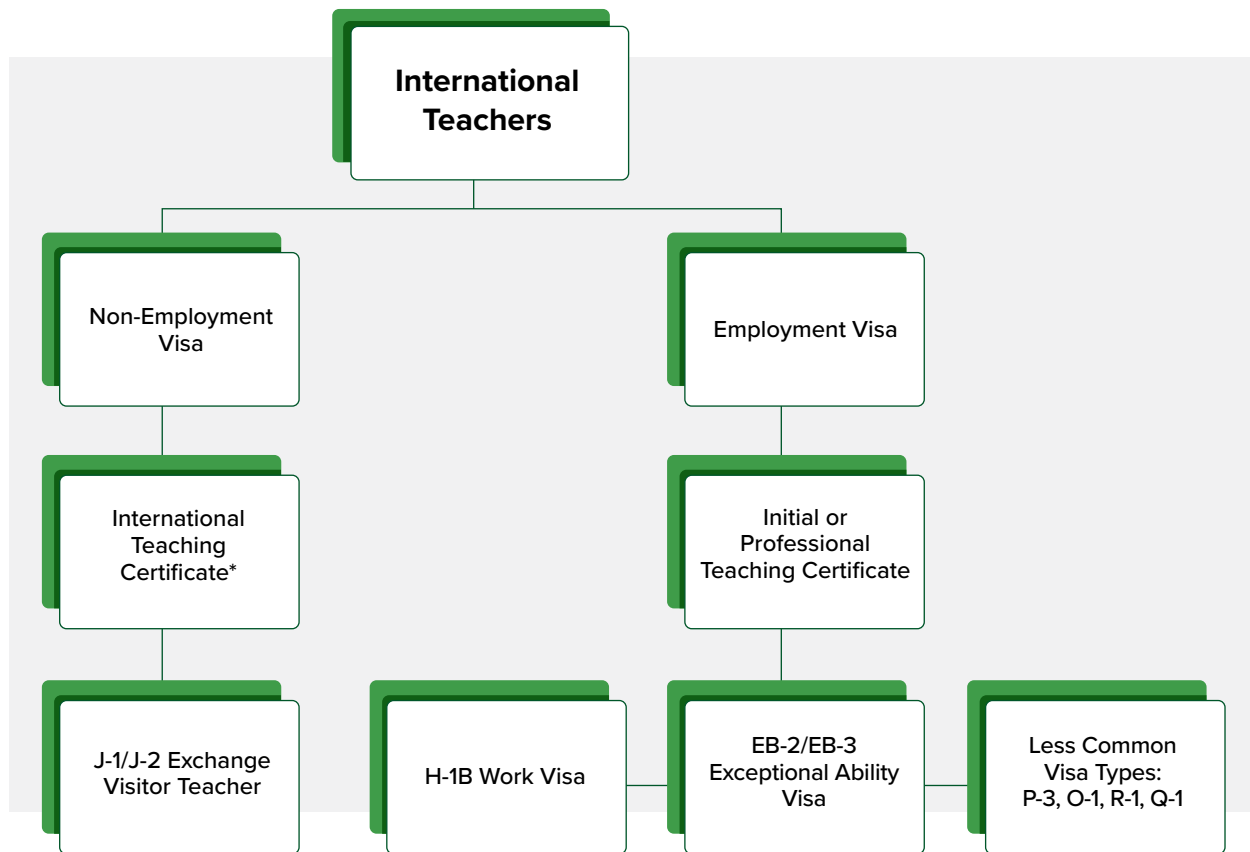
Teachers in the Exchange Visitor Program are usually employed on J-1 visas (Jung, 2023). This program, set up by the United States Department of State, allows foreign nationals to come to the US to study, conduct research, receive training, or teach (US Department of State, n.d.). As referenced on the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) website, the program has goals of “broadening the cultural understanding between countries and fostering the exchange of educational ideas, methods, and practices” (2024a). International teachers are one specific target group of the program. Spouses of those holding J-1 visas can apply for a J-2 visa and may also work as teachers. J-1 and J-2 visa holders can teach in the US for 3 years, with a possibility of a 2-year extension, before returning to their home country.



