# Rural Recruitment Initiative Funds Evaluation 2024-25

SC EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

*Reporting facts. Measuring change. Promoting progress.*

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# Acknowledgments

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## Appendices:

## The study was focused on the following questions:

1. How did districts utilize the Rural Recruitment Initiative (RRI) funds in 2024-25?

2. For selected incentives, what are the return on investments (ROI) for each incentive, the cost per hire per teacher and trends over time?

## History of the South Carolina Rural Recruitment in Education Initiative

South Carolina's rural regions have long struggled to fill teaching positions with adequately trained and certified educators. Challenges unique to these areas—such as limited access to resources, geographic isolation, and economic constraints—have contributed to persistent staffing gaps, directly impacting the quality of education students receive. The Rural Recruitment in Education Initiative serves as a strategic response to these challenges, making substantial investments in targeted strategies that support community growth and help ensure equitable educational opportunities for students in rural districts. By implementing targeted recruitment and retention strategies and offering incentives, the program aims to strengthen education in rural areas and improve long-term student outcomes.

Governor Nikki Haley's Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2015-16 recommended the establishment of a Rural Teacher Recruiting Initiative with an initial allocation of $1.5 million from Education Improvement Act (EIA) revenues. This funding was intended to address the critical need for recruiting and retaining educators in areas facing high teacher turnover. Governor Haley's budget emphasized strengthening talent retention in regions of the state with significant teacher shortages.

The fiscal year 2015-16 Appropriations Act contained Proviso 1A.73 (Appendix A) which established the Rural Teacher Recruiting Initiative (RRI). In 2015, the Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention and Advancement (CERRA) was authorized to implement and administer incentives with the allocated $1.5 million in EIA funding. The initiative also allows funds appropriated for the program to carry forward into subsequent fiscal years to maintain support and continuity.

Prior to making initial recommendations on incentives, CERRA met with staff from the Education Oversight Committee (EOC), the Governor's Office, Senate Education committee staff, and House Education committee staff to review potential strategies to be offered as incentives. In addition, CERRA met with superintendents and other district staff to gain input. In collaboration with the SC Department of Education and the EOC, CERRA developed a set of five core incentives aimed at attracting and retaining teachers. Recognizing that recruiting and retaining qualified educators has historically posed significant challenges in these communities, this initiative continues to focus on creating and promoting incentives which bring skilled teachers to areas that need them most.

## The original initiative's five core incentives included:

1. **Homegrown Teacher Initiative:** Offered high school graduates from eligible districts four years of subsidized tuition at any public college or university within the state, in exchange for a commitment to teach in their home district or another eligible district for a minimum of two years.
2. **Enhanced Student Loan Repayment:** Provided eligible teachers up to $7,500 per year in direct student loan repayment for each year of teaching in a qualifying district, for a maximum of five years.
3. **Rural Educator Salary Supplement:** Offered educators with less than five years of experience a stipend to increase their salary to align with five additional years of experience, based on the district's salary schedule. The supplement could be renewed up to the ten-year experience level.
4. **Graduate Degrees for Career Educators:** Provided educators with five to ten years of teaching experience with two years of tuition support for a graduate degree at a public college or university within the state, in return for a two-year teaching commitment in a qualifying district.
5. **Teaching Mentors:** Supported experienced teachers to serve as mentors, providing mentoring stipends of $5,000 for their service. These mentors offer guidance and support to newer teachers in eligible districts to foster retention.

## RRI Program Timeline

### FY 2015-16

*SC Governor Nikki Haley recommends the establishment of a **Rural Recruitment Initiative** in her Executive Budget.*

*SC General Assembly allocates **$1.5 million** of EIA revenues to RRI to address the critical need to recruit and retain teachers in SC school districts experiencing greater than 12% average teacher turnover. Five core incentives were established.*

### FY 2016-17

*CERRA issues **first report on the RRI program** on January 15, 2016.*

### FY 2017-18

*The development of a **loan forgiveness program** was added as an incentive. The program's purpose is to encourage classroom teachers to seek and become employed in one of the rural incentive districts. Eligible teachers may apply for up to $5,000 for up to seven years.*

*CERRA, in collaboration with other agencies, develops additional incentives for eligible districts.*

### FY 2019-20

***School district eligibility** was further revised to exclude the 15 wealthiest school districts based on the index of taxpaying ability.*

### FY 2022-23

*Budget proviso adopted requiring a **teacher recruitment and retention task force** be convened to develop strategies. RRI incentives addressed in final report.*

### FY 2024-25

*RRI budget proviso revised to require EOC to evaluate the impact of RRI incentives by Dec. 15, 2024.*

### FY 2025-26

*RRI budget proviso revised to require EOC to evaluate the impact of RRI incentives by June 30, 2026*

### FY 2026-27

*Based on budget amendments in the House and Senate budgets, revisions to RRI proviso include designating SC TEACHER as the new authority of the RRI initiative.*

## 2023 Teacher Recruitment and Retention Task Force

Pursuant to Proviso 1.114 in the 2022-23 Appropriation Act, a group of educators and stakeholders were convened to develop strategies on teacher recruitment and retention in South Carolina. The report[1] recommended increased coordination at the school, district, and state levels. Recommendations from the report related to incentives for districts to use for recruitment and retention to include:

- Critical needs stipends should be a strategy to recruit and retain teachers
- Schools should support nurses, counselors, media specialists, speech-language therapists, and psychologists
- Teacher loan forgiveness should be expanded
- Grow-your-own programs should be implemented by districts
- Teacher mentoring and induction should be increased from one to three years
- ProTeam and Teacher Cadet programs, administered by CERRA, should be expanded

1 SC Department of Education. Teacher Recruitment and Retention Task Force Recommendations. https://ed.sc.gov/newsroom/teacher-recruitment-and-retention-task-force-recommendations/

## Rural Recruitment Initiative Incentives

Districts eligible for RRI funds for 2024-25 are listed in Table A. These districts are not in the top 15 districts as listed on the most recent index of taxpaying ability (Appendix C) and have an average five year teacher turnover greater than 11%. Districts eligible for RRI funds for 2025-26 are listed in Appendix D as reported by the district's five most recent district report card.

*Table A: Eligible School Districts Rural Recruitment Initiative 2024-25[2]*

| Eligible School Districts Rural Recruitment Initiative Funds 2024-25[2] | |
|---|---|
| Abbeville | Jasper |
| Allendale | Kershaw |
| Anderson 2 | Lancaster |
| Anderson 3 | Laurens 55 |
| Anderson 4 | Laurens 56 |
| Anderson 5 | Lee |
| Bamberg | Lexington 2 |
| Barnwell | Lexington 3 |
| Calhoun | Lexington 4 |
| Chester | Marion |
| Clarendon | Marlboro |
| Colleton | McCormick |
| Darlington | Newberry |
| Dillon 3 | Orangeburg |
| Dillon 4 | Saluda |
| Dorchester 4 | Spartanburg 2 |
| Edgefield | Spartanburg 3 |
| Fairfield | Spartanburg 7 |
| Florence 3 | Sumter |
| Greenwood 50 | Union |
| Greenwood 51 | Williamsburg |
| Greenwood 52 | York 1 |
| Hampton | York 4 |

(Table A, right) Eligible districts have greater than 11% average annual teacher turnover, as reported by districts' five most recent district report cards issued by the SC Department of Education and are not one of the 15 wealthiest districts based on index of taxpaying ability.

[2] Source: CERRA, Rural Teacher and Recruitment Incentives Legislative Report, July, 2025.

***Incentives for Rural Recruitment Funds***

In 2017-18, incentives were identified by CERRA in collaboration with the Education Oversight Committee, the South Carolina Department of Education, district personnel directors, and superintendents. Eligible districts in 2024-25 selected from the same list of incentives developed in 2017-18 (see graphic below). Districts had discretion in choosing appropriate incentives to recruit and/or retain teachers.

# CERRA Incentives for Rural Recruitment Incentive Funds

## Recruiting into the Profession from Within a District

**Alternative Certification:** funds for districts to reimburse employees for costs associated with applying for and participating in an alternative certification program

**Bridge Program Partnerships:** funds to cover district costs associated with college/university partnerships to identify and support future teachers

**Certification Examinations:** funds for districts to reimburse employees for costs associated with certification exams and certification support seminars

**Teacher Cadet Start-Up Costs:** funds to cover costs associated with starting a new Teacher Cadet class, excluding teacher salary; may include startup of ProTeam or other types of teacher recruitment classes

## General Recruitment and Hiring

**District Website Upgrades:** funds for districts to improve their websites so as to assure accessibility from all devices, ease in locating information about vacancies and availability of online application process

**International Teacher Fees:** funds to cover district costs associated with hiring international teachers

**National Employment System Vendor:** funds for districts to subscribe to a national vendor package of online services to track, recruit, screen, and onboard applicants

**Recruitment Expenses:** funds for districts to cover costs of travel expenses associated with domestic recruitment activities (such as attendance at recruitment fairs), the purchase of marketing materials, etc.

## Recruitment

**Critical Needs Salary Stipend:** funds for districts to pay salary stipends to critical need subject teachers to encourage them to accept employment and to remain in the district

**Housing Purchase:** funds to reimburse districts for all or some of the cost of a down-payment and the renovation of a house or apartment from outside the district to offset the community costs

**Travel Stipend:** funds for districts to provide a stipend to teachers who travel to their teaching assignment from outside the district, to offset the community costs

**First Year Teacher Stipend:** funds for districts to increase the salary of a first year teachers to the second year teacher level

## Retention

**Graduate Coursework:** funds to reimburse teachers for costs associated with graduate coursework that the district has determined would address a district need or promote job satisfaction/retention

**Mentoring/Induction Support:** funds for districts to provide stipends for first year teachers mentors and to offer resources and training for mentors and first year teachers

**Professional Development:** funds to provide professional development for classroom teachers that is intended to address a district need or promote job satisfaction/retention

# District Allocation of RRI Funds

On an annual basis, district eligibility for RRI is determined. District eligibility is determined by two factors: teacher turnover rate must be above 11% (five-year average) and the district cannot be in the top 15 wealthiest districts as determined by the most recent Index of Taxpaying Ability. Once the list of eligible districts is determined by CERRA, districts are allocated funds according to the number of classroom teachers in the district and a weighting based on the district's five year average teacher turnover rate.

## *Example of Calculation for a District's Allocation of RRI Funds:*

**District X** has a **5 year teacher turnover rate of 11.94%** and has **207 classroom teachers**

***Step 1:*** District Teacher Turnover Rate – Teacher Turnover Rate Cutoff x Multiplier = **District Weighting**

*11.94 – 11 x 100* = **.0094**

***Step 2:*** District number of classroom teachers from Supply and Demand Report (self reported)

*207 teachers*

Step 3: Number of Teachers from Step 2 x District Weighting = **Total Teacher Weighting**

*207 x .0094* = **1.95**

Step 4: Number of Teachers in District + Total Teacher Weighting = **Combined Teachers in a District**

*207 + 1.95* = **208.95**

Step 5: Step 4 is completed for every eligible district for RRI funds and total for all districts is determined

*16,286 teachers (all RRI districts)*

Step 6: RRI allocation of funds/All RRI district teachers = **Base Allocation of Funding**

*$7,000,000 / 16,286* = **$429.81**

Step 7: Base Allocation x Combined Teachers in a District = **Amount of RRI Funding**

*429.81 x 208.95* = **$89,808.79**

So, District X would receive **$89,808.79 for its RRI funds.**

*Table B: 2024-25 Funding for RRI Qualifying Districts*

The RRI funding allocated for eligible districts in 2024-25 is listed below.[3]

| FY25 Qualifying Districts | Allocation |
|---|---|
| Abbeville | $89,808 |
| Allendale | $34,227 |
| Anderson 2 | $97,380 |
| Anderson 3 | $79,913 |
| Anderson 4 | $89,156 |
| Anderson 5 | $368,944 |
| Bamberg | $52,838 |
| Barnwell | $101,841 |
| Calhoun | $43,990 |
| Chester | $146,533 |
| Clarendon | $112,649 |
| Colleton | $119,815 |
| Darlington | $324,805 |
| Dillion 3 | $41,105 |
| Dillon 4 | $96,011 |
| Dorchester 4 | $64,489 |
| Edgefield | $101,948 |
| Fairfield | $88,594 |
| Florence 3 | $91,547 |
| Greenwood 50 | $256,653 |
| Greenwood 51 | $31,162 |
| Greenwood 52 | $43,681 |
| Hampton | $64,028 |
| Jasper | $78,602 |
| Kershaw | $283,031 |
| Lancaster | $440,876 |
| Laurens 55 | $164,667 |
| Laurens 56 | $86,754 |
| Lee | $51,322 |
| Lexington 2 | $266,279 |
| Lexington 3 | $66,510 |
| Lexington 4 | $104,360 |
| Marion | $140,167 |
| Marlboro | $102,228 |
| McCormick | $22,620 |
| Newberry | $191,076 |
| Orangeburg | $434,615 |
| Saluda | $73,103 |
| Spartanburg 2 | $302,456 |
| Spartanburg 3 | $90,807 |
| Spartanburg 7 | $266,865 |
| Sumter | $369,704 |
| Union | $109,636 |
| Williamsburg | $94,768 |
| York 1 | $157,834 |
| York 4 | $560,601 |
| Total | $7,000,000 |

[3] Source: CERRA, Rural Teacher Recruitment and Retention Report, July, 2025.

In addition, the following funds were dispersed in 2024-25 to districts with carry forward funds from the previous year.[4]

| District | Carry Forward Funds |
|---|---|
| Barnwell (Consolidated) | $61,401 |
| Clarendon | $2,000 |
| Dorchester 4 | $22,000 |
| Jasper | $44,278 |
| Marlboro | $107,226 |
| Total | $236,905 |

[4]Source: CERRA, email to R.Knight, Fall, 2025.

Table C shows the amount of RRI funds disbursed to districts for 2024-25 by individual districts, types of incentives, and amount disbursed. These data are from the CERRA 2025 report and are based on disbursements to school districts. Carry forward funds disbursed are not reflected.


[4]Source: CERRA, email to R.Knight, Fall, 2025.

*Table C - Disbursements by District 2024-25*[5]

| DISTRICT | INCENTIVE | DISBURSEMENT | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Abbeville** | Graduate Coursework | $4,105.00 | |
| | International Teacher Fees | $10,750.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $35,537.60 | |
| | Professional Development | $633.28 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $38,782.51 | **$89,808.39** |
| | | | |
| **Allendale** | Alternative Certification Fees | $1,902.55 | |
| | Certification Examination Support | $2,400.00 | |
| | International Teacher Fees | $24,227.00 | |
| | Surveys | $5,697.45 | **$34,227.00** |
| | | | |
| **Anderson 2** | Graduate Coursework | $38,700.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $23,000.00 | |
| | Professional Development | $14,859.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $20,821.00 | **$97,380.00** |
| | | | |
| **Anderson 3** | Bridge Program Partnerships | $1,420.00 | |
| | Certification Examination Support | $600.00 | |
| | National Employment System Fees | $28,800.00 | |
| | Professional Development | $12,780.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $1,793.00 | |
| | Website Updates | $34,520.00 | **$79,913.00** |
| | | | |
| **Anderson 4** | Alternative Certification Fees | $640.50 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $26,097.01 | |
| | National Employment System Fees | $9,000.00 | |
| | Professional Development | $47,279.35 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $6,138.34 | **$89,155.20** |
| | | | |
| **Anderson 5** | Mentoring/Induction Support | $126,944.00 | |
| | Professional Development | $167,000.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $75,000.00 | **$368,944.00** |
| | | | |
| **Bamberg** | Housing Purchase/Renovations | $47,813.24 | |
| | International Teacher Fees | $996.46 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $3,972.30 | |
| | Professional Development | $56.00 | **$52,838.00** |
| | | | |
| **Barnwell** | Alternative Certification Fees | $24,382.29 | |
| | International Teacher Fees | $46,099.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $16,223.15 | |
| | Website Updates | $15,136.56 | **$101,841.00** |
| | | | |
| **Calhoun** | Mentoring/Induction Support | $28,338.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $15,652.00 | **$43,990.00** |
| | | | |
| **Chester** | Critical Need Salary Supplement | $85,000.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $15,000.00 | |
| | Professional Development | $4,200.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $42,000.00 | **$146,200.00** |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Clarendon** | Bridge Program Partnerships | $5,000.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $57,000.00 | |
| | National Employment System Fees | $20,000.00 | |
| | Professional Development | $10,649.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $20,000.00 | **$112,649.00** |
| | | | |
| **Colleton** | First-Year Teacher Salary Supplement | $111,741.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $8,074.00 | **$119,815.00** |
| | | | |
| **Darlington** | Bridge Program Partnerships | $35,000.00 | |
| | Certification Examination Support | $20,000.00 | |
| | Critical Need Salary Supplement | $195,000.00 | |
| | International Teacher Fees | $51,755.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $7,850.00 | |
| | Professional Development | $15,200.00 | **$324,805.00** |
| | | | |
| **Dillon 3** | Critical Need Salary Supplement | $41,105.00 | **$41,105.00** |
| | | | |
| **Dillon 4** | Certification Examination Support | $2,500.00 | |
| | Graduate Coursework | $3,297.00 | |
| | Housing Purchase/Renovations | $1,992.80 | |
| | International Teacher Fees | $40,000.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $19,221.20 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $29,000.00 | **$96,011.00** |
| | | | |
| **Dorchester 4** | International Teacher Fees | $64,488.52 | **$64,488.52** |
| | | | |
| **Edgefield** | Alternative Certification Fees | $1,330.11 | |
| | Graduate Coursework | $400.68 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $74,095.57 | |
| | National Employment System Fees | $5,534.93 | |
| | Professional Development | $6,802.44 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $13,524.35 | **$101,688.08** |
| | | | |
| **Fairfield** | Alternative Certification Fees | $5,000.00 | |
| | Bridge Program Partnerships | $9,000.00 | |
| | Certification Examination Support | $3,000.00 | |
| | International Teacher Fees | $25,055.83 | |
| | National Employment System Fees | $25,613.17 | |
| | Professional Development | $5,925.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $15,000.00 | **$88,594.00** |
| | | | |
| **Florence 3** | Alternative Certification Fees | $750.00 | |
| | Bridge Program Partnerships | $12,000.00 | |
| | Certification Examination Support | $16,248.96 | |
| | Graduate Coursework | $6,000.00 | |
| | International Teacher Fees | $27,000.00 | |
| | National Employment System Fees | $9,112.14 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $20,435.90 | **$91,547.00** |
| | | | |
| **Greenwood 50** | Certification Examination Support | $1,636.00 | |
| | Critical Need Salary Supplement | $39,518.20 | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Graduate Coursework | $33,740.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $128,018.79 | |
| | Professional Development | $50,222.26 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $3,517.75 | **$256,653.00** |
| | | | |
| **Greenwood 51** | Critical Need Salary Supplement | $31,162.00 | **$31,162.00** |
| | | | |
| **Greenwood 52** | Alternative Certification Fees | $16,050.00 | |
| | Graduate Coursework | $11,904.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $2,700.00 | |
| | Professional Development | $8,026.65 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $5,000.00 | **$43,680.65** |
| | | | |
| **Hampton** | Alternative Certification Fees | $15,000.00 | |
| | International Teacher Fees | $30,000.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $19,028.00 | **$64,028.00** |
| | | | |
| **Jasper** | International Teacher Fees | $50,000.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $28,602.00 | **$78,602.00** |
| | | | |
| **Kershaw** | Bridge Program Partnerships | $3,000.00 | |
| | Critical Need Salary Supplement | $108,675.00 | |
| | First-Year Teacher Salary Supplement | $7,080.00 | |
| | International Teacher Fees | $33,250.00 | |
| | Professional Development | $63,015.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $22,611.00 | |
| | Surveys | $38,400.00 | |
| | Website Updates | $7,000.00 | **$283,031.00** |
| | | | |
| **Lancaster** | Alternative Certification Fees | $60,000.00 | |
| | International Teacher Fees | $196,616.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $70,839.00 | |
| | Professional Development | $14,520.00 | |
| | Surveys | $98,900.00 | **$440,875.00** |
| | | | |
| **Laurens 55** | First-Year Teacher Salary Supplement | $10,000.00 | |
| | Graduate Coursework | $43,200.00 | |
| | International Teacher Fees | $24,710.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $5,000.00 | |
| | Professional Development | $2,513.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $25,800.00 | |
| | Surveys | $27,810.00 | |
| | Website Updates | $25,634.00 | **$164,667.00** |
| | | | |
| **Laurens 56** | Alternative Certification Fees | $1,500.00 | |
| | Certification Examination Support | $500.00 | |
| | Graduate Coursework | $24,800.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $25,535.20 | |
| | National Employment System Fees | $8,221.52 | |
| | Professional Development | $2,000.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $17,190.00 | |
| | Website Updates | $7,000.00 | **$86,746.72** |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Lee** | Alternative Certification Fees | $2,249.52 | |
| | International Teacher Fees | $36,740.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $5,000.00 | |
| | National Employment System Fees | $4,306.68 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $3,025.80 | **$51,322.00** |
| | | | |
| **Lexington 2** | Alternative Certification Fees | $50,000.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $84,599.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $131,680.00 | **$266,279.00** |
| | | | |
| **Lexington 3** | Alternative Certification Fees | $17,000.00 | |
| | Certification Examination Support | $2,510.00 | |
| | Graduate Coursework | $17,000.00 | |
| | International Teacher Fees | $10,000.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $20,000.00 | **$66,510.00** |
| | | | |
| **Lexington 4** | Alternative Certification Fees | $18,000.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $21,700.00 | |
| | Professional Development | $46,910.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $17,750.00 | **$104,360.00** |
| | | | |
| **Marion** | Critical Need Salary Supplement | $136,620.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $1,500.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $2,047.00 | **$140,167.00** |
| | | | |
| **Marlboro** | Alternative Certification Fees | $6,000.00 | |
| | First-Year Teacher Salary Supplement | $75,000.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $15,228.00 | |
| | Travel Stipend for Commuters | $6,000.00 | **$102,228.00** |
| | | | |
| **McCormick** | Alternative Certification Fees | $6,835.12 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $3,311.89 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $11,833.31 | |
| | Travel Stipend for Commuters | $639.68 | **$22,620.00** |
| | | | |
| **Newberry** | Alternative Certification Fees | $9,000.00 | |
| | International Teacher Fees | $72,500.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $45,325.40 | |
| | National Employment System Fees | $22,454.38 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $33,980.70 | |
| | Website Updates | $7,815.52 | **$191,076.00** |
| | | | |
| **Orangeburg** | Alternative Certification Fees | $20,000.00 | |
| | International Teacher Fees | $379,420.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $16,113.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $19,081.95 | **$434,614.95** |
| | | | |
| **Saluda** | Alternative Certification Fees | $3,000.00 | |
| | Certification Examination Support | $1,500.00 | |
| | Graduate Coursework | $2,357.00 | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $50,235.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $2,500.00 | |
| | Website Updates | $13,700.00 | **$73,292.00** |
| | | | |
| **Spartanburg 2** | Certification Examination Support | $23,072.00 | |
| | Professional Development | $78,706.25 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $186,304.99 | **$288,083.24** |
| | | | |
| **Spartanburg 3** | Alternative Certification Fees | $5,000.00 | |
| | Certification Examination Support | $1,000.00 | |
| | Critical Need Salary Supplement | $10,000.00 | |
| | Graduate Coursework | $20,000.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $30,000.00 | |
| | Professional Development | $807.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $24,000.00 | **$90,807.00** |
| | | | |
| **Spartanburg 7** | Alternative Certification Fees | $43,800.00 | |
| | Bridge Program Partnerships | $23,858.30 | |
| | Certification Examination Support | $1,500.00 | |
| | Graduate Coursework | $20,000.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $117,092.22 | |
| | Professional Development | $16,116.02 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $25,000.00 | **$247,366.54** |
| | | | |
| **Sumter** | Alternative Certification Fees | $50,000.00 | |
| | Certification Examination Support | $9,600.00 | |
| | International Teacher Fees | $90,000.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $55,904.00 | |
| | Professional Development | $5,000.00 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $102,600.00 | |
| | Surveys | $56,600.00 | **$369,704.00** |
| | | | |
| **Union** | Certification Examination Support | $1,500.00 | |
| | Critical Need Salary Supplement | $94,127.53 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $2,638.84 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $11,369.63 | **$109,636.00** |
| | | | |
| **Williamsburg** | Bridge Program Partnerships | $22,500.00 | |
| | First-Year Teacher Salary Supplement | $6,908.00 | |
| | International Teacher Fees | $48,000.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $11,000.00 | |
| | National Employment System Fees | $6,360.00 | **$94,768.00** |
| | | | |
| **York 1** | Alternative Certification Fees | $415.00 | |
| | Certification Examination Support | $692.38 | |
| | Employment System Fees | $599.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $39,995.95 | |
| | National Employment System Fees | $18,061.91 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $40,453.26 | |
| | Teacher Cadet Start-Up Costs | $12,024.80 | **$112,242.30** |
| | | | |

