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Publication Date

2026-02-24

Who Leads California's Schools?

New Insights from Statewide Administrator Data



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2019–20

2020–21

2021–22

2022–23

2023–24

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful to the Hewlett Foundation for their generous support that funds our work. We want to especially acknowledge Peter Rivera, our program officer at the Hewlett Foundation, for his leadership and sustained commitment to our educator diversity portfolio endeavors. We also extend our gratitude to Dr. Daryl Camp, President of the Association of California School Administrators; Dr. Juan Manuel Santos, President and Jessica Ochoa, Chief Executive Officer of the California Association of Latino Superintendents and Administrators (CALSA); and Dr. Annamarie Francois, Associate Dean for Public Education, UCLA School of Education & Information Studies, for reviewing our brief and providing insightful feedback. This brief was designed by Geneva Sum, Communications Director at the UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools (CTS), and edited by Kate Rowley, Copy Editor at the Center. The authors also thank CTS colleagues Caitlyn McAloon and Deborah Mba for their contributions to this publication.



Suggested Citation:

Yagi, E., Kim, G. H. E., Johnson Jr., S. L., Bishop, J. P. (2026). *Who leads California's schools? New insights from statewide administrator data*. Center for the Transformation of Schools, School of Education & Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles.

ABSTRACT

This brief analyzes statewide educational administrator data released in July 2025 by the California Department of Education (CDE), marking the first such release since 2019.

UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools (CTS) researchers examined administrator data from five school years, from SY 2019–20 to SY 2023–24, to identify trends for variables of interest, including administrators' race/ethnicity, gender, education, and experience. The dataset includes principals and superintendents across California schools.

Key findings indicate that Black administrators outnumber Asian administrators, a pattern that contrasts with both California's population demographics and the demographic composition of the teacher workforce. While a master's degree remains the most common credential among administrators, there has been a noticeable increase in those holding only a bachelor's degree. The data also show a rise in the proportion of female administrators and administrators of color, alongside declines in the proportions of male and white administrators. Although these demographic changes increasingly reflect California's broader population, it is important to note that the CDE data aggregate all administrative roles. National patterns suggest that women are more likely to serve as elementary principals, while men remain disproportionately represented in superintendent positions, suggesting that disaggregated analysis may reveal more unequal leadership pathways than aggregated data alone. By documenting recent changes in California's educational administrative workforce, this analysis provides timely insight into educational leadership pipeline, informing state and district efforts to recruit, prepare, and retain a diverse workforce of school leaders.



Glossary of Key Terms

- **Administrator demographic:**
Administrators' reported ethnic and racial backgrounds.
- **Administrator experiences:**
Administrators' completed years of full-time teaching.
- **Administrator educational level:**
Administrators' highest level of attained degree.
- **Administrator gender composition:**
Administrators' reported gender identities.
- **Hispanic:**
Term used to identify people from Spanish-speaking countries.
- **Latino/a:**
Term used to identify people of Latin American descent.
- **Latine:**
Gender-neutral term used to identify people of Latin American descent.

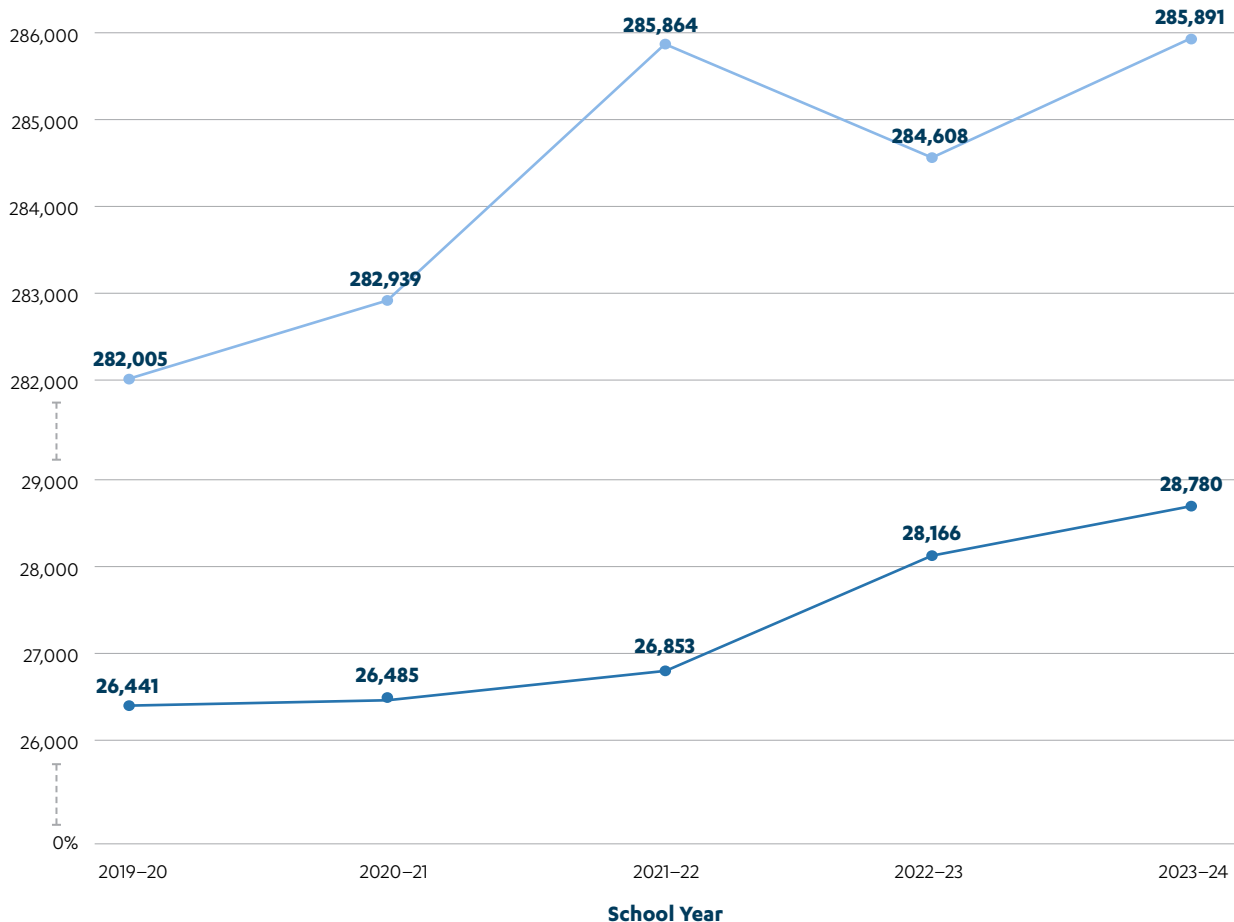
INTRODUCTION

In July 2025, the California Department of Education (CDE) released long-anticipated statewide data on educational staff for the first time since school year (SY) 2018–19.

The dataset includes various demographics of teachers, administrators, pupil services staff, and other non-instructional support staff. This brief focuses specifically on administrator data, primarily those in leadership roles such as principals and superintendents.

According to the CDE, the six-year reporting gap was caused by staffing shortages and the extensive work required to reconfigure five years of reports and data due to the state's transition to new course codes in SY 2018–19 (Lambert, 2024; Lambert & Willis, 2025). Although the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on students and teacher burnout were heavily reported on, far less information has been available on administrators and other staff (Kuhfeld et al., 2022; Lambert, 2022; Pier et al., 2021).

Figure 1. Number of Teachers and Administrators from SY 2019–20 to SY 2023–24



Note: Data derived from CDE files, SY 2019–20 through SY 2023–24 (accessed 2025).
Dashed line indicates discontinuity. Values between 0–26,000 and 29,000–282,000 are not observed.

As of SY 2023–24, California employs 285,891 teachers (Kim et al., 2026) and 28,780 administrators (see **Figure 1**). Researchers at the UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools recently published a brief highlighting notable trends in teacher demographics (Kim et al., 2026). When examined alongside the administrator data, several parallel and divergent trends emerge; both the teaching and administrative workforces have grown in size from SY 2019–20 to SY 2023–24, and both remain majority female. However, some patterns differ between the two groups, such as the population and percentage of different ethnic groups, as further elaborated on in this brief.

