



# Alaska Statewide Mentor Project

**RESEARCH SUMMARY  
2004-2010**

# 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, designed to induct early career teachers into professional learning environments based on the norms of collaboration, high expectations, equity, ongoing inquiry, and reflection on practice. In collaboration with a mentor, new teachers build structures that influence the way they learn—and the way they teach—so each will understand that excellent teachers build their practice one day at a time, from the first day they step into a classroom. Mentors encourage novices to set high expectations for themselves and their students, convey a belief in the power of the classroom teacher to affect student learning, and hold themselves personally accountable for the academic success of their students.

## Alaska Statewide Mentors

Alaska Statewide Mentors are experienced teachers from across the state who work full-time with early career teachers (ECTs) 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, providing guidance to help teachers find inspiration and stay energized in their new profession. First- and second-year ECTs hired in participating districts have the opportunity to work with an Alaska Statewide Mentor to focus on their individual professional growth. Foundational to the success of ASMP, the mentoring relationship is not evaluative: an Alaska Statewide Mentor is a knowledgeable confidant, problem solver, personal professional support, and even a co-teacher to model lessons that develop teaching strategies aligned with the needs of real students.

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*the many roles of an ASMP mentor*

## 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. Qualitative, quantitative and descriptive data are gathered on participants to study the effect of ASMP on teacher retention and student achievement. To guide programmatic changes, evaluations are conducted on each mentor professional development session, and an online survey is administered by an external agency each year with ECTs, their site administrators and ASMP mentors.

### [*My* mentor]

As the Research Team worked through coding qualitative data from open-ended responses to survey questions, it was noted that many respondents identified their mentor by name. In the following excerpts from the 2008–09 and 2009–10 online surveys, names have been changed to “[my mentor]”, which lends itself as the title of

this section running across the following pages of this publication. While the quantitative data displays summative trends throughout the history of ASMP, these qualitative snapshots provide another layer of understanding from the perspective of teachers served by the project.

## Teacher Retention

Research on teacher retention focuses on teachers in Alaska’s public school system and aims to change the long-term retention issues of new teachers to Alaska. One goal of ASMP is to increase teacher retention among ECTs, a group that historically sees roughly half of teachers leaving the profession within their first five years in the classroom.

ASMP combines teachers from the following categories when calculating our overall retention rate: teachers who

- stay at the same school
- move schools within the same district
- move districts within the state

We also categorize teachers who leave teaching but remain in Alaska, leave Alaska but remain in teaching, and leave both teaching and Alaska. Once a teacher receives mentoring, ASMP tracks them at the beginning of the next two years to determine their retention code for the previous year.

Overall, the average retention rate of ASMP teachers fluctuates around 79%, based on the number of first- and second-year, rural and urban teachers. Those who remain at the same school comprise the largest group each year, with far fewer moving between schools or moving to new districts, as shown in the table on the adjacent page. Prior to the implementation of ASMP, the historical retention rate for new teachers in the districts we serve most averaged about 68% over five years. Detailed results by each category are available by emailing the ASMP Research Team:

[research.asmp@gmail.com](mailto:research.asmp@gmail.com)

### [My mentor] and teacher retention ...

“Her positive feedback and support have been instrumental in keeping me in the field.”

“His attitude is always so positive. He makes me feel like I'm already ‘there’—not a beginning teacher, but a colleague. Today I am signing my contract for a second year partly because [my mentor] helped me see what a truly special situation I have here.”

“I have become more confident and enjoy teaching more. [My mentor] has guided me patiently to a greater understanding of the age level I am teaching and has served as a sounding board for problems I've encountered. Without my mentor's help, I might have given up numerous times.”

“[My mentor] acts as a role model for what I can hope for my career to look like down the road as an Alaska teacher.”