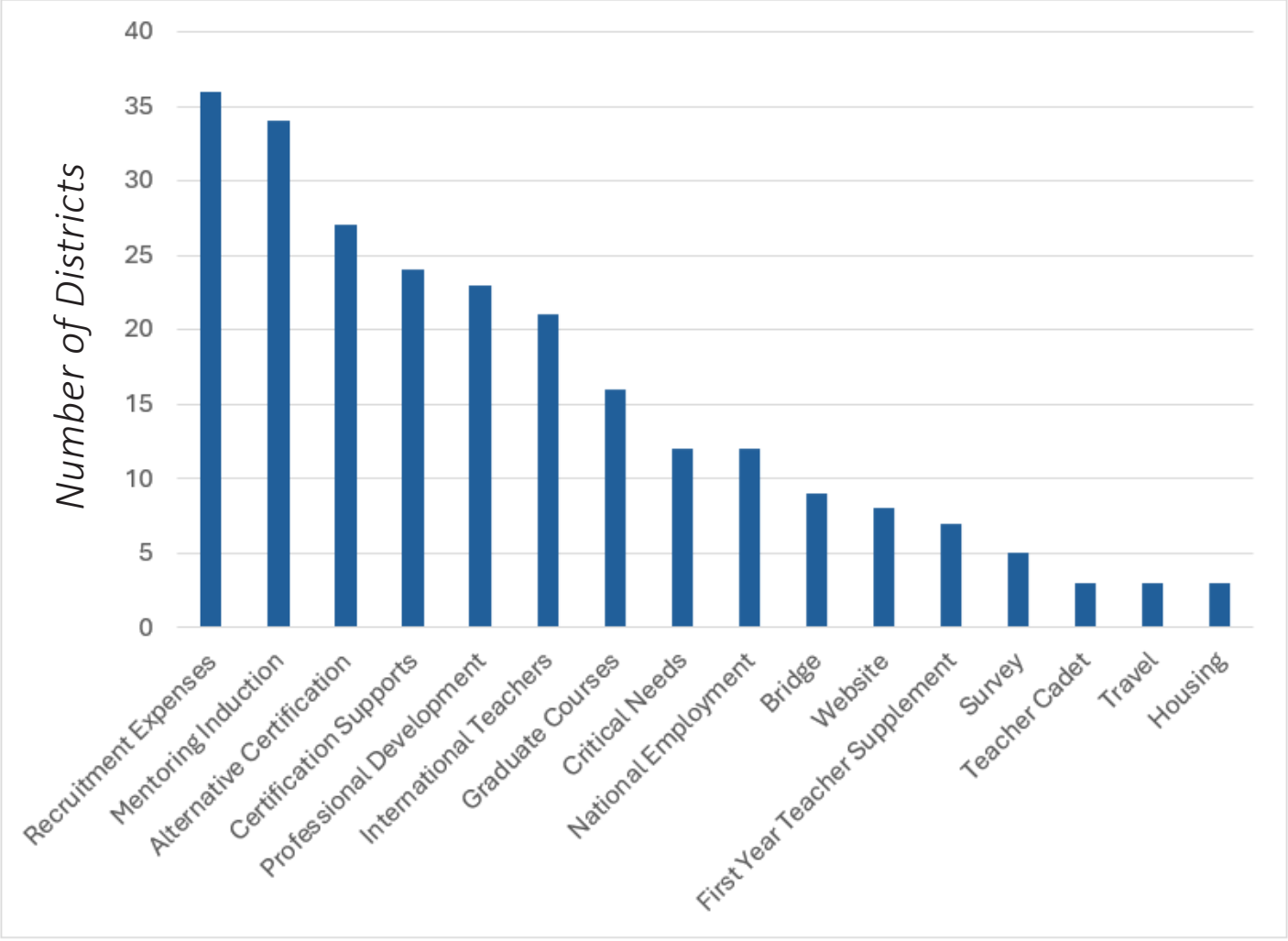
| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **York 4** | Alternative Certification Fees | $7,000.00 | |
| | Certification Examination Support | $2,310.00 | |
| | Critical Need Salary Supplement | $70,000.00 | |
| | Graduate Coursework | $50,000.00 | |
| | Mentoring/Induction Support | $36,376.56 | |
| | National Employment System Fees | $60,000.00 | |
| | Professional Development | $218,678.10 | |
| | Recruitment Expenses | $97,736.35 | |
| | Surveys | $15,000.00 | |
| | Website Updates | $3,500.00 | **$560,601.01** |
| | | | |
| **TOTAL** | | | **$6,920,121.60** |

Does not include carry forward funds dispersed

[5]Source: CERRA, Rural Recruitment and Retention Incentive Report, July, 2025.

Figure 1 and Table D represent the incentive expenditures by the RRI districts in 2024-25 based on a survey administered by the EOC. Districts most frequently used the following incentives: recruiting expenses, mentoring and induction, and alternative certification to recruit and retain teachers. A frequency distribution of incentives implemented by districts for 2024-25 is shown in Figure 1 below.

*Figure 1 - Frequency Distribution Rural Recruitment Incentives in 2024-25[5]*




[5]Source: EOC Survey to districts Fall 2025

Of the 46 RRI districts in 2024-25, Table D shows the percentage of districts implementing a specific incentive.

*Table D - Incentive Usage in 2024-25*[6]

| 2024-25 RRI Incentives | Percent of Districts Utilizing Incentive |
|---|---|
| Recruitment Expenses | 78% |
| Alternative Certification | 59% |
| Mentoring/Induction | 74% |
| Professional Development | 50% |
| International Teachers | 46% |
| Certification Exam Supports | 52% |
| Graduate Coursework | 35% |
| Website Development | 17% |
| Critical Needs Supplement | 26% |
| National Employment Fees | 26% |
| Surveys | 11% |
| First Year Teacher Supplement | 15% |
| Bridge Program Partnership | 20% |
| Teacher Cadet Start Up | 7% |
| Travel for Commuters | 7% |
| Housing Purchase/Renovations | 6% |

[6]Source: EOC. Survey to districts, Fall, 2025

The total expenditures by districts for 2024-25 are included in Table E below. The top expenditures by districts for 2024-25 are mentoring and induction, recruitment expenses and international teacher fees as reflected below.

*Table E - Incentives Expenditures 2024-25*[7]

| Incentive Type | Expenditure |
|---|---|
| Mentoring/Induction Support | $1,189,940.53 |
| Recruitment Expenses | $1,168,783.99 |
| International Teacher Fees | $1,261,607.81 |
| Critical Needs Salary Stipend | $811,207.73 |
| Professional Development | $791,898.35 |
| Alternative Certification Fees | $364,855.09 |
| Graduate Coursework | $275,503.68 |
| Surveys | $242,407.45 |
| National Employment System Fees | $218,063.73 |
| First-Year Teacher Salary Stipend | $210,729.00 |
| Website Upgrades | $114,306.08 |
| Bridge Program Partnerships | $111,778.30 |
| Certification Exam Support | $90,569.34 |
| Housing | $49,806.04 |
| Teacher Cadet Start-Up Costs | $12,024.80 |
| Travel Stipends for Commuters | $6,639.68 |
| Total | $6,920,121.60 |

Does not include carry forward funds expended

[7]Source: CERRA. Rural Teacher Recruitment and Retention Report, July 2025.

# Study Question #1

*How did districts utilize the RRI funds in 2024-25?*

## Descriptive Data from Surveys on 2024-25 RRI Incentive Funds

One component of the Rural Recruitment Initiative evaluation was to seek feedback from eligible districts in 2024-25 who received RRI funding on how funds were spent in their district. Forty-six districts met the eligibility requirements. Forty-six districts requested funding and all 46 districts responded to the survey.

The EOC sent a survey to school districts in September 2025 asking districts which incentives they utilized in the past year and to provide the specifics regarding the utilization of the funds. The following section describes the districts' responses regarding their utilization of incentives and the specifics regarding the incentive.

**27**

**Alternative Certification:** Twenty-seven districts (59%) used funds for alternative certification. Generally, these programs are "grow your own programs," recruiting community members or uncertified staff in the district to become certified teachers. Some of the programs require a bachelor's degree and others establish a pathway for a four-year degree and certification. There are currently 19 alternative certification programs approved by the SC Board of Education serving school districts in South Carolina. In 2024-25, districts reported 185 teachers enrolled in an alternative certification program which is a considerable increase from the previous year of 62 teachers. Districts spent $364,855 on this incentive in 2024-25. Of the 27 districts utilizing alternative certification, programs in Table F (below) were used most frequently as reported by the districts.

*Table F - Alternative Certification Programs*

| Name of Program | Number of Participants in Program (in various stages of certification) | Amount Districts Expended *(cost per participant)* | Number of participants Hired *(Percentage of Participants in Program Hired as Teachers in 24-25)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Program of Alternative Certification for Educators (PACE)** | 48 | $9,959 *($207)* | 21 *(44%)* |
| **Carolina Collaborative for Alternative Preparation (Carolina CAP)** | 18 | $45,000 *($2,500)* | 16 *(89%)* |
| **Teachers of Tomorrow** | 93 | $110,000 *($1,182)* | 52 *(56%)* |
| **Alternative Pathways to Educator Certification (APEC Coker University)** | 8 | $29,500 *($3,688)* | 5 *(63%)* |
| **Teach for America (TFA)** | 7 | $15,700 *($2,243)* | 6 *(86%)* |

9

**Bridge Program:** Nine districts (20%) used RRI funds to provide scholarships to certified teachers looking to obtain their master's degree, as an alternative certification pathway for certification, for teacher interns to participate in Read to Succeed, for apprenticeships, and for certification of teachers of multilingual learners. One district indicated they required teachers to remain with the district for five years when using the Bridge funds. Colleges and universities who partnered with school districts include Wofford, Converse, Clemson, USC Columbia, USC Upstate, Grand Canyon, Voorhees, and University of Phoenix. A total of $111,778 was spent by districts in 2024-25. Data to identify this incentive as solely contributing to recruitment was unavailable.

24

**Certification Supports:** Twenty-four (52%) of the districts used funds for certification supports. These funds were used to support teachers in some fashion in the administration of the Praxis tests. Expenses included Praxis reimbursement to teachers, online Praxis supports, tutors for Praxis help and Praxis books. One district reported using funds towards gifted and talented certification. (Note these percentage include duplicative counts from districts.) Districts spent $90,569 for certification supports. Data to identify this incentive as solely contributing to recruitment was unavailable.

12

**Critical Needs Stipends:** Twelve districts (26%) used this incentive to fund stipends for teachers in critical needs areas. Each district determines which teaching area is deemed to be critical needs that best fits their needs. Of the districts using this incentive, 623 teachers received a supplement as compared to 729 teachers the previous year. Districts reported a 94% retention rate for teachers receiving the supplement for 2024-25. (Note: Retention data for 2023-24 was not available.) The most prevalent subject areas used by districts for critical needs were special education, early childhood, elementary, and high/middle school mathematics. The amount of the stipends is determined by the district. The supplements ranged from $250 to $2500 per teacher. A total of $811,208 was spent by districts in 2024-25. Data to identify this incentive as solely contributing to recruitment was unavailable.

7

**First Year Teacher Stipends:** Seven districts (15%) paid a stipend to first year teachers using RRI funds. (One district did not respond to additional questions regarding this incentive.) Districts reported 145 teachers were paid this stipend and 137 teachers or 94% were retained the following year. For 2023-24, a total of 59 teachers received the supplement with a retention rate of 97%. The stipends varied from $1,000 to $2,500 with districts spending $211,729 for first year stipends in 2024-25. Data to identify this incentive as solely contributing to recruitment was unavailable.

16

**Graduate Courses:** Sixteen districts (35%) used RRI funds to pay the tuition for teachers to take graduate courses towards a master's degree, for technology training, for national board certification, and for English language learners' certification. Two hundred and thirty-six (236) teachers participated in graduate courses offered through RRI. Districts reported a retention rate of 85%. For comparison, 295 five teachers participated in graduate courses in 2023-24 with a retention rate of 97%. Districts spent $275,504 on graduate courses in 2024-25. Data to identify this incentive as solely contributing to recruitment was unavailable.


**Housing:** In 2024-25, three districts (5%) used funds for housing. No district used funds to provide allowances to teachers. (Note only two of the three districts responded to additional questions for this incentive.) Districts reported eight (8) teachers were supported and seven teachers were retained. No district used funds for housing stipends in 2023-24. The total amount of money expended by districts was $49,806 in 2024-25. Data to identify this incentive as solely contributing to recruitment was unavailable.


**International teachers:** Twenty-one districts (46%) used RRI funds to hire international teachers. As reported by the districts, 295 new international teachers were hired using this incentive in 2024-25 with 280 of these teachers retained at the end of the school year for a retention rate of 95%. As of fall 2025, districts reported using RRI funds to support over 800 total international teachers. International teachers are initially hired in one of two ways: on a J1 visa or H-B1 visa. Teachers hired on a J1 visa are hired using a vendor who specializes in securing teachers internationally such as Foreign Academic Cultural Exchange Service (FACES), Palmetto Academic and Cultural Teachers Immigrant Petition, Educational Partners International (EPI), Teacher Placement Group Cultural Exchange (PG), and International Teacher Exchange Service (ITES). The districts do not pay the fringe costs for these teachers; however, there is an ongoing annual fee to the vendor. Teachers hired on a H-B1 visa are sponsored by the district and the district pays annually for their fringe costs, plus the cost of the visa and legal fees. Districts reported spending a total of $1,261,608 on international teacher recruitment in 2024-25. Data analysis cannot isolate the incentive as the primary driver of this outcome.


**Mentoring and Induction:** Thirty-four districts (74%) of the RRI districts used the mentoring/induction program as an incentive. Districts reported 924 first year teachers were provided mentorship as part of their induction program. For these teachers, 812 were retained for a rate of 88%. In 2023-24, 585 teachers were mentored using RRI funds and 80% of these teachers were retained. Districts also reported 241 second year teachers were provided a second-year mentoring program and 171 or 77% of these teachers were retained in 2024-25. In 2023-24, 78 teachers were supported in mentoring and 100% of these teachers were retained. Mentoring was implemented in different ways in districts including mentors allowed time outside of their teaching duties, after school, during planning, district employees were used, professional development time and retirees were used. As reported by the districts in 2024-25, the cost per teacher using RRI funds was $812 for mentoring a first-year teacher and $312 per teacher for mentoring a year two teacher. A total of $1,189,941 RRI funds was spent on mentoring and induction in 2024-25. Data to identify this incentive as solely contributing to recruitment was unavailable.


**National Employment Fees:** Twelve districts (26%) of the districts used RRI funds for this incentive. This incentive is used to post teacher vacancies on national sites, purchase software to recruit, and to track and hire applicants. Vendors used included Talent Ed, Frontline, Neogov, Linkin, and Handshake. A total of $218,064 was spent by districts on national employment in 2024-25. Data to identify this incentive as solely contributing to recruitment was unavailable.


**Professional Development:** Twenty-three districts (50%) of the districts used funds for professional development. Districts used these funds to support teachers in areas of classroom behavior strategies, instructional strategies, National Board, Visible Learning, and professional learning communities. Districts also used the funds to attend conferences. A total of 1,679 (duplicative count) teachers participated in professional development using RRI funds. Total funds expended for professional development was $791,898 for 2024-25. Data to identify this incentive as solely contributing to recruitment was unavailable.


**Recruitment Expenses:** Thirty-six districts (78%) of the RRI districts used funds for recruiting expenses. The top categories of monies spent as reported by districts were: 94% of funds for marketing; 77% for items for prospective teachers; 63% for travel to fairs and recruiting, and 23% for career fair fees. The top categories of total monies spent were as follows: $546,000 for marketing, $323,000 for items for prospective teachers, $90,000 for travel, and $21,000 for career fair fees. A total of $1,168,784 was spent on this incentive in 2024-25. Data to identify this incentive as solely contributing to recruitment was unavailable.


**Teacher Cadet:** Three (7%) of the RRI districts used funds to establish Teacher Cadet classes. Approximately 220 students were enrolled in 2024-25. Districts spent $12,075 in 2024-25 on teacher cadet startup classes. No funds were used for this incentive in 2023-24. Data to identify this incentive as solely contributing to recruitment was unavailable.


**Travel Stipends:** Three districts (7%) used RRI funds for paying travel to teachers to commute to the district. Three (3) teachers received these funds for a total of $6,640. Two of the three teachers (67%) were retained. No district used travel stipends in 2023-24. Data to identify this incentive as solely contributing to recruitment was unavailable.


**Surveys:** Five districts (11%) used RRI funds for a survey tool for their teachers and administrators. All districts used Upbeat, a vendor, to create their surveys. Upbeat also provides onsite principal and teacher supports for an additional fee. Districts reported they used the survey results to gain insight to actionable strategies to improve teacher retention, to gain staff perspectives on school culture, to coach principals, and to set principal goals for retention. Districts spent $242,407 on surveys in 2024-25. Data to identify this incentive as solely contributing to recruitment was unavailable.


**Website Updates:** Eight districts (17%) of the RRI districts used funds as a strategy to upgrade their website. Vendors used included Final Site, Apptegy, and Beam. The districts reported website upgrades included securing compliancy issues, adding a portal, ensuring teacher employment was visible, restructuring the website, managing the website to showcase the district, sending texts to parents, restoration after a cyber attack, or adding a Chatbot. Districts spent $114,306 on this incentive. Data to identify this incentive as solely contributing to recruitment was unavailable.

# Long Term Use of RRI Funds

In looking at district incentives over time, Table G shows disbursements of incentives to districts over the past six years (2019-20 through 2024-25). The table shows a total of over $41 million dollars has been utilized by districts. Over the past six years, districts spent most of the RRI funds on international teachers at $10.8 million, critical needs stipends at $6.7 million, recruitment expenses at $6.6 million, mentoring and induction at $4.7 million and professional development at $4.5 million.

Over this period, districts receiving the highest incentive awards were Anderson 5, Chester, Colleton, Darlington, Florence 1, Florence 4, Laurens 55, Lexington 2. Newberry, Orangeburg, Spartanburg 3, Spartanburg 7, and York 4. A complete listing of the six-year summary by district is shown in Appendix E.

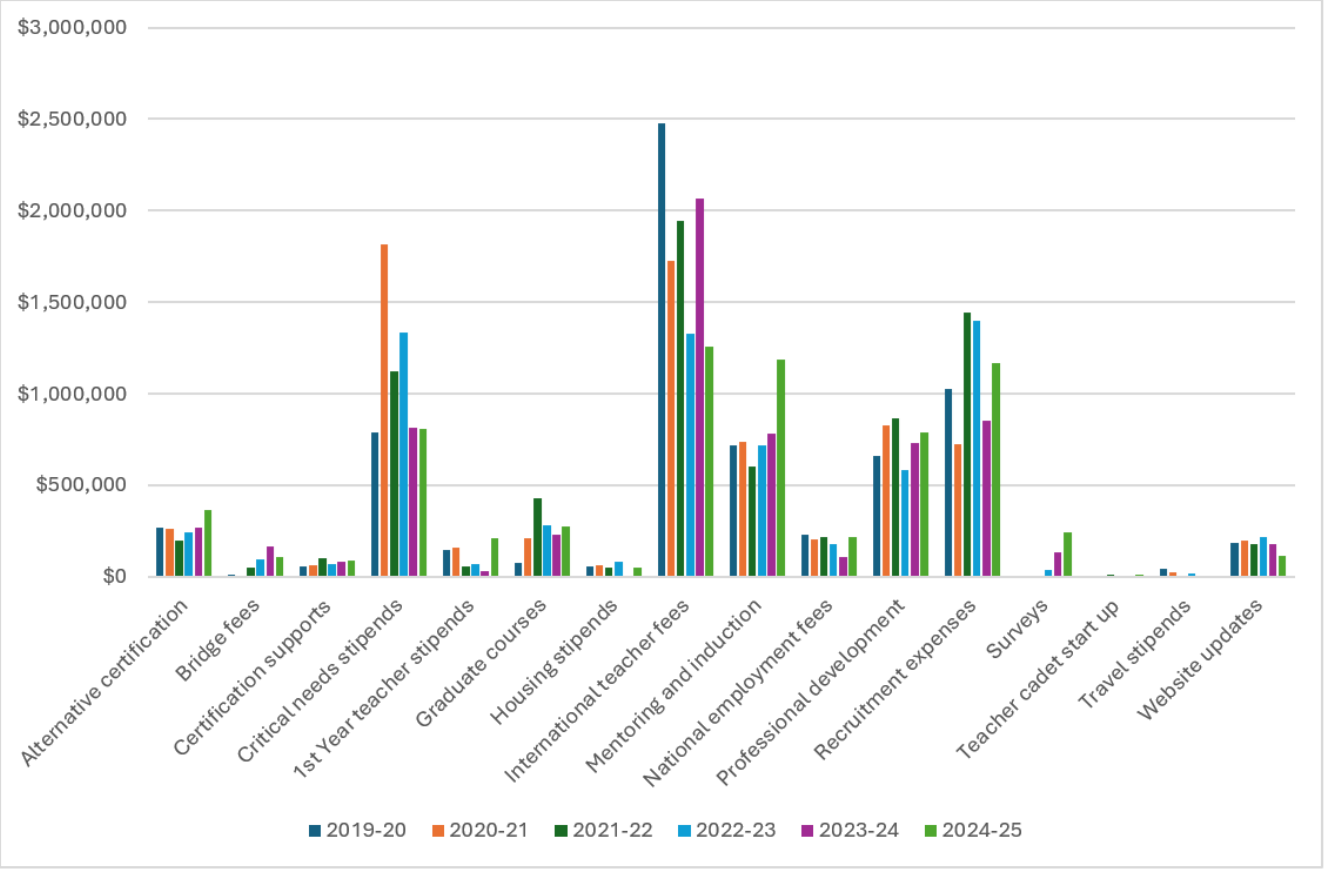
*Table G - Six Year Total RRI Funds Disbursed by Incentive Type*[8]

| Incentive | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 | 2022-23 | 2023-24 | 2024-25 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Alternative certification** | $269,407 | $265,624 | $202,513 | $246,151 | $271,718 | $364,855 | $1,620,268 |
| **Bridge fees** | $14,500 | $0 | $55,000 | $99,286 | $171,093 | $111,778 | $451,657 |
| **Certification supports** | $60,627 | $67,200 | $105,800 | $73,747 | $82,821 | $90,569 | $480,764 |
| **Critical needs stipends** | $793,395 | $1,819,719 | $1,123,568 | $1,336,116 | $818,658 | $811,208 | $6,702,664 |
| **1st Year teacher stipends** | $149,948 | $161,477 | $60,690 | $73,884 | $31,500 | $210,729 | $688,228 |
| **Graduate courses** | $78,077 | $212,297 | $433,850 | $282,335 | $235,382 | $275,504 | $1,517,145 |
| **Housing stipends** | $61,236 | $64,366 | $52,050 | $85,251 | $0 | $49,806 | $312,709 |
| **International teacher fees** | $2,474,955 | $1,724,836 | $1,943,910 | $1,328,967 | $2,068,151 | $1,261,608 | $10,802,427 |
| **Mentoring and induction** | $722,468 | $740,090 | $607,060 | $717,567 | $783,355 | $1,189,941 | $4,670,481 |
| **National employment fees** | $234,761 | $203,623 | $217,068 | $181,347 | $109,740 | $218,064 | $1,164,603 |
| **Professional development** | $662,011 | $830,421 | $868,905 | $586,356 | $729,686 | $791,898 | $4,469,277 |
| **Recruitment expenses** | $1,026,478 | $729,395 | $1,446,684 | $1,397,057 | $851,617 | $1,168,784 | $6,620,015 |
| **Surveys** | $0 | $0 | $0 | $40,950 | $137,681 | $242,407 | $421,038 |
| **Teacher Cadet start up** | $1,161 | $10,125 | $14,200 | $4,000 | $0 | $12,025 | $41,511 |
| **Travel stipends** | $43,173 | $28,335 | $7,000 | $18,190 | $0 | $6,640 | $103,338 |
| **Website updates** | $184,231 | $202,328 | $182,744 | $217,139 | $180,608 | $114,306 | $1,081,356 |
| | **$6,776,428** | **$7,059,836** | **$7,321,042** | **$6,688,043** | **$6,472,010** | **$6,920,122** | **$41,237,481** |

[8]Source: SC TEACHER, Rural Recruitment Spending: 5 Year ROI Analysis of Strategic Investments, April, 2026

The corresponding Figure 2 shows incentive expenditures by year by amount expended by districts.

*Figure 2 - Six Year Disbursements by Incentive Type*[9]




[9]Source: SC TEACHER. data from SC Teacher Rural Recruitment Spending: 5 Year ROI Analysis of Strategic Investments, April, 2026

Based on the six (6) year expenditures of RRI funds and 2025 vacancy rates[10] , districts with the highest percentage of vacancies and their respective six year expenditures[11] are listed by district below in Table H.