Although the release of new administrator data is valuable, important limitations remain. While CDE refers to administrators broadly as principals and

superintendents, clear definitions among specific administrative roles are not provided (CDE, 2023). As a result, role-specific trends cannot be identified. Consequently, while the findings presented in this brief offer critical insights into administrator demographics in California, some nuances remain obscured by the structure of the available data.

This brief aims to: (1) present key findings from the CDE administrator data; (2) highlight unique trends and potential correlation with other datasets, such as CDE's teacher data; (3) discuss implications and limitations; and (4) recommend strategies to address gender and racial imbalances among administrators, as well as call for more comprehensive research on administrators with utilization of additional administrator indicators.



METHODS

This brief draws on newly released statewide administrator staffing data from the California Department of Education (CDE), covering five school years from SY 2019–20 through SY 2023–24.

Data were obtained from the CDE's public certificated staff data files, which compile annual counts of school personnel reported by local education agencies across California (CDE, 2025a). The dataset includes information on administrator counts, race/ethnicity, gender, years of experience, and highest degree attained, enabling descriptive analyses of workforce composition and changes over time. For the purposes of this brief, administrators primarily include principals and superintendents as categorized in the CDE files.

CTS researchers downloaded statewide administrator data files from the CDE website (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/staff.asp>) and constructed analytic datasets to examine changes in both counts and percentages of administrators across key dimensions of interest. Administrators were grouped by experience level (first-year, inexperienced, and experienced), race/ethnicity, gender, and educational attainment. Percentages were calculated using total administrator counts as the denominator to ensure comparability across years. Analyses focused on descriptive trends and year-to-year comparisons in levels and shares rather than causal or inferential statistical modeling.

Several limitations should be noted. First, the CDE data aggregate multiple administrative roles and do not consistently distinguish among principals, assistant principals, superintendents, or other leadership positions, limiting role-specific analyses. Second, the data do not directly capture administrator attrition, mobility, or career pathways, making it difficult to determine whether changes reflect hiring, promotion, or exits from the profession. Third, demographic categories are based on self-reported information and may not fully capture multiracial or evolving identity categories. Finally, the six-year reporting gap prior to this release and changes in state data systems restrict the ability to analyze longer-term historical trends. Despite these limitations, the newly released CDE administrator data provide the most comprehensive statewide portrait of California's school leadership workforce in recent years and offer important insights into post-pandemic shifts in administrator diversity, experience, and preparation.



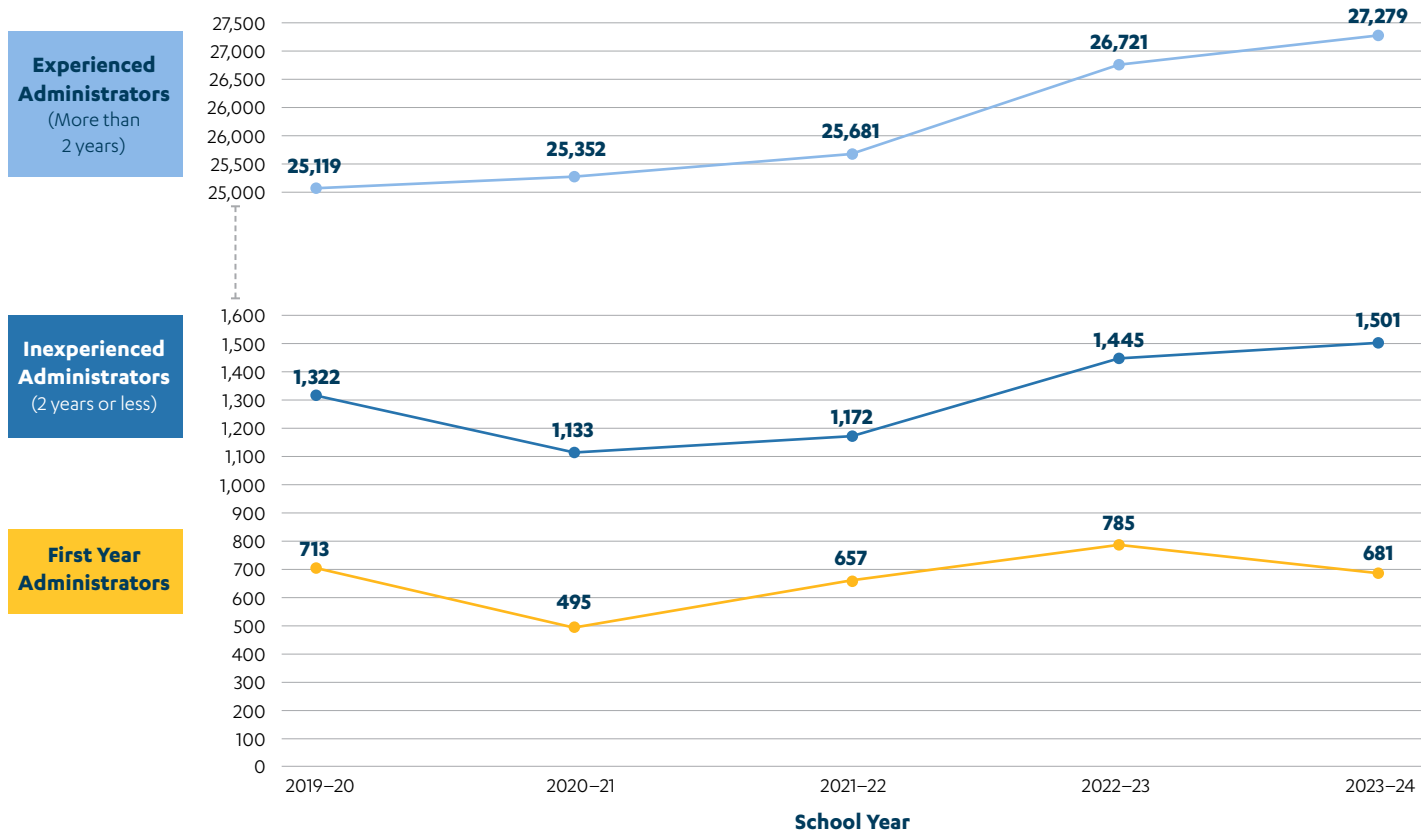
FINDINGS

1. The number of experienced administrators increased, but the overall percentage of experienced administrators is slowly declining.*

From SY 2019–20 to SY 2023–24, there was an increase of approximately 2,000 administrators with three or more years of experience. The number of inexperienced administrators, defined by CDE as those with two years of experience or less, also increased by about 200 individuals. The overall percentage of experienced administrators declined to 94.78% in SY 2023–24.



