

**NEW STUDENTS IN THE
ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT:
WHERE ARE THEY FROM?**
ANALYSIS OF ISER 2008-2009 SURVEY DATA

PREPARED BY
DR. MARIE E. LOWE

PROJECT STAFF
PATRICIA DEROCHE
SUZANNE SHARP
MEGHAN WILSON

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INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA ANCHORAGE
3211 PROVIDENCE DRIVE
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA 99508

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PHONE: (907) 786-6534 E-MAIL: MARIE.LOWE@UAA.ALASKA.EDU

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Executive Summary

Background

In September 2008, the superintendent of the Anchorage School District and the mayor of Anchorage sent a letter to the governor of Alaska, reporting what they thought might be an influx of students into Anchorage from rural communities. Enrollment in the school district was higher than expected, and it coincided with the largest-ever Alaska Permanent Fund dividend and with a one-time payment of \$1,200 the state made per person, to help offset high energy costs.

Researchers at the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) at UAA have a longstanding interest in migration patterns in Alaska and the Arctic, and they saw the increased enrollment in Anchorage schools as a potential opportunity to better understand:

- If rural Alaskans are moving to Anchorage
- Where they are coming from
- Why they are moving

So with the cooperation of the Anchorage School District, ISER conducted a survey of the parents or guardians of students who had enrolled in Anchorage in the 2007-2008 or 2008-2009 school years *and* who had transferred in from other Alaska school districts.

Besides finding out where students were coming from—and why—another purpose of the study was to provide the Anchorage School District and the Municipality of Anchorage with information about what they could do to help students and families who are new to the city. To our knowledge, this may be the first survey ever conducted to find out why people move to Anchorage from other areas of Alaska.

Method of Analysis

Our study population was limited to the families who had move from other areas of Alaska and enrolled new students in the district in the 2007-2008 or 2008-2009 school years. Unfortunately, we did not have access to data from earlier years—so we were not able to compare the number and characteristics of new students in previous years with those of new students in the most recent years.

From the information the Anchorage School District provided, we identified 881 students, from 791 families, who were new enrollees from other areas of Alaska. We were able to use that information to:

- Determine where all the 881 new students came from, and in particular to see how many came from communities on the road system and how many came from rural, mostly off-road communities.
- Survey parents or guardians of new students, to get more detailed information about why families and students moved to Anchorage and what problems they have faced in the city.

ISER and the Anchorage School District mailed surveys to 681 of the families who had enrolled new students in the 2007-08 or 2008-09 school years. In the end, we got 349 usable responses from parents or guardians of 407 students. Table S-1 summarizes the survey process.

Table S-1. ISER Survey of Families with New ASD Students

- Total study population: 791 families with 881 new students
- Mailed 681 surveys to parents or guardians*
 - Got 398 responses (from mailed surveys and phone follow-ups)
 - Excluded 24 military respondents (because their moves are determined by military)
 - Excluded 25 respondents who did not meet criteria or were duplicate responses
 - ***Analyzed 349 responses from parents or guardians of 407 students***

*Because so many of the new students were from the Mat-Su Borough, we mailed surveys to a 20% sample of parents or guardians of students from that area.

