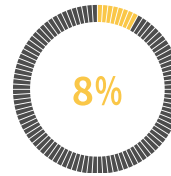


ALASKA'S PRINCIPAL APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

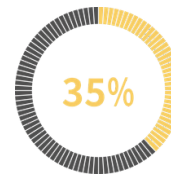
BUILDING LEADERSHIP PATHWAYS AROUND LOCAL PRIORITIES

Background

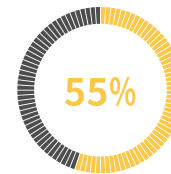
According to the Institute of Social and Economic Research at the University of Alaska Anchorage, [Alaska's principal turnover rate is roughly 35%](#), compared to the [national average of 8%](#). In fact, turnover reaches [as high as 55%](#) for the majority of Alaska's school districts, which are classified as rural and remote districts and places solely accessible by boat or plane. The implications reach far beyond the educators working under unstable leadership, extending to consequences for student outcomes and learning. [Research from the Wallace Foundation](#) shows that stable school leadership is associated with stronger teacher retention, improved school climate, and better student outcomes.



National average principal turnover rate in 2024



Percentage of principals in Alaska who left their schools in 2024



Alaska's principal turnover rate in rural and remote districts in 2024

Recognizing high attrition from classroom teachers to school administrators, Alaska launched the [Governor's Teacher Retention and Recruitment Working Group](#) in 2017. This working group brought together hundreds of stakeholders to gather research and survey data in order to build an action plan for strengthening the teacher workforce statewide. As a result, Alaska launched its first Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Program (RTAP) in 2024, as a means to build high-quality teacher preparation to strengthen teacher retention. Dean and Professor of University of Alaska Anchorage Tonia Dousay, who welcomed its first cohort in fall of 2024, noted that the [momentum comes at a critical time](#) as Alaska faces ongoing teacher shortages: "This is how we sustain communities and ensure their future. Children deserve teachers who look like them and who will be there for more than a year."

Seeing the success of the program coupled with the urgent need to alleviate school leadership attrition, the [Alaska Department of Education and Early Development \(DEED\)](#) partnered with the [Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development](#), the [US Department of Labor \(US DOL\)](#), the [University of Alaska Anchorage](#), the [University of Alaska Southeast](#), and local school districts to launch Alaska's Principal Registered Apprenticeship Program (PRAP).



As of summer 2026, there are 82 enrolled Teacher Apprentices, with district representation across the entire state, including both urban and rural districts.

Alaska's Principal Apprenticeship Program: Built for Rural and Remote

The PRAP emerged from Alaska's broader educator workforce strategy, which builds connected pathways into the profession from high school career exploration through [teacher preparation](#) and school leadership. Rural and remote districts, tribal leaders, and local educators shape the apprenticeship around the staffing, cultural, and geographic realities of their communities, while state partners align the systems and resources needed to support it. This decision was deliberate, prioritizing the districts facing the highest leadership turnover that often operate with small administrative teams responsible for multiple functions. Starting with priorities identified by rural and remote communities, the partners built a program grounded in local needs and realities.

That grounding shows up as a set of commitments Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) built into the program in partnership with the districts, mentors, and tribal leaders who make it work:



Cultural competency and power sharing



Reduced administrative burden on districts



Candidate roles and flexible placement structures



Sustained statewide coalition

Cultural Competency and Power Sharing

Alaska's principal apprenticeship reflects a broad commitment to designing educator pathways in partnership with the communities they serve. The program's standards, developed in collaboration with Alaska Native organizations and regional tribal partners, are embedded throughout the apprenticeship.

That commitment to shared leadership extends beyond the competency framework. Alaska partners with regional organizations, including the [Sealaska Heritage Institute](#) and [Bristol Bay Career and Technical Education](#), to expand educator apprenticeship opportunities across the state. These organizations bring deep regional relationships and expertise, while participating in statewide mentor training and apprenticeship convenings alongside districts, universities, and state agencies.

Rather than treating cultural competency as a standalone requirement, the program emphasizes how school leaders integrate local knowledge and pedagogy into everyday leadership practice.

Candidate Roles and Flexible Placement Structures

Eligibility for the program requires at least two years of administrative or leadership experience within the district. Because local turnover runs so high, districts need flexible placement criteria that allow candidates to participate while serving in a range of school-based roles.

Most candidates are recommended for assistant principal positions, but the program also allows candidates to remain classroom teachers if their district builds in structured release time or dedicated leadership responsibilities. Many rural and remote communities don't have assistant principal roles; instead, lead teachers and emergency-certified principals carry out administrative functions. Educators in these roles are eligible to apprentice once they enroll in an approved preparation program with formal mentor support and established structures for observation and feedback.

Mentorship responsibilities sit with personnel in local school districts, keeping the relationship anchored in long-term community needs. State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula (SAEF) grant funds provide a \$5,000 stipend per mentor to cover stipends and travel to annual training sessions. Higher education institutions provide additional stipend support for their participating mentors.

Reduced Administrative Burden on Districts

Launching a registered apprenticeship means navigating multiple systems at once – labor agencies, state education departments, and institutions of higher education, to name a few. This can easily overwhelm smaller districts without dedicated administrative staff. State partners assume the compliance and coordination responsibilities that districts identified as barriers, working directly with the US DOL and other state partners to make workforce funding more accessible. This allows districts to dedicate their own capacity toward mentorship, clinical support, and candidate development instead.



Sustained Statewide Coalition

DEED hosts monthly registered apprenticeship convenings for school districts, higher education partners, and workforce leaders to align requirements, share resources, and work through operational questions, ensuring vital information sharing and connectivity throughout the ecosystem.

To build mentor capacity, the [Alaska Statewide Mentor Project](#) is expanding its existing teacher mentor model into a parallel track for principal mentors, combining in-person onboarding each fall with remote coaching throughout the school year.

At the state and federal level, DEED works closely with the US DOL and the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development. The state labor department assigned dedicated staff at local job centers specifically to support educator apprenticeships so specific knowledgeable liaisons can be contacted about the programs. Districts own the application process for teacher apprenticeships, with DEED providing labor compliance oversight; state leaders plan to move principal apprenticeship toward that same model over time.

State leaders continue to build out long-term funding strategies, combining SAEF grant resources, Title II-A funds, and support from the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project. If funding is tight, DEED will prioritize mentor support first, since strong clinical coaching is harder to replace than tuition assistance, which many candidates can also access through Pell Grants and other aid.

Conclusion

Designing a leadership pipeline tailored to rural and remote districts sets Alaska up to build long-term stability in its schools and workforce pipeline. The program launches in the fall of 2026, bridging state agencies, higher education, local school districts, and tribal leadership into a unified strategy.

Rather than asking communities to adapt to a conventional preparation model, the program stands as a community-informed model for retention, staffed and structured to meet the constraints of the local context. By prioritizing the state's most isolated communities, Alaska is not just simply training new school leaders; it is building an ecosystem. This ecosystem of partnership and progress is built on a sustainable, culturally grounded foundation to ensure every student, regardless of zip code, benefits from strong and stable school leadership.

Together, this strategic collaboration recognizes that holding onto great leaders requires deep community partnership, administrative relief, and meaningful local authority.