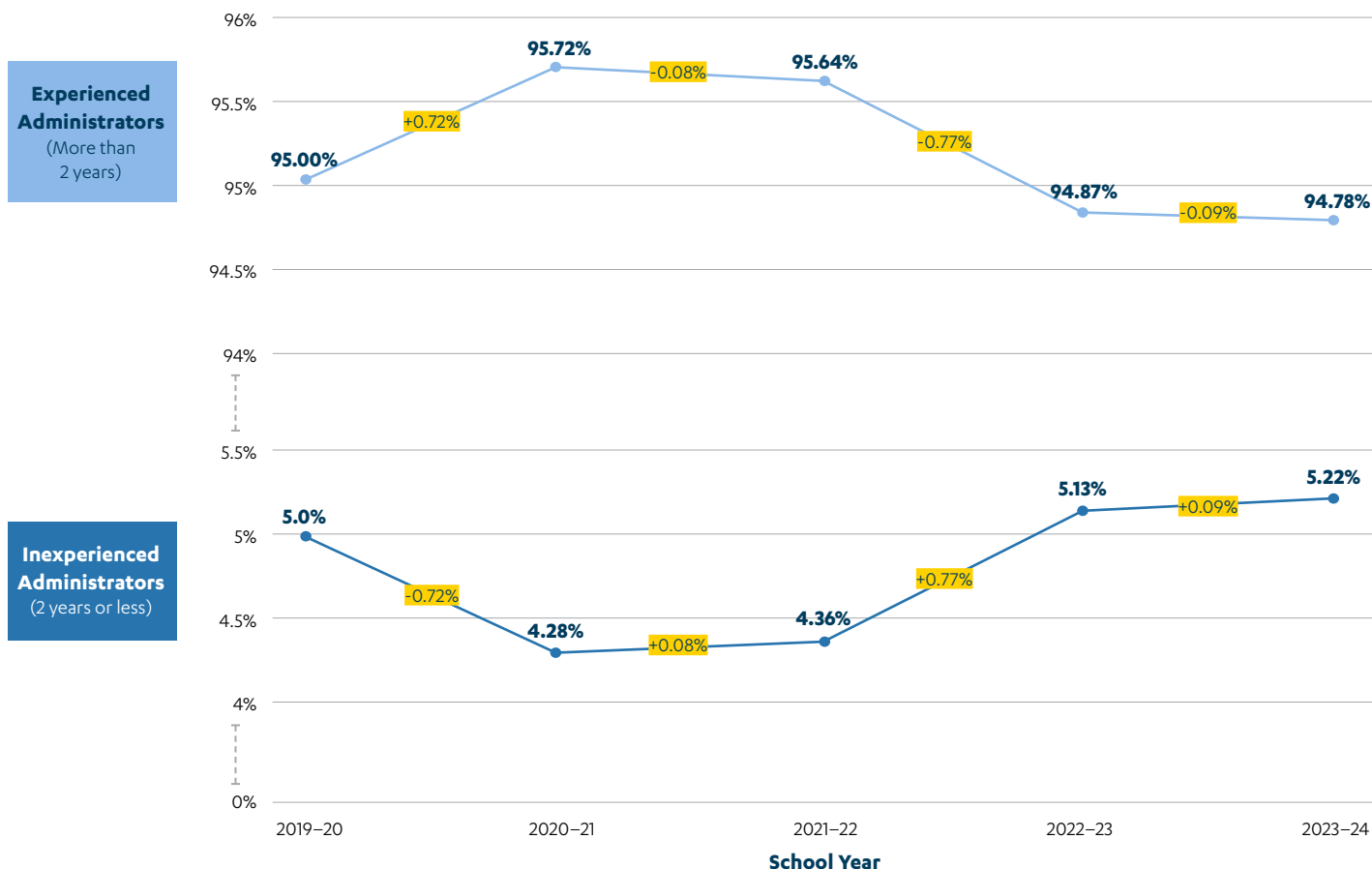
Figure 2. Number of Administrators by Experience from SY 2019–20 to SY 2023–24



Note: Data derived from CDE files, SY 2019–20 through SY 2023–24 (accessed 2025).

Dashed line indicates discontinuity. Values between 1,600–25,000 are not observed.

*Newly released data from CDE (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/cm/dqstaffdemo.asp>) for the 2024–25 school year published after the completion of this analysis reports the number of administrators decreased by 191 or -0.7% between 2023–24 to 2024–25. The new data shows that 95.7% (95.68% to be exact) of administrators are considered experienced.

Figure 3. Percentage of Administrators by Experience from SY 2019–20 to SY 2023–24

Note: Data derived from CDE files, SY 2019–20 through SY 2023–24 (accessed 2025).

Dashed line indicates discontinuity. Values between 0–4% and 5.5–94% are not observed.

*Newly released data from CDE (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/cm/dqstaffdemo.asp>) for the 2024–25 school year published after the completion of this analysis reports the number of administrators decreased by 191 or -0.7% between 2023–24 to 2024–25. The new data shows that 95.7% (95.68% to be exact) of administrators are considered experienced.

The most notable change from SY 2019–20 to SY 2023–24 is an increase of approximately 2,000 experienced administrators who have more than two years of experience (see **Figure 2**). While the change is less pronounced, the number of inexperienced administrators also increased by about 200 individuals. The only group that showed a decline was first-year administrators, which declined by 50 individuals. However, this number fluctuates year to year, likely reflecting annual variations in job openings. And, despite the overall increase in the number of experienced administrators, the percentage of experienced administrators has steadily declined since peaking in SY 2020–21 (see **Figure 3**). This suggests that while the total workforce of administrators is growing, there are more inexperienced administrators entering the workforce every year. One possible factor contributing to this shift is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. During SY

2020–21, approximately 11% of public school principals nationwide left their principalship entirely (Taie & Lewis, 2022). Many superintendents also chose to retire around this time, particularly those who had reached retirement eligibility post-pandemic (Lambert, 2023).

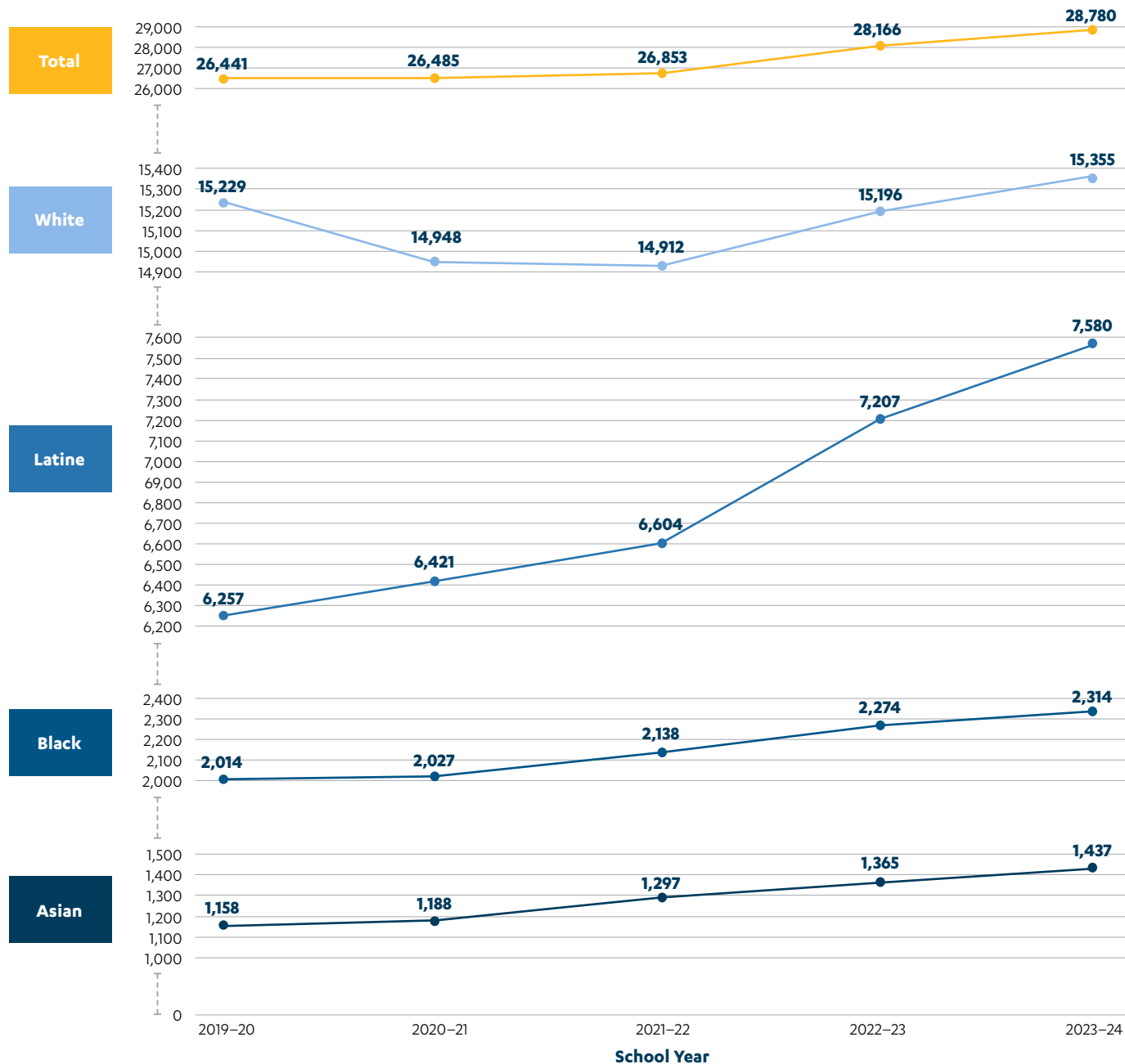
Supporting this trend, findings from The School Superintendents Association (AASA) show that the age of superintendents is getting younger, with those aged 60 or older decreasing from 19.48% in 2012 to 9.57% in SY 2023–24 (Thomas et al., 2024). Salary and pension considerations may also have influenced turnover, as 13% of public school principals earning less than \$75,000 left during SY 2020–21, compared to only 8% of those earning over \$115,000 (Taie & Lewis, 2022). Nevertheless, administrative turnover overall tends to be relatively slow, partly due to the lucrative pension systems in California, where some superintendents receive pensions exceeding \$250,000 (Venteicher, 2019).