Where New Students Came From

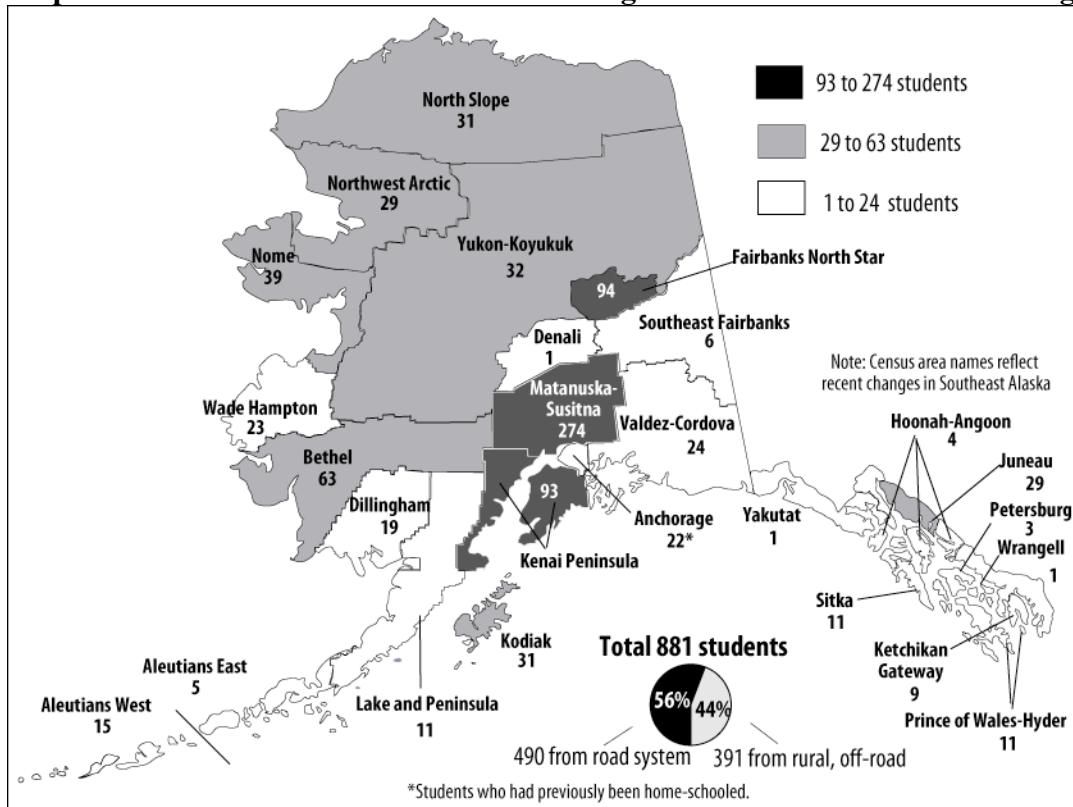
We were able to determine where all the 881 new Anchorage students had come from—490 students (56%) were from road system communities and 391 (44%) came from rural districts mostly off the road system. Map S-1 shows more about where the students came from, by census area. Students and families moved to Anchorage from all over the state, but the majority came from a few areas. Overall, the numbers show strong ties between communities in the Mat-Su Borough and Anchorage, but also significant movement into Anchorage from rural regional hubs such as Bethel, Nome, Barrow, and Kodiak, as well as the larger cities of Fairbanks and Juneau.

- *Nearly a third of the new students came from places in the Mat-Su Borough, just to the north of Anchorage. More than 10% came from the Kenai Peninsula south of Anchorage. Another 10% or so came from the Fairbanks North Star Borough, about 350 miles north of Anchorage.*

- *The largest number of students from an off-road region came from the Bethel census area—63, or 7% of all new students. Next was the Nome census area, where 39, or close to 5%, of new students originated.*

- *New students also came from almost every census area in Alaska, but in smaller numbers, as the map shows.*

Map S-1. Census Areas Where New Anchorage Students Lived Before Moving



Survey Respondents

As Table S-1 shows, we were able to analyze survey responses from 349 parents or guardians of 407 students who were new to Anchorage schools in the 2007-2008 or 2008-2009 school years. We believe the number of responses was large enough to provide us and the Anchorage school district with a good picture of the students and families who moved to Anchorage, why they moved, and what challenges they've faced since moving.

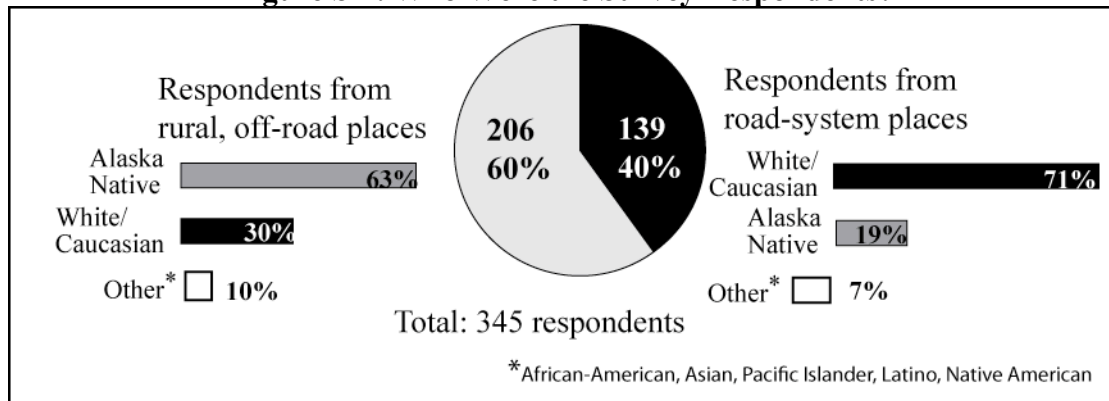
But we were not able to find out one of the things we hoped to learn—whether there had been a significant increase in migration from rural Alaska to Anchorage during 2008, and in particular whether the large Permanent Fund dividend and the energy rebate payments stimulated movement out of rural areas.

