

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 18, 2020

8:12 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Harriet Drummond, Co-Chair  
Representative Andi Story, Co-Chair  
Representative Chris Tuck  
Representative Tiffany Zulkosky (via teleconference)  
Representative Mike Prax

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Grier Hopkins  
Representative DeLena Johnson

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION: EDUCATOR RETENTION AND TURNOVER IN ALASKA:  
MAGNITUDES AND RELATED FACTORS

- HEARD

PRESENTATION: TEACHER RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT IN ALASKA

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

ASHLEY PIERSON, PhD, Senior Researcher  
Education Northwest  
Portland, Oregon

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-provided a PowerPoint presentation,  
entitled "Educator Retention and Turnover Under the Midnight  
Sun."

HELLA BEL HADJ AMOR, PhD, Senior Researcher  
Education Northwest  
Portland, Oregon

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-provided a PowerPoint presentation, entitled "Educator Retention and Turnover Under the Midnight Sun."

DAYNA DEFEO, PhD, Research Assistant Professor of Education  
Institute of Social & Economic Research  
University of Alaska Anchorage  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-provided a PowerPoint presentation, entitled "Teacher Retention & Recruitment in Alaska."

DIANE HIRSHBERG, PhD, Professor of Education Policy  
Institute of Social & Economic Research  
University of Alaska Anchorage  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Co-provided a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Teacher Retention & Recruitment in Alaska."

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:12:18 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR STORY** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:12 a.m. Representatives Zulkosky (via teleconference), Prax, Drummond, and Story were present at the call to order. Representative Tuck arrived as the meeting was in progress.

#### **PRESENTATION: Educator Retention and Turnover in Alaska: Magnitudes and Related Factors**

[8:15:12 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR STORY** announced that the first order of business would be a presentation on educator retention and turnover in Alaska by Dr. Ashley Pierson and Dr. Hella Bel Hadj Amor from Education Northwest.

[8:15:28 AM](#)

**ASHLEY PIERSON**, PhD, Senior Researcher, Education Northwest, stated that she and Dr. Hella Bel Hadj Amor would be providing a PowerPoint presentation, entitled "Educator Retention and Turnover Under the Midnight Sun." She indicated that they would share an overview of their recently released report by the same name, which examines trends and relationships in teacher, principal, and superintendent movement in Alaska.

[8:16:16 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease.

[8:17:39 AM](#)

DR. PIERSON reviewed the agenda for the presentation, which included sharing an overview of Alaska State Policy Research Alliance (ASPRA) and findings from the study on educator retention and turnover (slide 2). She directed attention to slide 3, and explained that in Alaska, the Regional Educational Laboratory - a federal program - supports ASPRA's work. The goal of ASPRA is to produce and share evidence on Alaska education issues that matter most. She noted that the study on educator retention and turnover came at the request of ASPRA stakeholders. Slide 4 listed the ASPRA leadership team: The Department of Education & Early Development (DEED), Alaska Council of School Administrators, University of Alaska (UA), and Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Northwest. She explained that REL Northwest is one of 10 Regional Educational Laboratories in the U.S. that serves its respective geographic region. The REL program's goal is to help states and districts use data to address policy issues and improve educational practices. She noted that the Institute of Education Sciences (EIS) at the U.S. Department of Education selects organizations to operate each REL through a competitive bidding process; Education Northwest holds the contract for the Northwest region (slide 5).

