

**The Alaskan Teacher Shortage:
Challenges with Recruitment and Retention in Rural Schools**

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Author Note

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Abstract

This literature review unpacks the role of both Alaska's rural setting and cultural disconnect between Alaska Natives and non-Native educators on the state's teacher shortage. This paper identifies that newly hired, non-Native educators' experiences with physical and social isolation lead to high turnover in rural schools. To address the high turnover, school leaders have engaged in recruitment strategies to fill open teaching positions and have heightened retention efforts to maintain employed faculty members. The findings of this review are organized into a tiered system that stem from two major contributors to teachers' isolation: Alaska's rural environment and cultural misalignment between Alaska Natives and non-Native educators. Based on the findings, this paper makes policy recommendations to support school leaders' recruitment and retention efforts, including mandated participation in induction programs that introduce potential hires to rural Alaskan living, formal mentorship opportunities for newly employed educators, and requirements that all new faculty seeking certification complete multicultural coursework at an approved in-state university.

Keywords: Alaskan teacher shortage, rural education, retention, recruitment, turnover, staffing challenges in rural schools, Alaska Native and non-Native cultural disconnect

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Alaskan school leaders began to actively recruit out-of-state educators upon the construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System during the 1970s. Individuals moved to areas that flourished from the production of oil, which buttressed thriving local economies. District leaders hired a flux of out-of-state teachers to accommodate for population increases. In the 1980s, oil supply declined, local economies deteriorated, and teacher salaries dropped. Many out-of-state educators returned to the lower 48 states due to declining conditions, and their departures resulted in employment shortages that currently persist in rural schools (McDiarmid et al., 2002).

Rural Alaskan school leaders experience the most difficulty with teacher retention and have heightened their recruitment efforts to fill empty positions. New hires typically leave their school within a couple years of initial employment, and the turnover rate is highest within impoverished rural areas (DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Kaden et al., 2016; McDiarmid et al., 2002, Peterson, 2019). While Alaskan urban school districts have historically experienced annual turnover rates between 6% and 14%, rural districts with the highest turnover have witnessed up to 100% of their faculty leave in a given year (McDiarmid et al., 2002). Alaskan schools in isolated areas have fewer overall applicants and fewer fully qualified applicants, and superintendents usually hire from a smaller pool (DeFeo & Tran, 2019). School leaders attempt to widen the candidate pool using recruitment strategies that attract teachers from outside the state. More than 75% of new hires come from out of state each year, and the majority of hires are white women. To increase the number of applicants, superintendents contend with higher costs

of operation to fund their employment efforts (Kaden, 2014; Kaden, 2016). The financial demand adds to leaders' recruitment challenges specific to rural communities.

Alaska's expansive rural landscape has impacted the state's high educator turnover (DeFeo & Tran, 2019). While Alaska is the largest state in the nation, it only contains one urban school district, which is the city of Anchorage. The remainder of districts are categorized on a spectrum between suburban and remote, and many areas are solely accessible by boat or plane (DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Munsch & Boylan, 2008). We categorize regions that are disconnected from an established road or ferry system as "in the bush". In Alaska, about forty percent of the population lives in "the bush" (Munsch & Boylan, 2008). Rural territories contain sparsely populated towns with low population densities, and the small size of Alaskan communities has implications for new teachers' accessibility to resources, social networks, and decision to remain in their positions.

An examination of a relationship between rural Alaskan school conditions and student education aspirations is outside the scope of this literature review, but I have included a discussion of a potential relationship to consider for future research opportunities. Teachers in impoverished schools face run-down school building conditions and a lack of updated classroom resources (Kaden et al., 2016; McDiarmid et al., 2002). Native students from small communities are well aware of the quality of their education, which underscores their hesitation and lack of confidence to pursue postsecondary opportunities (Doyle et al., 2009). A student's perception of their K-12 experience may feed into an educational aspirations-achievement gap. The gap demonstrates that Alaska Native students care about their academic performance and have high goals related to their educational attainment, yet external factors such as schools' limited assistance with college applications complicate the pathway to achieve their goals. Furthermore,

students do not necessarily need a postsecondary education to learn industry skills, mostly related to farming and fishing, to support local economies (Doyle et al., 2009; Monk, 2007).

