

WHEN THERE AREN'T ENOUGH TEACHERS:  
A SURVEY OF ALASKA SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS

A  
THESIS

Presented to the Faculty  
of the University of Alaska Anchorage

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION IN ADULT EDUCATION

By

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Anchorage, Alaska

December 2008

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

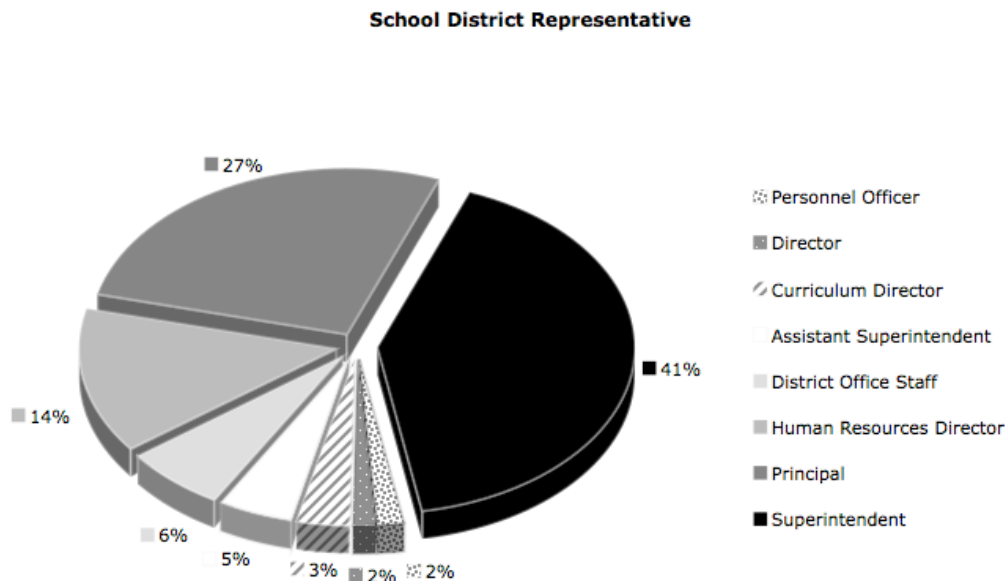
#### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to determine, from the school administrators perspective, what factors contribute to the challenges of Alaska teacher recruitment. The study seeks to determine the gaps in the supply and demand by subject area. Aggregating the responses by geographical region and subject provides an accurate reflection of where the teacher workforce demands really are by both geographical region and subject. As different states look to colleges and universities to fill the gaps in the supply and demand of teachers, understanding what factors contribute to the recruitment to the profession is valuable to examine the future workforce supply.

The challenges school administrators face in recruiting teachers is a concern for many Alaskans seeking to close the achievement gap for poor and minority students. Inexperienced teachers, including those trained in “fast track” programs often called alternative routes to certification, are more likely to teach in school with higher rates of poverty where poor and minority students reside. There is an assumption that if more highly qualified teachers are retained in schools, student achievement will improve. However, to attract teachers to work in those schools, it is important to first understand what factors contribute to the challenges of recruiting teachers for policymaker to remove barrier and create incentives for teachers to work in schools of most need. Reducing teacher turnover is an important step in the recruiting process because veteran teachers can assist in the induction process for new teachers. The survey revealed data on the implications of the teacher shortage on the school, staff, and students indicating the connection between teacher recruitment and retention on student success.

## Respondents

A total of 63 school administrators completed the online survey (n=63). Of the 63, eight (n=8) school districts (13%) were unidentifiable by any answer provided. Figure 1 the percentage of respondents by title provides a break down of completers by position. According to the data, the majority of respondents (41%) were superintendents, followed by principals at 27%, and human resource directors making up 14%; collectively these three subgroups make up over two-thirds of the responses with almost half of all responses coming from the school district superintendent (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1. Percentage of School District Respondents by Title*

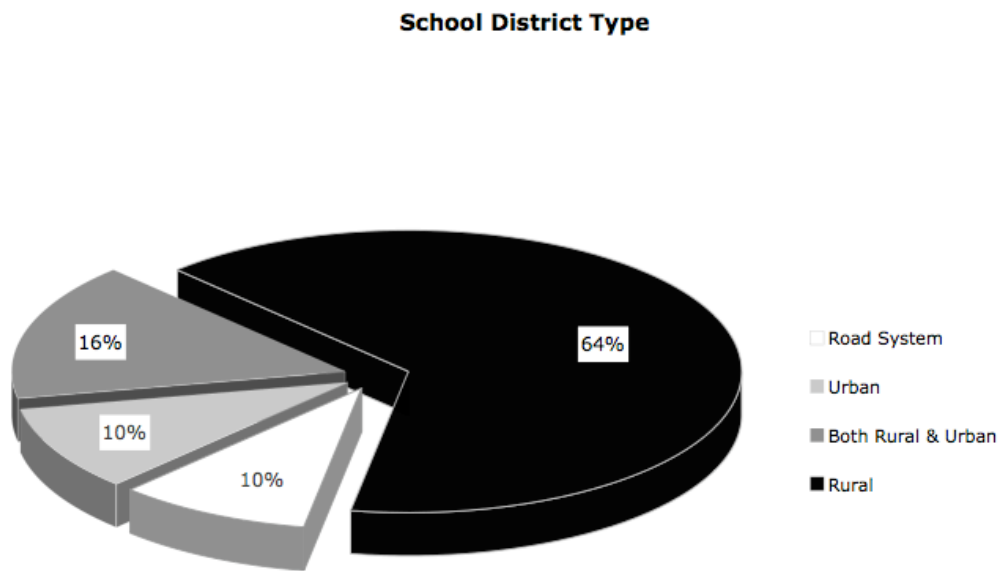
A total of five School district respondents (8%) listed more than one position, indicating respondents were responsible for more than one well-defined position in the district office. Respondents were asked to provide information on the number of years employed in the position(s) as well as the number of years employed in the district. The mean for the number of

years each respondent had been in the same position was  $M=4.85$ , the  $Mdn=3.5$ , with a  $SD=4.57$ . The years in the position ranged greatly with some respondents reporting only six months (.50) in the position, while others reported 20 years in the same position. The data for years in the district was somewhat similar, with  $M=9.58$ ,  $Mdn=6$ , and a  $SD=8.66$ . One respondent had been in the same district for 35 years. This question increased the reliability of the respondents by ensuring the majority of administrators had enough experience to draw upon to answer the questions.

There was an interest in determining how much time each respondent spent on recruiting activities. However, the data was difficult to analyze; a review of the comments section indicated respondents expressed difficulty in trying to quantify time in hours or days spent on this activity. Thus, this data is not reported in the findings. For future reference this questions would be structured as an open-ended comment.

