Public School Education a Big Industry

by Neal Fried and Brigitta Windisch-Cole

Local public education is one of Alaska's largest industries. Alaska's local school districts, combined, represent one of the state's biggest employers. Jobs with local school districts in kindergarten through 12th grade number over 20,000--nearly seven percent of all wage and salary jobs in Alaska. No industry is more ubiquitous. Often local education is the single largest employer in a community. In fact, two of the state's 10 largest employers are school districts. In many communities, one of the few employers is the local school district.

Local education is also a billion-dollar business. In Alaska, unlike nearly anywhere else in the country, local education is a basic sector employer. This anomaly occurs because, with almost 70 percent of all funds for local education coming from the state budget, oil revenues, not local tax dollars, provide the major funding for this industry. (See Figure 1.) As a result, when these education dollars are spent, they represent new economic activity in the state and in all of its communities. There-

fore, local education spending in Alaska is not only an investment in education but also has immediate economic impacts. This article will explore these economic effects and will discuss the employment opportunities provided by this industry.

For the purpose of this article, local education represents public education, covering kindergarten through grade 12. Private schools are not within the scope of this analysis.

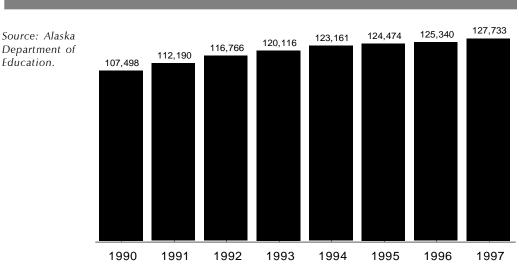
The ubiquitous industry

In 1997, over 127,000 children, more than onefifth of the state's population, attended public school in Alaska. (See Figure 2.) Only Utah had a larger percentage of its population in school. Alaska's high proportion of schoolchildren creates education-related jobs in practically every community. During 1997, on average, more than \$7,500 was spent educating each child.

In many communities, both large and small, the Anchorage. local school district is one of the largest employers, if not the largest. For example, in the Bristol Bay, Anchorage and Mat-Su Boroughs, the Copper Center region, Bethel and many other areas, the local school district is the single largest employer. In some communities, the public schools are one of the few sources of full-time, nonseasonal employment. In the Bethel, Wade Hampton (Yukon Delta area), and the Yukon Koyukuk census areas, more than 20 percent of wage and salary employment comes from school districts. (See Table 1.) In F i g u r e • 1

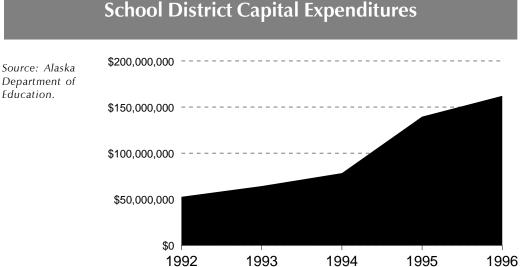
Neal Fried and Brigitta Windisch-Cole are labor economists with the Research and Analysis Section, Administrative Services Division, Alaska Department of Labor. They are located in Anchorage.

Sources of the \$910 Million Spent for Local Education in Alaska in 1996 Education.



Alaska's School Enrollment Continues to Climb Kindergarten through Grade 12

Figure • 3



eight other boroughs or census areas, schools provide over 10 percent of wage and salary employment. In addition, these employment numbers do not include all employees connected to, but not employed by, the school district, such as contracted school bus drivers. Neither do they include the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on school construction around the state, (See Figure 3.), nor the employment and income multiplier effects these education jobs create.

The payroll impact of local education is even greater. (See Table 1.) In 1996, the total payroll for local education was \$641 million. (See Table 2.) This total is nearly equivalent to the payroll of the oil industry. In the economically depressed region of Wade Hampton, in the Yukon Delta area, almost half of the payroll in the region comes from its local school district. In all but two areas of the state, the average wage in education is greater than the overall average wage for that region. The average annual wage for local education in Alaska in 1996 was \$36,557 as compared to Alaska's overall annual average wage of \$32,088. The exceptions were the North Slope Borough and the Valdez-Cordova census area where high oil industry wages pushed average earnings above the norm.