*Table H - Districts with Highest Vacancies (2025) with Corresponding Six Year Expenditures*

| District | Percent Vacancy (November 2025) | RRI Funds Expended (past 6 years) |
|---|---|---|
| **Lee** | 20.5% | $449,000 |
| **Hampton** | 11.9% | $687,207 |
| **Florence 3** | 8.7% | $833,473 |
| **McCormick** | 8.8% | $191,930 |
| **Marlboro** | 6.3% | $884,874 |
| **Williamsburg** | 7.5% | $820,717 |
| **Spartanburg 7** | 4.8% | $1,700,006 |
| **Jasper** | 4.7% | $607,425 |

Of the 75 school districts (including the charter school districts), 44 districts showed vacancies at 1% or less in November of 2025. The state vacancy average for fall 2025 was 1.25%. Note: SC Public School District did not submit a report.

[10]Source: CERRA, Email to R.Knight, March, 2026

[11]Source: Source: SC TEACHER, Rural Recruitment Spending: 5 Year ROI Analysis of Strategic Investments, April, 2026

# Financials for Rural Recruitment Initiative[12]

Districts submitted fund disbursement requests that specified the incentive for which funds would be utilized, the amount requested, and how the incentive would be implemented. A copy of the disbursement request form is attached as Appendix F. A total of $7,157,0271 was disbursed to districts between July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025.

Expenditures on behalf of the district site grants to teachers included ProTeam and Teacher Cadet site grants that offset the cost of supplies and/or travel to observe students in internship assignments. College partners receive site grants to offset the cost of Teacher Cadet College Days. Total expenditures for FY25 were $32,0361.

FY25 available funds included the EIA allocation of $7,598,392 plus $1,195,270 in FY24 carryover funds, for a total of $8,793,662. Funds that were disbursed and/or expended during FY25 ($7,157,027 + $32,036 + $370,394) totaled $7,559,457. Administrative costs of $376,915 (increase from FY24 due to additional staffing) bring the total utilized to $7,936,372. Available funds ($8,793,662) – funds utilized ($7,936,372) leaves a FY24 carryover amount of $857,290, resulting from some districts not making use of their full allocation.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Carry Forward 2023-24** | **$1,195,270** |
| **RRI Allocation from EIA funds for 2024-25** | $7,598,392 |
| **Total funds available for 2024-25** | $8,793,662 |

**Allocations for 2024-25**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Rural Recruitment Incentive Funds to Districts (total funds disbursed FY25, including carryover funds)** | **$7,157,027** |
| **District Expenditures for Incentives (based on total disbursed funds from FY25 allocation only)** | $6,920,121 |
| **Difference between Allocation/Expenditure (total FY24 carryover funds disbursed)** | $236,906 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **CERRA Administrative (inclusive of Winthrop indirect costs of $221,313)** | **$376,915** |
| **Site Grants to Teachers** | $32,036 |
| **Teacher Loan Forgiveness** | $370,394 |

# Rural District Undergraduate Loan Forgiveness Program[13]

Beginning in 2016-17 and pursuant to Proviso 1A.45, CERRA began administering the Rural District Loan Forgiveness Program (Program) as part of the Rural Recruitment Initiative. The Program's purpose is to encourage classroom teachers to seek and become employed in one of the rural incentive districts. Eligible teachers may apply for up to $5,000 for up to seven years. The loans are to be applied to existing teacher undergraduate loan balances. These loans are not eligible for any other loan forgiveness options. Loans are made directly to teachers upon receipt of an application, loan balance documentation and district verification that the teacher completed a full year of employment during the school year. CERRA sends the loan packets to district human resources departments, posts it on its website, and shares with various stakeholders.

[12]Source: CERRA, Email to R.Knight, November, 2025
[13]Source: CERRA. November, 2025.

Undergraduate loan forgiveness funds were disbursed directly to teacher applicants in 2025 in the amount of $298,627.58. Applicants must meet the requirements as outlined: receipt of a completed application, loan balance documentation, and district verification that the teacher completed a full year of employment during the 2024-25 school year. A total of 108 applicants applied for loan forgiveness and 65 were awarded loans. A total of 28 districts used loan forgiveness for their teachers. The districts offering the largest amounts in loan forgiveness are listed below in Table I.

*Table I - Top Six Districts using Loan Forgiveness Programs, 2024-25*

| District | Loan Forgiveness |
|---|---|
| **Anderson 5** | $28,981 |
| **Lancaster** | $32,248 |
| **Spartanburg 7** | $25,000 |
| **Edgefield** | $20,000 |
| **Barnwell** | $17,817 |
| **Colleton** | $16,698 |
| **York 4 (Fort Mill)** | $17,454 |

The total amount of loan forgiveness funds disbursed directly to teachers in 2023-24 was $370,324 and the previous year was $336,167.

## Previous Rural Recruitment Initiative Progress Reports

Two previous Rural Recruitment Incentive reports have been completed. One was done by University of South Carolina in 2019 and a second by the Education Oversight Committee in 2025.

In 2019, the EOC commissioned a progress report[14] on the use of RRI funds. The report was completed by Dr. Henry Tran and Dr. Douglas Smith at the University of South Carolina in June 2019. The report was an exploratory, descriptive study.

The results from this report are listed below.

- A top challenge for districts was recruiting teachers with the appropriate certification for their vacant positions.
- Teacher salaries made it difficult to retain teachers.
- The distance to a school proved to be a challenge for schools to recruit.
- The average teacher turnover rate was 17.9% and the cumulative instability rate was 52.5%, which means in the previous 10 years only 52.5% of the teaching staff remained intact.
- Of the 29 incentives presented to the districts, an average of 15 were utilized. The incentive utilized the most frequently for recruitment was travel for teachers to commute and international teachers. The most frequently used incentive for retention was induction/mentoring and travel for teachers to commute. (The incentives presented included ones the authors gleaned from the literature on teacher recruitment and retention as well as the incentives available to districts as RRI incentives.)

The recommendations made from the 2019 report were:

- Incentives offered should be aligned with strategies backed by empirical evidence.
- Websites should be teacher-friendly for maximum usage.
- RRI funds should be sufficient to make an impact.
- Data should be collected from multiple years to draw conclusions about the impact of the RRI strategies being utilized.

[14]Tran, Henry and Douglas Smith. Department of Educational Leadership: The Rural Recruitment Initiative Progress Report. Provided to the Education Oversight Committee; June, 2019.

In 2025, the EOC completed a report on the Rural Recruitment Initiative funds[15]. The link to this study can be found at https://eoc.sc.gov/sites/eoc/files/Documents/1_Rural%20Recruitment%20Initiative%20Report%202024_FINAL_12_12_24.pdf

The results showed:

- Districts reported trying to be more strategic in their plans for the use of incentives to build greater capacity in retention in their districts.
- Districts reported heavy use of hiring international teachers to reduce the number of vacancies.
- Vacancies were not evenly distributed across districts. Some districts reported 0 vacancies at the beginning of 2025 while others were as high as 41%.
- Districts were appreciative of the incentive funds and perceived these incentives were making a positive impact in their schools.
- Using data from the South Carolina Department of Education, SC TEACHER has been creating a statewide data infrastructure that is beginning to show a clearer picture of the training and movements of individual teachers in South Carolina.
- With time and improved data systems, SC TEACHER is confident in their ability to reliably provide data to districts and the state regarding short and long-term effects of individual incentives on retention and return on investment (ROI) for specific incentives. The EOC will continue to work closely with SC TEACHER in these efforts.

The recommendations from this report were:

- Expand the evaluation effectiveness of current incentives.
- Facilitate collaborative analysis for strategic refinement of the data.
- Implement data-driven decision making on strategic implementation of the incentives.
- Develop a training model for districts to use in preparing a plan for use of the incentives.
- Empower districts with long-term planning tools.

## Reviews of Current Rural Recruitment Initiative Program

From November 2025 until February 2026, several organizations convened to discuss the current RRI program and to make recommendations for future implementation of the program. Because the currently adopted budget proviso lists CERRA, SC Department of Education and the EOC as partners, these groups identified persons to attend. In addition, the EOC requested Ms. Melanie Barton, Governor's Office, to attend as she was on the original committee designing the program in 2015. The committee made the following recommendations:

- The application should be available online for districts.
- Consideration should be given to revising the budget proviso, excluding districts in the top one-third highest overall index of tax paying ability, and giving priority to districts who collaborate with neighboring districts. Funds not expended should be returned to the EIA.
- Districts should create a plan prior to the school year outlining the incentives to be used based on the retention/recruitment data in their district.
- The listing of incentives should be reduced based on available data supporting real return investment. The incentives recommended were: alternative certification/certification supports, critical need stipends, first year stipends, graduate courses, international teachers (to be phased out in three years), mentoring and induction, professional development, and grow your own.

[15]Rural Recruitment Initiative Funds Evaluation, Education Oversight Committee, June, 2019. Provided to the General Assembly and the Education Oversight Committee.

- The disbursement of funds should be maintained electronically (not paper) and funds should be reimbursed, not provided upfront.

The revised proviso language is expected to be adopted in the 2026-27 Appropriations Act, the list of incentives and updated application are in Appendices G, H, and I, respectively.

In 2024, SC TEACHER at the University of South Carolina convened a group of educators and researchers and other educational leaders, Litmus Policy Solutions, to review the education policy landscape. One focus was to review educator recruitment and retention through the RRI program. In March 2026, Litmus Policy Solutions released a report on Rural Recruitment Initiative Considerations. These considerations included changing the incentives, amending the eligibility of districts, and reporting of districts at the teacher level as well as other considerations[16]. The revised proviso language found in Appendix G transfers authority of the program from CERRA to SC TEACHER.

# Study Question #2

*For selected incentives, what are the return on investments (ROI) for each incentive, the cost per hire per teacher and trends over time?*

## Effectiveness of Rural Recruitment Initiative Incentives

The EOC requested the services of SC TEACHER at the University of South Carolina to conduct an analysis of the impact of Rural Recruitment Initiative spending of incentives on teacher retention and recruitment to identify the incentives that yield the most effective outcomes or return on investment (ROI). The report was entitled *Rural Recruitment Spending: 5 Year ROI Analysis of Strategic Investments* (See Appendix J). SC TEACHER has been building a data infrastructure that is designed to follow individual teachers into teaching. SC TEACHER reviewed selective incentives over a five-year period from 2019-20 through 2023-24. These incentives included: alternative certification, international teacher recruitment, First Year teacher stipends, induction and mentoring and general recruitment strategies. "For each strategy, the report documents the cost per hire or cost per retained teacher, the distribution of outcomes across districts and years, and trends over time. Findings describe associations between spending and outcomes."

It is important to point out that the financial incentives provided to districts are flexible, meaning that districts are not currently required to report or track each incentive by teacher. This is a challenge when attempting to analyze a specific incentive as to its contribution to recruiting or retaining a teacher since multiple factors and/or resources cannot be ruled out as contributing factors.

### Summary for the Five SC TEACHER Analyzed Categories

**1. Alternative Certification** was used by 36 unique districts observations (meaning the number of times districts used this incentive over a five-year period) and districts expended a total of $1.26 million. This incentive has remained relatively stable in spending across the districts.

One measure looked at whether a district retained more alternative certified teachers this year over the previous year, relative to what was spent. In looking at a year 1 retention (2021-22 and 2022-23), the ROI for this incentive shows a slightly negative change (-0.0000296) overall suggesting monies expended on alternative certification did not show an increase in teacher retention. Approximately 40% of the unique district observations (27 of 68) did show an improvement in retention. Districts showing improved retention rates were Greenwood 50, Laurens 55 and Spartanburg 7.

[16]Source: Rural Recruitment Initiative: Litmus Considerations: SC TEACHER, University of South Carolina, March 2026

A more direct way to look at the dollar cost associated with a teacher retained is to look at cost per retention. The median cost per additional teacher retained was $4,500. The retention rate for alternative certification improved from 73.5% in 2019-20 to 83.3% in 2023-24, suggesting districts have improved their ability to retain these teachers.

A second question was asked as to whether teachers certified using alternative certification remained with the same district and obtained their teacher certification. In looking at the two cohorts in 2019-20 and 2020-21, the retention rate declined sharply over a four-year period from 80% and 71% to 35% and 35%, respectively. After a four-year period, only approximately 25% of the teacher candidates in alternative certification pathways obtained their teacher certification.

**2. International Teacher Recruitment** was used by 39 unique districts (meaning the number of times districts used this incentive over a five-year period) for a five-year total of $9.54 million. The spending for this incentive was more volatile, especially during COVID and the restrictions placed on travel.

SC TEACHER used the measure of teachers hired per dollar spent for this incentive, primarily for international teachers on a J-1 visa. Teachers hired under a J-1 visa may remain in the United States for up to three years with the option to remain an additional two years. The average cost per hire for an international teacher on a J-1 visa was $17,538 with a median cost of $13,708. Costs for international teachers are on an annual basis. Districts show an upward trend in hiring the number of international teachers over the five-year period with certification areas in 2024-25, with the most hires in mathematics, science and English/language arts.

**3. First-Year Teacher Stipends** was used by 14 unique districts (meaning the number of times districts used this incentive over a five-year period) and districts spent a total of $477,000. The cost per retained teacher is $3,121. District expenditures for first-year teacher stipends have gradually decreased from a high of $149,948 in 2019-20 to $31,500 in 2023-24. However, the retention rate has been relatively high from 100% (34/34 teachers) in 2029-20 to 89% (8/9 teachers) in 2023-24.

A second question was whether a stipend is associated with more first-year teachers being retained in districts. The ROI for First Year Stipends show an extremely small positive change (0.0000431) per dollar spent, indicating a very small increase in the number of teachers hired following the stipend spending. Forty-three percent (43%) of observations had more hires as compared to the year before and 47% of the observations showed fewer hires. This sample size is small (18).

**4. Mentoring and Induction** was used by districts the most frequently with 44 unique districts (meaning the number of times districts used this incentive over a five-year period) with districts expending $3.57 million RRI over 5 years. The cost per retained teacher is $1,458 (from year 1 to year 2). The pooled retention rate is relatively high with an average of 87.9% over the six-year period.

The question of whether more teachers were retained in the following year spending occurred was asked. The overall ROI is slightly negative (-0.00000153) meaning the monies spent on this incentive the prior year did not show an increase in retained teachers.

**5. General Recruitment Expenses** is a combination of three incentives: recruiting expenses, website updates and national employment fees. Spending patterns showed districts spent a total of $7.36 million on these three incentives with recruitment expenses accounting for 75% of all monies spent. There were 46 unique districts (meaning the number of times districts used this incentive over a five-year period).

The cost per hire for the combination of these incentives was $1,041 per teacher based on the number of teachers hired divided by the district expenditures (46 unique districts observations) for these incentives. Based on the data from the districts, there was little difference between districts who used general recruitment monies from districts who did not as to who was being hired. See Table J.[19]

*Table J - General Recruiting Expenses*

| Group | Total New Hires | New to State | Lateral Movers | Role Changers |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **RRI Districts WITH General Recruiting Expenses** | 7,073 | 61.5% | 32.8% | 5.7% |
| **RRI Districts WITHOUT General Recruiting Expenses** | 1,929 | 60.5% | 33.1% | 6.4% |
| **Difference** | | +0.9 | -0.3 | -0.7 |

## Conclusions on Effectiveness

Based on the data provided by SC TEACHER regarding the five incentives studied, the data suggests there are some inconsistent findings. For example, alternative certification showed a negative ROI (-0.0000296); however, several district observations (40%) showed improved retention. A similar situation was exhibited by mentoring and induction which showed a negative ROI (-0.00000153) with an 87.9% retention rate.

For incentives in which the median cost per hire was provided, international teachers were the highest at $13,703 per teacher, alternative certification was $4,500, mentoring at $4,279, first-year teachers at $3,121, and the aggregate group of general recruitment expenses at $1,041. It should be noted that the number of teachers hired via general recruitment expenses could not be isolated as the only factor in evaluating this recruitment strategy.

In looking at long term retention, alternative certification appears to lack general sustainability for retaining teachers, especially for teacher candidates obtaining teacher certification (25%). Also it appears for districts using general recruiting monies, there is no discernible difference in teachers being hired from out-of-state. In terms of cost per teacher, international teachers are more than three times the cost of any one of the other four incentives analyzed.

[19]Ibid., p23

# EOC Recommendations

Determining return on investment for the Rural Recruitment Initiative funds distributed in 2024-25 and previous years is challenging because data systems are incomplete and not validated. As a result, projections should not be viewed as definitive. The EOC offers the following recommendations for this initiative:

Create an integrated educator data system that follows teachers from preparatory programs (traditional and alternative) through professional practice and retention. Absent this system, the ROI of RRI funds cannot be adequately determined.

Serious consideration should be given to the incentives available to districts. Only incentives where an ROI can be determined and can be directly attributed to teacher recruitment or retention should be offered as options for districts. Incentives that are hard to define and cannot be attributed directly to recruitment or retention, such as website and recruitment expenses, should be eliminated. Both the joint meeting among CERRA, SC Department of Education and EOC staff and SC TEACHER Litmus have made recommendations for future incentives to be made available.

Districts should be required to complete an online application that includes a detailed plan and rational for usage of incentives based on the data in their district. CERRA started this process in 2025-26 with additional revisions to the application and process in 2026-27. Training sessions should be required of districts receiving RRI incentives to support short- and long-term planning and encourage collaboration as part of this process. Additionally, payment to school districts should be reimbursements following the submission of receipts.

Stronger emphasis should be placed on incentives that show a positive outcome on teacher retention. A district's strong focus on teacher retention minimizes the need to recruit new teachers and has the potential to build a stronger school culture, rather than rebuilding the teaching staff each year. School leadership is a critical component in the process of teacher retention.

The eligibility of districts for RRI funds should be only those districts with the highest five year teacher turnover average (must be greater than the state average) and districts in the top one third of the index of tax paying ability are excluded. This recommendation is made based on an EOC analysis of available data.

# Appendices

**Appendix A**

1A.73 (Original) Rural Recruitment Proviso

2015-16 Appropriations Act

***1A.73.*** *(SDE-EIA: Rural Teacher Recruiting Incentive) (A) There is created a program within the South Carolina Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement (CERRA) to recruit and retain classroom educators in rural and underserved districts experiencing excessive turnover of classroom teachers on an annual basis.*

*(B) During Fiscal Year 2015-16, CERRA shall develop eligibility requirements and applications for individual educators, school districts, and institutions of higher education not inconsistent with existing licensure requirements for each, but also including:*

*(1) Eligible districts identified by CERRA as experiencing greater than twelve percent average annual teacher turnover, as reported on the districts' five most recent district report cards issued by the South Carolina Department of Education, may make application to participate in the program.*

*(2) Individuals eligible for incentives shall be willing to provide instructional services in an eligible district in exchange for participation in an incentive detailed in item (C) of this section, pursuant to the obligations and restrictions stated for each.*

*(3) Institutions of higher education eligible to receive education funding as a component of recruiting incentives created pursuant to item (C) of this section shall not be excluded from participation in Teaching Fellows Program in accordance with proviso 1A.58 of this Act.*

*(4) Any incentives requiring individuals to relocate into an eligible district to provide instructional services shall not be made available to individuals providing instructional services in other eligible districts.*

*(C) Pursuant to item (A), CERRA shall develop a set of incentives including, but not limited to, salary supplements, education subsidies, professional development, and mentorship to be provided to classroom educators that offer instructional services in eligible districts. The incentives and implementation shall be developed in consultation with the State Department of Education and the Education Oversight Committee, and shall provide incentive options for eligible individuals at all stages of their careers, including high-school and college or university students interested in entering the teaching profession.*

*(D) CERRA shall report by January 15, 2016 to the Governor, President pro Tempore of the Senate, and Speaker of the House on the incentives developed pursuant to item (C) of this section and make recommendations for attracting and retaining high quality teachers in rural and underserved districts. The report shall contain at a minimum eligibility requirements and application processes for districts and individuals, descriptions of and proposed budgets for each incentive program and an analysis of the number and demographics of individuals potentially eligible for each.*

*(E) Funds appropriated or transferred for use in the Rural Teacher Recruiting Incentive may be carried forward from prior fiscal years and used for the same purpose.*

**Appendix B**
1A.45 Rural Recruitment Incentive Proviso
2025-26 Appropriations Act

**1A.45.** (SDE-EIA: Rural Teacher Recruiting Incentive) (A) There is created a program within the South Carolina Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement (CERRA) to recruit and retain classroom educators in rural and underserved districts experiencing excessive turnover of classroom teachers on an annual basis.

(B) During the current fiscal year CERRA shall publish eligibility requirements and applications for individual educators, school districts, and institutions of higher education not inconsistent with existing licensure requirements for each, but also including:

(1) Eligible districts identified by CERRA as experiencing greater than eleven percent average annual teacher turnover, as reported on the districts five most recent district report cards issued by the South Carolina Department of Education and are not one of the fifteen wealthiest districts based on the index of taxpaying ability, may make application to participate in the program.

(2) Individuals eligible for incentives shall be willing to provide instructional services in an eligible district in exchange for participation in an incentive detailed in item (C) pursuant to the obligations and restrictions stated for each.

(3) Institutions of higher education eligible to receive education funding as a component of recruiting incentives created pursuant to item (C) of this provision shall not be excluded from participation in Teaching Fellows Program.

(4) Any incentives requiring individuals to relocate into an eligible district to provide instructional services shall not be made available to individuals providing instructional services in other eligible districts.

(C) Pursuant to item (A), CERRA shall develop a set of incentives including, but not limited to, salary supplements, education subsidies, loan forgiveness, professional development, and mentorship to be provided to classroom educators that offer instructional services in eligible districts and shall provide incentive options for eligible individuals at all stages of their careers, including high-school and college or university students interested in entering the teaching profession and including individuals entering the field through an alternative certification pathway to include, but not limited to, PACE, ABCTE, Teach for America, and CATE Work-Based Certification.

At a minimum, the incentives shall include:

(1) Development of a program for forgiveness of undergraduate student loans, not to exceed $5,000 per year, for up to 7 years, for teachers participating in this incentive that achieve certification through an alternative pathway or who have a loan from an institution other than the

South Carolina Student Loan Corporation or program other than the South Carolina Teachers Loan Program.

(2) Development of a forgivable loan program for individuals pursuing graduate coursework in furtherance of a teaching career, including enrollment in graduate-level coursework necessary to seek additional credentialing or certification relevant to the participants teaching practice, or individuals seeking an alternative pathway to certification as a teacher.

(3) Support for the establishment and maintenance of a teaching mentorship program, including salary supplements for teaching mentors not to exceed $2,500 per year.

(4) Other technical support and recruiting incentives as developed by CERRA in conjunction with the Department of Education and the Education Oversight Committee consistent with the objectives of this section.

(D) In addition to eligibility and application requirements, CERRA shall develop a process for recovering an amount equal to the incentives given to individual participants who fail to comply with the obligations associated with a relevant incentive in which they participate including, but not limited to, failure to complete a prescribed course of study, failure to obtain a relevant certification or licensure upon completion of a course of study, or failure to provide instructional services in an eligible district for a prescribed period of time.

(E) CERRA shall report by July thirty-first of the current fiscal year to the Governor, President of the Senate, and Speaker of the House on the incentives developed pursuant to item (C) of this proviso and make recommendations for attracting and retaining high quality teachers in rural and underserved districts. The report shall contain at a minimum eligibility requirements and application processes for districts and individuals, descriptions of and proposed budgets for each incentive program and an analysis of the number and demographics of individuals potentially eligible for each.

(F) Funds appropriated or transferred for use in the Rural Teacher Recruiting Incentive may be carried forward from prior fiscal years and used for the same purpose.

(G) The Education Oversight Committee is required to complete an evaluation of the impact of the funds and incentives related to the Rural Teacher Recruiting Incentive. A completed evaluation is due to the House Ways and Means Committee, the House Education Committee, the Senate Finance Committee, the Senate Education Committee, and the Governor’s Office by June 30, 2026.

