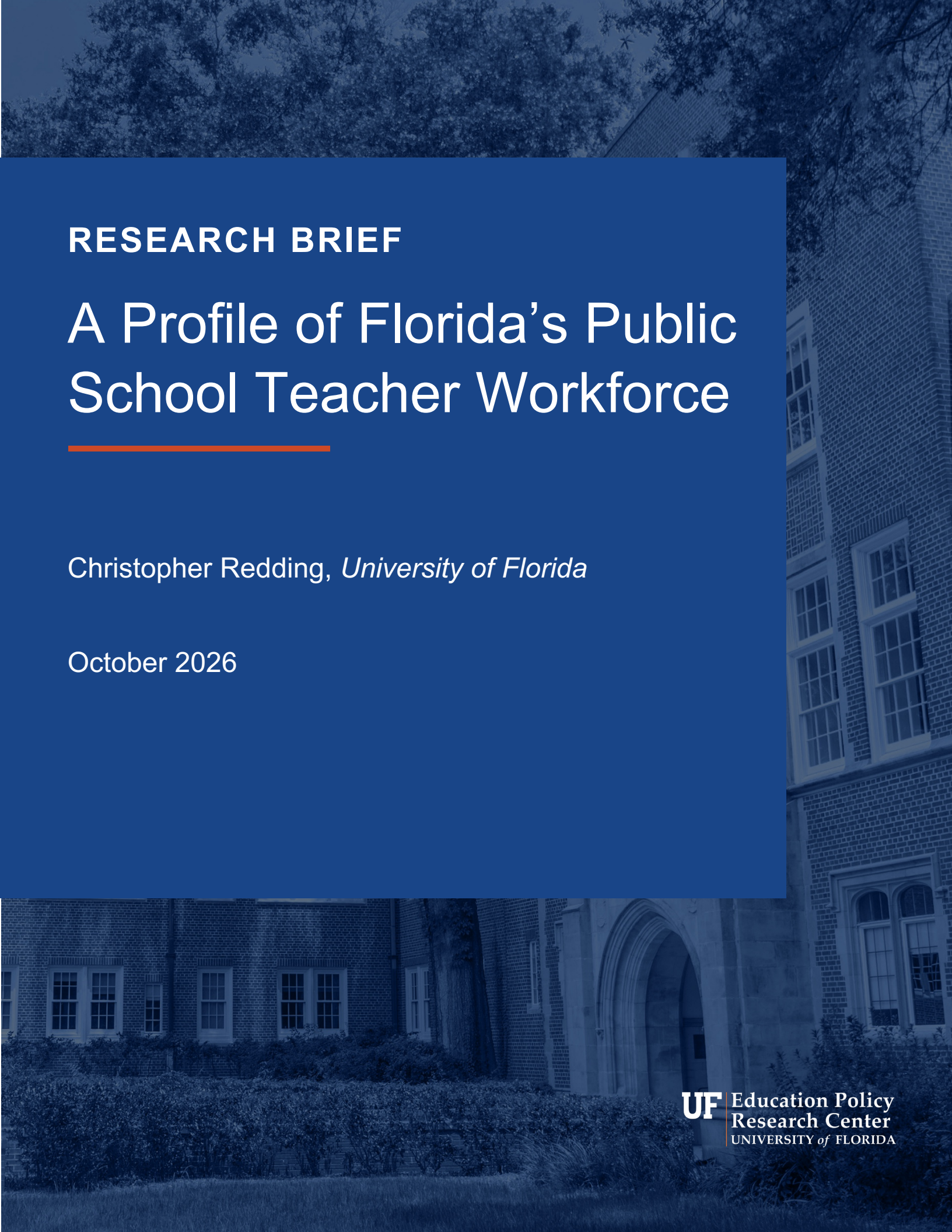

RESEARCH BRIEF

A Profile of Florida's Public School Teacher Workforce

Christopher Redding, *University of Florida*

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Christopher Redding

Teacher shortages are often discussed in terms of vacancies, but changes in who is teaching can provide a broader perspective on how the teacher workforce is evolving. Using data from 2017-18 through 2024-25, this brief examines trends in the composition of Florida's public school teacher workforce and compares Florida teachers to their national peers where possible. The findings show that Florida's teacher workforce has become increasingly racially and ethnically diverse, with growing shares of Black and Hispanic teachers. At the same time, Florida relies heavily on novice teachers, with nearly one-quarter of teachers in their first three years of teaching by 2024-25, a substantially larger share than nationally. The composition of instructional assignments has also shifted, with the share of exceptional student education teachers increasing while the share of elementary teachers has declined. These findings suggest that the composition of Florida's teacher workforce is changing, highlighting the importance of policies that support teacher recruitment, preparation, retention, and long-term workforce stability.