Doyle and Reyes (2009) surveyed an Alaska Native high school student who said,

Around here you can do pretty good without schooling or having education 'cause people in the city need money to buy food but here you can just go hunting. It's good around here, not like the cities. (p. 30)

Small villages may not prioritize higher education because students can learn production-based skills outside of a postsecondary experience. Community members can be successful providers with or without a higher degree, and this may widen the aspirations-achievement gap when achievement is exclusively defined as postsecondary education completion (Doyle et al., 2009). Future research may distill how poor school conditions and the divergence of community values with traditional education attainment expectations influence Alaska Native students' academic aspirations.

District leaders rely heavily on non-Native teachers to staff their schools and cultural strain between incoming teachers and Native communities results, which contributes to high teacher turnover. The literature review body includes multiple survey findings from outgoing non-Native teachers that suggest cultural disconnect from Alaska indigenous villagers adds to feelings of loneliness (Adams & Woods, 2015; DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Jester & Fickel, 2013; Kaden et al., 2016). New hires feel isolated in context of the broader community and in their schools. In some areas, non-Native faculty live in designated housing located on the outskirts of the village, and faculty must make a purposeful effort to socialize. Cultural misunderstanding between indigenous populations and non-Native teachers also exists in schools. Some miscommunication between teachers and families results from teachers' limited knowledge of

Native ways (Jester & Fickel, 2013). Teachers tend to leave their positions at rural Alaskan schools within just a few years, and they cite detachment from Native Alaskan culture as a primary reason for leaving (Peterson, 2019).

This literature review further unpacks the geographical and cultural reasons why Alaskan district leaders have struggled with staffing in their schools. I attempt to answer the following questions: How does teaching in a rural setting contribute to teacher recruitment and retainment in rural Alaska? Secondly, how does the state's unique Alaska Native cultural identity influence schools' difficulties with hiring and conserving faculty? I aim to obtain a deeper understanding of these conditions with a particular concern for non-Native teachers in context of broader communities and schools. This paper concludes with policy suggestions, calibrated with the findings, to alleviate the state's persistent teacher scarcity.

Methods

I included studies in this literature review that identify and examine the circumstances that contribute to the Alaskan teacher shortage. Using Georgetown University Library's online Advanced Search option, I utilized the search terms "teachers in Alaska Native schools", "Alaska teacher shortage", "Alaska teacher turnover", "teacher recruitment in rural Alaska", "teacher retention in rural Alaska" and "teacher turnover in rural Alaska". I constrained the time range from 2000 to 2019 to ensure that the studies were relevant to this century and to see if any staffing challenges have augmented overtime. I restricted the results to peer-reviewed journals and chose studies from EBSCO Education, Google Scholar, ERIC, ScholarWorks@UA, and Project Muse that focus on a certain region or a specific type of teacher in Alaska. Some researchers studied teachers in certain geographic areas, such as Kaden et al. (2016), who surveyed individuals serving northern Arctic communities. Other authors reported on specific

kinds of educators, and I particularly refer to the Starlings et al. (2014) study that assessed special education teacher turnover in the state. If a journal article addressed teacher recruitment or retention in the state of Alaska in some capacity, I included the report in the study. The databases contained a limited quantity of sources that were peer reviewed. Therefore, I utilized the same search terms to find journal articles relevant to the state's teacher shortages that were not peer reviewed, and I included these studies in the literature review body. I also found research that provided general information about the challenges of teaching in rural areas in the United States. I included this background research to contextualize the teacher disparity issue in Alaska, however, these studies are not included in the literature review body. Given the constraints, the final review body includes studies that examine the teacher staffing difficulty across a range of specialties and rural geographic settings.

To organize the findings, I used Microsoft Excel to classify each source's information into themes that contribute to the Alaska teacher shortage. I pinpointed isolation as the overarching theme that contributes to the shortage, and I found that teachers experience two types of isolation, physical and social. Two main reasons, or "streams", contribute to teachers' feelings of physical and social isolation: challenges unique to the Alaskan rural setting and cultural disconnect between Natives and non-Natives. As I coded the sources of isolation as either a result of rural setting or cultural disconnect, several subthemes emerged that supplement each stream as more specific evidence for the high educator turnover in Alaska.