#### *Rural to Urban School Districts*

When respondents were asked to identify the district as either rural, urban, both rural and urban, road-system, or none of the above, a total of 41 respondents considered the district rural (64%). Both rural and urban made up 16% of the total responses, while road-system and urban school districts made up only 10% of the responses. The urban districts represent the largest population of teachers and students. Figure 2 School District Rural to Urban depicts the representation of the responses. The limitations of this response were quickly identified; simply reporting the data based on rural, urban, and road-system skewed the results when different geographical regions were lumped into one population (see Figure 2). After respondents were asked to rate the level of overall concern with recruiting teachers it become important to disaggregate the data by geographical region as well as size.

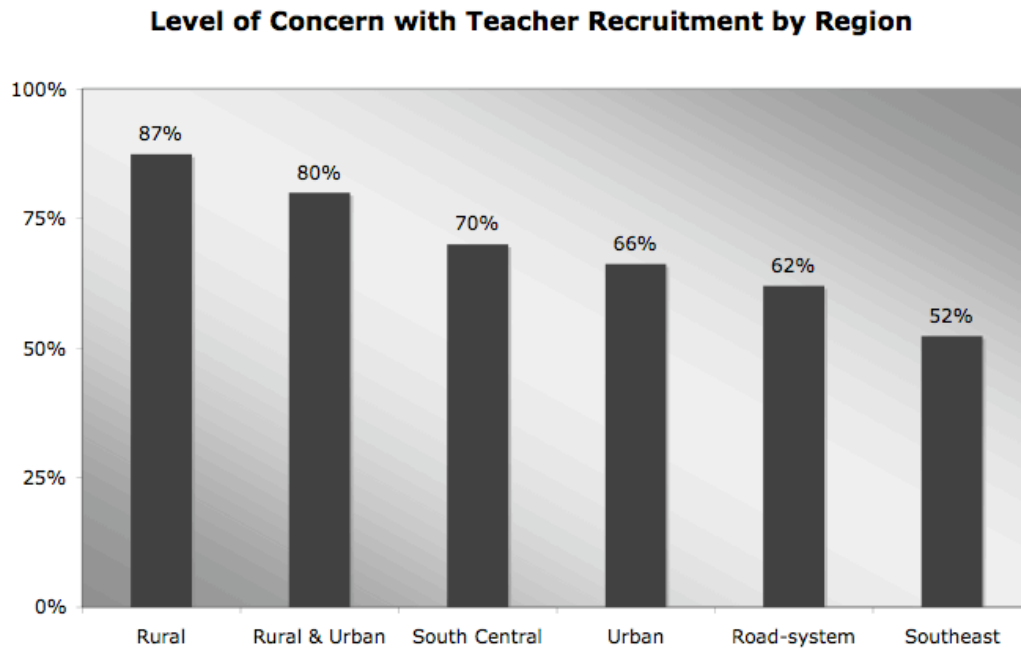


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*Figure 2. School District Rural to Urban*

### Overall Level of Concern with Recruitment

The overall concern with recruiting teachers by geographic region varied greatly based on what part of Alaska the school district represented. In analysis of this data, school districts were categorized into subcategories based on similarities in geographical representation, (coded as regions) and school size (coded as rural, urban, or road-system). For example, a school coded as rural would not include school districts residing in the Southeastern region of Alaska, or school districts on the road-system. When the regions were disaggregated rural schools (n=26) represent 41% of the respondents. When coding regions, the school district size, location (on or off the road-system, accessibility by air or ferry) and populations (both size and population of indigenous people) were considered. Figure 3 shows rural school districts, predominantly serving Alaska Native people have a significant (<35%) higher level of concern when recruiting teachers compared to Southeast school districts (see Figure 3).



*Figure 3. Overall Level of Concern with Teacher Recruitment by Region*

In Chapter 1 the characteristics of rural Alaska are described in more detail. Additional findings suggest rural districts had high agreement on the level of concern with teacher recruitment as indicated by a standard deviation of 1.11 ( $SD=11.1$ ). All districts identified as rural rated the level of concern between 7 to 10, with 41% reporting either 7 or 8 on the Likert scale, and 59% reporting 9 or 10 indicating a constant concern. Compared to Southeast districts, the standard deviation was greater ( $SD=2.97$ ) with a mean of 5.23 ( $M=5.23$ ) on a ten-point Likert scale.

Follow up data from the comment section provided additional data to increase reliability and provided insightful information on the contrast between rural and southeast districts. Comments from the southeast school districts indicate teacher retention was not a significant concern because turnover is relatively low. These findings are backed by the literature in the 2005 Supply and Demand Report (A. Hill & Hirshberg, 2005), as well as documented by small

number of southeast districts that participate in the Alaska Teacher Placement State Job Fair (M. Hill, 2006). Comments from Southeast School Districts on teacher recruitment were adapted for confidentiality (see Table 1) imply school districts in this region have the luxury to be more selective when concerned with teacher quality. These findings are not surprising, and may be attributed to the diverse economic opportunities, lack of poverty, and a relatively mild climate located on the Alaska Highway-marine system; variable resulting in stable working conditions. These factors are not confirmed by data because school districts were not asked to report reasons contributing to stable working conditions. These are however, strong indicators and characteristics commonly associated with southeast Alaska.

Table 1.

Comments from Southeast School Districts on Overall Concern with Teacher Recruitment

1. Good teachers frequently will stay a long time
2. [District] has little turnover*
3. The pool is thin, we hire teachers from northern districts long before the job fair
4. We are fortunate that salaries and benefits don't impact our recruitment
5. We have long term teachers
6. Our emphasis in [district] is getting the highest qualified teacher*

Notes: \*comments adapted for confidentiality

In stark contrast the tone echoed in the comments from rural school districts found in Table 2 Comments from Rural School Districts on Overall Concern with Teacher Recruitment, indicates not only the constant challenge rural school districts in Alaska face when recruiting teachers, but the recognition of the impact of teacher quality, or lack there of on student learning (see Table 1). Comments adapted for confidentiality such as the following in Table 2 should raise the level of concern for policymakers and educational leaders throughout the state (see Table 2).



Table 2.