Introduction

Policy discussions of Florida's teacher workforce frequently focus on whether the state has enough teachers to staff public school classrooms throughout the state. The Florida Department of Education and the Florida Education Association each report annually the number of vacancies going into each school year.[i] Yet, vacancies are only part of the story about who is staffing classrooms in the state. Schools also respond to staffing challenges by changing who they recruit, prepare, and retain. As a result, shortages can alter the demographic, professional, and instructional composition of the workforce even when overall staffing levels remain relatively stable.

At the same time, Florida's teacher workforce has operated in a rapidly changing policy environment. Since 2020, state leaders have pursued reforms affecting school operations, classroom instruction, teacher licensure, and compensation, each of which may have shaped who enters, remains in, and exits the profession. More recently, in the wake of the expansion of Family Empowerment Scholarships, public school enrollments have started to shrink.[ii]

Who is teaching in Florida's public schools serves as a barometer of broader changes shaping the teacher labor market. Shifts in teacher demographics, licensure pathways, and instructional assignments reflect how districts respond to changing student needs, recruitment challenges, and state policy initiatives. Examining who teaches in Florida's schools provides a richer understanding of how the profession itself is evolving.

This research brief uses data on the composition of the Florida public school teachers from the 2017-18 to the 2024-25 school year. I focus on demographic characteristics (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender, and age), teaching experience, and primary instructional area. For years in which national data are available, I compare these characteristics with a national sample of public school teachers. The purpose of this brief is not to focus specifically on new teachers but to provide a profile of Florida's public school teacher workforce.

Specifically, this brief has three main aims:

- Describe the demographic characteristics, teaching experience, and subject area of Florida public school teachers.
- Document trends in how these characteristics have changed over time.
- Compare the characteristics of Florida public school teachers to a national sample of teachers.

Demographic Characteristics of Florida Public School Teachers

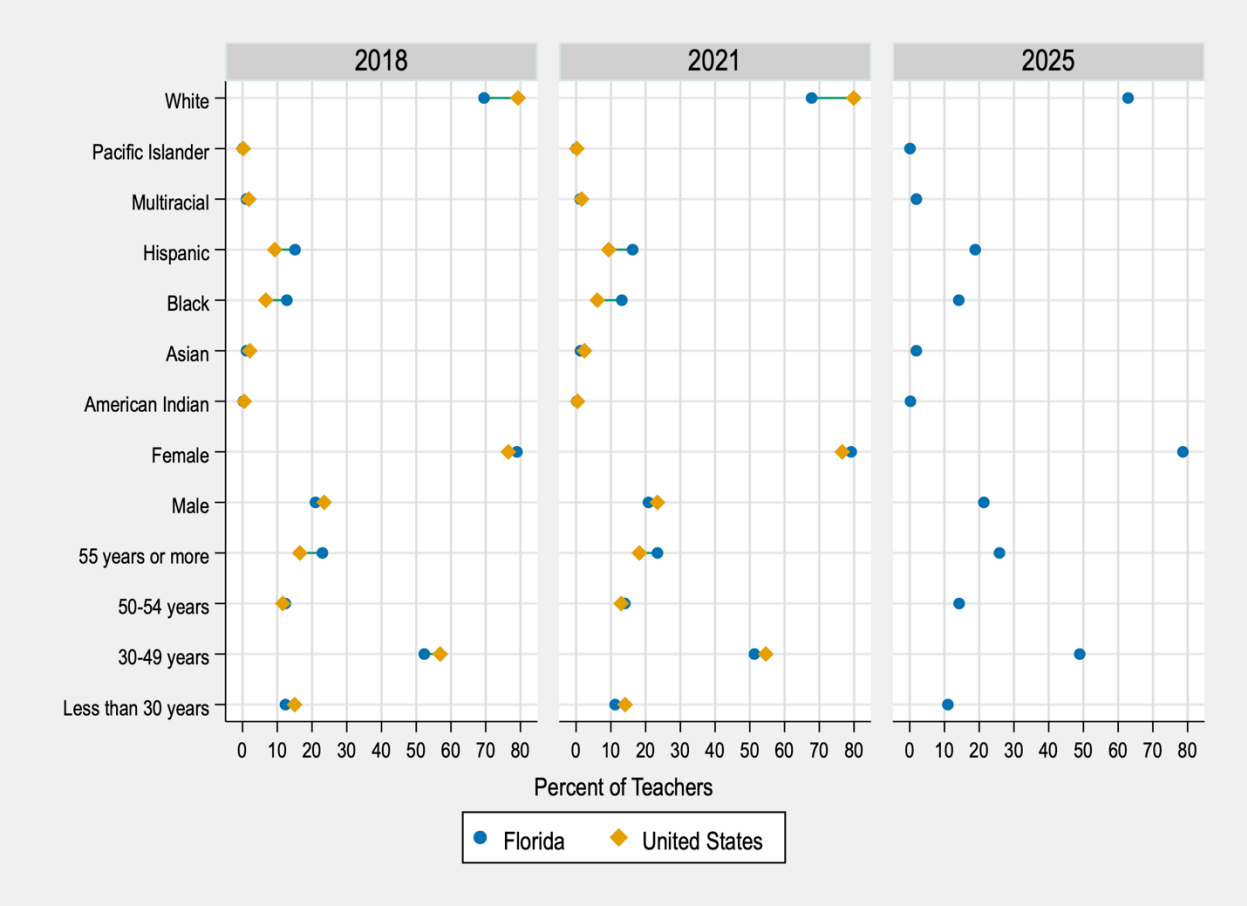
The first set of analyses reports demographic characteristics for public school teachers compared to a national sample of public school teachers. The first two panels of Figure 1 provide comparisons between Florida teachers and a nationwide sample of teachers in the 2017-18 and 2020-21 school years, when these data are available. The final panel reports the characteristics of Florida teachers in 2024-2025 to show if trends in the demographic characteristics of teachers shifted more recently.