Alternatively, other international teachers may possess an employment visa. Most international educators who go this route have an H-1B visa (Bartlett, 2014), which is primarily for specialty occupation workers, has a base period of 3 years, and can be extended to 6 years (Jung, 2023). A smaller proportion of international teachers typically hold EB-2 or EB-3 visas (Teachers Council, 2022). An EB-2 visa requires a teacher to either have an advanced degree or show extraordinary abilities (US Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2022). EB-3 educators must address a labor shortage in an area and possess at least a bachelor's degree (US Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2022).

From both EB-2 and EB-3 visa statuses, there are established pathways to gaining a green card, granting some international teachers permanent residence (US Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2022). Other less common types of employment visas held by international teachers include P-3, O-1, R-3, and Q-1 visas. As noted in Figure 1, international teachers on an employment visa begin teaching in South Carolina with an initial teaching certificate, not the short-term international teaching certificate used for teachers on J-1 and J-2 visas. **This report focuses only on international teachers holding an international teaching certificate in South Carolina.**

Figure 1. Types of International Teachers



*This subset is the focus of this report, referenced throughout as *international teachers*.



From 2017 to 2021, South Carolina was the second most active state employing educators with international teaching certificates, along with North Carolina (1st), California (3rd), Texas (4th), and Arizona (5th) (US Department of State, n.d.). To be eligible, educators must meet teaching qualifications in their home country, have at least 2 years of teaching experience, and have a degree equivalent to at least a bachelor's degree in the United States (US Department of State, n.d.). They also need to meet the standards in the state where they will teach and possess sufficient English language proficiency (US Department of State, n.d.). At the national level, from 2018–22, the highest number of teachers enrolling in this program came from China, Colombia, France, India, Jamaica, Mexico, the Philippines, and Spain (US Department of State, n.d.).

In South Carolina, the majority of international teachers are sponsored by one of eight private companies with a no-objection status (SCDE, 2024c). These companies collaborate with districts throughout the state to place international teachers from a variety of countries (SCDE, 2024c). Sponsors work with districts to evaluate and select candidates (SCDE, 2024a, 2024c). They then assist selected teachers in obtaining J-1 (or J-2) visas. Additionally, the SCDE has a memorandum of understanding with five countries—France, Germany, Spain (SCDE, 2024a), China, and India (SCDE, 2024b)—and can act as an international program sponsor for visiting teachers from those nations (SCDE, 2024a).



Engagement of international educators through the Exchange Visitor Program can serve to address the critical need for qualified teachers in hard-to-staff areas.

The services these teachers offer supplement more than just numerical deficits; they provide students with quality educational experiences and opportunities to grow as informed global citizens. It is essential to acknowledge the challenges faced by districts in recruiting and retaining teachers and to recognize the employment of international educators as a multifaceted solution, addressing vacancies and expanding cultural experiences. Additionally, it is important to consider the complexities and resources involved in the valuable, yet temporary measure of hiring international educators to fill vacancies.



KEY QUESTIONS

To gain a more detailed and nuanced understanding of international teachers working in South Carolina public schools, we looked at both 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 international teachers working in South Carolina?
2. What does the distribution of international teachers look like across the state? How does their placement vary across geographic locale, school poverty level, and school organizational level?
3. How does employing international teachers relate to teacher attrition in South Carolina districts?

DATA, VARIABLES, AND ANALYSES

The findings presented in this report are based on the analysis of 1,209 teachers with an international certificate 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. District- and school-level data were obtained from 2022–23 South Carolina School Report Cards, except for school locale, 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, years of experience, and certification area. School-level data included district, organizational level (i.e., elementary, middle, high), poverty level, and geographic locale (i.e., urban, suburban, town, 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 is based on the percentage of pupils-in-poverty (PIP) within a school. This continuous variable was used to construct a three-level categorical variable. Of all the public schools in the state in 2022–23, those in the highest quartile (i.e., top 25%) of PIP were classified as high poverty. 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 classified 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 largely descriptive in nature. Correlation coefficients were calculated to examine relationships between district-level teacher attrition and the percentage of international teachers in the district. 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 international educators. The same three sources of data and variables were used for longitudinal analyses.



Our Key Questions



+ KEY QUESTION 1

What are the demographics of international teachers working in South Carolina?