Comments from Rural School Districts on Overall Concern with Teacher Recruitment

1. Our first concern is highly qualified, second we need to take the time to review the applicants and make sure they have the qualifications they list on their packets, we hired a person one year who was less than honest and not Highly-Qualified*
2. I consider this the biggest challenge we have*
3. Somewhat stable at the moment but always a constant concern
4. With a certified staff of [more than 200 teachers], recruitment is a year around effort. This year we began the year with [more than five] special education vacancies. This puts a tremendous burden on the rest of the staff, and reduces the services we can provide to students; The difficulty in recruiting also affects the quality of our staff, although most of our teachers are very good, we sometimes select and retain staff that we would not if we had more to choose from*
5. Our turnover is much too high for a quality academic program; we want to increase teacher retention and hire the best teachers for only a few openings and all too often we have far too many openings*
6. The percentage of teacher turnover has declined over the past years, and teacher retention is a high priority in the district*.

Notes: \*comments adapted for confidentiality

By comparing both quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the school administrators in Alaska, one cannot ignore the disparities which must exist between the quality in the educational services school districts can or cannot provide when there is an insufficient pool of teachers willing (a key term) to teach in impoverished areas. Triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative data increases the reliability of the findings. This analysis sets the

framework for the challenge that all local, state, and federal policymakers must address in the public education system. What are school districts administrators expected to do when there aren't enough qualified teachers willing to sign a contract and come to Alaska?

In analyzing the responses of the data for urban and road-system school districts the trends indicated the challenges in recruiting teachers were more isolated by position and core-content areas, such as math, science and special education, which might explain why 50% of the urban responses rated the level of concern for teacher recruitment relatively high, between 7 to 10, with a standard deviation of 2.29 ( $SD=2.29$ ) and mean score of 6.62 ( $M=6.62$ ). Using a constant comparative method to increase reliability of the qualitative data, the comments from both the urban and road-system school districts were analyzed for trends. In Table 3 comments from urban, road-system, and rural and urban school districts on overall Concern with teacher recruitment confirm specific content areas increase the level of concern for recruitment in urban and road-system schools (see Table 3).

Table 3.

Comments from Urban, Road-system, and Rural & Urban School Districts on Overall Concern with Teacher Recruitment

1. Really depends on the position the district is looking to fill
2. With the cost of living increases, more teacher recruitment competition in the lower 48, the changes in the retirement system, NCLB Highly-Qualified requirements, it is becoming very difficult to find quality teachers*
3. This is especially true from some specific positions that are very hard to fill
4. Math, Science, and Technology*
5. In hard to fill positions: [for example] our immersion programs, special education, and math*
6. Teachers can usually be found but the quality can be poor
7. Finding the number of Highly-Qualified people we need to fill certain positions in our schools - especially, special education*
<i>Notes: *comments adapted for confidentiality</i>

For the majority of the respondents the level of concern was high with 41.3% (n=26) of respondents indicating recruitment was a constant concern, rating it a 9 or 10 on a ten point Likert scale with a standard deviation of two and half (SD=2.50) and a mean of seven (M=7.3). The most compelling finding up to this point is captured best by one respondent who states, “[a]lthough most of our teachers are very good, we sometimes select and retain staff that we would not, if we had more to choose from” (see Table 2, no. 4). Comments such as these give the data a human element that is difficult to communicate in graphs and raw scores on aggregated responses. Qualitative data document the elements of frustration, concern, and challenges with teacher recruitment.

### Hardest to Fill by Grade Level and Content Areas

National data indicates teacher recruitment by grade level becomes more of a challenge at the secondary level. This may be attributed to the highly qualified variable and regulations of NCLB (2002). Alaska school administrators confirm finding teachers by grade level becomes more difficult the higher the grade level. Figure 4 Difficulty Staffing by Grade Level, demonstrates this trend (see Figure 4).

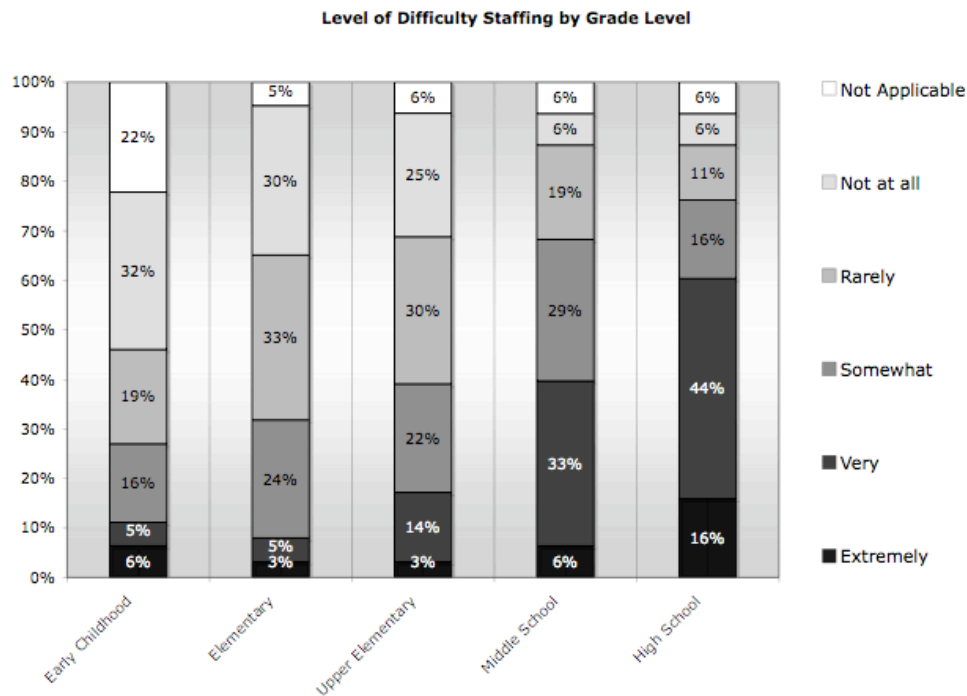
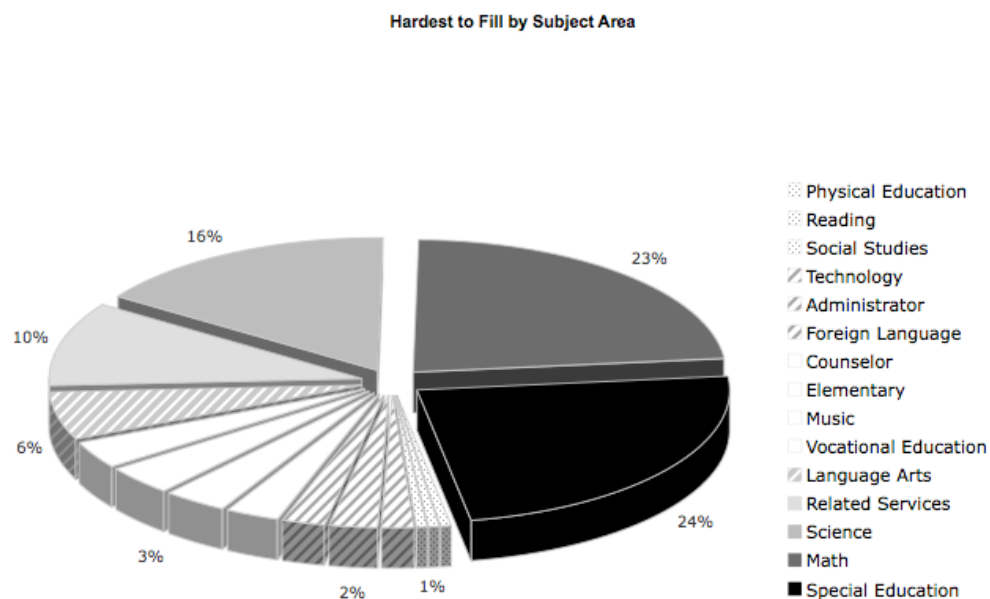


