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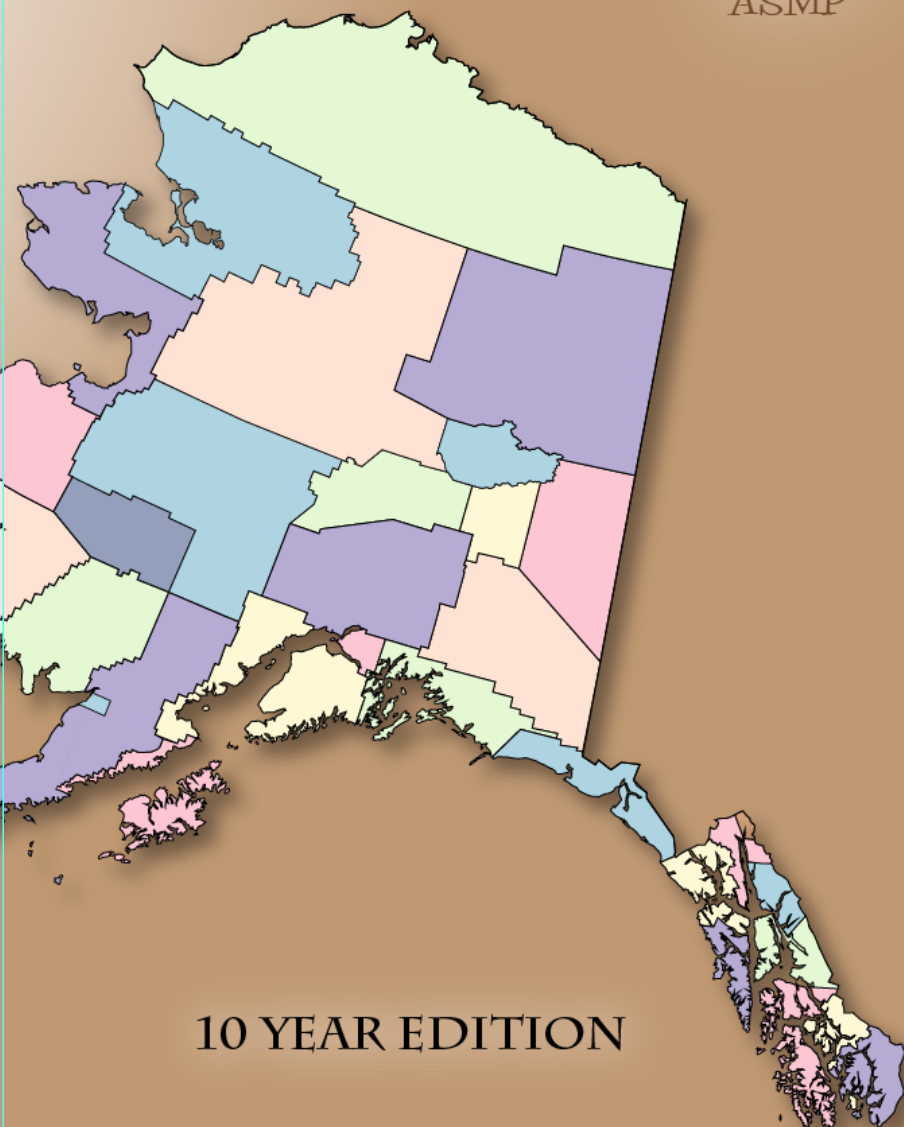
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# Alaska Statewide Mentor Project