The industry keeps growing

During the 1990s, school enrollment has steadily grown, spurring growth in local education employment. In 1997, employment in public education topped

Figure • 5

Figure•4

1/ Estimate.

Source: Alaska

Department of

and Analysis

Section.

Labor, Research

20.400

19,495

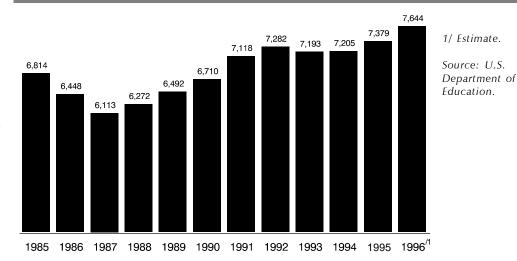
the 20,000 mark.(See Figure 4.) In recent years, public education has been the impetus for nearly all the growth in local government. Because of its large size, turnover, and recent early retirement incentive programs, local education is providing more employment opportunities than it has since the 1980s.

Discussing employment opportunities in this industry often translates into examining opportunities for teachers. (See Figure 5.) Teaching positions account for nearly half of the jobs in local education. (See Figure 6.) The other half of public education's occupational profile includes various types of professionals, service workers, support and managerial positions. Most of the discussion in this article, however, refers to teachers, since they are largely the backbone of this industry.

Job opportunities for teachers are good

During the past two years, and probably for the next two years, the job outlook for teachers in Alaska is more positive than it has been in a long time. Many factors affect the supply and demand for teachers. On the demand side, there is growth in enrollments, teacher-pupil ratios, funding, legal requirements and the national labor market for teachers. Influencing the supply side are the number of graduates, wages, the national supply of certified teachers and the general condition of the overall job market. In Alaska, there are two distinct labor markets for teachers-school districts that are

The Number of Alaska School Teachers Continues to Grow



Alaska's School District Employment Reaches Record in 1997

18,984

18.600

1987 1988 1989 1990 1991 1992 1993 1994 1995 1996 1997^{//}

18,056

17,497

16,672

16,052 16,075

19,140 19,028

School Districts Play an Important Role in Alaska's Economy

Source: Alaska Department of Labor, Research and Analysis Section.

Area:	Share of Total Area Employment in 1996	Share of Total Area Payroll in 1996
Statewide	6.7%	7.6%
Matanuska-Susitna Borough Nome Census Area North Slope Borough Northwest Arctic Borough Prince of Wales/Outer Ketchikan Sitka Borough Skagway-Hoonah-Angoon Census A Southeast Fairbanks Census Area Valdez-Cordova Census Area Wade Hampton Census Area	5.5 3.2 4.4 21.5 14.1 5.3 14.1 5.5 8.1 4.0 8.7 5.0 6.0 probined with Bristol 14.7 16.8 7.4 15.6 10.4 6.6 rea 12.7 14.8 8.4 29.0	5.9 3.6 5.3 27.5 17.2 6.1 17.1 6.9 10.0 5.5 10.1 5.0 7.9 <i>Bay Borough</i>) 21.2 20.6 5.3 16.4 12.3 8.2 12.4 17.2 8.0 48.5
Wrangell-Petersburg Census Area Yakutat Borough Yukon Koyukuk Census Area	8.8 8.9 25.8	10.4 9.0 26.6

urban or on the main road system, and the rural job market.

The urban teacher scene

For the past two decades, a constant flood of applicants chased after a limited number of teaching jobs in urban and on-the-road system school districts. Many of these districts, particularly the larger ones, were often quite passive about re-

cruiting for most teaching positions because the applicant pool was so large. It was not unusual for the school districts of Fairbanks, Anchorage, Mat-Su, Kenai and Juneau to have thousands of applicants on file. During the 1980s, there were years when there were only 10 openings for secondary teachers for the entire Anchorage School District. During this period, the following comment appeared in one of Alaska's newspapers: "to become a school teacher . . . appears almost analogous to becoming a movie star." However, more recently the script has changed.

