Alaska Statewide Mentor Project

Research Summary 2004-2020









16 Year Edition

Alaska Statewide Mentor Project
ASMP

2019-2021 Alaska Statewide Mentor Project

Mentors, coordinators, and staff



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"I'm glad the mentors exist. I had one as a new teacher that helped me navigate my village, and retain my sanity, and now I am a principal. Mentors help."

— Site Administrator

The Alaska Statewide Mentor Project

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"My Mentor has been a great support to me. He gets back to me immediately when I need help and goes above and beyond the call of duty to supply me with resources and support. He has never, ever made me feel inadequate or incompetent and always gives me a much needed boost when he visits [my community]. Thank you so much for sending him to us!"

— Early Career Teacher

About the Project

The Alaska Statewide Mentor Project (ASMP) is designed to induct early career teachers (ECTs) into the field of teaching through professional learning environments based on reflective practice, equity and cultural relevance, high expectations, ongoing inquiry, and collaboration. ASMP mentors work toward achieving the long-term goals of increasing teacher retention and improving student achievement by providing individualized support to guide the development of teacher instruction and classroom best practices. Mentors provide personalized support to ECTs and use formative assessment tools with their ECTs to collaboratively collect data, identify ECT needs, and establish goals during weekly communication and video-recorded observation cycles of teaching practice.

ASMP research

The ASMP Research Team collects data to measure the effectiveness of the project in terms of meeting its goals of increasing ECT retention and improving student achievement. Qualitative, quantitative, and descriptive data are gathered to guide programmatic changes including an annual survey of ECTs, mentors, and site administrators, mentor focus groups, and evaluations after each Professional Development session.

Mentoring model

While all ECTs receive the same quality mentoring (based on the Mentoring Cycle of observation, data collection, and reflection) there are three delivery methods that differ only in the amount of mentor travel: in-person, hybrid, and distance. In-person mentoring involves six on-site visits; hybrid involves on-site visits at the beginning and end of the academic year and one or two more visits mid-year; distance mentoring is conducted using distance technologies and in-person visits occur only when the ECT travels

through their mentor's home base. All mentoring methods include weekly contact, personalized mentoring in pedagogy, reflection, tool use, and goal-setting. AY2019-20 was unprecedented due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Because of University and State travel restrictions, almost all mentoring was conducted via distance delivery in the spring through fall of 2020.

Swivl observation

Since 2015, ASMP has increasingly employed the Swivl system[1] of video recording and observation. The Swivl system includes the Swivl app, Swivl Cloud, and the Swivl robot base. Through the app and cloud, ECTs and mentors are able to securely upload and share video recordings. The robot base holds a recording device (i.e. an iPhone) and rotates to track a marker/microphone worn by the teacher. While the original intent was to use the Swivl system to replace in-person observation in schools where travel was limited, teachers and mentors across the state have found a multitude of creative uses for the Swivl system. Currently, all ASMP mentors are trained to use the Swivl system and are using it with ECTs in all three delivery methods. The Project also expanded distance delivery and observation technologies to include vid-con platforms such as Zoom to visit classrooms and meet one-on-one with ECTs.

> *"She made a great impact in [my community]. Not only did she help her charges she helped other staff, cultivated relationships with students, and involved herself in our community. She really showed herself in her effort to connect on multiple levels with our community."*
>
> *— Early Career Teacher*

[1]Swivl.com

Project numbers since inception

Since the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project began in 2004, the project has served, on average, 400 early career teachers (ECTs) per year with about 75 percent from rural districts and the remaining 25 percent from urban districts (Anchorage, Fairbanks, Kenai, Matanuska-Susitna, and Sitka). Estimating an average of 15 students per teacher, the program serves approximately 6,000 K-12 students each year. Over the past 16 years, ASMP has mentored teachers in 52 of 54 Alaskan school districts.