Figure 4. Difficulty Staffing by Grade Level

Difficulty in staffing by subject area was collected from the target audience. School administrators were given the option of entering the top three most challenging positions to fill by content area to ensure the raw data captured the true response. The analysis of the data was then coded into categories. For example, if a respondent listed *English* that specific unit was coded as *Language Arts*. Additionally, all of the related services, such as *speech pathology*, *school psychologist*, and *occupational therapists*, were amassed into one aggregated unit coded

as related services. It is likely two of the top three responses (see Figure 5) for subject areas considered hardest to fill translate into secondary teaching assignments given math (n=40) and science (n=28) are identified as core content areas for highly qualified and offered most often as stand alone courses in middle school and high school. This data set strengthens the reliability of the previous question, which measures the difficulty of hiring by grade level, and confirms secondary teachers in core content areas rank among the hardest positions for school administrators to staff, second only to special education (n=42). These findings are aligned with the national data as reported in the literature review.



*Figure 5. Subject Areas Considered Hardest to Fill*

Responses such as special education, math, and science were fairly consistent regardless of geographical location. The analysis of the qualitative data when cross-referenced with the geographic variables, indicated school districts in rural areas commented on the need for dual endorsement areas. This analysis demonstrates how, for rural and southeast school districts, the highly-qualified (n=5) element contributes to the shortage of teachers. Operationally it assumes

all schools are the same in size. Table 4 captures comments from southeast school districts on the hardest positions to fill by grade level and content areas, which reinforces the challenges of recruiting secondary teachers (see Table 4).

Table 4.

Comments from Southeast School Districts on Hardest to fill by Grade Level and Content Areas

1. [We have] mostly K-12 schools, generalist no longer work, [we] need elementary teacher with at least one skill in secondary*
2. In the middle and high school the difficulty depends on the position, [while] physical education and language arts are easy to fill; math, science, vocational education are difficult*
3. Obtaining Highly-Qualified teachers as defined by NCLB has become more of a challenge at the high school level*
4. Highly-Qualified math and science, and special education are the most difficult to hire*
5. [We] need multi-skilled teachers*
6. [Related services] are taking jobs in the private sector, the pay is higher*
7. Luckily, we have had the same special education and math teachers in the district for years, [however] the technology teacher has changed several times*
8. Teachers with good core subject knowledge and effectiveness combined with the ability to teach other electives in foreign language or vocational education are highly sought after*
9. By far the most difficult positions to fill are Highly-Qualified teacher to come in and teach a multi-age*
10. High school and Junior high school math presents a challenge*

*Notes:* \*comments adapted for confidentiality

Rural school districts report similar findings to Southeast districts (see Table 5).

Table 5.

Comments from Rural School Districts on Hardest to Fill by Grade Level and Content Areas

1. Challenging to find teachers with the special temperament and patience*
2. Difficult finding someone who can work with multilevel-age classes, middle and high school teachers with more than one major such as English and History*
3. Biggest challenge, finding secondary generalist capable and willing to teach a variety of subjects; Highly-Qualified requirements are too much pressure*
4. It is more difficult to find Highly-Qualified teachers for middle and high school levels; they do not have expertise that elementary teachers do*
5. The high school staffing difficulty is dependent on subject area
6. In secondary, it depends on the core subject expertise you are looking for
7. Special education teachers and specialists are the hardest to find
8. Staffing is usually not a problem, retention for more than two years is*
9. Special education folks across the grade levels are also very difficult to find; administrators at all levels are also very difficult to find*
10. Special education is definitely the hardest area to find qualified applicants*
11. Math and science were the hardest positions to fill, followed by Language Arts*
12. Quality administrators are very much in short supply*
13. Dual endorsements such as a math and science, all the levels in high school*
14. Specialty areas in high school can be tough to staff
15. K-12 special education positions as well as administrative positions*

*Notes: \*comments adapted for confidentiality*

Comments from Rural School Districts on Hardest to Fill by Grade Level and Content Areas include concerns regarding secondary positions and special education. Three responses from rural districts included administration (n=3) as hard to staff. Lastly, the urban school district comments on hard to staff positions increases the reliability to conclude highly-qualified (NCLB,



2002) content areas are among the hardest positions to staff according to Alaska school administrators. Data from Table 6 confirms this too (see Table 6).

Table 6.

#### Comments from Urban School Districts on Hardest to Fill by Grade Level and Content Areas

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1. NCLB content area concerns would be math [Highly-Qualified]\*
  2. These two areas [either science, vocational education, or math] are very competitive in the district with not enough candidates\*
  3. The question does not provide enough detail, for instance, middle school staffing is a problem for math teachers, but not at all for social studies; ratings were based upon start of school year; finding individuals mid-year would have a different rating\*
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*Notes:* \*comments adapted for confidentiality

The data collected for this section of the study includes qualitative data to increase understanding and reliability. After coding of the cumulative comments in Tables 1-6, one can conclude special education (n=9) positions are among the hardest positions to fill regardless of geographic region; followed by secondary core content areas (n=20) regulated by NCLB (2002), (n=9), such as math (n=12) and science (n=6), are among the hardest positions to fill, but even more so for small rural schools unable to hire teachers certified in every subject matter.

Teacher quality and student learning, as demonstrated through comments about leadership, concern for other staff, and retention of teachers coupled with a tone of despondency was evident in the analysis of the qualitative data. Comments coded for teacher quality, concern for students and learning, references to retention or concern for staff, as well as adjectives used to describe teacher disposition make up 46% of the responses (n=22). These findings are significant because it reinforces the national findings, and confirms the same is true for Alaska.