Limitations

A restricting factor in this literature analysis is that survey results from small-scope studies cannot be generalized to every rural school in Alaska. Each study includes teacher or preservice teacher survey results. Some of the research focuses on a certain type of educator, a

distinct point in an educator's career, a particular Alaskan region, or a singular teacher preparation program, and we cannot extrapolate the findings to every district in the entire state (Adams & Woods, 2015; Jester & Fickel, 2013; Kaden et al., 2014; Starlings et al., 2002).

Recommendations for a particular rural school district may not be the best set of improvements for another school.

Sparse data about the Alaskan teacher shortage overall is a second limitation to this examination of the state's high turnover. Some of researchers included in the review body acknowledge that their studies are preliminary and suggest further analysis to reinforce their findings. To fill in gaps, authors like Starlings et al. (2002), use literature reviews and nationwide data on rural teacher recruitment and retention information to draw similar conclusions about staffing challenges in Alaska. The data collection specific to Alaska has yet to reach a level of sophistication in which enough information exists to disaggregate data into subcategories, such as teachers' previous experience levels, cultural identity, and specific regional origin (in state or the lower 48). Based on the studies in this review, researchers have yet to examine teacher staffing issues in a broad set of Alaskan rural school districts. I was able to draw conclusions that contribute to the teacher shortage based on constrained survey samples, but the findings do not apply to all rural schools in the state.

Findings

The following explanations of the findings align to each question that addresses the main reasons for teachers' feelings of social and physical isolation. I discuss the influence of Alaska's rural setting and Native/non-Native disconnect on isolation and unpack the subthemes that fit into either stream. I provide specific causes of the identified subthemes and include the supporting details in stratified explanations.

See Table 1 for a complete summary of the literature review findings and Figure 1 for the findings presented in a tiered system. For ease of visualization, in Figure 1, the findings are organized as a vertical binary tree plot with four levels and three tiers. I differentiate the physical and social reasons for isolation into both rural settings and Native and non-Native cultural disconnect (Tier 1), which are further supported by common subthemes (Tier 2). The particular reasons that fit within each subtheme and their supporting details compose the bottom-most level (Tier 3).

