

Alaska's Public Schools

A profile of occupations, earnings, and employment

About 132,000 children attend public schools around the state, and that generates many jobs in a wide range of occupations. In both rural and urban Alaska, the local school district is often among an area's largest employers.

Teachers make up about 60 percent of employees in public schools, a part of local government known as local education. (See Exhibit 1.) The other 40 percent includes everything from librarians and school nurses to janitors and administrators.

Modest growth for a big employer

With the exception of the state's few boarding schools, Alaska's public school enrollment and jobs correspond roughly with the concentration of population. Generally, where there are people, there will be school-aged children — and when

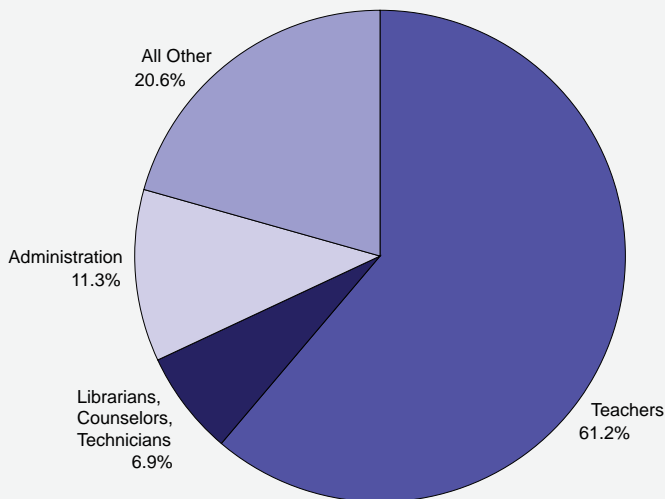
there are enough school-aged children, there will be schools and jobs in local education. Enrollment numbers are predictably largest in Anchorage, Mat-Su, Fairbanks, and Juneau. (See Exhibit 2.)

The 21,600 jobs in local education made up 7 percent of all wage and salary employment in 2011. (See Exhibit 3.) By major category, only health care, retail trade, leisure and hospitality, professional and business services, and state government were larger. (See Exhibit 4.)

From 2000 to 2011, jobs in local education grew at an average rate of 1.3 percent a year. That growth rate was slightly below the overall job growth rate of 1.6 percent and well below the growth of health care (7.4 percent) and natural resources and mining (4.4 percent), two of the state's strongest performers over the last decade. (See Exhibit 5.)

1 More Than Half Are Teachers

Alaska education occupations, 2011



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

Less-than-average earnings

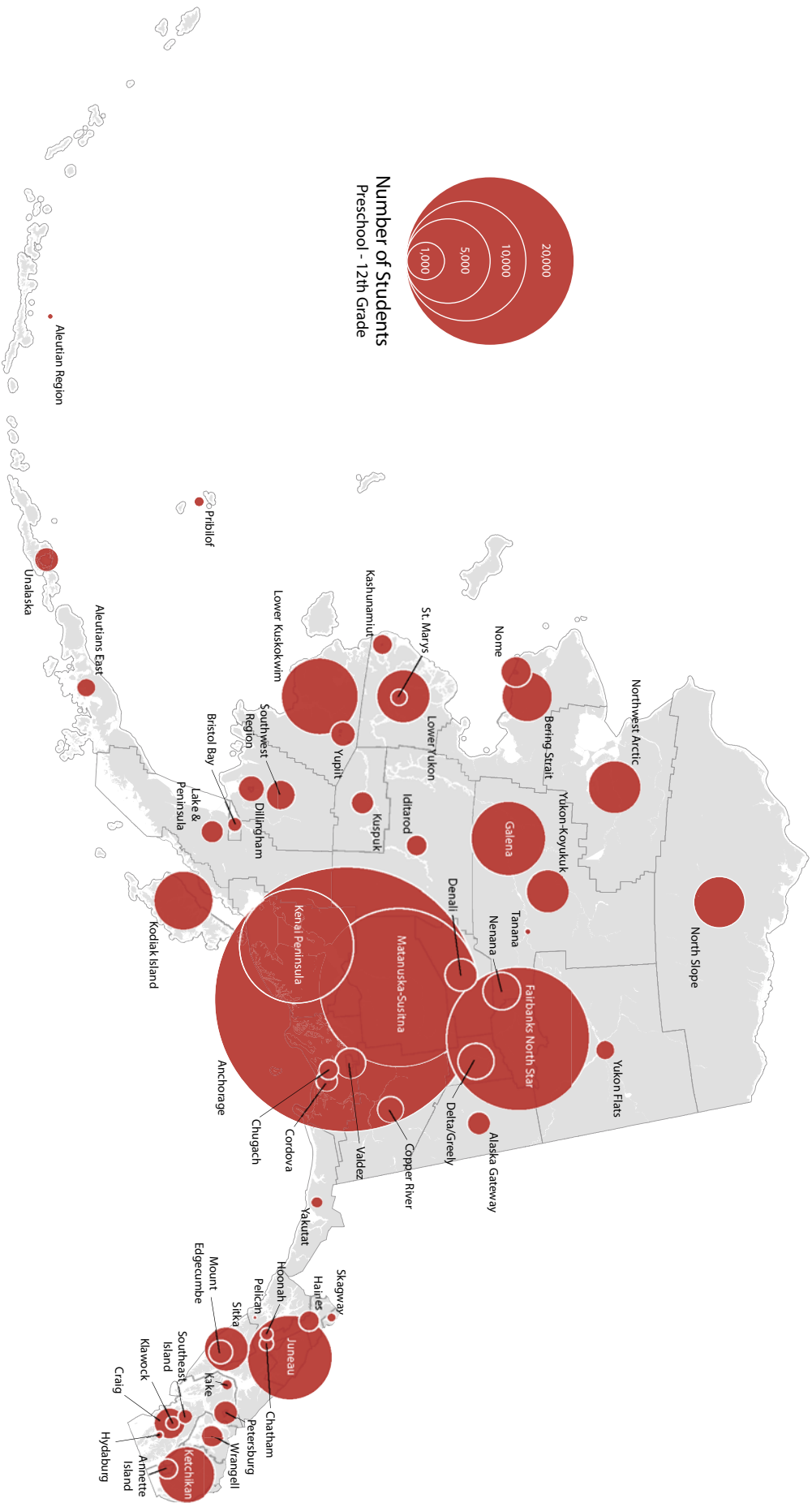
The average local education job paid \$43,800 in 2011, about 11 percent less than the statewide average and 24 percent less than the average for other public sector jobs.