<b>Retention Rates by Category</b>	<b>2004– 05</b>	<b>2005– 06</b>	<b>2006– 07</b>	<b>2007– 08</b>	<b>2008– 09</b>	<b>2009– 10*</b>
Overall	79%	78%	77%	81%	79%	91%
Same school	71%	71%	66%	72%	69%	77%
Same district	7%		5%	5%	7%	6%
New district	1%	7%	6%	4%	3%	8%
Rural		74%	72%	78%	77%	91%
Urban		92%	93%	91%	86%	89%
Year 1		76%	96%	84%	83%	93%
Year 2		81%	69%	77%	75%	88%

\* final data collection in progress, 62% response rate

How do we know if the retention rates for ASMP teachers are better than the state retention rates? We do see that they are higher than statewide statistics for the various subgroups, but what should the ideal retention rate be? We know that not all teachers can be retained because of the many human realities beyond ASMP’s scope of influence, such as teachers who leave to start a family, to continue their own education, or to be closer to their families in another state, among other factors. The Research Team is embarking on studies to determine which factors affect the decisions of teachers in Alaska, which then leads to an understanding of the ideal retention rate for our state.

“[My mentor] has gone above and beyond to ensure my success in the classroom and as a growing professional. She has contacted me on her off-time to ensure my success was maintained. She housed me in her home with four other teachers when we were snowed out from returning to our sites. My mentor cares. I would have failed without her.”

“I know he will help many teachers stay in the profession and accept the challenge of continuing to live and work in rural Alaska.”

“Through my mentor, I have learned how to improve my classroom and the strategies that I use. My mentor has helped me to build my confidence, something that is vital to ensuring teacher retention in a school.”

“I am continually impressed at her ability to set aside time and brain-power to focus on my world of teaching. I always look forward to her visits and am continually encouraged to stay in the profession (even in the ugliest phase of my first year).”

## Student Achievement

Improving student achievement is a primary goal of ASMP. In 2010, ASMP presented results on a comparative analysis between Alaska Standards Based Assessment (SBA) scores from veteran teachers and mentored ECTs in Reading, Writing, Math and Science. The study included 196 classes of mentored ECTs matched with 104 veteran teachers of students in grades 4-10.

With lack of randomization, ECTs and veteran teachers were matched within districts so as to create a comparable set of teachers who are similar on many attributes other than years of teaching experience. The matching produced a strong quasi-experimental design. The groups were comparable on school location and rural/urban district classification, teacher gender, student gender, grade level distribution, and percentage of students with IEPs. They differed on years of teaching experience with the average for ECTs being 1.5 years (standard deviation=0.5) versus veteran teachers with an average of 12.3 years (SD=7.5). The groups also differed on pre-test score, which was the average SBA score from the previous year for Reading, Writing, and Math. These scores were all about 20 points lower (equivalent SD) for the ECTs' classes than veterans' classes, confirming that new teachers often work with lower performing students. The analysis used student scaled score data (RSS09, WSS09, MSS09, SciSS09) nested within teacher classes and employed a hierarchical linear analysis producing the results in the table.

While 3 out of 4 models are statistically significant, the effect sizes are small enough that the differences are not practically recognized. The 4th model, Math, does not produce statistically significant differences in results between ASMP-mentored teachers and veteran teachers once adjusted for multiple comparisons.

### *[My* mentor] and working with students ...

"[My mentor] gives me so much help with my very most challenging students. He gives me feedback and encouragement, and has gone above and beyond to help me figure out a situation."

"You have improved my practice by leaps and bounds, and I have a new understanding of how my kids work due to your insights. Thank you for all the time you've spent in our classroom; the kids loved getting to know you!"

"I liked the fact that she worked so hard to make sure we kept in contact. It was not always easy. She provided me with great feedback and was wonderful to have in the classroom; she helped me a lot with my interactions with the students and working with the problem children."

"Very helpful when I am having difficulty connecting lessons to my students' lives and she gives me great ideas to piggyback my lessons in order to make them more relevant and informative for my students."

<b>Results of Student Achievement Study</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>Math</b>	<b>Science</b>
<i>outcome variable</i>	RSS09	WSS09	MSS09	SciSS09
<i>difference in scores between ASMP and contrasting group</i>	-4.7	-5.5	-7.0	-8.2
<i>p-value</i>	0.037	0.038	0.023*	0.023
<i>student-level effect size</i>	0.06	0.07	0.09	0.11
<i>teacher-level effect size</i>	0.10	0.12	0.15	0.17

\* not statistically significant after applying the Benjamini-Hochberg adjustment for multiple comparisons

Results show that in the case of Math, students in classrooms of mentored first- and second-year teachers perform the same as those in classrooms of veteran teachers (scores are not statistically significantly different). In Reading, Writing, and Science, ASMP teachers started off with students scoring 0.37 standard deviations lower and finished with students scoring only 0.06 – 0.11 standard deviations lower. Although mentoring new teachers did not totally close the achievement gap between students of new teachers and veteran teachers, the scores are much closer than what is found for students of new teachers without mentoring. Thus, mentoring conducted through ASMP shows promising results. For a copy of the paper presented at the national conference of the American Educational Research Association in May, 2010, go to <http://www.eric.ed.gov> and search for Eric #ED510316.

