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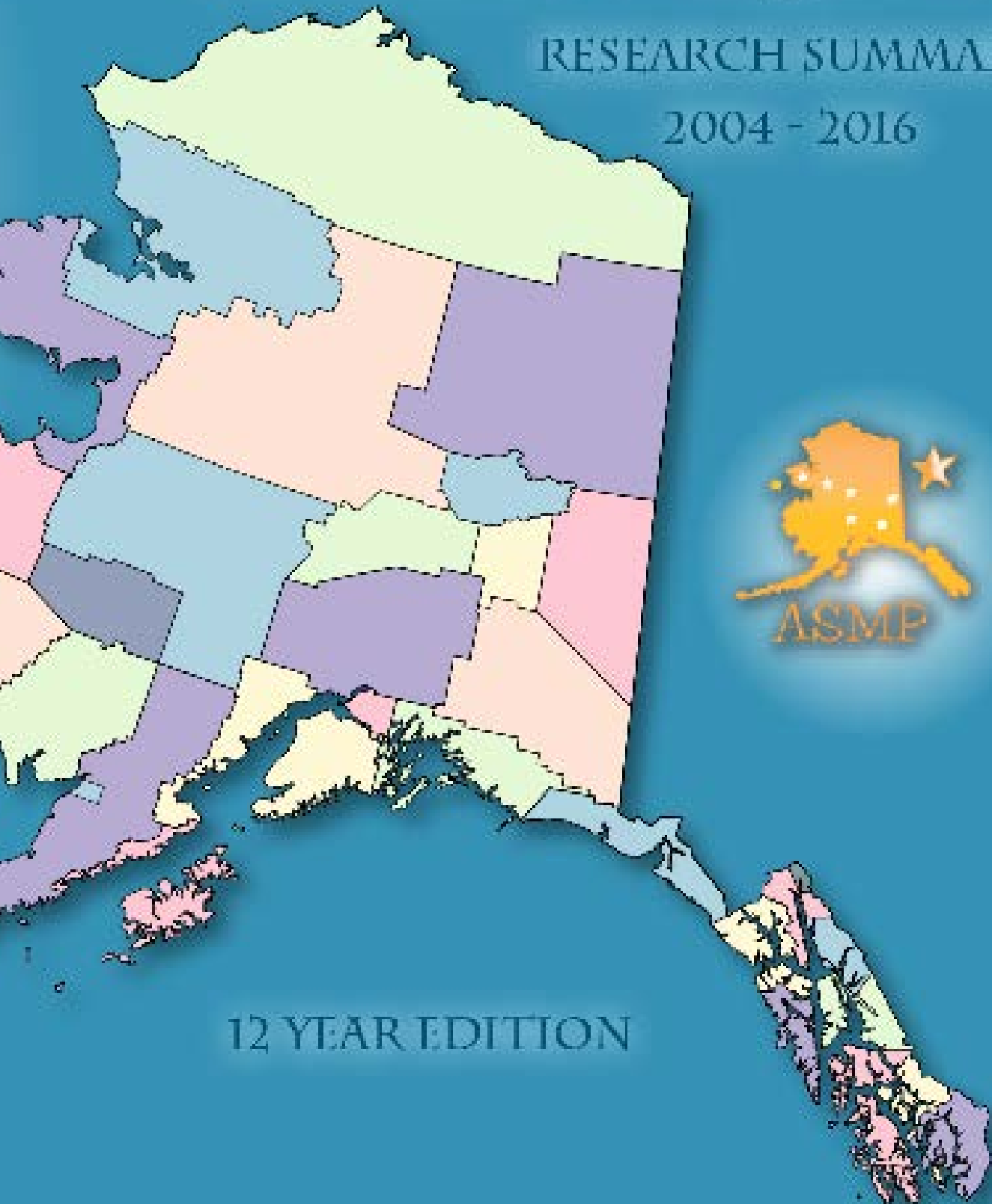
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Alaska Statewide Mentor Project

RESEARCH SUMMARY

2004 - 2016



2016-2017 Alaska Statewide Mentor Project: Mentors, coordinators and staff

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"I was able not just to survive, but thrive because of her help, resources, and modeling... she gave me support, access to resources, and was someone I could talk to confidentially about everything. It was with joy that I signed a contract for next year, and I thank her for that."

— ECT survey, 2015

The Alaska Statewide Mentor Project

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About the project

The Alaska Statewide Mentor Project (ASMP) is designed to induct first- and second-year teachers into the teaching field through professional learning environments based on collaboration, high expectations, equity, ongoing inquiry, and reflective practice. Mentors receive extensive training and continual professional development on best practices in teaching and mentoring, and the use of formative assessment tools that help to identify and support teacher needs and professional goals. ASMP's mentoring model is based on the New Teacher Center model of mentoring and induction, and has been adapted and "Alaskanized" since the project was established in 2004.