2. Both the number and percentage of administrators of color have increased.

Between SY 2019–20 and SY 2023–24, California saw notable increases in both the number and percentage of administrators of color. Latine administrators increased from 6,257 to 7,580, rising from 23.66% to 26.34%. Asian administrators increased from 1,158 to 1,437, rising from 4.38% to 4.99%. Black administrators increased from 2,014 to 2,314, rising from 7.62% to 8.04%.

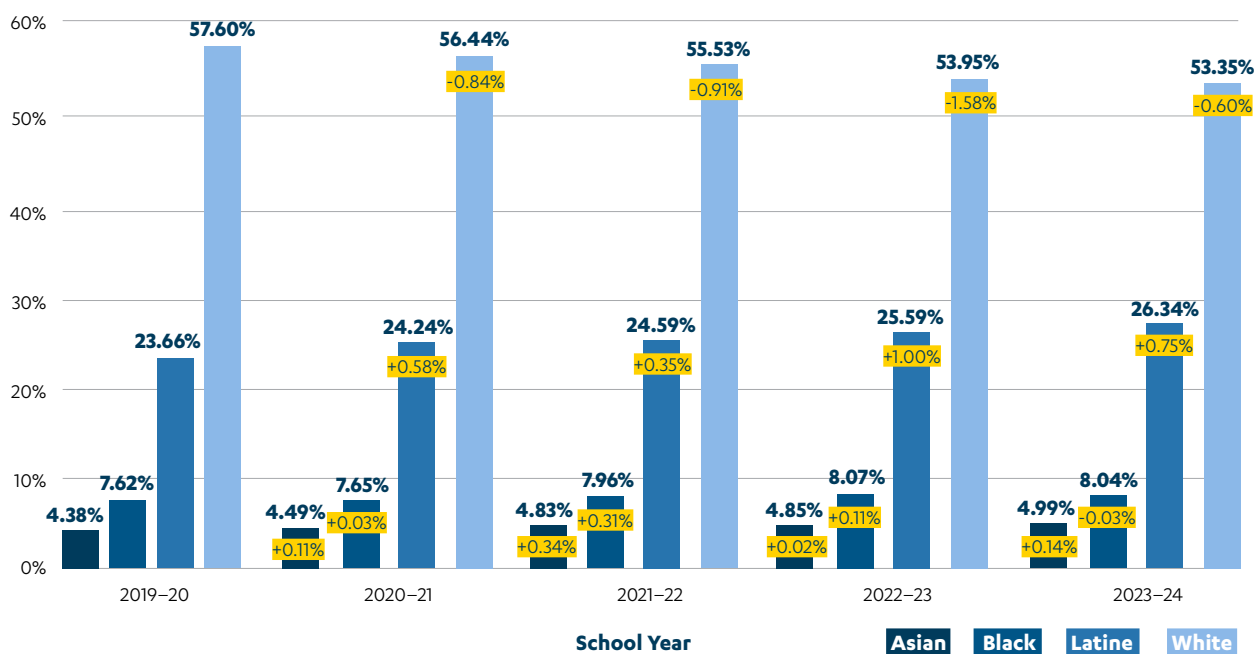


Figure 4. Number of Administrators by Race from SY 2019–20 to SY 2023–24



Note: Data derived from CDE files, SY 2019–20 through SY 2023–24 (accessed 2025).

Dashed line indicates discontinuity. Values between 0–1,000, 1,500–2,000, 2,400–6,200, 7,600–14,900, and 15,400–26,000 are not observed.

Figure 5. *Percentage of Administrators by Race from SY 2019–20 to SY 2023–24*

Note: Data derived from CDE files, SY 2019–20 through SY 2023–24 (accessed 2025).

Latine administrators showed the most substantial growth of more than 1,000 administrators (see **Figure 4**), increasing from 23.66% in SY 2019–20 to 26.34% in SY 2023–24 (see **Figure 5**). Asian administrators also grew modestly in both number and percentage, from 4.38% to 4.99% and an increase of about 300. Notably, the number of Black administrators also increased by about 300 from SY 2019–20 to SY 2023–24, raising their representation from 7.62% to 8.04%. While the growth among Latine and Asian administrators is particularly visible, the rise in Black administrators stands out as it contrasts with relatively stagnant trends in the number of Black teachers.

These demographic shifts align with broader patterns in California and the nation (Grissom et al., 2021). Research shows that demographic diversification in educational leadership often lags behind student diversity; however, intentional recruitment strategies, targeted leadership development programs, and state investments in educator-of-color pipelines have begun to narrow this gap (Hansen & Quintero, 2018). State and district initiatives emphasizing equity-focused leadership pathways, such as mentorship programs, residencies, and funding tied to educator diversity, have likely contributed to the growth of administrators of color (CDE, 2022).

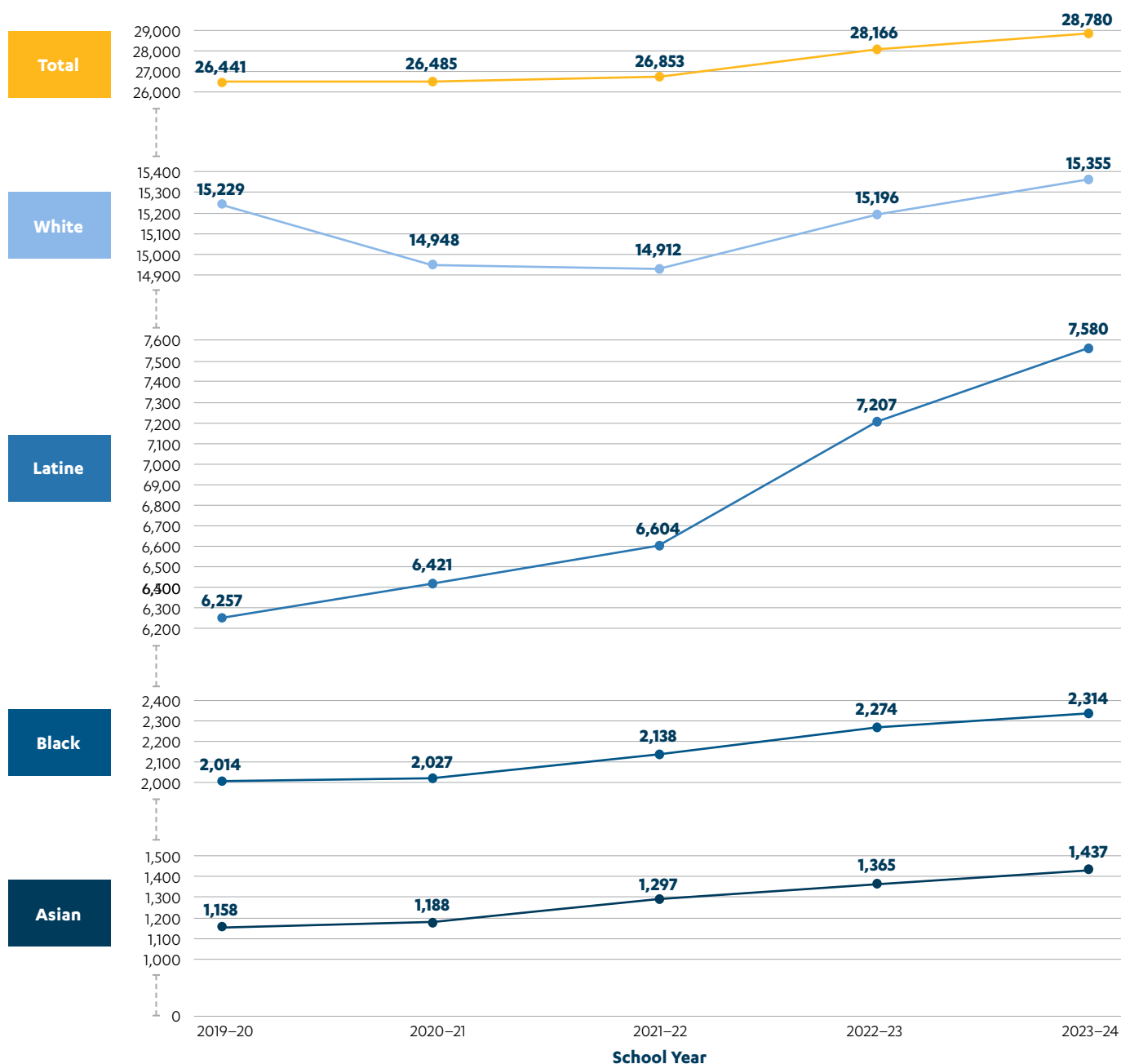
The increases in Black administrators are consistent with evidence that, although Black educators remain underrepresented in leadership, targeted recruitment and leadership development programs can help reduce this gap (Grissom et al., 2021). At the same time, the increases in Latine, Asian, and Black administrators in California from SY 2019–20 to SY 2023–24 likely reflect several interacting dynamics rather than a single cause. A policy-analysis report explains that high turnover in California school leadership during the COVID-19 crisis opened a large number of vacancies, and districts often filled those roles by promoting experienced teachers, a pool that has grown more racially diverse, which raised counts of administrators of color (Marsh et al., 2022). In addition, pandemic-era hiring practices and heightened attention to equity appear to have accelerated appointments of underrepresented leaders, producing faster growth in non-white hires even as the overall administrative workforce expanded (Jang & Bailes, 2025). Together, these factors suggest that while challenges remain in sustaining and expanding educator diversity, California's administrative leadership is gradually becoming more reflective of its student population.