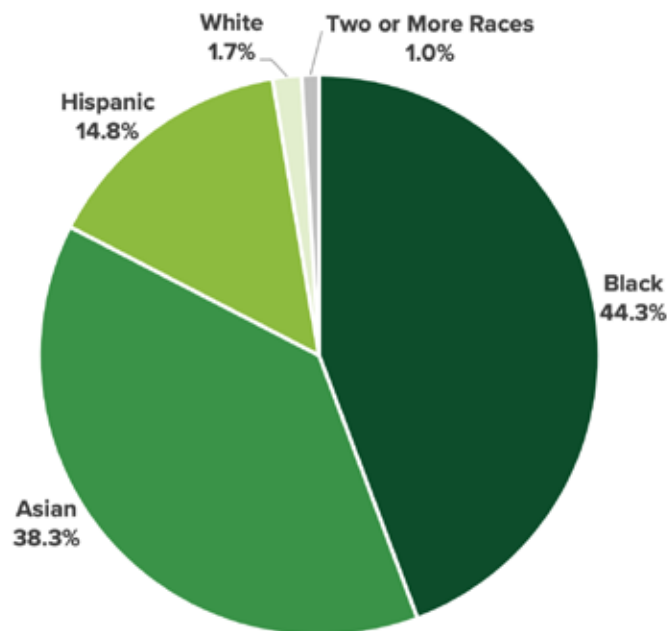
To address Key Question 1 and Key Question 2, we examined the profiles of all South Carolina teachers holding an international teaching certificate and a J-1 or J-2 visa, working as PK–12 classroom teachers or special education teachers (i.e., itinerant, resource, and those working in self-contained classrooms). There were 1,209 teachers meeting these criteria during the 2022–23 academic year. Two of these international teachers simultaneously held positions at two different schools within the same district, and seven worked at two or three schools located in adjacent districts. Thus, the total number of positions occupied by international teachers amounted to 1,219.

Demographics of International Teachers in 2022–23

In South Carolina public schools from 2022–23, the teaching experience of international teachers varied widely, ranging from a minimum of 1 year to as many as 35 years. The average level of teaching experience was approximately 11 years.

In South Carolina, international teachers were also predominantly female (73%) and racially diverse. Around 45% of international teachers identified as Black, about 38% identified as Asian, and slightly less than 15% identified as Hispanic (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Racial Demographics of International Teachers in 2022–23



International teachers in South Carolina were certified in 38 different subject areas. The largest percentage of teachers held certifications in mathematics (13.5%), elementary education (12.9%), special education (12.0%), and Spanish (10.8%). About 35% of teachers held certificates in more than one subject area. The numbers and percentages of international teachers certified in different areas are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number and Percentage of International Teachers by Subject Area Certification in 2022–23

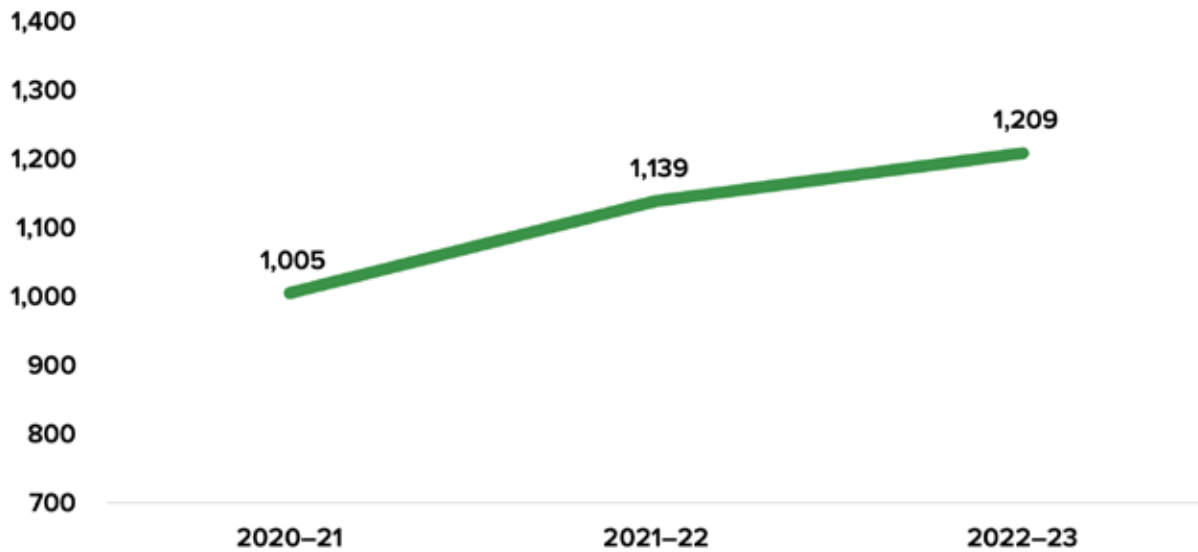
Subject area	Number	Percent
Mathematics	227	13.5%
Elementary education	217	12.9%
Special education	201	12.0%
Spanish	182	10.8%
Middle-level mathematics	139	8.3%
English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)	135	8.0%
Middle-level science	99	5.9%
English	77	4.6%
Biology	57	3.4%
Middle-level language arts	55	3.3%
Early childhood	52	3.1%
French	51	3.0%
Science	47	2.8%
Chemistry	35	2.1%
Social studies	22	1.3%
Middle-level social studies	18	1.1%
Physical education	15	0.9%
Physics	10	0.6%
Art	8	0.5%
Chinese	8	0.5%
History	5	0.3%
Music	4	0.2%
Agriculture	3	0.2%
Computer science	3	0.2%
Environmental science	2	0.1%
German	2	0.1%
Economics	1	0.1%
Family and consumer science	1	0.1%
Industrial technology education	1	0.1%
Latin	1	0.1%
Music education (choral)	1	0.1%
Literacy	1	0.1%
Business and marketing	1	0.1%
Total	1,681	100.0%