ASMP collaborates with multiple stakeholders with whom we share the goals of improving teacher quality, increasing beginning teacher retention, and advancing student outcomes. In the summer of 2015, the K-12 Outreach Office came under the umbrella of the University of Alaska Fairbanks' School of Education, opening doors for collaborative research. As part of UA President Johnsen's Strategic Pathways initiative, ASMP received funding to continue its work on increasing the number of "homegrown" Alaska educators and improving teacher retention. In the summer of 2016, ASMP's role with the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development shifted from a partnership to an advisory one. In addition, ASMP partners with school districts to match mentors to ASMP-qualified teachers, and meet teacher and student needs.

ASMP strategies and actions: Theory of practice

"I am a product of the mentor program. Because I had a great mentor who helped me through those tough 1st two years I have stayed in rural Alaska and plan to be at this site for a long time. Reduction of the program would greatly hinder our ability to keep good, quality teachers in rural Alaska."

— ECT Survey, 2016

The ASMP model is founded on teacher induction and mentoring research, where the ASMP mentor is focused on both the needs of the teacher and their students in their specific context. ASMP trains and supports mentors who work with early career teachers (ECTs) and together they move instructional practice forward. ECTs improve their teaching practice, gain greater confidence and self-efficacy in their teaching, remain in the teaching profession, and ultimately advance student outcomes.

ASMP mentors are experienced Alaska educators who work with first- and second-year teachers. ASMP provides mentors with two-year intensive training and continual professional development. Each mentor has a peer mentor with whom they can celebrate successes and troubleshoot challenges they encounter in the field. In addition, mentors meet monthly online and

contribute to online discussion forums. These “just-in-time” supports allow the mentor to meet the individualized needs of the teacher and their students. At the heart of the dyad is the mentor-teacher relationship where mentors support their ECTs both professionally and emotionally. Drawing on their professional development and extensive teaching experience, the mentor collaboratively problem-solves with their ECTs and provides them with teaching resources. Mentors serve as non-evaluative, experienced educators who help the ECT navigate the challenges of being a beginning teacher in Alaska.



Figure 1. ASMP's theory of practice

ASMP mentoring work & training: Intensive and focused

Mentors must adhere to the ASMP mentoring model's expectations: 1) meet at least 3.5 hours per month with each ECT; 2) communicate weekly via distance methods on weeks they do not meet face-to-face; and 3) use student and classroom data to support and move ECT

During 2015-16 school year each mentor on average

- Met 6.95 times with each ECT
- Used 11 tools and/or resources per ECT
- Communicated 70 times with each ECT using distance methods (e.g. phone, email, video-conferencing)

teaching practice forward. Because the mentoring relationship is non-evaluative, ASMP mentors employ a formative assessment system aligned with Alaska teaching and cultural standards to develop the ECT's reflective skills. Using mentoring language, the mentor and ECT work collaboratively to improve teaching instruction with the ultimate aim of improving student learner outcomes.

In addition to their work with ECTs, ASMP mentors stay up to date with best mentoring practices; district, state, and federal initiatives; culturally responsive teaching; and other educational topics. ASMP provides just-in-time learning for mentors: Each ASMP mentor participates in four in-person professional development sessions and 14 mentor forums. Moreover, mentors have a peer-mentor with whom they can share successes and problem-solve challenges.

ASMP research

The ASMP Research Team collects data to measure project effectiveness in meeting programmatic goals of increasing beginning teacher retention, improving teacher quality, and advancing student learning. Qualitative and quantitative data are gathered to guide programmatic changes. Data include evaluations of mentor professional development sessions and trainings, mentor focus groups, and annual on-line surveys of ECTs, site administrators, and ASMP mentors.

Effectiveness, efficiency, and innovation: Research and the ASMP Portal

The ASMP Research Team looks at how to improve cost-effectiveness and efficiency without sacrificing positive ASMP impacts on teacher retention, teacher quality, and student learning. There are indications that ASMP mentoring is having a positive impact on student achievement.

Student Achievement Study (2008-2010)

During the 2008-2009 academic year, ASMP conducted a study to examine the impact that ASMP mentoring had on student achievement in grades 4-10 as measured by standardized test scores in language arts, mathematics, and science. Although there were statistically significant differences between students of ASMP-mentored ECTs and students of veteran teachers, it appeared that the achievement gaps between these two groups of students were closing.

[See Adams, B. L. (2010). Connecting mentoring to student achievement in Alaska: results and policy implications. Paper presented at the Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Denver, CO. <http://www.aera.net/Publications>]

Studying ASMP effectiveness in urban contexts (2012-2016)

In January 2012, the U.S. Department of Education awarded ASMP with an Investing in Innovation (i3) grant that supports our Urban Growth Opportunity (UGO) study. The five year validation study examined the effectiveness of the ASMP model in 5 urban districts:

Anchorage, Fairbanks, Matanuska-Susitna, Kenai Peninsula, and Sitka. Three cohorts of ECTs were randomly assigned to a mentoring model, either the ASMP model or the “Business-As-Usual” model, which was the current ECT support model within that district.