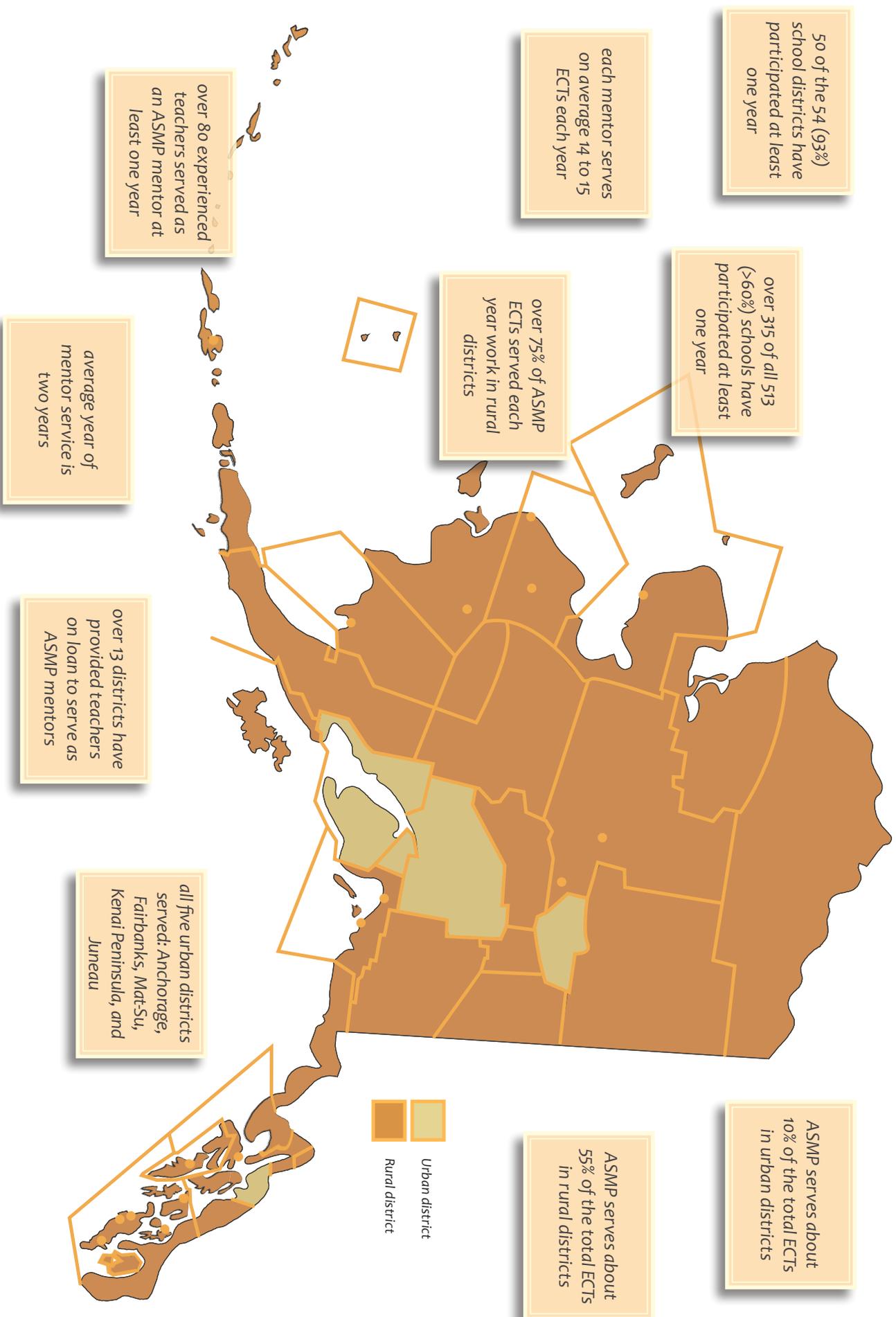
“[My mentor] was a tremendous help when I needed to reorganize the physical arrangement of my classroom. She has a tremendous wealth of knowledge which is being well-tapped. What a wonderful way to share great teachers that are such a treasure!”