3. The number and percentage of white administrators are relatively stagnant, but the overall percentage of white administrators within the workforce is decreasing.



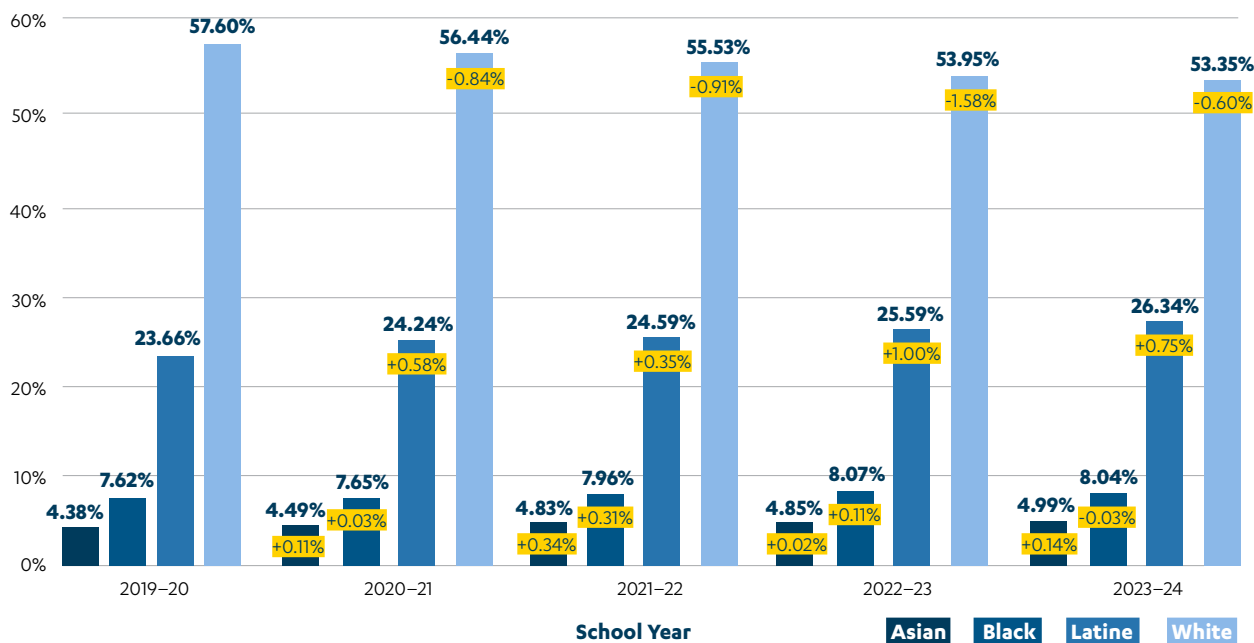
The number of white administrators is relatively stagnant across the five years, starting at 15,229 in SY 2019–20 and decreasing to 14,912 in SY 2021–22, then increasing again to 15,355 in SY 2023–24, post-COVID.

Figure 4. Number of Administrators by Race from SY 2019–20 to SY 2023–24



Note: Data derived from CDE files, SY 2019–20 through SY 2023–24 (accessed 2025).

Dashed line indicates discontinuity. Values between 0–1,000, 1,500–2,000, 2,400–6,200, 7,600–14,900, and 15,400–26,000 are not observed.

Figure 5. Percentage of Administrators by Race from SY 2019–20 to SY 2023–24

Note: Data derived from CDE files, SY 2019–20 through SY 2023–24 (accessed 2025).

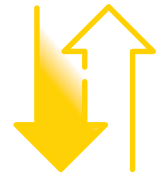
The number of white administrators is relatively stagnant across the five years, starting at 15,229 in SY 2019–20 and declining slightly to 14,912 in SY 2021–22 before increasing again to 15,355 in SY 2023–24, after the height of the COVID-19 pandemic (see **Figure 4**). In contrast, the overall number of administrators increased substantially during this period from 26,441 in SY 2019–20 to 28,780 in SY 2023–24. As a result, even though the numerical count of white administrators showed little net change, their *percentage* of the administrator workforce declined steadily from 57.6% to 53.35% over the same years (see **Figure 5**). This pattern indicates that the diversification of the administrator workforce was driven more by growth in the number of administrators of color than by a sharp decline in the number of white administrators.

Over this same period, California's student population also became increasingly diverse. Latine students comprised about 54.9% of students in 2019–20 and remained the majority group statewide (CDE, 2020). By 2023–24, Latine students represented 56.1% of enrollment, while white students composed about 20.3%, Asian students 9.9%, and Black students 4.9% (CDE, 2025c). Because students of color formed the majority of the student body throughout this period while white administrators remained numerically static, the relative underrepresentation

of administrators of color compared with students of color suggests that administrator diversification has not yet fully reflected the demographic shifts in the student population.