Note. Some teachers hold certifications in multiple subject areas. For this reason, the total in the table exceeds the 1,209 teachers making up the sample.

Longitudinal Trends in Demographics of International Teachers

The number of international teachers working in the state for the 3 most recent academic years is shown in Figure 3. From the 2020–21 to the 2021–22 academic year, that number increased by approximately 13%. It increased again by 6% from 2021–22 to 2022–23. Long-term trends cannot be clearly established at this time since employment numbers could have been affected by travel restrictions during the pandemic.

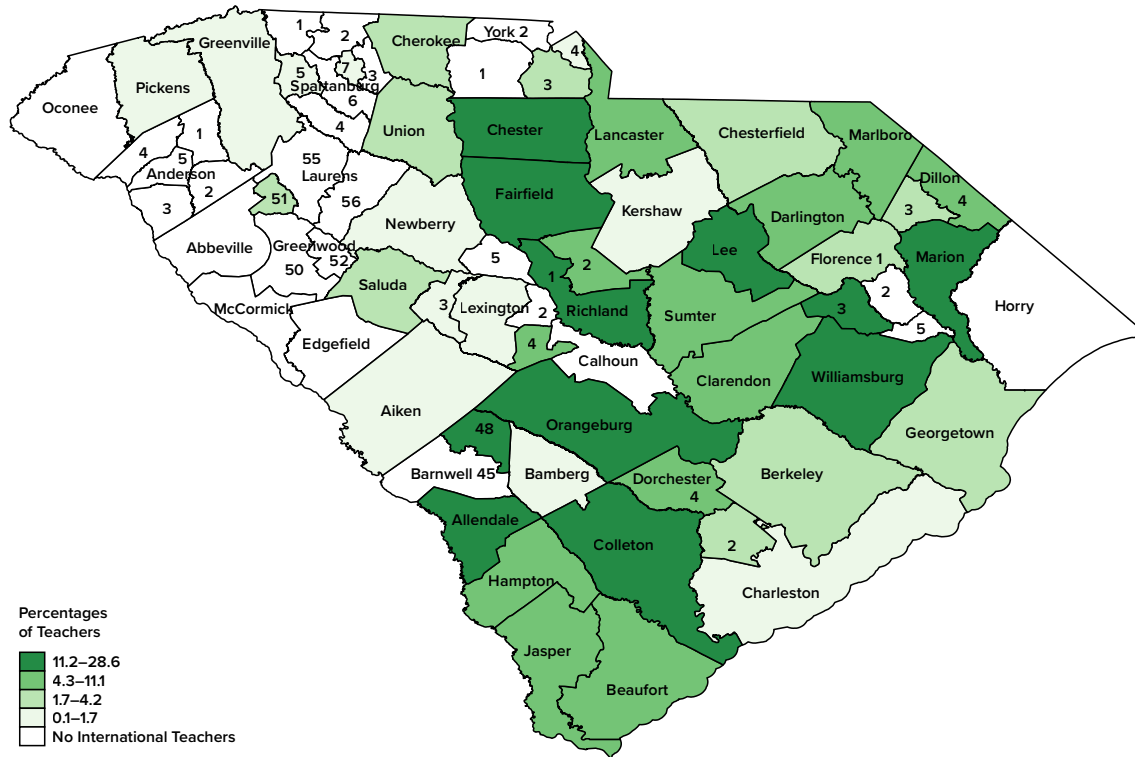
Figure 3. *Number of International Teachers by Academic Year*



Over the 3-year period in question, the composition of international teachers by gender and race remained relatively stable. Each year, about 97% of international educators were non-White. Black teachers had the most representation at 43–44%, followed by Asian teachers at 38%, and Hispanic teachers at 14–16%. The majority of international teachers were female, with their proportion fluctuating slightly between 73% and 76%.