Currently, ASMP is focusing its resources on teachers in rural schools identified as needing additional support under the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) System for School Success[2]. **ASMP has been able to serve 100% of the ECTs in rural high-needs schools that have requested mentor support.**

Who are mentors?

ASMP has trained 140 mentors since 2004. In AY2019, ASMP onboarded six new mentors to bring a fresh perspective into the project. Two of these mentors had previously mentored in ASMP 10 or more years ago. Mentors are experienced Alaskan K-12 educators who are fully released from teaching to devote their time to mentoring. An ASMP mentor is a knowledgeable colleague, confidant, problem solver, advocate, and professional and emotional supporter. Mentoring is non-evaluative, aligns with State Teaching and Cultural Standards, and strives to teach ECTs to infuse cultural relevance into their practice. While the minimum requirement is 5 years of teaching in Alaska, most current mentors have taught in Alaska for over 20 years.

"My Mentor provided me with resources to help with students' emotional needs and for some creative classroom ideas." — Early Career Teacher

[2] https://education.alaska.gov/akaccountability

Mentor training and support

New mentors undergo two years of intensive professional development where they learn best mentoring practices while partnered with a veteran mentor. Veteran mentors help new mentors establish and reflect on their own goals for advancing their mentoring practice. Veteran mentors also receive support from Administrative Coaches who were ASMP mentors at one time. Administrative Coaches follow a protocol of support similar to that for a new mentor. ASMP also pairs all mentors with peer mentors with whom they collaborate and problem solve. In AY2019-2020, ASMP implemented coaching observations. Mentors would record themselves working with their ECTs and share these videos (with ECT permission) with their coach and partner for feedback and reflection.

All mentors receive just-in-time training during professional development sessions throughout the year. These trainings include five multi-day, in-person intensive sessions per year (conducted online due to Covid-19) as well as two monthly online sessions addressing immediate mentor needs and distance delivery technologies. In addition, mentors are encouraged to attend conferences and seminars outside of ASMP.

A hallmark of Alaska's mentoring model includes ongoing cultural training and support centered on Alaska's five cultural standards and culturally-responsive practices.

Who are early career teachers?

ASMP teachers are new to the profession—in their first or second year of certified classroom teaching. The majority of ECTs stay with the program for 2 years with approximately 75% of first-year teachers continuing to work with mentors for their second year. **From 2004 through academic year 2019-2020, ASMP has served over 5,000 individual ECTs**. ASMP has served, on

average, 400 ECTs per year. From 2012-13 through 2015-16, ASMP was conducting a study of mentoring in an urban context (UGO). The higher distribution of urban ECTs during these years is reflected in *Figure 1*. After this grant period, ASMP served an average of 155 ECTs per year, mostly in rural districts due to budget constraints.

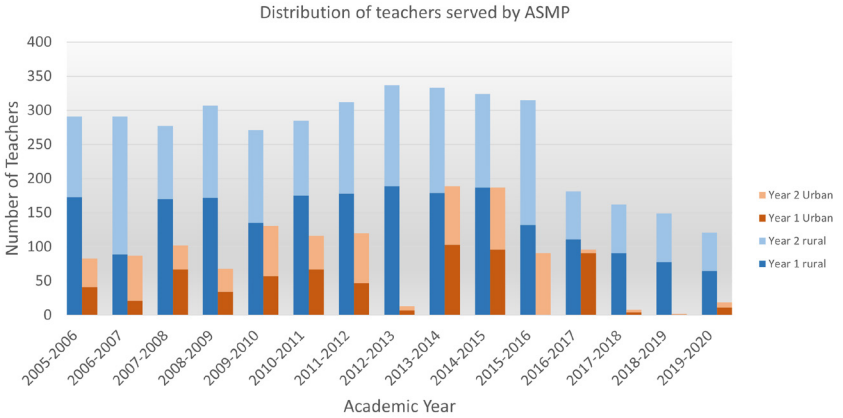


Figure 1: Distribution of ASMP-mentored ECTs. *From 2012-13 through 2015-16, ASMP was conducting a study of ASMP in an urban context (Urban Growth Opportunity, or UGO). The higher distribution of urban ECTS during these years is reflected in this graph. The 2015-16 was the final year of the study, hence there are fewer urban first-year teachers."*

