



## MENTORING MATTERS

# Findings from a Five-Year Study of the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project

The Alaska Statewide Mentor Project (ASMP) supports first- and second-year Alaska teachers by providing them with highly trained mentors for two years. All mentors are current or former Alaska teachers with ten or more years of experience who are fully released from their teaching responsibilities. Housed at the School of Education at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, ASMP partners with districts, the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, communities, and cultural organizations (see [https://www.uaf.edu/soe/k12\\_outreach/](https://www.uaf.edu/soe/k12_outreach/)). ASMP collects and analyzes programmatic and outcome data to understand how to increase the number and quality of “home grown” teachers in the state—a key objective of the University of Alaska’s Strategic Pathways framework.

ASMP’s goals are to increase teacher retention, improve instructional practice, and increase student achievement in Alaska. Based on research, the key components of the ASMP model are high-quality, experienced mentors; initial training and continuous professional development for mentors; appropriate mentor expectations for interactions with mentees; and a suite of formative assessment mentoring tools. Mentors receive two years of intensive training based on the New Teacher Center’s mentoring model. Through the Alaskan version of this model, mentors also receive continuous professional development designed to meet the unique needs of Alaska schools and districts. Each ASMP professional development features a Cultural Connections component that focuses on culturally responsive materials and pedagogy, and the formative assessment mentoring tools include Alaska’s teacher standards.

This summary provides key findings from the recent study, *Mentoring early career teachers in urban Alaska: Impact findings from the Investing in Innovation (i3) evaluation of the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project Urban Growth Opportunity*. It also provides recommendations for establishing a beginning-teacher mentoring program.

## STUDY OVERVIEW

The Investing in Innovation (i3) validation study emerged from an internal ASMP study<sup>1</sup> that found promising results regarding the achievement of students who had ASMP-mentored teachers. From 2011 to 2016, ASMP partnered with Education Northwest to participate in a randomized controlled trial. Using a rigorous study design, researchers at Education Northwest examined the impact and implementation of ASMP in five urban Alaska school districts: Anchorage, Fairbanks North Star Borough, Sitka, Kenai Peninsula Borough, and Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

Three cohorts of teachers were recruited. Teachers in the treatment group received two years of ASMP mentoring. Teachers in the control group (or “business-as-usual” teachers) received either no mentoring or formal mentoring normally provided through their district. The study examined how early-career teachers’ participation in ASMP impacted:

1. Retention as a teacher in Alaska
2. Instructional practice
3. Student achievement

## KEY FINDINGS

Overall the study found several positive effects of ASMP on teachers and students. ASMP-mentored teachers were retained in teaching at notably higher rates than business-as-usual teachers. Education Northwest researchers did not find strong evidence of differences between ASMP-mentored and business-as-usual teachers in instructional practice. However, analyses of student achievement indicate that students of ASMP-mentored teachers generally had higher achievement scores. The program had statistically significant and educationally important impacts on diverse secondary students in mathematics and primary grade students in reading. The following sections highlight findings from the i3 study.



### **ASMP had a positive impact on third-year teacher retention.**

ASMP-mentored teachers, across all three cohorts, were retained as teachers in Alaska at higher rates during their third year of teaching than their counterparts at 80.5% and 76.6% respectively. Although not statistically significant, these results demonstrate that ASMP is having a positive impact on teacher retention.

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<sup>1</sup> Adams, B. L. (2010, May 3). *Connecting mentoring to student achievement in Alaska: Results and policy implications*. Paper presented at the 2010 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Retrieved September 11, 2017, from the AERA Online Paper Repository.