[8:19:59 AM](#)

HELLA BEL HADJ AMOR, PhD, Senior Researcher, Education Northwest, turned attention to the study on educator retention and turnover in Alaska, conducted by REL Northwest (slide 6). Slide 7 highlighted the research focus: educator turnover rates; community, school, educator, and student characteristics associated with turnover; and relationships between superintendent, principal, and teacher turnover. Slide 8 provided the timeframe and key definitions as follows:

- Educators refers to teachers, principals, and superintendents
  
- Turnover refers to educators leaving their positions at schools and districts

- Retention refers to educators staying in their positions at schools and districts
- Timeframe was 2012/13 to 2017/18

DR. BEL HADJ AMOR noted that turnover includes three categories: same district movers, other district movers, and leavers. She directed attention to slide 9, which highlighted that half of Alaska's teachers and one-third of its principals are employed in urban areas; furthermore, half of the students in Alaska attend schools in urban areas. She explained that states and school districts are finding it increasingly difficult to retain educators, and efforts to recruit and retain teachers in Alaska are complicated by the state's unique characteristics, including geographic remoteness and a challenging natural environment.

[8:24:03 AM](#)

DR. BEL HADJ AMOR continued to slide 10. She said national research suggests that educator turnover is associated with lower student outcomes, including lower test scores and lower proficiency on state math and reading assessments, as well as higher turnover in high-poverty schools, as educators tend to leave higher-poverty schools for lower-poverty ones. She indicated that turnover is costly for schools and districts.

[8:25:03 AM](#)

DR. PIERSON shared findings from the study on retention and turnover trends in Alaska (slide 11). She explained that most of Alaska's turnover involves "leavers" - educators who retired, left Alaska, or remained in the state but are no longer educators. Turnover rates in Alaska for 2017/2018 indicate that 13 percent of teachers were leavers, while 9 percent of teachers were "movers" - individuals who went to a new district or school but remained in the Alaska public school system (slide 12). She reported that the percentage of teachers who did not return to their school or role has been steady over time. From 2012/2013 to 2017/2018, the statewide teacher turnover rate varied between 21 and 24 percent each year; the leaver rate varied between 12 and 15 percent; the mover rate between 8 and 10 percent (slide 13). Overall, she said, Alaska has higher teacher turnover than the national average, which in 2017, was 16 percent. Alaska's teacher mover rate is comparable to other states, but the leaver rate is higher (slide 14). In contrast to teachers, the percentage of principals who did not return to their school or role varied over time and is generally higher than the rate for

teachers. From 2012/2013 to 2017/2018, the statewide principal turnover rate varied between 23 and 33 percent each year; the leaver rate varied between 17 and 25 percent; the mover rate between 6 and 9 percent (slide 15). Overall, Alaska has higher principal turnover than the national average, which was 18 percent in 2017; however, Alaska's principal mover rate is comparable to other states (slide 16). Similar to principals, the percentage of superintendents who did not return to their district or role has varied over time and is generally higher than the rate for teachers. From 2012/2013 to 2017/2018, the statewide superintendent turnover rate varied between 19 and 40 percent each year; the leaver rate varied between 13 and 36 percent; the mover rate between 4 and 8 percent (slide 17). She noted that Alaska's superintendent mover rate is comparable to other states (slide 18). Overall, she said, statewide turnover rates from 2012/2013 to 2017/2018 remained steady for teachers but varied for principals and superintendents.

[8:31:47 AM](#)

DR. BEL HADJ AMOR continued to address study findings and break them down by locale. She turned attention to slide 19, which showed a map of schools in Alaska. She explained that rural schools have higher teacher and principal turnover than urban or urban-fringe schools. Average annual turnover rates for teachers during the study timeframe were 36 percent in rural-remote schools, 25 percent in rural-hub/fringe schools, and 19 percent in both urban-fringe and urban school types (slide 20). Furthermore, a higher percentage of educators in rural schools - compared to those in urban schools - did not return to their school or role; the teacher leaver rate varied from 11 to 23 percent, while the teacher mover rate varied from 8 to 13 percent (slide 21). She noted that 64 percent of rural-remote teachers and 68 percent of rural-remote principals who turn over leave the state or the profession. She continued to slide 22 and stated that the majority of teachers from rural schools who moved across districts moved to another rural district. She added that the study did not find a large migration of teachers from rural schools to urban schools in the data.

