

Alaska Statewide Mentor Project

Research Summary
2004-2018



14 Year Edition

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Research Summary 2004-2018

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Alaska Statewide Mentor Project

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The Alaska Statewide Mentor Project exists to lift up and support the profession of teaching in Alaska. The project provides individualized support to first- and second-year teachers, developing an effective teaching force that is responsive to the diverse academic needs and cultural backgrounds of all students.

2018-2019 Alaska Statewide Mentor Project Mentors, coordinators, and staff



Back row (left to right): Jan Littlebear, Ed Sotelo, Hal Neace, Glenda Findlay, Sue McIntosh, Linda Frey, Sandi Immel-Boyd, Don Campbell.

Middle row (left to right): Keiko Herrick, Kellie Pitman, Karen Doyle, Marilyn White, Liz Will.

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The Alaska Statewide Mentor Project

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“The professional development the mentors receive helps them provide effective support to ECTs. Providing teachers with support in their instruction, classroom management, finding balance are all extremely valuable. The mentor that has been working with our teachers has been able to build trusting relationships with all the ECTs she works with which in turn allows her to provide valuable feedback, listen to challenges and help in valuable ways.”

— Site Administrator

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 the norms of collaboration, high expectations, equity, ongoing inquiry, and reflective practice. Mentors support ECTs through mentoring data collection tools. Using these tools, mentors and ECTs collaborate to collect data, identify ECT needs, and establish goals during weekly communication and on-site or video-recorded observation cycles of teaching practice.

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.

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 if 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.

Swivl observation

Since 2015, ASMP has increasingly employed the Swivl system¹ 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.

“Without my ASMP mentor, I would have left last year for sure and wouldn’t have returned to help my students. I have been able to reflect on myself and my teaching practice to become a more effective educator.”

— Early Career Teacher

¹Swivl.com

Project numbers since inception

The Alaska Statewide Mentor Project began in 2004. The project has served, on average, 400 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 teachers, the program serves **approximately 6,000 K-12 students** each year.

Currently, ASMP is focusing its resources on teachers in schools identified as Priority or Focus by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (AKDEED). Priority and Focus schools are those that AKDEED has determined could benefit the most from additional support. These designations are based on Alaska School Performance Index (ASPI²) scores, graduation rates, and other school characteristics. Since AY1718, ASMP has been able to serve 100% of early career teachers in 1- and 2-star ASPI schools that have requested mentor support.

Who are mentors?

ASMP has trained 126 mentors since 2004. Mentors are experienced Alaska K-12 educators who are fully released from teaching to devote their time to mentoring. An ASMP mentor is a knowledgeable colleague, confidante, 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 (Figure 1).

² Alaska Department of Education & Early Development. (2014). Alaska School Performance Index (ASPI): 2013-2014 school rating details. Retrieved from https://education.alaska.gov/aspi/pdf/statewide_summary_2013.pdf.

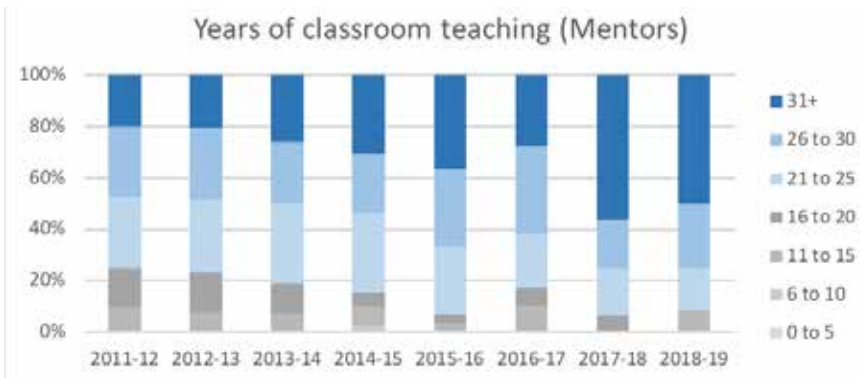


Figure 1: Distribution of mentor classroom teaching experience, AY1112-AY1819

Mentor training and support

New mentors undergo two years of intensive professional development where they learn best mentoring practices while working 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 different peer mentors each year with whom they collaborate and problem solve.