In terms of racial/ethnic identity, Florida public school teachers are more racially diverse than teachers nationwide. In the 2020-21 school year, 79.9% of public school teachers nationwide identified as White, 9.4% identified as Hispanic, 6.1% identified as Black, 2.4% identified as Asian, 1.6% identified as multiracial, 0.4% identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.2% identified as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.[iii]

In Florida, 67.8% of public school teachers identified as White, 16.3% identified as Hispanic, 13.2% identified as Black, 1.3% identified as Asian, 1.2% identified as multiracial, 0.2% identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.1% identified as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.[iv] It is also noteworthy that the racial/ethnic makeup of the teacher workforce has shifted in Florida: the fraction of White teachers shifted from 69.5% in 2017-18 to 62.9% in 2024-25.

The overwhelming majority of public school teachers identify as female (79%), which resembles the 77% of female teachers nationwide. Teachers are slightly older in Florida. Nationally, the median age for public school teachers in 2020-21 was 42 years old, whereas it is 45 in Florida[v]--which is driven by the slightly larger share of teachers over 50 years old (31.2% versus 37.4%).

Figure 1. Comparing Demographic Characteristics of United States and Florida Public School Teachers



Notes. National teacher demographic characteristics from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey.

Key Findings

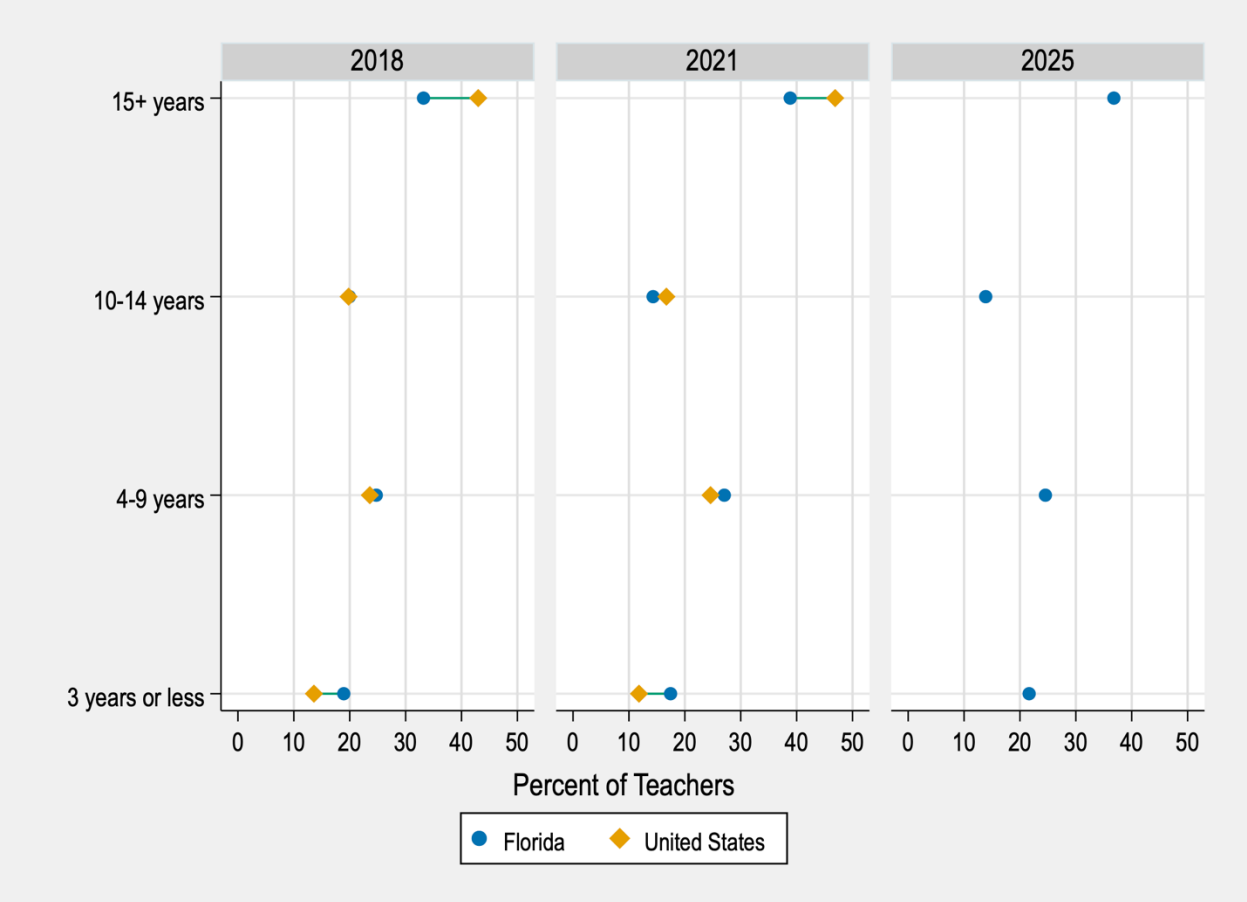