The year 1997 or 1998 may go down as a record year for new hires in Alaska's public education system. (See Figure 7.) Last year the Alaska Teacher Placement staff predicted that "Alaska's demand for educators would be astronomically high." This demand is partially due to the current local and statewide early retirement incentive programs that began in 1996 and will continue through the year 2000. Although this is the third time an early retirement incentive package has been offered, under present circumstances it is translating into almost unprecedented opportunities for teachers in Alaska. Thus far, 435 teachers have taken early retirement, and the number

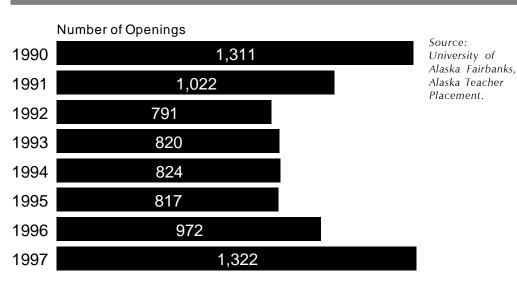
will increase significantly. The Anchorage School District alone expects to see more than 220 and possibly as many as 300 teachers retire at the end of the 1997-98 school year. This is in addition to those who took advantage of the package last year. Therefore, demand is high and opportunities are good.

During the first wave of early retirements, many urban districts drew on their large local supply of individuals with teaching credentials. This included a large pool of substitute teachers. As a result the supply of substitutes in many school districts is now stretched thin. Additionally, the supply of students graduating with teaching credentials from Alaska's schools has changed little during the past five years. Their numbers actually fell a bit during the past two years.(See Figure 8.)

A tighter national market further affects this drawdown on Alaska's supply of teachers. Growing enrollments nationwide and some education initiatives, such as California's effort to cut classroom size, have increased the demand for school teachers around much of the country. The median age of teachers nationally is higher than that of the overall workforce; therefore, as older teachers retire, they are creating more opportunities for new teachers. And the hot overall national job market is attracting people with teaching credentials into other professions. Additionally, salaries for Alaska's teachers during the past decade have increased more slowly than they have in much of the rest of the nation. (See Figure 9 and Table 3.) This combination of factors has meant that fewer applicants with teaching credentials from elsewhere in the country are looking for teaching jobs in Alaska.

The Job Breakdown in Local Education in Alaska's Schools **Teachers** Source: Alaska 46.1% Department of Labor, Research and Analysis Section. Management 4.9% Others Other Professionals 5.3% 7.4% Service Workers 12.6% Administrative Support 23.7% Figure • 7

Openings for Teachers in Alaska's Public Schools



As a result, many of Alaska's school districts are having to make greater efforts to recruit teachers. For example, during last year's three job fairs put on by the Alaska Teacher Placement, there were fewer candidates to choose from as the year progressed. By the third job fair, there were only 130 registrants for 90 positions compared to a

3-to-1 ratio of registrants to positions during the first fair. For the first time, students in the 1998 graduating class of the University of Alaska-Anchorage's School of Education are being recruited well before graduation. The Anchorage School District also experienced a first by putting on a job fair in December to recruit teachers in anticipa-

(continued on page 8)