A disproportionate percentage of new hires in rural districts are from out of state: rural districts draw 70% of new hires from out of state compared to 23% in urban districts (Shaw, D. G., Hirshberg, D., & Hill, A., 2013[3]). Teachers represented in ASMP mirror this trend as well, underscoring the need for personalized mentoring to help these teachers succeed. Consistent with study findings, 73% of ECTs received their teaching certification from outside of Alaska, while 22% received theirs from Alaskan universities, and 5% took an alternative path to certification including AKT2 (Alaska

[3] Hill, A , Hirshberg, D., & Shaw, D. G.(2013). Why Aren't They Teaching? A study of why some University of Alaska teacher education graduates aren't in classrooms. Center for Alaska Education Policy Research, University of Alaska Anchorage. http://hdl.handle.net/11122/8970

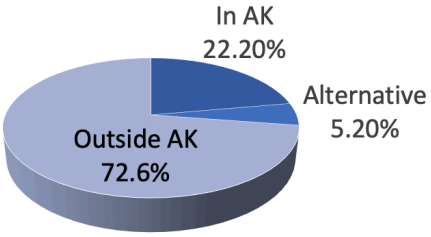


Figure 2: Teacher certification location. *Teacher certification calculated from average of responses on ASMP year-end ECT survey: AY1112 - AY1920, n=1907.*

Transition to Teaching; *Figure 2*). ASMP teachers are similar to teachers across the country in that there are more women than men (66%, *Figure 3*), the majority are under 30 years of age (69%, *Figure 4*), and mostly Caucasian (83%), with the next largest ethnic group being American Indian/Alaska Native at only 1.2% (*Figure 5*).

Not only do these new educators face the challenges common to beginning teachers everywhere, Alaska ECTs must do so in situations very different from familiar mainstream conditions with regard to school size, Alaskan village setting, and majority Indigenous student body. Mentors help their ECTs solidify basic teacher practices such as establishing classroom management strategies, lesson planning, time management, and paperwork as well as adjusting to unique Alaskan rural life. Furthermore, as Alaska is the only state with Cultural Standards for Educators[4], ASMP mentors are trained in implementing these standards to help their mentees "teach through culture" to keep material relevant and engaging for Alaskan students.

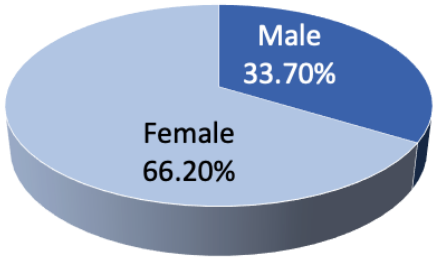


Figure 3: Teacher gender *calculated from average of responses on ASMP year-end ECT survey: AY040512 - AY1920, n=1911.*

Schools

ASMP has served over 80 percent of all Alaska schools in 52 of the 54 school districts

[4] https://education.alaska.gov/akstandards/cultural/cultural_standards.pdf

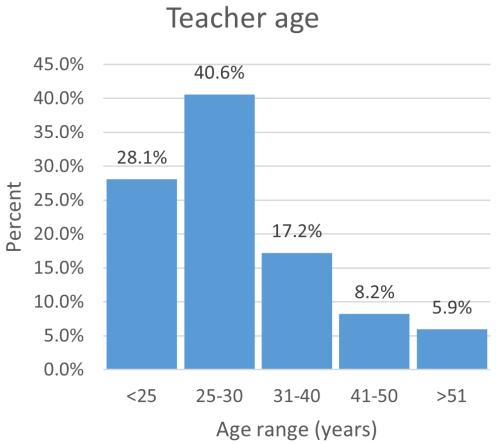


Figure 4: Teacher age *calculated from average of responses on ASMP year-end ECT survey: AY1011 - AY1920, n=1900.*

