

The Molly Hootch Schools After 40 Years: Successes, Failures, and Opportunities

Jody Drew¹, Erica Allen¹, John Matt¹

¹Department of Educational Leadership, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana, U.S.

Correspondence: John Matt, Department of Educational Leadership, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana, U.S..

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Abstract

This quantitative study was designed to understand the relationship between the variables of student attendance, educator experience and turnover, and student achievement at the Molly Hootch schools in rural Alaska, to better understand the current state of achievement according to data from 2002–2019, collected from the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (AKDEED) database. Data revealed that Molly Hootch school attendance was at 90% and that proficiency among students dropped from 40% to 15% during the years under review. The drop in proficiency during a time period where attendance level was strong leads to further qualitative exploration of the causes of the phenomenon.

Keywords: Alaska, molly hootch, rural, Alaska native

1. Introduction to the Study

Alaskan students have consistently performed poorly on national education rankings compared to students in other states (Trimble, 2018). Furthermore, the Alaska Native population is disproportionately represented in the lowest levels of student achievement within these state rankings (DeFeo et al., 2017). Following a lawsuit by Molly Hootch and Anna Tobeluk in 1976, high school students from the Yukon River village of Emmonak (Native Voices, n.d.), the Governor of Alaska signed the Tobeluk Consent Decree. This decree committed the state to provide high schools in Alaska Native Villages. In the *Molly Hootch Lawsuit*, over 4,000 Alaska Native plaintiffs claimed they faced racial discrimination by the State of Alaska because they lacked high schools in their rural villages (Alaskool, n.d.). Even though the State of Alaska admitted no wrongdoing, they did agree to build 105 “Molly Hootch” high schools in rural villages in response to the lawsuit. However, researchers have not yet determined whether these schools have adequately educated the students who attend them.

The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (AKDEED) uses school-level standardized test data as a measure of quality control for schools, citing three purposes: to inform parents, to identify schools in need of improvement, and to ensure a quality education (AKDEED, 2018).

Among rural Alaska Native populations, student academic achievement, as measured by these state-mandated tests, remains lower than both the state and national average levels in mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA) (Patterson Silver Wolf & Butler-Barnes, 2017). It is unclear whether this result is consistent with the “Molly Hootch” schools. More specifically, it is not clear whether student attendance, high turnover of educators, or the years of educator experience contribute to student achievement in “Molly Hootch” schools. The purpose of the present quantitative study was to describe the academic performance of the Molly Hootch schools and to investigate the relationships between student attendance, educator experience, and school efficacy, as measured by achievement on standardized tests in the Molly Hootch schools in rural Alaska.

2. Background

On September 3, 1976, Alaska Governor Jay Hammond signed a consent decree ending the class-action lawsuit known as the *Molly Hootch Case*, which was officially tried as *Tobeluk v. Lind* (Alaskool, n.d.; see Appendix A). The plaintiffs in this suit numbered more than 4,000, resided in 126 rural villages, and claimed racial discrimination by the State of Alaska. The plaintiffs claimed that leaders from the State provided high schools in small, predominantly White villages—but did not do so in the plaintiffs’ small, predominantly Alaska Native villages.

In the settlement decree, despite denying any wrongdoing, leaders of the State of Alaska agreed to construct high schools

in any of the 126 villages named in the consent decree that wanted a high school. Eventually, 105 schools were built. This act enabled rural Alaska Native students to stay in their home villages for high school, rather than forfeiting high school or traveling great distances to attend residential schools. Although the construction of schools in the rural villages of Alaska seemed socially and culturally beneficial to families and communities, the educational benefits anticipated by and for the Molly Hootch communities have not been realized (Alaskool, n.d.). Moreover, the Molly Hootch schools have not demonstrated proficient levels of academic attainment.

In 2011, Alaska Governor Sean Parnell asked Margie Brown, President and Chief Executive Officer of Cook Inlet Region Inc. (CIRI), for suggestions for education reform (Brown, 2011). CIRI is one of 12 land-based Alaska Native regional corporations created by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. The Lower Kuskokwim School District is comprised of schools in Bethel, Alaska that predate the Tobeluk Consent Decree and about 25% of the Molly Hootch schools reside in this district. Brown (2011) confirmed, “Alaska students are near the bottom among the states, with Alaska Native students ranking among the worst-performing groups in the state. [We] are barely in the game ... fewer than half of Alaska Native students graduate from high school” (para. 2).

On March 28, 2017, Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD) Staff (2017) reported that LKSD had a pre-Kindergarten to 12th grade average attendance rate of 90% but had only achieved a 53% graduation rate. Further, less than 41% of students in math and 33% of students in reading were meeting growth goals, and less than 19% of students in the Ugton/Cugton dual language schools showed proficiency in these subjects (LKSD Staff, 2017). Alaskan PK–12 education ranked 46th in a nationwide study (Trimble, 2018). Alaska Native students were disproportionately represented at the lowest levels of achievement and graduation rates. High school graduation rates for Alaska Native students hover around 30%. Those who do graduate demonstrate the reading and writing levels of fifth graders, as measured by state standards-based assessments (AKDEED, 2016; Wolf et al., 2017). Fifty-two percent of all Alaskan high school graduates who enroll at the University of Alaska require significant remediation in preparation for college work (Gutierrez, 2013).

Several factors may contribute to the poor educational record of Alaska in general and rural Alaska specifically. For example, educator turnover rates in rural Alaska are among the highest in the nation (Hill & Hirschberg, 2013). Up to 70% of educators working in the Molly Hootch villages are beginning teachers who are neither Alaska Native nor native to Alaska (Carter, 2006; Patterson Silver Wolf & Butler-Barnes, 2017). Novice teachers develop competencies more quickly when they work in high-functioning professional cultures and when they have the support and guidance of an experienced principal. Unfortunately, many principals in rural Alaska—sometimes called “the bush”—may also be outsiders in the initial years of their work as administrators (DeFeo et al., 2017; Trumbull et al., 2015). The reality shock and culture fatigue beginning teachers and principals experience contributes to educator failure and high turnover rates in rural Alaska (Patterson Silver Wolf & Butler-Barnes, 2017; Torres, 2017; Trumbull et al., 2015). Turnover rates in these schools have historically been—and remain—much higher than national rates, even among other high-poverty, high-needs schools (DeFeo et al., 2017; Patterson Silver Wolf & Butler-Barnes, 2017). Furthermore, researchers have associated high turnover rates and inexperienced teachers with poor achievement among students (Adams & Woods, 2015; DeFeo et al., 2017; Murnane, 1975). Thus, rural Alaska Native students require more experienced educators, but encounter teachers with less experience (DeFeo et al., 2017).