For each district, we also considered the proportion of international teachers employed relative to the total number of teachers (i.e., PK–12 classroom and special education). Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of international teachers as a percentage of the overall teacher population within each district. Similar to Figure 4, this distribution shows that higher percentages of international teachers worked in the Pee Dee, Lowcountry, and Midlands regions.

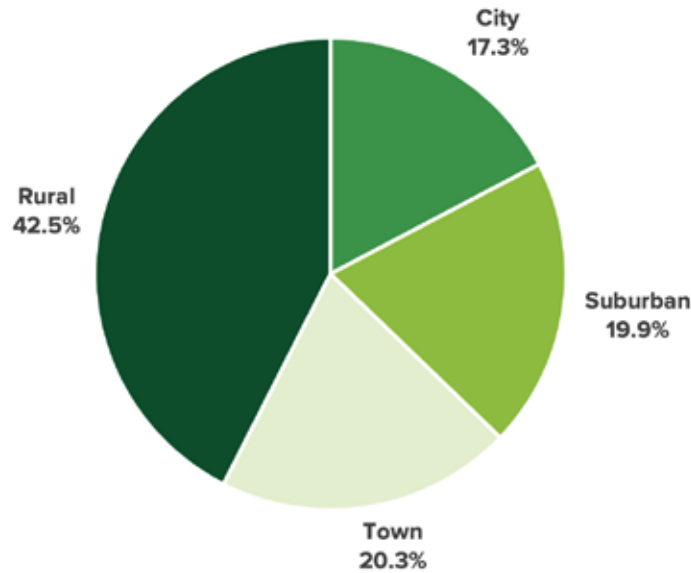
Figure 5. Percentage of International Teachers by School District in 2022–23



Types of Schools Employing International Teachers in 2022–23

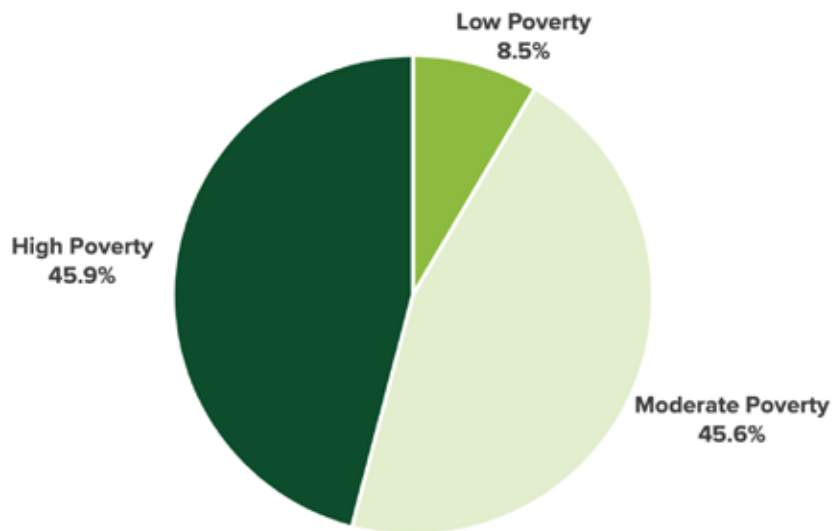
As part of this key question, we also explored the geographic locale (i.e., city, suburban, town, or rural), poverty level, and organizational level of schools employing international teachers. For geographic locale, nearly 2 in 3 international teachers were employed in nonmetropolitan schools (i.e., rural or town), with about 43% in rural locations and 20% in towns (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. *Percentage of International Teachers by Geographic Locale in 2022–23*