This study measured teacher effectiveness, student achievement, and teacher retention. External evaluators analyzed ASMP’s fidelity of implementation and assessed the differences between ECTs receiving the ASMP model and the Business-as-Usual model. If the study shows that the ASMP model is effective in urban areas, it is possible that other states may adopt the Alaska mentoring model. The final report for this study will be complete by June 2017.

“I want to thank the district for appointing a UGO mentor for me. She was awesome and was there for me. It was nice to know that she is just a phone call, a video call, or an email away when I started feeling overwhelmed.”

— i3/UGO ECT Survey, 2015

and online resources that support the work of the mentor and ECT. Data collected from the online tool-suite, ECT and mentor demographic information, and other data garnered from research are housed within the Portal. The Portal serves as an integrated and unified system that centralizes tools and resources used for and by mentors and ECTs, streamlines data entry and access, and houses programmatic evaluation.

“It is difficult to transition from the Lower 48 to rural Alaska. It is an alienating experience and as a teacher one often cannot separate the transition and the job... Since first year teachers in the bush are entering such a unique situation, it is necessary for them to have professional and emotional support to let them know that their experience is somewhat typical.”

— ECT Survey, 2016

In the spring of 2017, the Research Team, in collaboration with OIT and K-12 Outreach REACHUp, is developing an on-line library of culturally relevant materials and other pedagogical resources for ECTs and mentors.

Distance delivery mentoring study (2016-2017)

During 2016-17 academic year the ASMP Research Team is examining the effects that distance communication technologies have on teacher retention, teacher self-efficacy, student engagement, the mentor-ECT relationship, and cost. Data include teacher and mentor interviews, mentor focus groups, and student engagement and teacher efficacy surveys.

Through this exploratory study, we are piloting the use of a system where beginning teachers and mentors can share and dialogue over recordings of teacher practice. Three mentors and 25 ECTs from 6 rural districts are participating in this study. We expect to have results of this study by the end of May 2017.

ASMP Portal (2015-ongoing)

In the summer of 2015, the ASMP Research Team and University of Alaska’s Office of Information Technology (OIT) began to develop the ASMP Portal and transitioned mentors to the use of formative assessment tools online. The Portal houses all ASMP mentoring tools

Programmatic impacts: Retention, teacher practice, and student learning

ASMP is a data-driven program with the goals of improving teacher retention in Alaska, teacher practice, and student learning. We have demonstrated this model’s effectiveness over 12 years of collecting data.

“I think use of the [formative assessment] tools along with collaborative data analysis and problem solving have the greatest impact on student learning because the process is tailored to the expressed needs of individual teachers and their students. Use of the Alaska teaching and cultural standards is also important because teachers are connecting to the central areas of focus for teaching and connecting with students, families and communities...”

— Mentor survey, 2016

Project numbers since inception

Project numbers have remained consistent, serving on average 400 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. Through academic year 2016-17, ASMP has served over 2,500 individual ECTs and trained nearly 130 experienced Alaska teachers to be high-quality mentors. To date, ASMP has served over 80 percent of all Alaska schools (167

schools in 2016-current academic year) for at least one year and has been invited into 52 of the 54 school districts.