The mix of occupations in local education explains some of the difference, and a possible larger-than-average percentage of part-time jobs could also be a factor because the data set that produces earnings numbers counts a 20-hour-per-week job the same as a full-time job.

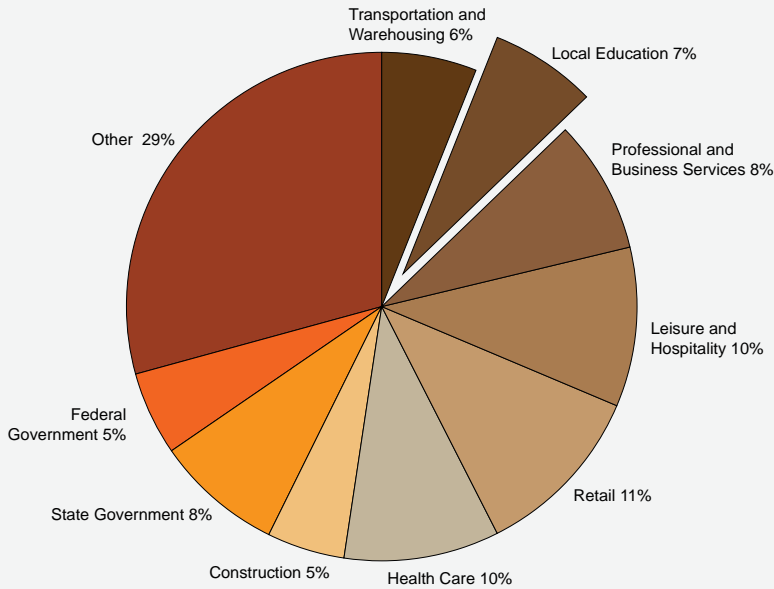
In nominal terms, average earnings in local education have climbed from around \$35,000 in 2000 to nearly \$44,000 in 2011 — but when adjusted for inflation, they actually fell by 7.4 percent over that period. In contrast, overall earnings statewide were up 5.4 percent when adjusted for inflation. (See Exhibit 6.)

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Public School Enrollment Alaska districts, 2011–2012 school year



3 Local Education a Significant Employer Alaska industries, 2011



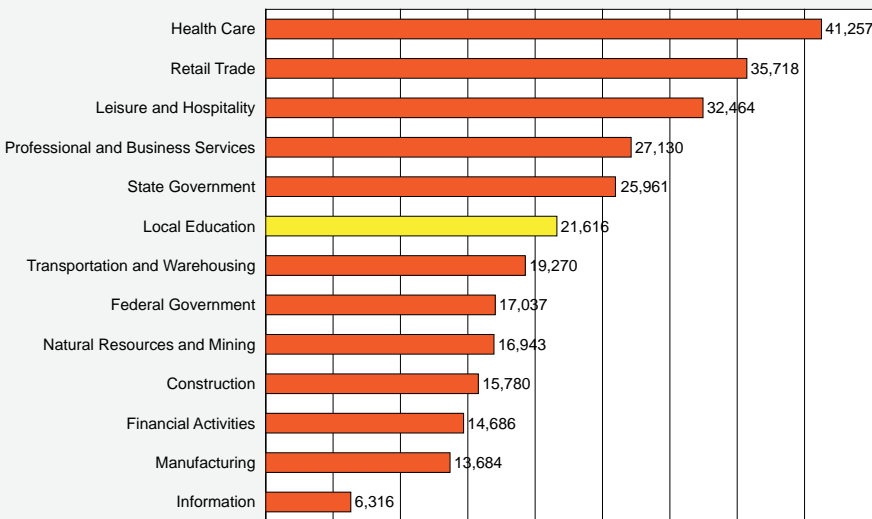
Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Caution is necessary when interpreting those numbers, however. Many factors affect a sector's average earnings, including seniority and a change in the mix of occupations, and the education world has certainly seen its share of change in recent years in the form of federal legislation and education reforms.