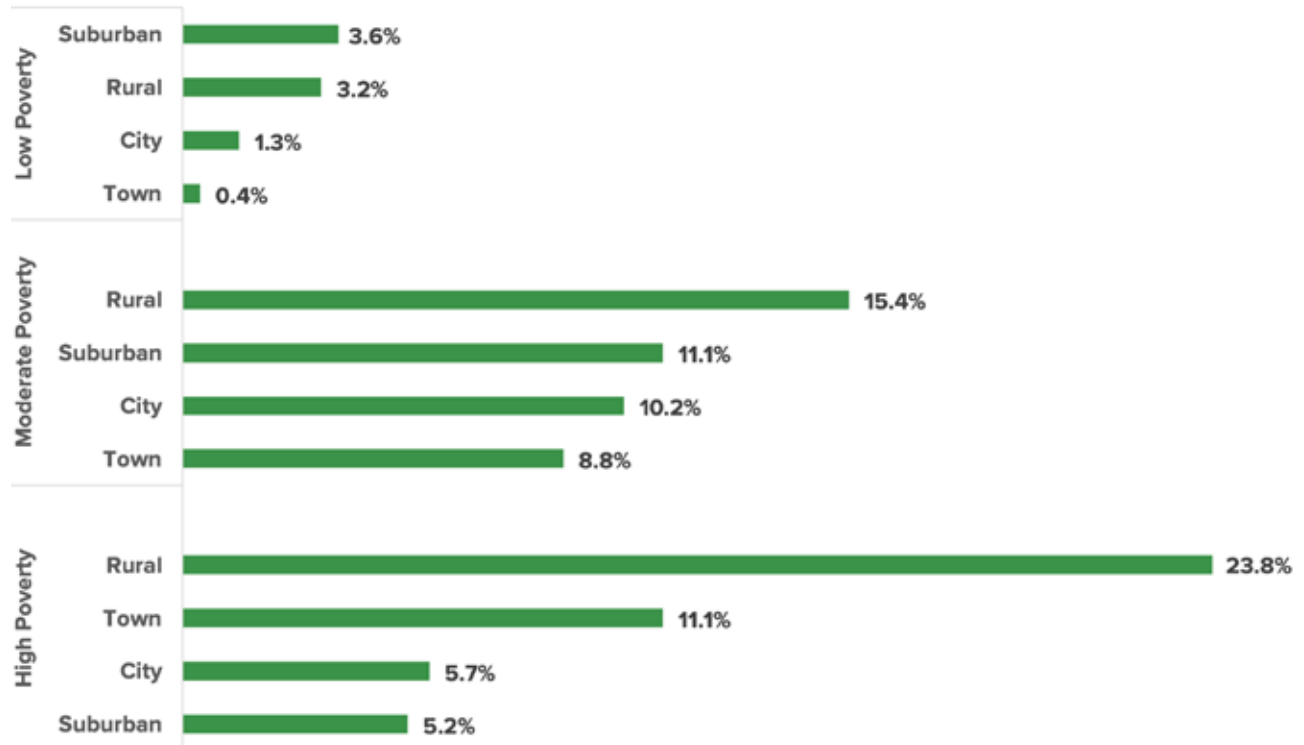
Regarding school poverty level, a majority of international teachers worked in moderate- and high-poverty schools, with less than 9% working in low-poverty schools. More specifically, the PIP indices of schools employing international teachers varied between 17% and 100%, with a mean of 77% and a median of 82%. Figure 7 shows the distribution of international teachers across schools with different levels of poverty.

Figure 7. *Percentage of International Teachers by Poverty Level in 2022–23*



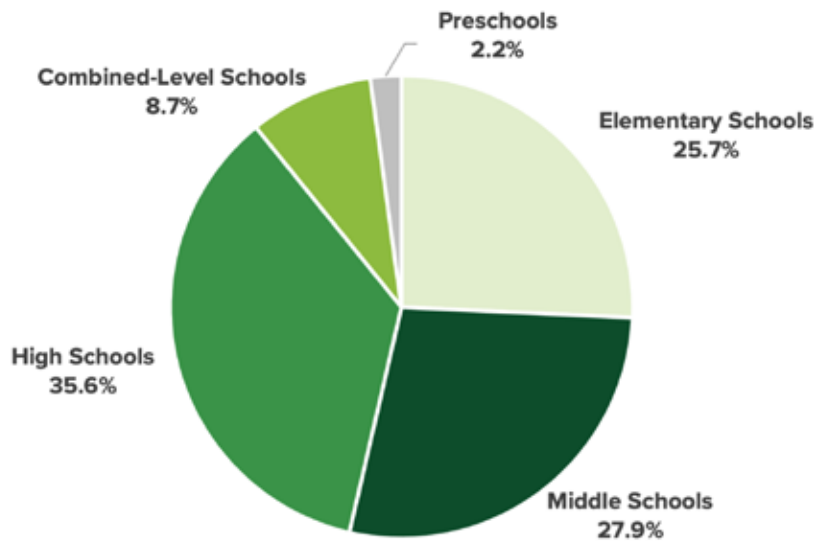
Taking both poverty level and geographic locale into account, the largest number of international teachers (23%) worked in high-poverty rural schools, followed by moderate-poverty rural schools (15%). Figure 8 presents a more nuanced distribution of international teachers by both school poverty level and geographic locale.