[8:36:19 AM](#)

DR. PIERSON directed attention to slide 23 and addressed turnover and educator characteristics. She reported that first-year turnover rates among teachers were higher than later years; the turnover rate for teachers in their first year was 35 percent compared to a turnover rate of 19 percent for teachers

beyond their first year. Data showed little difference for principles (slide 24). Additionally, teachers and principles who prepared outside Alaska had higher turnover rates compared to those prepared in Alaska. Average annual turnover rate from 2012/2013 to 2017/2018 was 18 percent for teachers prepared in Alaska compared to 24 percent for teachers prepared outside Alaska. The average annual turnover rate for principals was 24 percent for those prepared in Alaska compared to 34 percent for those prepared outside Alaska (slide 25). She noted that teachers prepared outside Alaska had higher turnover rates, especially in rural-remote schools, possibly because more teachers in rural-remote areas are prepared outside the state compared to other locales (slide 26). She explained that sometimes, teachers from outside Alaska have a difficult time adjusting and require additional support to acclimate to a new community and unfamiliar living conditions. The variation for principles in rural-remote schools was even more pronounced. Rural-remote principles prepared outside Alaska had a 20 percent higher turnover rate than their Alaska-educated counterparts. Overall, she said, the data suggests that teachers and principals who prepared outside Alaska and teachers in their first year were more likely to turn over the following year.

DR. PIERSON turned attention to slide 27 and addressed turnover and school characteristics. She reported that teachers who earned lower salaries had higher turnover rates, with a 29 percent turnover rate for the lowest group of teacher earners compared to 19 percent turnover among the highest earners. She noted that at all salary levels, turnover was higher in rural-remote areas than in other locales (slide 28). The study also found a correlation between principal and teacher turnover: the average annual teacher turnover rate was 25 percent in schools where the principal left compared to 21 percent when the principal stayed (slide 29).

[8:41:55 AM](#)

DR. BEL HADJ AMOR continued to slide 30 and shared potential recruitment and retention strategies based on feedback from district leaders. The first strategy is to recruit continuously for retention. She conveyed that hiring is a priority; further, that good hires are favorable to fast hires. The second strategy is to build trust between administrators and teachers. She explained that in a trusting relationship, teachers discuss challenges they face before deciding to leave. They are also more open to support and suggestions from leadership. The third strategy is to recreate familiar living conditions. Living in

rural remote Alaska can offer a rare opportunity to make deep meaningful connections, she said. She recommended careful planning and realistic expectations to help minimize frustration. The fourth strategy is to support teacher growth. Despite limited budgets, districts try to offer professional learning opportunities, such as paying for credit hours, scheduling collaborative time, and partnering teachers with local entities to design and deliver courses. Additionally, three districts mentioned having benefited from a statewide mentorship program. The fifth strategy is to treat teachers like the leaders they are. Districts offered a range of leadership opportunities, including participating in curriculum mapping and coding, serving as peer evaluators, presenting at conferences, and providing input on professional development offerings and district programs. The sixth strategy is to make up for pay that is not competitive; examples that reportedly helped teacher retention include a generous contract and benefits package; longevity bonuses and bonuses for providing termination notices in advance; funding for professional development; and flexibility to live outside the district. The seventh strategy is to find pockets of cross-district collaboration in a competitive environment. She pointed out that districts compete for available candidates; however, a degree of collaboration exists, such as applying for grants with another district to offer teachers common professional development. Some teachers suggested collaborating on marketing and communication materials that present living and teaching in Alaska as an attractive option. Additionally, systematically tracking candidates who may not be a good fit for one district but could be for another (slides 31-37).

