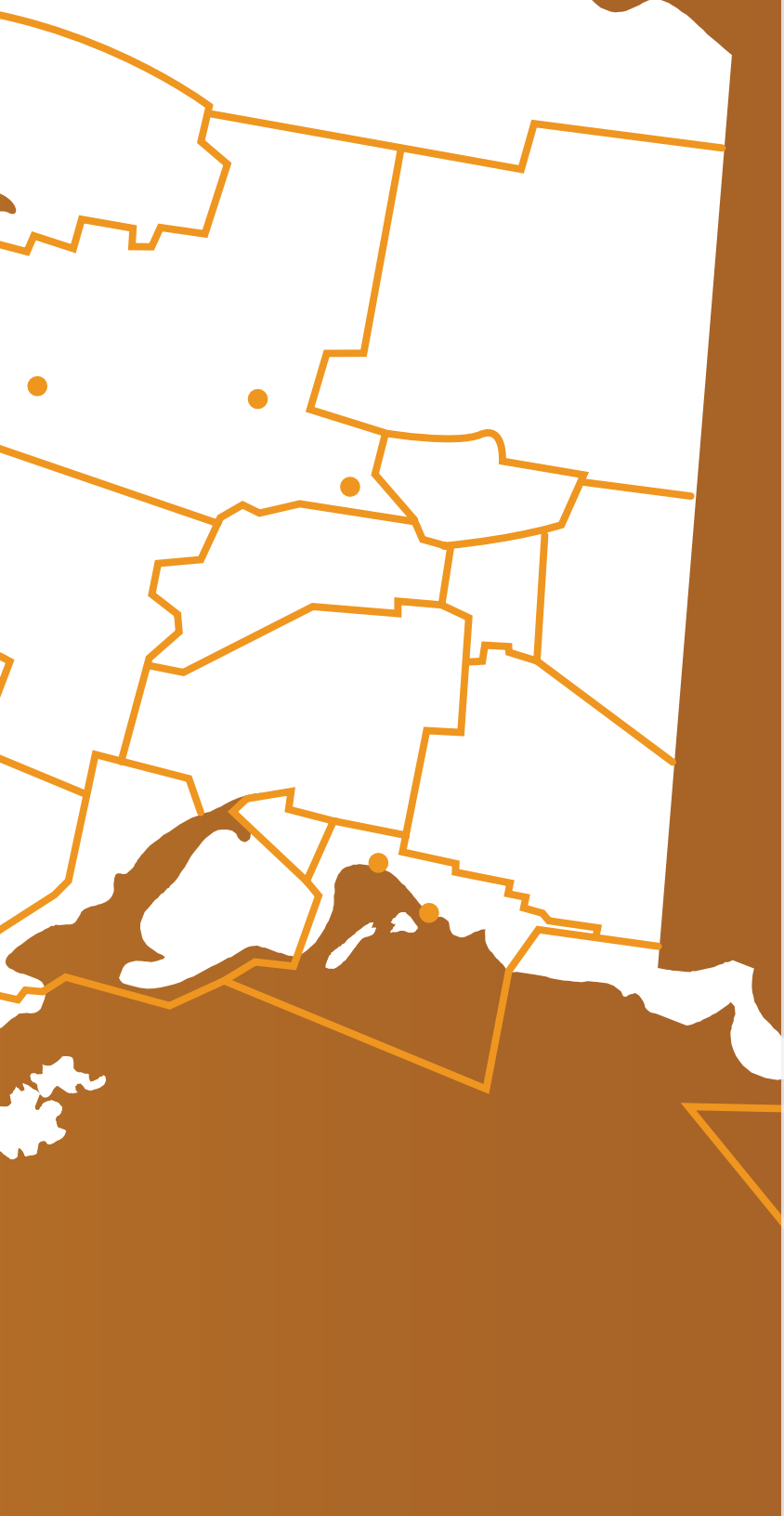




Alaska Statewide Mentor Project

Research Summary

2004–2012





2012–2013 Alaska Statewide Mentor Project: Mentors, Coordinators, and Staff

(Front row, from left to right) Stacey Woolsey, Debbie Hawkins, Barbara Adams, Betty Walters; *(second row)* Texas Gail Raymond, Pat Odin, Abby Augustine, Christine Walker, LuAnne Nelson, Kellie Wannamaker, Maureen Petrunic, Chris Jencks, Bev Lewanski, Cindy Lou Aillaud, Judy Youngquist, Marc Robinson, Cathé Rhodes; *(third row)* Ed Sotelo, Mary Downs, Brenda Luthi, Marcia Indahl, Lisa Stewart, Carol H. Jerue, Katy Odneal, Liz Will, Cynthia Petrovich, Judy Olsen; *(fourth row)* Dave Schmitz, Lori Koutsky, Kathie Steele, Marilyn White, Ann Ness, Karen Doyle, Jenny Carlson, Charlie Costello, Hal Neace, Trish Johnston; *(fifth row)* Kathy Berry Bertram, Don Campbell, Eric Muehling, Dave Boyd, Cyndy Curran, Morgan Gray, Glenda Findlay. *(Not pictured)* Pat McDonald, Kathleen Wright, Renée Helie, Joe Jordan, Craig Baldwin, Michelle Thomason, Toni McFadden, Casey Demmert.