After the initial two years, mentors continue to receive just-in-time training during professional development sessions throughout the year. These trainings include in-person sessions and online work sessions covering general mentoring topics as well as sessions focusing on topics for using distance technologies. All professional development is infused with the importance of cultural relevance. 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?

ECTs are teachers 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. From 2004 through academic year 2018-2019, **ASMP has served over 5,000³ individual ECTs.**

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. 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 6% took an alternative path to certification including AKT2 (Alaska Transition to Teaching; Figure 2).

- 66% are female
- 68% are 30 years old or less (Figure 3)
- 81% are Caucasian with the next largest ethnic group being American Indian/Alaska Native (4.8%; Figure 4).

Teacher certification

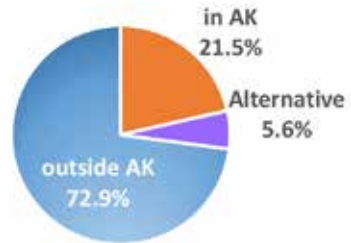


Figure 2: Percent ECT certification route, includes both rural and urban ECTs. Percentages are calculated from average of responses on ASMP year-end ECT survey, AY1112-AY1718.



Figure 3: Distribution of teacher age from responses on ASMP year-end ECT survey, AY1112-AY1718.

³ Internal data.

⁴ Shaw, D. G., Hirshberg, D., & Hill, A. (2013). Why aren't they teaching? A study of why some University of Alaska teacher education graduates aren't in classrooms. Policy Brief 1: UAA Center for Alaska Education Policy Research.

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. Furthermore, Alaska is the only state with Cultural Standards for Educators⁵, and ASMP mentors are trained in implementing these standards to help their mentees “teach through culture” to keep material engaging and relevant for Alaskan students.

Schools

ASMP has served over **80 percent of all Alaska schools in 52 of the 54 school districts** for at least one year. 76% of ECTs served by ASMP taught in remote, rural schools that are not connected to the road system; 24% were in urban and rural areas accessible by road (Figure 5). 92% of ECTs teach in schools with less than 450 students enrolled (Figure 6).

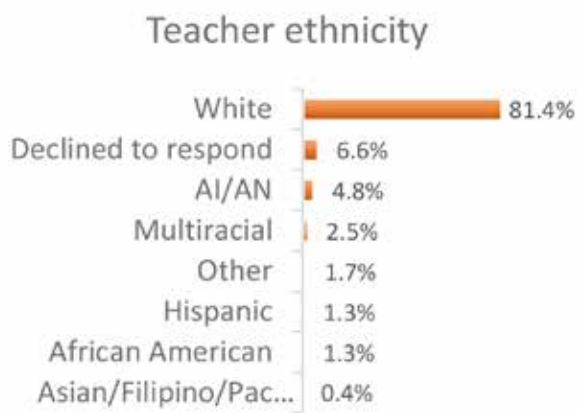


Figure 4: Self-reported ethnicity from ASMP year-end ECT survey, AY0405-AY1718.

⁵ https://education.alaska.gov/akstandards/cultural/cultural_standards.pdf

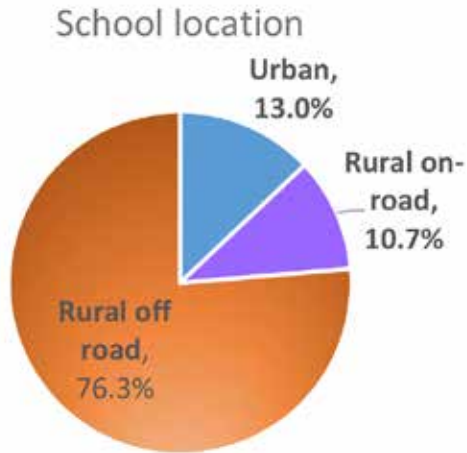


Figure 5: School location calculated from average of responses on ASMP year-end ECT survey, AY0809 - AY1718.