RESEARCH SUMMARY  
2004-2014



10 YEAR EDITION



## 2014-2015 Alaska Statewide Mentor Project: Mentors, Coordinators and Staff

*(Back row, from left to right)* Craig Baldwin, Don Campbell, Ed Sotelo, Todd Carlson, Kris Selman, Dave Boyd, Charlie Costello, Hal Neace, Laurel Dietz, Trish Johnston, Linda Frey; *(fourth row)* Jan Littlebear, Sandi Toth, Kirstie Willean, Karen Remick, Deb McCabe, Cathé Rhodes, Cathy Kibling, Marilyn White, Cynthia Petrovich, Lindy Kinn, Sue McIntosh, Judy Youngquist, John Nielsen; *(third row)* Lisa Stewart, Stacey Wayne, Woody Wilson, Ann Ness, Beth Hartley, Marcia Indahl, Jenny Carlson, Glenda Findlay, Brenda Luthi, Abby Augustine; *(second row)* Karen Doyle, Christine Walker, Marc Robinson, Kathleen Wright, Liz Will, Carol Jerue; *(first row)* Marie Angaiak, Kellie Pitman, Betty Walters, Debbie Hawkins, Maureen Petrunic, Roxa Hawkins.

# The Alaska Statewide Mentor Project

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## About the Project

The Alaska Statewide Mentor Project (ASMP) is a partnership between the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development (EED) 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 continuous training enabling them to support ECTs through formative assessment tools used to collaborate with ECTs toward identifying ECT needs and meeting ECT goals via weekly contact at a distance, and monthly face-to-face visits.

## Alaska Statewide Mentors

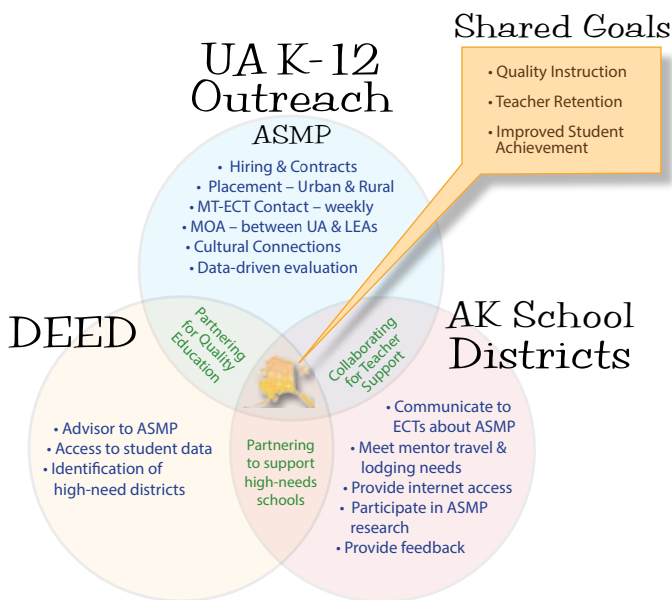
ASMP Mentors are experienced teachers from across the state who work with ECTs during their first and second year as classroom teachers. Mentors provide instructional mentoring and support to ECTs. An ASMP Mentor is a knowledgeable confidant, problem solver, emotional and professional supporter, and a co-teacher who models lessons to meet the needs of ECTs' students. Since the mentoring relationship is not evaluative, ASMP Mentors employ a formative assessment system, aligned to state standards to guide teacher practice.

## ASMP Research

ASMP Research Team collects data to answer a variety of questions 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 on participants to guide programmatic changes; these include evaluations after each Mentor Academy, mentor focus groups and annual on-line surveys of ECTs, their site administrators and ASMP mentors.

## Research Goals by Funding Source

Data is 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 and long-term (5-year) teacher retention, and the rate of ECT professional growth.



## Alaska Department of Education & Early Development (EED)

ASMP provides mentor support to high-needs schools as identified by the Alaska School Performance Index (ASPI). The ASMP Research Team conducts studies of interest to the EED and UA partnership. Recent research funded through EED focuses on the effects of ASMP mentoring on special education ECTs and the academic achievement of their students.

