

“Genius without education is like silver in the mine.” *Benjamin Franklin*

Although Franklin had finished his formal education by the time he was 10 years old, he appreciated the importance of teachers as miners of young minds. Alaska's teachers who engage our students and promote their learning are the subject of this article.

Who are they?

According to Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development wage files,¹ almost 14,000 teachers worked at some time in Alaska during 2008. The quarterly average was about 10,450 workers. Of those, about 8,000 were resident² Alaskans who worked all four quarters and earned at least \$15,000 that year. (See Exhibit 1.)

Vocational education teachers earned the highest average wages at more than \$59,000 a year while elementary teachers earned the least, averaging about \$49,000 a year. Part of this difference is likely because wages tend to grow with experience. The average age of vocational education teachers is five years higher than for elementary teachers. (See Exhibit 1.)

More than 70 percent of all Alaska resident teachers were female in 2008. Females accounted for almost 93 percent of all kindergarten

teachers. At the other end of the spectrum, they make up only 35 percent of vocational education teachers.

The average age of Alaska's resident teachers was 44 years in 2008. Middle and secondary school teachers were the youngest at 43. Vocational and special education teachers were the oldest with an average age of 49 and 46 respectively. (See Exhibit 1.)

This year, about 34 percent of current teachers are eligible to retire.³

The 2000 Census identified more than 15 percent of the state's population as American Indian or Alaska Native, yet Alaska Natives make up less than 5 percent of teachers in the state.⁴

Most teachers are employed by local government

About 32 percent of resident teachers taught at the elementary school level, 9 percent at the middle school level, 30 percent were secondary school teachers, 2 percent taught kindergarten, 10 percent were special education teachers at all levels, 2 percent taught vocational education at the middle and secondary levels, and 16 percent were coded as all other teachers. Some of the latter group taught multilevel classes.

Most teachers in Alaska's public schools are employees of local government. It's no surprise that local government employed more than 96 percent of all resident teachers and paid more than

¹ ODB wage files contain occupation and place of work information for wage and salary workers covered by unemployment insurance and employed in Alaska.

² Alaska residency is determined by matching the Alaska Department of Revenue Permanent Fund Dividend file with the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development wage file. The wage file contains quarterly earnings and industry information on workers covered by unemployment insurance within Alaska. Those who aren't subject to unemployment insurance laws include self-employed workers, fishermen, the uniformed military, federal employees, and elected and appointed officials. Workers included in the wage file were considered Alaska residents if they applied for a PFD in either 2008 or 2009.

³ According to the Alaska's University for Alaska's Schools Report. This report from the University of Alaska to the legislature is on teacher preparation, recruitment and retention. See www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_documents.asp?session=26&docid=5420

⁴ See footnote No. 3.

1 Resident Teachers Alaska, 2008

Teacher Level	Resident Teachers	(\$) Total Resident Wages	(\$) Average Resident Wages	Males	Females	Average Age
Kindergarten	123	\$6,441,426	\$52,369	9	114	44
Elementary	2,550	\$125,057,497	\$49,042	486	2,064	44
Middle School	684	\$35,364,572	\$51,703	273	411	43
Secondary	2,356	\$121,951,275	\$51,762	904	1,452	43
Special Education	790	\$40,470,128	\$51,228	135	655	46
Vocational Education	162	\$9,607,767	\$59,307	106	56	49
Teacher, Others ¹	1,264	\$68,174,046	\$53,935	413	850	45
Total	7,929	\$407,066,711	\$51,339	2,326	5,602	44

Data is for workers that worked in all four quarters of 2008 and had wages of at least \$15,000 during the year.

¹ This group includes tutors, private tutors, consumer education specialist, lecturers, substitutes, and other teachers.