for at least one year since 2004. On average, 78% of ECTs served by ASMP teach in remote, rural schools that are not connected to the road system and are only accessible by small plane or boat (weather permitting); 10% teach in rural schools on the road system; and 12% teach in urban schools. However, since AY2017-2018, the first year after the completion of the UGO project, ASMP has focused its efforts on rural schools.

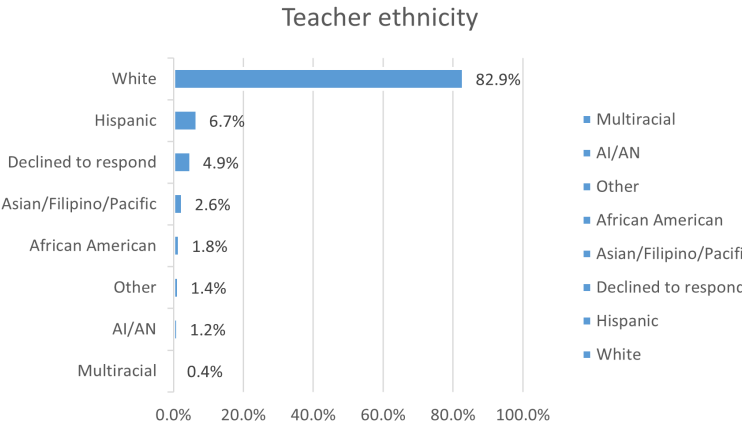


Figure 5: Teacher self-reported ethnicity *from average of responses on ASMP year-end ECT survey, AY0405 - AY1920, n=1892.*

Over the past 3 years, mentors have traveled to serve teachers in rural, off-road communities (93%), while on-road and urban schools make up 4% and 3% of schools, respectively (*Figure 6*).

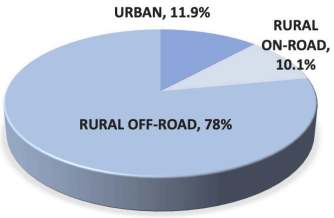


Figure 6: Teacher-reported school location *from average of responses of ASMP year-end ECT survey, AY0809-AY1920, n=2990.*

Rural teacher turnover and mobility

Teacher retention is defined as a teacher remaining in the Alaska public K-12 school system from one year to the next. Historically, Alaska has had difficulty with retaining teachers, (especially beginning teachers) in remote, rural villages. Prior to ASMP, the average retention rate of first-year ECTs in rural districts was much lower than their counterparts working in urban districts—about 67% compared to 83%[5] . To get a more accurate picture of average retention rates at rural sites, we calculated three-year rolling averages. We compared retention rates for experienced teachers, first-year ASMP-mentored teachers, and second-year ASMP-mentored teachers over the history of the program.

Experienced rural teachers, on average, tend to stay teaching in Alaska at higher rates (approximately 86 percent) than the historical average of new teacher retention (approximately 67 percent). Retention rates for ASMP-mentored teachers who stay to teach in Alaska remains higher than historical average (78%; *Figure 7*). ASMP is making an impact on rural sites.