## Alaska Humanities Forum (AKHF)

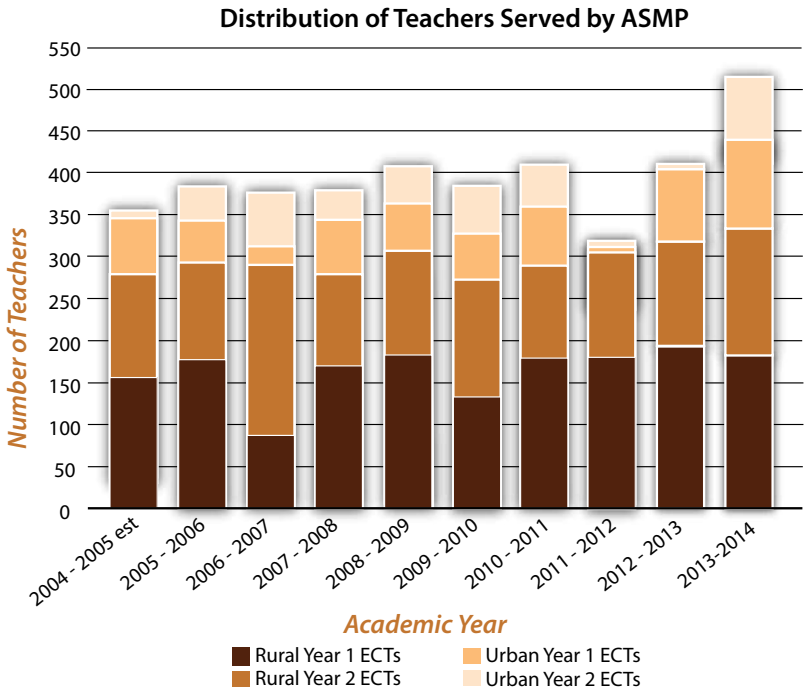
The focus of this organization is on the creation of culturally experienced mentors and ECTs through professional development such as cultural camps. From 2011-12 to 2013-14 the ASMP Research Team supplied data to the evaluators of the Alaska Humanities Forum's Creating Cultural Competence (C3) grant. ASMP data were merged with AKHF datasets to investigate how creating culturally competent ECTs affected teacher retention and teacher satisfaction from Lower Kuskokwim and Northwest Arctic Borough School Districts. In the fall of 2015, UA and AKHF will continue this study with an additional outcome measure: student achievement.

## University of Alaska (UA)

In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education funded ASMP's Urban Growth Opportunity (UGO) with an Investing in Innovation (i3) grant. This five-year validation study examines effectiveness of the ASMP model in urban contexts. This study's outcome measures are teacher effectiveness, student achievement and teacher retention. UGO external evaluators gather and analyze data to measure ASMP's fidelity of implementation, and assess the differences between ECTs who do and do not receive ASMP mentoring at five urban school districts: Anchorage, Fairbanks, Mat-Su, Kenai Peninsula and Sitka. In the spring of 2014, the UGO study was in its third year with the recruitment of a third cohort of ECTs.

## Project Numbers Since Inception

Project numbers since inception have remained consistent, serving on average about 392 ECTs a year. In the beginning years of the project, about 75 percent of the ECTs served by ASMP were from rural districts with the remaining 25 percent from urban districts in the state. Through academic year 2013-14, ASMP has served over 2,300 individual ECTs through training of nearly 130 experienced Alaska teachers as high-quality mentors. From 2004 to 2014, ASMP has been invited into 52 of the 54 school districts within the state. To date, over 80 percent of all Alaska schools (235 in 2013-14 school year) have been served by ASMP at least for one year.





## *A Study of Mid-Career Teachers Mentored by ASMP*

One study investigated the success of ECTs who served in 2004-05 and 2005-06 who were still teaching in the state five years or longer. Longitudinal retention rates were calculated to see how improvements in yearly retention appeared to have influenced long-term (retention) success. This “Mid-Career Teacher” study focused on determining the five-year retention rates of ECTs served by ASMP, and the factors that seem to have allowed the teachers to be successful and remain teaching in the state. Of the teachers served by ASMP in the first two years of the project, 56 percent remained teaching in Alaska’s public K-12 school system after five 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. These components of teacher efficacy also contributed to the teachers’ ability to cope with the stressors associated with teaching in Alaska.