More importantly administrators recognize the problem, yet struggle to find solutions. Responses that demonstrate concern for student learning and the importance of teacher quality without a prompt, other than an open-ended comment, is a testament to the awareness of the effects a shortage of qualified teachers has on student learning.

### Factors that Contribute to the Challenges of Recruiting Teachers

As this data is further analyzed it becomes important to understand from an administrators' perspective what factors contribute to the challenge of recruiting teachers. Figure 6a Degree of Challenge by Factor for Recruitment depicts what administrators believe are barriers to attracting teachers to Alaska (see Figure 6a). Using a stacked column graph, which compares the percentage each value contributes to the total across the categories, and rates specific factors on a scale of 1 to 10; the darker the bar, the increase in perceived challenge.

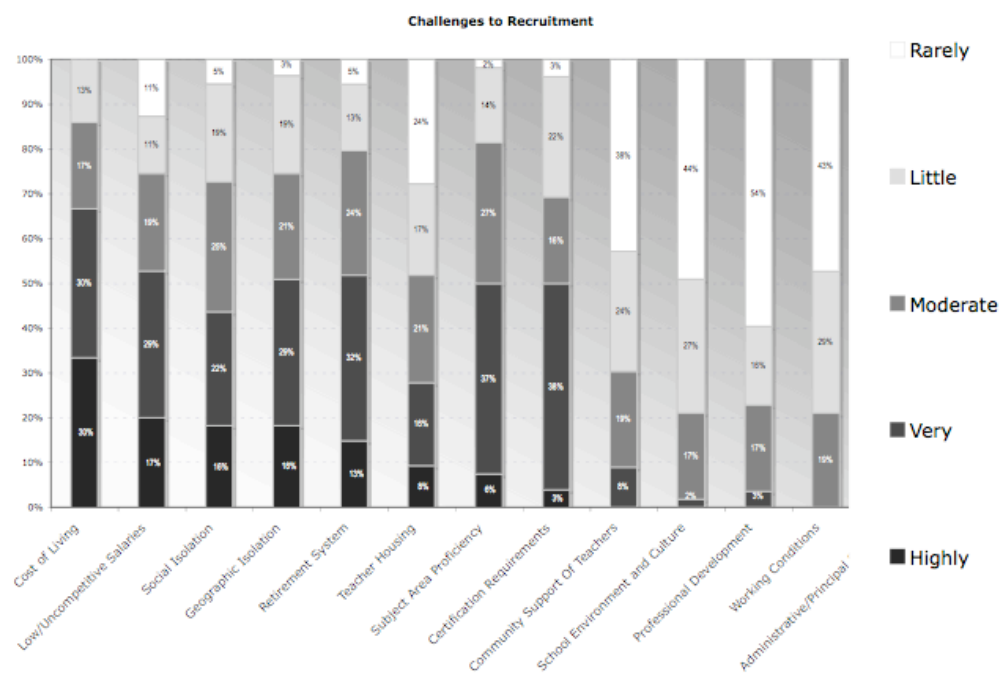
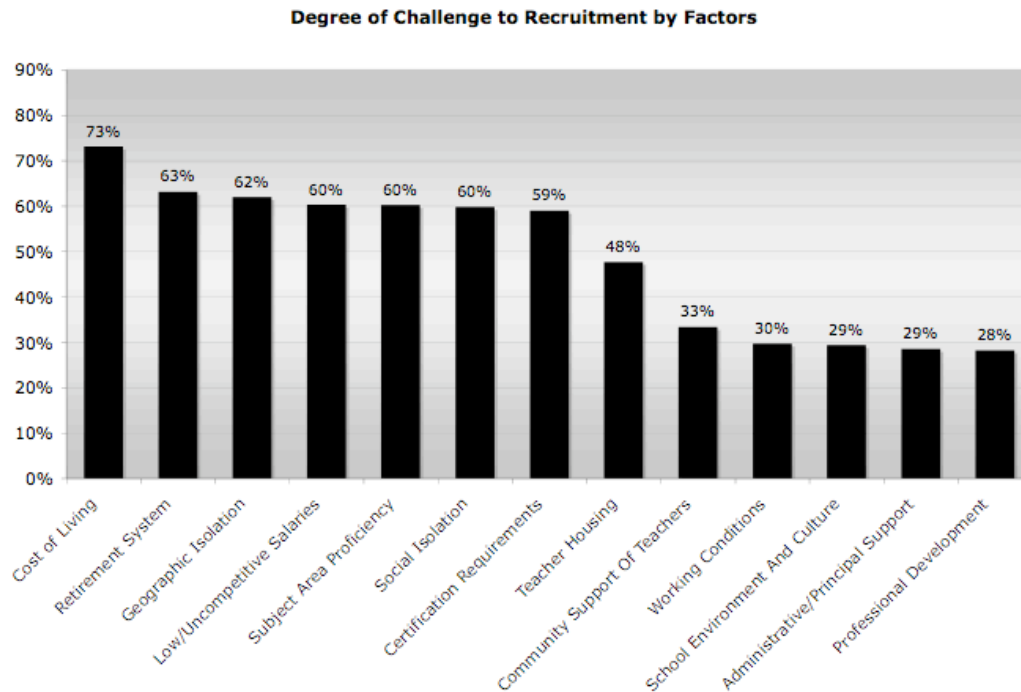


Figure 6a. Factors that Contribute to the Challenge of Recruiting Teacher



*Figure 6.b. Degree of Challenge by Factor for Recruitment*

Figure 6.b. Degree of Challenge by Factor for Recruitment, which uses the same data set for analysis, measures the response average rate divided by the highest degree possible. From this analysis, half the data appears fixed between 63-59%, relatively flat, with one exception, the *Cost of Living* (73%) rises to the top of the list in both Figure 6.a. and Figure 6.b (see Figure 6b). Administrators in Alaska believe the cost of living is the primary factor contributing to the challenge of attracting teachers to Alaska, one additional question from the survey provided such assurance. From Figure 7 Top Three Ranked Concerns Related to Recruitment Challenges, one can deduce the cost of living factor is consistently selected as the major challenge to teacher recruitment, and the primary concern school administrators face when it comes to recruiting teachers (see Figure 7).