> *"I'm glad the mentors exist. I had one as a new teacher that helped me navigate my village, and retain my sanity, and now I am a principal. Mentors help."*
>
> *— Site Administrator*

[5] Alaska Department of Education and Early Development

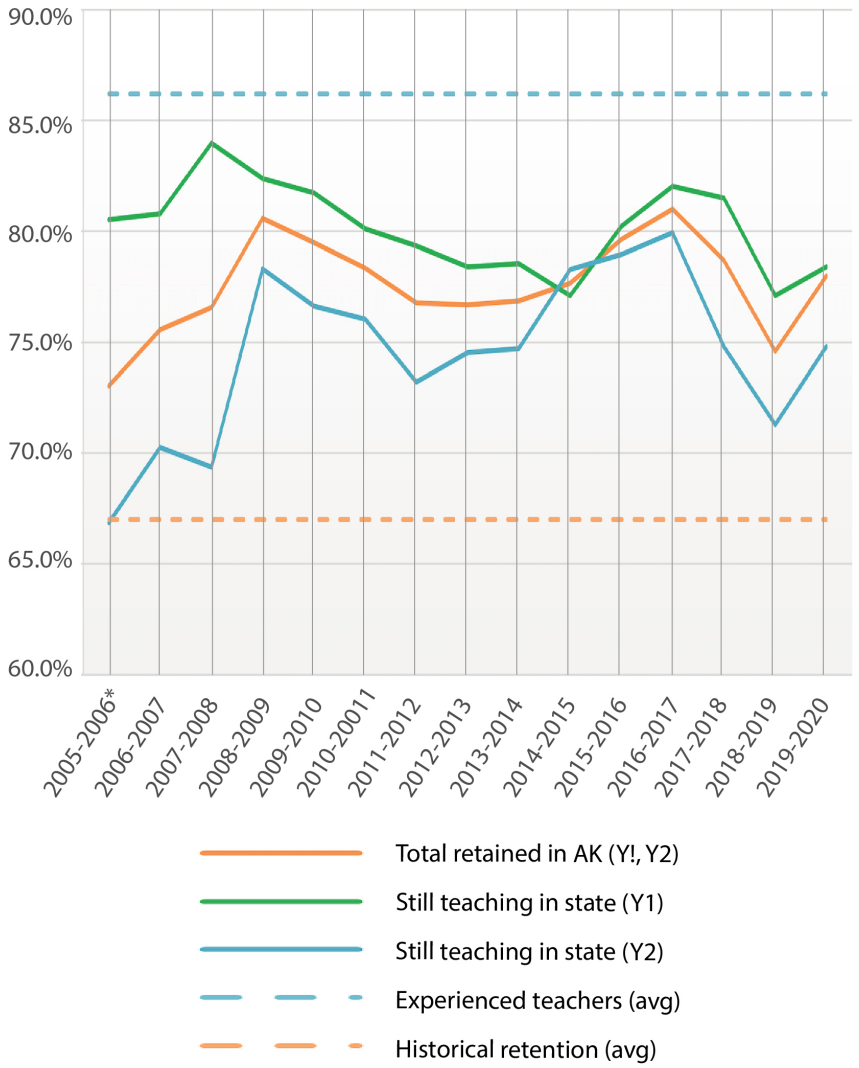


Figure 7: Percentage of teachers retained in Alaska *calculated as 3-year weighted rolling averages. * Only 2 years of data available for calculations. Experienced teacher retention data obtained from Alaska Department of Education & Early Development. "Turnover among Alaska teachers: is it changing?" Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage. Research Summary No. 69.*

Annual Survey

Each year in March, ASMP commissions the New Teacher Center (NTC) to conduct an online survey to gauge satisfaction and implementation from the perspective of the ECTs, their site administrators, and the ASMP mentors. Working with the NTC survey administrator, survey questions are customized by the ASMP Research Team specific to Alaska and ASMP-served ECTs. It is notable that since 2012 (when overall satisfaction questions were introduced), ECTs overwhelmingly agree that their ASMP mentor has been beneficial to their teaching and that they attribute teaching success to mentoring. 89% of ECTs agreed that having an ASMP mentor had been beneficial to their teaching (*Figure 10*). 86% ECTs attributed "Some," "Quite a bit," or "A great deal" of their success to their mentor (*Figure 8*).