School District Employment and Earnings by Area in 1996

	Census Area or Borough	He Name of District	Location of eadquarters or District Office Em	Average Annual ployment	Total Payroll by School District
	Statewide			17,532	\$640,910,978
1/Dissolved in June 1996.	Aleutians East Borough	Aleutians East School District	Sand Point	95	2,484,188
2/The headquarters of the Yukon/ Koyukuk School District is located	Aleutians West Borough	Pribilof School District Unalaska City School District Aleutian Region District School Cente Adak Region School District ^{/1}	St. Paul Unalaska r Unalaska Adak	53 75 8 3	1,820,507 2,406,499 235,506 288,743
in Fairbanks.	Municipality of Anchorage	Anchorage School District	Anchorage	5,285	211,481,340
3/School district boundaries cross census area or borough.	Bethel Census Area	Kuspuk School District Lower Kuskokwim School District Yupiit School District	Aniak Bethel Akiachak	136 946 115	4,250,179 29,070,874 3,170,865
Source: Alaska Department of Labor, Research	Bristol Bay Borough and Lake & Peninsula Borough	Bristol Bay Borough Schools Lake & Peninsula Borough Schools	Naknek King Salmon	70 159	2,139,660 5,770,963
and Analysis Section.	Denali Borough	Denali Borough Schools	Healy	73	2,408,841
	Dillingham Census Area	Dillingham City Schools Southwest Region Schools	Dillingham Dillingham	97 193	3,578,251 6,114,063
	Fairbanks North Star Borough	Yukon/Koyukuk School District ^{/2} Fairbanks N.S. Borough School Distric	Fairbanks ct Fairbanks	28 1,651	1,160,902 60,338,999
	Haines Borough	Haines Borough Schools	Haines	71	2,262,465
	Juneau Borough	Juneau City Schools	Juneau	654	28,045,011
	Kenai Peninsula Borough	Kenai Peninsula Borough	Soldotna	1,408	48,446,078
	Ketchikan Gateway Borough	Ketchikan Gateway Borough Schools Southeast Island School District	Ketchikan Ketchikan	284 112	10,444,588 2,369,631
	Kodiak Island Borough	Kodiak Island Borough Schools	Kodiak	376	12,359,054
	Lake & Peninsula Borough (combined with Bristol Bay Be	Lake & Peninsula Borough Schools orough)	King Salmon	(se	e above)
	Matanuska-Susitna Borough	Mat-Su Borough Schools	Palmer	1,482	59,371,910

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School District Employment and Earnings by Area in 1996 (continued)

Census Area or Borough	Name of District	or District	verage Annual Syment	Total Payroll by School District
Nome Census Area	Nome Public Schools Bering Strait School District	Nome Unalakleet	120 453	4,309,180 14,437,121
North Slope Borough	North Slope Borough Schools	Barrow	608	26,771,109
Northwest Arctic Borough	Northwest Arctic Borough Schools	Kotzebue	381	14,214,340
Prince of Wales/ Outer Ketchikan Census Area	Annette Island Schools Craig City Schools Hydaburg City School District Klawock City School District	Metlakatla Craig Hydaburg Klawock	78 73 30 47	2,776,553 2,082,824 822,262 1,527,241
Sitka Borough	Mt. Edgecumbe (State government) Sitka Borough School District) Sitka Sitka	47 208	1,575,009 6,971,668
Skagway-Hoonah- Angoon Census Area	Hoonah City School District Pelican City School District Chatham School District Skagway City Schools	Hoonah Pelican Angoon Skagway	60 11 104 29	1,640,886 368,223 2,494,060 857,647
Southeast Fairbanks Census Area	Alaska Gateway Schools Delta/Greely School District	Tok Delta Junction	110 131	2,973,154 4,727,015
Valdez-Cordova Census Area	Copper River School District Cordova City School District Valdez City School District Chugach School District (Whittier)	Glennallen Cordova Valdez Anchorage	126 75 150 33	3,188,080 2,623,770 6,009,358 1,066,391
Wade Hampton Census Area	Kashunamiut School District St. Mary's City Schools Lower Yukon School District	Chevak St. Marys Mountain Village	47 35 428	1,712,985 801,562 13,053,080
Wrangell-Petersburg Census Area	Kake City School District Petersburg School District Wrangell Public Schools	Kake Petersburg Wrangell	51 97 82	1,181,662 3,450,479 2,755,468
Yakutat Borough	Yakutat School District	Yakutat	38	1,196,982
Yukon Koyukuk Census Area	Yukon/Koyukuk School District ^{/2} Galena City School District Nenana School District Tanana City School District Iditarod Area School District ^{/3} Yukon Flats School District	Fairbanks Galena Nenana Tanana Mc Grath Fort Yukon	137 46 39 25 129 130	3,795,800 1,417,666 1,092,766 797,013 3,952,039 4,248,468