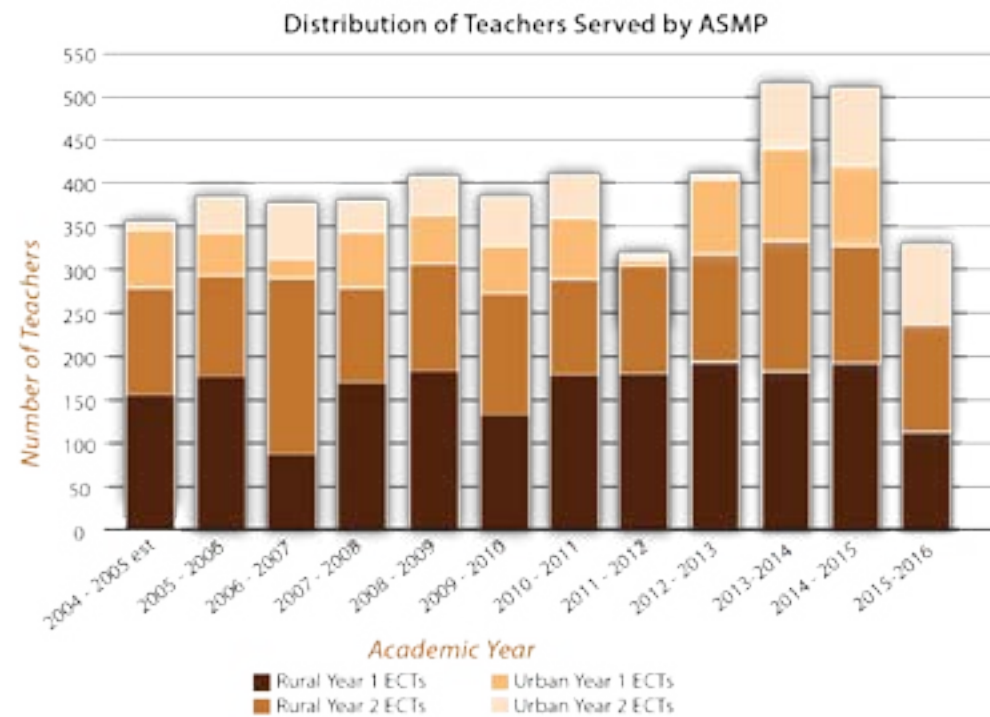


Figure 2. Distribution of ASMP-mentored ECTs. From 2012-13 through 2015-16, ASMP was conducting a study of ASMP in an urban context. The higher distribution of urban ECTS during these years is reflected in this graph. The 2015-16 was the final year of the study, hence there are fewer urban first-year teachers.

Rural retention

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 percent compared to 83 percent (Hill & Hirschberg, 2008).

To get a more accurate picture of average retention rates at rural sites, three-year rolling averages were computed. We compared retention rates for experienced teachers, first-year ASMP-mentored teachers, and a combined first- and second-year ASMP mentored teachers over the history of the program.

Same rural district: Looking at rural teachers staying in the same rural district, experienced teachers' average retention rate hovers around 81 percent. The ASMP-mentored first year teachers' and AMSP first and second years' retention rates are about 74 percent and 71 percent, respectively (Figure 3).

Staying in Alaska: The gaps between experienced and ASMP-mentored ECTs display a similar pattern to those remaining in rural districts. Experienced teachers on average tend to stay teaching in Alaska at higher rates (approximately 86 percent) than first and second year ASMP-mentored ECTs (approximately 77 percent; Figure 4).

It is important to note that educators leave their teaching situation or the teaching profession for a multitude of reasons, some of which are exogeneous (e.g. getting married out-of-state, health issues, family, etc.). Keeping this in mind, it appears that ASMP is making an impact at rural sites. Retention rates for ASMP-mentored teachers remain higher than historical average.