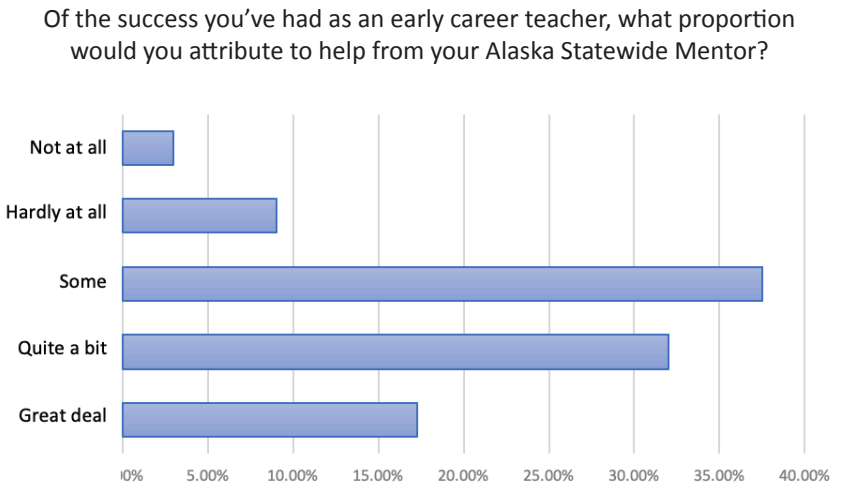


Figure 8: Percentage of teachers reporting *that their ASMP mentor contributed to their overall success in their first or second year of teaching. From ASMP year-end ECT survey, AY1112-AY1920.*

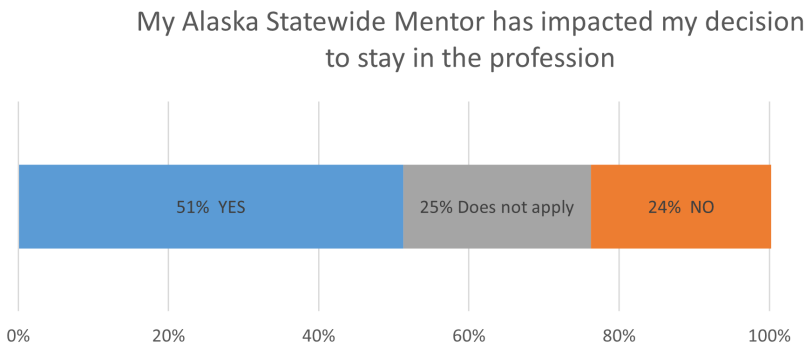


Figure 9: Percentage of teachers reporting *that their ASMP mentor influenced their decision to stay in teaching. From ASMP year-end ECT survey, AY1617 – AY1920.*

Teacher turnover in rural vs urban schools

Intra-district	Total # teachers	Within-district transfers	% Turnover
Rural	1,951	379	19%
Urban	5,206	606	11%
Inter-district hires	**Total # teachers**	**New to district**	**% New hires**
Rural	2,528	577	23%
Urban	5,739	533	9%
All new hires	**Total # teachers**	**All new hires**	**% Turnover**
Rural	4,479	956	21%
Urban	10,945	1,139	10%

Table 1. Teacher turnover in rural vs urban schools (AY2018-19). *Data from "Turnover in Certificated Personnel in Alaskan Public Schools for the 2018-19 School Year", Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, Assessment and Accountability.*

From the ECT perspective, teachers feel ASMP helps with retention. More than half of ECTs surveyed said that their ASMP mentor impacted their decision to stay in the teaching profession (*Figure 9*).

Turnover in certified staff in Alaskan Schools

ASMP was developed to help Alaskan schools face the challenge of retaining new teachers. In particular, rural schools face a higher turnover rate in addition to hiring the majority of their new teachers from out of state [6]. This report examines the turnover rate of certified staff (in addition to teachers) between rural and urban Alaskan districts. Data were provided by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development as Turnover in Certificated Personnel in Alaskan Public Schools for the 2018-19 School Year.