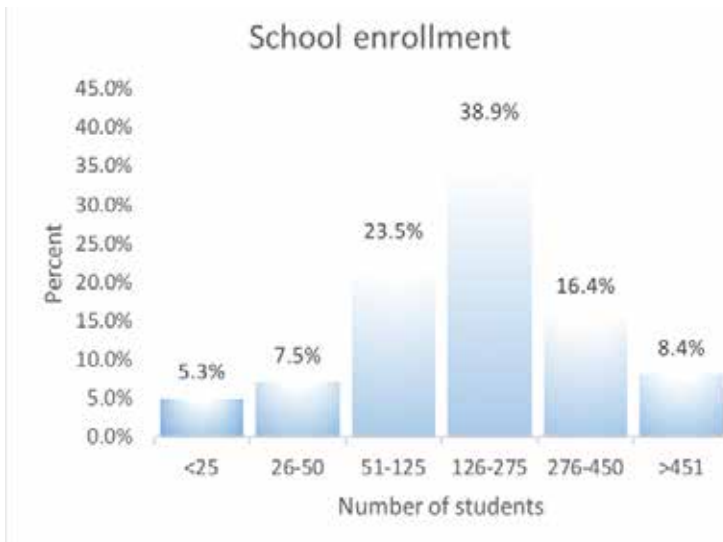


Figure 6: School size (enrollment) calculated from average responses on ASMP year-end ECT survey, AY0809 - AY1718.

Rural teacher turnover

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%⁶. 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 at rural sites.

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

— Site Administrator

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.

⁷ Selected “Agree more than Disagree,” “Agree,” or “Strongly Agree” in response to this question.

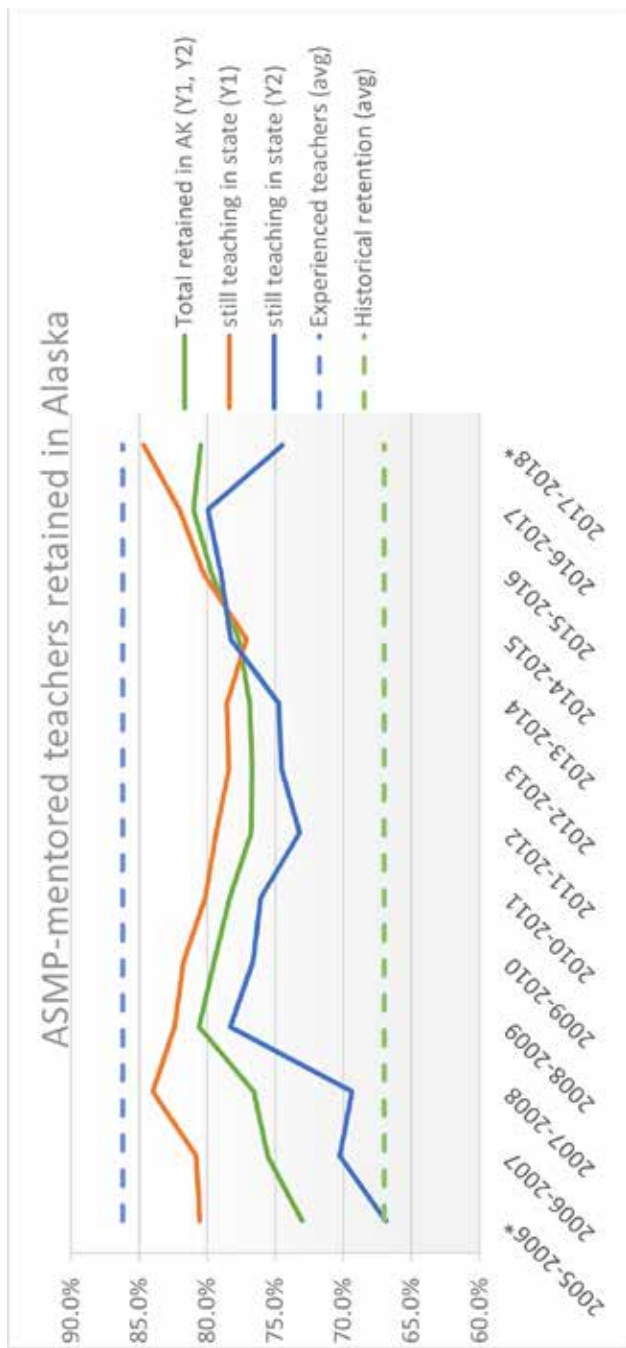


Figure 7: Percentage of teachers retained in their rural district calculated as 3-year weighted rolling averages.* Only 2 years of data available for calculations. Experienced teacher retention data obtained from Alaska Department of Education & Early Development. Historical retention average from Hill & Hirschberg (2008). 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.