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 “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.

- **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; adjusting culturally biased classroom curriculum, teaching style, or how course content is presented appropriate to the situation; viewing each student as an individual, then working to meet the student’s specific needs.

Many teachers 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 the ASMP 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.



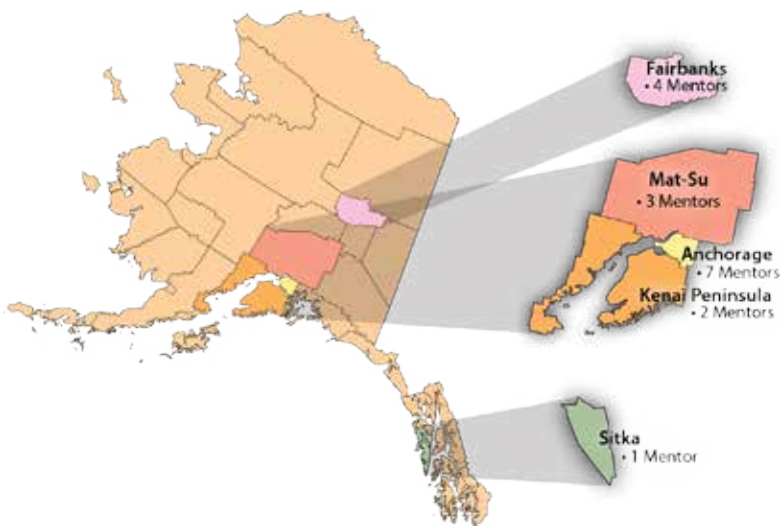
## Teacher Efficacy Model

ECTs 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

The U.S. Department of Education awarded funding to ASMP project through an Investing in Innovation (i3) grant, starting in January 2012. The grant expands the ASMP mentoring services to urban districts. Historically, ASMP services have been provided primarily in Alaska's rural districts. ECTs in five urban districts are randomly assigned to a mentoring model: either the ASMP model or the "Business As Usual" model, which is the current ECT support model in place within that district. The UGO study measures the impact of the ASMP mentoring model on teacher effectiveness, student achievement and teacher retention. If the study shows the ASMP model is effective in urban areas, it is possible that other states may adopt the Alaska mentoring model.