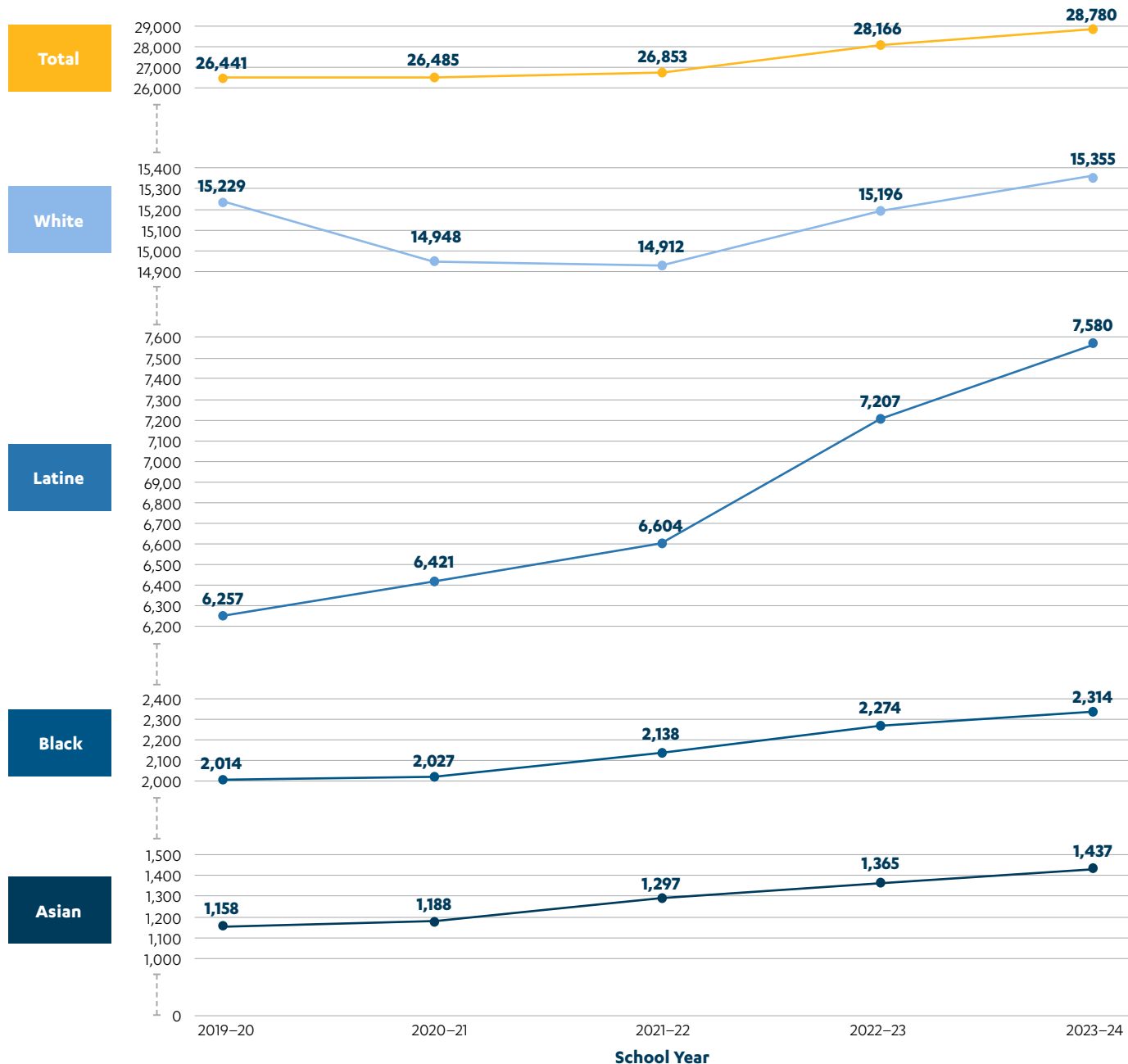
Considering that the number of administrators of color increased during this period, the pandemic-era decline in the number of white administrators requires explanations specific to this group. The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to unusually high superintendent and administrator turnover. In California, superintendent turnover rose from 11.7% after SY 2019–20 to 20.9% after SY 2020–21, with just over 18% leaving after SY 2021–22 (Lambert, 2023). Because white administrators have historically been the majority of the administrator workforce, they would have constituted the largest share of those exiting the profession during this period. In addition, white administrators, who are overrepresented among older and late-career leaders, were more likely to be at or near retirement age during the pandemic, making them particularly vulnerable to leaving amid sudden shifts in job demands, political pressures, and crisis-driven working conditions (Lambert, 2023). These conditions likely accelerated retirement among large numbers of white administrators, amplifying their decline in the workforce during the early pandemic years and contributing to their long-term proportional decrease.

4. There are more Black administrators compared to Asian administrators, contrary to patterns for the number and percentage of Black and Asian teachers.



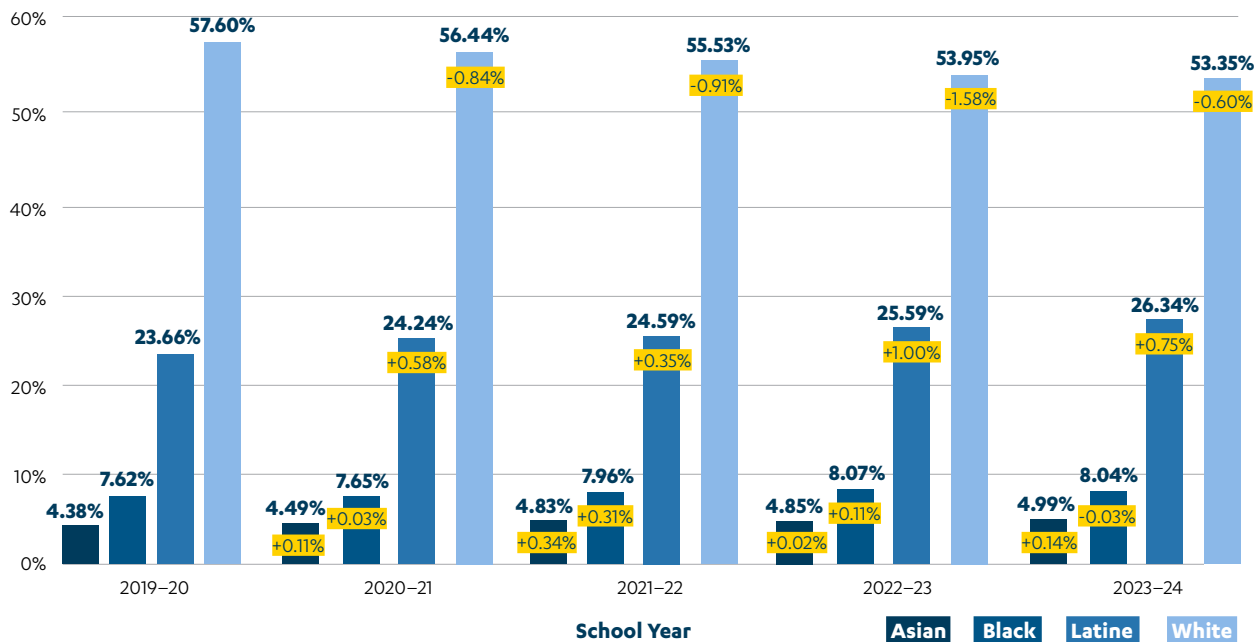
The number of Black administrators increased by about 300 educators from SY 2019–20 to SY 2023–24, and the overall percentage rose from 7.62% to 8.04%. The number of Asian administrators likewise increased by almost 300 during the same period, and their percentage grew by a little over 0.6%, reaching 4.99% in SY 2023–24.

Figure 4. Number of Administrators by Race from SY 2019–20 to SY 2023–24



Note: Data derived from CDE files, SY 2019–20 through SY 2023–24 (accessed 2025).

Dashed line indicates discontinuity. Values between 0–1,000, 1,500–2,000, 2,400–6,200, 7,600–14,900, and 15,400–26,000 are not observed.

Figure 5. Percentage of Administrators by Race from SY 2019–20 to SY 2023–24

Note: Data derived from CDE files, SY 2019–20 through SY 2023–24 (accessed 2025).

There are more Black administrators compared to Asian administrators, which, interestingly, is in direct contrast to trends of the number and percentage of Black and Asian teachers in California, as well as the demographics of California's population. The number of Black administrators increased by about 300 from SY 2019–20 to SY 2023–24 (see **Figure 4**), and the overall percentage rose from 7.62% to 8.04% (see **Figure 5**). The number of Asian administrators likewise increased by almost 300 during the same period (see **Figure 4**), and their percentage grew by a little over 0.6%, reaching 4.99% in SY 2023–24 (see **Figure 5**). Notably, this percentage-point increase among Asian administrators is slightly larger than the percentage-point increase among Black administrators. These upward trends may reflect recent and ongoing efforts in California to expand leadership pipelines and mentorship programs for educators of color, which research suggests can positively influence career mobility and retention.

One plausible explanation for this upward trend in Black administrators aligns with literature affirming the important role that administrators can play in supporting teachers through mentorship, providing effective professional development, and encouraging them to pursue advanced degrees and leadership

positions (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Grissom et al., 2021). National research further indicates that such supportive leadership conditions play a critical role in shaping educators' career trajectories and retention, especially for educators of color (Carver-Thomas et al., 2025). Together, this evidence suggests that leadership supports may not only improve teacher retention but also strengthen pathways into administrative roles. Also implicit in this finding are possible insights for why lower numbers of Black teachers are leaving the classroom but remain in education while shifting into administrative roles (Bishop & Howard, 2025).



With respect to Asian administrators, several factors such as cultural norms, mentorship, and inadequate support systems that affirm Asian identities may contribute to lower numbers seeking leadership roles despite recent increases (Gündemir et al., 2019; Kodama & Dugan, 2020; Shen, 2024; Superville, 2023). In addition, racism associated with the perceived positive Model Minority Myth (MMM) stereotype must also be considered (Hartlep, 2021; Petersen, 1966). Although often framed as flattering, the MMM treats Asians as monolithic and can contribute to their exclusion from leadership advancement due to racialized assumptions about their capabilities or dispositions. At the same time, the MMM can reinforce competition with other racial groups by perpetuating the false notion that Asians do not need educational, professional, and institutional support (Hartlep, 2021; Zhou & Lee, 2017).