# Appendix C
Index of Taxing Paying Ability

## South Carolina Department of Revenue
## Index of Taxpaying Ability Report

**Generated On:** 01/30/2026

**Index Year** 2026
**Tax Year** 2024

| District Name | Index |
|---|---|
| ABBEVILLE | 0.00242 |
| AIKEN | 0.02954 |
| ALLENDALE | 0.00094 |
| ANDERSON1 | 0.00906 |
| ANDERSON2 | 0.00247 |
| ANDERSON3 | 0.00218 |
| ANDERSON4 | 0.00504 |
| ANDERSON5 | 0.01292 |
| BARNWELL45 | 0.0000 |
| BEAUFORT | 0.06481 |
| BERKELEY | 0.06053 |
| CALHOUN | 0.00327 |
| CHARLESTON | 0.13197 |
| CHEROKEE | 0.0086 |
| CHESTER | 0.00504 |
| CHESTERFIELD | 0.0052 |
| COLLETON | 0.00739 |
| DARLINGTON | 0.01007 |
| DILLON3 | 0.00102 |
| DORCHESTER2 | 0.02137 |
| DORCHESTER4 | 0.00355 |
| EDGEFIELD | 0.00322 |
| FAIRFIELD | 0.00523 |

# South Carolina Department of Revenue
# Index of Taxpaying Ability Report

**Generated On:** 01/30/2026

**Index Year** 2026
**Tax Year** 2024

| District Name | Index |
|---|---|
| FLORENCE1 | 0.01677 |
| FLORENCE2 | 0.00057 |
| FLORENCE3 | 0.00214 |
| FLORENCE5 | 0.00057 |
| GEORGETOWN | 0.01899 |
| GREENVILLE | 0.09444 |
| GREENWOOD50 | 0.00826 |
| GREENWOOD51 | 0.00056 |
| GREENWOOD52 | 0.00235 |
| HORRY | 0.10477 |
| JASPER | 0.00628 |
| KERSHAW | 0.00967 |
| LANCASTER | 0.01363 |
| LAURENS55 | 0.00461 |
| LAURENS56 | 0.00264 |
| LEE | 0.00155 |
| LEXINGTON1 | 0.0182 |
| LEXINGTON2 | 0.0115 |
| LEXINGTON3 | 0.00186 |
| LEXINGTON4 | 0.00151 |
| LEXINGTON5 | 0.01654 |
| MCCORMICK | 0.00137 |
| MARLBORO | 0.00301 |

# South Carolina Department of Revenue
# Index of Taxpaying Ability Report

**Generated On:** 01/30/2026

**Index Year** 2026
**Tax Year** 2024

| District Name | Index |
|---|---|
| NEWBERRY | 0.00613 |
| OCONEE | 0.02272 |
| ORANGEBURG | 0.01177 |
| PICKENS | 0.0234 |
| RICHLAND1 | 0.03267 |
| RICHLAND2 | 0.01895 |
| SALUDA | 0.00197 |
| SPARTANBURG1 | 0.00487 |
| SPARTANBURG2 | 0.01082 |
| SPARTANBURG3 | 0.00312 |
| SPARTANBURG4 | 0.00295 |
| SPARTANBURG5 | 0.01909 |
| SPARTANBURG6 | 0.01515 |
| SPARTANBURG7 | 0.01002 |
| UNION | 0.00349 |
| WILLIAMSBURG | 0.00381 |
| YORK1 | 0.00364 |
| YORK2 | 0.01045 |
| YORK3 | 0.01732 |
| YORK4 | 0.01292 |
| HAMPTON | 0.0021 |
| BAMBERG | 0.00114 |
| BARNWELL | 0.00215 |

# South Carolina Department of Revenue
# Index of Taxpaying Ability Report

**Generated On:** 01/30/2026

**Index Year** 2026
**Tax Year** 2024

| District Name | Index |
|---|---|
| CLARENDON | 0.00387 |
| DILLON4 | 0.00219 |
| MARION | 0.00317 |
| SUMTER | 0.01249 |

## Appendix D

RRI FY26 Eligible SC School Districts

| Rural Recruitment Initiative FY26 | |
|---|---|
| | |
| **Eligible SC School Districts** | |
| Abbeville | Kershaw |
| Allendale | Lancaster |
| Anderson 3 | Laurens 55 |
| Anderson 5 | Laurens 56 |
| Bamberg | Lee |
| Barnwell | Lexington 2 |
| Chester | Lexington 3 |
| Chesterfield | Lexington 4 |
| Clarendon | Marion |
| Colleton | Marlboro |
| Darlington | McCormick |
| Dillon 3 | Newberry |
| Dillon 4 | Orangeburg |
| Dorchester 4 | Saluda |
| Edgefield | Spartanburg 2 |
| Fairfield | Spartanburg 3 |
| Florence 1 | Spartanburg 4 |
| Florence 3 | Spartanburg 7 |
| Greenwood 50 | Sumter |
| Greenwood 51 | Union |
| Greenwood 52 | Williamsburg |
| Hampton | York 1 |
| Jasper | York 4 |

**Appendix E** - Six Year RRI Expenditures by Districts

## Rural Recruitment Initiative 6 Year Expenditures

| District | FY20 | FY21 | FY22 | FY23 | FY24 | FY25 | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Abbeville | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | $96,927.00 | $89,808.00 | **$186,735.00** |
| Allendale | $76,900.00 | $51,552.00 | $52,625.00 | $48,412.00 | $39,187.00 | $34,227.00 | **$302,903.00** |
| Anderson 2 | N/A | $135,903.00 | $130,675.00 | $124,010.00 | $91,160.00 | $97,380.00 | **$587,328.00** |
| Anderson 3 | $148,700.00 | $92,504.00 | $100,750.00 | $103,898.00 | $86,563.00 | $79,913.00 | **$612,328.00** |
| Anderson 4 | $160,700.00 | $115,239.00 | $119,364.75 | $108,242.00 | $94,854.00 | $89,156.00 | **$687,611.00** |
| Anderson 5 | N/A | $472,766.84 | $390,050.00 | $406,800.00 | $407,436.64 | $368,944.00 | **$2,246,813.00** |
| Bamberg | N/A | N/A | N/A | $77,580.00 | $62,414.00 | $52,838.00 | **$192,832.00** |
| Bamberg 2 | $53,900.00 | $29,699.16 | $42,550.00 | N/A | N/A | N/A | **$126,150.00** |
| Barnwell 19 | $41,000.00 | $24,669.00 | $19,750.00 | N/A | N/A | N/A | **$85,419.00** |
| Barnwell 29 | $56,900.00 | $38,540.00 | $40,325.00 | N/A | N/A | N/A | **$136,545.00** |
| Barnwell 45 | $124,680.00 | $87,032.00 | $88,325.00 | $86,090.00 | $60,961.00 | N/A | **$450,908.00** |
| Barnwell Consolidated (48) | N/A | N/A | N/A | $63,755.00 | $11,700.00 | $101,841.00 | **$238,697.00** |
| Calhoun | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | $43,990.00 | **$43,990.00** |
| Chester | $285,700.00 | $208,102.00 | $209,850.00 | $202,917.00 | $92,500.00 | $146,200.00 | **$1,210,667.00** |
| Clarendon | N/A | N/A | N/A | $90,418.00 | $111,187.90 | $112,649.00 | **$326,254.91** |
| Clarendon 1 | $56,300.00 | $25,379.00 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | **$81,679.00** |
| Clarendon 2 | $153,799.22 | $99,235.00 | $85,750.00 | N/A | N/A | N/A | **$338,785.00** |
| Clarendon 4 | N/A | N/A | $89,825.00 | N/A | N/A | N/A | **$89,825.00** |
| Colleton | $296,300.00 | $216,958.00 | $217,450.00 | $172,626.00 | $134,780.70 | $119,815.00 | **$1,180,578.00** |
| Darlington | $566,313.00 | $393,327.00 | $402,250.00 | $366,750.00 | $329,911.00 | $324,805.00 | **$2,386,725.00** |
| Dillon 3 | $81,700.00 | $44,533.00 | $52,050.00 | N/A | N/A | $41,105.00 | **$219,388.00** |
| Dillon 4 | $228,100.00 | $147,348.00 | $147,550.00 | $85,000.00 | N/A | $96,011.00 | **$754,962.00** |
| Dorchester 4 | $146,600.00 | $97,681.95 | $90,578.62 | $88,260.00 | $49,289.35 | $64,489.00 | **$584,019.00** |
| Edgefield | $202,600.00 | $145,908.00 | $142,925.00 | $134,134.00 | N/A | $101,948.00 | **$727,515.00** |
| Fairfield | $220,900.00 | $153,132.00 | $153,150.00 | $131,055.00 | $103,645.00 | $88,594.00 | **$850,476.00** |
| Florence 1 | N/A | N/A | $399,625.00 | $658,176.00 | $558,124.00 | N/A | **$1,615,925.00** |
| Florence 2 | $65,900.00 | $45,806.00 | $44,575.00 | N/A | N/A | N/A | **$156,281.00** |
| Florence 3 | $206,100.00 | $144,280.00 | $147,625.00 | $137,793.00 | $106,128.00 | $91,547.00 | **$833,473.00** |
| Florence 4 | $60,200.00 | $43,363.00 | $29,125.00 | N/A | N/A | N/A | **$132,688.00** |
| Greenwood 50 | N/A | $340,716.41 | $366,021.02 | $300,336.00 | $265,914.96 | $256,653.00 | **$1,530,108.00** |
| Greenwood 51 | $62,100.00 | $42,473.00 | $43,450.00 | $38,486.00 | $33,103.00 | $31,162.00 | **$250,774.00** |
| Greenwood 52 | N/A | N/A | N/A | $55,723.00 | $45,803.00 | $43,681.00 | **$145,207.00** |
| Hampton | N/A | N/A | $122,800.00 | $113,828.00 | $83,317.00 | $64,028.00 | **$383,973.00** |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hampton 1 | $129,900.00 | $90,828.00 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | **$220,728.00** |
| Hampton 2 | $50,500.00 | $32,003.00 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | **$82,503.00** |
| Jasper | $166,834.50 | $107,585.00 | $108,225.00 | $106,313.00 | $38,400.00 | $78,602.00 | **$607,425.00** |
| Kershaw | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | $283,031.00 | **$283,031.00** |
| Lancaster | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | $439,059.00 | $440,876.49 | **$879,935.49** |
| Laurens 55 | $371,900.00 | $267,253.00 | $261,800.00 | $218,699.00 | $172,840.39 | $164,667.00 | **$1,829,736.39** |
| Laurens 56 | N/A | N/A | $89,252.33 | $76,817.00 | $84,504.75 | $86,746.49 | **$396,935.49** |
| Lee | $117,400.00 | $78,419.00 | $79,900.00 | $67,637.00 | $45,320.00 | $51,322.00 | **$449,046.00** |
| Lexington 2 | N/A | $369,690.00 | $371,725.00 | $350,771.00 | $284,857.00 | $266,179.00 | **$1,643,222.00** |
| Lexington 3 | N/A | N/A | N/A | $80,336.00 | $63,704.00 | $66,510.00 | **$210,550.00** |
| Lexington 4 | $185,200.00 | $132,039.00 | $137,800.00 | $110,767.00 | $106,528.00 | $104,360.00 | **$792,618.00** |
| Marion | $276,200.00 | $187,034.00 | $193,600.00 | $186,080.00 | $147,397.00 | $140,167.00 | **$1,130,478.00** |
| Marlboro | $235,300.00 | $147,183.00 | $153,849.73 | $138,660.00 | $0.00 | $102,228.00 | **$884,447.00** |
| McCormick | $39,500.00 | $40,975.00 | $40,725.00 | $23,400.00 | $24,710.00 | $22,620.00 | **$191,930.00** |
| Newberry | $375,900.00 | $268,836.00 | $269,900.00 | $252,179.00 | $202,755.00 | $191,076.00 | **$1,567,537.00** |
| Orangeburg | $715,300.00 | $480,500.00 | $443,800.00 | $130,432.00 | $351,550.00 | $434,615.00 | **$2,792,750.00** |
| Saluda | $121,200.00 | $81,435.00 | $100,325.00 | $92,306.00 | $71,150.00 | $73,103.00 | **$539,708.00** |
| Spartanburg 2 | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | $288,084.00 | **$288,084.00** |
| Spartanburg 3 | N/A | $120,880.28 | $128,000.00 | $119,500.00 | $100,043.00 | $90,807.00 | **$569,674.00** |
| Spartanburg 7 | N/A | $372,287.00 | $367,000.00 | $363,517.00 | $316,935.00 | $265,367.00 | **$1,700,006.00** |
| Sumter | $850,400.00 | $580,729.00 | $593,625.00 | $503,918.00 | $399,422.00 | $369,704.00 | **$3,297,798.00** |
| Union | N/A | $148,671.00 | $151,800.00 | $144,966.00 | $120,891.00 | $109,636.00 | **$675,964.00** |
| Williamsburg | $217,400.00 | $152,392.00 | $143,250.00 | $127,457.00 | $85,450.00 | $94,768.00 | **$820,717.00** |
| York 1 | N/A | $204,949.00 | N/A | N/A | $41,326.25 | $112,627.00 | **$479,472.00** |
| York 4 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | $568,237.00 | $560,601.00 | **$1,128,838.00** |
| | | | | | | | |
| Total Expenditures to Districts | $7,148,326.72 | $7,059,835.64 | $7,321,041.45 | $6,688,044.00 | $6,529,985.94 | ########## | **$41,685,714.73** |

NA Not part of RRI

## Appendix F
## CERRA Letter of Assurance/ Disbursement Request Form

**District Name and Mailing Address:**

_____

**Superintendent Name and Email Address:**

_____

**Designated Contact Person and Email Address:**

_____

**Please list all IHE Partners:**

_____

**Assurances:**

1. I acknowledge and understand that FY26 RRI funds disbursed to the district are to be used only for the purpose and in the manner stated in the request.
2. I acknowledge and understand that the **FY26** ***Proposed Spending Worksheet*** and **FY26** ***RRI Disbursement Request Form*** must be used for any requests for disbursement of funds.
3. I acknowledge and understand that FY26 RRI funds which have been disbursed to the district must be utilized before the conclusion of FY26. All requests for disbursements and the ***FY26 EOY Summary Form*** must be submitted to CERRA by **May 29th, 2026**.
4. I acknowledge and understand that any or all of the funds requested but not utilized must be returned to CERRA as soon as the district determines that the funds are not fully needed. Alternatively, a ***FY26 Reallocation Form*** can be submitted to request that some or all of the previously disbursed funds be utilized for a different incentive. Any FY26 funds not requested by May 29th, 2026 will require the use of the ***FY26 Carryover Form***.
5. I acknowledge and understand that the district's use of RRI funds must be reviewed as part of the district's annual audit, and that the district must specifically notify the district's auditor to that effect. I also acknowledge and understand that any negative findings related to the auditor's review of the district's use of RRI funds will be reported to CERRA within 30 days of the auditor's findings being reported to the district.
6. CERRA will provide an end of year summary of funds allocated. I acknowledge and understand that I will be required to report the impact of the incentive(s) on the district's recruitment and retention efforts. I further acknowledge and understand that a year-end spending report accounting for the use of FY26 RRI funds must be submitted to CERRA by **August 1, 2026.**
7. I acknowledge and understand that any failure to comply with RRI requirements could result in referral of the district and/or the district superintendent to the State Department of Education and/or other state entities for any and all appropriate legal or administrative action.
8. I acknowledge and affirm that I will not receive FY26 RRI funds until I have verified and now affirm that all RRI funds disbursed to the district prior to or during FY21 have been utilized as stated on the request forms and that the use of the funds has been reviewed by the district's auditor.

**Superintendent Signature:** _____ **Date:** _____

**Appendix G**
**2026-27 EIA Budget Proviso (Passed by House and Senate)**

**1A.44.** (SDE-EIA: Rural Teacher Recruiting and Retention Incentive) (A) There is created a program within the South Carolina ~~Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement (CERRA)~~ Teacher Education Advancement Consortium through Higher Education Research (SC TEACHER) to recruit and retain classroom educators in rural and underserved districts experiencing elevated teacher ~~excessive~~ turnover ~~of classroom teachers on an annual basis~~.
(B) During the current fiscal year ~~CERRA~~ SC TEACHER shall publish eligibility requirements and applications for individual educators, school districts, and institutions of higher education not inconsistent with existing licensure requirements for each, but also including:
(1) Eligible districts identified by ~~CERRA~~ SC TEACHER as those whose three-year average teacher retention rate, calculated using teacher-level administrative data for eligible classroom educators, falls below the statewide three-year average district retention rate, and that are not within the highest quartile of districts based on index of taxpaying ability. Eligible districts may make application to participate in the program ~~experiencing greater than eleven percent average annual teacher turnover, as reported on the districts five most recent district report cards issued by the South Carolina Department of Education and are not one of the fifteen wealthiest districts based on the index of taxpaying ability, may make application to participate in the program~~.
(2) Notwithstanding item (B)(1), districts in the lowest quartile of taxpaying ability shall remain eligible if their three-year average teacher retention rate is within two percentage points of the statewide three-year district average, recognizing structural recruitment and retention challenges associated with limited fiscal capacity.
(3) Once determined eligible, a district shall retain eligibility status for a period of three fiscal years, subject to monitoring and reporting by SC TEACHER, to support long-term strategic recruitment and retention planning and implementation.
(4) Individuals eligible for incentives shall be willing to provide instructional services in an eligible district in exchange for participation in an incentive detailed in item (C) pursuant to the obligations and restrictions stated for each.
~~(3)~~(5) Institutions of higher education eligible to receive education funding as a component of recruiting incentives created pursuant to item (C) of this provision shall not be excluded from participation in Teaching Fellows Program.
~~(4)~~(6) Any incentives requiring individuals to relocate into an eligible district to provide instructional services shall not be made available to individuals providing instructional services in other eligible districts.
(C) Pursuant to item (A), ~~CERRA~~ SC TEACHER shall develop a set of incentives including, but not limited to, salary supplements, education subsidies, loan forgiveness, professional development, and mentorship to be provided to eligible classroom teachers or candidates ~~educators that offer instructional services~~ in eligible districts and shall provide incentive options for eligible individuals at all stages of their careers, including high-school and college or university students interested in entering the teaching profession and including individuals entering the field through an approved alternative certification pathway ~~to include, but not limited to, PACE, ABCTE, Teach for America, and CATE Work-Based Certification~~. In developing and approving incentives, SC TEACHER shall ensure that funding allocations reflect a balanced and evidence-informed approach to both recruitment and retention, recognizing that sustained workforce stability requires investment beyond initial hiring.
(1) At a minimum, the incentives shall include:

~~(1)~~(a) Development of a program for forgiveness of undergraduate student loans, not to exceed $5,000 per year, for up to 7 years, for teachers participating in this incentive that achieve certification through an alternative pathway or who have a loan from an institution other than the South Carolina Student Loan Corporation or program other than the South Carolina Teachers Loan Program.
~~(2)~~(b) Development of a forgivable loan program for individuals pursuing graduate coursework in furtherance of a teaching career, including enrollment in graduate-level coursework necessary to seek additional credentialing or certification relevant to the participants teaching practice, or individuals seeking an alternative pathway to certification as a teacher.
~~(3)~~(c) Support for the establishment and maintenance of a teaching mentorship program, including salary supplements for teaching mentors not to exceed $2,500 per year.
~~(4)~~(d) Other technical support and recruiting incentives as developed by ~~CERRA~~ SC TEACHER in conjunction with the Department of Education and the Education Oversight Committee consistent with the objectives of this section.
(D) In addition to eligibility and application requirements, ~~CERRA~~ SC TEACHER shall develop a process for recovering an amount equal to the incentives given to individual participants who fail to comply with the obligations associated with a relevant incentive in which they participate including, but not limited to, failure to complete a prescribed course of study, failure to obtain a relevant certification or licensure upon completion of a course of study, or failure to provide instructional services in an eligible district for a prescribed period of time.
(E) ~~CERRA~~ SC TEACHER shall report by July thirty-first of the current fiscal year to the Governor, President of the Senate, ~~and~~ Speaker of the House, and Education Oversight Committee on the incentives developed pursuant to item (C) of this proviso and make recommendations for attracting and retaining high quality teachers in rural and underserved districts. The report shall contain at a minimum eligibility requirements and application processes for districts and individuals, descriptions of and proposed budgets for each incentive program and an analysis of the number and demographics of individuals potentially eligible for each.
(F) Additional evidence-based report requirements shall include:
(1) tracking of incentives funded under this proviso, to the extent practicable, to individual classroom educators;
(2) analysis of expenditures by category of recruitment and retention strategy;
(3) computation of return on investment and related effectiveness measures for categories of spending, including impacts on recruitment, retention, and workforce stability; and
(4) as a condition of eligibility and continued participation, districts shall provide timely, accurate, and standardized information necessary for such tracking and analysis, as specified by SC TEACHER.
(G) To streamline reporting evidence consistency, accuracy, and transparency, SC TEACHER shall:
(1) Develop, maintain, and make available to eligible districts a secure district-facing portal that provides access to aggregated information relevant to the Rural Teacher Recruiting & Retention Incentive including, but not limited to, incentive expenditures, recruitment and retention trends, and educator working conditions data, consistent with applicable privacy and data governance requirements.
(2) The district portal shall be designed to support districts required responsibilities in use of these data for district planning, monitoring, and evaluation of recruitment and retention strategies funded under this proviso.
(H) Funds appropriated or transferred for use in the Rural Teacher Recruiting Incentive may be carried forward from prior fiscal years and used for the same purpose.

~~(G) The Education Oversight Committee is required to complete an evaluation of the impact of the funds and incentives related to the Rural Teacher Recruiting Incentive. A completed evaluation is due to the House Ways and Means Committee, the House Education Committee, the Senate Finance Committee, the Senate Education Committee, and the Governors Office by June 30, 2026.~~

**Appendix H.**
**Recommended Rural Recruitment Incentives for 2026-27 from an interagency working group (EOC, SCDOE, CERRA, and the Governor's office)**

| **Proposed RRI Incentives** |
|---|
| Alternative Certification and Certification Supports |
| Critical Needs Stipends |
| First Year Stipends |
| Graduate Courses |
| International Teachers (to be phased out in three years) |
| Mentoring and Induction |
| Professional Development |
| Grow Your Own (District Innovative Program) |

**Appendix I**

**Recommended Rural Recruitment Initiative District Application**
**Pursuant to Proviso 1A.44**

## Overview & Instructions

### Overview

Since Fiscal Year 2016 (FY16), pursuant to Proviso 1A.73, the Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement (CERRA), in collaboration with the Education Oversight Committee (EOC), and the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE), has been responsible for developing and maintaining a comprehensive list of recruitment and retention incentives available to rural districts. The provision has been renewed annually, with several substantive amendments implemented over time to strengthen its effectiveness.

Under the current FY27 Proviso 1A.44, districts identified as eligible will be invited to apply for Rural Recruitment Initiative (RRI) funds. Eligibility is determined through a rigorous analysis of three key indicators:

1. *Academic Performance*: Districts with the lowest performance in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics, based on report card scores for grades 3-8, English 1, and Algebra 1.

2. *Fiscal Capacity*: Districts with the lowest index of Taxpaying Ability, reflecting their capacity to generate local revenue, as reported by the South Carolina Department of Revenue.

3. *Teacher Retention*: Districts with the highest three-year teacher turnover rates, as indicated on the school report card.

Using these criteria, a list of eligible districts will be determined by the Education Oversight Committee. An eligible district must decide by July 15, 2026 whether it will apply for the RRI funds. If an eligible district elects not to apply for the Rural Recruitment Initiative funds by this deadline, the Education Oversight Committee will move to the next district on the ranked alternate list.

District applications for RRI funds must reflect comprehensive planning, research, and documentation to demonstrate a measurable impact on teacher recruitment and retention. Districts are expected to:

- Outline proposed strategies supported by research
- Clearly define anticipated outcomes

- Include baseline data to accurately measure progress
- Provide both short-term and long-term indicators of success
- Develop a detailed progress-monitoring framework
- Collect and report teacher recruitment and retention data throughout the funding period

A cross-agency team will support districts in crafting robust, aligned proposals and will review applications for adherence to program goals. Pending availability, funding will be provided for three years. Districts are encouraged to consider collaborative, regional approaches. Ultimately, each plan must answer the critical question: How will you know the Rural Recruitment Initiative funds are improving teacher recruitment and retention rates in your schools?

**Application Instructions**

The Rural Recruitment Initiative (RRI) application includes three components: Basic Information, Plan Information and Timeline, and Assurances. Districts should ensure alignment with their district strategic plan and should collaborate closely with the cross-agency support team to develop a comprehensive, research-backed proposal. Participation in RRI workshops, hosted by CERRA, is required as these sessions will provide guidance on best practices and compliance requirements. Funds must be allocated within the following categories: alternative certification and certification supports, critical needs stipends, first year stipends, graduate coursework, international teachers (districts allocating funds to this category must include a three-year plan for phasing out this funding), mentoring and induction programs, professional development opportunities, *grow your own* or other innovative district programs. Thoughtful planning and coordination will help districts craft a proposal that meets program expectations and demonstrates a clear, measurable path toward improving teacher recruitment and retention.

Once submitted, the application will be reviewed by a team composed of representatives from the South Carolina Department of Education and the Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement.

| Rural Recruitment Initiative Application Questions |
|---|

**Section I: Basic Information**

- Date submitted
- District name
- Primary contact name
- Contact position title
- Contact phone number

- Contact email address

**Section II: Plan Information & Timeline**

1. ***Identify Area(s) of Need***
   Describe your district's greatest area(s) of need in relation to teacher recruitment and retention. Be specific and include relevant data where possible.
   **This will likely serve as baseline data*.

2. ***Recruitment Plan***
   What is your plan to increase recruitment in your district (based on your needs identified in Q1)? Refer to the following categories as applicable: alternative certification and certification supports, critical needs stipends, first year stipends, graduate coursework, international teachers (districts allocating funds to this category must include a three-year plan for phasing out this funding), mentoring and induction programs, professional development opportunities, grow your own or other innovative district programs. Include supporting research with citations and provide detailed information on how implementation will occur.