“She was a great sounding board and had the experience working with the local population so she was able to give me insight into the issues.”

“The mentor experience complements and validates my teaching methods, and makes a difference in my students' classroom experiences.”

“If I have an issue in the classroom, she looks objectively at the situation and talks through the strategies that may help. I appreciate that kind of feedback. Not having a huge toolbox of strategies yet, it is helpful to gain new perspectives.”

## Quick Facts Around the State



## Focus on Special Education

Through a five-year U.S. Department of Education grant, the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project has been able to increase focus on mentoring special education teachers by pairing mentors with special education certifications to work specifically with special education early career teachers. Over the five years, ASMP served 128 special education ECTs with an increasing number served by special education mentors each year, up to 75% in the final year. Working with a subsample of about a third of all new special education teachers in the state, ASMP continues to retain over 80% each year, as shown in the table below.

<b>Retention in Special Education</b>	<b>2005–06</b>	<b>2006–07</b>	<b>2007–08</b>	<b>2008–09</b>	<b>2009–10</b>
<i>Special Education ASMP teachers</i>	32	30	28	46	42
<i>Retained in Alaska</i>	26	28	26	38	29/32*
<i>Percent retained</i>	81%	93%	93%	83%	90%*

\* final data collection in progress, 76% response rate, thus the estimate is most likely high

Longitudinal studies are in order now that the beginning cohorts of ECTs have been teaching in Alaska at least five years. Starting with the special education teachers, we can calculate retention after 2, 3, and 4 years using the same categories as the year to year analysis. A cohort is defined as the group of special education teachers served that year by ASMP, thus most ECTs are counted in two different cohorts since they can receive two years of service. Of the special education ECTs who composed Cohort 1 in 2005-06, 81% were still teaching special

### *[My mentor]* and encouraging feedback ...

“She has made herself indispensable as someone outside of my situation who knows special education and can help.”

“[My mentor] has been exceptionally resourceful and always has feedback or materials for me when I ask for them. Our visits are productive and I enjoy learning about what I can do differently, or hearing about what I'm currently doing from someone other than an administrator.”

“[My mentor] is always quick to give feedback that is meaningful to my successes and challenges. Her observations of my classroom provide me with a different perspective which pushes me to be a better teacher.”

“My statewide mentor has been a great addition to this school year. I am able to communicate to him about my needs/areas of weakness and he has helped me to grow into a confident teacher. He made great relations with all of the new teachers at our site and has been a light to our school.”

education in the Alaska public school system in 2006-07, 69% were still teaching special education in the Alaska public school system in 2007-08, 63% in 2008-09 and dropping down to 53% in 2009-10. State data indicates that 41% of new special education teachers leave the Alaska school system after four years (Hill & Hirshberg, Research Summary No. 69, 2008). ASMP special education teachers in Cohort 1 do have a slightly higher four-year retention and there seems to be a similar trend for the other cohorts, although several more years are needed to see the long-term pattern.

Longitudinal Retention in Special Education†	2005–06	2006–07	2007–08	2008–09	2009–10
Cohort 1 2005–2006	26/32 81%	22/32 69%	20/32 63%	17/32 53%	
Cohort 2 2006–2007		28/30 93%	21/30 70%	16/30 53%	
Cohort 3 2007–2008			26/28 93%	18/28 64%	
Cohort 4 2008–2009				38/46 83%	
Cohort 5 2009–2010					29/32* 90% (42 total)

\* final data collection in progress, 76% response rate

† Out of the 128 special education ECTs served by ASMP, 8 are still teaching in Alaska’s public school system, but no longer in a special education position. For these calculations, they are considered “not retained”.

“I appreciate the feedback after you observe a lesson. It has given me another set of eyes and made me aware of things that I would not have picked up on because I was engaged with other students.”

“My mentor is very creative and thinks outside the box. This solution-based thinking has provided me with good teaching tools, a social network, and the energy to continue at the intense pace needed for this job.”