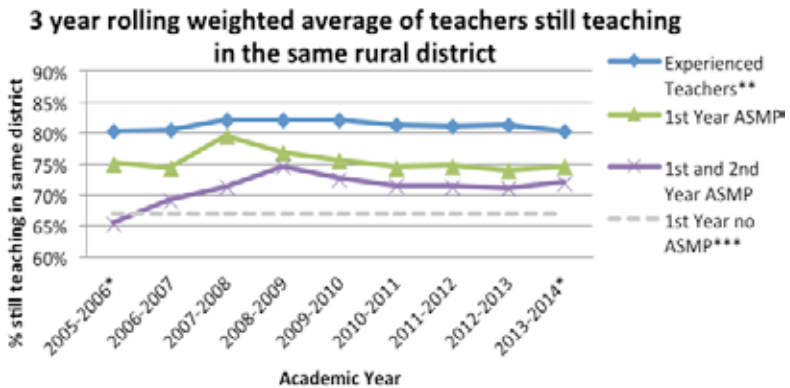


**Urban Districts Participating in the UGO Study in 2013-14**

## Examining the Gap in Rural Teacher Retention

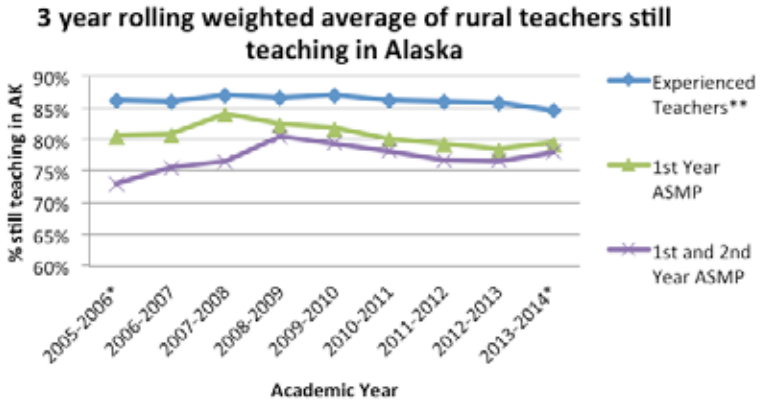
ASMP has been serving rural districts in Alaska since the 2004-05 academic year. Teacher retention is defined as a teacher remaining in the Alaska public K-12 school system from one year to the next. Historically, Alaska has had some difficulty with retaining teachers, especially beginning teachers in rural areas. 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 percent compared to 83 percent (Hill & Hirschberg, 2008). But how does this data compare to what has been transpiring with ASMP-mentored ECTs?

To get a more accurate picture of the retention rate in rural sites, three-year rolling averages were computed. Looking at rural teachers staying in the same rural district, experienced teachers' average retention rate is hovering around 81 percent; but interestingly, ASMP mentored first year teachers' and ASMP first and



second year teachers' retention averages are about 75 percent and 71 percent, respectively. Moreover, for teachers still teaching in Alaska, the gaps between experienced and ASMP-mentored ECTs appear to be similar to the pattern for those who stay teaching in the same rural districts: Experienced teachers tend to stay teaching in Alaska at higher rates (approximately 86 percent) than first and second year ASMP mentored ECTs (approximately 77 percent).

In analyzing this data, it is important to note that teachers leave their teaching situation or the teaching profession for a multitude of reasons; some reasons are exogenous, e.g., getting married; hence, they cannot be impacted by contextual factors. Keeping this in mind, it appears that ASMP is making an impact on rural retention rate.



\*only used 2 years in rolling averages

\*\* data obtained from Alaska Department of Education Certified Staff Accounting Database, as analyzed by Alexandra Hill, Research Associate, Institute of Social and Economic Research, January, 2015

\*\*\*projected rural retention rate of 1st year ECTs without ASMP, based on Hill & Hirshberg (2008)

— 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 on-line 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 programmatic adjustments when necessary, ASMP Research Team collects two types of data:

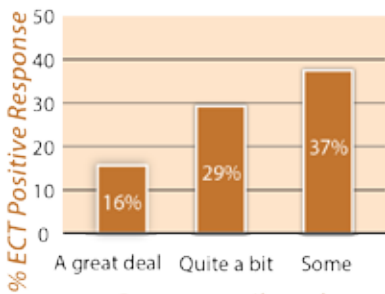
**quantitative**—these data lend themselves to being represented numerically, either by count, assigned ranking, or percentage. Quantitative data are often used to determine trends within a sample from the population being studied.

**qualitative**—these data often give a more in-depth picture especially contextual aspects, which cannot be captured through quantitative data.

## Results of Closed-Ended Survey Responses

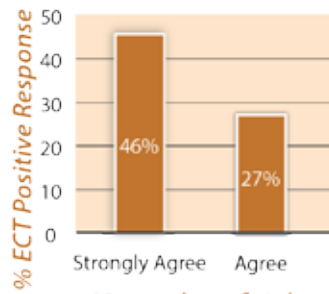
An important set of quantitative data comes from closed-ended survey questions, where participants are able to select from a range of established responses. Depending on the content of the question being asked, respondents may be allowed to choose only one from a set of possible responses; in other cases, they may be allowed to choose more than one response. The following 2013-14 data from 257 respondents indicate that ASMP is making a difference for Alaska ECTs.

### Closed-Ended Survey Results



#### Success attributed to Mentor guidance

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



#### Mentor beneficial to teaching

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

## 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 percent) 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:



Rate your overall experience with ASMP:  
• 97% of districts are "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the project.