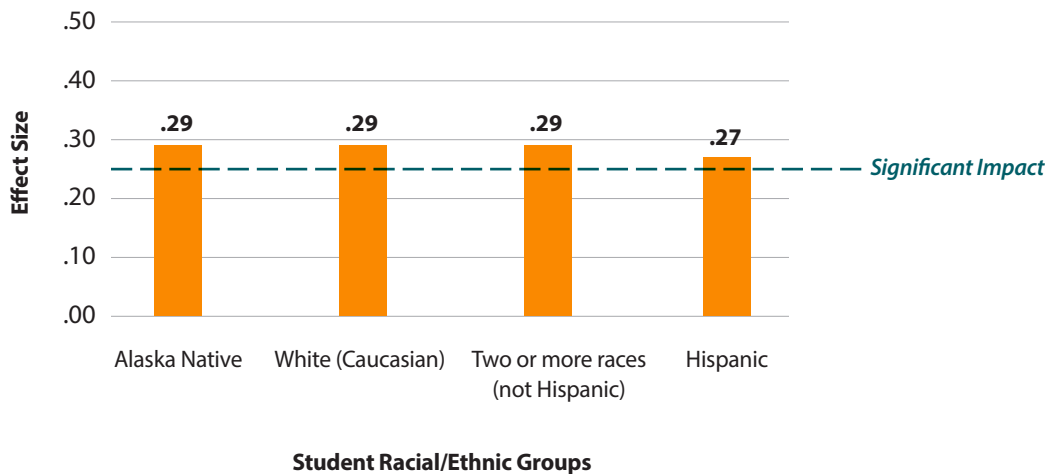
## A diverse group of secondary students who had ASMP-mentored teachers made statistically significant gains in mathematics.

In their first year of teaching, educators with ASMP mentors made a positive impact on secondary-level students' mathematics test scores. Students who identified as Alaska Native, White, Hispanic, or two or more races (not Hispanic) earned significantly higher scores on the state math assessment than students who had business-as-usual teachers.

As one measure of the impact of ASMP-mentored teachers on students' test scores, researchers from Education Northwest used effect size, which quantifies the difference between the two groups. The *What Works Clearinghouse*<sup>2</sup> considers any effect size of 0.25 or larger as having significant impact.

From this study, the effect size values of this diverse group of secondary math students ranged from 0.27 to 0.29—meaning that the average scores of these students with ASMP-mentored teachers exceeded nearly 30 percent of students who had business-as-usual teachers.

### ***ASMP-mentored teachers positively impacted the math assessment scores of students who identified as Alaska Native, White, Hispanic, or of two or more races (not Hispanic)***



<sup>2</sup> The What Works Clearinghouse (<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>) is an investment of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) within the U.S. Department of Education. It reviews educational research studies for scientific merit, based on rigorous standards.



## **Elementary students of first-year ASMP-mentored teachers had significantly higher state reading assessment scores than students of teachers with no formal mentor.**

Researchers from Education Northwest found statistically significant differences between the average state reading assessment scores of primary school students who had first-year teachers with ASMP mentors and students who had teachers with no formal mentor. In fact, the average standardized reading assessment scores of first-year ASMP-mentored teachers' students were more than double those of students whose teachers had no formal mentor.

These two statistically significant findings on student achievement in primary reading and secondary mathematics indicate the positive effects of ASMP on discrete groups of students.

## **MENTORING PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS**

Induction and mentoring programs are often portrayed as common-sense solutions to increasing the number of quality teachers who stay in the profession. This i3 validation study informs policymakers and the research community about the components of a successful teacher mentoring program. In doing so, it fills a long-standing gap in the literature and lends support to other studies about the impact of mentoring programs.<sup>3</sup> Based on this study, recommendations for implementing teacher mentoring programs include:

### **1. Provide Tailored and Sustained Professional Development for Mentors**

It is important to tailor the mentor training to address the needs of teachers and students, with an eye on continuously improving content, providing peer learning/interaction time, and responding to participants' feedback.

ASMP professional development providers base their sessions on the needs of mentors and mentees, drawing on feedback from online surveys and evaluations of mentor training sessions; they designate time for mentors to discuss challenges and successes, problem-solve, and reflect with their peer mentor.

### **2. Target Instructional Practice during Mentor-Mentee Interactions**

To improve mentees' instructional practice, mentors should focus on instructional mentoring. This includes addressing not only "survival" skills but professional growth through reflective dialogue and goal setting. Specifically, mentors should problem-solve with their mentees, recognizing successes, actively listening for challenges and addressing them, and focusing on teacher instructional practice and student learning.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the New Teacher Center's i3 evaluation (see <http://info.newteachercenter.org/i3-intake-form>).

Using formative assessment mentoring tools, ASMP mentors gather classroom data that they share and discuss with their mentees. Both parties use this information as a springboard to set professional learning goals. During the year, they revisit these goals and discuss next steps.

## **ASMP MENTORING MATTERS**

ASMP's positive effects on teacher retention and student achievement in reading and mathematics show that the program is having a significant impact on teachers—and student learning. ASMP demonstrates that a structured program focused on instructional mentoring can influence teacher and student outcomes. In short, ASMP mentoring matters.

*Download the full report at [LINK HERE](#)*

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