About the Project

The Alaska Statewide Mentor Project (ASMP) is a partnership between the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development and the University of Alaska system. It is designed to induct early career teachers (ECTs) into the field of teaching through professional learning environments based on the norms of collaboration, high expectations, equity, ongoing inquiry, and reflective practice. Mentors receive extensive ongoing training enabling them to support ECTs through formative assessment tools used to collaborate with ECTs toward identifying their needs and meeting their goals, weekly contact at a distance, and monthly face-to-face visits.

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Alaska Statewide Mentors

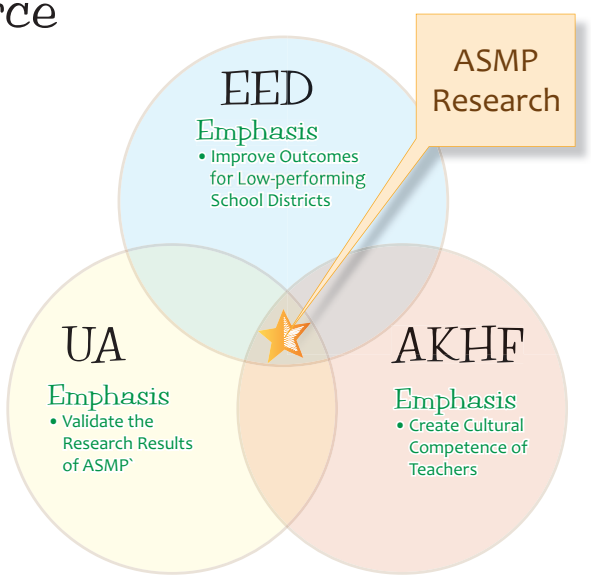
Alaska Statewide Mentors are experienced teachers from across the state who have dedicated time to work with early career teachers during their first and second year as classroom teachers. Alaska Statewide Mentors work toward achieving the long-term goals of increasing teacher retention and improving student achievement by providing instructional mentoring and support to ECTs, helping them find inspiration and stay energized in their new profession. Foundational to the success of ASMP, the mentoring relationship is not evaluative and employs a formative assessment system to guide teacher practice. An Alaska Statewide Mentor is a knowledgeable confidant, problem solver, personal professional support, and a co-teacher to model lessons that demonstrate teaching strategies aligned with the needs of real students.

ASMP Research

The Alaska Statewide Mentor Project strongly believes in and practices making data-driven decisions and conducting research. ASMP collects data to answer a variety of questions as well as to measure the effectiveness of the project in terms of meeting its goals. Ongoing research continues to investigate the project's accomplishments more deeply and cohesively with each study. Qualitative, quantitative, and descriptive data are gathered on participants to study the effect of ASMP on teacher retention and student achievement. Research to guide programmatic changes include evaluations for each mentor professional development session, and annual online surveys of ECTs, their site administrators, and ASMP mentors administered by an external agency.

Research Goals by Funding Source

Data are gathered on a regular basis and analyzed by the ASMP research team to update and further develop our understanding of known topics of concern. Topics include outcomes such as yearly teacher retention, long term (5-year) teacher retention, and early career teacher growth. Student achievement is always at the core of ASMP mentoring and these types of studies often are performed over multiple years. ASMP program improvements are based on event evaluations, mentor focus groups, and online surveys of teachers, mentors, and site administrators. ASMP implementation, including connections to standards (teaching, student content, culturally responsive) is analyzed through implementation forms and satisfaction data gathered by online surveys.



Alaska Department of Education & Early Development (EED)

The Research Team conducts studies of interest to the ASMP partnership between EED and UA. Recent research funded through EED will focus on the effects of ASMP mentoring on special education teachers and the academic achievement of their students. By 2015, the goal of this research is to replicate the 2009 SBA study for this subset of participants served by ASMP.

Alaska Humanities Forum (AKHF)

The ASMP Research Team will supply data to the evaluators of the Alaska Humanities Forum's Creating Cultural Competence (C3) grant. ASMP data will merge with AKHF datasets to investigate how creating cultural competence in early career teachers affects teacher retention, teacher satisfaction, and student achievement for participants from two rural districts: Lower Kuskokwim and Northwest Arctic Borough School Districts.

University of Alaska (UA)