“Your feedback and insight into life in Alaska has helped me develop as a professional and led me to change some of my viewpoints as an educator.”

“She has a very calm and helpful personality, which makes it easy to talk to her about things I might need help with. She also does a great job of communicating weekly and getting back to me right away when I ask for feedback or information she might be able to share on lessons or units.”

## Survey Results: Early Career Teachers

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. Keeping in mind that responses to satisfaction surveys often fluctuate based on personality, we combine categories to get an overall sense of satisfaction with the project. In general, a high majority of ECTs are still satisfied with the project, feel their ASMP mentor meets their needs and has had an influence on them as a professional.

<i>ECT Responses</i>	2004–05	2005–06	2006–07	2007–08	2008–09	2009–10
<i>My mentor meets my needs. (% of 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed')</i>	73%	83%	88%	80%	90%	90%
<i>Of the success you've had as an early career teacher, what proportion would you attribute to help from your mentor? (% of 'some' to 'a great deal')</i>	79%	86%	88%	83%	82%	81%
<i>From what source do you receive the most support? (ranking of ASMP mentor based on %)</i>	2nd	1st	1st	1st	1st	2nd

2004/2005: 2nd place (32%) to working with colleagues in 1st place (38%)  
 2005/2006: 1st place (37%) then in 2nd informal communication with colleagues (30%)  
 2006/2007: 1st place (36%) then in 2nd informal communication with colleagues (31%)  
 2007/2008: 1st place (34%) then in 2nd working with colleagues (26%)  
 2008/2009: 1st place (30%) then in 2nd informal communication with colleagues (28%)  
 2009/2010: 2nd place (26%) to working with colleagues in 1st place (34%)

### *[My mentor]* and material support ...

“[My mentor] supports my areas of strength and provides constructive ways for me to improve in areas of need [by] modeling, story-telling, Socratic questioning, and humor. I can really look up to him because of his experience and knowledge. I aspire to be like him; he is calm, organized, and super interesting.”

“The SBA practice references and writing examples [...] helped me a great deal when preparing students for the test. I appreciate the tips and positive feedback as well.”

“I really appreciate having [my mentor] to collaborate with. She's supportive academically and emotionally.”

“The additional materials like vocabulary builders, math games, 7-step teaching strategies either helped me to save time and focus my energy on other areas, or were great ideas to begin to filter into my instruction. You have always been encouraging, constructive, available, and supportive.”

These results look slightly different from early career teachers located in rural, remote schools in comparison to those in city schools. From the ECT responses to the question, “Your school location” on the 2009–10 survey, the results were broken down into the following four groups: urban (14% of respondents, 46 ECTs), rural on the road system (15% of respondents, 48 ECTs), rural hub off the road system (12% of respondents, 38 ECTs) or rural off the road system (57% of respondents, 180 ECTs). Although teachers in urban schools ranked the ASMP mentor as the 3rd source for receiving the most support next to working with colleagues and informal communication with colleagues, a majority still felt ASMP mentors met their needs and attributed at least some of their success to working with the project. For teachers with fewer colleagues, ASMP ranked higher and higher on support and a higher proportion of ECTs in those locations were satisfied with the project.

<b>ECT Responses 2009–10 by Location Sub-group</b>	<b>urban</b>	<b>rural on road</b>	<b>rural hub off road</b>	<b>rural off road</b>
<i>My mentor meets my needs. (% of ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’)</i>	73%	91%	96%	89%
<i>Of the success you've had as an early career teacher, what proportion would you attribute to help from your mentor? (% of ‘some’ to ‘a great deal’)</i>	72%	80%	86%	84%
<i>From what source do you receive the most support? (ranking of ASMP mentor based on %)</i>	3rd	2nd	2nd	1st

“Not only do I respect her as an experienced, animated, and strong mentor, [my mentor] has also become a friend. I admire her drive and deep desire to aid me in my pursuit to become a better teacher, and I am grateful for her effort to find resources and strategies to reduce classroom and staff issues. She brings a down-to-earth and real-life perspective to surviving and enjoying teaching in rural Alaska.”

“She is a rock when I need impartial advice and has a strong understanding of issues unfamiliar to first-year experience.”

“Great enthusiasm towards completing tasks, excellent array of ideas, extremely helpful in all aspects, considered more than just a mentor.”