Do you feel mentoring by ASMP has helped increase retention of early career teachers in your district?  
• 84% of districts feel the project has helped increase retention "a lot," "quite a bit," or "some."



Do you feel mentoring by ASMP has helped to improve student achievement in classrooms of early career teachers in your district?  
• 88% of districts feel the project has helped improve student achievement "a lot," "quite a bit," or "some."

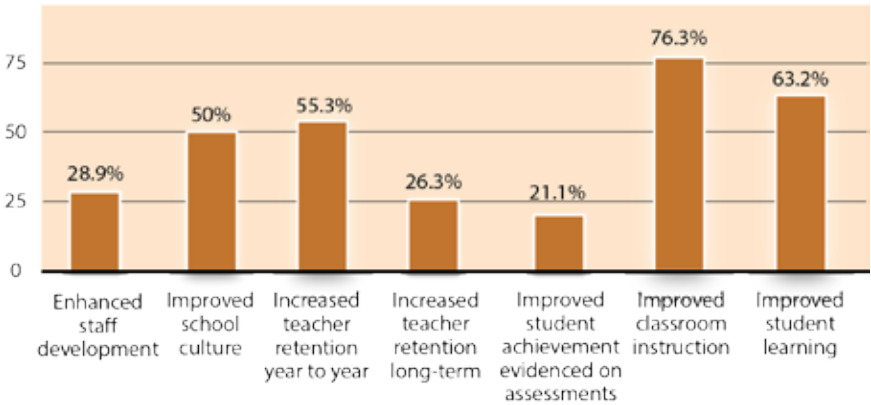


Do you feel mentoring by ASMP has helped to improve instruction in classrooms of early career teachers in your district?  
• 89% of districts feel the project has helped improve instruction "a lot," "quite a bit," or "some."



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 continue to validate the positive impact that Alaska Statewide Mentors have on ECTs and their schools. Here are some of the responses from 2012-13 and 2013-14 site administrator surveys:

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

The personalized attention given to each early (career) teacher is one of the most important aspects of ASMP Project. Mentors are often honest and can delve into areas where some administrators are cautious to get into, especially for weak teachers. Mentors assist early career teachers in all areas. The personal relationships built with early career teachers make the program very successful (2014 Survey).

Their work is targeted and focused on elements that directly influence instruction, assessment, classroom environments and planning. When a new teacher begins, the mentor can give them strategies that will develop their skills and influence student achievement (2013 Survey).

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

Adversely! The State of Alaska cannot grow its own teaching force, it must be imported. As a result, our teacher and administrator turnover rate is detrimental to continuity of instruction. Our students suffer in many, many ways from this turnover. The mentor program helps stabilize teacher turnover because of its role in developing rural teachers. Without mentors, our teachers are on their own (2014 Survey).

My immediate reaction to this question was noooooo! The mentors are such great support. They become part of our staff. When they are here it feels like they are just another staff member. Another person who cares about our students and their success. I don't know of an administrator anywhere who has the time to provide as much support as new teachers need. The state mentors take some of this off our plates and are able to provide the support in a very non-threatening way (2013 Survey).

First and second year teachers have a very difficult time and enter our rural schools with limited knowledge of culture and teaching experience. The mentors help bridge this gap for them. They know what the teachers don't know and what they need to know. They then coach them to gain the knowledge. Bottom line is this: mentors have a direct positive impact on the teachers that impact student learning (2013 Survey).

### The Many Mentor Roles



### Notes to Mentors from Early Career Teachers

#### Resource

I feel fortunate to have had such a great mentor, always encouraging and providing support and feedback. It was always nice to discuss district, school and classroom issues with someone outside of the district and school for which I work. To continue, my mentor had provided me with a lot of resources to use in the classroom. He has

also helped me out a lot with my work towards my certification: editing, revising, giving advice and looking over my portfolio (2013 Survey).