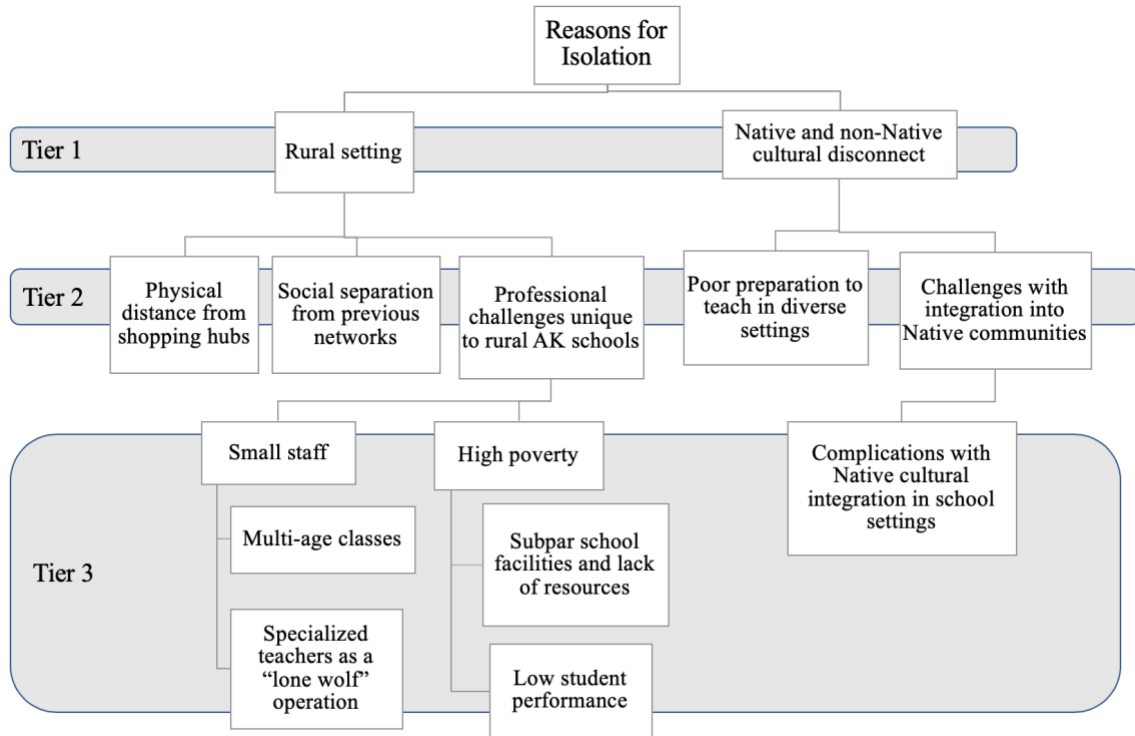
Table 1

Alaskan teachers’ and preservice teachers’ reasons for physical and social isolation, 2002-2019

Reason	Category Elaboration	Discussed In...
Rural Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Physical distance from resources/shopping hubs ❖ Social isolation from previous networks, family, and friends ❖ Professional challenges unique to rural Alaskan schools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Small staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Multi-age classes ■ Specialized teachers often operate as a “lone wolf” ➤ High poverty status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Subpar school facilities and lack of classroom resources ■ Low student performance 	Adams & Woods, 2015; DeFeo et al., 2017; DeFeo et al., 2018; DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Kaden et al., 2014; Kaden et al., 2016; McDiarmid et al., 2002; Munsch & Boylan, 2008; Starlings et al., 2002
Alaska Native and Non-Native Cultural Disconnect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Poor preparation to teach in diverse settings ❖ Challenges with cultural integration into Native communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Complications with Native cultural integration in school settings 	Adams & Woods, 2015; DeFeo et al., 2018; DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Doyle et al., 2009; Jester & Fickel, 2013; Kaden et al., 2016

Figure 1

Alaskan teachers’ and preservice teachers’ reasons for physical and social isolation, 2002-2019, arranged by tier in a binary tree plot



Tier 1: Reasons for Isolation Related to Rural Setting and Native and Non-Native Cultural Disconnect

Both incoming and outgoing teachers cite isolation as the primary reason for leaving their positions in Alaskan schools. This paper identifies two reasons for their isolation: New teachers claim the lifestyle adjustment to living in a rural area is challenging, and the cultural strain between Alaska Natives and newcomers fosters stress. Kaden et al. (2014) includes a statement in their research that supports teachers’ experience loneliness as a result of Alaska’s remote landscape and social integration challenges,

Unfamiliarity with rural living conditions and Indigenous cultures, the Arctic environment, and community relations added to emotional stress and feelings of isolation

during professional experiences. (p. 37)

As the quote above suggests, isolation resulting from teachers' incompatibility with remote living conditions and Native ways of life increases the likelihood that teachers will leave their jobs.

Tier 2: Challenges Associated with Teaching in Rural Alaska

The following findings address the question, "How does teaching in a rural setting contribute to teacher recruitment and retainment in rural Alaska?". I organize the causes related to rural settings into three categories: physical distance from shopping hubs, social separation from previous family and friend networks, and professional challenges associated with education in rural schools. I then elaborate within each of the Tier 2 categories.

Physical Distance from Shopping Hubs

The majority of studies included in the literature review body find that teachers report physical isolation as a predominant challenge. Survey respondents claim their communities had less access to resources due to far proximity from shopping hubs. Villages "in the bush" may exist widely apart from each other. The mountainous terrain, expansive ice, and harsh climate of Alaska separates the landscape, which restricts avenues to shopping centers (Adams & Woods, 2015). To work around limited access, villages commonly organize occasional trips into a more populated area to buy supplies. New teachers have the additional option to purchase items online if internet is available, but shipping to remote areas makes orders more expensive, and teachers may not be financially able to accommodate for the price increases (Adams & Woods, 2015; Kaden et al., 2016). Several studies mention that new faculty said they were underprepared to live in conditions similar to a third world country. They did not bring enough supplies that could

help them adjust to life in Alaska. The lack of preparation added to teachers' unfamiliarity with life in rural areas and feeling detached from their previous lifestyle habits (Adams & Woods, 2015; DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Kaden et al., 2014). Consequently, new educators' experiences with physical isolation influences their decision to remain employed in their district schools.