Achievement results from the LKSD’s 2015–2016 school year (SY) indicate that solutions to the student achievement problem lie in factors under the schools’ control. One of those factors is educator turnover. Previous scholars have found that a shortage of qualified teachers and higher turnover rates have disproportionately influenced high poverty and minority school districts, and these factors have strong negative correlations to student achievement (Chain et al., 2017; Hanushek, 2016). Ronfeldt et al. (2013) concurred, establishing a direct causal link between teacher turnover and student achievement. Another factor under the schools’ control is the experience level of the educators they hire. Research shows that educator years of experience contributes to the academic achievement of students (Murnane, 1975; Patterson Silver Wolf & Butler-Barnes, 2017).

3. Purpose

The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate the relationships between student attendance, educator experience, and student achievement in the Molly Hootch schools in rural Alaska. The findings from this study contribute knowledge regarding the educational efficacy of the Molly Hootch schools and reveal whether school leaders are adequately serving the community they are hired to assist. Researchers have indicated that student populations of rural Alaska do not perform to the standards of the national average (Trumbull et al., 2015) in mathematics and ELA. Scholars have also shown that Alaska Native students are disproportionately represented in the bottom levels of student achievement (Patterson Silver Wolf & Butler-Barnes, 2017). This research additionally shows that educator years of experience contributes to the academic achievement of students (Murnane, 1975; Patterson Silver Wolf & Butler-Barnes, 2017). In the present study, the researcher reviewed the existing literature on this topic and identified gaps in the

knowledge about the Molly Hootch schools. Therefore, this research contributed to filling the gaps in research on education in rural Alaska.

4. Research Questions

For the purposes of this project, the study asked the following overarching research question: What are the relationships between school attendance, student achievement, educator turnover, and the experience of teachers and principals? The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting loss of employment in the University of Alaska system disqualified this researcher from accessing the deidentified, individual level data required for the study that they had originally envisioned and proposed. Therefore, using school-level data that was available to the public, the researcher conducted a quantitative case study to examine the following research questions:

To achieve the purpose of the current study, the researcher developed the following overarching research question: What are the relationships between school attendance, student achievement, educator turnover, and the experience of teachers and principals?

RQ1: What levels of academic achievement did students attending the Molly Hootch schools attain from 2010–2019?

RQ2: What were the rates of attendance for the Molly Hootch schools from 2010–2019?

RQ3: What were the rates of educator turnover at the Molly Hootch schools from 2010–2019?

RQ4: What were the years of educator experience for the Molly Hootch schools from 2010–2019?

5. Methodology

The Alaska Native student population is disproportionately represented in the lowest level of student mathematics and ELA achievement within state rankings in Alaska (DeFeo et al., 2017). In 1976 the State of Alaska agreed with the plaintiffs in *Tobeluk v. Lind*, who argued that schools were needed in rural Alaska to help increase the access and quality of education for Alaska Native students (Schneider, 2018). After much deliberation, 105 schools and additions to 24 elementary schools (i.e., the Molly Hootch schools) were built in response to this call (Kaden et al., 2016). To date, however, no research has been conducted on whether these schools are adequately educating the rural student population.

Student achievement, as measured by standardized tests, among rural Alaska Native populations remains lower than the averages at both the state and national levels (Patterson Silver Wolf & Butler-Barnes, 2017). It is unclear whether student attendance, high turnover of educators, or years of educator experience contribute to low student achievement in the schools built in rural Alaskan villages after the Molly Hootch lawsuit settlement. The purpose of this quantitative causal-comparative study was to investigate the relationships between student attendance, educator turnover, educator experience, and student achievement in the Molly Hootch schools in remote, rural Alaska.

In the causal-comparative quantitative study originally proposed, the researcher would have employed a linear mixed-model to analyze the relationships between educator experience, educator turnover, student attendance, and student achievement. In the quantitative case study they conducted, the researcher analyzed the census of school level attendance rates and academic achievement, the reported rates of educator turnover, and the years of experience of the educators working in the Molly Hootch schools from 2002 to 2019.

Population and Sample Selection

The population of this study included students, teachers, and principals who attended or who were employed by Molly Hootch schools from 2010 to 2019. The researcher did not take a random sample, instead they used a census of the entire population. They chose the years 2010 to 2019 because 2010 is the first year of publicly available information and 2019 was the most recent data available at the time of the study.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher collected data using records from the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (AKDEED). They collected school-level data, but no individual-level data. No information on principals was available. The researcher collected school-level data on the educators, but no individual-level information. The educators included only teachers.

The researcher also collected only school-level data on student achievement and attendance, as well as on educator experience and turnover. These data were available in the AKDEED database. AKDEED granted the researcher permission to access this database, and the researcher collected no personally identifiable information.

6. Data Analysis

This case study yielded information that describes important characteristics of education in the Molly Hootch schools. The first characteristic was the level of academic achievement, as measured by the annual state-mandated standards-based assessment. The researcher used three different instruments for the assessment of student achievement over the timeframe

of the study. Each of the assessment instruments was norm-referenced, standards-based, and criterion-referenced. In an inferential study, these results would be considered the dependent variable.

The second important characteristic of education in the Molly Hootch schools was student attendance. The researcher collected information on attendance from data provided to AKDEED. Schools and districts compute the number of days that individual students are present in school on days when instruction is offered, divided by the total number of days instruction was offered each year. The result of the computation is reported as a school-wide percentage. In an inferential study, attendance would be included in the model as a control variable

In an inferential study, educator experience would be included as an independent variable. This variable would be measured by counting years of teaching or administrative experience on an interval scale. In this case study, the researcher included the years of teacher experience as the schools and districts reported to AKDEED.

In an inferential study, teacher and administrator turnover rates would also be included as an independent variable. This variable would be measured by counting years teaching in a school on an interval scale. In this case study, the researcher included how many years a teacher was in a district according to data collected annually, in October, and reported to AKDEED. The data do not reflect the instances where students in a particular grade or classroom may have had more than one teacher, a substitute teacher, or no teacher at all.