3. ***Retention Plan***
   What is your plan to improve teacher retention in your district? Refer to the same categories listed above. Include supporting research with citations and provide detailed information on how implementation will occur.

4. ***Progress Monitoring and Measuring Success***
   How will you monitor progress and measure success (based on your need and data in Q1)? Please note that for each teacher who benefits from this funding, the district must submit names and certificate numbers. This will allow both the district and the cross-agency team to track the impact of funding on teacher recruitment and retention at the district and state levels.

5. ***Implementation Timeline***
   Upload a three-year timeline that includes detailed implementation steps and scheduled progress-monitoring checks. This timeline should clearly indicate short-term and long-term milestones aligned with your recruitment and retention goals.

**Section IIa: Plan Information & Timeline (International Teachers)**

If the district plan includes allocating funds for international teachers, please provide the phase-out plan here.

**Section III: Assurances**

The district understands and assures the following:

- A district team, comprised of at least the superintendent, Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Human Resources director, and a teacher representative collaborated to develop this proposal.
- The district can submit descriptions of events and copies of original receipts to CERRA for reimbursement twice per academic year: by November 30, 2026 and April 30, 2027.
- Upon request, the district must provide invoices. Only expenses directly related to the approved plan will be eligible for reimbursement.

Appendix J

# Rural Recruitment Spending:
# 5-Year ROI Analysis of Strategic Investments

## 1. Introduction

In this report, SC TEACHER analyzes 5 years of Rural Recruitment Initiative spending across five incentive categories (alternative certification, international teacher recruitment, 1st-year teacher stipends, induction and mentoring support, and general recruitment expenses). For each category, the report documents cost per hire or cost per retained teacher, the distribution of outcomes across districts and years, and trends over time. Findings describe associations between spending and outcomes.

### 1.1 Purpose and Scope

This report presents a return on investment (ROI) analysis of South Carolina's Rural Recruitment Initiative (RRI) funds for the 5 fiscal years from 2019–20 through 2023–24. The RRI provides Education Improvement Act (EIA) funds to rural and economically disadvantaged school districts to support the recruitment and retention of teachers in hard-to-staff positions.

The analysis covers five spending categories for which administrative outcome data are sufficient to compute ROI: alternative certification, international teacher recruitment, 1st-year teacher stipends, induction and mentoring support, and general recruitment expenses. Together, these five categories account for $22.2 million, or approximately 65%, of the $34.3 million disbursed to districts over the 5-year study window. Additional RRI categories, including critical needs stipends, professional development, graduate coursework, and several smaller incentive types, are documented in Table 1.1 but are not analyzed for ROI because the data infrastructure needed to link spending to individual recruitment or retention outcomes is not yet in place for those categories.

The five categories span the two primary goals of the RRI program: recruitment (bringing teachers into districts who were not previously there) and retention (supporting teachers already employed in districts so they remain). International teacher recruitment and general recruitment expenses are analyzed as recruitment strategies; their primary outcome is the number of teachers hired per dollar spent. Alternative certification, induction and mentoring, and 1st-year stipends are analyzed as retention strategies; their primary outcome is the number of additional teachers retained from one year to the next per dollar spent. This distinction is central to the analysis: It explains why ROI is defined differently across categories and why categories cannot be ranked on a single scale. Section 1.3 and Technical Appendix A explain the methodological basis for these differences in detail.

Table 1.1 lists all RRI spending categories, their 5-year totals, the number of unique districts that used each category, and their analytical status.

**Table 1.1.** *RRI Spending Categories, 5-Year Totals (2019–20 Through 2023–24), District Participation, and Analytical Status*

| Spending category | 5-year total (2019-24) | Unique districts | Analytical status | Outcome |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Categories analyzed in this report** | | | | |
| Alternative certification | $1,255,413 | 36 | Analyzed — Section 3.1 | Cost per retained teacher (Measure 2); change in retained teachers vs. prior year (Measure 1) |
| International teacher recruitment | $9,540,819 | 39 | Analyzed — Section 3.2 | Cost per new hire |
| 1st-year teacher stipends | $477,499 | 14 | Analyzed — Section 3.3 | Change in 1st-year hires vs. prior year |
| Induction and mentoring | $3,570,540 | 44† | Analyzed — Section 3.4 | Change in retained teachers vs. prior year |
| General recruitment expenses (recruitment activities, website updates, national employment fees) | $7,364,821 | 46 | Analyzed — Section 3.5 | Cost per new hire |
| **Sub-total — categories analyzed in report** | **$22,209,092** | **55** | **64.7% of all 5-year disbursements to districts** | |
| **Additional categories — not analyzed for ROI** | | | | |
| Critical needs stipends | $5,891,456 | — | Not analyzed—lacks teacher-level tracking to link spending to individual outcomes | |
| Professional development | $3,677,379 | — | Not analyzed—lacks teacher-level tracking to link spending to individual outcomes | |
| Graduate coursework | $1,241,641 | — | Not analyzed—lacks teacher-level tracking to link spending to individual outcomes | |
| Bridge fees, certification supports, housing, travel stipends | $1,297,792 | — | Not analyzed—lacks teacher-level tracking to link spending to individual outcomes | |
| **Sub-total — categories NOT analyzed in report** | **$12,108,268** | — | **35.3% of all 5-year disbursements to districts** | |
| **TOTAL — all categories** | **$34,317,359** | **—** | **5-year total, 2019-20 through 2023-24** | |

Unique district counts for analyzed categories reflect the number of districts with at least 1 year of spending in that category within the study window; the 55-district total for analyzed categories counts each district once, regardless of how many categories a district used. †The district count for induction and mentoring support reflects all 6 years, including 2018–19; the 5-year ROI analysis (Section 3.4) covers 42 unique districts.

## 1.2 Background on the Rural Recruitment Initiative

The RRI was established in fiscal year 2015–16 under Proviso 1A.73 of the General Appropriation Act. The initial appropriation of $1.5 million from EIA revenues was administered by the Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement (CERRA) and targeted school districts with average annual teacher turnover greater than 12%. Across subsequent years, the program was modified several times: The turnover eligibility threshold was lowered to 11%, the 15 wealthiest districts by index of taxpaying ability were made ineligible, a rural district undergraduate loan forgiveness program was added, and the annual appropriation grew substantially.

District eligibility is determined annually by CERRA based on two criteria: (a) average annual teacher turnover exceeding 11% as reported on the five most recent district report cards and (b) exclusion from the top 15 districts by index of taxpaying ability. Eligible districts apply for and receive annual allocations, with the allocation amount determined by a formula that weights district size (number of classroom teachers) and turnover rate above the eligibility threshold. Because the allocation formula is driven primarily by teacher count, larger districts receive more funding in absolute terms; the turnover weighting adds a relatively small adjustment. This property of the allocation formula is relevant to interpreting some cross-district comparisons in Section 3.5.

RRI offers districts considerable flexibility in how they use their allocations. Funds may be carried forward from one year to the next, and districts may apply for funds across as many incentive categories as their staffing strategy requires. The wide variation in how districts allocate their funds is evident in the 5-year data: No single category dominates across all districts, and several districts shifted their strategies substantially from year to year, possibly in response to changing staffing conditions.

## 1.3 Methodology Overview

ROI is calculated at the district-year level: Each combination of a district and a fiscal year in which that district had spending in a given category constitutes one observation. The unit of analysis is the district-year rather than the district alone because RRI strategies change from year to year. Districts that invested heavily in induction in 2020–21 and shifted to international recruitment in 2022–23 yield observations that are meaningfully different for each year. Using district-years rather than district averages preserves that within-district variation and increases the statistical precision of the estimates. Different analyses within a category apply different inclusion criteria. For example, some require prior-year spending, some require consecutive years of outcome data, and some are restricted to a 5-year window, while others include a 6th baseline year. As such, the number of district-year observations reported will vary within the same category across tables. Each table notes its specific inclusion criteria.

All ROI formulas use a 1-year lag structure: Spending in fiscal year $t$ is linked to outcomes observed in year $t + 1$. This lag reflects how the program operates in practice. A district funds recruitment activities in one year and measures how many teachers are newly hired at the start of the following year; it funds induction throughout a school year and measures how many of those teachers return the following year.

Because the five categories pursue different goals, each uses a different outcome measure. For recruitment categories, the outcome is the number of teachers hired; ROI is expressed as new hires per dollar, or equivalently as cost per hire. For retention categories, the outcome is the year-over-year change in the number of teachers retained; ROI is expressed as additional retained teachers per dollar spent, which is positive when more teachers are retained than in the prior year and negative when fewer are retained. These are not interchangeable metrics. A cost-per-hire figure from general recruitment and a cost-per-additional-retained-teacher figure from induction describe fundamentally different activities and comparing them as if they were on the same scale would be misleading. Section 4 places all five categories side by side, with this caveat explicitly stated, and Technical Appendix A documents each formula in full detail.

From district-year ROI values, an overall ROI is computed as a pooled ratio: the sum of all outcome values across all district-year observations divided by the sum of all spending values for the category. This approach was chosen over a simple average because averaging district-year ROI values is distorted by observations with very small denominators. A district that spent $1,500 on induction in a single year produces an ROI value that is arithmetically enormous, even if the absolute outcome was trivial. The pooled ratio weights each district-year observation in proportion to its actual share of total spending, so large-spending districts have appropriately more influence on the overall estimate than small-spending ones. Because the pooled ratio is implicitly spending-weighted and may not reflect the typical district's experience, the median district-year ROI is always reported alongside it. Table 1.2 provides a concise reference for all six ROI formulas documented in the appendix.

**Table 1.2.** *Summary of ROI Formula Components by Category*

| Category | Numerator (outcome) | Denominator (cost) | Interpretation of positive value | Timing structure |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alternative certification (retention) (Formula 1) | Change in # of retained alt cert candidates year-over-year | Prior-year RRI spending ($t-1$) | Additional retained candidates per dollar | Spending in $t-1$; outcome change from $t-1$ to $t$ (1-year lag) |
| Alternative certification (retention) (Formula 2) | Retained alt cert candidates in $t+1$ | Current-year RRI spending ($t$) | Cost per retained candidate | Spending in $t$; outcome in $t+1$ (1-year lag) |
| International recruitment | New international teachers hired in year $t+1$ | RRI spending on international teacher fees in year $t$ | International teacher hires per dollar spent | Spending in $t$; outcome in $t+1$ (1-year lag) |
| 1st-year stipends (recruitment) | Change in # of 1st-year teachers year-over-year | Prior-year stipend spending ($t-1$) | Additional 1st-year hires per dollar spent | Spending in $t-1$; outcome change from $t-1$ to $t$ (1-year lag) |
| 1st-year stipends (retention) | Pooled retention rate: stipend years vs. non-stipend years | N/A — no spending denominator | Descriptive rate difference | All stipend and non-stipend district-years compared (no lag structure) |
| Induction/ mentoring (retention) | Change in # of retained induction teachers year-over-year | Current-year RRI spending ($t$) | Additional retained induction teachers per dollar spent | Spending in $t$; outcome in $t+1$ (1-year lag) |
| General recruitment | New hires in year $t+1$ | RRI spending in year $t$ | New hires per dollar; or cost per hire | Spending in $t$; outcome in $t+1$ (1-year lag) |

All formulas use spending in year $t$ as the denominator unless otherwise noted. "Change" in outcome means value in $t+1$ minus value in $t$.

## What the Data Support and What They Do Not

RRI funds are allocated to districts as flexible resources, without requiring tracking of which specific teachers benefit from each dollar spent. This creates an inherent attribution challenge, particularly for retention categories. When a district spends on induction and retains 90% of its early-career teachers, the analysis can document the association between that spending and that outcome, but it cannot rule out that some teachers would have stayed regardless, or that other factors (e.g., a new principal, an improved salary schedule, statewide labor market conditions) explain part or all of the retention difference. It also cannot account for additional resources (e.g., federal grants, other district investments) that may have been deployed alongside RRI dollars toward the same recruitment or retention goals. The analysis captures only the RRI spending allocated; it does not capture the total investment surrounding it.

Because of this limitation, the ROI estimates in this report should be interpreted as associations between RRI spending and outcomes, not as causal effects. They describe what happened in districts that invested in each strategy, year by year, across the study period. Where patterns are consistent across many districts and multiple years, the evidence for a relationship between spending and outcomes is stronger. When outcomes vary widely across districts or years, the analysis seeks to

identify which contextual factors may explain that variation, while acknowledging that the available data cannot resolve all sources of uncertainty.

Three additional constraints affect interpretation throughout the report. First, all ROI calculations use a 1-year outcome window; programs like induction and alternative certification that are designed to build long-term teaching careers may generate retention effects over 3 to 5 years that this analysis cannot capture. Second, the ROI metrics measure recruitment and retention counts, not teacher quality, instructional effectiveness, student outcomes, or teacher satisfaction. Third, several categories have relatively small panels (1st-year stipends: 23 district-year observations; alternative certification: 68 observations), and findings from smaller-sample categories are less precise than those from larger ones. Section 5 addresses these limitations in detail.

**A note on the study period:** The study window is 2019–20 through 2023–24 for all five analyzed categories. For retention categories (alternative certification, mentoring/induction, 1st-year stipends), 2018–19 data are used as the prior-year baseline for the 2019–20 ROI calculations but do not constitute a separate ROI observation year. Spending figures for induction and 1st-year stipends are sometimes cited over 6 years (including 2018–19) to give the full picture of program investment; in those cases, the applicable total is noted explicitly.

### Categories Not Analyzed for ROI

Several RRI spending categories are not analyzed in this report. Critical needs stipends ($5.9 million across 5 years) are paid to teachers in high-need subject areas, but a data infrastructure to identify which teachers received stipends and whether they remained in those positions is not yet in place. Professional development ($3.7 million) supports teacher quality and satisfaction broadly rather than targeting a defined cohort whose outcomes can be tracked. With beneficiary tracking in place, these funds could be connected with SC TEACHER's SC Teacher Working Conditions Survey. Graduate coursework ($1.2 million) represents a long-term career investment with retention effects that may not materialize within a 1-year outcome window. Smaller categories (e.g., bridge program fees, certification supports, housing stipends, and travel stipends) also lack consistent beneficiary tracking. These categories are excluded from the ROI analysis as they require an improved data infrastructure to be assessed rigorously.

# 2. Overall RRI Spending Patterns

## 2.1 Aggregate Spending Trends

From 2019–20 through 2024–25, South Carolina RRI-eligible districts disbursed a total of $41.2 million in funds. Table 2.1 shows the complete distribution across all spending categories and years. Annual disbursements ranged from $6.47 million (2023–24) to $7.32 million (2021–22), a variation of less than 12% across the 6-year period. This stability reflects consistent legislative appropriations and steady district participation, with no year showing a dramatic contraction in overall program activity.

**Table 2.1.** *Total RRI Funds Disbursed by Incentive Type, 2019–20 Through 2024–25*

| RRI incentive | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 | 2022-23 | 2023-24 | 2024-25 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alternative certification | $269,407 | $265,624 | $202,513 | $246,151 | $271,718 | $364,855 | **$1,620,268** |
| Bridge fees | $14,500 | — | $55,000 | $99,286 | $171,093 | $111,778 | **$451,657** |
| Certification supports | $60,627 | $67,200 | $105,800 | $73,747 | $82,821 | $90,569 | **$480,764** |
| Critical needs stipends | $793,395 | $1,819,719 | $1,123,568 | $1,336,116 | $818,658 | $811,208 | **$6,702,664** |
| 1st-year teacher stipends | $149,948 | $161,477 | $60,690 | $73,884 | $31,500 | $210,729 | **$688,228** |
| Graduate courses | $78,077 | $212,297 | $433,850 | $282,035 | $235,382 | $275,504 | **$1,517,145** |
| Housing stipends | $61,236 | $64,366 | $52,050 | $85,251 | — | $49,806 | **$312,709** |
| International teacher fees | $2,474,955 | $1,724,836 | $1,943,910 | $1,328,967 | $2,068,151 | $1,261,608 | **$10,802,427** |
| Mentoring and induction | $722,468 | $740,090 | $607,060 | $717,567 | $783,355 | $1,189,941 | **$4,760,481** |
| National employment fees | $234,761 | $203,623 | $217,068 | $181,347 | $109,740 | $218,064 | **$1,164,603** |
| Professional development | $662,011 | $830,421 | $868,905 | $586,356 | $729,686 | $791,898 | **$4,469,277** |
| Recruitment expenses | $1,026,478 | $729,395 | $1,446,684 | $1,397,057 | $851,617 | $1,168,784 | **$6,620,015** |
| Surveys | — | — | — | $40,950 | $137,681 | $242,407 | **$421,038** |
| Teacher Cadet start-up | $1,161 | $10,125 | $14,200 | $4,000 | — | $12,025 | **$41,511** |
| Travel stipends | $43,173 | $28,335 | $7,000 | $18,190 | — | $6,640 | **$103,338** |
| Website updates | $184,231 | $202,328 | $182,744 | $217,139 | $180,608 | $114,306 | **$1,081,356** |
| **Total RRI funds disbursed** | **$6,776,428** | **$7,059,836** | **$7,321,042** | **$6,688,043** | **$6,472,010** | **$6,920,122** | **$41,237,481** |

A dash (—) indicates no disbursements for that category in that year. Source: CERRA.

The distribution of spending across categories is highly concentrated. International teacher fees are the single largest category at $10.8 million over 6 years (26.2% of total disbursements). Critical needs stipends ($6.7 million, 16.3%), recruitment expenses ($6.6 million, 16.1%), mentoring and induction ($4.8 million, 11.5%), and professional development ($4.5 million, 10.8%) round out the top five. Together, these five categories account for approximately $33.4 million, or 81% of all RRI disbursements. The remaining 19% is distributed across eleven smaller categories, including alternative certification, graduate courses, website updates, housing and travel stipends, and bridge fees.

**Study period note:** This section reports full 6-year disbursement figures (2019–20 through 2024–25) using Table 2.1. The ROI analysis in Section 3 covers 5 years only (2019–20 through 2023–24) because 2024–25 teacher employment and outcome data are not yet available for the outcome linkage calculations. Where dollar figures are referenced in Section 3, they reflect the 5-year totals, which are smaller than the 6-year figures shown in Table 2.1.

## 2.2 Spending Patterns for the Five Analyzed Categories

This section describes spending patterns for the five categories analyzed for ROI in Section 3. For context, 5-year totals (2019–20 through 2023–24) are noted where relevant, as those are the figures used in the ROI calculations.

### Alternative Certification

Districts spent $1.62 million on alternative certification across 6 years ($1.26 million across the 5-year window), with 36 unique districts using the category across the study period. Annual spending was relatively stable, ranging from $203K to $272K across the first 5 years, with a notable increase to $365K in 2024–25. The year-over-year stability suggests this category functions as a sustained programmatic investment in a subset of districts rather than an episodic response to staffing crises. Of the 36 participating districts, slightly less than 40% used the category in at least 4 of the 6 available years, while roughly 28% used it in only 1 or 2 years, reflecting the mix of districts that have established alternative certification pipelines and those that draw on it opportunistically to address specific vacancies.

### International Teacher Fees

International teacher fees represent the largest single RRI category at $10.8 million across 6 years ($9.54 million across the 5-year window), with 39 unique districts using the category across the study period. The year-over-year pattern is the most volatile of any analyzed category, largely driven by the pandemic. Spending declined from $2.47 million in 2019–20 to $1.72 million in 2020–21, and fell further to $1.33 million in 2022–23 as international visa processing backlogs and travel restrictions persisted beyond the acute phase of COVID-19 challenges. Recovery was evident by 2023–24, when spending returned to $2.07 million. Approximately 62% of districts using this category did so in at least 4 of the 5 years in the ROI window. A small number of larger districts account for a disproportionate share of total spending in this category.

### First-Year Teacher Stipends

Spending for 1st-year stipends totaled $688K across 6 years ($477K across the 5-year window), the smallest of the five analyzed categories. Only 14 unique districts used stipends at any point during the study period, and usage was highly sporadic: 10 of the 14 used the category in only a single year, two used it in 2 consecutive years, and only Williamsburg County School District sustained participation across all 6 years. The year-over-year pattern is also the most variable: Spending peaked at $161K in 2020–21, dropped sharply to $61K in 2021–22, recovered modestly, fell to $32K in 2023–24, and then rose to $211K in 2024–25. Whether the 2024–25 increase represents a durable expansion of stipend use or a single-year spike is not yet clear from the available data.

### Mentoring and Induction

Mentoring and induction is the most consistently growing RRI category. Total spending was $4.76 million across 6 years ($3.57 million across the 5-year window), with 44 unique districts participating across the study period. The trend is unambiguously upward: Annual spending grew from $722K in 2019–20 to $740K in 2020–21, dipped to $607K in 2021–22, and then rose in each subsequent year, reaching $1.19 million in 2024–25. No other category shows this level of consistent, multi-year growth. The number of districts using induction in a given year grew from 12 in 2018–19 to 26 in 2023–24,

suggesting that participation is expanding as more districts develop or formalize their mentoring programs. Nearly half of these districts (approximately 48%) used the category in at least 4 of the 6 available years.

### General Recruitment Expenses

General recruitment is reported across three subcategories in Table 2.1 (recruitment expenses, website updates, and national employment fees), which are combined in the ROI analysis as a single broad-funnel recruitment category. Together, these three subcategories total $8.87 million across 6 years ($7.36 million across the 5-year window), with 46 unique districts participating. Recruitment expenses are the dominant subcategory, accounting for $6.62 million (74.7% of the combined total) and covering job fairs, digital advertising, printed materials, and general outreach. Website updates ($1.08 million, 12.2%) and national employment system fees ($1.16 million, 13.1%) make up the remainder.

General recruitment has the highest district participation of any analyzed category and the most consistent year-over-year usage: Approximately 74% of participating districts used at least one of the three subcategories in at least 4 of the 5 years. Annual combined spending fluctuated more than the stability of participation would suggest, ranging from $1.46 million (2019–20 combined) to $1.85 million (2021–22), reflecting variation in the scale and frequency of recruitment activities across years. The 2021–22 spike in recruitment expenses coincides with the return of in-person career fairs and hiring events following pandemic closures, when multiple years of deferred outreach activity may have compressed into a single high-spend year.

## 3. ROI Analysis by Category

This section presents ROI findings for each of the five analyzed categories. Each category is evaluated using the outcome measure most appropriate to its purpose, as described in Section 1.3 and Technical Appendix A. Comparisons across categories require care because the metrics are not on the same scale. Section 4 addresses cross-category comparisons directly.

## 3.1 Alternative Certification Programs

Alternative certification programs support teachers who enter the classroom on a provisional license while working toward full professional certification. Districts use RRI funds to cover program fees, exam costs, and mentoring expenses for these candidates. The primary goal is to retain them long enough to complete the certification process and establish careers in RRI districts.

This section reports two complementary measures of program performance. Measure 1 (year-over-year change in retained count) asks whether more alternative certification candidates were retained following the spending year than the year before, using prior-year spending as the denominator. Measure 2 (cost per retained teacher) asks what each retained alternative certification candidate costs the district in the investment year, using current-year spending as the denominator. Because Measure 1 requires prior-year spending and consecutive retained counts, it draws on a narrower panel: 29 districts and 68 district-year observations. Measure 2 requires only that current-year spending be positive, giving a broader panel of 36 districts and 84 district-year observations.

### 3.1.1 One-Year Return on Investment

The data allow for two ways to measure whether the investment paid off.

The first measure asks: Did the district retain more alternative certification candidates this year than last year, relative to what was spent the year before? This captures potential improvement over time. However, the measure has a limitation: It is sensitive to cohort size, meaning that a district that doubled its alternative certification enrollment will likely retain more candidates in absolute terms even if its retention rate stays the same.

The second measure asks: How much did it cost the district for each alternative certification candidate who remained the following year? Technical Appendix A provides full definitions for both measures.

**Measure 1: Year-Over-Year Retention Change**

**Table 3.1.1.** *Alternative Certification Summary, 2019–20 Through 2023–24*

| Metric | Value |
|---|---|
| Overall ROI (pooled) | −0.0000296 change in retained teachers per dollar |
| Median ROI | 0.000000 (no change at median) |
| District-years with improving retention | 27 of 68 (39.7%) |
| Districts with spending per year (range) | 13 (2019–20) to 23 (2023–24) |
| Median cost per additional teacher retained† | $4,500 |
| Total spending (2019–20 through 2023–24) | $1,255,413 |
| Observations | 68 district-years; 29 unique districts |

†Median among district-years where year-over-year retention improved. Measure 1 requires prior-year spending data, giving 68 observations across 29 unique districts.

Across the study period, alternative certification spending was associated with a slightly negative overall result: The total number of retained alternative certification candidates across all district-years was 31 fewer than the prior year, against $1.0 million in prior-year spending. The median result was exactly zero, meaning the middle observation showed no change in retention from the prior year, neither an improvement nor a decline. In 27 of the 68 instances where a district spent on alternative certification and had data for the following year, retention improved. In other words, when looking at each district's experience year by year, about 4 in 10 spending years were followed by an improvement in the number of alternative certification candidates who stayed.