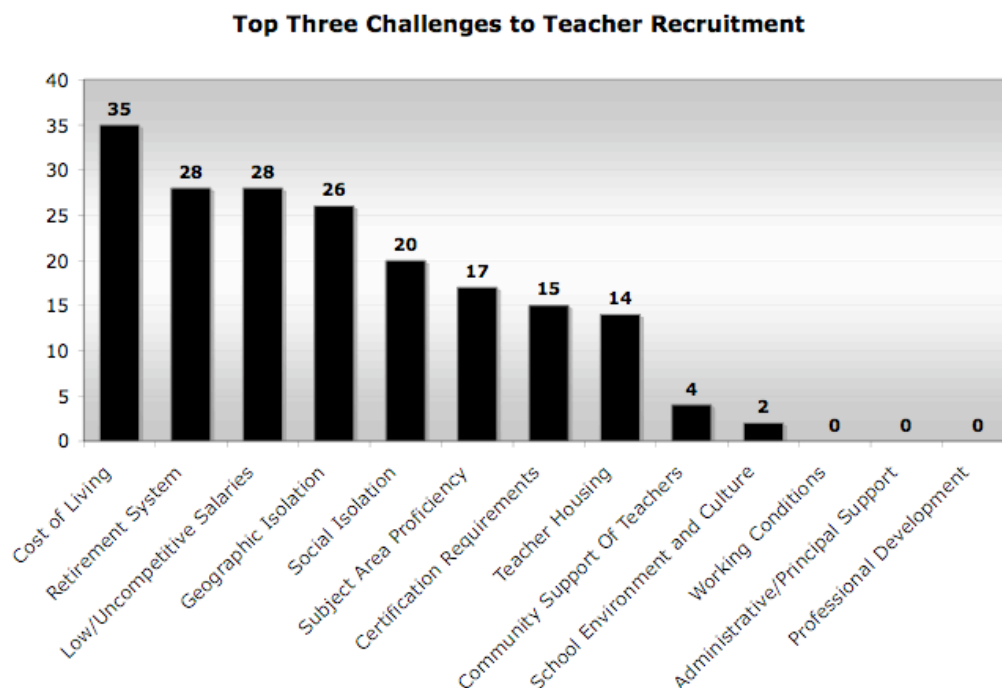
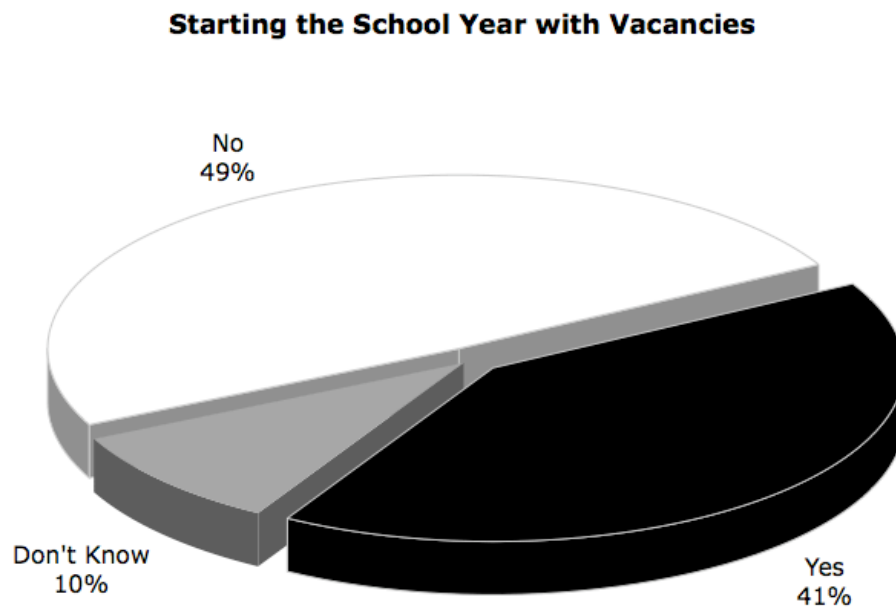


Figure 7. Top Three Ranked Concerns Related to Recruitment Challenges

The analysis of the top three ranked factors, the *Cost of Living*, *Retirement System*, and *Low/Uncompetitive Salaries* (see Figure 7) are the most frequently selected factors. Out of a combination of 187 responses (n=187) cost of living was selected 35 times. These three factors collectively represent compensation; livable wages, pay for professional services, and a decent retirement systems surface to the top of the list. It is critical to pause at this point and reflect on, Ingersoll’s keynote presentation held in Alaska. He stated, “We cannot simply pour more water into a leaky bucket and expect to solve the teacher shortage” (R. Ingersoll, 2006). This statement should bring both awareness and caution as educational leaders seek to close the teacher employment and student achievement gap. Increasing teacher quality must remain a central focus when looking at increasing the number of teachers in the applicant pool. Quality teachers and the instruction they provide as well as the experience are not looking for employment in rural areas of Alaska.

#### When There Aren’t Enough Teachers

As the title implies, when there aren't enough teachers, what options do school administrators have when they can't fill a vacancy with a highly qualified teacher? When school administrators were asked about starting the school year with vacancies, 41% indicated "yes" (n=26), the school year was under way however, not all of the positions were filled.



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*Figure 8. School District that have Started the School Year with Vacancies*

Of the 41% of respondents who indicated yes, 7 rural school districts (n=7) indicated starting the school year with vacancies. Table 7 includes comments from school districts that started a school year with vacancies. Further examination of this data reveals the majority of administrators resort to hiring substitute teachers (n=16), which was most frequently referenced in the comment section (see Table 7). For other respondents, contracting (n=7) was an option. Reassignment or changes in staff such as consolidating classes or spreading out the work load made up a small percent of the options (n=3); and finally two comments indicated the possibility of not being able to offer services (n=2) as a potential options.

Table 7.

Comments from School Districts Who Start the School Year with Vacancies

1. We have used substitute-teachers until the job was filled
2. We cover most of these staffing issues by reassigning specialists to cover vacancies
3. Long term substitute-teachers are a possibility, since we have enough retired teachers
4. Frequent substitute-teachers, long term substitute-teachers
5. Long-term substitute-teachers, contract services
6. We did use the emergency [EED will not issue emergency certificates] teachers have to be enrolled in a teacher preparation program, which is a problem
7. Contracting services, using non-Highly-Qualified teachers
8. Long-term certified substitute-teachers
9. Long-term substitute-teachers
10. Long-term certified substitute-teachers (usually a retired teacher)
11. We have used long-term substitute-teachers when available, re-employed retired teachers, spread the workload among existing staff, and revamped schedules
12. Contracting services in the specialties areas
13. Long-term substitute-teachers and reassigning students to other classes
14. Long-term substitute-teachers
15. Contracting services and long-term substitute-teachers
16. This last year we had two vacancies at the secondary level we were unable to fill
17. Substitute-teachers fill in until we hire or convert positions to TA time
18. These are specialist vacancies, use of contracting, long-term substitute-teachers, and no service are possible outcomes

Notes: \*comments adapted for confidentiality, editing and coding, some comments deleted

## Conclusion of Findings

By triangulating the qualitative and quantitative data one can conclude school district administrators are aware the shortage of qualified teachers exists, and indicate in comments a concern for student learning and the impact on other staff. The options are limited as to what school administrators can do when there are not enough qualified teachers willing to enter the workforce. The factors administrators consider which contribute most to the challenge of recruitment are driven by compensation, or the lack of compensation. There should be little question students suffer the most when there are not enough qualified teachers.