- Florida's teacher workforce is more racially and ethnically diverse than the national teacher workforce and has become increasingly diverse over time. Compared with teachers nationwide, Florida has larger shares of Hispanic (16.3% vs. 9.4%) and Black teachers (13.2% vs. 6.1%) and a smaller share of White teachers (67.8% vs. 79.9%). This diversity has increased over the past decade, with the share of White teachers in Florida declining from 69.5% in 2017–18 to 62.9% in 2024–25, while the national share has remained near 80%.
- Teaching remains a predominantly female profession. Nearly four out of five Florida public school teachers (79%) identify as female, a proportion similar to the national teacher workforce (77%).
- Florida's teacher workforce is somewhat older than the national workforce. The median age of Florida teachers is 45 years, compared with 42 years nationally, reflecting a smaller share of teachers under age 30 and a larger share age 50 and older.

Teaching Experience and Subject Area of Florida Public School Teachers

The experience of public school teachers is in sharp contrast to teachers nationwide, as shown in Figure 2. In the 2020-21 school year, 11.8% of teachers in the United States are in their first three years in teaching compared to 17.5% in Florida. In contrast, there are fewer teachers with 15 or more years of teaching experience than the United States as a whole. Nationwide, 46.9% of teachers have more than 15 years of teaching experience compared to 38.9% in Florida. This pattern may reflect more second career teachers in the state than elsewhere in the United States. On average, the average U.S. teacher had 14.5 years of experience in 2020-21 compared to 11.7 years in Florida.

To further contextualize the distinct profile of teaching experience in Florida, the top panel of Figure 3 reports the distribution of teaching experience in the 2024-25 school year. 7.1% of Florida teachers were in their first year of teaching; 22.3% of teachers were in their first three years of teaching.