“She has had an enormous impact on my teaching! She helps me focus my lessons and provides me with great ideas for future lessons, is completely professional at all times, and her knowledge of the teaching profession is outstanding. She has exceeded my expectations, and I truly hope I will work with her again next year.”

## Survey Results: Site Administrators

Site administrators complete a shorter survey providing satisfaction information from their perspective as well as implementation information. Each year when asked, “Overall, I am satisfied with the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project,” a high majority have chosen agreed or strongly agreed, growing each year from 73% in the first year, 83%, 88%, 82%, 91%, and up to 93% in 2009-2010. More recently, perceptions concerning the two goals of ASMP have been gauged with the header, “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?”, and results are shown in the table below.

<b>Site Administrator Responses</b>	<b>2008–09</b>	<b>2009–10</b>
<i>The Alaska Statewide Mentor Project has positively impacted student achievement in my district. (% of ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’)</i>	75% of all responses 90% of responses eliminating 15% “does not apply”	75% of all responses 85% of responses eliminating 11% “does not apply”
<i>The Alaska Statewide Mentor Project has positively impacted teacher retention in my district. (% of ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’)</i>	80% of all responses 91% of responses eliminating 12% “does not apply”	79% of all responses 90% of responses eliminating 9% “does not apply”

Each year when asked what is most effective about ASMP from a site administrator’s perspective, the most common ideas include the ECT having an unbiased person from outside the district, a non-evaluative person, someone who is confidential, and another person to provide suggestions on improving practice and effective instruction. There is a growing camaraderie between mentors and site administrators as ASMP continues to improve on how to communicate effectively with principals while maintaining confidentiality with the early career teacher. Recently, one site administrator wrote, “[The mentor] is a professional who knows what she’s doing. Her attention to detail and high expectation helps mold a new teacher into an educator who also takes on those professional characteristics exhibited by the mentor. With her experience and higher standard the mentor is able to ‘groom’ the new teacher into a confident individual who sets higher standards for himself/herself.”

When asked what they would change, the most resounding comment is to have more face-to-face, on-site visits—a sentiment echoed in both the ECT and mentor surveys. Currently, we use our restricted resources to serve as many ECTs as possible in a high quality manner. Over time, ASMP hopes to serve all teachers new to the profession in an intensive manner as well as serve teachers new to the state, regardless of experience, in the most effective ways.

## Where are ASMP Mentors Now?

ASMP mentors undergo an intensive two-year professional development program to learn how to work with adults, use mentor language, and employ a formative assessment system with ECTs that is grounded in teaching standards. Although no rigorous research has been done to see how this professional development affects ASMP mentors after they exit the project, research plans include investigating qualitatively these effects on the first 74 ASMP mentors. At this time, about 23% of mentors have gone “forward” into the classroom, using their newly found knowledge to continue to improve their own instruction. Another 9% of mentors are now working as site administrators in the state, integrating their acquired knowledge into the system through instructional leadership. The majority, 28%, have moved into other leadership positions either with their districts, or through additional educational opportunities with EED, UA, AASB or NEA. Of the remaining 39%, 17% are retired and may be volunteering as leaders in their community, while 22% continue working with the project as mentors or trainers.

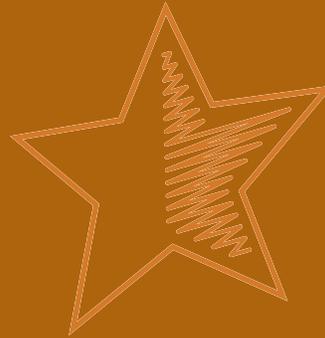
## Online Survey Response Rates

ASMP continues to ensure the online surveys are of high quality and credibility. Each year the project aims for at least a 70% response rate from each of the participant groups. This has been achieved almost all years for ECTs and more recently with site administrators.

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%

“The broad perspective and research based ideas and encouragement have been priceless for my new teachers. Their cheerful and positive variety of help from listening to modeling to assisting with data collection has really helped my newer teachers fill less overwhelmed. They have particularly helped them find balance which is essential for longevity in the profession.”—*Site Administrator*

Please note: This version of the ASMP Research Summary 2004–2010 has been modified from its original publication. It has been formatted for electronic distribution, or to be printed on standard 8.5” by 11” portrait-oriented pages.



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