Social Separation from Previous Networks

Living in rural communities contributes to teachers' feelings of social isolation. Newcomers are physically separated from previous networks, family, and friends (DeFeo et al., 2017; Kaden et al., 2014; Munsch & Boylan, 2008). New teachers' loneliness may be exacerbated by the knowledge that their community is only accessible by plane or boat. For example, some preservice teachers enrolled in Alaska Pacific University's Remote Rural Practicum Program were concerned that their family and friends from home would not visit because travelling to Alaskan villages is more logistically complicated and expensive (Munsch & Boylan, 2008). One participant noted in her teaching preservice program post-questionnaire, "I have no friends or relatives there and none of mine would ever come to see me" (Munsch & Boylan, 2008, p. 6). Teachers' disconnect from pre-established social networks adds to their social isolation and may influence their eventual decision to leave the village.

Tier 3: Professional Challenges Unique to Teaching in Rural Schools

This review identifies two sets of professional challenges unique to teaching in rural Alaskan schools related to both small staff and high poverty. To accommodate for small student populations, schools combine traditionally separate class cohorts and rely on certain specialized faculty to oversee an entire student population in a school (Adams & Woods, 2015). Educators contend with an untraditional model of classroom teaching in addition to managing conditions

related to high poverty. Teachers operate within structurally inadequate school buildings and cope with few resources (Kaden et al., 2014). The teaching conditions unique to rural schools exacerbate educators' feelings of stress and isolation.

Small Staff: Multi-Aged Classes. New faculty face isolating challenges working in small Alaskan schools that operate with a limited staff. Teachers often find themselves as the sole facilitator of multi-age and multi-grade classrooms because both faculty and student populations are small. Teacher preparation and certification programs are traditionally structured around single-grade classes, and individuals may find themselves underprepared to teach an amalgamation of students typically separated by age and age-aligned developmental abilities (Adams & Woods, 2015; Starlings et al., 2002). In some cases, educators teach in content areas outside their certification to bridge existing gaps due to the broad extent of the teacher shortage. Whether a faculty member's certification aligns with their subject matter or not, they may be the only individual responsible for teaching their subject and planning curriculum that spans several grades. Teachers have fewer peer mentorship and collaboration opportunities with other educators within a solitary structure. More experienced teachers previously accustomed to collective collaboration efforts with their peers in previous professional experiences need to adjust to a more independent dynamic as a multi-grade teacher (Kaden et al., 2014).

Small Staff: Specialized Teachers as the "Lone Wolf". Particular groups of specialized teachers may be especially confined as the "lone wolf" in rural schools. School leaders often employ one special education teacher per school. Such teachers work alone with populations that range from students labeled as gifted to students that need more psychological support. Special education teachers also may be the single advocate for their students, which can

be tiring (Starlings et al., 2002). New specialized educators manage a heavy workload that is typical in small rural schools and contributes to their feelings of isolation.

High Poverty: Subpar School Facilities and Lack of Resources. New teachers endure personal pressure to overcome pre-existing school conditions regarding facility quality and classroom resources. Some educators are surprised that rural Alaskan communities are typically high-poverty and struggle to maintain sufficient school conditions (Kaden et al., 2016). A survey of 135 outgoing rural teachers believed their overall facilities were in greater need of significant repair than in-state urban schools (McDiarmid et al., 2002). As a result of inadequate funding, school leaders find maintaining heating systems in frigid conditions, clean water accessibility, and sufficient air circulation to be challenging. Teachers must address classroom resource shortfalls as well. They work with a lack of textbooks and technological equipment, such as printers or computers (Adams & Woods, 2015, Kaden et al., 2016). New faculty are further strained by a lack of supplies and are unable to fully stock their classrooms with their personal resources, and their unfulfilled efforts adds to feelings of helplessness (Kaden et al., 2016). Faculty particularly experience stress to overcome pre-existing school conditions regarding poor facility quality and undersupplied classrooms in rural schools.