As national leaders strive to ensure every child learns, there are no solutions in the mandates, no funding to ensure schools have the resources needed to be successful, and little to no understanding of the context at the local level. Schools for the most part are not going to be successful if unable to attract and retain teachers who can inspire learning and achievement in students. Until then, as the Alaska Administrators have indicated, teacher recruitment will remain a significant challenge in isolated geographical regions and in core subject areas.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Interpretation of the Findings

The purpose of this study is to determine, from the school administrators perspective, what factors contribute to the challenges of Alaska teacher recruitment. Findings from this study paint an overall picture of the challenges school district face in staffing schools. From the administrators' perspective the factors that contribute to the challenges of teacher recruitment are driven by the lack of adequate compensation to keep up with the cost of living. The degree to which these factors impact schools varies from region to region, based on school size, geographical locations, economic conditions in a region, and the population of students the school serves. The gaps in the content areas are clearly special education, math, and science, followed by related services such as speech pathologists or school psychologist. Aggregated responses by geographical region undoubtedly suggest rural schools have a harder time staffing schools than do schools in the southeastern region of Alaska.

The map of Alaska's Public School District (see Figure 9) provides a visual example of the vast and diverse teaching opportunities in Alaska's schools. Public schools in Alaska serve more than 130,000 students and employ close to 9,000 teachers. However, these students and teachers are not distributed evenly across the state. Most of the population is centered in the metropolitan areas of Anchorage, Matanuska/Susitna, Fairbanks, and Juneau. The Anchorage School District is one of the 100 largest school districts in the nation, with 3,000 teachers and 50,000 students. While most students are in urban areas, the majority of Alaska's 54 school districts are located in rural places. Of Alaska's 503 schools, 135 schools have fewer than 50 students and 82 schools enroll 25 or fewer students.



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## Map of Alaska School Districts



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*Figure 9.* Map of Alaska School Districts. Source: Alaska Teacher Placement Brochure; designed by Joe Jordan and Morgan Dufseth (2008) used with permission.

The teacher workforce demands are relatively constant in rural Alaska, meaning teacher recruitment appears to be a constant concern for districts serving primarily Alaskan Native students. It is simply not fair to suggest colleges and universities need to fill the gaps in the supply and demand of teachers, if the supply will not bridge the gap. More teachers will not help close the achievement gap if students who graduate as teachers are not willing to earn degrees in high needs area such as special education, and/or work in areas (geographical locations) where teacher turnover is highest.

Understanding the factors that contribute to the recruitment to the profession is addressed in the section below under areas for future studies. The theoretical framework, which ties this study to Adult Education, looked at the relationship between power and knowledge, and asserts that all educational institutions to some degree are designed to limit emancipation and enlightenment through social discourse. Habermas, who argued that political debate has become, “scientifically managed” (Habermas, 2005, p.133), casts light on the social dilemma of education. There is no rich public dialogue that speaks deeply to the role and the purpose of

education, which might inspire a future generation of students to consider a career in teaching. The limited power teachers, administrators, schools, and communities have over education is regulated by the federal government through the state agencies and local governance structures.

This heavy-handed control over defining teacher quality to determining what is scientifically based (NCLB, 2002) is suffocating the opportunities for change. The policymakers of NCLB could never understand the implications of this act in the context of Alaska. Those who control education, may unintentionally want education to function as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present systems and to bring about conformity, which Freire (1995-2006) asserts in the earlier quote.

Because school administrators are responsible for recruiting and hiring teachers for schools, and must adhere to state statutes and regulations, which govern schools through policy, accountability rest solely on the school administrator to ensure schools are staffed with highly-qualified teachers. A review of the literature in Chapter 2 indicated poor and minority children are deprived of a quality education, measured by Western standards because these students are more likely to be taught by inexperienced and unqualified teachers. Alaska Natives consistently perform below the state average and lower than any other ethnic group on the Alaska Standards Based Assessment test (SBA). These same administrators, are asked to hire quality teachers, yet are not offered solutions from the state or federal government as to what should be done when there are not enough teachers. In the end it is the students who suffer most when there is a lack of supply of qualified teachers reaches. Yet this issue will not be address so long as the teacher shortage only affects poor and minority students.

### *Implications*

While the implications of a teacher shortage was not the central focus of this study, it is worth exploring for future research. As the literature demonstrates, there are not enough qualified teachers in the existing workforce willing to teaching in rural and poor communities. As a result school administrators and state officials must develop alternatives to meet the demand to ensure a ‘teacher’ in every classroom is highly-qualified, another major challenge as indicated in the findings from the survey is the lack of flexibility in national laws. Children, already economically disadvantaged, are being taught by the least qualified teachers more often, and as a result the achievement gap among poor and minority students is widening according to *Accountability Texas-Style: The Progress and Learning of Urban Minority Students in a High Stakes Testing Context*, published in Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis (Vasquez-Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008). Findings from this study create awareness for stakeholders and policymakers and provoke examination of the implications policies have on the status of the profession. Looking again at the national data (Clewett et., 2000) and Ingersoll (2003) report the teacher shortage is one of distribution, poor and urban or rural schools, as well as shortages in high needs area such as special education, math, and science will ensure our most needy students continue to under achieve. Specific implications for this study include recognition of the need to look at education in Alaska as a means by which policymakers, state leaders in both K-12 and Higher Education, and Alaskans in general begin a dialogue on the status of the profession. These discussions can foster new partnerships that look more systemically and critically at the role of education in relation to society. Conversations can also help Alaskan Native cope with the dark history education has for so many indigenous people.

#### *Relationship to Previous Research*

This study has corroborated several findings from previous research. Thus, while the word *unique* and Alaska are often used synonymously, from the research finding, Alaska is very similar in terms of comparing data on teacher shortages. Differences give privilege to the use of the word *unique*, the context of Alaska; forms of travel; vast geographical regions; extreme climates; and diverse populations are all variables contributing to the greatness that makes teaching in Alaska truly adventurous.