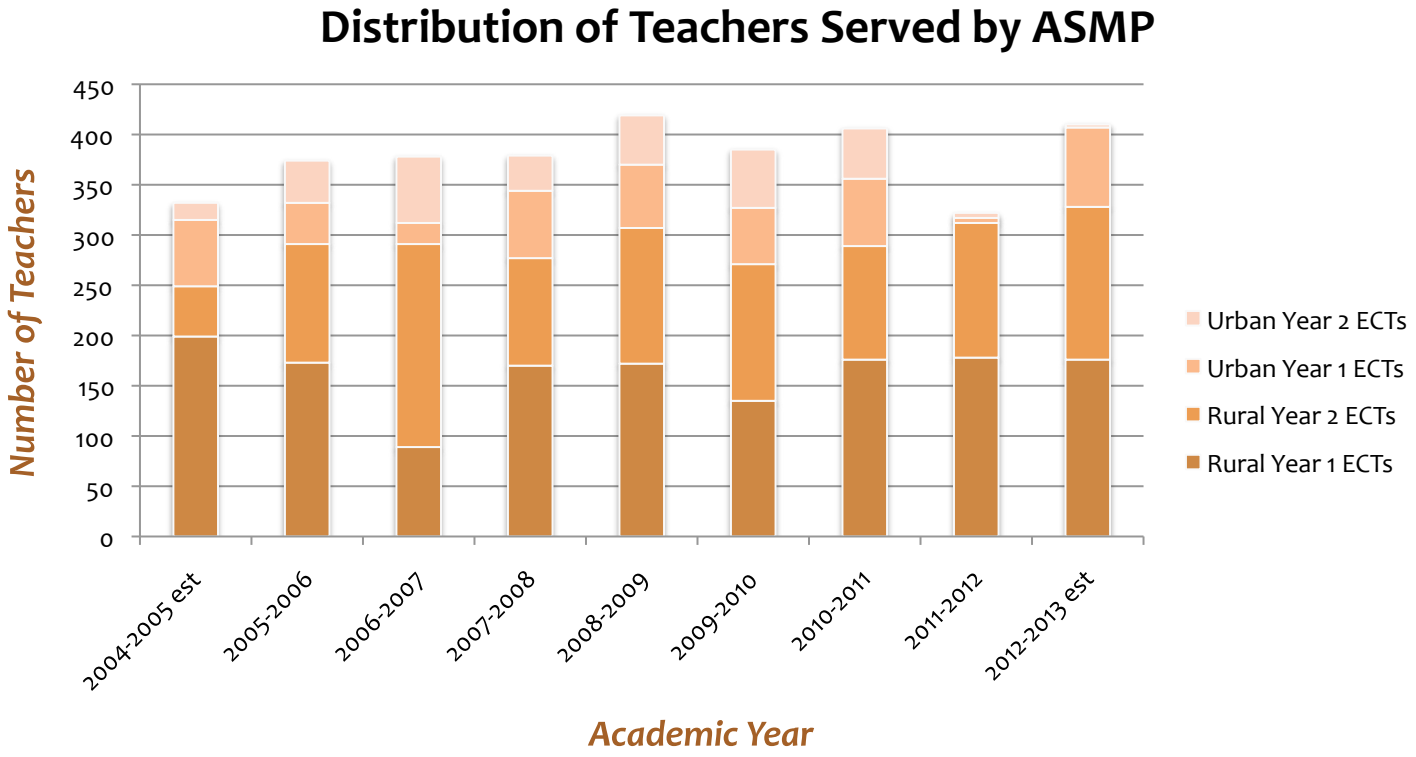
In 2011, the US Department of Education funded ASMP's Urban Growth Opportunity (UGO) with an Investments in Innovation (i3) grant. UGO external evaluators will gather and analyze data specifically for urban districts. The study includes the following components of the program:

- urban mentor selection
- urban mentor professional development
- urban mentor – ECT interaction (distance and in person, relationships, responsiveness)
- urban mentor use of formative assessment system to support teacher professional growth

These components address the ASMP outcomes of retention, growth, and student achievement for teachers in urban districts. This validation experiment will enable external evaluators to measure the ASMP model's fidelity of implementation, and to assess the differences between ASMP ECTs and a comparison group of urban first- and second-year teachers who do not receive ASMP mentoring. *(See page 6 for a fuller discussion of the UGO study)*

Project Numbers since Inception

Project numbers since inception have remained consistent, serving on average about 380 early career teachers (ECTs) a year. In the beginning years of the project about 75% of the ECTs served by ASMP were from rural districts with the remaining 25% from the top five largest urban districts in the state. Due to funding changes in the Fall of 2011, ASMP served primarily rural districts (97% of ECTs) in academic year 2011–2012 (AY12) and then an increased amount of urban teachers again in AY13 (80% rural, 20% urban). Overall, ASMP has served over 2,100 individual ECTs through training 108 experienced Alaska teachers as high-quality mentors through AY13.



Over 8 years, ASMP has been invited into 52 of the 54 school districts within the state to serve their early career teachers. To date, nearly 70% of all schools (345 by the end of AY12) have been served by the project at least one year.