Assumptions

Researchers must make assumptions that they believe to be true but that they cannot verify (Creswell, 2014). This researcher investigated the relationship between student attendance, educator experience, educator turnover, and student achievement. One assumption was that a relationship, whether negatively or positively correlated, existed between the variables. Another assumption was that the data from the AKDEED records would be accurate. Although this assumption cannot be avoided, it is important to remember that it does affect the study, and the researcher had no control over the way AKDEED collected data and maintained its records.

7. Results

Attendance

The Molly Hootch schools' mean attendance rate exceeded 90% for the years under study. Each school calculated these rates and reported them to the state as average daily attendance in October of each year. There were no significant differences in attendance rates between small, medium, and large schools, or across years; the attendance mean stayed between 89% and 92%. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the mean of attendance, while Figure 1 depicts the changes in the mean of attendance from 2010 to 2019.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Attendance Rate for the Years 2010–2019

Year	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	Mode	Minimum	Maximum
2010	89.47	5.54	89.77	91.29	65.76	100.0
2011	89.26	5.72	90.07	85.06	71.18	99.99
2012	89.69	5.07	90.38	84.83	72.43	100.0
2013	90.62	4.08	90.73	94.64	75.84	100.0
2014	92.56	3.52	92.78	0	79.71	99.86
2015	89.67	5.47	90.62	82.10	72.60	98.80
2017	89.33	5.34	90.35	89.84	74.80	98.63
2018	89.71	5.21	90.76	86.54	66.05	98.33
2019	89.07	5.23	90	89.28	72.58	98.45

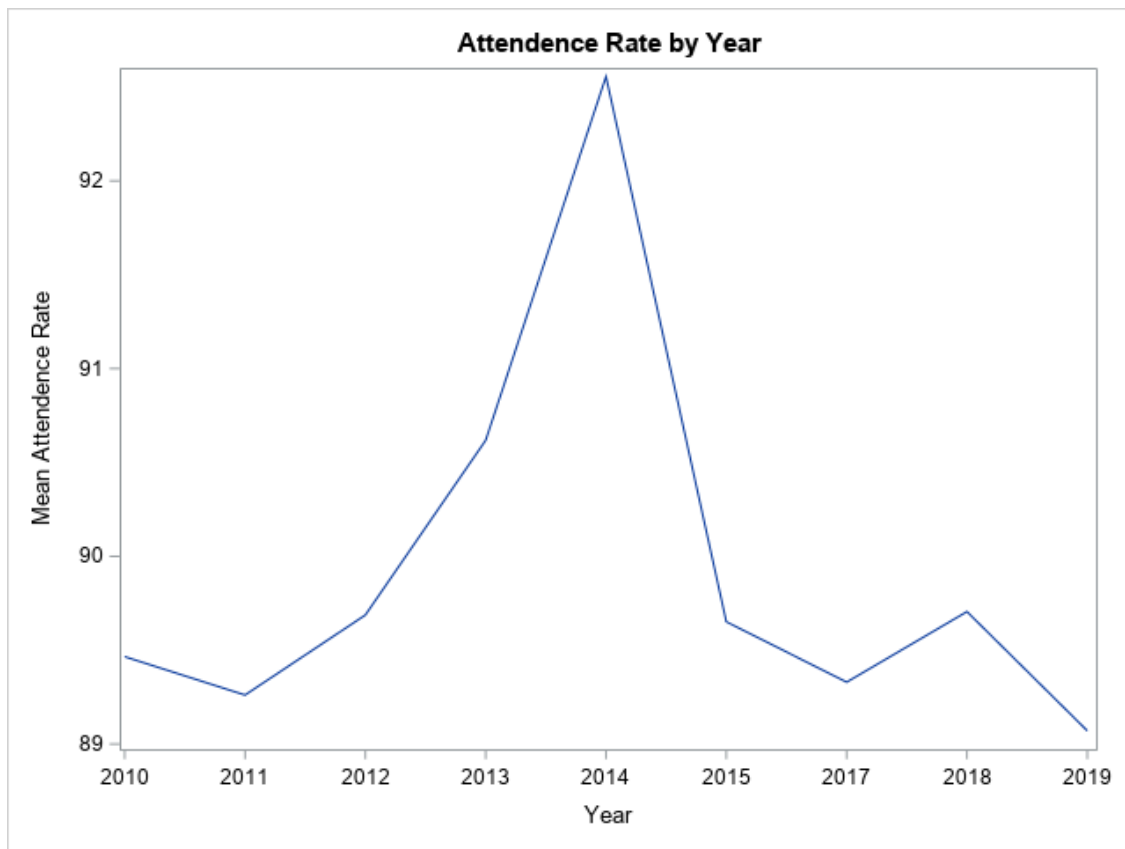


Figure 1. Student Attendance Rates 2010–2019

Academic Achievement

The years 2010–2014 showed the highest level of academic achievement for the Molly Hootch schools, with proficiency, as measured by the SBA, at 49% in 2010 and dropping to 40% in 2014. In 2015, the state changed their assessments. The results obtained from the Alaska Measure of Progress for this year showed that students/schools reaching proficiency dropped to 15%. The 2016 assessment was canceled due to technical difficulties. From 2017 to 2019, Alaska educators administered the Performance Evaluation of Alaska’s Schools (PEAKS). Although the PEAKS results showed a very slight improvement, proficiency remained close to or below 15%. Table 2 reports the results for proficient students over the period from 2010 to 2019. Figure 2 displays the changes in the math and ELA scores over this period, and Table 3 reports descriptive statistics for total students who took the tests over this period.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for the Proficient Percent 2010–2019

Year	Mean	Median	Mode	Minimum	Maximum
2010	25.61	50.00	60.00	10.71	80.49
2011	41.71	40.79	20.00	9.23	89.83
2012	39.03	36.00	20.00	6.35	80.00
2013	40.12	40.00	40.00	6.98	80.00
2014	39.40	39.79	60.00	5.00	80.00
2015	15.08	10.00	5.00	1.15	60.00
2017	14.59	10.00	5.00	1.97	50.00
2018	15.47	10.96	5.00	1.61	57.14
2019	15.31	10.00	20.00	1.24	60.00