High Poverty: Low Student Performance. A school-level factor that impacts teacher turnover in Alaskan rural settings is strain from low student performance. Districts are already impoverished, and student performance is typically low (Doyle et al., 2009; Kaden et al., 2016). Students of color are more likely to receive lower grades, experience higher dropout rates, and have a reduced opportunity to develop strong study skills. In rural Alaska, a majority of high school students have said their schools' resources and academic counseling efforts have provided limited support to help achieve their educational goals (Doyle et al., 2009). School staff roles are

designed to support teachers with their students, but with a lack of cohesive network support in a school, teachers' isolation compounds in a high-poverty rural environment. The pressure may lead to early burnout (Kaden et al., 2016). Further studies will aid our understanding of the extent to which impoverished Alaskan schools perpetuate low student performance.

Tier 2: Challenges Associated with Native and Non-Native Cultural Disconnect

The following findings associated with Native and non-Native cultural disconnect address the question, "How does the state's unique Alaska Native cultural identity influence schools' difficulties with hiring and conserving faculty?" In this section, I separate the extensions of Tier 1 cultural disconnect reasoning into two contributors categorized as Tier 2: poor preparation to teach in diverse settings, and new teachers' challenges with integration into Native communities and schools.

Poor Preparation to Teach in Diverse Settings

Non-Native teachers are poorly prepared to teach in culturally diverse settings and experience detachment as a result of the cultural knowledge gap. Many new faculty are surprised about their students' cultural richness (Kaden et al., 2016). Without a strong knowledge base of Alaskan Native culture, non-Native educators often teach a "disconnected curriculum" from Native history (Jester & Fickel, 2013). Non-native educators that did not grow up in a village are likely to teach their students in the same ways that faculty would teach children of similar cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. New hires, likely unknowingly and unintentionally, perpetuate a racially misaligned "culture of power" that Native students and faculty resist (Jester & Fickel, 2013; Milner, 2010). Outgoing teachers have cited that their unfamiliarity teaching a culturally relevant curriculum contributed to strain and eventual decision to leave (DeFeo et al.,

2017). Programs related to professional development, teacher preparation, and new teacher orientation are currently attempting to prepare non-Native educators to deliver a more culturally responsive curriculum (DeFeo et al., 2018, DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Kaden et al., 2014).

Challenges with Integration into Native Communities

Non-Native teachers may interpret their interactions with Alaska Native communities as distant when they first move to villages. Newcomers find community members' hesitations to form relationships surprising. Racial mismatch between the majority of incoming teachers and Native populations is indicative of cultural mismatch, as new faculty typically do not share the same racial identity as Alaska Native villages. As of 2018, 90% of Alaska Natives reside in rural districts (DeFeo et al., 2018). According to Kaden et al. (2016),

More than 70% of newly hired teachers are not from Alaska and less than 5% are Native teachers. Teachers new to Arctic Alaska often learn about the local cultures, Arctic lifestyles, and differentiating instruction only to leave after a year or two. (p. 130).

Non-Native individuals experience the effects of racial and cultural dissimilarity as teachers and as community residents (Jester & Fickel, 2013). Newcomers' community networks are typically restricted to their school colleagues and the outer village. Alaskan Natives (including students' families) are used to high educator turnover and are less motivated to socialize with new people (Kaden et al., 2014). Cultural disconnect feeds into some non-Native teachers' feelings of seclusion. Thus, many faculty eventually choose to leave their teaching positions.

Tier 3: Complications with Native Cultural Integration in School Settings

Non-Native faculty and preservice teachers refer to feeling a lack of support from Alaska Natives as a cause of feeling isolated (DeFeo et al., 2018; DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Jester & Fickel, 2013; Munsch & Boylan, 2008). Some Alaskan school leaders have acknowledged in interviews that they no longer fully invest in new teachers, as leaders expect most educators will leave within a year or two (DeFeo et al., 2018). In schools, recent hires may interpret their relationships with elders to be strained as a symptom of unawareness concerning Native ways, and faculty members can misinterpret elder's protection of their teachings as exclusion from collaboration. Teachers may feel excluded when students and elder Native educators choose to communicate in their Native language rather than English (Jester & Fickel, 2013). Non-Native teachers may read hesitant interactions from students' families as polarizing, and misinterpretations of the family and teacher relationship may result. Considering culturally-rooted miscommunications, educators may retreat into feelings of discouragement rather than persist in building relationships with Alaska Native students and colleagues.