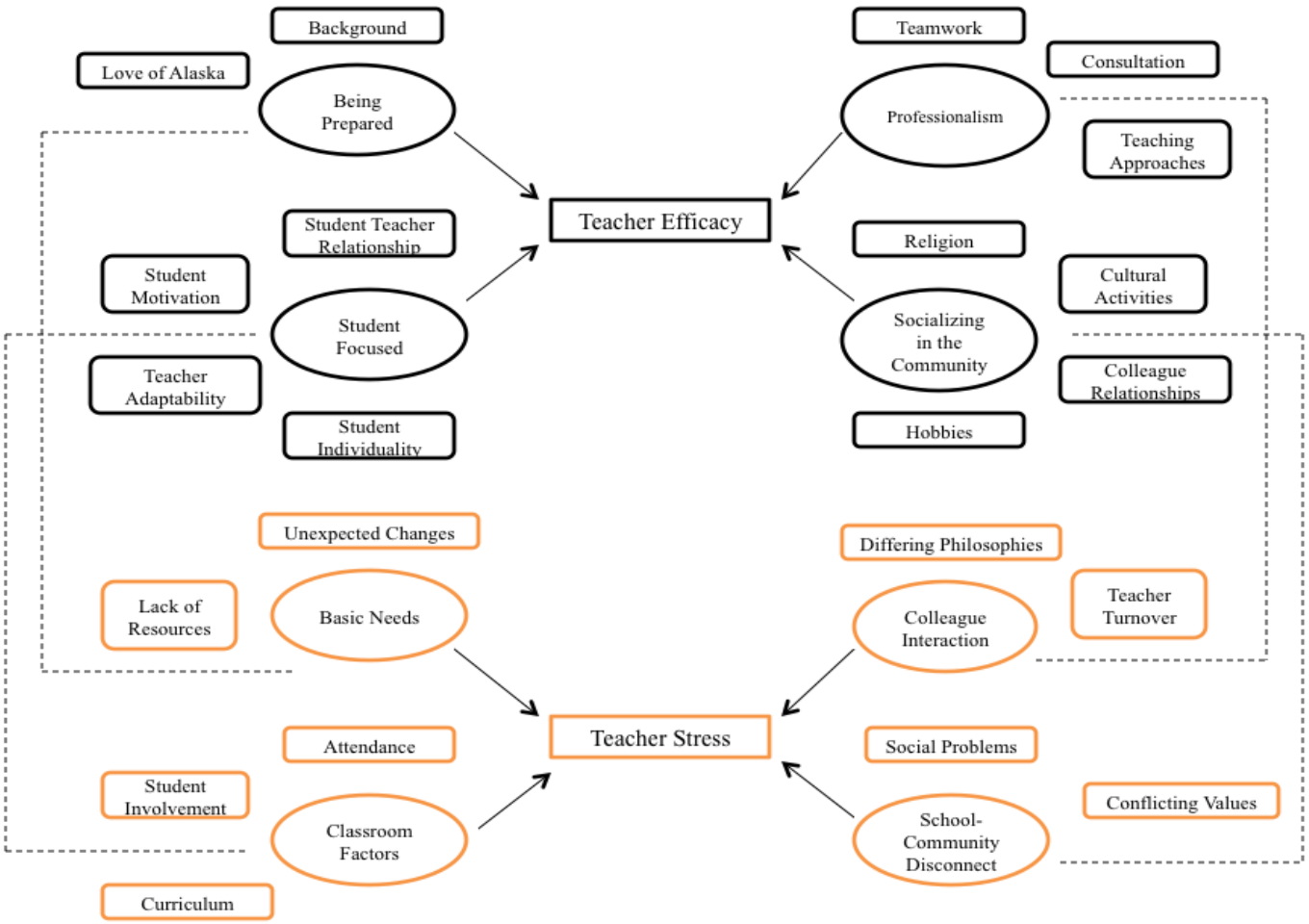
A Study of Mid-Career Teachers Mentored by ASMP

One example of going deeper with teacher retention analysis is to investigate the success of early career teachers served in 2004–2005 and 2005–2006 school years who are still teaching in the state after five years or longer. Longitudinal retention rates are calculated to see how the improvements in yearly retention influence long-term success. This "mid-career teacher" study focused on determining the five-year retention rates of early career teachers served by ASMP, and the factors that allowed the teachers to be successful and remain teaching within the state. Of the teachers served by ASMP in the first two years of the project, 56% remained teaching in Alaska's public K-12 school system after 5 years. Interviews were conducted with 13 of these teachers who were randomly sampled from the list. The questions centered around teacher efficacy, the belief that the teacher can make a positive influence on students in terms of learning. Results revealed that teachers experienced efficacy based upon a number of factors, including teacher preparation, professional development, community engagement, and using a student-specific focus (shown in black circles). These components of teacher efficacy also contributed to the teachers' ability to cope with the stressors associated with teaching in Alaska (parallel factors shown in orange circles).

Some of dominant themes contributing to teacher efficacy include the following:

- **Being Prepared**
  Background, love of Alaska, appreciating rural lifestyles—experience working with minority populations; living in rural areas; going to school in Alaska, or growing up in Alaska; having a "love" of Alaska, such as appreciating the lifestyle of "living in the bush" or "the village lifestyle".
- **Being Professional**
  Teamwork, consultation, teaching approaches—sharing a philosophy of education; collaborating with one another; utilizing outside resources, such as working with other professionals, organizations, and community members; inviting native elders into the classroom to share their knowledge. Many teachers also described how they consulted with their ASMP mentor, and how this was helpful in obtaining a sense of teacher efficacy. In particular, they described how their mentor was one of the ways in which they learned about different teaching approaches—the creative strategies teachers use to manage their classroom, such as utilizing rubrics, having structure, and working out systems of teaching that synthesize and integrate curriculum from different subjects.
- **Socializing in the Community**
  Religion, cultural activities, hobbies, colleague relationships—participating at church gatherings, potlatches, Alaska Native dances, hunting and/or fishing; fostering personal interests and activities such as playing hockey or walking on sea ice; colleagues supporting, relying on, visiting, or participating in activities with one another.
- **Being Student-focused**
  Student-teacher relationships, student motivation, teacher adaptability, student individuality—trying to connect personally by finding out about the students interests; recognizing intrinsic student motivation; adapting culturally biased or inappropriate classroom curriculum, their teaching style, or how course content is presented appropriate to the situation; viewing each student as their own individual, then working to meet the student's specific needs.