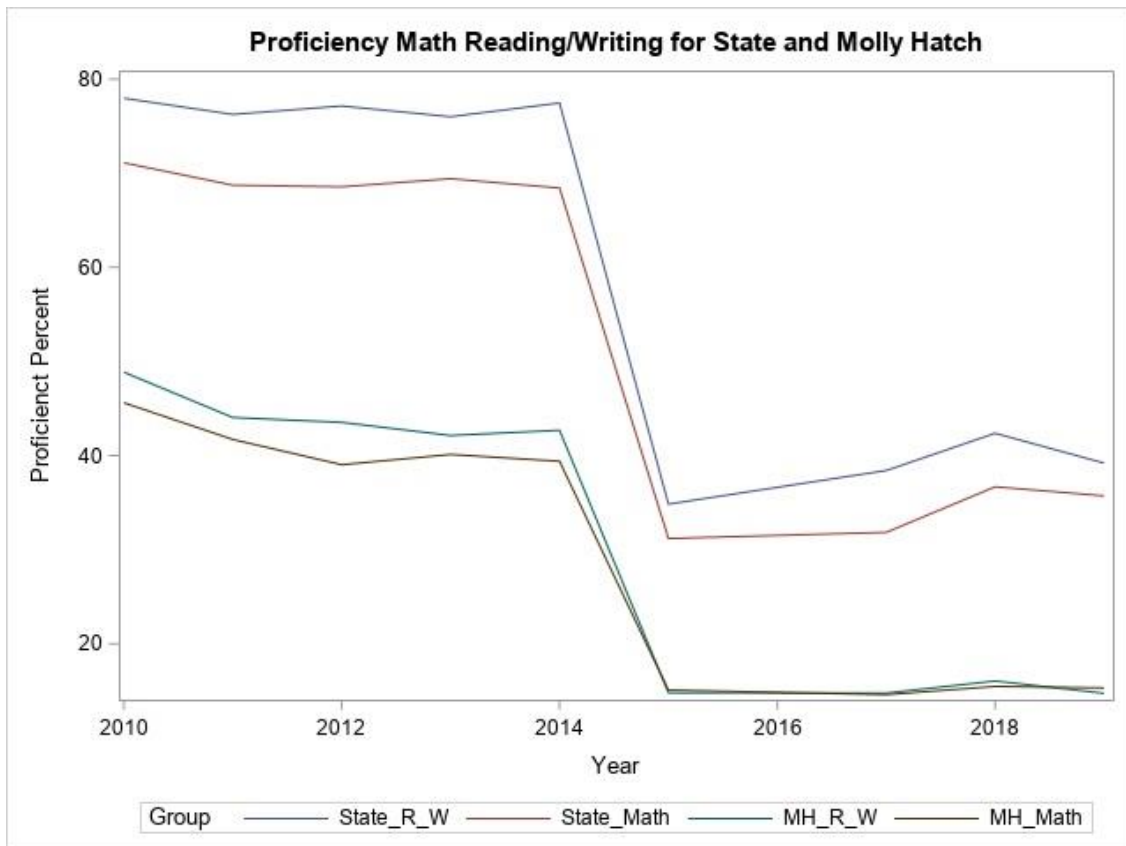


Figure 2. Academic Achievement 2010–2019

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Total Students Taking the Tests 2010–2019

Year	Mean	Median	Mode	Minimum	Maximum
2010	46.16	29.00	9.00	5.00	225.0
2011	46.52	32.00	7.00	5.00	196.0
2012	48.08	34.00	9.00	5.00	218.0
2013	48.87	30.00	5.00	5.00	220.0
2014	50.16	33.50	5.00	5.00	261.0
2015	52.03	36.00	5.00	5.00	261.0
2017	52.14	35.00	9.00	5.00	267.0
2018	47.80	34.00	9.00	5.00	248.0
2019	48.75	35.00	12.00	5.00	242.0

Achievement by School Size

Schools with greater than four students and less than or equal to 11 students were categorized as *small*, those with more than 11 and less than or equal to 30 as *average*, those with greater than 30 and less than or equal to 76 as *medium*, and those with more than 76 as *large*. Although the small schools achieved slightly higher rates of proficiency, and although it appears that proficiency decreased with increased school size, the differences do not indicate size as a significant factor in student/school academic achievement (see Figure 3).

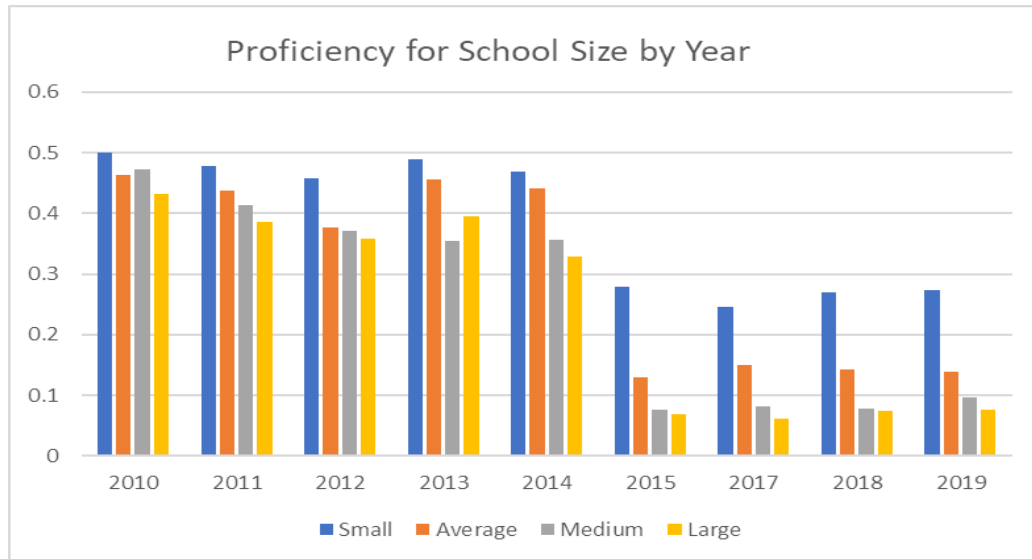


Figure 3. Proficiency for School Size by Year

Teacher Experience

The mean of years of experience for teachers in the Molly Hootch schools was between 7.5 and 8.5 years, as individual schools and/or districts reported to the state. The state then averaged this data (see Table 4 and Figure 4). Because it is an average, it cannot be used to evaluate the relationships, if any, between educator experience and student achievement. Unless the school in question has only one teacher, the significance of years of experience, reported as an average, is nil. Further, the years of experience category in the annual report was meant to report the actual years of experience teaching in the position for which hired, but AKDEED acknowledged that it may not be so. In some cases, the reported years of experience may only reflect salary schedule placements. Because many teachers working in the Molly Hootch schools come from out of state, and Alaska only allows them to “bring in” 5 years for salary purposes, the years of experience may be unreliable. Nevertheless, the teaching cadre in the Molly Hootch schools appears to have only half the years of experience as their colleagues “outside” these schools. The National Clearinghouse for Educational Statistics reported that 63% of teachers working nationwide, and also in the State of Alaska, in 1999–2000 and 2017–2018 had 14 or more years of experience.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Average Years of Experience 2010–2019