In particular, 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 agreed⁷ that having an ASMP mentor had been beneficial to their teaching** (Figure 8).

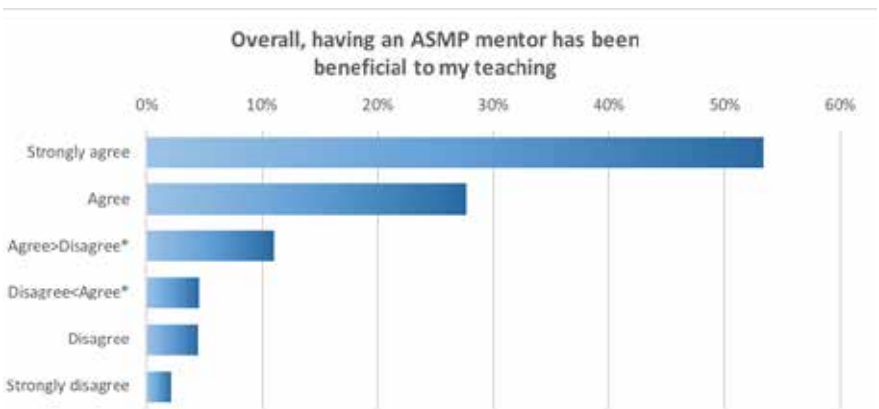


Figure 8: Percentage of respondents for each category of “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?” from ASMP year-end ECT survey. * “Agree more than Disagree” and “Disagree more than Agree” were not answer options prior to AY2013-2014.

86% ECTs attributed “Some,” “Quite a bit,” or “A great deal” of their success to their mentor (Figure 9).

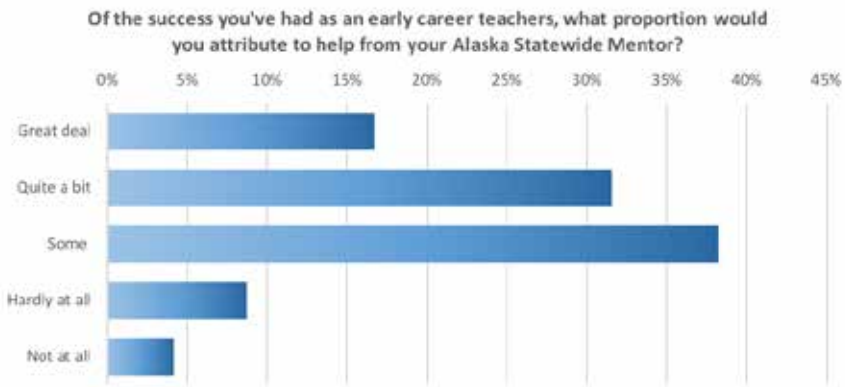


Figure 9: Percentage of respondents for each category of “Of the success you’ve had as an early career teachers, what proportion would you attribute to help from your Alaska Statewide Mentor?” from ASMP year-end ECT survey.

“The fact that I can reach my mentor anytime is invaluable, and knowing that he is non-evaluative. I can talk to him about my concerns regarding literally anything in the classroom and be frank and clear in my question, without needing to worry about how to phrase things appropriately to an administrator/supervisor.”

— Early Career Teacher

Highlights from AERA Conference paper submission:

“Mentoring early career teachers: What is most helpful?”

ASMP-UGO received federal funding under the Investing in Innovation Fund (i3) program for a rigorous study of project impact in five urban Alaska school districts. Using UGO data, this paper sought to determine differences (if any) in what ECTs find most helpful in the mentoring process after one year of mentoring. This study compared the reported experience of ECTs participating in ASMP UGO and ASMP Rural with a control group that received “Business as Usual” (BAU) mentoring. Teachers in the BAU group received whatever mentoring—formal or informal—that was available to them.