T a b l e • 3

Average Teacher Salaries by State 1989-90 and 1996-97

		1989-90	1996-97	Percent of Change	1997 Percent of U.S. Average	
1/ Estimated by	United States	\$31,367	\$38,509	22.8%	100.0%	
the National Education Association.	Alabama Alaska	24,828 ^{/1} 43,153 ^{/1}	32,549 50,847	31.1 17.8	84.5 132.0	
/ issociation.	Arizona	29,402	33,350	13.4	86.6	
	Arkansas	22,352	29,975	34.1	77.8	
Source: National Education	California	37,998	43,474	14.4	112.9	
Association.	Colorado	30,758	38,175	24.1	99.1	
	Connecticut	40,461	50,426	24.6	130.9	
	Delaware	33,377	41,436	24.1	107.6	
	District of Columbia	38,402	45,012	17.2	116.9	
	Florida	28,803	33,881	17.6	88.0	
	Georgia	28,006	36,042	28.7	93.6	
	Hawaii	32,047	36,842	15.0	95.7	
	Idaho	23,861	31,818	33.3	82.6	
	Illinois	32,794	42,679	30.1	110.8	
	Indiana	30,902	38,575	24.8	100.2	
	lowa	26,747	33,275	24.4	86.4	
	Kansas	28,744	35,837	24.7	93.1	
	Kentucky	26,292	33,950	29.1	88.2	
	Louisiana	24,300	28,347	16.7	73.6	
	Maine	26,881	33,800	25.7	87.8	
	Maryland	36,319	41,148	13.3	106.9	
	Massachusetts	34,712/1	43,806	26.2	113.8	
	Michigan	37,072/1	44,251	19.4	114.9	
	Minnesota	32,190	37,875	17.7 14.1	98.4	
	Mississippi Missouri	24,292 27,094	27,720 34,342	26.8	72.0 89.2	
	Montana	25,081	29,950	19.4	77.8	
	Nebraska	25,522	31,768	24.5	82.5	
	Nevada	30,590	37,340	24.5	97.0	
	New Hampshire	28,986	36,867	27.2	95.7	
	New Jersey	35,676	49,349	38.3	128.1	
	New Mexico	24,756	29,715	20.0	77.2	
	New York	38,925	49,560	27.3	128.7	
	North Carolina	27,883	31,225	12.0	81.1	
	North Dakota	23,016	27,711	20.4	72.0	
	Ohio	31,218	38,831	24.4	100.8	
	Oklahoma	23,070	29,270	26.9	76.0	
	Oregon	30,640	40,900	33.5	106.2	
	U					

(continued from page 5)

tion of the 1998-99 school year. The Alaska Teacher Placement Spring Annual Fair is anticipating a record number of recruiters in 1998.

Far more opportunities in rural Alaska

In many ways, recruitment of teachers in rural school districts is not different from recruitment in more urban areas; it is simply far more intense. Turnover is much higher in rural Alaska. In 1996, before the most recent early retirement package, rural school districts replaced nearly 21 percent of their staff versus nine percent for urban and onthe-road system districts. In 1997, the first year of the early retirement package, the Yupiit school district, based in Akiachak, replaced 47 percent of its teachers. Some school districts will not be extending the retirement packages next year for fear of losing too many experienced teachers.

Often the small size and isolation of rural communities are given as reasons for a much higher turnover rate. Stress related to the meeting of two cultures is also a contributor. Other factors include the absence of a career ladder, housing and weather problems and the lack of amenities. Although starting salaries in most rural school districts are higher than those in urban districts, the cost-of-living differences and high travel costs often cancel out the higher salaries. (See Table 4.)

⁽continued on next page)

Table•3

Most rural school districts generally have little or no pool of local qualified teachers to choose from. Nearly 60 percent of their new recruits come from out-of-state. The average tenure for rural school teachers is far shorter than in urban areas. It is not uncommon for teachers of rural school districts to use their experience as a stepping stone into urban Alaska. Although fewer rural teachers are taking advantage of the early retirement package, these districts are feeling the ripple effect. For example, the Lower Kuskokwim school district, the state's largest rural district, typically experiences a 10 percent turnover rate, but last year that rate climbed to 14 percent. Higher turnover means there are far more opportunities for individuals with teaching credentials to find jobs in rural Alaska.