Year	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	Mode	Minimum	Maximum
2010	8.51	4.11	8.00	2.67	0	24.00
2011	7.91	3.86	7.75	10	0	22.0
2012	7.97	4.08	7.15	6.00	1	24.00
2013	7.89	3.88	7.25	3.00	0	25.00
2014	7.74	3.28	7.33	4.00	2.00	22.00
2015	8.02	3.82	7.33	7.00	1	22.33
2017	7.39	4.15	6.50	6.00	0	22.00
2018	8.24	4.72	7.00	7.00	2	30.50
2019	8.43	5.07	7.33	7.50	1.25	31.50

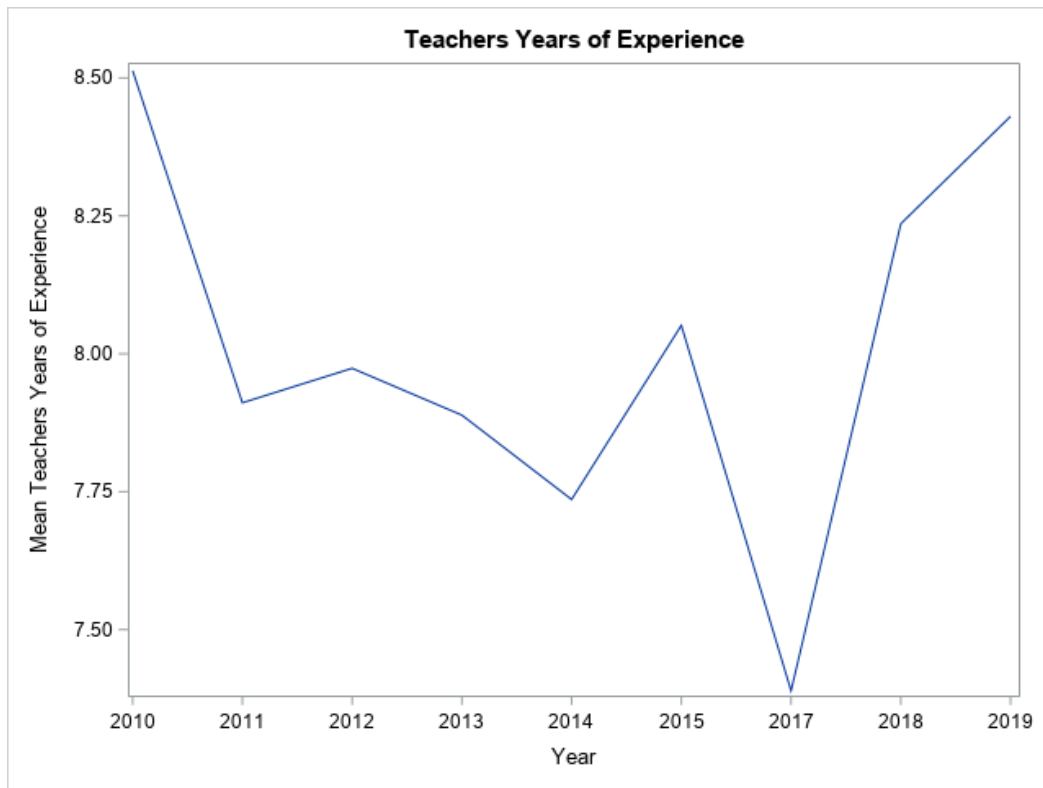


Figure 4. Teacher Years of Experience 2010–2019

Figure 5 depicts proficiency attained, by years of teacher experience and school size

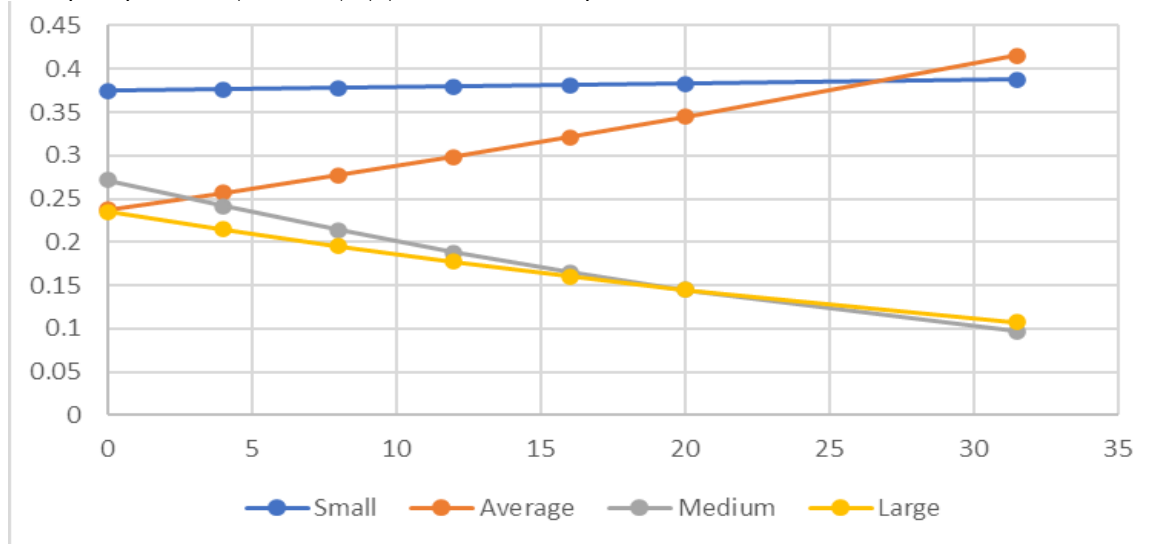


Figure 5. Proficiency for Average Years of Teacher Experience by School Size

Educator Turnover

The Molly Hootch schools reported teacher and administrator turnover rates to be between 22% and 32%, which are double the national average in the years between 2010 and 2019 (see Table 5 and Figure 6). These data are collected annually, in October, along with the average daily attendance. The data do not reflect the instances where students in a particular grade or classroom may have had more than one teacher, a substitute teacher, or no teacher at all.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Teacher Turnover 2010–2019