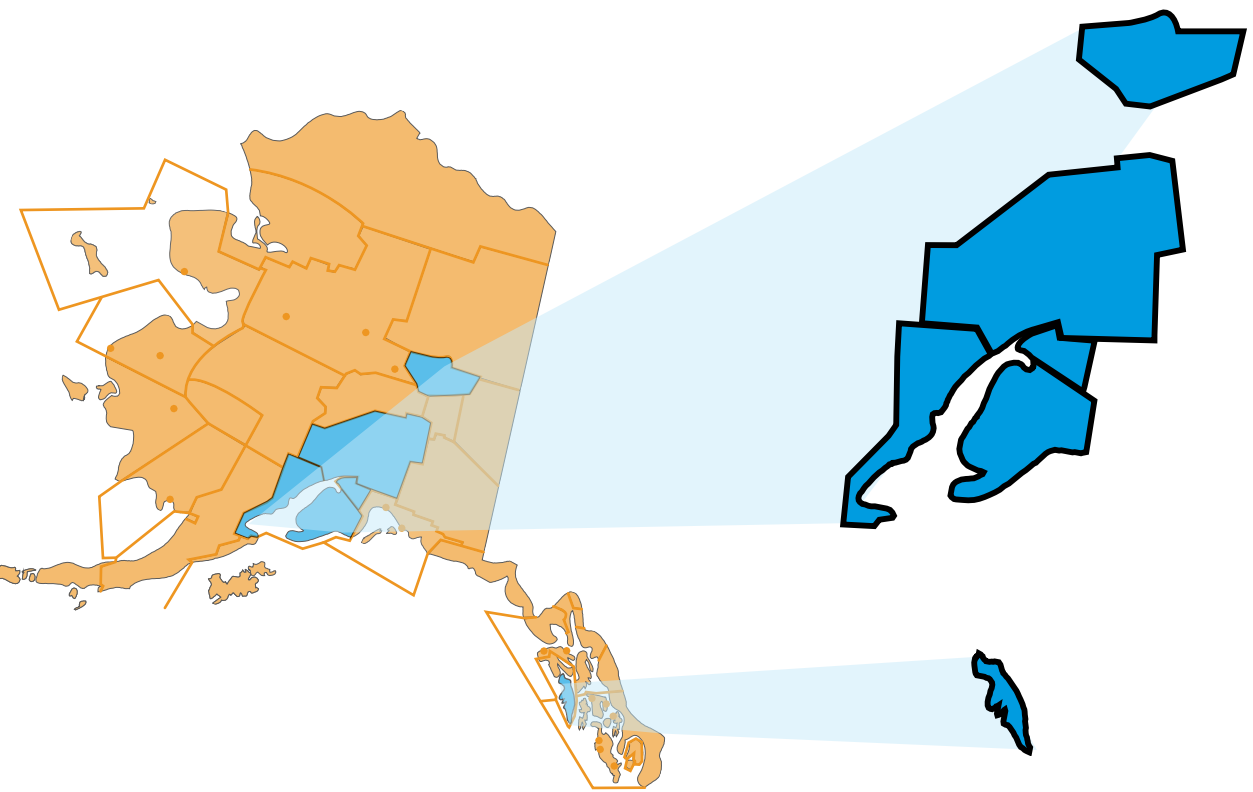
Teacher Efficacy Model



Early career teachers in Alaska are met with various stressors. By looking at teachers who stay in the profession and in the state, this study has identified elements that can mitigate these stressors and increase teachers' feeling of efficacy.

Studying Student Achievement and Teacher Mentoring

With the promising results from the 2009 ASMP student achievement study, the U.S. Department of Education awarded funding to the project through an "Investments in Innovation" Grant starting in January 2012. The grant expands the mentoring services that are primarily provided in Alaska's rural districts to urban districts, and is titled the Urban Growth Opportunity (UGO). Funding allows a larger number of early career teachers in urban districts to be served while randomly assigning them to various types of mentoring models, either the ASMP model or the "Business As Usual" model—whatever is currently in place within that district. The randomization provides the most objective research possible. Whereas the 2009 ASMP student achievement study compared the results from ECTs' classrooms to their veteran counterparts, all participants in the UGO study are early career teachers. The grant is considered a validation grant, meaning that there is a good model in place that needs to be substantiated in other situations. If the model is found to be effective in urban Alaska, it is possible that other states may adopt the model as well. The goals of the study are to measure the impact of the ASMP mentoring model on teacher retention, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement.



- **Fairbanks —2 mentors**
- **Mat-Su —2 mentors**
- **Anchorage —4 mentors**
- **Kenai Peninsula —1 mentor**
- **Sitka —1 mentor**

Urban Districts Participating in the UGO Study

Measuring Teacher Growth

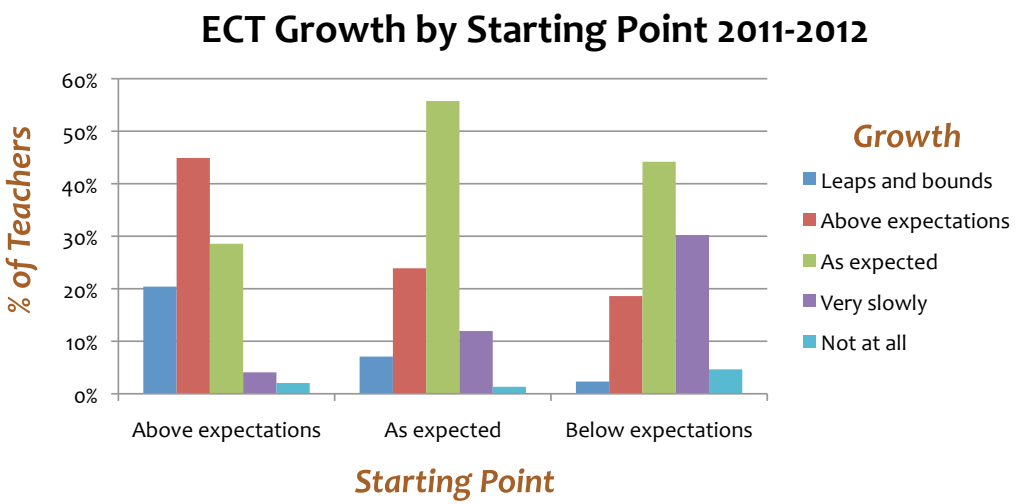
ASMP measures teacher effectiveness through a growth model grounded in teaching standards. Mentors work with the early career teachers (ECTs) weekly through distance communication. Mentors visit and observe ECT classrooms monthly, discussing data gathered and collaboratively determining next steps. Often, a mentor is the professional most connected to an ECT's practice. For this reason, mentors played an important role in developing the tool used to measure teacher growth within ASMP.