Teacher Turnover

We examined two categories of certified teacher hires: within-districts transfers (intra-district) and new hires from out-of-district (inter-district). Intra-district hires only include experienced teachers as a teacher cannot be both a transfer and new to the district. Inter-district hires include any teachers new to the district including ECTs and veteran teachers from Alaska and from out of state. For this exploration, urban districts were Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, Mat-Su, Kenai, and Sitka (247 schools) while the other 48 districts were classified as rural (259 schools).

From the data summarized in *Table 1*, it is clear that rural districts hired as many, if not more teachers than urban districts despite the much larger number of total teachers in urban districts. This resulted in a 19% turnover as intra-district transfers and 23% as new-to-district teachers for an average 21% turnover rate in the rural teaching force. This figure corroborates with the historic 67% retention rate mentioned earlier in this summary. Urban districts saw an average of 10%, or half the turnover rate.

[6] Hill, A., & Hirshberg, D. (2008). Turnover among Alaska teachers: Is it changing? Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage. Research Summary No. 69.

Turnover in other certified personnel

Figure 10 compares hiring and turnover in other certificated personnel including administrative, program, and support staff. The height of the bar represents the total number of positions and the gold portion represents the number of those positions that are new hires with the percentage noted above. Rural schools showed a similar, nearly double the turnover rate in personnel. Rural admin turnover was 42% compared to urban at 21%; rural program was 43% while urban was 27%; and rural support turnover was 35% while urban was only 13%.

These figures show that the "revolving door" in rural schools is not limited to teachers alone, but includes certified personnel. This issue requires additional investigation as to the reasons for high turnover and the effects on students and school environment.

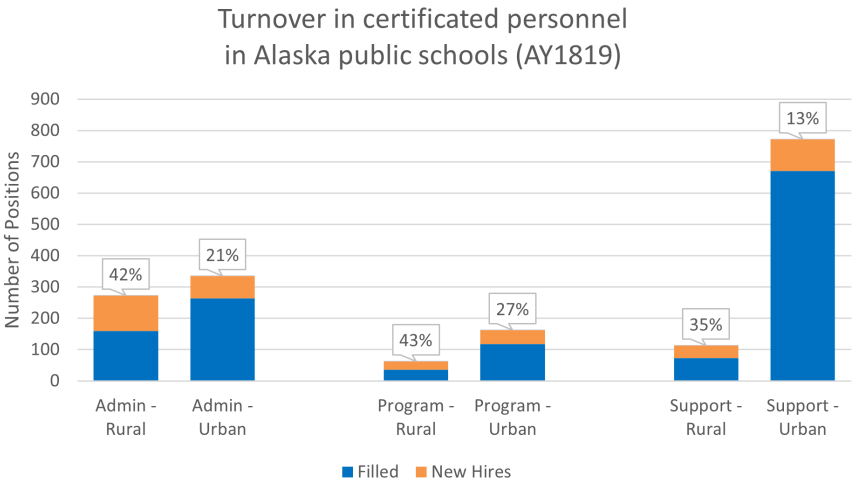


Figure 10: Turnover of certificated school staff. Data courtesy of Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, "Turnover in Certificated Personnel in Alaskan Public Schools for the 2018-19 School Year".

Early Career Teacher Quotes

"My mentor has helped me turn big picture ideas into practical application. Whether that is in management, or instructional design, she has helped me build more structure."

"She goes beyond what is required of her for her job. She is helpful and stays with us trying to help no matter what our schedules are like. Thank you for being flexible and a great resource for all of the teachers, not just the ones you're assigned to."

"It was nice to receive emotional support from someone who knows the profession when I felt overwhelmed & stressed, especially after moving somewhere new where I knew nobody! Although I do not enjoy writing down goals (lol), [mentor] showed me how this can be beneficial. It helps me (as a new teacher) stay focused on the most important tasks at hand. Setting goals with [mentor] was pivotal in being able to meet with reading groups in my class every week."