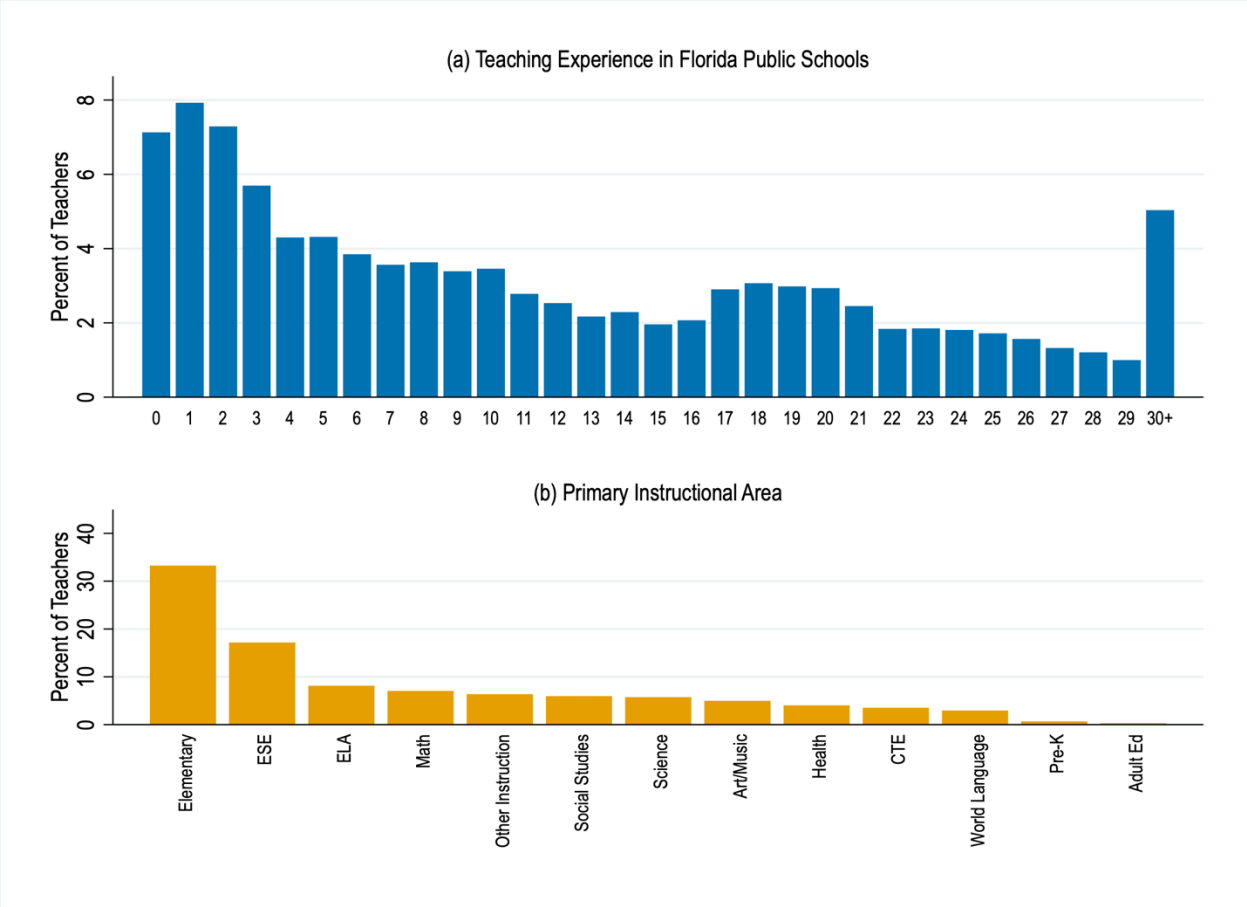
Figure 2. Comparing Teaching Experience of United States and Florida Public School Teachers



Notes. National teacher demographic characteristics from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey.

The bottom panel of Figure 3 reports teachers' primary instructional area. Elementary and exceptional student education (ESE; Florida's designation for special education and gifted education) are the two most common instructional areas, comprising half of teachers' instructional assignments. Though elementary school teachers, the number and relative share has decreased slightly since 2016-17: in the 2016-17 school year self-contained elementary teachers made up 36% of teacher statewide compared to 33% in the 2024-25 school year. In contrast, the number and relative share of ESE teachers increased from 15.7% in the 2016-17 school year to 17.2% in the 2024-25 school year. The relative share of other subject area teachers has been more consistent over time.