[8:48:12 AM](#)

DR. BEL HADJ AMOR directed attention to slide 38 and presented two categories of considerations for increasing educator retention in Alaska: human resources and school conditions. Drawing on the full report, the first consideration for human resources is to increase the supply of Alaska-educated teachers. She explained that the number of teacher candidates graduating from Alaska education programs has decreased in recent years; however, UA has set a goal to increase the share of UA-educated teachers hired in the state from 43 percent in 2018 to 90 percent by 2025. The state could also consider increasing efforts to recruit educator preparation program candidates from rural Alaska and provide them with tailored support for living in different conditions, as well as providing them with online opportunities. One caveat, she said, is that more evidence is

needed on whether candidates from rural areas tend to return to rural areas to teach or lead schools (slide 39). The final considerations for human resources are to find the right fit for educators regarding the district and community they work for, and to advertise Alaska (slides 40-41).

8:50:45 AM

DR. BEL HADJ AMOR turned attention to considerations for school conditions, beginning with additional support for rural schools to bolster educator retention. She pointed out that teachers in rural schools face geographic, social, cultural and professional isolation; a high cost of living; the inability to purchase housing; burdensome workloads; and few opportunities for professional growth. Furthermore, many historically underserved students in Alaska are concentrated in rural-remote schools; therefore, targeting resources to those schools would allow for a more equitable use of limited resources (slide 42). The second school-related consideration is to build trust and a sense of belonging. Potential methods of accelerating educators' sense of belonging include connecting them to colleagues, friends, and local activities in the community (slide 43). The third consideration is to offer educators financial and nonfinancial incentives. She explained that increasing salaries is an effective tool to retain teachers, especially in rural-remote schools; nonetheless, it may need to be combined with other strategies to improve working conditions in these schools. She suggested reallocating resources to targeted schools to alleviate conditions related to turnover, such as reducing the need for teachers to hold multiple positions or teach at multiple sites. She noted that the full report mentions a review of legislative efforts in other states to support and fund financial incentives (slide 44). The fourth school-related condition is to focus on principal support and retention. She reminded the committee of the correlation between principal and teacher turnovers. Consequently, improving working conditions for principals may improve both teacher and principal retention. National research cited in the full report suggests ways to increase principal retention, including providing principals with professional growth opportunities and manageable workloads and increasing autonomy and salaries (slide 45).

8:54:26 AM

The committee took a brief at-ease.



**PRESENTATION: Teacher Retention and Recruitment in Alaska**

[8:55:18 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the next order of business would be a complementary presentation by the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA).

[8:56:26 AM](#)

DAYNA DEFEO, PhD, Research Assistant Professor of Education, Institute of Social & Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage, co-provided a PowerPoint presentation, entitled "Teacher Retention & Recruitment in Alaska," with Dr. Diane Hirshberg. She directed attention to slide 2 and explained that the UAA Center for Alaska Education Policy Research (CAEPR) is an education policy clearing house within ISER with the objective to conduct nonpartisan research that's applicable to Alaskans and supports policymaking. She stated that CAEPR's work falls into three categories: college and career readiness, arctic and indigenous education, and teacher supply and demand.

[8:57:50 AM](#)

DIANE HIRSHBERG, PhD, Professor of Education Policy, Institute of Social & Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage, continued to slide 3 and provided the context within which Alaska's teacher turnover occurs. She reported that the current workforce is composed of 7,900 teachers, of which 15 percent were new to Alaska in 2017-2018. Also, 53 percent of teachers prepared in Alaska institutions work in urban schools and 24 percent teach in rural-remote schools. Furthermore, inexperienced (first year) teachers are 2.5 times more likely to be in high-poverty than low-poverty schools (slide 4).

[8:59:46 AM](#)

DR. DEFEO conceptualized Alaska's teacher turnover context as a "perfect storm," primarily for three reasons: Alaska's economic downturn, teacher shortage in the lower 48, and an economic boom in the lower 48 (slide 5). Slide 6 illustrated an economic perspective on teacher turnover. She pointed out that the national demand for teachers is high while the supply is low; while in Alaska, the supply and demand are relatively flat - except for a consistently high demand for out-of-state teachers. She noted that Alaska was producing a consistent number of

teachers until UAA, the state's largest teacher preparation program, suspended admissions in 2019. Teacher turnover rates are high in both the nation and Alaska. She indicated that a lower competitiveness is the differing factor between Alaska and the lower 48 (slide 6). Dr. DeFeo continued to address the context for demand, supply, turnover, retention, and competitiveness in Alaska, beginning with supply. She said teacher supply has two primary sources: Alaska's teacher education programs and out-of-state hires (slide 7).