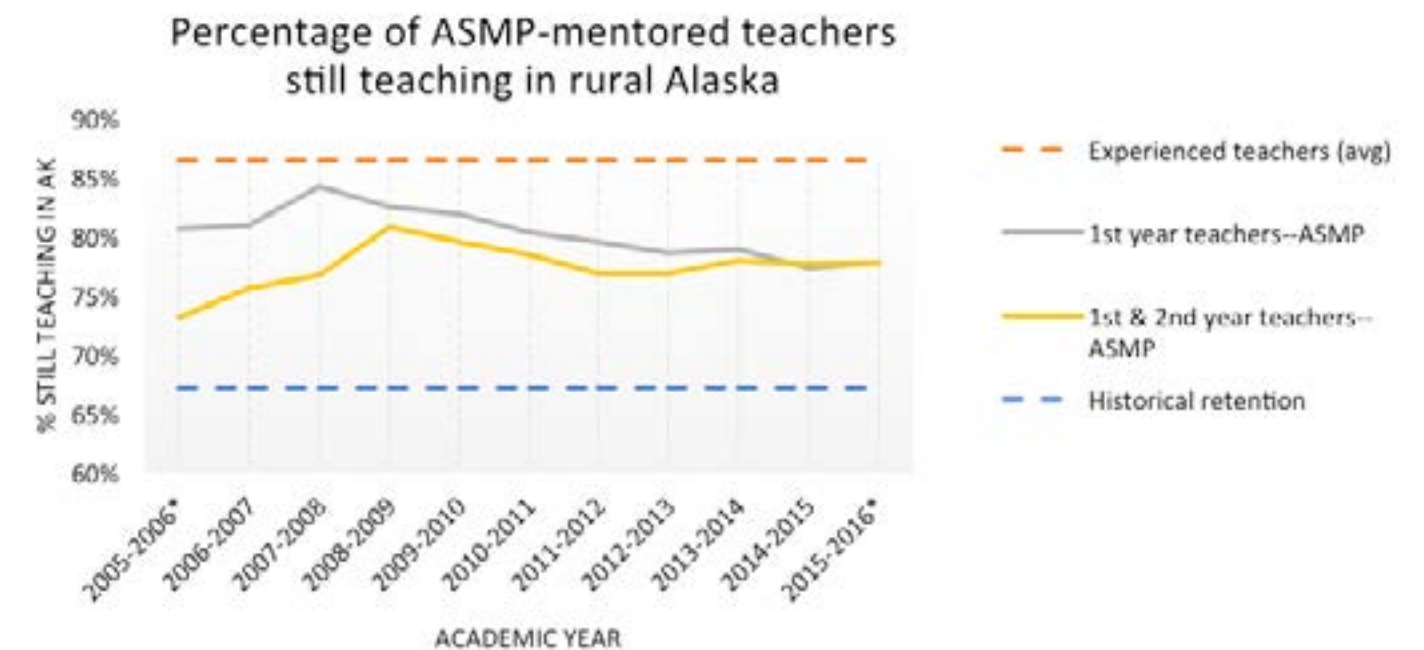


Figure 3. Percentage of teachers retained in their rural district calculated as 3-year weighted rolling averages. * Only 2 years of data available for calculations. Experienced teacher retention data obtained from Alaska Department of Education & Early Development. Historical retention average from Hill & Hirschberg (2008). Turnover among Alaska teachers: is it changing? Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage. Research Summary No. 69.

Percentage of ASMP-mentored teachers still teaching in rural Alaska

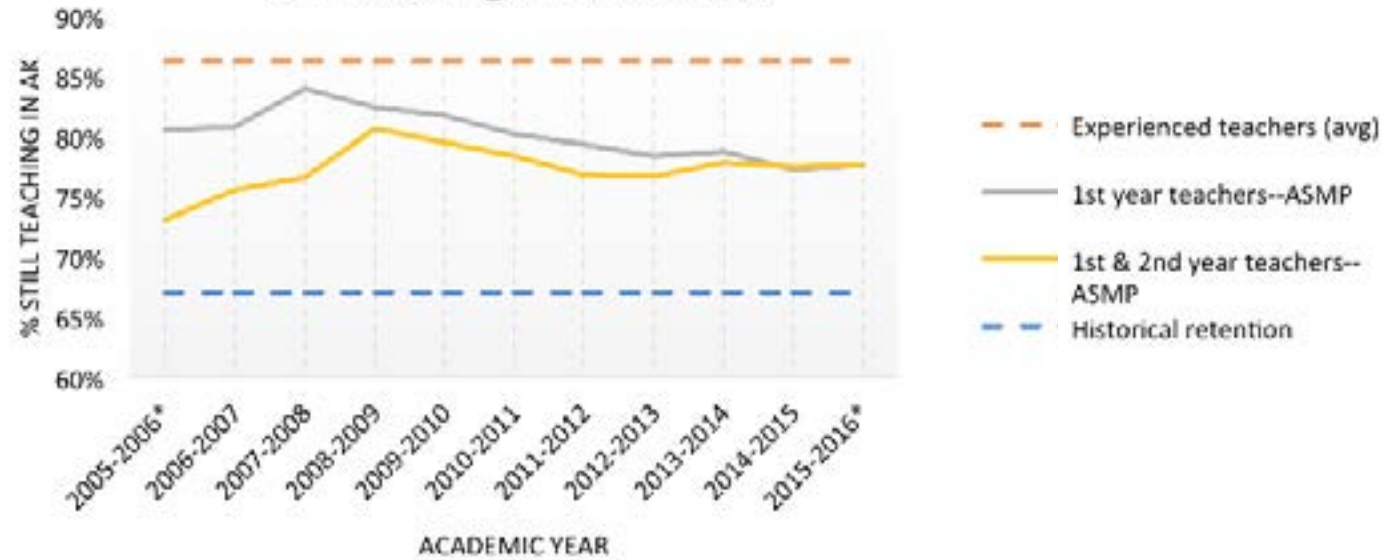


Figure 4. Percentage of teachers retained in Alaska calculated as 3-year weighted rolling averages. * Only 2 years of data available for calculations. Experienced teacher retention data obtained from Alaska Department of Education & Early Development. Turnover among Alaska teachers: is it changing? Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage. Research Summary No. 69.

Interestingly, when rural ECTs were surveyed regarding their plans to remain in their current rural districts, 39% said they planned to stay for 1-3 years, 21% planned to stay 4-6 years, and 12% planned to remain for more than 10 years (NTC Survey, 2016).

Teacher practice

Mentors provide personalized support for beginning teachers. Teacher practice is the area in which their mentor work is most influential. We see this influence in year-end surveys taken by ECTs and site administrators. 88% of ECTs agreed that having an ASMP mentor benefited their teaching (Figure 5). 76% of site administrators concurred that having an ASMP mentor influenced their site's growth with regard to teaching practice (Figure 6).