Figure 8. *Distribution of International Teachers by Geographic Locale Across Poverty Levels in 2022–23*



International teachers in South Carolina during the 2022–23 academic year were relatively evenly spread over the three main organizational levels (i.e., elementary, middle, and high schools), as shown in Figure 9. About 36% worked in high schools, followed by about 28% in middle schools and about 26% in elementary schools. The remaining teachers worked either in preschools (2%) or schools with combined levels (9%). Of those employed in K–12 contexts, almost 14% worked as special education teachers either in a self-contained classroom or as special education resource teachers.

Figure 9. *Percentage of International Teachers by Organizational Level in 2022–23*



Note. Combined-level schools are comprised of several school organizational levels, such as middle and high school grade levels; elementary and middle school grade levels; or elementary, middle, and high school grade levels.

Longitudinal Trends in Distribution and School-Level Factors for International Teachers

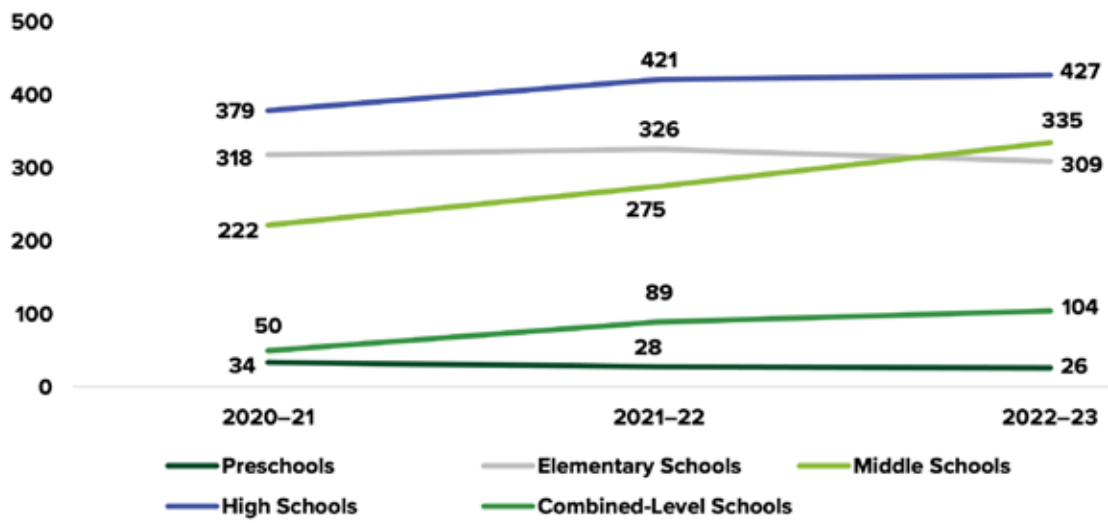
During the 3 most recent academic years, 23 South Carolina school districts did not hire international teachers. In districts that did, international teachers, on average, made up about 5.2% of the total teaching staff in 2020–21, about 5.8% in 2021–22, and about 6.2% in 2022–23.

The distribution of international teachers across the four locales of city, suburban, town, and rural schools has remained stable over the past 3 academic years. Consistently, during each academic year, about 42–43% of international teachers worked in rural schools, followed by about 20–21% in town schools, approximately 19% in suburban schools, and around 17% in city schools.

A 3-year examination of data by school poverty level shows that the gap between the number of international teachers working in high-poverty and moderate-poverty schools has been narrowing. In 2020–21, 55% of international teachers in the state worked in high-poverty schools and 36% in moderate-poverty schools. However, by the 2022–23 academic year, these percentages were almost equal (see Figure 7). This trend aside, the percentage of international teachers working at either high- or moderate-poverty schools has stayed the same (around 90%).