Year	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	Mode	Minimum	Maximum
2010	23.24	21.09	20	0	0	100.0
2011	22.93	21.23	22.22	0	0	100.0
2012	27.26	21.94	25.00	0	0	100.0
2013	27.33	24.27	25.00	0	0	100.0
2014	24.42	20.64	25.00	0	0	100.0
2015	30.83	27.83	26.67	0	0	100.0
2017	30.33	28.55	25.00	0	0	100.0
2018	24.63	22.90	25.00	0	0	100.0
2019	29.67	23.94	25.00	0	0	100.0

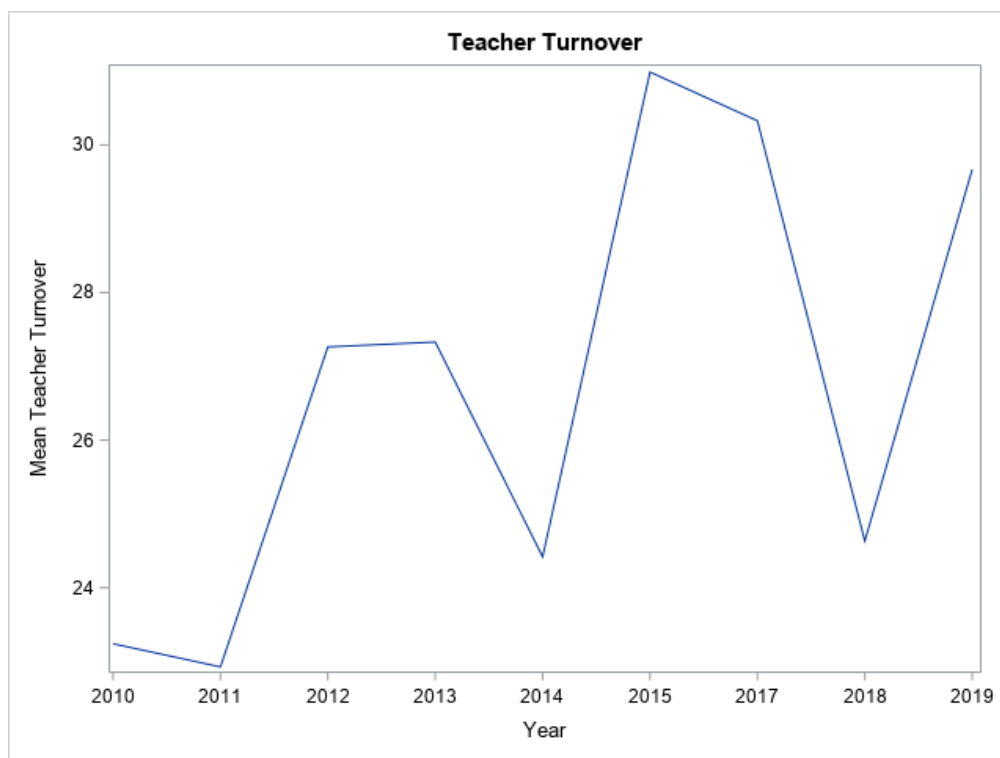


Figure 6. Teacher Turnover 2010–2019

Figure 7 depicts the line chart of average teacher experience, turnover, student attendance, proficiency in math, and proficiency in English from 2010 to 2019. There were no data available for the year 2016. This plot reveals that student attendance and teacher experience did not change substantially during this period. There was a drastic decrease in students' proficiency in math and English in 2015, the year in which the state changed its assessments. However, teacher turnover rates remained between 22% and 32% in these years.

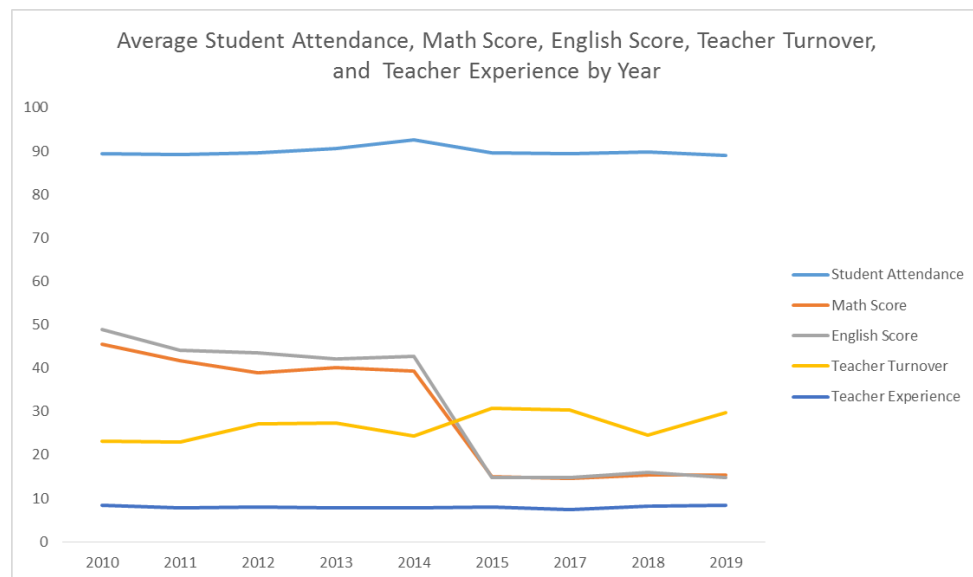


Figure 7. Average Teacher Experience, Turnover, and Student Attendance, Proficiency in Math, and Reading/Writing 2010–2019

8. Conclusions

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism defines learning as a collaborative experience that occurs between a less experienced learner and a trusted, more experienced teacher. This relationship is significant to both the successes and the failures of the Molly Hootch schools to date. This relationship is also significant to maximizing the possibility of doing things differently and better for the students and educators in the Molly Hootch schools, and potentially all Alaska schools. Additionally, it is imperative that trust is the foundation for the student-teacher relationship. Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) asserted that trust is central to an organization's effectiveness, but also remind us that it takes time to build this trust.