"First and second year teachers are treading water, just trying to stay afloat/sane. Alaska Statewide Mentors give them an incredible amount of support/mentorship that saves our state lots of money in the long run, keeps great potential in our state, and improves teacher retention and quality."
— Administrator survey, 2016

Overall having an ASMP mentor has been beneficial to my teaching

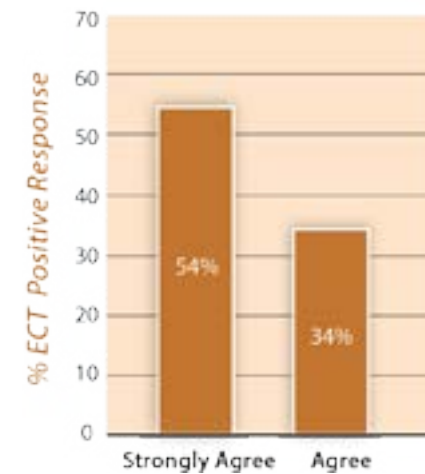


Figure 5. Mentor impact on rural & urban ECT teaching (NTC & i3/UGO Survey, 2016)

ASMP influences my site's growth in teacher practice.

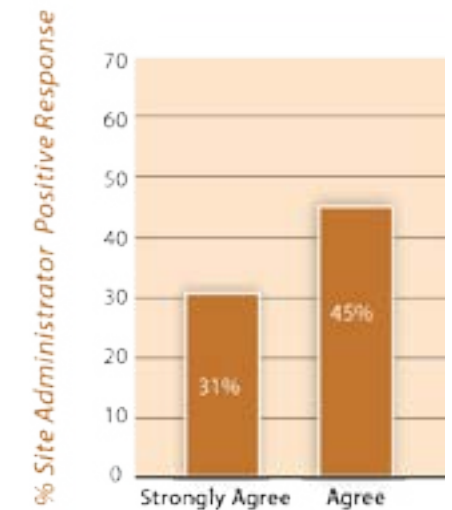


Figure 6. ASMP impact on rural & urban site growth (NTC & i3/UGO Survey, 2016)

Influence of mentor activities on teaching practice, post-year 2

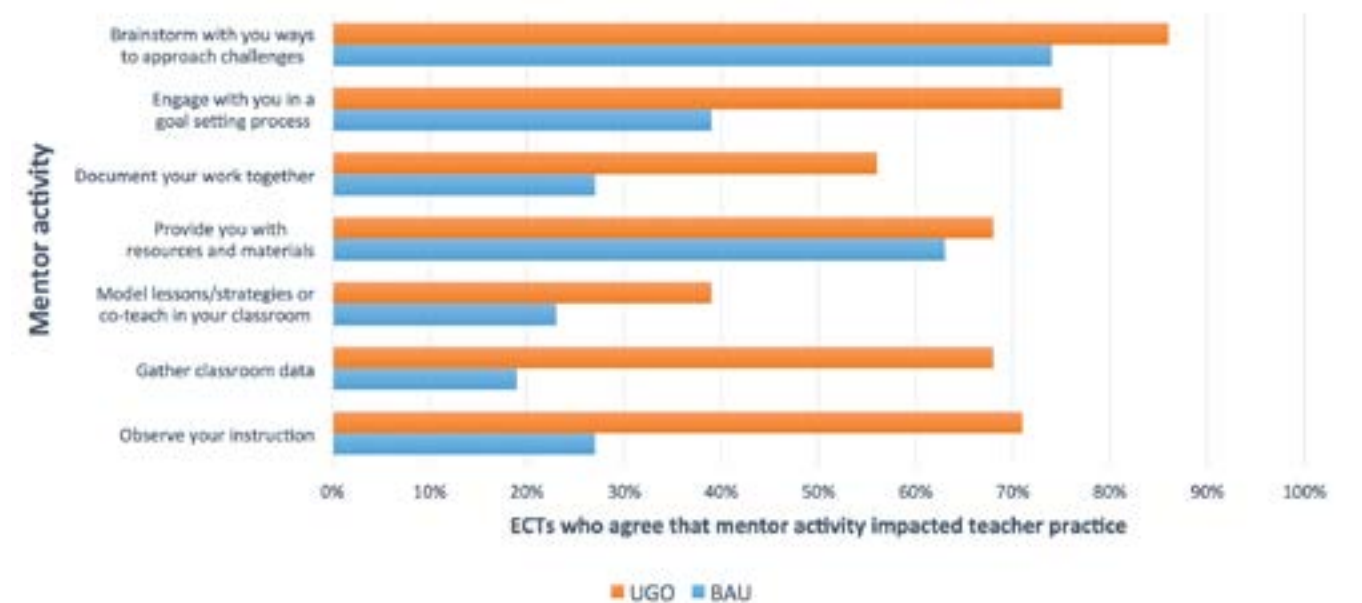


Figure 7. Percentage of ECTs who stated that specific mentor activities influenced their teaching practice. Data represent combined responses across the three UGO and three BAU ECTs cohorts. UGO = ASMP-mentored urban ECTs (Urban Growth Opportunity grant), BAU = Business-as-Usual-mentored teachers.