Across school organizational levels (see Figure 10), there is an observable increase in the percentage of international teachers working in middle schools. This percentage has grown from 22% in 2020–21 to almost 28% in 2022–23. At the same time, the percentages of international teachers working in preschools, elementary schools, and high schools have decreased moderately. During each academic year, the percentage of teachers working in high schools was the highest.

Figure 10. Longitudinal Comparison of International Teachers Across Organizational Levels



Note. Combined-level schools are comprised of several school organizational levels, such as middle and high school grade levels; elementary and middle school grade levels; or elementary, middle, and high school grade levels.

+ KEY QUESTION 3

How does employing international teachers relate to teacher attrition for South Carolina schools?

To address Key Question 3, we examined Pearson correlation coefficients between each district's percent of international teachers employed and the 1-year teacher attrition rate. We similarly examined correlation coefficients between each district's percent of international teachers employed and the 3-year teacher attrition rate, as 3-year rates are not as susceptible to random fluctuations. 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 stronger relationships. We considered values with magnitudes of .30 and higher to reflect a substantive relationship between the teacher attrition rate and the percentage of international teachers in a district.

Relationships Between Employing International Teachers and Teacher Attrition in 2022–23

Both the correlation between the percentage of international teachers and a 1-year attrition rate and the correlation between the percentage of international teachers and a 3-year attrition rate showed important relationships. The correlation with a 3-year attrition rate was stronger (.60) than the correlation with a 1-year attrition rate (.38). Yet, both values show that districts with higher percentages of international teachers have higher attrition rates.

Despite this evidence, the exact meaning of these relationships is not immediately clear. Districts experiencing higher attrition rates may be hiring international teachers to address vacancies. It may also be the case that districts that prioritize hiring international teachers do so more frequently than others, leading to higher attrition rates due to the temporary nature of international teachers' stays.

Longitudinal Trends in Relationships Between Employing International Teachers and Teacher Attrition

Over the last 3 academic years, the relationships between districts' teacher attrition rates and their percentage of employed international teachers have shown stability. Districts with higher percentages of international teachers had higher 1-year and 3-year attrition rates. The strength of the relationship with 3-year attrition rates has been relatively high and stable across the past 3 academic years, ranging between .60 and .64. The strength of the relationship with 1-year attrition rates was stable for the 2020–21 and 2021–22 academic years, at .49 and .50, respectively. However, it decreased slightly to .38 in 2022–23. Regardless of school year, these correlations show substantive relationships between teacher attrition rates and the percentage of international teachers employed by districts. Again, there may be multiple reasons for these correlations.

+ CONCLUSION

In this report, we have created an initial picture of international teachers working in South Carolina. Continuing to develop this profile will eventually provide district and state education leaders with valuable information regarding international teacher employment. As a preliminary snapshot, this report indicates notable correlations between district attrition rates and the percentage of teachers employed with an international teaching certificate. This finding may support the notion that schools experiencing greater teacher retention issues are hiring international teachers as one strategy to fill vacancies. On the other hand, attrition may be a product of the limited time (i.e., 3 years) teachers with a J-1 (or J-2) visa can stay in the United States. Schools employing more teachers with an international teaching certificate would likely have higher attrition rates in part because those teachers must leave the school (and the country) at the end of their allowed time.

The information in this report can be used alongside other SC TEACHER reports and other data sources to clarify important issues. For example, Cartiff et al. (2024) found that middle school retention rates in the state have continued to decrease, whereas high school and elementary school retention rates rebounded in 2022–23. In this report, we found that, while percentages of international teachers in elementary and high schools are on a downward trend, the percentage in middle schools continues to increase. This might indicate that middle schools are hiring some international teachers as a strategy to address vacancies.

Additionally, moderate- and high-poverty schools continue to have higher attrition rates than low-poverty schools (Cartiff et al., 2024), and they also collectively employ higher percentages of international educators. This again could indicate that schools facing greater retention challenges may be employing international teachers more from a general need for qualified teachers than as a way to participate in cultural exchange.

With such complex and nuanced situations, further research and analysis are needed before more definitive conclusions can be drawn. Continuing to create a more complete profile of international teachers in South Carolina, as well as international teachers on other types of visas, will allow for more sophisticated investigations to inform policies and practices.

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EDUCATOR WORKFORCE PROFILE