"Boarding schools for Indigenous children in the United States and Canada have a deservedly bad reputation for mistreatment and abuse" (Reyhnor, 2018, p. 1). Construction of the Molly Hootch schools was an appropriate corrective step to the previous practice of forcing students to travel long distances to attend these boarding schools. Regrettably, as Wohlforth (2016) pointed out, the State of Alaska has never acknowledged or apologized for its role in the deaths, abuses, and generations of trauma of Alaska Natives in boarding schools. Unless and until the State takes responsibility for these actions, and engages in reconciliation, it is likely that Alaska Native families and communities will continue to withhold their trust from the public schools. Additionally, AKDEED could benefit from evaluating the effectiveness of their annual State required assessments. According to Kendi (2016), standardized tests, such as those mandated by AKDEED, can be used as an objective way to rule nonwhites as intellectually inferior and thereby justify providing ineffective schooling.

After recognizing the need for change in September 2016, Commissioner Michael Johnson and the AKDEED worked together to transform the AKDEED mission and vision statements. This work focused on strategies to improve Alaska students' educational outcomes and overall well-being. Five strategic priorities were designed to support educational excellence for all of Alaska's public school students. In April 2017, Commissioner Johnson and the State Board formally launched *Alaska's Education Challenge*. Nearly 100 Alaskans from all corners of the state, representing diverse backgrounds, interests, and experiences, convened to work collaboratively to develop up to three recommendations for each of the State Board's five strategic priorities:

1. amplify student learning
2. ensure excellent educators
3. modernize the education system
4. inspire tribal and community ownership of educational excellence
5. promote safety and well-being

The committee that focused on Strategic Priority No. 4 ultimately outlined the following recommendation, which the State Board later adopted: "Self-Governance Compacting: Create the option for self-governance compacting for the delivery of education between the State of Alaska and Tribes or tribally-empowered Alaska Native organizations" (AKDEED, 2022)

The opportunity for Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations to compact for education in their villages has the potential to provide the same profound change in the Molly Hootch schools and other predominantly Alaska Native schools that the establishment of Tribal Colleges and Universities did for American Indian Higher Education. When discussing this change policy, Chandler (2010) referred to Senge et al.'s (1999) use of the term 'profound change' to describe organizational change that "combines inner shifts in people's values, aspirations, and behaviors with 'outer' shifts in processes, strategies, practices and systems" (Senge, et al, 1999, p. 15). Chandler (2010) goes on to suggest "The building of whole new education systems and institutions that are unique to the needs of American Indian people are an example of profound change" (Chandler, 2010, p. 24).

In 1978 the United States Government enacted the *Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act of 1978*, establishing "grants for the operation and improvement of tribally controlled colleges or universities to insure continued and expanded educational opportunities for Indian students" (para 1). Prior to this act, American Indian students found scant success in other institutions of higher education. Tribal Colleges and Universities, which are fully accredited by the same standards and organizations as every other college or university, "are unique in the way they function as an extension of the values and norms of their communities for their students. Students and staff repeatedly describe their colleges as functioning like an extended family, with warmth, humor, and discipline provided in culturally appropriate ways" (Chandler, 2010, p. 22).

The *Learn-Ed Inventory* (2002) was developed by Education Northwest to provide data needed to guide the development of Tribally controlled colleges and universities. The inventory was designed by "a panel of American Indian and Alaska Native master educators to determine how and to what extent a school is serving Native students and supporting their needs" (p. 1). The inventory "encompasses all factors impinging on students, both directly and indirectly" (p. 1). Educators and community members in Molly Hootch, and other predominantly Alaska Native villages, could also use the *Learn-Ed Nations Inventory* to guide development of their Self-Governance Compacting, similar to how the Tribally controlled colleges and universities utilized the *Learn-Ed Inventory*.

9. Recommendations

Principal Experience

Grissom, Egalite, and Lindsay (2021) affirm that experienced principals are central to the nurture and growth of beginning teachers, to the development of integrated professional climates in the schools, and to cultivating the vigorous, engaged involvement of school and community stakeholders in ensuring all aspects of student success. Principal effectiveness appears to be particularly important for lowering teacher turnover in high poverty schools (Grissom, 2011; Bartanen, Grissom, & Rogers. 2019). In the Molly Hootch schools, experienced principals, particularly those familiar with the culture of the villages they serve in, could provide guidance, support, and perspective to beginning and experienced teachers who are new to the bush and to the Molly Hootch schools. The Tribally controlled Colleges in Alaska, Illisagvik and Denali, are in a unique position to lend guidance and support the development of educational leaders who serve in predominantly Alaska Native villages. Additionally, The University of Alaska's initiative to "home grow" teachers in Alaska rural communities could play a critical role in developing both teachers and leaders who understand their student's unique needs. Home grown, tribally-educated principals and superintendents would be well-positioned to bring about positive outcomes for the students and communities of the Molly Hootch schools.

Professional School Culture

Kardos, et al (2001) tell us that schools can better provide sustenance and support to new teachers when the professional culture of a school is an integrated culture rather than a novice-oriented, or veteran-oriented culture. An integrated professional culture includes a mixture of novice and veteran teachers who work collaboratively with the principal to continuously improve all areas of student achievement. This type of culture could promote strong gains in Molly Hootch schools. Unfortunately, the average years of experience for teachers in the Molly Hootch schools is 7.5 years, about half the national and state average years of experience. This suggests that rather than an integrated professional culture, the culture in these schools is likely novice oriented. Moreover, the rate of teacher turnover reported in this study, though lower than reported in other studies, is still high enough that these school's professional cultures must be reconstructed almost every school year.

Teacher Experience

Murnane (1975) identified teacher experience as the most important factor in student achievement over which schools have control. Kini and Podolsky (2016) later supported this claim, stating, "teaching experience is positively associated with student achievement gains throughout a teacher's career" (p. 33). Additionally, Ladd and Sorenson (2017) advised, "The findings are quite clear. There appear to be large returns to experience for middle school teachers in the form...of higher test scores" (p. 34). From 2010 to 2019, the mean years of experience for teachers in the Molly Hootch schools

remained between 7.5 and 8.5 years. This number was derived by totaling the years of experience each teacher, in each school, had in the same job code, as reported to the State in the October 15 Online Alaska School Information System (OASIS). Murnane (1975) asserts that teachers are still learning their craft for the first seven to eight years of work. Because of this, Murnane warned against assigning the same groups of students to beginning teachers year after year. Considering this information, further research will be required to determine the effect of teacher experience on the students attending the Molly Hootch schools.