Figure 3. Teaching Experience and Subject Area of Florida Public School Teachers, 2024-2025



Notes. Adult ed = adult education; CTE = career and technical education; ESE = exceptional student education; ELA = English language arts; Pre-K = prekindergarten.

Key Findings

- Florida's teacher workforce includes a larger share of early-career teachers and fewer highly experienced teachers than the nation as a whole. In 2020–21, 17.5% of Florida teachers were in their first three years of teaching compared with 11.8% nationally, while

a smaller share had 15 or more years of experience. By 2024–25, 22.3% of Florida teachers were in their first three years.

- Elementary and ESE teachers account for about half of Florida's teaching workforce, but their shares are changing over time. Since 2016–17, the share of elementary teachers has declined, while the share of ESE teachers has increased; other instructional areas have remained relatively stable.

Summary

Discussions of Florida's teacher workforce often focus on shortages and vacancies, but these challenges can result in broader changes to who is teaching in the state's classrooms. Changes in the demographic, professional, and instructional composition of teachers offer a window into how schools have adapted to shifting recruitment conditions, student needs, and policy priorities.

In terms of the racial/ethnic demographics of the Florida teacher workforce, Florida's teacher workforce is more racially and ethnically diverse than the national teacher workforce. Interestingly, amidst anecdotes of teachers of color leaving in response to censorship related to the teaching about race[vi], the fraction of teachers of color have only increased. The share of Black teachers increased from 12.8% in 2017-2018 to 14.1% in 2024-2025; the share of Hispanic teachers increased from 15.1% to 18.9% over this period.

Perhaps the most important finding of this brief is showing the reliance of novice teachers in staffing schools in the state. In 2020–21, 17.5% of Florida teachers were in their first three years of teaching compared with 11.8% nationally. The fraction of beginning teachers has only grown since then, with a nearly one quarter of Florida teachers in their first three years in the 2024-25 school year. Interestingly, though teachers are less experienced in Florida, they also tend to be slightly older than the national teacher workforce, also with fewer teachers under 30.

Although elementary and ESE teachers collectively account for about half of Florida's teachers, their relative shares have moved in opposite directions over time: the proportion of elementary teachers has declined since 2016–17, whereas the proportion of ESE teachers has steadily increased. Other instructional areas have remained largely unchanged.

Policy Implications

Broader research on the teacher workforce shows that who decides to become and remain a teacher is not only shaped personal preferences, but also by myriad policies shaping access to and experiences as a teacher.[vii]

With evidence from the teacher mobility brief that teachers of color turn over at similar rates as White teachers—or even slightly lower rates, in the case of Hispanic teachers—suggests that a greater emphasis could be placed on recruiting a more racially and ethnically diverse teacher workforce. Yet, steps have been taken that limit university and school-district efforts to promote the recruitment of teachers of color. Senate Bill 266 in 2023 prohibited the use of state and national resources on diversity, equity, and inclusion programs.[viii] Moreover, in 2025, Governor DeSantis eliminated funds budgeted for the long-standing Florida Fund for Minority Teachers.[ix]

School districts in Florida appear to have been more successful in recruiting ESE teachers. Amidst similar rates of leaving teaching as other subject areas, the state has seen growth in the

number of special and gifted education teachers. Perhaps most successful has been a tuition grant for paraprofessionals working to become a teacher. ESE teacher recruitment also includes many who come through alternative certification programs, who are more likely to leave.[x]

The largest concern identified by this brief is the overwhelming reliance on early career teachers to staff public schools in the state. Regardless of how effective they will be, teachers make quick improvements in how well they are able to impact their students' performance. They learn how to manage classroom behavior, design appropriate lessons aligned to their students' unique learning needs, and recognize when students struggle and adjust instruction accordingly. This learning takes time and, when a revolving door of new teachers, it risks contributing to a less than ideal instructional experience than if more Florida children were taught by veteran teachers. Contributing to this issue is the finding from the teacher mobility brief that turnover is highest among novice teachers. Investments in mentoring, induction programs, instructional coaching, and opportunities for professional growth may help reduce early-career turnover and improve long-term workforce stability.[xi] Even larger investments may also be needed in teacher compensation, so teaching is a financially sustainable occupation for a growing number of teachers.