Data used in the analysis were open-ended responses by post-Year 1 teachers to the question “What did you receive the most help with to improve your teaching experience?” from the year-end ASMP survey. Coding schemes were developed and identified through analysis of survey data. Coded responses were then ranked by frequency with which they were mentioned by ECTs. Tests for differences in the proportion of ECTs addressing a particular theme between conditions were conducted using N-1 Pearson’s chi-squared test⁸.

- “Pedagogical skills” was the most mentioned category for all three groups, perhaps not surprisingly considering pedagogy is a teacher’s primary function and concern.
- UGO ECTs were more likely than other groups to report help in areas related to teaching as a profession, such as

⁸ Campbell, I. (2007). Chi-squared and Fisher–Irwin tests of two-by-two tables with small sample recommendations. *Statistics in Medicine*, 26(19), 3661-3675.

professional growth, collegial support, and the Observation/
Data Collection/Feedback cycle.

- Rural ECTs made little mention of the Observation Cycle and instead expressed appreciation for collegial support, resources, and classroom/behavior management. Rural teachers often feel isolated and lack resources such as libraries and reliable internet available in urban settings.
- Teachers in the BAU group did not mention help in professional growth, collegial support, or the Observation Cycle as frequently as UGO teachers, but did rank organizational knowledge as the second most frequently mentioned support. In urban districts with no mandated mentor program, mentors are often colleagues in the building who are not trained in the observation cycle and not released full-time to observe beginning teachers.

“I have used the ASMP with my first years of teaching. A great program that should be available to all new teachers to Alaska’s education system.”

— Site Administrator

Highlights from ASMP report on Superintendent Tenure in Alaska

The high turnover rate that challenges Alaskan schools is not limited to new teachers alone, school districts also appear to have high turnover at administrative levels as well. This report examined historical superintendent data collected by the Alaska Superintendent Association⁹ (years 1976 through 2015) in order to answer three different questions:

1. What is the average tenure by year?
2. What is the turnover rate of Alaskan superintendents?
3. How long can a superintendent be expected to stay in their current position?

Average current tenure

For a given year, how long has the current superintendent held their position? As a standard statistic, this is a convenient figure for comparison with averages of other groups. The mean for all districts was calculated for a given year. The first five years (1976-1977 through 1980-1981) were excluded because the school districts and superintendent positions had just been established and averages were skewed toward low values. For all districts, over the study period (1976-2015), the average tenure of Alaska superintendents is 3.4 years, compared to the national average of 5-6 years¹⁰ (Figure 10).

⁹ Alaska Association of Superintendents. (2015). Superintendent History 1976-2015. In Superintendent-History-Protected.pdf. <http://www.alaskaacsa.org>

¹⁰ Superintendent and District Data. (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=740>



Figure 10: Average current tenure by year is plotted by calculating the mean for the number of years served by the current superintendents for each year. Districts with partial terms or no data were excluded from calculations for that year.

Turnover rate

Turnover rate is commonly used to examine the question “How many newly filled positions are there in a given year?” We calculated the forward cohort divided by the total number of positions for a given year, where the forward cohort is the number of first-year positions. This assumes an exit or interim period the year before. While the turnover rates range widely, from 7.4% to

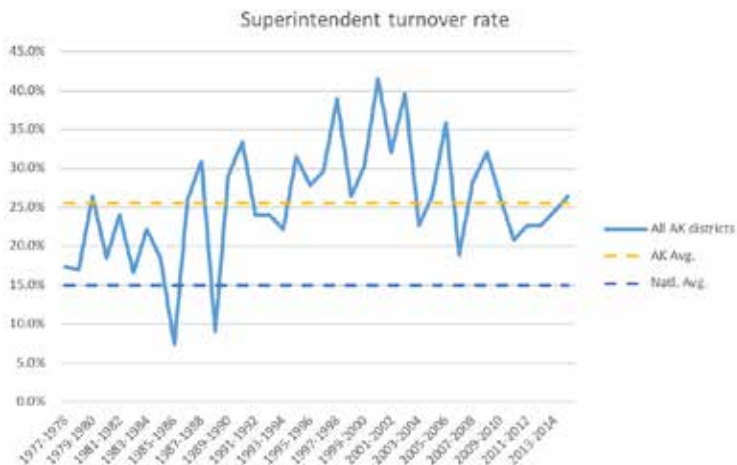


Figure 11: this figure shows the percentage of first-year positions occupied each year. A superintendent’s first full year was counted as their first year, rather than a partial term the previous year.