Always shortages in some areas

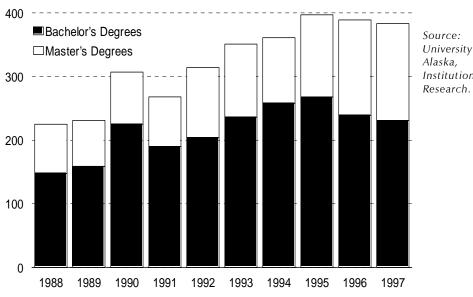
Both urban and rural school districts find certain occupations persistently difficult to fill because there are not enough qualified applicants. (See Table 5.) Special education has topped the shortage list for more than a decade. There are several factors pushing the demand for special education teachers. The number of special-ed students is climbing faster than general enrollments, partially due to federal legislation that continues to expand the coverage of eligible students. The integration of special-ed students into regular classrooms also reguires more teachers. There is more turnover and burnout

Average Teacher Salaries by State 1989-90 and 1996-97 (continued)

	1989-90	1996-97	Percent of Change	1997 Percent of U.S. Average
Pennsylvania	33,338/1	47,429	42.3%	123.2%
Rhode Island	36,057	43,019	19.3	111.7
South Carolina	27,217	32,659	20.0	84.8
South Dakota	21,300	26,764	25.7	69.5
Tennessee	27,052	33,789	24.9	87.7
Texas	27,496	32,644	18.7	84.8
Utah	23,686	31,750	34.0	82.4
Vermont	29,012	37,200	28.2	96.6
Virginia	30,938	35,837	15.8	93.1
Washington	30,457	37,860	24.3	98.3
West Virginia	22,842	33,169	45.2	86.1
Wisconsin	31,821	38,950	22.4	101.1
Wyoming	28,141	31,721	12.7	82.4

Figure • 8

Education Graduates from University of Alaska Number of Graduates



Teachers' Base Salary 1996-97

Source: Association of	District	Location of District Office	Average Annual Salary
Alaska School	Alaska		\$32,542
Boards.	Alaska Gateway Schools	Tok	34,329
	Aleutian Region District School Center	Unalaska	32,600
	Aleutians East School District	Sand Point	36,100
	Anchorage School District	Anchorage	30,079
	Annette Island Schools	Metlakatla	32,073
	Bering Strait School District	Unalakleet	31,939
	Bristol Bay Borough Schools	Naknek	33,667
	Chatham School District	Angoon	32,285
	Chugach School District	Anchorage	29,383
	Copper River School District	Glennallen	31,965
	Cordova City School District	Cordova	30,414
	Craig City Schools	Craig	30,208
	Delta/Greely School District	Delta Junction	31,400
	Denali Borough Schools	Healy	30,939
	Dillingham City Schools	Dillingham	34,244
	Fairbanks N.S. Borough School District		31,931
	Galena City School District	Galena	34,500
	Haines Borough Schools	Haines	28,209
	Hoonah City School District	Hoonah	31,908
	Hydaburg City School District	Hydaburg	29,593
	Iditarod Area School District	McGrath	32,780
	Juneau City Schools	Juneau	31,242
	Kake City School District	Kake	32,189
	Kashunamiut School District	Chevak	35,500
	Kenai Peninsula Borough	Soldotna	29,500
	Ketchikan Gateway Borough Schools	Ketchikan	30,544
	Klawock City School District	Klawock	29,621
	Kodiak Borough Schools	Kodiak	32,482
	•	Aniak	
	Kuspuk School District		34,070
	Lake & Peninsula Borough Schools Lower Kuskokwim School District	King Salmon	31,500
		Bethel	33,947
	Lower Yukon School District	Mountain Village	34,039
	Mat-Su Borough Schools Nenana School District	Palmer	31,037
		Nenana	32,321
	Nome Public Schools	Nome	31,820
	North Slope Borough Schools	Barrow	39,474
	Northwest Arctic Borough Schools	Kotzebue	33,441
	Pelican City School District	Pelican	32,718
	Petersburg School District	Petersburg	30,712
	Pribilof School District	St. Paul	34,810
	Sitka Borough School District	Sitka	30,506
	Skagway City Schools	Skagway	29,165
	Southeast Island School District	Ketchikan	29,344
	Southwest Region Schools	Dillingham	35,560
	St. Mary's City Schools	St. Marys	32,596
	Tanana City School District	Tanana	33,718
	Unalaska City School District	Unalaska	35,700
	Valdez City School District	Valdez	34,631
	Wrangell Public Schools	Wrangell	28,000
	Yakutat School District	Yakutat	28,687
	Yukon Flats School District	Fort Yukon	31,520
	Yukon/Koyukuk School District	Fairbanks	34,172
	Yupiit School District	Akiachak	34,500