Through focus group sessions with mentors, a scale was developed by the ASMP Research Team using observable classroom practices. This tool includes a starting point and growth rate for a teachers' professional practice, considerations for the influence (or not) of ASMP, and key traits of the teacher and situation that allow professional growth.

To measure growth, ASMP first determines a starting point for each ECT. Using teaching standards and data gathered over the first two months of interactions with ECTs, mentors categorize the teachers' professional practice "As Expected", "Above" or "Below Expectations" for a first- or second-year teacher. Rather than an indicator of the teachers' preparation program or their quality as a teacher, this tool characterizes where an ECT falls on a continuum specific to their teaching situation (school, community, grade, content). This descriptive continuum includes many professional practices, ranging from classroom management to planning lessons to developing as a professional. The charge given to an ASMP mentor is to move an ECT's practice forward, from good to great. Most ECTs fall into the "As Expected" category for a starting point. In AY12, 71% of the 320 ECTs with teacher effectiveness scores started where they were expected to be as an early career teacher (15% above and 13% below). This pattern is similar to those found in the two previous years as well (not depicted).

Growth is measured by again referencing the teaching standards, verified through data gathered throughout the year, and organized and reassessed at the end of the year. Since ASMP is non-evaluative, descriptors such as growing "Leaps and Bounds" or "Very Slowly" were used so that mentors focus on observable practices, not on evaluating the performance of a teacher. The graph shows the distribution of ECTs based on their growth organized by starting point. Remembering that 71% of the ECTs started off in the center category, the results show that most ECTs are growing professionally at a rate "As Expected" as well. Those starting "Above Expectations" do have more ECTs with faster growth than those starting "Below Expectations", but that is not to say that ECTs starting "Below Expectations" cannot grow. In fact, 65% of those ECTs showed growth for that year (As Expected, Above Expectations, and Leaps and Bounds).

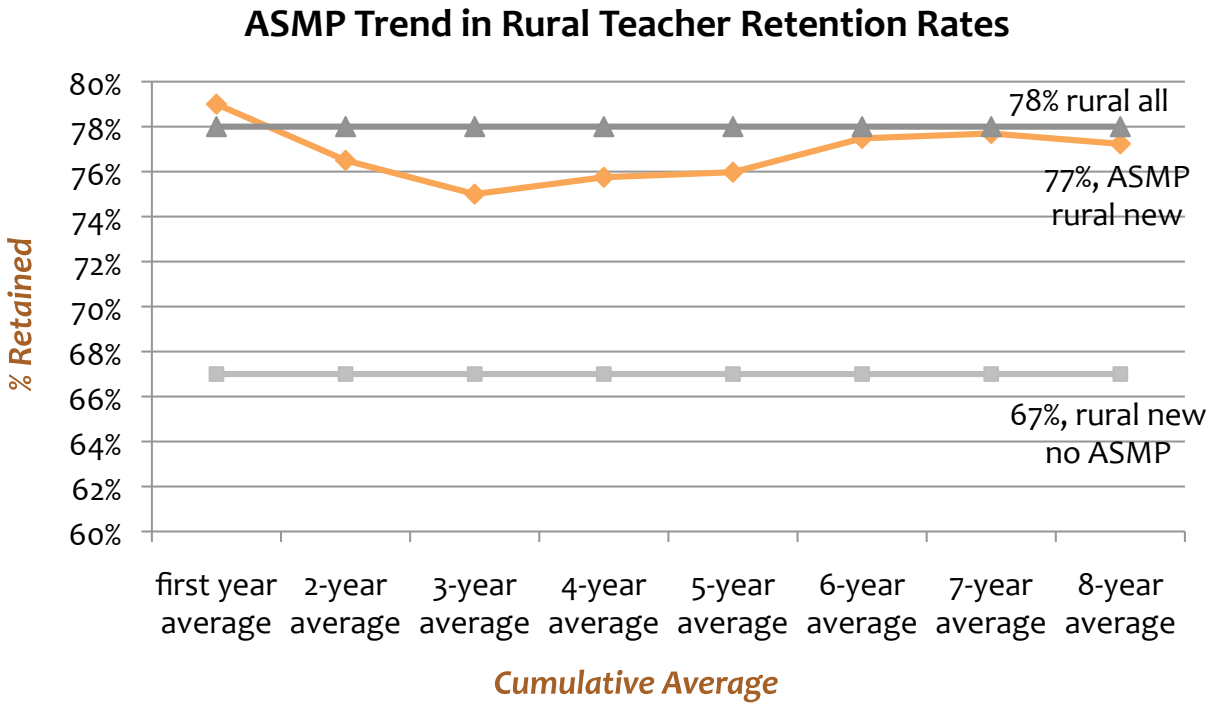
The UGO study enables the ASMP Research Team to validate this instrument by comparing results of this data collection tool to those obtained by Education Northwest through teacher observation.