That's partly because we weren't able to get data about new Anchorage students in previous years. Our survey can, however, serve as a baseline, should there be a future survey of where new students in Anchorage were living before they moved to the city. And we did collect substantial information that sheds new light on migration to Anchorage from other areas.

Keep in mind that while we had 349 usable survey responses from parents or guardians of new students, not all respondents answered every question—so in the text and figures that follow, the number of respondents cited may vary slightly. Also, some figures report information about just students, while others show information about families.

Figure S-1 shows that about 40% of the survey respondents were from road communities and 60% from off-road communities. Close to two-thirds of those moving from rural off-road communities identified themselves as Alaska Native, and more than two-thirds from road communities identified themselves as White/Caucasian. These numbers aren't surprising, since they mirror the ethnic distribution in the state. Alaska Natives are the majority population in many remote rural areas, and much of urban Alaska is White/Caucasian, although it is becoming increasingly diverse.

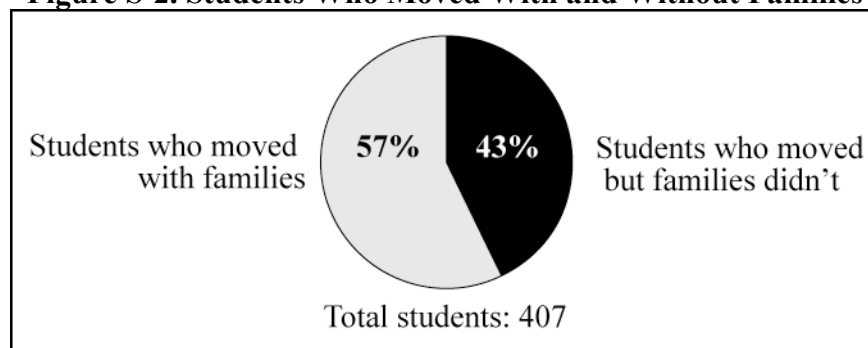
Figure S-1. Who Were the Survey Respondents?



Survey Findings

• *Here's our most surprising finding: About 43% of the students included in our survey moved but their families didn't.* The other 57% moved because their families moved, as Figure S-2 shows. Figure S-3 shows why students moved independently, and Figure S-4 shows why entire families moved.

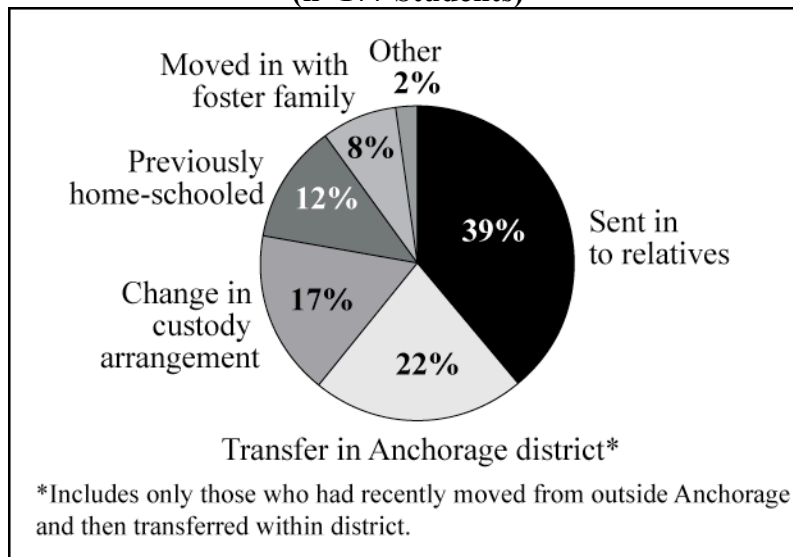
Figure S-2. Students Who Moved With and Without Families



Students Moving Alone

- *More than a third of students who moved alone were sent from other places to live with relatives in Anchorage.* Alaska Native families were the most likely to report such student moves.
- *A number of students who moved alone had simply transferred to new schools within the Anchorage district.* This category includes only students we knew had recently moved from outside Anchorage and then transferred from one school to another within Anchorage. Such transfers may occur for a number of reasons, but one reason may be unstable living arrangements for some students new to Anchorage.

Figure S-3. Why Did Students Move Without Their Families?
(n=177 Students)



- *Some of the new students who moved alone had previously been home-schooled.* Virtually all the respondents reporting students who were previously home-schooled identified themselves as White/Caucasian. We believe it's possible that many of these students already lived in Anchorage before they enrolled in public schools, even though they show up in school records as having transferred from other Alaska districts. That's because a number of Alaska school districts have programs for home-schooled children—and children from any area can enroll in such programs.