Discussion

This literature review examines the causes of the Alaskan teacher shortage. I identify isolation as the overarching theme and differentiate the causes of isolation as either the state's rural expanses or cultural misalignment between new non-Native teachers and Alaska Natives. In this section, I discuss the greater significance of each reason and offer aligned policy suggestions.

Rural Setting Implications for School Leaders and Incoming Teachers

The influence of Alaska's rural setting on staffing shortages has implications for school leaders engaged in teacher recruitment efforts. School leaders have started to screen applicants, seemingly qualified on paper, to gauge if they could adjust to living in rural areas. Superintendents or similar leaders may also call applicants to convey the challenges of living in villages in advance of moving to the state (Peterson, 2019). One district superintendent uses his own salary to bring candidates to the region for touring and interviewing purposes to fully expose the candidate to the rural Alaskan lifestyle (DeFeo & Tran, 2019). Rural districts also offer competitive salaries as another recruitment tactic. According to the National Education Association, the nationwide average starting salary was \$39,084.00 U.S.D. during the 2017-2018 school year, and a new teacher starting in Alaska would earn \$46,954.00 U.S.D. (National Education Association, 2018). However, the financial incentive strains schools that are classified as high poverty (DeFeo et al., 2018). Superintendents have made challenging trade-offs to allocate scarce resources for recruitment purposes, such as advancing salary incentives, in already financially-stretched schools.

One potentially effective tool for school leaders to attract and retain more teachers is the establishment of formal mentorship. Within the literature review body, studies report little to no research regarding the probability an applicant would be more motivated to accept a job offer if schools had established mentorship programs. School leaders choose whether or not to take advantage of programs that partner mentor teachers with new faculty (Adams & Woods, 2015). In 2004, the University of Alaska created the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project (ASMP) as one program to combat the teacher shortage in rural villages. School districts can request the ASMP connect early-career teachers with mentors, and the mentor must remain confidential. New

faculty check in with their mentor virtually on a weekly basis and in person on a monthly basis (Adams & Woods, 2015). Schools that use mentorship programs like ASMP reap positive benefits in regard to supporting new teachers. A mentor has the professional training to answer questions neutrally, which will not impact a newcomer's reputation in the village. New teachers are able to ask their mentor for information about the rural lifestyle. Educators confidently seek answers without the fear of further polarizing themselves from Native communities and are likely to seek additional help from their mentor as needed (Kaden et al., 2014). Faculty adjusting to both living and teaching in a rural setting find formal mentorship comforting, and the partnership may aid in preventing teachers from leaving their positions.

Policy Suggestions Related to Rural Alaskan Conditions

Policymakers should consider mandating programs that could help new faculty prepare to live in rural districts. A policy should set aside funding to send candidates to a specific school district so that potential hires can obtain a sense of the living conditions before finalizing an employment agreement. For hired teachers, policymakers could require mandatory induction programs, which would introduce teachers to the unique conditions of living in their particular Alaskan community. Several studies mention that new faculty were underprepared and did not bring enough supplies (Adams & Woods, 2015; DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Kaden et al., 2014). An induction program could help prepare individuals prior to teaching, or teachers in the interview consideration process, determine if they would be suited to life with minimal resource access in rural Alaska. In-state universities currently offer immersion programs that place preservice teachers in rural communities, but they are voluntary, and we do not yet know if these program graduates are successful as teachers (Munsch & Boylan, 2008). The creation of mandatory immersion experiences and tracking the trajectory of preservice teachers after graduation would

be a useful starting place to understand the effectiveness of these programs. Policies that regulate induction practices could help new hires successfully adjust as rural Alaskan community residents.