Finally, when considering these trends, it is important to note the broader context of student and teacher demographics: in SY 2024–25, Asian students made up roughly 10% of California's public school enrollment, while Black students constituted about 5% (CDE, 2025b); at the same time, approximately 6% of teachers are Asian and 3% are Black (CDE, 2025a). As Asians make up about 5% of administrators compared to 10% of students and 6% of teachers, we can see the need for an increase in Asian administrators. While the recent growth among administrators of color is encouraging, demographic mismatches highlight the ongoing need to strengthen and support diverse leadership pipelines.

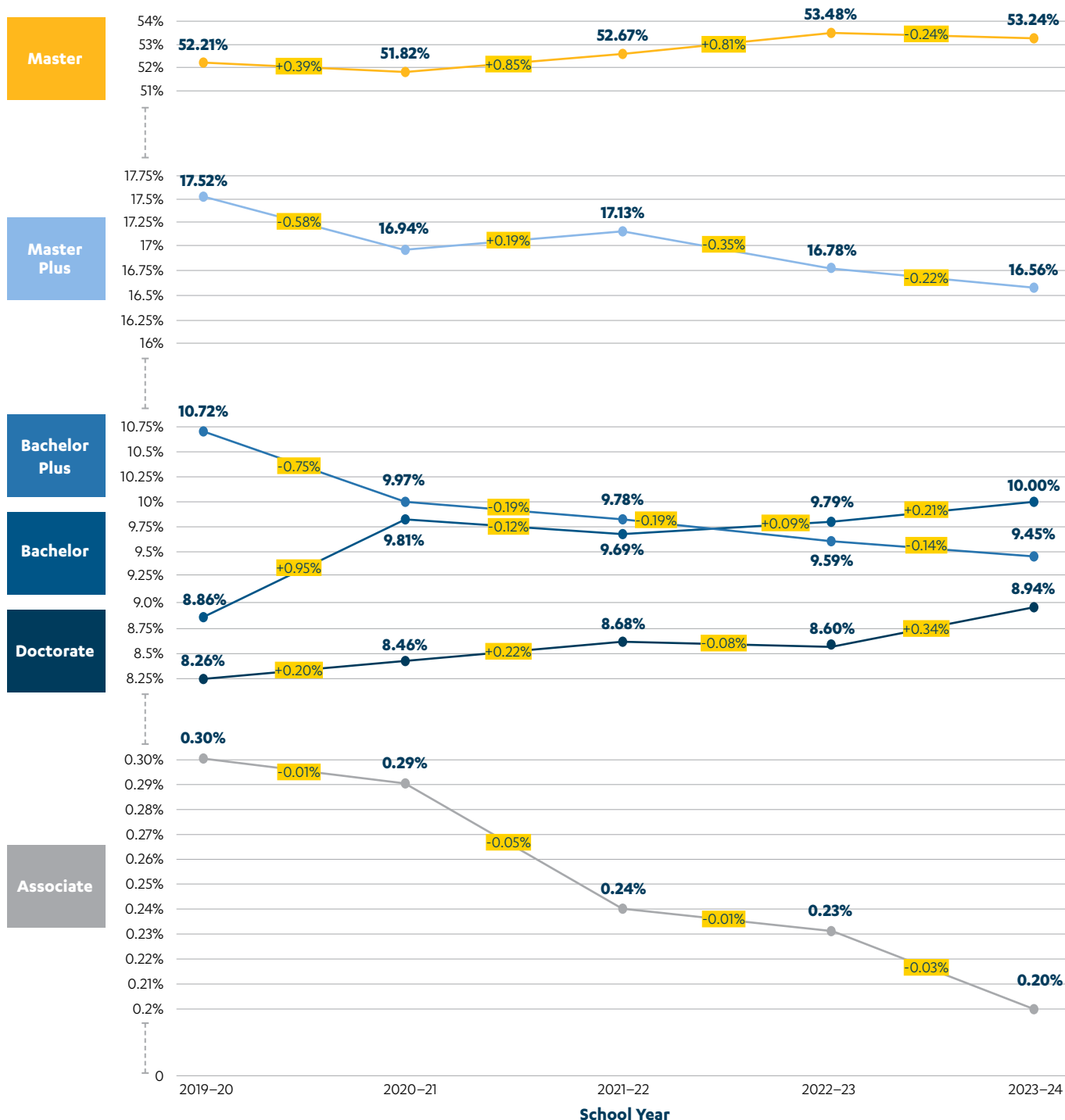


5: The percentage of administrators with master's degrees increased and remained the most common degree.



Administrators holding a master's degree represent the majority at 53.24% in SY 2023–24, an increase from 52.21% in SY 2019–20.

Figure 6. Percentage of Administrators by Education Level from SY 2019–20 to SY 2023–24



Note: Data derived from CDE files, SY 2019–20 through SY 2023–24 (accessed 2025).

Dashed line indicates discontinuity. Values between 0–0.2%, 0.3–8.25%, 10.75–16%, and 17.75–51% are not observed.

The distribution of educational levels among administrators has remained relatively stagnant over the past five years (see **Figure 6**). While some fluctuations are visible, the difference is about 1% for all degrees. Notably, administrators holding a master's degree continue to represent the overwhelming majority at 53.24% in SY 2023–24, showing a 1% increase from SY 2019–20. In contrast, administrators with master's plus and bachelor's plus degrees both decreased by around 1%, suggesting that individuals in these “plus” categories may be completing higher degrees. Despite the decline, the master's plus degree remains a relatively strong second most common degree. Though subtle, the steady shifts may be signaling the emergence of new pathways to become administrators.



6: The percentage of administrators with bachelor's degrees increased.

Administrators with bachelor's degrees experienced a 1% increase, surpassing those with bachelor's plus degrees in SY 2022–23.



Interestingly, administrators with only a bachelor's degree experienced a 1% increase, surpassing those with a bachelor's plus in SY 2022–23, and continuing to grow. According to the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC), administrators are traditionally required to possess a valid prerequisite credential as well as complete training, an internship, or successfully pass a California Preliminary Administrative Credential Examination (CPACE) (CTC, 2025c). Prerequisite credentials include but are not limited to a clear teaching credential, Teacher Librarian Services Credential, Speech-Language Pathology Services Credential, or even a School Nurse Services Credential (CTC, 2025c). As most of these credentials concurrently require a bachelor's degree, and more often, the traditional pathways to these professions also require a master's degree, it is unsurprising that the two most common degrees among administrators are a master's and a master's plus (CTC, 2025a; CTC, 2024). However, the slight but gradual increase in administrators with only a bachelor's degree is somewhat unexpected. The rise of integrated undergraduate teacher preparation programs and some nursing pathways that do not require an associate degree (such as the California

Licensed Vocational Nurses (LVN) pathway or those with military clinical education and experiences) may help explain this trend (California Board of Registered Nursing, 2025; CTC, 2024). These untraditional routes, when combined with administrative internship or examination pathways, could account for the small but notable presence of administrators holding only an associate degree as well.

