

Problem of Practice 1

Most teachers in Alaska come from outside the state and may have a difficult time adjusting. On average, from 2008 to 2012, about 64 percent of teachers hired statewide were from outside Alaska, and they often have higher turnover rates than the state's homegrown teachers (Hill & Hirshberg, 2013). In the (fictitious) Northern Lights Borough School District, 75 percent of teachers were prepared outside Alaska. The largest school in the district is a K–12 school where all 10 teachers were prepared outside of Alaska. Five of those teachers are new this school year. Only one teacher has been at the school for more than five years. He is also the basketball coach. The principal has been at the school for three years after teaching in a neighboring district for 10 years. She is also the school's business manager and the district's special education director. All teachers teach multiple grade levels and/or subject areas, a common situation in Alaska (Firestone, 1991; Hirshberg, Hill, & Kasemodel, 2014). A recent REL Northwest study found that lower salaries, holding more than one position, and teaching at more than one school site were related to increased teacher turnover (Vazquez Cano, Bel Hadj Amor, & Pierson, 2019). How can school and district leaders use data to try and prevent turnover at this school?

Problem of Practice 2

Living conditions in Alaska can include extreme weather; months with no sunlight; months with no darkness; and the isolation of living in a remote community without roads, access to supplies, or entertainment. In many rural communities in the state, access to television and the Internet is often limited to the school site (Vazquez Cano et al., 2019). The fictitious Retreating Glacier School District includes a rural town, where the school district office is located, and four remote village schools. There is higher teacher and principal turnover in the villages, where there is no road access, than there is in the town. District and school leaders suspect educators' sense of isolation is a key cause of turnover. How can they use data and evidence to test their assumption, develop a sustainable educator support model to mitigate causes of departure, and determine whether the model is effective?

Problem of Practice 3

Research and anecdotal evidence point to a wide range of reasons why educators do not enter or stay in the profession in Alaska. These include geographic remoteness and a challenging natural environment, heavy workloads that can involve serving in multiple roles and teaching multiple grade levels and/or subject areas, lack of satisfaction with district leadership, and challenges with community integration (Firestone, 1991; Hirshberg et al., 2014; Kaden, Patterson, Healy, & Adams, 2016). Alaska has also become less competitive in the regional job market. Although it ranks among the top 10 states for average teacher salary (National Education Association, 2019), districts in other Western states are hiring more educators and

increasing wages at a higher rate than Alaska (Hirshberg, Berman, DeFeo, & Hill, 2015). Small rural schools across four neighboring districts are struggling to fill teacher vacancies. Their principals are getting together to put a plan into place to help attract individuals to the profession and their community. How can they use data to better understand why individuals decide to become teachers and why they choose to teach in small rural schools? How can they use that information?

References

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