among special-ed teachers than among other teaching staff. In Alaska, only the University of Alaska-Anchorage offers specialed teaching credentials. There is a strong demand for special-ed teachers throughout the United States. Therefore, the shortage of teachers specializing in this field will likely remain unchanged for the foreseeable future.

A growing number of school districts are grappling with a shortage of applicants qualified to teach secondary science and math. School districts are also experiencing a shortage of music and art teachers. The rapid introduction of technology and computers into the classroom is causing the demand for teachers endorsed in technology and computers to grow faster than the supply. Districts also are struggling to fill school counselor positions. Because many rural schools are small and one teacher often teaches a variety of subjects, multiple endorsements can be critical; but many rural school districts are finding these positions difficult to fill. In a similar vein, a number of rural districts are finding it harder to locate teaching couples. These teams are sought after because of housing availability. Alaska's school-age population is far more ethnically and racially diverse than the state's overall population, and diversity in this age group is increasing rapidly. Most school districts feel there is a real shortage of minority candidates. The demand for Native Alaskan teachers is so strong that a number of programs exist to increase the supply of

Figure • 9

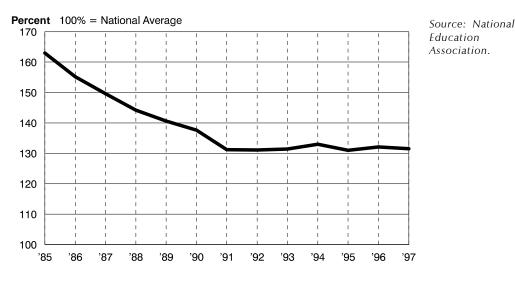
Native Alaskan teachers. Teachers who can teach English as a second language or are bi-lingual are also in big demand. Recruitment in the area of elementary education seems to be less problematic.

Other staff can also be difficult to recruit. Filling the positions of physical and occupational therapists is a perennial problem. These shortages are likely to persist because they also reflect the national labor market. School districts also note shortages of speech pathologists, school psychologists and librarians.

A good time to find a job in local education

Local education is big business in Alaska. It is often the largest employer in a community. Alaska's public education payroll is nearly as large as that of the oil industry. In rural Alaska it's not unusual for local education to be the primary source of both employment and payroll. Local education employs over 20,000 people in the state and has always been an important source of employment opportunities. During the past year, and over at least the next two years, local education will generate an above average number of job opportunities. An early retirement package, a strong demand for educators nationally, fewer out-ofstate applicants and a generally tighter job market have led to better than usual job opportunities for teachers and others associated with local education. Given the industry's size and its diverse needs, opportunities will continue to exist even after the last wave of retirees moves through the system.

Average Teacher Salaries in Alaska As Percentage of the National Average



Table•5

A Partial List of Jobs In Local Education Which Are In Strong Demand

Teaching Staff

Special Education Teachers Math And Science Teachers Music Teachers Art Teachers Technology and Computer Teachers Teachers With Multi-Endorsements Minority and Native Alaskan Teachers Bi-Lingual Teachers Teaching Couples

Other Staff

School Counselors Physical Therapists Occupational Therapists School Psychologists Speech Pathologists Librarians Source: Alaska Department of Labor, Research and Analysis Section.