"[ASMP mentor] is truly a light in my life. She is supportive and encouraging, while helping me to better assess my teaching strategies and practices."

"She has always been available and quick to respond when I needed help. If she knew I needed more information, she would research it for me and get back with me quickly. She is a true mentor who guides, provides examples, and cares for her mentored teacher."

"I think the most beneficial part of my relationship with my mentor was to be able to disconnect from the daily struggles and step back to see the larger picture. Time to reflect is not only vital for student learning, but for teacher learning as well. Having someone with knowledge and experience to talk with about observations in the classroom is incredibly valuable and allows me to identify the signs in the classroom in order to make the best teaching decision."

"My mentor was mostly a sounding board and a person to whom I could vent without feeling judged or worrying that it'd affect an evaluation. I don't have another teacher who teaches what I do on site so it's rare I can talk to someone who is going through the same thing as me. Having someone to run things by is the most helpful thing my mentor has done."

"At the beginning of the school year I had a student who was not compliant with my classroom rules. [mentor] and I talked about this student and he gave me resources that worked with her. He reminded me to try and make the choice her choice and to have a contract with her. Which really worked."

What would you have liked to receive more help with to improve your teaching experience?

"A complete, year(s)-long co-teaching experience. As brilliant as my mentor is, it's unfair to new teachers to simply throw them into the pool and see if they swim (just like I do for my students). Instead, new teachers should be paired with exceptional, experienced educators to co-teach their first year, if not first few years. This would reduce burnout and show newbies just what is required day-in, day-out to make an excellent educator."

"One-on-one time with [mentor]. Her presence provided a supportive outlet for me both as a young teacher and as someone brand new to rural AK."

"Site visits are vital to my success because it ensures a strong, trusting professional relationship. I feel valued and supported in an interactive, face-to-face mentor program."

"Having a mentor who really cares about my success. I know this because we have actual dialogues instead of her simply telling me what I need to do, we arrive at conclusions together."

"I appreciate being given time to collaborate with fellow teachers during my planning period. I also appreciate the out of the school building get-togethers that my mentor initiates. These get-togethers have built a strong relationship with the teachers in my community both within my school building as well as those at other sites. Being in a small community, this in and of itself is invaluable."



Mentor Hal Neace is surrounded by 5th graders in Brett Steven's classroom in Utgiagvik. Photo: Brett Stevens.

Site Administrator Quotes

Which aspect(s) of the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project have had the greatest impact on student learning? Why?

"Early career teachers struggle in any environment, but especially in rural Alaska. The efforts made to help these individuals navigate challenges during the first couple of years on the job have a resonating effect on achievement both during that time and in the years to come."

"The modeling - our teachers don't get many opportunities to see good practices modeled once they are in the classroom. I also believe that the feedback the mentors give is extremely helpful, especially when there is goal setting and follow through."

"They are another resource that my teachers can gather information and skills from in a way that allows them to be open and honest without fear."

"Helping new teachers have an outside perspective that is not tied to an evaluation."

"Observations and feedback to the teacher. This "other set of eyes" helps facilitate new teacher assimilation of new ideas, techniques and teaching strategies."

"I believe the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project has positively impacted our teacher retention rate the most!"

"Having a non partisan professional working with new teachers outside of the normal routine."

"Having an objective and open minded person to talk to, and to help teachers understand the big picture of instruction. Many new teachers come in with deficit thinking about our students. A mentor can really help turn this around."

"Having an experienced, calm teacher help navigate those First Year waters is valuable. If the teacher has better direction and support, it stands to reason that students will benefit."

"Providing continued support and training to new teachers is beneficial to teachers continued development which leads to retention of the teachers. Also, with the support and training provided, teachers learn the processes to provide an environment that leads to student success in the classroom."

Published by

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