For example, if a significant percentage of experienced, higher-paid teachers retired or if education reforms resulted in more jobs for lower-paid teachers' assistants, average earnings would fall even though an individual teacher or other local education worker's earnings may have more than kept pace with inflation.

The simplistic conclusion to avoid is that earnings for any specific local education occupation — whether it be teachers, administrators, or the many others — have lost ground to inflation or that specific people who work in public schools have seen their earnings decline when adjusted for inflation. That's a question the average earnings data can't answer.

4 School Districts Among Top Employers Alaska employment by industry, 2011



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

Trends in enrollment and employment

Intuitively, one might think enrollment trends would roughly match employment trends — and over a long period, that is likely. However, enrollment fell 1.3 percent from 2000 to 2011, and local education employment grew 13.9 percent. (See Exhibit 7.)

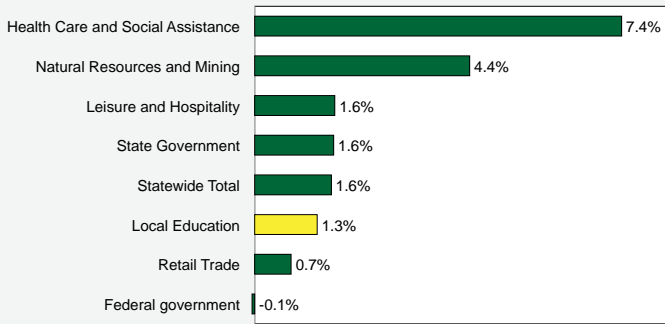
The year-to-year changes in enrollment were generally small, which may partially explain why employment did not follow the same pattern over the period.

Another possible explanation, similar to the earnings data, is that with federal education reform and a variety of state and federal efforts to improve public schools, positions may have been created or maintained that wouldn't have been otherwise.

The enrollment decline isn't expected to continue, though, because Alaska's

Education Jobs Grow Modestly 5

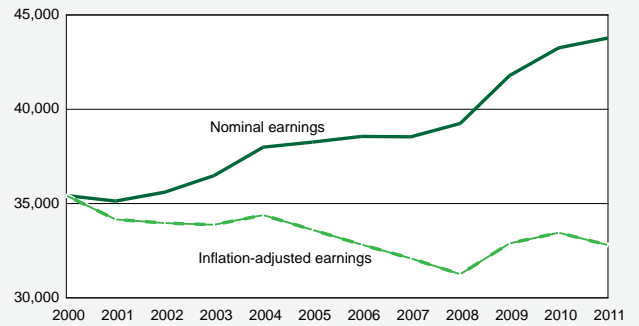
Average annual growth, 2000 to 2011



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

Inflation Cuts Average Earnings 6

Alaska public education, 2000 to 2011



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

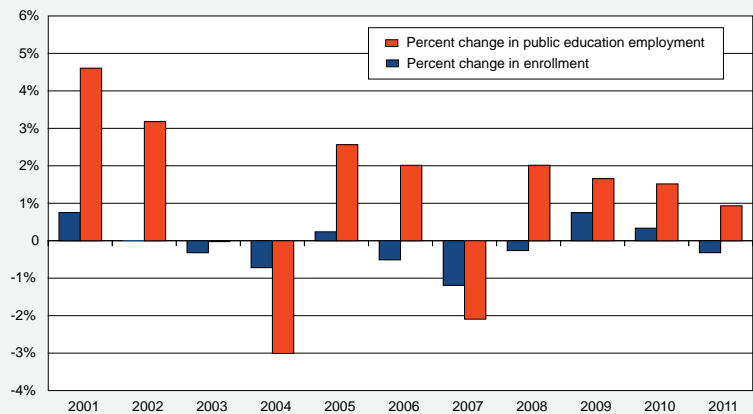
school-aged population is projected to grow 24 percent by 2035.

A stable force in the economy

Local education employment has been fairly steady since 2000, varying between 19,000 and 21,600 jobs. Over the last four years, the job count has climbed every year by small percentages. That same basic pattern is expected to continue in the absence of significant shocks to the state's economy.

Enrollment Declined Slightly 7

Local education enrollment and employment



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