Year-by-year results varied considerably. The first 2 years of the study period both showed positive median results; performance fell in 2021–22 and 2022–23, consistent with the national wave of teacher attrition following COVID-19, before partially recovering in 2023–24.

**Table 3.1.2.** *Year-Over-Year Retention Change: Alternative Certification Results by Year*

| Year | Median result | Districts | Positive outcomes |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2019–20 | 0.000060 | 10 | 5 of 10 (50%) |
| 2020–21 | 0.000048 ← Best year | 13 | 7 of 13 (54%) |
| 2021–22 | −0.000154 | 13 | 3 of 13 (23%) |
| 2022–23 | −0.000115 | 16 | 8 of 16 (50%) |
| 2023–24 | −0.000025 ← Recovery | 16 | 4 of 16 (25%) |

A positive value means more alternative certification candidates were retained than in the prior year.

Three districts (Greenwood School District 50, Laurens County School District 55, and Spartanburg School District 7) showed improving retention in every year for which prior-year spending data were available. Spartanburg School District 7 is the most consistent example, with stable retention rates of 86–88% across a growing cohort over multiple consecutive years.

### Measure 2: Cost per Retained Teacher

Across 84 district-year observations involving 36 unique districts, the pooled cost per retained alternative certification candidate was $1,524, with a median of $955. Four observations had zero retained candidates despite spending. The overall candidate retention rate (the share of alternative certification candidates who remained in their district the following year) improved from 73.5% in 2019–20 to 83.3% in 2023–24, suggesting that districts' ability to hold onto the candidates they invest in strengthened over the study period.

**Table 3.1.3.** *Cost per Retained Alternative Certification Candidate by Year*

| Year | Districts | Pooled cost per retained teacher | Candidate retention rate | Median cost per retained teacher |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2019–20 | 13 | $1,938 | 73.5% | $649 |
| 2020–21 | 15 | $1,509 | 76.5% | $1,059 |
| 2021–22 | 16 | $1,164 ← Best | 77.3% | $909 |
| 2022–23 | 17 | $1,810 | 78.6% | $1,017 |
| 2023–24 | 23 | $1,365 | 83.3% | $1,218 |

Candidate retention rate = share of alt cert candidates still in the district the following year.

**ROI note:** These two measures can tell different stories about the same district. A district can show a slightly negative Measure 1 result, meaning it retained a smaller number of teachers than the prior year, while still showing a reasonable Measure 2 cost per retained teacher, because retention counts fluctuate for reasons beyond the program itself. Reading both together gives a more complete picture than either one alone.

## 3.1.2 Multi-Year Retention and Certification Outcomes

The 1-year measures shared in Section 3.1.1 capture whether retention improved in a given year. The more consequential question for a program designed to build a sustainable teacher pipeline is the longer-term one: Do these teachers ultimately earn professional certification, and do they remain in the district that invested in them? SC TEACHER tracked two cohorts of newly hired alternative certification

candidates who entered RRI spending districts in 2019–20 (*n* = 65) and 2020–21 (*n* = 100), across 4 years each.

### Retention and Certification: Two Cohorts, 4 Years

**Table 3.1.4.** *Four-Year Retention and Certification Outcomes for Newly Hired Alternative Certification Candidates in RRI Spending Districts by Cohort*

| Outcome | 2019-20 cohort (*n* = 65) | 2020-21 cohort (*n* = 100) |
|---|---|---|
| **Retention trajectory (still teaching in same district)** | | |
| After Year 1 | 80% | 71% |
| After Year 2 | 54% | 49% |
| After Year 3 | 36% | 41% |
| After Year 4 | 35% | 34% |
| **Certification outcomes (at end of 4-year window)** | | |
| Achieved professional certification | 58.5% | 42.0% |
| Certified AND still in same district | 30.8% | 22.0% |

2019–20 cohort measured through 2023–24; 2020–21 cohort measured through 2024–25.

The two cohorts follow notably different paths but arrive at nearly the same destination. The 2019–20 cohort starts at 80% retention after Year 1 and declines gradually to 35% by Year 4; its largest single-year loss comes in Year 2, not Year 1. The 2020–21 cohort starts lower at 71% after Year 1 and then declines more gradually to 34% by Year 4. In both cohorts, the majority of total attrition has occurred by the end of Year 2 (71% and 77% of all departures, respectively), with relatively little additional attrition in Years 3 and 4. The convergence at Year 4 to 35% and 34% is the most notable pattern: two cohorts with different starting points and different early trajectories ended up in nearly the same place.

Certification rates differed more between cohorts. In the 2019–20 cohort, 58.5% achieved professional certification within 4 years; in the 2020–21 cohort, 42% did. The difference may reflect differences in district composition across cohorts or variation in certification program structure.

The combined outcome, professionally certified and still in the same district, was met by 30.8% of the 2019–20 cohort and 22% of the 2020–21 cohort. These are the figures most directly relevant to assessing whether the district's investment produced a lasting return.

**Note on measurement:** These retention figures count teachers who remained in the same district that originally hired and invested in them. Some who left their original district continued teaching in South Carolina elsewhere. The figures here reflect the return to the investing district, not to the state's workforce overall.

## 3.2 International Teacher Recruitment

Districts use RRI funds to recruit teachers from abroad through the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program and the H-1B Visa Program, paying agency placement fees, visa processing costs, and administrative expenses. Across 5 years, 39 unique districts spent a combined $9,540,819 on international recruitment across 108 district-year observations. Of these 39 districts, 10 (26%) used international recruitment in all 5 spending years of the study period, and 13 (33%) used it in 4 or 5 years, reflecting sustained agency partnerships.

### 3.2.1 Cost per Teacher Recruited

International recruitment measures the number of actual teachers hired per dollar spent. Teachers on J-1 visas serve fixed-term contracts of up to 3 years, with the option to extend for 2 years. The program does not aim to grow a permanent international workforce but to maintain annual recruitment capacity, replacing teachers as their contracts end and recruiting new cohorts each cycle. Measuring year-over-year change in hires would show zero or negative results even in years when the program is working exactly as intended. Cost per hire captures what the investment actually bought.

**Table 3.2.1.** *International Teacher Recruitment Summary*

| Metric | Value |
|---|---|
| Overall cost per hire | $17,538 per teacher recruited |
| Median cost per hire | $13,708 per teacher |
| Range of cost per hire | $12 to $311,000 |
| Districts with spending per year (range) | 18 (2022–23) to 24 (2019–20) |
| Recruitment success rate | 66.7% of district-years with spending hired ≥ 1 teacher |
| Total teachers recruited (5-year) | 541 teachers (in district-years with international fee spending) |
| Total spending (2019–20 through 2023–24) | $9,540,819 |
| Observations | 108 district-years; 39 unique districts |

*Note.* Teacher hire counts reflect only teachers on J-1 or J-2 exchange visitor visas, as identified by their international teaching certificate.

Districts spent an average of $17,538 per teacher recruited, with a median of $13,708. The range is wide, from $12 (Hampton County School District, 2021–22, which paid $34.57 in agency fees and placed 3 teachers) to $311,000 (Orangeburg County School District, 2020–21, when $622,000 in fees yielded only 2 hires), reflecting real differences in agency relationships, hiring volume, and year-to-year variability in visa processing outcomes.

#### Year-by-Year Patterns

**Table 3.2.2.** *Visiting International Teacher Recruitment Performance by Year*

| Spending year | Districts with spending | Teachers hired the following year | Success rate | Overall cost per hire | Median cost per hire |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2019–20 | 24 | 29 | 54.2% | $85,343 | $40,644 |
| 2020–21 | 24 | 96 | 62.5% | $17,423 | $13,417 |
| 2021–22 | 20 | 97 | 85.0% | $20,040 | $14,000 |
| 2022–23 | 18 | 144 | 66.7% | $9,229 | $9,688 |
| 2023–24 | 22 | 175 | 68.2% | $11,818 | $9,500 |

Success rate = share of district-years with current-year spending that hired at least one teacher the following year.

The pandemic's impact on international recruitment was severe. In 2020–21, with visa processing suspended and international travel restricted, districts that had invested in recruitment saw only 29 hires at a cost of $85,343 per hire, nearly five times the study-period average.

Recovery was substantial. By 2022–23, 85% of district-years succeeded in hiring at least one teacher. The 2022–23 spending year showed the lowest cost per hire in the study period at $9,229, driven in part by high-volume districts achieving exceptional efficiency.

One-third of district-years with prior spending (36 of 108 observations, 33.3%) resulted in zero hires despite the investment. This non-success rate was highest during the COVID-19 disruption and lowest during the 2022–23 recovery. Zero-hire outcomes can result from visa processing failures, candidates withdrawing after placement, or timing mismatches between spending and when teachers arrive. Districts using international recruitment should expect occasional failed recruitment years as a normal feature of the strategy.

### 3.2.2 Visa Type Distribution

Visa type data are available for 2023–24 and 2024–25. The majority of new international hires arrived on J-1 cultural exchange visas. A substantial share arrived on H-1B specialty occupation visas, which allow longer stays and do not carry the departure requirement, but do require employer sponsorship, are subject to annual caps, and involve more complex administrative processes.

H-1B teachers are more likely to result in longer-term workforce presence, but the higher administrative burden means they may be used selectively by districts with the capacity to manage the process.

**Table 3.2.3.** *International Teacher Hires by Visa Type, 2023–24 and 2024–25*

| Spending year | J-1 hires | H-1B approvals | Total | H-1B share |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2023–24 | 146 | 73 | 219 | 33.3% |
| 2024–25 | 175 | 70 | 245 | 28.6% |

The table includes RRI spending districts only. The US State Department data only include H-1B visa approvals, not actual hires.

Because H-1B sponsorship costs are typically handled through legal and human resources channels rather than agency fee lines, the cost-per-hire figures for H-1B-heavy districts are overstated relative to the true cost per teacher placed. A district like Darlington County School District, which placed 3 J-1 teachers and had 24 H-1B approvals in 2023–24, shows a cost per-hire figure based on 3 placements when 27 teachers may have actually been recruited.

**Note on measurement:** International recruitment ROI measures teachers hired per dollar spent. It does not capture how long those teachers stayed, whether they fulfilled their contracts, or what happened after the 3-year J-1 period ended. The figures reflect RRI-funded district-years only; international hiring through non-RRI channels is not included.

### 3.2.3 Certification Areas for Newly Hired International Teachers

Mathematics and science consistently account for the largest share of international teacher placements, reflecting possible persistent shortages in these subjects among domestically available candidates. Together, they represented 35–51% of all certification areas each year. English and language arts and special education emerged as notable categories beginning in 2023–24, with English and language arts peaking at 32 certifications in 2023–24 and special education going from zero placements in prior years to 22 in 2023–24 and 27 in 2024–25. Table 3.2.4 provides certification areas for newly hired international teachers in RRI districts that invested in the international fees spending category. Note that certification area counts exceed hire counts in some years because some teachers hold certifications in multiple areas; teachers with missing certification data are reported separately and excluded from the area-level counts.

**Table 3.2.4.** *Certification Areas of Newly Hired International Teachers, 2021–22 Through 2024–25*

| | 2021-22 | 2022-23 | 2023-24 | 2024-25 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total number of newly hired international teachers* | 96 | 97 | 144 | 175 |
| Total number of teachers with missing certification area | 19 | 21 | 5 | 0 |
| Total number of certification areas** | 90 | 83 | 165 | 211 |
| Mathematics | 25 | 21 | 33 | 50 |
| Science | 21 | 9 | 25 | 40 |
| Elementary | 20 | 18 | 14 | 31 |
| English and language arts | 5 | 12 | 32 | 27 |
| Special education | 0 | 0 | 22 | 27 |
| World languages | 11 | 10 | 15 | 10 |
| Social studies | 2 | 8 | 10 | 8 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Early childhood | 5 | 2 | 3 | 6 |
| English for speakers of other languages | 0 | 0 | 9 | 7 |
| Physical education | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Arts and music | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Other | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |

**Newly hired international teachers in RRI districts that invested in the international fees spending category.*
***A teacher may hold certifications in more than one area; totals reflect certification-area counts, not unique teachers.*

## 3.3 First-Year Teacher Stipends

First-year stipends are direct financial payments to newly hired teachers during their 1st year of employment. Unlike recruitment fees or certification costs, the money goes to the teacher, functioning simultaneously as a recruitment signal and a retention incentive, since payments are typically tied to completing the school year.

This section reports three analyses with different observation counts, each reflecting different inclusion criteria: Table 3.3.1 uses all 23 district-year observations with any stipend spending across the full 6-year window (2018–19 through 2023–24); the retention comparison (Table 3.3.3) draws on 18 observations restricted to the 5-year ROI window (2019–20 through 2023–24); and the recruitment ROI (Table 3.3.4) uses 21 observations that additionally require prior-year stipend spending to serve as the cost denominator, which excludes a district's 1st year of participation.

First-year stipends are the smallest of the five analyzed categories in total dollar terms and the most narrowly used. Across 6 years, 14 unique districts spent a combined $542,104 across 23 district-year observations. Between two and five districts used stipends in any given year, with participation declining to just two districts by 2023–24.

### 3.3.1 Spending Patterns

**Table 3.3.1.** *First-Year Stipend Program Overview*

| Metric | Value |
|---|---|
| Total spending (2019–20 through 2023–24) | $477,499 |
| Total spending (including 2018–19) | $542,104 |
| Unique districts using stipends | 14 districts |
| District-year observations | 23 district-years |
| Districts with spending per year (range) | 2 to 5 |
| Peak spending year | 2020–21 ($161,477) |
| Most recent year (2023–24) | $31,500 (2 districts) |

The 5-year total used in ROI calculations is $477,499; the 6-year total, including 2018–19, is $542,104.

**Table 3.3.2.** *First-Year Stipend Spending and 1st-Year Teacher Retention by Year*

| Year | Districts | Stipend spending | 1st-year teachers† | Retained next year | Retention rate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2018–19 | 5 | $64,605 | 34 | 34 | 100.0% |
| 2019–20 | 5 | $149,948 | 29 | 24 | 82.8% ← COVID |
| 2020–21 | 4 | $161,477 | 80 | 75 | 93.8% |
| 2021–22 | 2 | $60,690 | 15 | 14 | 93.3% |
| 2022–23 | 5 | $73,884 | 35 | 32 | 91.4% |
| 2023–24 | 2 | $31,500 | 9 | 8 | 88.9% |
| **5-year total** | | **$477,499** | **168** | **153** | **91.1%** |

†First-year teacher counts and retention rates reflect stipend-spending districts only in each year.

Spending peaked in 2020–21 at $161,477 and then fell sharply. The 2019–20 retention rate of 82.8% is the lowest among stipend years and likely reflects COVID-related disruptions.

### 3.3.2 Retention Outcomes

The straightforward comparison asks: Did districts that offered 1st-year stipends retain their 1st-year teachers at higher rates than districts that did not?

**Table 3.3.3.** *Pooled 1st-Year Teacher Retention Rates by Stipend Status, 2018–19 Through 2023–24*

| Group | Observations | Pooled retention | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| District-years with stipend spending | 18 | 91.1% | Small sample; wide variation |
| District-years without stipend spending | 167 | 87.6% | |
| Difference | | +3.5 pp | Descriptive only; not causal |

District-years with stipend spending show a pooled retention rate of 91.1%, compared to 87.6% in district-years without stipends, a descriptive difference of 3.5 percentage points. These are pooled retention rates across all 1st-year teachers in stipend vs. non-stipend district-years during the 5-year study window. This gap should not be read as evidence that stipends cause higher retention. With only 18 observations in the stipend group, the sample is small. Districts that choose to offer stipends may differ in other ways from those that do not (e.g., stronger administrative capacity, more stable

leadership, or better working conditions) that independently support retention. The 3.5 percentage point difference is presented as a descriptive observation only.

The pattern holds, though less strongly, in the year after a stipend year: Districts in the year following a stipend offering show a pooled retention of 91.2%, compared to 87.3% for districts with no prior stipend history. This possible persistence of the pattern is also descriptive only.

### 3.3.3 Recruitment ROI

A separate question is whether stipend spending is associated with more 1st-year teachers arriving in the first place, rather than just better retention among those who are already hired. This recruitment measure asks whether the number of 1st-year hires increased in the year following stipend spending, relative to what the district spent. Technical Appendix A provides the formula.

**Table 3.3.4.** *First-Year Stipend Recruitment ROI Summary, 2018–19 Through 2023–24*

| Metric | Value |
|---|---|
| Observations (prior-year spending > 0) | 21 |
| Overall recruitment ROI | 0.0000431 additional 1st-year hires per dollar |
| Median recruitment ROI | 0.000000 (no change at median) |
| District-years with more hires than prior year | 9 of 21 (42.9%) |
| District-years with fewer hires than prior year | 10 of 21 (47.6%) |
| Implied cost per additional 1st-year hire | Approximately $23,200 (based on overall ROI) |

The median recruitment ROI is exactly zero, indicating that the typical district-year observation shows no change in 1st-year hire counts following stipend spending. Less than half of observations (42.9%) showed more hires than the prior year; nearly half (47.6%) showed fewer. The overall positive ROI figure is driven upward by a small number of high-result observations, particularly Dorchester School District 4 in 2019–20, where $1,780 in spending coincided with three additional 1st-year hires, a striking ratio driven almost entirely by the very small expenditure denominator rather than by an unusual hiring outcome.

Taken together, the retention and recruitment data for 1st-year stipends describe a small, declining program, with suggestive but limited evidence of impact due to sample size. The 3.5 percentage point retention advantage in stipend years is directionally positive; the median recruitment ROI of zero is less encouraging. Neither figure can establish a causal link between stipend spending and outcomes.

## 3.4 Induction and Mentoring Support

Induction and mentoring spending covers the cost of structured support programs for teachers in their 1st years in a district: mentor stipends, formal induction program costs, coaching, and early-career professional development. Unlike 1st-year stipends, which go directly to the teacher, induction spending primarily funds infrastructure for new teachers, such as experienced mentors, coordinators, and support structures designed to reduce the attrition common in the first 2 years of teaching.

Induction and mentoring has seen the sharpest growth in adoption of any RRI category, with the number of participating districts more than doubling over the study period, from 12 in 2018–19 to 26 in 2023–24. Across 5 years, 42 unique districts spent a combined $3,570,540 across 114 district-year observations in the 5-year study window. Table 1.1 shows 44 unique districts, reflecting 6-year participation including 2018–19; all ROI calculations in this section use the 42-district, 5-year panel.

### 3.4.1 Spending Patterns and Participation

**Table 3.4.1.** *Year-by-Year Induction and Mentoring Spending, Participation, and Retention Among Teachers on Induction Contracts*

| Spending year | Districts | Total spending | Induction teachers | Retained next year | Pooled retention rate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2018–19 | 12 | $414,741 | 305 | 296 | 97.0% |
| 2019–20 | 22 | $722,468 | 595 | 491 | 82.5% |
| 2020–21 | 22 | $740,090 | 538 | 483 | 89.8% |
| 2021–22 | 20 | $607,060 | 456 | 406 | 89.0% |
| 2022–23 | 24 | $717,567 | 521 | 437 | 83.9% |
| 2023–24 | 26 | $783,355 | 708 | 632 | 89.3% |
| **6-year total (2018-19 to 2023-24)** | | **$3,985,281** | **3,123** | **2,745** | **87.9%** |

Two years stand out. The 2018–19 aggregate retention rate of 97.0% is the highest in the dataset, but that year had only 12 participating districts with relatively small induction cohorts. The 2022–23 retention rate of 83.9% is the lowest; the cause is not clear from the administrative data, but the recovery to 89.3% in 2023–24 suggests this was not sustained.

### 3.4.2 Does Investment Level Matter?

To examine whether higher induction spending is associated with better retention, the data were grouped by how much each district spent per induction-program teacher in a given year, with districts not spending on induction serving as a comparison group.

**Table 3.4.2.** *Teacher Retention Rates by Induction and Mentoring Investment Level, 2018–19 Through 2023–24*

| Investment level | Observations | Teachers on induction contracts | Retained next year | Pooled retention rate | Average spent per teacher |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No spending | 105 | 2,712 | 2,372 | 87.5% | $0 (baseline) |
| Low (Q1) | 32 | 991 | 866 | 87.4% | $320 per teacher |
| Medium-low (Q2) | 31 | 998 | 865 | 86.7% | $915 per teacher |
| Medium-high (Q3) | 31 | 730 | 648 | 88.8% | $1,789 per teacher |
| High (Q4) | 32 | 404 | 366 | 90.6% | $4,483 per teacher |

Investment quartiles (Q1–Q4) are based on RRI induction spending per program teacher.

Districts with low and medium-low investment (averaging $320 and $915 per teacher) show retention rates the same as or below those of non-investing districts. Only the two highest quartiles, averaging $1,789 and $4,483 per teacher, show retention rates above the no-investment baseline, at 88.8% and 90.6%, respectively.

This does not mean that a small investment in induction teachers reduces retention. Districts investing small amounts may face more difficult baseline conditions or be in the early stages of building their programs. What the pattern does suggest is that modest investment is not reliably associated with a retention benefit, and that the positive association between induction spending and retention appears concentrated at higher spending levels.

**Note on analysis:** The 3.1 percentage point gap between no-investment (87.5%) and high-investment (90.6%) districts is descriptive, not causal. The high-investment quartile is defined by spending per induction teacher, and the data show that high-quartile districts are actually the smallest in the dataset: They average 12.6 induction teachers per year compared to 31.0 in the low quartile. A district spending $30,000 on four induction teachers registers a higher per-teacher figure than one spending $100,000 on 40 teachers. Small cohorts may also support closer mentoring relationships independent of the dollar amount spent. The association between per-teacher investment level and retention cannot be interpreted as evidence that spending more per teacher causes better retention.

### 3.4.3 Year-Over-Year ROI

Induction ROI measures whether more teachers were retained in the year following spending than were retained the year before, using the same year-over-year change numerator as alternative certification Measure 1, but with a different denominator timing: Induction divides by current-year spending, while alternative certification Measure 1 divides by prior-year spending. The full methodology is in Technical Appendix A.

**Table 3.4.3.** *Induction and Mentoring ROI Summary, 2018–19 Through 2023–24*

| Metric | Value |
|---|---|
| Total spending (2019–20 through 2023–24) | $3,570,540 |
| Total spending (including 2018–19) | $3,985,281 |
| Unique districts using stipends (5-year) | 42 districts |
| Observations (prior-year spending > 0) | 96 district-years |
| Districts with spending per year (range) | 20 (2021–22) to 26 (2023–24) |
| Overall ROI | −0.0000142 (slightly negative) |
| Median ROI | −0.0000153 (slightly negative) |
| District-years with positive ROI | 41 of 96 (42.7%) |
| District-years with zero ROI | 6 of 96 (6.2%) |
| District-years with negative ROI | 49 of 96 (51.0%) |
| Median cost per additional retained teacher† | $4,279 |

†Median among district-years with positive ROI.

The overall ROI and the median ROI are both slightly negative. This means that across the typical district-year, prior-year induction spending was not associated with an increase in retained teachers. In 51.0% of observations, the number of retained teachers declined from the prior year despite spending; in 42.7%, it improved.

A slightly negative result is not the same as saying induction spending reduces retention. The numerator (i.e., the year-over-year change in the number of teachers retained) is affected by many factors beyond any program: Cohort size variation, individual life decisions, statewide labor market conditions, and district leadership changes can all independently influence year-to-year retention counts, regardless of what a district spends on mentoring. The ROI measure answers a narrow question: Did spending in the prior year predict a net increase in retained teachers this year? Across most district-years, the answer is that retention held roughly steady or declined slightly, with no measurable increase attributable to the prior-year investment.

## 3.5 General Recruitment Expenses

General recruitment spending covers the costs of actively seeking new teacher candidates: attending job fairs, advertising positions, maintaining online recruitment presence, and paying fees to employment networks. Unlike the other four categories, general recruitment is broad-funnel as it does not target a specific candidate type, career stage, or retention mechanism. Its goal is to build a larger, better-qualified applicant pool for open positions in RRI districts.

General recruitment is the second-largest of the five analyzed categories by total spending, behind international recruitment. Across 5 years, 46 unique districts spent a combined $7,364,821 across 145 district-year observations. Because general recruitment spending is broad-funnel rather than targeted at a specific cohort or hire type, the analysis focused on cost per new hire and where newly hired teachers came from (new-to-state, lateral movers, or role changers). Technical Appendix A explains the methodological basis for this approach.