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

2 Districts with 100+ Teachers¹ Alaska, 2009-2010 school year

Rank	School District	Total Teachers FTE ¹	Total Students Kindergarten to Grade 12	Student Teacher Ratio ²
1	Anchorage School District	2,934	49,001	16.8
2	Matanuska-Susitna Borough Schools	959	16,579	15.8
3	Fairbanks North Star Borough Schools	837	14,313	16.7
4	Kenai Peninsula	596	9,230	13.7
5	Juneau Borough Schools	346	4,953	14.3
6	Lower Kuskokwim School District	277	4,000	14.3
7	Kodiak Island Borough Schools	184	2,568	13.6
8	Bering Strait School District	176	1,649	9.3
9	North Slope Borough Schools	168	1,544	9.2
10	Ketchikan Gateway Borough Schools	154	2,110	13.7
11	Lower Yukon	150	1,932	12.9
12	Northwest Arctic Borough Schools	142	1,824	12.9
13	Sitka Borough Schools	104	1,339	12.4
	Alaska Statewide	8,151	129,187	14.7

This report is based on unaudited survey data collected by the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development in October 2009.

¹ Based on the number of full-time equivalent teachers.

² Student/Teacher Ratio is calculated by dividing student average daily membership by total teachers.

Source: Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, Assessment and Accountability

97 percent of all teacher wages in 2008. About 130 of the state's resident teachers worked in private schools or for state government. The latter group includes teachers who worked at Mount Edgecumbe High School, the state run public boarding school in Sitka.

The Anchorage School District employed more than one-third of all resident teachers in the state. Matanuska-Susitna Borough Schools and Fairbanks North Star School District were the second and third largest employers of teachers, but Anchorage schools employed more than the second- to fifth-largest districts combined. (See Exhibit 2.)

New hires

There were more than 1,300 new hire⁵ elementary, secondary and special education teachers in 2008. More than half of them were hired between the months of July to September – when most new teachers are hired for the school year.

The Department of Education and Early Development estimates that Alaska schools hired roughly 900 to 1,100 teachers in 2009.⁶ The Department of Education's numbers are not directly comparable to the Department of Labor's. Some new hires in Labor's count may have held more than one job during the year and could be counted more than once.

Demand for teachers exceeds the supply of resident workers

Ideally, Alaska would train and provide the bulk of its teachers. So far this isn't happening.

From 2006-2009, the University of Alaska graduated an average of about 200 new K-12 teachers a year. They graduated between 30 and 44 special education teachers annually for that period as well.⁷

Special education vacancies are the hardest to fill, followed by math and science in that order. Elementary positions are slightly easier to fill than secondary. This may be partly because students can earn a bachelor's degree in elementary education in four years, but a secondary teacher needs a subject-matter degree and then

⁵ New hires are workers who didn't work for the employer in any of the four quarters prior to the reference quarter. This number includes residents and nonresidents

⁶ See footnote No. 3.

⁷ See footnote No. 3.

must complete either a master's or post-baccalaureate program.

Alaska Teacher Placement, a primary clearinghouse and matching agency for the state's schools, reports that Alaska is only able to produce about one-third of teachers required each year. Most new teachers are recruited from out of state.⁸

Turnover is highest in rural areas and among new teachers

Teacher turnover is an issue that affects teachers on a personal and professional level and districts on a staffing and financial level. A relatively high percentage of teachers in Alaska, especially new teachers and those in rural areas, do not stay on the job.

In 2007, turnover for all school districts averaged 14 percent. Turnover was 10 percent for urban districts and 22 percent for rural districts. Rates were even higher for new teachers. Teacher turnover in the state's largest districts is comparable to that of U.S. mid-sized cities, but turnover in rural districts is higher than almost any place in the country except some inner-city districts in large cities.⁹

Teachers in Alaska leave their jobs for many reasons. Salaries are still above the U.S. average but are lower than they used to be – relative to other places. Travel and cost of living expenses are especially high in remote areas. Some new teachers, especially those from outside of Alaska, are not prepared for the harsh climate, remoteness, and cultural challenges they find in some rural areas of the state.

The financial burden associated with recruiting and hiring new teachers falls heavier on rural schools than large urban ones. The process takes a disproportional percentage of the smaller rural schools' budgets. Money that could have been

Licensing / Certification Elementary and High School

In Alaska, all teachers in public schools or state-approved nonpublic schools must be at least 18 years old. Classroom teachers are required to have a valid Initial, Professional, or Master certificate. Special education teachers must hold a special education endorsement.

To qualify for an Initial certificate, an applicant must meet the following requirements:

- Have a bachelor's degree or higher;
- Complete a teacher preparation program, or be currently enrolled in a teacher preparation program (program must be completed within two years of the issuance of the Initial certificate); and
- Obtain Passing scores on the Praxis I, CBEST, or WEST-B exam.