Narrowing the Gap in Rural Teacher Retention

The Alaska Statewide Mentor Project has been serving rural districts in Alaska since the 2004-2005 school year. Teacher retention is defined as a teacher remaining in the Alaska public K-12 school system from one year to the next. "Staying" means the teacher stays at the same school, stays in the same district, or even moves to a new district but stays teaching in the state. Retention is calculated on average from year to year and has fluctuated between 72% and 85% for rural teachers served by ASMP. However, the trend for rural districts retaining first- and second-year teachers who received mentoring from ASMP is leveling off at 77% over an 8-year average, as shown by the orange line in the graph.

How do we know if this is an improvement for rural teacher retention? This is an increase over the retention rates of new teachers in rural districts before ASMP mentoring, which was 67% on average as shown by the gray line (Hill & Hirshberg, 2008). More importantly, this 8-year average brings the retention rate of new teachers in rural Alaska to almost the same as the retention rate of all teachers in rural Alaska, regardless of years of experience, which is 78% according to Hill and Hirshberg.



— 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.

Annual Surveys

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 the particular roles of those participants. In order to gauge the effectiveness of the intervention and make programatic adjustments when necessary, ASMP collects two broad types of data:

- *quantitative*—these data lend themselves to being represented numerically, either by a count, assigned ranking, or percentage. Quantitative data are often used to determine trends within a sample from the population being studied, and can help to mitigate extreme "outlier" responses in order to establish a better understanding of the norm.
- *qualitative*—these data offer more individualized responses from participants, usually in the form of writing, and do not immediately lend themselves to be expressed numerically without further analysis. However, qualitative data do hold their own power to complete the informative picture from a human perspective, and provides fertile ground in which to situate quantitative data.

Survey Response Rates

Project Year	ECT	Mentor	Site Admin
2004–05	76%	100%	51%
2005–06	64%	100%	14%
2006–07	82%	100%	62%
2007–08	76%	100%	61%
2008–09	83%	100%	74%
2009–10	85%	100%	75%
2010–11	86%	100%	73%
2011–12	80%	100%	72%

When conducting any kind of survey instrument to measure the success of a program, meeting a response rate of at least 70% of respondents ensures reliability of results; a response rate less than 70% can indicate that the results are not truly representative of a group's experience. Since the spring of 2009, ASMP has achieved response rates greater than 70% in all three survey groups: early career teachers, mentors, and school site administrators.

Results of Closed-Ended Survey Responses

An important set of quantitative data comes from closed-ended survey questions, where participants are able to select from a range of established responses. Depending on the content of the question being asked, respondents may be allowed to choose only one from a set of possible responses; in other cases, they may be allowed to choose more than one response. The following AY12 data from 243 respondents indicate that ASMP is making a difference for early career teachers in Alaska:

Of the success you've had as an early career teacher, what proportion would you attribute to help from your Alaska Statewide Mentor?

86% "A great deal", "Quite a bit", or "Some"

Overall, having an Alaska Statewide Mentor has been beneficial to my teaching.

88% "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"

Survey of Superintendents: Mentors' Influence Reaches Beyond ECTs' Classrooms

During the Fall of 2011, ASMP conducted a survey of Alaska's superintendents to determine the effectiveness of the program from the perspective of school district leadership. Of the superintendents of Alaska's 54 school districts, 38 (70.3%) responded to a survey of 17 questions ranging from descriptive and demographic inquiries, to more specific impacts of ASMP's service within districts. Highlighted questions and results are as follows:

Question 16— Rate your overall experience with the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project.

- 97% of districts with intimate knowledge of ASMP are "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the project.

Question 10— Do you feel mentoring by the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project has helped increase retention of early career teachers in your district?

- 84% of districts with intimate knowledge of ASMP feel that the project has helped increase teacher retention "a lot", "quite a bit" or "some".

Question 11— Do you feel mentoring by the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project has helped to improve student achievement in classrooms of early career teachers in your district?

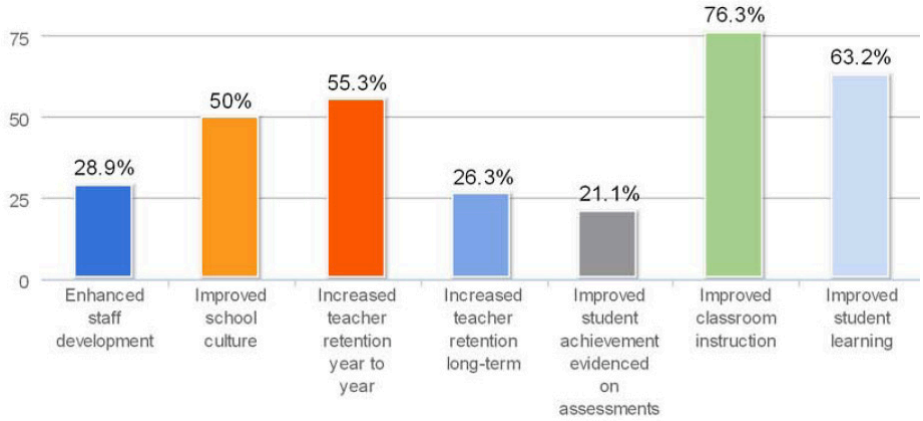
- 88% of districts with intimate knowledge of ASMP feel that the project has helped improve student achievement "a lot", "quite a bit" or "some".

Question 12— Do you feel mentoring by the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project has helped to improve instruction in classrooms of early career teachers in your district?

- 89% of districts with intimate knowledge of ASMP feel that the project has helped improve instruction "a lot", "quite a bit" or "some".