41.5%, the majority of turnover occurs between 20 and 40%. At an average 24%, the turnover rate for Alaska is far higher than the national average of 14-16%¹¹ (Figure 11).

Full Tenure

Full tenure asks, “How long can the person who begins service now be expected to last?” and is calculated from historical data where the length of tenures of most superintendents is known¹². There may have been a few who served years after the period of available data, but not enough to skew the results and disrupt the general trend. To avoid biases at the beginning and end of the dataset, the first data point is taken 5 years after the creation of the school districts (AY1980-81) and the last data point is taken 5 years before the end of the dataset (AY2010-11). Average full tenure of Alaskan superintendents is 6.1 years (Figure 12).

“My mentor went above and beyond in always bringing resources with her visits and these were most appreciated as well, teaching in a remote area where there is [no] store :)”

— Early Career Teacher

¹¹ Superintendent and District Data. (2017). Retrieved from: <http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=740>.

¹² Yee, G., & Cuban, L. (1996). When is tenure long enough? A historical analysis of superintendent turnover and tenure in urban school districts. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 32(Suppl.), 615-641.

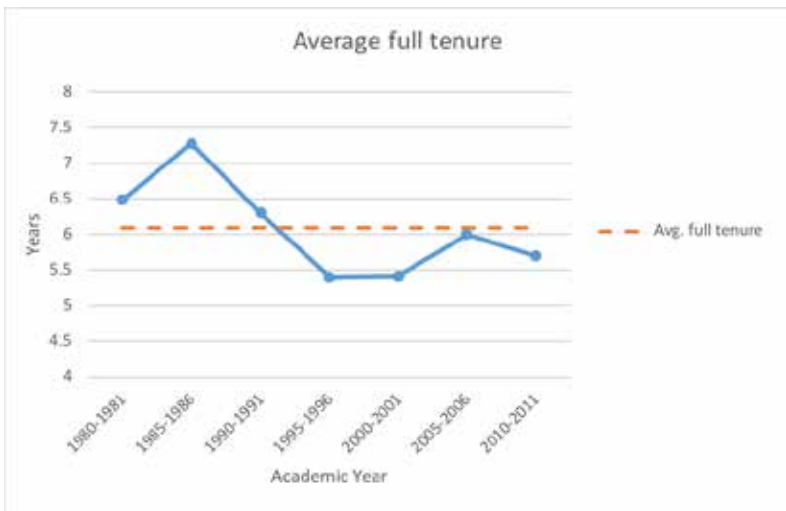


Figure 12: Average full tenure of all superintendents. Partial terms were not included in the calculations of a superintendent's full tenure.

Conclusions

This high rate of turnover and short terms of service may be due in part to superintendent contracts in Alaska. While there is no mandated method of hiring and contracting, three years is the maximum contract length, after which, the board must decide whether to renew. That being said, initial contracts are often for less than three years and contracts can be extended at any time, or may be automatically extended if no action is taken by a deadline.

Average tenure by year is relatively flat. Upon examination of the figures, it appears that superintendents served longer in the 80s than they do currently. This trend is reflected in superintendent turnover and average full tenure. Turnover rate was mostly below average for the 70s and 80s, then mostly average and above average after AY1987-88. Full tenure was above average until the AY1995-96 data point when it dropped below average. Though the rate of turnover has increased since the 80s, average tenure, rate of turnover, and full tenures have remained fairly stable since then.



“Overall support from the statewide mentor - the new teachers appreciate the additional support which is crucial during those first two years in bush Alaska.”

— Site Administrator



“Our post-lesson conferences are an excellent way to receive feedback and to have someone familiar with my classroom and students offer very valuable and practical advice.”

— Early Career Teacher

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