### **Problem Solver**

My mentor has been great. She is always helpful and is really great at helping you realize what you are doing right. Then we come up with plans to improve. She is also a great sounding board for problems and issues I am having. I am moving schools within the district this year and I hope that I will still be able to have her as my mentor for my second year (2014 Survey).

### **Assessor**

This year's mentor has been a great asset to my teaching. He comes in with a good amount of heads-up via email. He works to tell me what he will be looking for, but also what I would like him to look for. When we are debriefing what he saw, he is a great help in opening my eyes on things I haven't noticed. He is also very encouraging. It is nice to have someone come in about once a month to give you positive feedback about what they see you doing in your classroom. His knowledge has been a great help in learning to work with some of my students (2014 Survey).

### **Coach**

I love the fact that you are always there for me when I need assistance and you don't limit your help to only educationally based. It's nice to be able to vent to someone and tell them how things are really going instead of putting on a front. If you don't mind an email from me every so often even though I will not be one of your mentees anymore. I appreciate all that you do for me and the other first and second year teachers. Thank you so much for all of your help (2013 Survey).

### **Teacher**

I feel absolutely blessed to have my Alaska Statewide Mentor. The first year of teaching has had its ups and downs and she has been

a knowledgeable sounding board for all of them. I appreciate her vast knowledge about PBIS (Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support) and her dedication to training our group of new teachers about the district policies. I feel that she has made a tremendous impact on my teaching ability and the past year of mentorship has increased my success rate on the profession. Well done! Thank you for your patience, kindness and encouragement (2013 Survey).

### **Facilitator**

One of the goals we had set this year and worked towards was to have effective assessments and differentiating assessments. With the help of my mentor, I have started to use a variety of formative assessments in my classroom and can use the data to adjust my teaching and to form upcoming units and to reteach concepts. We were able to collaborate on types of assessments and what they could look like in my classroom. It was also very helpful to have my mentor's science expertise to help me in differentiating my science assessment and activities to reach the variety of learners in my room (2014 Survey).

### **Learner**

My mentor supported my Personal Learning Community personal and community goals by researching and finding professional resources to help me improve my guided reading practice. This allowed me to nurture my students and help them meet their first grade standards. I am happy to report that they are all at or above first grade benchmark. YEAH!!! Her support exceeded my expectations (2014 Survey).

I love my mentor! She has been such a blessing to me during my first year of teaching. She offers wonderful, specific encouragement. She provides practical resources that can be implemented in the classroom right away, and are relevant to what I am teaching. She is empathetic and real. She is an intellectual educator who values students, calling them "scholars." She is an excellent example for me, and I highly value her input and feedback. Absolutely zero

complaints. Rather, I could go on and on about how remarkable my mentor is. I am extremely thankful for her and her support (2013 Survey).

### **Advocate**

This is my last and final year with Alaska Statewide Mentor Project and I need to let you know how much the program has helped me to grow as a professional. I will be forever grateful for the wisdom, support and guidance that was provided through my mentors! Thank you for helping me find my very own personal teaching style, validating my strengths and giving me the courage to reach for the stars! I look forward to many more years of teaching !!! Thanks again for your expertise (2014 Survey).

### **Today and Beyond**

During the 2014-15 academic year, the ASMP Research Team in collaboration with the Office of K-12 Outreach's Media Specialist have been creating an electronic system of mentor tools and forms. Mentors use these tools to document their standards-based work with ECTs, to support the instructional development of their ECTs and to allow the mentors the means to reflect on their own mentoring practice.

In addition, the ASMP Research Team has been developing two databases: one live and the other archived. Data collected from the on-line tool-suite; the ECT and mentor demographics forms; yearly ECT, mentor and site administrator surveys and other data garnered from research will be housed within these databases. The aim is to create an integrated and unified system which can be easily accessed by the ASMP Research Team to answer future research questions and allow for continual programmatic evaluation.