[9:04:51 AM](#)

DR. HIRSHBERG stated that Alaska is experiencing a decline in the number of teachers produced by the University of Alaska in 2020. She reported that prior to the closing of UAA's teacher education program, the state was producing between 230-275 teachers each year. Due to the closure of the initial licensure programs in 2019, that number dropped to 186. She noted that projections estimate 166 teachers will graduate this coming fiscal year. The number of in-state graduates is not likely to increase for several more years (slide 8). She questioned how to get more students into the teacher education pipeline to reverse the trajectory and increase numbers (slide 9).

[9:07:14 AM](#)

DR. DEFEO continued to slide 10, which provided a list of reasons why people become educators: experience working with youth; a personal connection to an educator; working as a paraprofessional; and taking a career exploration course. She said widening the pipeline requires increased opportunities for these exposures and experiences. Slide 11 highlighted discouraging factors that augment the decline in nationwide interest in the teaching profession. She suggested considering opportunities for compensation, workload, competitiveness, and status.

[9:11:44 AM](#)

DR. HIRSHBERG highlighted in-state initiatives to grow the workforce, including Preparing Indigenous Teachers and Administrators for Alaska's Schools (PITAAS), Indigenous Scholars Program, Educators Rising Alaska, district-based paraprofessional to teacher pathways, and teacher recruitment initiatives. She noted that none of the aforementioned initiatives are directly supported by the state (slide 12).

[9:14:43 AM](#)

DR. DEFEO continued to slide 13 and addressed hiring from outside Alaska. She explained that hiring out-of-state teachers places a work and resource burden on rural superintendents and districts as they are responsible for communicating with candidates and must help them find housing and engage in professional networks. She further noted that hiring the right teacher is not just about credentials, he or she must fit the community. Out-of-state teachers require orientation and training to adjust to village living and Alaska's cultures. Furthermore, teachers hired from the lower 48 usually take the job sight unseen because it's too expensive to fly teachers into communities for interviews; therefore, they must rely heavily on superintendents and district leaders for a successful transition (slide 13).

[9:17:21 AM](#)

DR. HIRSHBERG directed attention to slide 14 to discuss demand. She said over 1,000 teachers are consistently hired every year in Alaska and the demand, which is driven by turnover, outweighs the state's own supply. Alaska's demand for teachers is met with particular challenges making some jobs more difficult to fill than others. Positions such as special education and secondary math and science are the hardest to fill, as are positions in schools serving low-income and high minority populations and schools located in rural and remote communities (slide 15).

[9:19:01 AM](#)

DR. DEFEO addressed turnover and retention (slide 16). She reiterated that in Alaska, turnover contributes to both the low supply and high demand for teachers. She explained that not all turnover is bad, as new teachers can bring fresh ideas and invigorate school environments; however, high turnover is problematic for numerous reasons: turnover impacts the quality of instructions, erodes school climate, affects continuity of instruction, impacts professional development, and leads to burnout (slide 17). Teacher turnover is also expensive. In 2015, CAEPR estimated that separation, recruitment, hiring, and orientation/training costs \$20,431 per teacher. Costs excluded from that estimation include school costs, such as onboarding, training, and mentoring; state costs, like higher education and recruitment; teacher costs in time and money put towards earning a degree; and community costs. Consequently, the long-term

costs of high teacher turnover are teacher productivity and student proficiency (slide 18).

[9:23:32 AM](#)

DR. HIRSHBERG remarked that there are initiatives to retain educators in Alaska. The Alaska Statewide Mentor Program (ASMP) - currently funded by the university system and some federal funding - is one such initiative. Professional development efforts also exist, including the Alaska Staff Development Network and the Alaska Cross-Content Conference. She noted that these opportunities are continually shrinking as district funding decreases. Furthermore, research found financial incentives and longevity bonuses as an ineffective method to abate teacher turnover (slide 19).