Ingersoll's work (R. Ingersoll, 2006; R. M. Ingersoll, 2001, Fall, 2003a) is among the most noted for looking at national trends using large data sets to measure and assess the teacher shortage. This study does not survey teachers or use employment data to the same degree as Ingersoll, however, the data does contribute to the reliability of the findings in much of Ingersoll's work. This study reinforces the findings in the Alaska Supply and Demand report (A. Hill & Hirshberg, 2005) and gives meaning to causation of workforce trends in education for Alaska. However, as with any research effort, there are always more questions that surface.

#### Suggestions for Future Research

The most obvious suggestion for future research would be to replicate the survey with other groups who work in and around education. Staff at EED, retired administrators, school board members, and of course teachers themselves would provide additional data from a variety of groups who have varying degrees of control over education. Findings may not be as consistent or as aligned with administrators' opinions on the factors, but perhaps the shortage areas and geographical regions would still produce the same results. This would allow for use of the same survey with slight modifications depending on the group, as well as provide opportunities to do comparative analysis between groups. Knowing the perceptions and opinions of school board members would be of particular interest for two reasons. First, in Alaska board members often

are part of the hiring team in smaller schools. Secondly, knowing if board members share the same sentiments about cost of living as the administrators would be of interest because boards hire and evaluate the superintendent. Thirdly, school boards have control over schools through budget approval, curriculum adoption, hiring, and major issues impacting students. Most importantly, it would be valuable to know if school board members are equally concerned with teacher turnover.

Another suggestion for future research should examine teacher recruitment into the profession. As the literature review highlights in Chapter 2, fewer students are choosing to enroll in teacher preparation programs, of those students who do enroll in a program, many do not perform well on standardized tests (Clewett et al., 2000). Understanding from potential teachers, what prevents them, and conversely encourages them to pursue a career in education is increasingly important when looking at the supply and demand of the workforce.

Finally, there must be space for researchers who have a genuine concern for the population of students deemed as failing, in this case Alaska Natives, to experiment with new methodologies of teaching and learning with and in diverse population of students. This space must be absent of state and federal regulations, which have done little, and in some cases arguably damage, to improve student learning. This space must be absent of the control centered pedagogy that relies on misleading lessons from history and limited vocabulary which does not begin to reflect the complexities that exist in the context and language. What do they have to lose, which has not been sacrificed already?

#### Recommendations for Policymakers

This study was conducted to give voice to the Alaska school administrators and the challenge to find quality teachers for the students of Alaska. Hiring a teacher is perhaps the most

important decision a school administrator will make during the year. Many dedicated professionals spend years in Alaska serving students and have an intimate understanding and appreciation for the complexities that exist in the Alaska education system. Yet for some, with all the knowledge, longevity, and expertise the ability to ensure every teacher is highly qualified is a constant battle. Policies are often developed with the best of intentions. However, policies can become limitations without solutions or support for the very individuals they are seeking to support.

### Recommendations Specifically for the Alaska Context

*Tap-a-Teacher.* Seeking solutions to the immediate need is most important. Alaska would benefit from a program that would keep a pool of active teachers, administrators, counselors, and service providers who would work under contract at any time and place needed. These educators would be called upon at the time of need and would be willing to work up to six months regardless of the location. These individuals would receive an advanced teachers salary credit for service, all travel expenses would be paid to and from the site, and a bonus after the contract expired. Educators would have to apply to the program and sign a contract. The cost to administer the program would be the responsibility of the state, given the ultimate responsibility for ensuring teachers hired in Alaska are highly-qualified it is appropriate to offer solutions. Educators working in the program would be evaluated after each service and asked to work with the incoming teacher for two weeks. As agreement for participating in this program educators-on tap would receive tuition coupons for the local colleges. The School district would have to demonstrate a need to receive the services from Tap-a-Teacher. The intent of this program would provide school districts with an option other than employing teachers not qualified.

*Reciprocity for Teacher Certification.* Teachers and administrators certified in another states

would receive instant reciprocity for two years in Alaska. They would be required to submit a notarized copy of a valid teaching certificate, fingerprint cards for a background check, and a nominal fee for processing the certificate. If a teacher agreed to sign a contract for a third year with the same school district that teacher would receive an additional year to complete the required tests and course work. Retention would also qualify teachers for a \$250 stipend to enroll in a National Boards Certification cohort for Alaska educators aimed at supporting teachers seeking advanced credentialing.

*National Boards.* Any teacher interested in teaching in Alaska who can verify receipt of a National Boards Certification (NBC) would not be required to take any additional tests or coursework for certification. NBC teachers would receive a discount for certification processing for 10% off the application fee. Any teacher completing National Board Certification while in Alaska would receive \$250 in educational resources.

*Alaskan Native Studies.* Teachers working in Alaska would be required to take part in a state funded professional development training which would immerse teachers new to Alaska in a week long summer cultural camp.

*The Virtually Highly-qualified Teacher.* The NCLB requirements of highly qualified would be removed for all small schools; in place higher level courses in math and science would be offered through distance delivered course work from a central hub out of the State Department in collaboration with university officials. Computers, bandwidth, and software would be provided through grants from the state. Transforming small high school classes into a matrix of classes offered across the regions connected via distance through program such as black board and illuminate, bug in the ear and web-cams would allow teachers to team teach with a certified teacher on the ground who would support classroom management duties and help create a

comfortable learning environment. Students could remain in the villages and still receive a quality education with online technologies. This method of delivery might increase engagement as well as expand the networks with other students in Alaska. The idea that students all have to sit in rows and technology is limited to one or two instructional tools represents the status quo.

*Future Teachers of Alaska.* Data from the Alaska Supply and Demand Report (A. Hill & Hirshberg, 2005) indicate teachers who are prepared in Alaska and are Alaskan Native have a higher retention rate than those prepared outside of Alaska. Inspiring the next generation of students to become teachers is a worthy cause. However, those efforts will only be effective if the issues around working conditions and the expectations of the job are addressed through public debate and discourse. It would be a travesty to encourage students to become teachers and have little influence to change the working conditions in schools. Strengthening the native voice through organizational membership for collective recommendations around policy would have a greater effect on the education system in the long run.

### Closing

There are a variety of initiatives that could be added to the list, such as differentiation of pay for special education teachers, to supporting new teacher in the profession through mentoring and induction. Initiatives focusing resources on growing more teachers, while on one hand may increase the supply, may not stop the turnover. Adding more water to a leaky bucket will not solve the shortage of teachers or close the achievement gap. Stopping the drain of the teacher workforce into other professions must a priority; at the same time addressing what issues and factor drive the exodus of teachers from schools is equally important. While many solutions are achievable, initiatives would be much more successful if the single most important recommendation is implemented. The locus of control of schools much change to transform the



teaching profession. We must stop looking to policymakers to solve the problems in education, and look to them to create access to achieving solutions. Through open and honest dialogue this can be achieved.

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