Respondents were also asked the ancillary question, "Do you feel ASMP has impacted your district (not just the early career teachers receiving mentoring) in any of these areas?" Respondents were presented with a check-box system that enabled them to select as many applicable responses as needed from a listing of prescribed categories. The results show that superintendents view the presence of ASMP in their districts as having a positive impact on classroom instruction, student learning, year-to-year teacher retention, school culture, and staff development, among other areas.

Effects of ASMP Beyond ECTs' Classrooms



Open-Ended Responses from Site Administrators

Survey responses from administrators of schools served by ASMP align with other feedback the Research Team has solicted, and continue to validate the positive impact that Alaska Statewide Mentors have on early career teachers and their schools.

What is most effective about the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project? Why?

Providing new teachers, who are often new to Alaska, with a mentor is extremely important to the success of our teachers. Our small schools limit the opportunity for mentoring within the school [...] the ASMP provides teachers with quality mentors who know about more than content. These [mentors] provide insight and training on a multitude of AK-specific issues (community relationships, cultural differences, etc) that take years to learn.

The opportunity to have a mentor observe and instruct a new teacher in the areas that are challenging or weakest. Being able to guide them to a place where they make the decisions to change and grow with out being formally evaluated. The information that a mentor can share is so beneficial and the project has made it very user friendly so that teachers can implement the strategies right away.

It gives our beginning teachers another strong support tool to assist in providing quality instruction during those first critical years. They are able to work closely one on one with our beginning teachers to lend tools, knowledge, learning and teaching strategies, and support, even beyond what the principal or others are offering.

I truly appreciate that the mentor has more time to offer my beginning teacher than I do! My beginning teacher has stated that both her principal and her mentor agree on those things that could be improved, and it adds validity to both folks. She's improved considerably, and that's great considering she was terrific when I hired her.

Teaching is a difficult profession, especially for new hires. The mentor project helps to ensure that new teachers have a professional connection, resource and confidant. Having a mentor increases teacher success and efficacy, therefore increasing teacher satisfaction and retention.

Working in Alaska is unique, in itself, and adding an off-road and extremely rural setting for new teachers can be overwhelming. The project is very necessary to help newer teachers have success right away for their career and the students in their classrooms.

How would a reduction in mentoring services impact your school and/or district?

Reducing the mentors means more instability and continued disenfranchisement of new teachers! We want these new teachers to not only stay in our communities for a good length of time but we want to see them have resources they can utilize to improve their own professional development and be successful as a teacher for a very long time!

Because of the mentoring program my first and second year teachers are the ones that become my best team leaders at the school-wide level. The mentoring program gives them some confidence and works them through some of the sticky points that we have all had to work through the hard way. Without the program I'd be responsible to do this on my own.

Retention of high quality teachers is an on-going struggle for our district. Our students' needs are often unique to this place, in this time. It is not an easy population to serve. Support and development is vital for our new teachers to succeed.

In rural settings, a reduction of mentoring services would mean new teachers leaving the job and possibly the profession. Mentors provide both personal and professional support, a blend of what is needed to make it over the obstacles of the early career teacher.

Open-Ended Responses from Early Career Teachers

Problem-Solver

My mentor has been a very important support as a colleague, confidant, role model, instructor, and friend and has made all the difference in my growth as a better teacher. My mentor is always there to serve and support rather than be critical. Whenever we collaborate, my mentor's approach is "what can I do to help? " rather than, "this is what you did wrong and what you need to change".

Assessor

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time with my mentor. She is always willing to listen and assist with suggestions and feedback. She has helped with dealing with challenging students and situations and provided many engaging and meaningful classroom activity ideas and resources. She has made my classroom a better place in many ways! I don't feel I am being critiqued but more so supported, encouraged, and guided.

Coach

I love my state mentor and the state mentor project. Without this project, I would no longer be teaching.

I feel incredibly fortunate to have [worked] with a mentor. I could not have made it through the year without [him].

Teacher

Thank you for providing me with great advice and many resources. Your counsel has been priceless. When I was scattered, you never dropped the ball once. Endless thanks for your quality professional advice and meaningful friendship, both of which are occasionally in short supply in the bush.

Facilitator

My mentor is a very knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the profession. He provides helpful ideas in the classroom such as the breathing exercises and student portfolios. He is a great guide and provides help without infringing on the flow of my classroom.

Learner

She does an excellent job. She goes above and beyond to help in anything we may possibly need. She is constantly e-mailing and bringing resources to us. She e-mails on regular basis to keep in touch and calls on a regular basis as well. She makes herself available and is understanding when we are swamped and do not get back to her right away. I couldn't ask for a better mentor.

Advocate

I loved working with my mentor. At first it was intimidating to accept her visits, because I was worried about criticism, but it was an unfounded worry. She had been very respectful, professional and sensitive towards me in her interactions with me. I appreciate her insightful presence at this early milestone of my professional carrier. It made a huge difference regarding the overall outcome of my success at work.

Trusted Listener

Visits were very important and useful for me. Being able to bounce ideas off of another person who was not a colleague or evaluating me was very useful.

She has been an unbiased third party to help me deal with issues within my school and has given me excellent resources (books, websites, ideas) and advice throughout the year.

Collaborator

Your pleasant and caring attitude always made it comfortable to be around you and discuss situations as a teacher without the fear of my ranting being passed on to someone else. Your numerous resources, materials, and skills have built my confidence and made me a better teacher.

Resource

I don't think you need to do anything different. You are always there to support me, and I know how to get in contact with you if I need to. Your observations and questions are helpful in my classroom, and I think you are the perfect Mentor! Keep up the good work!



The Many Roles of the Mentor

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