Also:

- The applicant must complete three semester hours in Alaska studies and three semester hours in multicultural education or cross cultural communications within two years of certification.
- A one-year teaching certificate may be issued for applicants who have not yet met the testing requirement, but hold a current, valid teaching certificate in another state.
- The Initial certificate is valid for up to three years and is nonrenewable. The requirements for the Professional or Master certificate must be met during the life of the Initial certificate.
- The fee for a teacher certificate is \$125. There is also a \$66 background check fee which is subject to change.

For more information about teacher certification, contact:

Alaska Department of Education and Early
Development
Teacher Education and Certification Section
801 W. 10th Street, Suite 200
P.O. Box 110500
Juneau, AK 99811-0500
907.465.2831 Voice
907.465.2441 Fax
E-mail: tcwebmail@alaska.gov
<http://www.eed.state.ak.us/TeacherCertification1>

⁸ According to the Alaska Teacher Placement Web site: www.alaskateacher.org/doku.php?id=getting_certified

⁹ Alexandra Hill and Diane Hirshberg, "Turnover Among Alaska Teachers: Is It Changing?" Research Summary No. 69, Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage

applied to educational services or supplies is spent looking for teacher replacements.

Teachers who graduate from training programs in Alaska have lower turnover rates than teachers from programs outside of the state. From 2000-2005, nearly three-quarters of the in-state graduates remained at their jobs while half of those from out of state moved on.¹⁰

¹⁰ See footnote No. 9.

Summary

Alaska has many opportunities for teachers who are willing to work in rural areas. Also, teachers of math, science and special education are in demand. With nearly 35 percent of the state's teachers eligible to retire this year, Alaska will need more teachers. Studies have shown that teachers trained in-state tend to stay at their jobs longer. Teacher training groups and districts recognize the need to work together to train more Alaskans to teach in the state's schools.

Mentoring Teachers in Alaska

**By Melissa Hill, K-12 Outreach Program Director and
Barbara Adams, ASMP Research Lead**

Teacher turnover in Alaska is highest among new teachers in rural areas. Typically, teachers hired to work in rural Alaska are prepared out of state and have limited experience working or living in areas similar to rural Alaska.

The experience can be overwhelming for a new teacher coming to Alaska. Transportation by boat or small plane, limited teacher housing, extreme climate changes, multi-aged classrooms, and a different value system and way of life are all factors that require these teachers to adapt to their new environment, both in and outside of the school. Couple the newness of relocating to rural Alaska with being a first-year teacher, and the probability for success is limited.

One program, the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project (ASMP), which started in 2004 as a response to the challenge of teacher retention, supplies a means to help ensure teachers in these remote areas succeed in the classroom. ASMP is a collaborative effort between the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development and the University of Alaska. Currently the ASMP is the only program of its kind in the country where mentoring is state funded and offered at no cost to the school districts.

ASMP matches first- and second-year teachers called Early Career Teachers (ECTs) with experienced educators who act as mentors. These mentors offer knowledge and experience based on at least eight years of teaching in Alaska. Mentors use an array of formative assessment tools to help ECTs foster instructional strategies to promote learning in the classroom. Mentors observe new teachers in the classroom, model lessons and co-teach with them, provide guidance and support, promote self-reflection and goal setting, and serve as instructional coaches and impartial listeners. In most cases, mentors have monthly face-to-face meetings with ECTs at the rural teaching sites. They also maintain weekly contact with teachers using email, telephone, Skype, instant messaging, or video conferencing.

Between 2005 and 2009, ASMP consistently served between 370 and 380 teachers per year. New teachers are typically mentored for a two-year period. Between 2004 and 2009, the average retention rate was 81% for teachers that were mentored.

ASMP is driven by two goals: increase teacher retention and improve student achievement. The challenge of recruiting and retaining teachers for rural Alaska is complex and no single program or initiative will close the achievement gap for Alaska's minority students.

The Alaska Statewide Mentor Project is research based and focuses on instruction and learning. It's just one example of a program that is making a difference towards the goal of retaining quality teachers in rural Alaska. More information about the project is available at the following Web site: www.alaskamentorproject.org/.