### 3.5.1 Spending Patterns

**Table 3.5.1.** *General Recruitment Program Overview, 2019–20 Through 2023–24*

| Metric | Value |
|---|---|
| Total spending (2019–20 through 2023–24) | $7,364,821 |
| Unique districts with spending | 46 districts |
| District-year observations | 145 district-years |
| Districts with spending per year (range) | 25 (2019–20) to 33 (2022–23) |
| Overall cost per new hire (2019–20 through 2023–24) | $1,041 |
| Annual cost per hire (range) | $613 (2023–24) to $1,603 (2019–20) |
| Total new hires in RRI districts (5-year) | 7,073 |

**Table 3.5.2.** *General Recruitment Spending by Subcategory*

| Subcategory | 5-year total | % of total | What it covers |
|---|---|---|---|
| Recruitment expenses | $5,451,232 | 74.0% | Job fairs, career events, travel, advertising, marketing materials |
| Website updates | $967,051 | 13.1% | District careers pages, online recruitment infrastructure |
| National employment service fees | $946,538 | 12.9% | Fees to national job boards and placement networks |
| **Total** | **$7,364,821** | **100%** | |

Recruitment expenses (e.g., direct costs of attending job fairs, career events, and candidate outreach) make up nearly three-quarters of general recruitment spending. Website updates and national employment service fees divide the remainder roughly equally. The subcategory mix is broadly stable across years, though national employment fees have declined in absolute terms ($235K in 2019–20 to $110K in 2023–24), while recruitment expenses show more year-to-year variation, likely reflecting differences in how many job fairs and career events districts attended in a given year.

**Table 3.5.3.** *General Recruitment Spending and New Hire Counts by Year*

| Year | Districts with spending | Total recruitment spending | New hires | Cost per hire |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2019–20 | 25 | $1,445,470 | 902 | $1,603 |
| 2020–21 | 27 | $1,135,346 | 1,105 | $1,028 |
| 2021–22 | 30 | $1,846,496 | 1,361 | $1,357 |
| 2022–23 | 33 | $1,795,544 | 1,843 | $974 |
| 2023–24 | 30 | $1,141,965 | 1,862 | $613 |
| **5-year total** | | **$7,364,821** | **7,073** | **$1,041** |

Cost per hire = total spending ÷ total new hires across all RRI districts; this treats all RRI hiring as partly attributable to the collective recruitment activity in the cohort.

Hiring volume grew substantially over the study period, from 902 new hires in 2019–20 to 1,862 in 2023–24, while spending did not grow at the same pace. The result is a 62% reduction in cost per hire, from $1,603 in 2019–20 to $613 in 2023–24. Whether this reflects the effect of recruitment spending, broader labor market shifts, or other factors cannot be determined from these data.

### 3.5.2 Who is Being Hired: New Teachers vs. Transfers

A persistent concern about general recruitment spending in RRI districts is that it may primarily attract teachers already working in South Carolina, effectively moving teachers among districts rather than growing the statewide pool. The hire composition data address this directly.

New hires fall into three groups: new-to-state (teachers newly entering the South Carolina workforce, whether recent graduates or arrivals from other states), lateral movers (teachers already employed in South Carolina who transferred from another district), and role-changers (individuals shifting into teaching positions from non-teaching roles).

**Table 3.5.4.** *Hire Composition by General Recruitment Spending Status*

| Group | Total new hires | New-to-state | Lateral movers | Role changers |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| RRI districts WITH general recruitment spending | 7,073 | 61.5% | 32.8% | 5.7% |
| RRI districts WITHOUT general recruitment spending | 1,929 | 60.5% | 33.1% | 6.4% |
| **Difference** | | **+0.9 pp** | **−0.3 pp** | **−0.7 pp** |

Districts with general recruitment spending hired a slightly higher share of new-to-state teachers (61.5%) than non-spending districts (60.5%), a difference of 0.9 percentage points. Lateral mover shares are nearly identical (32.8% vs. 33.1%). This small gap is directionally inconsistent with the concern that general recruitment spending primarily redistributes existing South Carolina teachers, but the difference is too small to draw strong conclusions. Districts that invest in recruitment may also differ from non-investing districts in ways that independently affect who applies.

Table 3.5.5 breaks down hire composition by spending quartile, comparing across the range of investment levels rather than the simple with/without binary.

**Table 3.5.5.** *Hire Composition by General Recruitment Spending Quartile, 2019–20 Through 2023–24*

| Spending level | New hires (next year) | New-to-state | Lateral movers | Role-changers |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| No spending (baseline) | 1,929 | 60.5% | 33.1% | 6.4% |
| Low (Q1) (highest new-to-state) | 1,352 | 63.0% | 31.1% | 5.8% |
| Medium-low (Q2) | 1,421 | 61.0% | 33.4% | 5.6% |
| Medium-high (Q3) | 1,588 | 61.0% | 33.1% | 5.9% |
| High (Q4) | 2,712 | 61.3% | 33.1% | 5.6% |

Spending quartiles are based on total general recruitment spending among district-years with spending > 0.

The relationship between spending level and hire composition is essentially flat. New-to-state shares range from 60.5% (no spending) to 63.0% (low, Q1) across all groups, with a 2.5 percentage-point spread and no consistent directional pattern. All quartiles show similar lateral mover shares, clustering around 31–33%. The quartile analysis provides no evidence that spending more on general recruitment shifts the mix of new hires toward out-of-state candidates.

Across all 5 years, new-to-state teachers made up the majority of new hires in spending districts, ranging from 56.9% (2022–23) to 64.7% (2019–20). Lateral movers ranged from 30.9% to 35.6%, and role changers from 3.7% to 7.5%. No sustained directional trend is visible in the composition data across the 5-year period.

# 4. Comparative Analysis Across Categories

Sections 3.1 through 3.5 analyzed each RRI spending category individually. This section draws comparisons across all five categories, examining differences in scale, outcome frameworks, cost, and participation patterns. Because the five categories are designed for different purposes and use different outcome metrics, direct comparison requires care; the goal is to place the findings side by side for context rather than to rank categories on a single scale.

## 4.1 Overview of Spending, Scale, and Outcomes

Table 4.1 provides a summary comparison of all five categories across the 5-year study period and summarizes the distribution of positive outcomes and median costs where applicable. Across retention categories, roughly 40–43% of district-year observations show positive outcomes; international recruitment has a 66.7% success rate, with substantial variation within each category.

**Table 4.1.** *Cross-Category Comparison of RRI Spending, Participation, and Outcome Results, 2019–20 Through 2023–24*

| Category | 5-year total spending | Primary outcome measure | Unique districts | District-year observations | Overall results | Positive outcomes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alternative certification | $1,255,413 | Change in retained teachers vs. prior year (Measure 1) | 29 | 68 | −0.0000296 change in retained teachers per dollar | 27 (39.7%) district-years had improving retention |
| | | Pooled cost per retained alternative certification candidate (Measure 2) | 36 | 84 | $1,524/retained teacher | 80 (95.2%) district-years retained at least one candidate; Candidate retention rate improved by 9.8 percentage points in 5 years |
| International recruitment | $9,540,819 | Cost per international teacher recruited | 39 | 108 | $17,538/recruited teacher | 72 (66.7%) district-years hired at least one international teacher |
| 1st-year stipends | $477,499 | Pooled retention rate (Measure 1) | 14 | 18 | 91.1% pooled retention for spending district-years | Spending districts had a 3.5 pp pooled retention advantage |
| | | Change in 1st-year hires vs. prior year (Measure 2) | 14 | 21 | +0.0000431 change in 1st-year hires per dollar | 9 (42.9%) district-years had more hires than prior year |
| Induction/ mentoring | $3,570,540 | Change in retained teachers vs. prior year | 42 | 96 | −0.0000142 in retained teachers per dollar | 41 (42.7%) district-years had improving retention |
| General recruitment | $7,364,821 | Cost per new hire | 46 | 145 | $1,041/new hire | For districts in all spending categories, the majority (61.5%) of new hires are new to the state |

*Note*. Outcome measures differ across categories and are not directly comparable; see Section 3 for full methodology on each. For retention categories, positive outcome = year-over-year increase in retained teachers. International success rate = share of observations with at least one hire. General recruitment uses cost-per-hire framework only.

**A note on comparing ROI across categories:** Each category uses a different outcome framework because the categories have different goals. General recruitment and international recruitment measure cost per hire (a recruitment outcome). Alternative certification and induction/mentoring measure change in retained teachers per dollar (a retention outcome). First-year stipends include both a retention comparison and a recruitment ROI. Because the numerators and denominators differ, the figures in Table 4.1 are not on the same scale and should not be treated as a simple ranking of effectiveness.

A consistent pattern across the two year-over-year retention categories (i.e., alternative certification and induction/mentoring) is that fewer than half of observations show positive outcomes: 39.7% and 42.7%, respectively. This suggests that year-over-year improvement in retained teacher counts is

achievable in roughly 4 out of 10 cases but is not the modal outcome.

For 1st-year stipends, the recruitment ROI (change in 1st-year hire counts) shows 42.9% of observations to be positive, but the more relevant retention finding is descriptive: Districts offering stipends show a pooled retention rate 3.5 percentage points higher than non-stipend years. For international recruitment, the 66.7% success rate reflects a different calculation: whether any teachers were successfully placed in a given district-year. The 33.3% of international district-years with zero hires despite spending represents a meaningful share of non-productive investment, most of which is concentrated in early study years and COVID-affected observations.

## 4.2 Participation Patterns Across Categories

Table 4.2 describes how participation has evolved across the study period for each category.

**Table 4.2.** *District Participation Patterns by RRI Spending Category, 2018–19 Through 2023–24*

| Category | Unique districts | Districts per year | Participation trend |
|---|---|---|---|
| General recruitment | 46 | 25–33 per year | Growth from 25 to 30 spending districts over 5 years |
| Induction/mentoring | 42 | 12–26 per year | Consistent growth: 12 districts (2018–19) to 26 (2023–24) |
| International recruitment | 39 | 18–24 per year | Disrupted by COVID 2020–21; recovered and grew to 175 hires in 2024–25 |
| Alternative certification | 36 | 13–23 per year | Relatively stable; 39% of participating districts used it in only 1 year |
| 1st-year stipends | 14 | 2–5 per year | Declining: peaked at 5 districts, fell to 2 (2023–24) |

Two categories show clear growth in district participation over the study period: induction/mentoring (12 to 26 districts) and, to a lesser extent, general recruitment. International recruitment recovered from its COVID disruption and continued to grow in absolute hiring volume, reaching 175 hires in 2024–25. First-year stipends show the only clear decline in participation, dropping from a peak of 5 districts to just 2 in 2023–24. Alternative certification participation has been relatively stable with no strong trend.

## 4.3 Recruitment vs. Retention: Different Frameworks, Different Evidence Standards

### Recruitment Categories

General recruitment and international recruitment share a common outcome structure: both measure whether spending is associated with more teachers hired. The evidence standard is relatively direct; hires either happened or they did not, and cost per hire is calculable. General recruitment produced 7,073 new hires in spending districts over 5 years at a blended cost of $1,041 per hire; international recruitment produced 544 tracked hires at a per-hire cost of $17,538. These costs are not equivalent in what they buy: general recruitment casts a broad net for any qualified teacher, while international recruitment targets teachers willing and able to work on J-1 or H-1B visas, often in subjects where domestic recruitment has been unsuccessful.

### Retention Categories

Alternative certification and induction/mentoring aim to keep teachers who have already been hired. Their ROI measures year-over-year change in the number of teachers retained per dollar spent, which is a more volatile metric than cost per hire: It depends not only on

spending but also on cohort size, individual life circumstances, and dozens of district-level factors outside the program. This volatility is one reason both retention categories show slightly negative overall ROI despite 42–43% of individual observations being positive.

**First-Year Stipends: Spanning Both Frameworks**

First-year stipends is the only category that appears in both frameworks. The recruitment ROI asks whether 1st-year hiring increased in the year following stipend spending. In response, 42.9% of the 21 recruitment ROI observations are positive, with a pooled result of 0.0000431 per dollar. The retention component is reported as a descriptive comparison rather than a cost-effectiveness ratio: districts in stipend-offering years retained 1st-year teachers at a pooled rate of 91.1%, compared to 87.6% in non-stipend district-years, a difference of 3.5 percentage points. Because the retention comparison does not divide by spending, it is not on the same scale as the retention ROI figures for alternative certification and induction/mentoring.

## 4.4 Cross-Cutting Patterns

Several patterns hold across multiple categories:

- Year-over-year variability is high across all retention categories. Retention rates fluctuate for reasons unrelated to spending, and the 1-year ROI framework captures this noise along with any signal from the investment.
- High-participation districts tend to show sustained high retention, but the causal direction is not established. Districts with strong retention infrastructure may invest more because they have the capacity to do so, rather than retaining more because of the investment. Edgefield County School District, Greenwood School District 50, and Sumter School District appear consistently across multiple categories as high-participation, high-retention districts.
- Investment level appears to matter more for retention categories than for recruitment categories. For induction/mentoring, the retention difference between high-investment districts (averaging $4,483/teacher) and no-investment districts is 3.1 percentage points; low and medium-low investment shows no retention advantage over no investment. For general recruitment, hire composition across spending quartiles is essentially flat (new-to-state shares range from 60.5% to 63.0%), providing no evidence that spending level affects the mix of teachers hired.
- COVID-19 affected all five categories in 2020–21 and to some extent 2021–22. International recruitment saw the sharpest disruption ($85,343/hire in 2020–21, nearly five times the study-period average). For induction, 2022–23 shows a dip to 83.9%, which mirrors the dip in statewide teacher retention (Starrett et al., 2026).[1]

# 5. Limitations and Considerations

This section addresses methodological limitations affecting the interpretation of ROI findings and identifies factors not captured in the quantitative analysis.

[1] Starrett, A., Dmitrieva, S., & Cartiff, B. (2026, March). *South Carolina teacher attrition, mobility, and retention report for 2024–25.* SC TEACHER. https://sc-teacher.org/EPR-teacher-retention-mar2026

## 5.1 Measurement Limitations

### Teacher-Level Tracking

Historically, RRI funds have been allocated to districts as flexible resources without requirements to track which specific teachers benefit from each dollar spent. Each spending category carries its own set of measurement assumptions that affect how results should be interpreted.

- For alternative certification, spending is matched to retention rates among teachers on alternative certification contracts in the spending district. Districts may support alternative certification candidates in ways that go beyond direct RRI expenditures, and teachers on alternative route certificates include those at varying stages of the certification process.

- For induction and mentoring, retention rates reflect all teachers on induction contracts in the spending district—not only those whose mentoring was directly funded by RRI. Whether that population should be further restricted to teachers from traditional EPPs is an open methodological question; including all induction contract teachers likely understates the per-teacher investment for districts with large induction cohorts and mixed funding sources.

- For 1st-year stipends, the retention comparison reflects all 1st-year teachers in stipend-offering districts, not only the individual teachers who received stipends. This broadens the comparison group beyond the directly treated population, which may dilute the estimated retention effect.

- For international recruitment, the hire counts reflect new J-1 visa holders and/or H-1B approvals documented in agency records. This excludes teachers on visa renewals or extensions, teachers placed through non-agency channels, and any ongoing visa maintenance or agency retainer costs not captured in the annual fee data. The true cost of sustaining an international teacher pipeline is therefore likely higher than what is reported here.

- For general recruitment, spending can be linked to total new hire counts in the district but cannot be traced to specific hires or activities. The hire composition analysis reflects all new hires in spending districts, not only those who may have been reached through RRI-funded recruitment efforts.

These assumptions mean ROI estimates should be read as approximations rather than precise accountings. Where the assumptions broaden the measured population beyond the directly treated group (i.e., 1st-year stipends and induction), the estimated effects are likely conservative. Where costs are undercounted (i.e., international recruitment), cost-per-hire figures likely understate the true investment.

### Attribution and Confounding

The ROI calculations measure associations between RRI spending and outcomes, not causal effects. Multiple factors operating simultaneously affect the same outcomes.

- District characteristics (e.g., geographic isolation, salary schedules, school leadership, working conditions, and local labor market dynamics) affect both which districts invest in RRI and how well those investments perform.
- Complementary investments (e.g., local district funding, Title I and Title II grants, and in-kind supports such as principal mentoring and professional learning communities) may interact with RRI spending in ways that amplify or dilute the apparent RRI effect.

- Teacher characteristics (e.g., career stage, subject area, alternative certification pathway, and personal circumstances) affect retention decisions independently of any district support program.

These confounding factors do not invalidate the analysis, but they do mean that district-level ROI variation reflects both the effectiveness of spending decisions and the baseline context in which those decisions operate. A district showing low ROI may face more severe structural challenges rather than having made less effective spending choices.

## 5.2 One-Year Outcome Window

All ROI calculations measure outcomes 1 year after spending. This time frame is appropriate for operational planning purposes but likely misses some longer-term effects:

- Induction and mentoring programs are designed to accelerate early-career development over multiple years. Teachers who complete comprehensive induction may show progressively higher retention in years 2–5 of their careers, beyond the 1-year window. The growing investment in induction, despite a slightly negative one-year ROI, is consistent with districts perceiving longer-term benefits that are not captured in this analysis.
- Alternative certification teachers who complete professional certification may show higher long-term retention than is visible in any single year's comparison. The convergence of Year 4 retention rates between 2019–20 and 2020–21 cohorts (35.4% vs. 34.0%) is suggestive of a structural long-term pattern, but multi-year cohort tracking is needed to generalize this finding.
- General recruitment and international recruitment deliver their primary value in the hiring year; multi-year tracking of recruited teachers would measure whether these hires persist in RRI districts over time.

## 5.3 Sample Size Constraints in Smaller Categories

First-year stipends (21 ROI observations; 18 retention observations in the 5-year window) and alternative certification (68 Measure 1 observations; 84 Measure 2 observations) have smaller samples than induction (96 ROI observations) and general recruitment (145 observations). Findings from smaller-sample categories are less precise and should be interpreted with more caution than findings from larger-sample categories. District-specific findings (e.g., individual district ROI in the 1st-year stipend analysis) are particularly sensitive to small absolute changes in cohort sizes.

## 5.4 Data Infrastructure Needs

The limitations described above point to specific data infrastructure improvements that would strengthen future analyses. Linking RRI expenditure records to individual teacher identifiers would allow direct tracking of which teachers benefited from each category, enabling more precise attribution. Extending retention tracking to 3 and 5 years post-hire would capture longer-term effects of induction and alternative certification investments. Connecting RRI data to teacher evaluation, salary, commute distance, and working conditions data would enable assessment of quality outcomes beyond retention counts.

# 6. Summary of Findings

This report examined RRI spending across five categories (alternative certification, international teacher recruitment, 1st-year stipends, induction and mentoring support, and general recruitment) across 5 fiscal years (2019–20 through 2023–24) in up to 55 eligible South Carolina districts. The total 5-year spending across the five analyzed categories was approximately $22,209,092. Table 6.1 summarizes the primary findings from each category.

**Table 6.1.** *Summary of RRI ROI Findings by Category, 2019–20 Through 2023–24*

| Category | 5-year spending | Unique districts | Overall ROI result | ROI framework | Key additional findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alternative certification | $1,255,413 | 36 | Measure 1: Negative overall (39.7% positive); Measure 2: $1,524/retained teacher | Measure 1: Change in retained count; Measure 2: Cost per retained teacher | 4-year retention converges to about 34–35%; 58.5% certification rate (2019–20 cohort), 42.0% (2020–21) |
| International recruitment | $9,540,819 | 39 | $17,538/hire overall | Teachers per dollar | COVID disruption recovered; cost improved to $9,229/hire in 2023–24; 66.7% success rate |
| 1st-year stipends | $477,499 | 14 | Recruitment: 0.0000431 per dollar (42.9% positive); Retention: +3.5 pp pooled retention vs. non-stipend district-years | Recruitment: change in 1st-year hires per dollar; Retention: pooled retention rate in stipend vs. non-stipend district-years | +3.5 pp pooled retention vs. non-stipend; participation declining; only Williamsburg County School District used all 6 years |
| Induction and mentoring | $3,570,540 | 42 | Negative overall (42.7% positive); ROI: −0.0000142 | Retained teachers per $ | High-investment districts (+$4,483/teacher) show 90.6% retention vs. 87.5% baseline; high quartile = smallest districts |
| General recruitment | $7,364,821 | 46 | $1,041/hire (spending districts) | Hires per dollar | 61.5% new-to-state vs. 60.5% non-spending (+0.9 pp); cost/hire declined 62% across 5 years; no quartile pattern in hire composition |

## 6.1 What the Data Show by Category

**Alternative certification ($1,255,413 | 36 districts)**

Measure 1 (year-over-year change in retained count) gives a slightly negative overall result (−0.0000296), with 39.7% of observations showing improvement. Measure 2 (cost per retained teacher) gives a pooled cost of $1,524 per retained alternative certification candidate, with the retention rate improving from 73.5% in 2019–20 to 83.3% in 2023–24. The most consistent long-term finding is that Year 4 retention converges at approximately 34–35% regardless of cohort entry year, suggesting a structural pattern in alternative certification teacher careers rather than a spending-driven one. The 2019–20 cohort achieved professional certification at 58.5%; the 2020–21 cohort at 42.0%.

**International recruitment ($9,540,819 | 39 districts)**

International recruitment addresses teacher shortages in subject areas where domestic recruitment consistently fails, at a pooled cost of $17,538 per successful hire overall. The cost improved dramatically over the study period, from $85,343/hire in the COVID-disrupted 2020–21 year to $9,229/hire in 2023–24. The overall success rate is 66.7%, meaning 33.3% of district-years with spending yielded zero hires or hired teachers on H-1B visas that are impossible to capture in the state administrative data.

### First-year stipends ($477,499 | 14 districts)

First-year stipends are the smallest and most narrowly used category, with participation declining from a peak of five districts to two in 2023–24. The recruitment ROI averages 0.0000431 across 21 observations, with 42.9% positive. The retention comparison shows spending districts had a pooled retention rate of 91.1% vs. 87.6% in non-stipend district-years (a descriptive difference of 3.5 percentage points), but the sample is small (18 spending observations in the 5-year window).

### Induction/mentoring ($3,570,540 | 42 districts)

Induction and mentoring has seen the sharpest growth in adoption of any RRI category, more than doubling from 12 to 26 participating districts. The overall ROI is slightly negative (−0.0000142) and the median is also slightly negative, meaning that in most district-years, the number of teachers retained did not increase year-over-year following induction spending. Among the 42.7% of observations with positive ROI, the median cost per additional retained teacher is $4,279. The investment-level analysis shows that only districts in the top two quartiles (averaging $1,789 and $4,483 per teacher) show retention rates above the no-investment baseline. Notably, high-quartile districts are the smallest in the dataset, averaging 12.6 induction teachers, compared to 31.0 in the low quartile, so the apparent investment advantage may reflect small-cohort dynamics rather than spending level.

### General recruitment ($7,364,821 | 46 districts)

General recruitment is the second largest of the five analyzed categories by total spending, and the broadest by district participation. The 5-year blended cost is $1,041 per new hire in spending districts, declining from $1,603 in 2019–20 to $613 in 2023–24. The hire composition gap between spending and non-spending districts is small: 61.5% new-to-state vs. 60.5% (a 0.9 percentage point difference), with lateral mover shares nearly identical. Across spending quartiles, new-to-state shares cluster between 60.5% and 63.0% with no consistent pattern, providing no evidence that spending level affects the mix of teachers hired.

## 6.2 What These Data Can and Cannot Support

The findings in this report describe associations between RRI spending and teacher recruitment and retention outcomes across 5 years and up to 55 districts. The data support the following types of statements:

- Descriptive statements about what outcomes were observed in districts that spent in each category, including the distribution of positive and negative outcomes and the cost per outcome where applicable.
- Comparisons of outcome patterns across districts and years within each category, identifying cases where outcomes were consistently strong or consistently weak.
- Observations about participation trends, cost trends over time, and the relationship between investment level and outcomes within a category.

The data do not support causal claims that a specific spending category caused a specific outcome because the analysis cannot rule out confounding from district characteristics, labor market conditions, complementary investments, and teacher selection effects. The cross-category cost comparisons in Section 4 describe what different categories cost per documented outcome, but because the outcome measures differ across categories, these figures do not represent a single ranking of program effectiveness.

# Technical Appendix A

## Return on Investment: Definitions, Formulas, and Panel Data Construction

This appendix documents the analytical methods underlying the ROI estimates reported in Section 3 of the main report.

### A.1 Why ROI Definitions Vary Across Categories

A single ROI formula cannot apply to all five RRI spending categories because the categories have fundamentally different theories of action, meaning different hypotheses about how spending produces value. ROI is most meaningful when the metric matches what a program is designed to accomplish.

The five categories are divided into two broad groups based on their theory of action:

**Recruitment categories: spending is expected to increase the number of teachers hired**

- General recruitment
- International teacher recruitment
- 1st-year stipends (recruitment component)

For these categories, the relevant outcome is how many teachers were hired, and ROI is naturally expressed as hires per dollar (or its reciprocal, cost per hire). A positive ROI means more teachers were hired following the spending; a cost-per-hire figure shows what they paid per additional classroom teacher filled.

**Retention categories: spending is expected to increase the number (or rate) of teachers who stay**

- Alternative certification
- Induction and mentoring
- 1st-year stipends (retention component)

For these categories, the relevant outcome is how many more teachers were retained compared to the prior year. ROI is expressed as additional retained teachers per dollar. A positive ROI means retention improved year-over-year following the spending; a negative ROI means fewer teachers were retained despite spending.