Policymakers and researchers need more data to bolster the argument that mentorship effectively addresses recruitment and retention issues in Alaska. The ASMP has been an established program for 15 years and could possibly serve as a reference program for the creation of other mentorship opportunities. Adams & Woods (2015) interviewed program alumni in their study on the ASMP 's success rate and found that “Of the teachers served by the ASMP in the first two years of the project, 56% (n=282) continued teaching in Alaska’s public K-12 school system after five years” (p. 256). The certainty of the ASMP success rate would likely improve if researchers interview program alumni beyond the first two years of the project. Therefore, policymakers and stakeholders can use ASMP data to continue identifying the strengths of the program as a framework for other mentorship opportunities in Alaska. Expanding research to include more graduates and creating new studies on other university-sponsored programs will better inform policymakers on effective mentorship practices to establish in other programs.

Native and non-Native Disconnect: Implications for School Leaders and Incoming Teachers

Some outgoing non-Native teachers construe their stress into negative perceptions of Alaska Native students. The most drastic perceptions include that students are unteachable and have families that do not value education at home (Jester & Fickel, 2013). In the literature review body, the ratio of Alaskan Universities’ recruitment of non-Native, in-state teachers versus in-state, Native educators into teacher preparation programs is unknown. Researchers may better understand if recruitment plans should be centered in Alaska instead of out of state if we had more complete knowledge of in-state recruitment, employment, and direct impact on teacher

retention. Researchers can begin to study if in-state, non-Native teachers are more likely to form asset-based thinking regarding their Native students.

Teachers new to the community should use personal strategies to reduce their isolation living in rural districts. Adams & Woods (2015) suggest that educators make an effort to attend events in the greater community and build relationships with their students. Non-Native members need time to adjust to living in Alaskan villages and bridge cultural gaps (DeFeo et al., 2018). A newcomer should realize that loneliness alleviates when they purposely try to connect with people in the community. With a conscious and sustained social effort, teachers may find a support system sooner than expected and remain in the communities that could greatly benefit from their persistence.

Policy Suggestions Related to Cultural Disconnect

Education leaders have recently modified certification policies to bridge cultural gaps, and institutions have yet to publish data that evaluate their effectiveness. The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development enacted a statewide policy that requires applicants for state-approved teacher certification to complete Alaska Multicultural and Alaska Studies classes. Effective July 2018, applicants must take at least three semester hours of Alaska Multicultural coursework and three semester hours of Alaska Studies coursework at an approved in-state university (Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, n.d.). Thus far, the content is variable and differs in quality (DeFeo et al., 2018). Alaskan universities have yet to publish data to fully understand the success of these programs in relationship to teacher turnover alleviation. As this initiative unfolds, policymakers should collaborate with school leaders and researchers to identify areas of improvement for certification requirements. Stakeholder groups would be able to collaborate on amendments to better improve the certification policy

requirements. The states' multicultural coursework requirement aims to close the cultural gaps between non-Native teachers and Alaska Natives, which may prevent teachers from feeling isolated and leaving their schools.

Policymakers should implement statewide mentorship programs with broader experience prerequisites to help teachers learn about Alaska Native communities. The Alaska Statewide Mentor project is well-established, but the ASMP is optional and offered to just early-career teachers. More experienced educators new to the state can also benefit from mandatory consultations with an accessible mentor familiar with local culture (Adams & Woods, 2015). Policymakers may require statewide mentorship program participation regardless of an individual's previous classroom experience. Therefore, a wider cohort of non-Native educators would receive formal assistance to bridge cultural gaps, boosting the likelihood more teachers will remain in their Native villages.

Conclusion

This literature review examined the reasons for Alaska's persistent teacher shortage. New educators are underprepared to live and teach in expansive rural settings (Adams & Woods, 2015). Furthermore, many incoming non-Native faculty members are minimally aware of Alaska Native ways and must learn Native cultural ways of living (DeFeo et al., 2018; DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Jester & Fickel, 2013; Munsch & Boylan, 2008). In this review, I identify social and physical isolation as the overarching cause of the teacher shortage and divide the findings into two contributing streams: the state's rural setting and cultural disconnect between Natives and non-Native teachers. I present further lines of reasoning within these two streams to support that isolation affects non-Native teachers as both community and school members. The findings in this review body are a work in progress, and I encourage researchers to continue to create an

expansive network of Alaskan educator recruitment, retention, and turnover data to build on the current information. When state leaders have a deepened understanding of the teaching conditions particular to Alaska, the research will shape aligned policy solutions and ultimately amplify Alaskan Native culture.

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