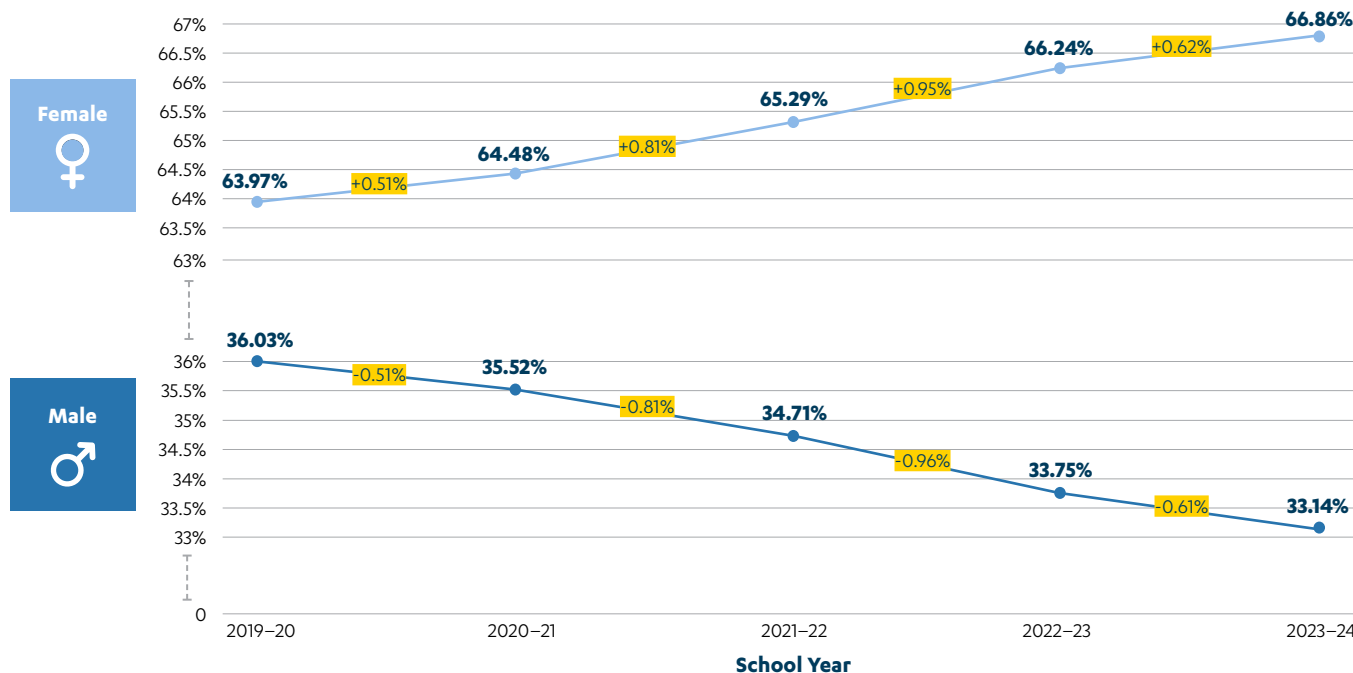


7: The percentage of female administrators increased, while the percentage of male administrators decreased.

In SY 2019–20, 63.97% of administrators were female, and 36.03% were male, with a 27.94% gap. In SY 2023–24, this number changed to 66.86% and 33.14% respectively, widening the two genders' percentage gap to 33.72%.



Figure 7. Percentage of Administrators by Gender from SY 2019–20 to SY 2023–24



Note: Data derived from CDE files, SY 2019–20 through SY 2023–24 (accessed 2025).

Dashed line indicates discontinuity. Values between 0–33% and 36–63% are not observed.

The gender gap among school administrators in California has been widening significantly in favor of female administrators, unlike the relatively stagnant gender gap among teachers. In SY 2019–20, 63.97% of administrators were female, and 36.03% were male, with a 27.94% gap. In SY 2023–24, this number changed to 66.86% and 33.14%, respectively, widening the two genders' percentage gap to 33.72% (see **Figure 7**). While the gender gap remains high in both teaching and administrator positions, the gap is 45.47% for teachers compared to the 27.94% for administrators. This reflects almost 10% more male administrators compared to male teachers in terms of the overall aggregate percentage.

Although female administrators are increasing in percentage, administrator positions were often held by men in the past century, with only 20% of principal posts held by women in 1973 (Maranto et al., 2018). Even in 2022, women only held 30% of superintendent positions in the United States, indicating that the

overall increase in female administrators may be position-dependent (Superville & Baker, 2022). The drop in the percentage of male administrators may indicate that more male administrators are retiring or more male teachers may be leaving the school system entirely, further perpetuating the lack of male teachers. Research shows that male teachers are 12% more likely to leave their schools when they work under female principals compared to male principals, while this difference was not shown for female teachers (Husain et al., 2018). Although these male teachers may be leaving the profession by becoming administrators, coaches, or even support staff, this growing gender gap among administrators highlights the shift in dynamics in education leadership, but also raises important questions about workforce retention, especially among male educators. As more women enter leadership roles, understanding the factors behind male attrition may be important in fostering a balanced and sustainable educational workforce for female teachers and administrators.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations build on these findings to address challenges in educator recruitment, diversity, preparation, retention, and quality.

They are designed to help state and district leaders translate emerging data into actionable strategies that strengthen the educator pipeline, ensure equitable representation, and support the long-term sustainability of California's teaching workforce.

1. Establish statewide metrics and goals for a capable, sustainable and diverse school administrator workforce.

California's ability to deliver equitable, high-quality education depends on a strong, stable, and diverse school administrator workforce. Yet the state currently lacks clear metrics, goals, and accountability structures to assess whether its leadership pipeline reflects the communities it serves or is positioned for long-term sustainability. To address this gap, California should establish a statewide framework that defines measurable goals for administrator diversity, retention, and advancement—paired with the data systems, research investments, and leadership pathways necessary to achieve them.

2. Modernize and standardize administrator data systems.

The state should modernize and standardize administrator data systems to capture more frequent, disaggregated information on administrator roles, career pathways, retention, and working conditions. Current reporting aggregates administrative positions and limits the state's ability to understand differences across roles such as principals, assistant principals, and superintendents. Annual, role-specific data—disaggregated by race, gender, age, geography, and school level—would enable the state to set meaningful benchmarks, track progress over time, and align policy decisions with workforce needs.

3. Invest in administrator-centered research and needs assessments to complement quantitative data.

Organizations such as ACSA (the Association of California School Administrators), CAAASA (the California Association of African American Superintendents & Administrators), CALSA (the California Association of Latino Superintendents and Administrators), and CAAPLE (the California Association of Asian and Pasifika Leaders in Education) already surface critical insights from administrators across California, but these efforts are largely unsupported by the state. California should fund statewide surveys, qualitative studies, and longitudinal research that center on administrators' lived experiences, career motivations, and barriers to retention—particularly for administrators of color and women navigating advancement into senior leadership roles. These findings should directly inform workforce goals and policy design.





4. Determine explicit state goals to strengthen and diversify leadership pipelines.

Building on promising investments such as the Diverse Education Leaders Pipeline Initiative (DELPI) and the 21st Century California School Leadership Academy (21CSLA), which have expanded access to leadership preparation, the state must assess where credentialed administrators are placed, whether they are retained, and how they progress into senior roles. Clear statewide targets for placement, advancement, and retention—especially for superintendents and secondary school leaders—would ensure these programs produce lasting system-level change.

5. Policymakers should address persistent racial and gender disparities across administrative roles.

There is a need for the state to carefully examine how bias in hiring practices, hiring practices, and organizational culture shape leadership outcomes. While women comprise the majority of administrators overall, they remain underrepresented in middle school, high school, and superintendent positions. Similarly, administrators of color are less likely to occupy the highest leadership roles. State and local agencies should be required to compare administrators' demographics with those of their student populations and use those analyses to guide leadership development, mentoring, and succession planning strategies.

6. Assess the long-term impact of COVID-19 and federal funding shifts on administrator stability and retention.

A comprehensive statewide report examining burnout, early retirement, workload changes, and fiscal uncertainty would provide critical insight into administrators' decisions to remain in or exit the profession. These findings should inform future investments in leadership supports, compensation structures, and working conditions. All of this should tie back to the first recommendation listed around establishing clear metrics and goals for a talented, diverse, and sustainable school administrator workforce.



CONCLUSION

Overall, findings from this brief show that demographic and experience patterns among California educators remained relatively stable between SY 2019–20 and SY 2023–24, with only modest shifts in educational attainment, administrative experience, and gender and racial representation.

At a glance, administrators' demographics appear somewhat more diverse than those of teachers—for example, gender representation is more balanced among administrators, and administrators of color are represented at slightly higher rates (Kim et al., 2026).

Yet a closer examination points to critical gaps that demand attention. The number and proportion of Asian and Black administrators remain far below the statewide population, and while the growth of female administrators may signal progress, national trends

show that women are still concentrated in principalships while men disproportionately occupy superintendent roles. These patterns underscore the need to better understand who has access to leadership pathways—and who continues to be excluded.

As California pushes to build an educator workforce that reflects the diversity of its communities, the state should prioritize more comprehensive, disaggregated data systems and targeted research on administrator preparation, recruitment, and career mobility. Strengthening administrator data collection would provide critical insight into leadership pathways, retention, and the persistent racial and gender disparities that exist across administrative levels, including in the aftermath of COVID-19. While some initiatives seem to be contributing to growth in administrators of color, sustained state investment and closer analysis of leadership pipelines and placement outcomes are needed to expand equitable access to principal and superintendent roles and to strengthen administrators' impact on teachers, students, and the communities they serve.



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