According to Veenman's (1984) work, many beginning teachers experience reality shock and the collapse of the ideals and aspirations they developed in college when faced with actual educational practice. Moreover, most teachers in the Molly Hootch schools—whether experienced or beginning—are vulnerable to what Grubis (2008) called culture fatigue. Culture Fatigue describes the exhausted result of living and working in an entirely alien place, with unfamiliar people and constantly surprising behavior, protocols, and practices.

Because of these concerns, it is recommended that schools hire the most experienced teachers and principals available and provide immersive orientations for them, in order to maximize academic achievement for students and combat culture fatigue in the educators. Whether these orientations are in the form of culture camps with elders and kids, or being matched with age-appropriate, local peer mentors; relationships from these orientations can serve as touchstones, guides, and handy living references to help the teacher bond with and become comfortable in their new place and with their new colleagues.

Teacher Turnover

Teacher turnover rates in the Molly Hootch schools have been reported to be as high as 100% in some schools and in some years. From 2010–2019, the mean rate of teacher turnover fell between 23% and 30%. As with student attendance and teacher experience, the researcher only collected the turnover numbers for this study on a single day in October. The number does not reflect cases where a class or subject may have had more than one teacher during a school year, but only whether the teachers in the school were the same and in the same positions from one October to the next. Turnover affects the students whose teacher leaves, the colleagues with whom the teacher worked, and the budget of the school and district the teacher left by requiring recruiting, hiring, and training a replacement teacher (Sorenson & Ladd, 2020). Moreover, Wohlforth (2016) astutely observed that educator turnover may have a fatiguing effect on the hospitality of people who live in the villages, “a new teacher often feels unwelcome in a community that seems uninterested in her work. The village can even seem hostile and dangerous. Why isn't this new teacher welcomed more warmly? Villagers have seen people like her cycle through endlessly” (para. 8). Wohlforth (2016) also counsels, “students don't bond with teachers they know are leaving” (para. 8). Further research is needed to determine the full nature and extent of the effect of educator turnover beyond the school building.

Standardized Tests as Measures of Academic Achievement and/or Cultural Alignment

The State of Alaska uses the results of standardized tests to measure students' academic achievement as a gage for school efficacy. From 2010 to 2019, the Molly Hootch schools failed to achieve proficiency for between 50% and 85% of students. The state asserts that there is a high level of consistency between state-wide assessments and state academic standards. From the available data, the researcher could not determine whether demographic biases are present in the assessments used by the State of Alaska. Further, if demographic biases are present, it is unclear whether they are purposeful (that is, set to measure students' familiarity with and fluency in majority culture) or whether they are unconscious remnants of eugenically motivated origins of standardized testing. Standards pertaining to majority culture literacy are not explicitly evident in the Alaska state standards. If demographic bias is present in the state assessments, it may have contributed to the very low academic achievement measured in the Molly Hootch schools. This bias could particularly account for the considerable drop in proficiency after the change in State assessments in 2015. Research is needed to determine the presence, if any, of demographic bias in the state's standardized assessments.

In order to proactively address potential bias concerns, those villages that choose to pursue tribal compacting may wish to develop alternative instruments, perhaps like the AIMS Key Indicator System (AKIS), which was developed based on input from AIHEC [American Indian Higher Education Commission], Tribal Colleges and Universities, accrediting organizations, the American Indian College Fund, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and others. This instrument was developed to reflect the distinctive assessment needs and unique system of higher education in Tribal Colleges and Universities. Often, traditional measures of success, assessment, and measurements of student success do not reflect the success at Tribal Colleges and Universities, so the AKIS was developed to measure success and impact in higher education (Chandler, 2010, p. 24).

Attendance

School attendance is a critical element in academic achievement. From 2010–2019, the Molly Hootch schools recorded a mean attendance rate of 90%. This high attendance rate indicates that students taking the AKDEED mandated tests were present in school almost all the time. As such, they were available to receive the instruction provided by their school. This high rate of attendance also indicates that families, communities, and schools are succeeding in getting children to school. The low levels of academic achievement reported in the Molly Hootch schools cannot then be linked to student absenteeism. Further research should be conducted to understand how the Molly Hootch schools have achieved such a high attendance rate. The findings of those studies could be of assistance to other schools and communities beyond the bush.

10. Summary

Studies widely report that Alaska Native students score well below their non-Native counterparts on state and national assessments of academic achievement. Following the Molly Hootch lawsuit settlement, the State of Alaska built high schools in 105 predominantly Alaska Native villages where students of high school age had previously been forced to travel long distances to attend boarding schools run by the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs, or to forego high school. Because of the Molly Hootch schools, students have been able to stay in their home communities and attend high school. However, the educational efficacy of the Molly Hootch schools had not been evaluated. Through this study, the researcher sought to identify school efficacy, as measured by academic achievement on standards-based assessments, and to discover the relationships, if any, between student attendance, academic achievement and educator experience in the Molly Hootch schools.

The researcher used school-level attendance and achievement data, as well as teacher years of experience and rates of turnover averages, to create a general description of education in the Molly Hootch schools. Student attendance was unexpectedly high for the years under study, hovering around 90%. Likewise, rates of teacher turnover were between 25% and 33%, well below the rates reported in other studies. The average years of teacher experience was found to be about 7.5 years, which is about half the years of the state and national average. More than 50%, and as many as 85%, of students failed to demonstrate grade-level proficiency on the state-wide assessment for the years under study.

Officials at AKDEED must determine to what extent their standardized tests, required for all students in Alaska, contain implicit or explicit demographic biases. This step is crucial to discovering whether the tests measure academic achievement or if they truly measure acculturation. The State of Alaska invests financially in the System for School Success in order to support poor-performing schools. If the tests reflect acculturation, rather than academic achievement, the focus of the System for Success will require realignment.

Although construction of the Molly Hootch schools provided the opportunity for rural Alaska Native students to attend high school, the quality of education available in these schools is poor. It would behoove education and community leaders to examine the experience level of the educators being hired. If these hires are predominantly less experienced, or inexperienced, leaders should know that hiring and retaining more experienced educators is likely to have a beneficial effect on student academic achievement. Although hiring more experienced educators would not address higher rates of turnover, the culture fatigue of living and working in a remote, rural village, or the predominance of educators from “outside,” it would remove the reality shock of being a first-time teacher and, often, first-time “adulting” from the many other challenges that educators in the Molly Hootch schools face. Additionally, leaders should explore further collaborations with Tribally controlled colleges to support Molly Hootch teachers and Alaska State Universities to develop approaches to “home grow” teachers in these remote communities.

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