Preliminary survey results from the i3/UGO study indicate that ASMP mentors significantly influence their ECTs' teaching practice through specific mentoring activities. Significant differences between ASMP-mentored and Business as Usual-mentored ECTs were found in classroom observation, gathering classroom data, lesson modeling and strategy demonstrations, engagement with goal setting, and brainstorming solutions to classroom and student challenges. These are activities critical to teacher development.

Work with my mentor has impacted my students' learning

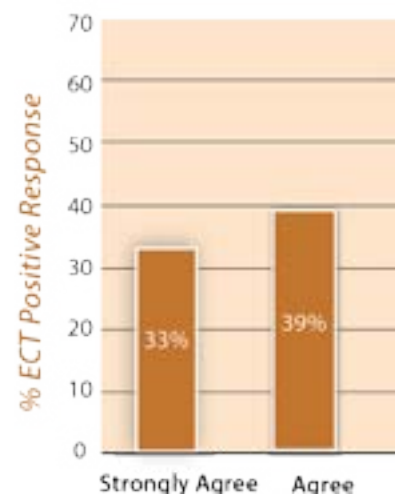


Figure 8. Mentor impact on rural student learning (NTC Survey, 2016)

ASMP mentors' interactions are supporting the ECTs' ability to impact student learning

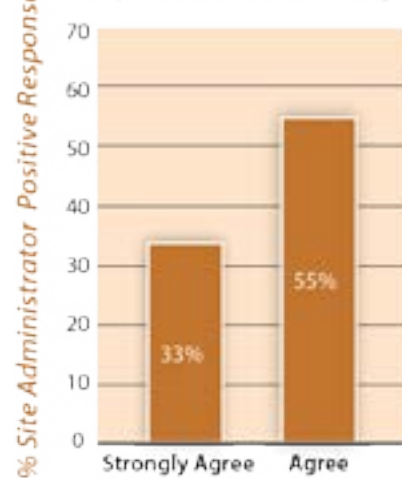


Figure 9. ASMP mentors' influence on rural & urban ECTs' ability to impact student learning (NTC & i3/UGO Survey, 2016).

Student Learning

ASMP mentors support the beginning teacher, who in turn builds the student knowledge base. Adams (2010) showed promising results that the achievement gaps between students of ASMP-mentored teachers and the students of veteran teachers were closing.

This conclusion is reinforced by the ECT and site administrator surveys: 72% of ECTs agreed or strongly agreed that working with an ASMP mentor impacted their students' learning (Figure 8). 88% of site administrators agreed or strongly agreed that ASMP mentor support influenced ECT's ability to impact student learning (Figure 9).

Open-ended responses from ECTs and site administrators

The impacts that ASMP mentors have on retention, teaching practice, and student learning are also voiced in the open-ended responses from ASMP-mentored ECTs and their site administrators on the annual end-of-the-year surveys. The development of a trusting, non-evaluative, and confidential relationship between mentor and ECT not only builds confidence in teaching skills, but also allows beginning teachers to focus on professional development.

Site administrator perspective

Rural site administrators often responded that because mentors were experienced teachers from outside of the district, they were able to influence beginning teachers' learning and growth. This is evidenced through answers to the following questions, given to site administrators with ASMP-mentored ECTs.

What is most effective about Alaska Statewide Mentor Project and why?

Having someone from outside of the district give support and feedback to my ECT is helpful. I do not always have enough time to coach and guide like I would want to, so having the extra support is great. In addition, an Alaska Statewide Mentor has given my teachers an outside viewpoint and a confidential ear to help problem solve (SA Survey, 2015).

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

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

ASMP provides another set of eyes in the classroom, someone who can work with teachers in a nonjudgmental fashion. As I am the teacher's evaluator, feedback is received differently from me than from someone who is not in that role. Additionally, having a person in the room who has had a different set of educational experiences provides alternate ways of solving classroom behavioral and instructional issues and provides access to varied instructional practices. Finally, when the mentor is saying the same thing as the Site Administrator, which is often the case, it serves as an assist in getting the mentee to buy-in, aiding the likely success of the teacher (SA survey, 2016).

The Alaska Statewide Mentor Project has impacted student learning by providing a support system different from the administration. The mentor is neutral and is able to provide a different point of view. The mentor is in the classroom once a month, but he/she can see the growth the new teacher is or isn't making. When teachers embrace the mentor project, they are much more successful. My teacher is ecstatic that she's had (MENTOR NAME) as her mentor and is grateful for the ideas and support (MENTOR NAME) has provided. Because my NT is learning and growing as an educator, her students are more successful (SA Survey, 2014).

I believe that the 'Confidentiality' aspect of the Mentor-Teacher relationship is crucial to the ongoing success of the program. It allows both the teacher and the mentor to communicate more honestly and effectively and I believe this factor contributes to high degree of effectiveness of the program (SA Survey, 2015).