First-year stipends are the only category that spans both groups: they include a recruitment ROI (did 1st-year hiring increase following stipend spending?) and a separate retention comparison (did districts offering stipends retain 1st-year teachers at higher rates than those that did not?). These two submetrics answer different questions and are reported separately.

## A.2 Notation and Variable Definitions

Table A.1 defines all variables and subscripts used in the formulas in Section A.4.

**Table A.1.** *Variable Definitions Used in ROI Formulas*

| Symbol | Name | Definition |
|---|---|---|
| $d$ | District index | Identifies each unique school district in the panel; $d = 1, \ldots, D$ |
| $t$ | Year index | Identifies each fiscal year; $t$ corresponds to the year in which outcomes are observed |
| $Spending_{!,\#}$ | RRI expenditure | Total dollars disbursed from RRI funds to district $d$ in fiscal year $t$, within a given category |
| $Retained_{!,\#}$ | Retained teacher count | Number of teachers in district $d$ who were employed at the end of year $t$ and returned for year $t+1$ (alt cert and induction) |
| $Hires_{!,\#}$ | New hire count | Number of teachers newly placed in district $d$ in year $t$ (international and general recruitment) |
| $FYTeachers_{!,\#}$ | 1st-year teacher count | Number of teachers in their 1st year of employment in district $d$ in year $t$ (1st-year stipends) |
| $RetRate_{!,\#}$ | Retention rate | Proportion of eligible teachers in district $d$ in year $t$ who returned for year $t+1$ (1st-year stipend retention comparison) |
| $N_!$ | District-years observed | Number of fiscal years for which district $d$ has both valid spending and outcome data in a given category |
| $\Sigma_!\Sigma_\#$ | Double summation | Sum across all districts and all years with valid observations in a given category |

*Note.* Subscripts $(d, t)$ are omitted below where they would be redundant; all formulas are understood to apply to a single district $d$ and fiscal year $t$ unless otherwise noted.

## A.3 Panel Data Construction

### A.3.1 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis throughout is the district-year: a single school district observed in a single fiscal year. A district may contribute multiple observations to the panel if it was eligible for and used RRI funds in multiple years. The panel is unbalanced, meaning not all districts participate every year, and some districts enter or exit eligibility during the study window as their turnover rates change. This means district-year counts are lower than (number of districts) × (number of years).

### A.3.2 Source Data

Two types of administrative data were linked to construct each category's panel:

- RRI expenditure records (from CERRA via SC TEACHER): Annual disbursement amounts by district and incentive type for each fiscal year in the study window. These records identify which districts spent funds in each category in each year and the amounts spent.
- Teacher employment and outcome records (from the South Carolina Department of Education via SC TEACHER's statewide data infrastructure): Annual counts of teachers by district, including 1st-year status, retention from one year to the next, certification level and pathway, contract status, and hire origin (new-to-state, lateral mover, or role changer).

These two data sources were linked by district and fiscal year. Not all districts appear in both sources in all years: a district with zero spending in a given category in a given year does not appear in the expenditure records for that category, and districts that became eligible mid-study or exited eligibility have partial records.

### A.3.3 Inclusion Criteria and Panel Construction

For each category, a district-year observation was included in the ROI panel if and only if:

- The district reported spending greater than zero dollars in the relevant incentive category in year $t$.
- Valid outcome data (retained teacher counts, hire counts, or retention rates, depending on category) were available for both year $t$ and year $t + 1$ for that district.
- The spending year and outcome year fell within the study window defined for that category.

Observations with zero spending were excluded from the ROI denominator calculations because dividing by zero is undefined and because zero-spending districts, by definition, have no ROI to calculate. However, zero-spending districts were retained for descriptive comparisons. For example, in the induction retention-by-investment-level analysis (Section 3.4) and the general recruitment hire composition comparison (Section 3.5), non-spending districts serve as the comparison baseline.

Table A.2 shows the resulting panel dimensions for each category.

**Table A.2.** *Panel Dimensions by Category*

| Category | Year range | Unique districts | District-year observations | Max years per district | Inclusion criteria |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alternative certification | 2019–20 to 2023–24 | 36 (Formula 2); 29 (Formula 1) | 84 (Formula 2); 68 (Formula 1) | 5 | Formula 2 (cost per retained): current-year spending > 0. Formula 1 (year-over-year change): prior-year spending > 0 and retained count available in both $t$ and $t+1$ |
| International recruitment | 2019–20 to 2023–24 | 39 | 108 | 5 | Spending > 0; outcome = J-1 new placements and/or H-1B approvals in $t+1$ (may be 0). |
| 1st-year stipends | 2018–19 to 2023–24 | 14 | 23 (all years); 21 (rec. ROI); 18 (retained, 5-year) | 6 | Stipend spending > 0; FY teacher count in both $t$ and $t+1$. |
| Induction and mentoring | 2018–19 to 2023–24 | 42 (5-year) | 96 (5-year retention ROI); 126 (6-year investment-level retention) | 6 | Spending > 0 (ROI panel) |
| General recruitment | 2019–20 to 2023–24 | 46 | 145 | 5 | Any general recruitment spending > 0; hires > 0 in $t+1$ |

Induction shows two observation counts because the ROI panel (spending > 0 in both years) and the retention-by-investment analysis (any induction spending in $t$) use slightly different inclusion criteria.

### A.3.4 Time Lag Structure

All ROI formulas use a 1-year lag: spending in year $t$ is linked to outcomes in year $t+1$. This lag reflects the mechanism by which spending is expected to operate: a district spends on recruitment in year $t$ and measures how many teachers are in place at the start of year $t+1$; a district funds induction throughout year $t$ and measures how many of those teachers return for year $t+1$.

For 1st-year stipends, the recruitment ROI formula uses the same 1-year lag as all other ROI formulas in this report: spending in year $\boldsymbol{t-1}$ is the denominator, and the outcome is the change in 1st-year hire counts from $\boldsymbol{t-1}$ to $\boldsymbol{t}$. The retention comparison also uses outcomes observed in $\boldsymbol{t}$ following spending in $\boldsymbol{t-1}$, so the timing structure is identical, though the retention comparison is descriptive rather than a cost-effectiveness ratio.

### A.3.5 Missing Data and District Consolidation

Several districts consolidated or changed names during the study window (e.g., Barnwell 45 and 48, Clarendon districts, Hampton districts). Observations for districts that consolidated were treated as separate entities up to the year of consolidation and as the consolidated entity thereafter, consistent with CERRA's reporting. District-years with clearly inconsistent records (spending reported but implausibly large year-over-year outcome changes exceeding ±3 standard deviations from the category mean) were flagged and reviewed; no observations were excluded on this basis.

## A.4 ROI Formulas by Category

The following subsections define the ROI formula for each category. Each subsection states (1) the theory of action, (2) the formal formula(s), (3) interpretation of the result, and (4) category-specific

limitations. Alternative certification is the only category with two complementary formulas (Section A.4.1); all other categories use a single formula.

### A.4.1 Alternative Certification

#### Theory of Action

Alternative certification spending covers program fees, cohort support, and administration for teachers entering through non-traditional pathways (e.g., CarolinaCAP, PACE, Teacher for Tomorrow). The SC TEACHER data infrastructure enabled us to track a specific identified cohort at the district level: the number of alternative certification candidates in year $t$ and the number of that same group who are still employed in the district in year $t + 1$. Because an identified cohort exists, two complementary ROI metrics are meaningful, and both are reported in Section 3.1.

#### Formula 1: Year-Over-Year Change in Retained Count

This formula asks whether more alternative certification candidates were retained after the spending year than before it. It measures whether retention is improving relative to prior-year spending.

$$ROI_{\$\%\#\&,\#} = \frac{Retained_{!,\#\cdot\&} - Retained_{!,\#}}{Spending_{!,\#(\&}}$$

where:

$Retained_{!,\#\cdot\&}$ = number of alt cert candidates in year $t$ still employed in district $d$ in year $t + 1$

$Retained_{!,\#}$ = number of alt cert candidates in year $t - 1$ still employed in district $d$ in year $t$

$Spending_{!,\#(\&}$ = RRI alt cert expenditure in district $d$ year $t - 1$ (1-year lag)

**Note on metrics:** The subscript on $Retained(d,\cdot)$ denotes the employment observation year (when employment status is checked), not the candidate enrollment year. Each annual observation compares two successive cohorts at their respective 1-year retention checkpoints.

#### Interpretation of Formula 1

- A positive value means more alternative certification candidates were retained after the spending year than before. The value is the number of additional retained teachers per dollar spent.
- A zero value indicates the retained count did not change year over year.
- A negative value means fewer alternative certification candidates were retained despite spending.
- The magnitude is very small (on the order of $10^{-5}$ to $10^{-4}$) because it represents a count change divided by a dollar amount, typically in the tens of thousands.
- Formula 1 is sensitive to changes in cohort size: a district whose alternative certification cohort grew will show a positive numerator even if the retention rate remains unchanged, because more teachers are retained in absolute terms.

### Formula 2: Cost per Retained Teacher

This formula asks directly what each retained alternative certification candidate costs the district. It is structurally equivalent to the international recruitment cost-per-hire metric and is more stable than Formula 1 because it does not depend on prior-year cohort size.

$$Cost\_per\_retained_{d,t} = \frac{Spending_{d,t}}{Retained_{d,t\to t+1}}$$

Equivalently as retained teachers per dollar:

$$ROI\_alt2_{d,t} = \frac{Retained_{d,t\to t+1}}{Spending_{d,t}}$$

where:

$Retained_{d,t\to t+1}$ = number of alt cert candidates from year $t$ still employed in district $d$ in year $t+1$

$Spending_{d,t}$ = RRI alt cert expenditure in district $d$ in year $t$

### Interpretation of Formula 2

- The cost-per-retained figure is the most directly interpretable: It is the dollar cost associated with one alternative certification candidate remaining in the district for at least 1 year after the investment year.
- Observations where $Retained(d, t+1) = 0$ despite spending > 0 (four observations in the data) represent complete cohort loss in year $t+1$. These are included in the pooled ratio, where they contribute spending to the denominator and zero to the numerator.
- Unlike Formula 1, there is no negative value: Retained teachers can only be zero or positive. Efficiency variation is captured by the range and distribution of cost-per-retained values.

### Relationship Between the Two Formulas

Formula 1 uses prior-year spending ($t-1$) and measures whether retention is improving. Formula 2 uses current-year spending ($t$) and measures what the investment directly bought. A district can show negative Formula 1 ROI (retention fell year-over-year) while still having a reasonable Formula 2 cost-per-retained figure (meaning it retained a substantial share of its cohort at modest cost). Both metrics are reported in Section 3.1 because together they characterize different dimensions of program performance.

### Category-Specific Limitations Applying to Both Formulas

- The cohort tracked is the entire alternative certification cohort, where candidates are enrolled in an alternative route program and in a teaching position. Current data collection does not link individual candidates to specific expenditure amounts; per-teacher spending figures assume funds were distributed proportionally across the enrolled cohort.
- Neither formula distinguishes between teachers who leave because they failed certification, found better opportunities, or departed for personal reasons unrelated to program quality.
- The multi-year certification and retention outcomes described in Section 3.1.2 are not captured by either of the 1-year ROI formulas. Those outcomes require longitudinal cohort tracking beyond the 1-year window.

## A.4.2 International Teacher Recruitment

### Theory of Action

International recruitment spending covers agency fees paid to secure teachers from outside the US, typically on J-1 exchange visitor or H-1B specialty occupation visas. The expectation is that spending in year $t$ will result in international teachers being present in the district at the start of year $t+1$. The metric is therefore a recruitment outcome, not a retention outcome.

### Formula

$$ROI\_intl_{d,t} = \frac{Hires_{d,t+1}}{Spending_{d,t}}$$

Equivalently expressed as cost per hire:

$$Cost\_per\_hire_{d,t} = \frac{Spending_{d,t}}{Hires_{d,t+1}}$$

where:

$Hires_{d,t+1}$ = number of international teachers successfully placed in district $d$ in year $t+1$

$Spending_{d,t}$ = RRI international teacher fee expenditure in district $d$ in year $t$

### Interpretation

- A positive ROI (any value > 0) means at least one international teacher was successfully placed per dollar spent. The cost-per-hire reciprocal is more intuitive as it represents the dollar cost per successfully placed teacher.
- A value of zero hires (spending > 0, hires = 0) means the district spent on recruitment activities, but no teachers were successfully placed in year $t+1$. These observations are included in the pooled ratio calculation, where they contribute spending to the denominator and zero to the numerator.
- Unlike the retention categories, there is no negative ROI here: Hires can only be zero or positive. The variation across districts and years is therefore captured by the cost-per-hire range, not by the sign of the ROI.

**Category-Specific Limitations**

- The underlying assumption is that all new J-1/J-2 teachers are supported by the international fees.
- The formula captures the cost of placement, not the cost of sustained employment. International teachers on J-1 visas have an initial 3-year contract with an option for a 2-year extension, for a maximum stay of 5 years; those on H-1B visas may remain longer depending on employer sponsorship. The ROI formula does not track whether a placed teacher remained through subsequent years, which would require linking individual teachers to specific expenditure amounts.
- Current SCDE administrative data can only track teachers who arrived on a J-1/J-2 visa. To track H-1B visa hires, we must assume that all visa approvals from the US State Department result in successful hires.

### A.4.3 First-Year Teacher Stipends

First-year stipends are analyzed using one ROI formula and one descriptive comparison that address different questions. The recruitment ROI asks whether stipend spending is associated with more 1st-year hires in the following year. The retention comparison asks whether districts offering stipends retained 1st-year teachers at higher pooled rates than non-stipend district-years; this is a descriptive group comparison, not a cost-effectiveness ratio.

**ROI Formula: Recruitment**

$$ROI\_stipend_{!,\#} = \frac{FYTeachers_{!,\#} - FYteachers_{!,\#(\&}}{Spending_{!,\#(\&}}$$

where:

$FYTeachers_{!,\#}$ = number of 1st-year teachers in district $d$ in year $t$

$Spending_{!,\#(\&}$= RRI 1st-year stipend expenditure in district $d$ in year $t-1$

Lag: spending in $t-1$; outcome is change in 1st-year teacher count from $t-1$ to $t$.

**Descriptive Comparison: Retention**

$$Pooled\ retention\ rate\ (stipend\ years) = \frac{\sum retained}{\sum FYTeachers}$$

across all district-years with stipend spending > 0

$$Pooled\ retention\ rate\ (non-stipend\ years) = \frac{\sum retained}{\sum FYTeachers}$$

across all district-years with stipend spending = 0

$$Difference = pooled\ retention\ rate\ (stipend) - pooled\ retention\ rate\ (non-stipend)$$

This pooled rate weights each district-year by its cohort size, giving more influence to district-years with more 1st-year teachers. The comparison uses all district-year observations in the 5-year study window (2019–20 through 2023–24), regardless of whether prior-year spending data are available. The resulting difference of +3.5 percentage points (91.1% vs. 87.6%) is descriptive only.

**Interpretation**

- A positive recruitment ROI means more 1st-year teachers were hired in year $t$ than in year $t-1$, following stipend spending in year $t-1$ (i.e., stipend spending attracted more 1st-year teachers).
- A positive retention comparison means the pooled retention rate in stipend district-years exceeds the pooled retention rate in non-stipend district-years. This is a descriptive finding; it does not adjust for differences between districts that offer stipends and those that do not.

**Category-Specific Limitations**

- The underlying assumption is that all 1st-year teachers in the district are supported by the stipends.
- With only 21 district-year observations in the recruitment ROI panel and 18 in the 5-year retention comparison, these are the smallest samples in the analysis. Individual district-year values are sensitive to small absolute changes in cohort size, and the overall pooled ratios are more easily influenced by a single large observation than in categories with larger panels.
- The retention comparison (stipend vs. non-stipend years) is confounded by year effects: The years in which districts offered stipends may differ systematically from non-stipend years in ways unrelated to the stipend program (e.g., labor market conditions, leadership changes).

### A.4.4 Induction and Mentoring

**Theory of Action**

Induction and mentoring spending covers stipends for mentors, program fees, and administrative support for teacher induction programs. The expectation is that structured mentoring will increase the number of early-career teachers retained from one year to the next, relative to what would have been observed without the program.

### Formula

$$ROI\_ind_{d,t} = \frac{Retained_{d,t+1} - Retained_{d,t}}{Spending_{d,t}}$$

where:

$Retained_{d,t}$= number of teachers on induction contracts in district $d$ in year $t$ who return for $t+1$

$Spending_{d,t}$ = RRI induction/mentoring expenditure in district $d$ in year $t$

Lag: spending in $t$; outcome is change in retained induction-cohort teacher count from $t$ to $t+1$.

### Interpretation

- Interpretation follows the same logic as alternative certification (Section A.4.1). A positive ROI indicates that the number of induction-cohort teachers retained increased year over year following the spending; a negative ROI indicates it decreased.
- An important distinction from alternative certification: The induction cohort eligible for retention is defined as teachers in the district on induction contracts. The retention question is purely about whether mentoring support reduces early attrition.

### Category-Specific Limitations

- The underlying assumption is that all teachers on induction contracts in the district are supported by the induction and mentoring spending.
- The same cohort-size sensitivity applies as in alternative certification: year-over-year changes in the number retained reflect both retention rate and cohort size. A district whose 1st-year teacher cohort grew from 10 to 20 may show a positive numerator even if the retention rate fell.
- The investment-level analysis in Section 3.4 groups districts by per-teacher spending quartile and compares average retention rates across quartiles and to non-spending districts. This analysis uses the broader retention panel (114 district-year observations with any induction spending in the 5-year window; 126 including 2018–19) rather than the ROI panel (96 observations) and uses retention rate rather than retained count as the outcome. The two analyses are therefore not directly comparable and should be interpreted as addressing different questions.
- Induction spending per teacher varies widely across districts (less than $200 to more than $5,000 per teacher). The ROI formula does not account for this variation; high- and low-intensity programs are treated the same in the pooled formula.

### A.4.5 General Recruitment

#### Theory of Action

General recruitment spending covers a broad range of activities (e.g., recruitment fairs, advertising, website development, and national employment system fees) designed to attract teachers to the district from any source. The expectation is that spending in year $t$ will produce more new hires beginning in year $t+1$. Because this is a broad-funnel activity rather than a program with a defined participant cohort, the metric is cost per hire rather than change in a tracked cohort.

#### Formula

$$ROI\_rec_{d,t} = \frac{Hires_{d,t+1}}{Spending_{d,t}}$$

Equivalently as cost per hire:

$$Cost\_per\_hire_{d,t} = \frac{Spending_{d,t}}{Hires_{d,t+1}}$$

where:

$Hires_{d,t+1}$= total new teachers hired in district $d$ in year $t+1$ (includes new-to-state, lateral movers, role changers)

$Spending_{d,t}$ = RRI general recruitment expenditure in year $t$,including recruitment expenses, website updates, and national employment system fees

Lag: spending in $t$; outcome is new hires in $t+1$.

#### Hire Composition Subanalysis

In addition to cost per hire, general recruitment spending is analyzed by hire composition: the share of new hires who are new-to-state (not previously employed as public school teachers in South Carolina), lateral movers (previously employed in a different South Carolina district), or role-changers (previously employed in a non-teaching role in South Carolina). This is not an ROI formula but a descriptive comparison between districts with and without spending in a given year:

$$NewToState\_share_{d,t+1} = \frac{NewToState\ \ hires_{d,t+1}}{Total\ hires_{d,t+1}}$$

Compared across:

- District-years with $Spending_{d,t} > 0$
- District-years with $Spending_{d,t} = 0$

#### Interpretation

- A lower cost per hire indicates higher efficiency: More teachers were placed per dollar spent.
- Unlike the retention categories, there is no negative ROI: Hires are non-negative. Efficiency variation is captured by the range of cost-per-hire values.
- The hire composition analysis is descriptive. A higher new-to-state share in spending districts compared to non-spending districts is consistent with general recruitment expanding the

teacher workforce (bringing in teachers who were not previously in South Carolina) rather than redistributing existing South Carolina teachers across districts.

**Category-Specific Limitations**

- General recruitment spending is the broadest category and the one with the least direct traceability between spending and outcomes. A district attending a recruitment fair in year $t$ may hire some teachers directly as a result, but it also hires teachers through other channels (walk-in applications, word of mouth, referrals) simultaneously. The formula attributes all new hires to the district in year $t + 1$, not just those potentially traced to RRI-funded recruitment activities.
- The allocation formula links higher spending to larger districts (more classroom teachers, weighted by turnover rate above the 11% threshold). This means the spending quartile analysis of hire composition conflates spending level with district size.
- General recruitment spending includes three subcategories (recruitment expenses, website updates, and national employment fees) that are combined in the primary analysis. Districts that use only website updates spend on a different activity than districts that primarily attend job fairs, but the formula treats all three subcategories identically.

## A.5 Aggregating District-Year ROI to an Overall Category Estimate

### A.5.1 The Pooled Ratio

For each category, an overall ROI is computed as the pooled ratio: the sum of all outcome values across all district-year observations divided by the sum of all spending values across all district-year observations.

$$Overall\_ROI\_category = \frac{\sum_i \sum_t [Outcome_{i,t}]}{\sum_i \sum_t [Spending_{i,t}]}$$

where the sums run over all district-year observations included in the panel for that category

For general recruitment and international recruitment, where the outcome is a hire count, this simplifies to total hires divided by total spending across all years and districts. For the alternative certification and induction and mentoring categories, it is the total change in retained teacher counts (which may be negative in some years) divided by total spending.

### A.5.2 Why the Pooled Ratio was Used

Three aggregation approaches were considered:

- Simple mean: average of all district-year ROI values, treating each observation equally
- Spending-weighted mean: each district-year ROI is weighted by its spending share
- Pooled ratio (sum of outcomes/sum of spending): equivalent to the implicit spending-weighted mean but avoids dividing by spending twice

The pooled ratio was chosen for two reasons. First, it avoids distortion from extreme outliers with very small denominators. In the induction panel, Dorchester School District Four's 2021–22 observation has spending of only $1,466, producing an ROI of 0.007503, an order of magnitude larger than any other observation. Under a simple mean, this single observation would pull the overall estimate substantially toward a positive value that does not reflect typical program performance. Under the pooled ratio, that district-year contributes $1,466 to the denominator (out of $3.57 million total), representing a 0.04%

weight, and its influence on the overall figure is proportional to its actual fiscal share. Second, the pooled ratio answers the more policy-relevant question: Per dollar actually spent across all participating districts and years, what was the aggregate return?

### A.5.3 The Pooled Ratio is Implicitly Spending-Weighted

An important property of the pooled ratio is that it gives more weight to districts that spent more. A district that spent $500,000 on induction has 100 times the influence on the overall ratio as a district that spent $5,000. This is appropriate for a program-level policy question (we want to know what the program achieved overall per dollar), but it may mean the overall ROI does not reflect the median district's experience. For this reason, the main report always reports the median district-year ROI alongside the pooled ratio. For induction, both the pooled ratio and median are negative, which strengthens the conclusion. For alternative certification (Measure 1) and 1st-year stipends, the pooled ratio is nonzero, but the median is exactly zero, meaning the typical district-year showed no change even though the aggregate did, a pattern that is itself informative about the skewed distribution of outcomes in those categories. For international recruitment and general recruitment, cost per hire is always positive, so sign comparison does not apply; the median cost per hire provides a sense of the typical district's experience relative to the spending-weighted pooled figure.

## A.6 What These ROI Metrics Do and Do Not Measure

### A.6.1 What They Measure

- The association between RRI spending and observed recruitment or retention outcomes at the district level, measured 1 year after spending
- The cost efficiency of each category: how many units of outcome (hires or additional retained teachers) were observed per dollar of spending, in districts that used each category
- The distribution of outcomes across districts and years: how often outcomes were positive, zero, or negative, and how variable outcomes were across contexts
- The trend in cost efficiency over time: whether the cost per hire or cost per additional retained teacher changed across the study period

### A.6.2 What They Do Not Measure

- Causal effects: The formulas produce associations, not causal estimates. The counterfactual (what retention or recruitment would have been without RRI spending) is not observed. Confounders, including district leadership, salary levels, working conditions, labor market conditions, and complementary investments, are not controlled.
- Quality outcomes: Teacher effectiveness, instructional quality, student achievement, and professional satisfaction are not captured in any ROI formula.
- Long-term persistence: All formulas use a 1-year outcome window. Whether recruited or retained teachers persist in the district for 3, 5, or 10 years is not measured.
- Certification completion: For alternative certification, whether a teacher who is retained in year $t+1$ has completed professional certification is tracked separately in the cohort analysis (Section 3.1.2) but is not incorporated into the ROI formula.
- Multi-category interactions: Districts often invest in multiple categories simultaneously (e.g., induction and alternative certification, or general recruitment and international recruitment). The formulas analyze each category independently and do not capture whether combinations of strategies produce synergistic or diminishing returns.

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