[9:26:02 AM](#)

DR. DEFEO addressed Alaska's competitiveness by considering compensation and work environment (slide 20). She emphasized that compensation should offer a large enough salary and benefits package to recruit and retain qualified teachers that fit the community (slide 21). She explained that Alaska used to pay the highest average teacher salaries in the nation, but now ranks seventh without adjusting for geographic cost differentials. In 2015, CAEPR calculated that Alaska salaries were 10 percent lower than they should be. Additionally, based on CAEPR's modeling, some districts need to pay much more than they currently do if they wish to attract and retain highly qualified educators (slide 22). Regarding Alaska's teacher benefits, Dr. DeFeo said districts can leverage their resources to offer benefits that have the most value and utility in their communities. She pointed out that a 2018 study found that in Alaska, teachers value tenure at more than \$30,000; thus, it could be a benefit that creates significant savings. She indicated that when used and structured wisely, benefits could be worth more than their dollar value and in turn, enhance teacher recruitment and retention (slide 23). She emphasized that teachers weigh compensation packages when considering whether to work and where to work. Given Alaska's dependence on out-of-state hires, she said, competitive compensation packages are a necessity (slide 24).

[9:31:49 AM](#)

DR. HIRSHBERG explained that working conditions are a stronger predictor of turnover than compensation, particularly in rural

schools. Research indicated that teachers were more likely to leave without support from parents or school/district administrators. Community characteristics, such as housing, recreation, and transportation were also significant, but less so than community relationships and school leadership issues. She said the implication is that educator retention can be supported by other factors besides budget (slide 25).

[9:33:55 AM](#)

DR. DEFEO provided a brief overview and key areas of opportunity for the future (slide 26). She reiterated that teacher turnover is not unique to Alaska and existed prior to the current economic recession. Current challenges include a high demand for teachers and an unprecedented low supply coupled with an unusually high level of competition from the lower 48 (slide 27).

[9:35:02 AM](#)

DR. HIRSHBERG said opportunities to grow the pipeline exist; however, these initiatives face unstable funding sources, especially those reliant on federal funding. She recommended investing in initiatives to grow Alaskan-educated teachers who are more likely to stay long term. She also suggested developing new initiatives with community/tribal-based teacher preparation and licensure models; alternative certification for career changers who may be displaced by the current economy; state-operated loan forgiveness programs; and additional opportunities for experienced educators.

DR. DEFEO said an important opportunity is to increase competitiveness. She recommended considering the attractiveness of the profession, equitable incentives to teach in different subjects and communities, and the ability to compete in a national market (slide 29).

[9:39:34 AM](#)

DR. HIRSHBERG added that addressing factors that drive turnover is another key opportunity. She said local communities and schools should work together to strengthen relationships and create processes for mentoring and inducting teachers into local community life. Additionally, statewide professional development organizations and university education leadership programs could work together on strengthening the capacity for school and district administrators to support educators.

Finally, she encouraged developing infrastructure, such as new housing and schools, to assist in reducing turnover (slide 30).

[9:42:54 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND inquired as to why other states' "leaver" rates are not available.

[9:43:18 AM](#)

DR. PIERSON explained that a number of turnover studies on principals did not breakdown turnover into "movers" and "leavers," which is why the leaver rate is not available.

[9:44:02 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY stated that children and youth are Alaska's most important resource. She stressed the importance of supporting educators and providing them with a rewarding environment and proper compensation.

[9:44:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK commended the presenters' research. He also emphasized the importance of ensuring that educators have meaningful careers, which can be hindered in Alaska by uncertainty, insufficient compensation, and a lack of respect. He maintained that much is gained by providing consistent career paths dedicated to the state's education system.

[9:46:26 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:46 a.m.