ECT perspective

ECTs concur with the site administrators that having a non-evaluative and confidential mentor was beneficial to their professional development and their students' learning. The ASMP mentor seems to take on multiple roles to meet the needs of the ECTs: They provide resources, lend a caring ear, offer and model teaching strategies, and provide data-based feedback on teaching practice to ECTs. This is evidenced through responses to the following questions given to ASMP-mentored ECTs.

What additional feedback might you give your ASMP mentor?

Having an Alaska Statewide Mentor helps me a great deal. The village is an isolating place, even among a community of teachers. When a mentor completes an observation or discusses the work experience with a new teacher it gives that teacher some scope on their situation, and to some degree, helps them step out of the vacuum that is the rural Alaska school. It is very important for me to have some perspective on what my teaching looks like or what my experience means and my mentor helps to provide that for me. I think the work that mentors do is great, and I hope that I will have their continued support in the future (ECT Survey, 2016).

Having a state mentor has greatly contributed to my confidence in teaching. I greatly appreciate her feedback, ideas and suggestions. It is wonderful to have someone to "go-to" with questions and not feel judged. Some things are easier to ask a mentor than a supervisor. I really appreciate the time my mentor has spent with me in the classroom and resources. I also love the goodies, especially living where there are no fruit or veggies available in store. Thank you for providing this program. This experience has positively played a role in my first year of teaching, which I believe will influence my teaching abilities and style for many years to come (ECT Survey, 2015).

I find this program and experience very valuable. I hope this program will continue to help guide new teachers like myself. It is extremely critical to receive this source of support so that I can better build my skills as a new teacher. This program has given me the extra confidence and help that I would not otherwise obtain. It makes a world of difference to have someone who is able to provide instant feedback and expertise when I come to specific challenges in my profession. Building a strong foundation as a new teacher is vital as the profession is very demanding. This program provided the support needed so that I can see myself becoming a life-long, effective teacher (i3/UGO ECT Survey, 2014).

Thank you for being a listening ear that is detached from the situations and therefore providing solid ideas and feedback. I appreciate the time spent together. It's been great having an outside source to bounce ideas or problems off of! (ECT Survey, 2014)

What did you receive the most help with to improve your teaching experience?

Just being able to talk to someone who has taught here for many years has been very helpful. Even though I had spent time in Alaska there were still some cultural issues that, after discussing, I have been able to understand and respond to better. Anytime I get stuck for a direction on a specific child my mentor has given me ideas and content that has been very helpful. I had a tragedy happen in my family and my mentor helped me walk through that and was very attentive to my emotional compass as the days, weeks, and months moved on. This was a saving grace for me (ECT Survey, 2016).

I believe the help received was very broad and generally covered the whole spectrum of teaching: from lesson plans, classroom arrangement, class policies, classroom & behavioral Management to name a few. All suggestions were welcome and insightful. One such example was when the mentor pointed out that my group/table seating arrangements were causing the students to have their backs towards me and hence they were not always watching what was going on. By the next mentor visit, I had arranged the tables in rows and columns... (i3/UGO ECT Survey, 2014).

I am impressed with how my mentor teacher not only helped me inside of the classroom but also outside. For example, how to work with other teachers (co-teachers) in preparation for and teaching a class, aligning my teaching strategies to the standards, preparing for parent/teacher conferences, and being highly qualified in a teaching field. Also I got ALOT from my reflection on my teaching which my mentor teacher helped me facilitate (ECT Survey, 2015).

I found it very helpful to have someone outside of my district that I could talk to about my job. Knowing that my mentor was not evaluating me and does not report to my administration or my district let me be more comfortable going to him for help. I'm able to discuss things with my mentor that I would be uncomfortable talking about with my administration and/or colleagues (ECT Survey, 2015).

Looking toward the future: working together to support educators

Grounded in developing and supporting teachers, ASMP continues to evolve as the needs of the state, districts, teachers, and site administrators change. ASMP Program Leaders are forging and strengthening relationships to increase the quantity and quality of communication among stakeholders. Efforts include participation at state superintendents' meetings, one-on-one meetings with district officials, ASMP and K-12 Outreach Newsletters, and K-12 Outreach Open Houses. From these on-going conversations, ASMP has been pursuing new ways to efficiently and effectively support ECTs and the sites where they teach. Offering and using distance-delivery methods is one area where more exploration is needed.

Finally, ASMP is one part of a greater system: the Office of K-12 Outreach. As the program looks to the future, ASMP will be collaborating more with K-12 programs to strengthen the K-20 educational pipeline. One of these outcomes is expanding the ASMP Portal to become a K-12 Portal, housing not just ASMP programmatic data, but also that of Future Educators of Alaska, Alaska Teacher Placement, and Raising Educational Achievement through Cultural Heritage Up. By working and problem-solving together, we believe our partnering with other statewide stakeholders will keep quality educators in Alaska.



ASMP Mission Statement

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.