Finally, the large fraction of beginning teachers is likely a result of the ease with which people can enter the classroom under temporary teaching licenses. There are likely two possible directions. One, the state could make it less attractive to enter or keep a temporary certification by increasing preparation requirements (e.g., requiring more coursework or clinical experiences before serving as the teacher of record) or shortening the period in which teachers can teach with a temporary license. Second, temporary licensure policies remain consistent, steps could be taken to transition more alternatively certified teachers to a professional teacher license. This may include financial incentives and partnerships with teacher preparation programs throughout the state.

The findings in this brief suggest that Florida's teacher workforce is not simply changing in size, but in composition. As policymakers consider future reforms, attention should focus not only on the number of teachers in classrooms, but also on building a workforce that is experienced, representative of the students it serves, and positioned to remain in the profession over time. Decisions about teacher preparation pathways, recruitment strategies, and investments in workforce development will help determine whether these changes strengthen the profession or contribute to continued instability in the years ahead.

Appendix

Data

This brief used longitudinal administrative data on public school teachers in Florida for the 2017–2018, 2020–2021, and 2024-2025 school years. These years were chosen as the first two reflect the most recent school years in which there is comparable national data on the teacher workforce from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS). NTPS data is not for the 2017–2018 and 2020–2021 school years, with the 2024-2025 included to provide more recent shifts in teacher characteristics.

Teacher demographic characteristics include race/ethnicity, gender, and age. Racial/ethnic categories include non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White, non-Hispanic, Two or More Races and Hispanic (regardless of race). Gender is a binary Male-Female variable. NCES uses the following categories for age: less than 30 years, 30-49 years, 50-54 years, and 55 years or more.

Other teacher characteristics also include teaching experience and subject area. In some analyses, I use the following experience categories to facilitate comparisons with national data: 3 years or less, 4-9 years, 10-14 years, and 15 or more years of experience. In other analysis, I report an annual measure of teacher experience, grouping teachers with 30 or more years of experience into a single category. Subject areas include prekindergarten, self-contained elementary, English language arts (ELA)/reading, math and computer education, natural sciences, social studies, world languages, art, dance, drama, and music, health, physical education, and athletic coaching, exceptional student education (ESE), career and technical education (CTE), adult education, and other instruction.

I include full-time instructional staff with non-missing school characteristics. The sample includes 251,882 unique teacher observations and 467,982 teacher-year observations.

Methods

This analysis primarily relies on graphical analysis to show descriptive trends in the characteristics of Florida public school teachers. I first compare the demographic characteristics of Florida public school teachers and a national sample of teachers. These comparisons can be made in the 2017–2018 and 2020–2021 school years, with the 2024-2025 included to provide more recent shifts in teacher characteristics. A similar comparison is made for teaching experience.

For the final analysis, I report on the full distribution of teaching experience for the 2024-2025. I also report the frequency of teachers' primary instructional area. Though not reported directly in the brief, I examine whether the number or relative breakdown of teachers' subject area has shifted over time. Comparable national data on subject area is not available.

Limitations

There are several limitations with this analysis that should be noted. Similar to other briefs in this series, this brief is descriptive in nature and does not attempt to identify the causes of changes in teacher workforce composition. While shifts in teacher characteristics occurred

alongside changes in state policy, labor market conditions, and student demographics, the analyses cannot determine the extent to which any specific factor contributed to observed trends.

Second, comparisons with survey-based NTPS data may differ from Florida administrative records in measurement and reporting practices. Although every effort was made to harmonize categories, some differences may reflect variation in data collection rather than true differences in teacher characteristics. The largest concern here pertains to teaching experience. In the NTPS, teachers report on the number of school years they have worked as a K-12 teacher in public, public charter, or private schools. As the measure of teaching experience for Florida teachers does not include work in private schools, it may understate years of experience. An additional limitation stemming from the NTPS data is that it has not been collected since the 2020-2021 school year and thus national comparisons are somewhat dated at this point.

Third, the administrative data captured in this brief are an admittedly limited set of teacher characteristics. Of primary interest that is not included in the current brief is data on licensure status and preparation pathway. In addition, the focus on teachers' primary teaching assignments can misrepresent the complex roles and responsibilities that teachers have come to fill in many schools.

Notes and Sources

I thank Chris Curran, Hyunji Kim, and Florence Bason for reviewing and providing feedback on earlier drafts of this brief. Microsoft Copilot was used to assist with summarizing source materials, improving readability, and identifying typographical and grammatical errors during the preparation of this report. All analyses, interpretations, findings, and conclusions were reviewed and verified by the authors, who assume full responsibility for the content.

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