These students are included here should further discussion on this issue be warranted, because no comparative data exist on numbers of home-schoolers entering the district annually—making this number difficult to assess. Whether the “previously home-schooled” number represents a new trend or is a common yearly amount is unknown. Our data can serve as a benchmark, should there be future research on home-schooled students in Alaska.

In many cases, respondents told us that these previously home-schooled students chose to enroll in public schools because they wanted more activities and opportunities—which mirrors what some of those who moved from rural areas to Anchorage said about why they came.

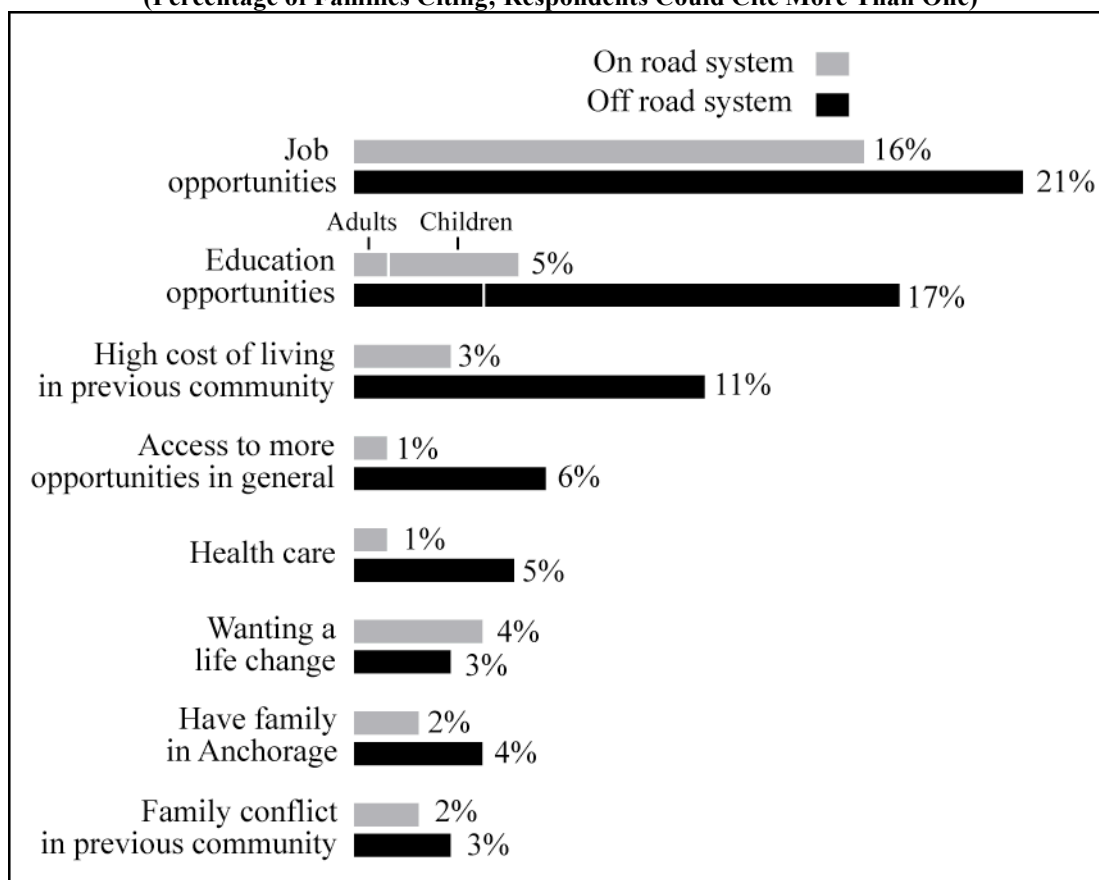
- *Changes in custody arrangements also explained why some students moved alone*—for example, a child of divorced parents may have been living with one parent elsewhere but moved to Anchorage to live with the other parent. Some students also move from other areas of Alaska to live with foster families in Anchorage.

Families Moving

- *Families moving from communities both on and off the road system most frequently said they moved for job opportunities*—although more families from off-road places cited that reason, as Figure S-4 shows.

Figure S-4. Why Did Families from On and Off the Road System Move?
(n=230 Families)

(Percentage of Families Citing; Respondents Could Cite More Than One)



- *Having better education opportunities (mostly for children, but also sometimes for parents) was another reason many families moved.* But a much bigger share of families from rural off-road places cited education opportunities as an impetus for moving.

- *The high cost of living in rural areas was an incentive for many families from off-road places to move.* Other reasons cited less frequently for family moves to Anchorage included wanting some life change; looking for more opportunities (or at least access to more opportunities); and having relatives in Anchorage.

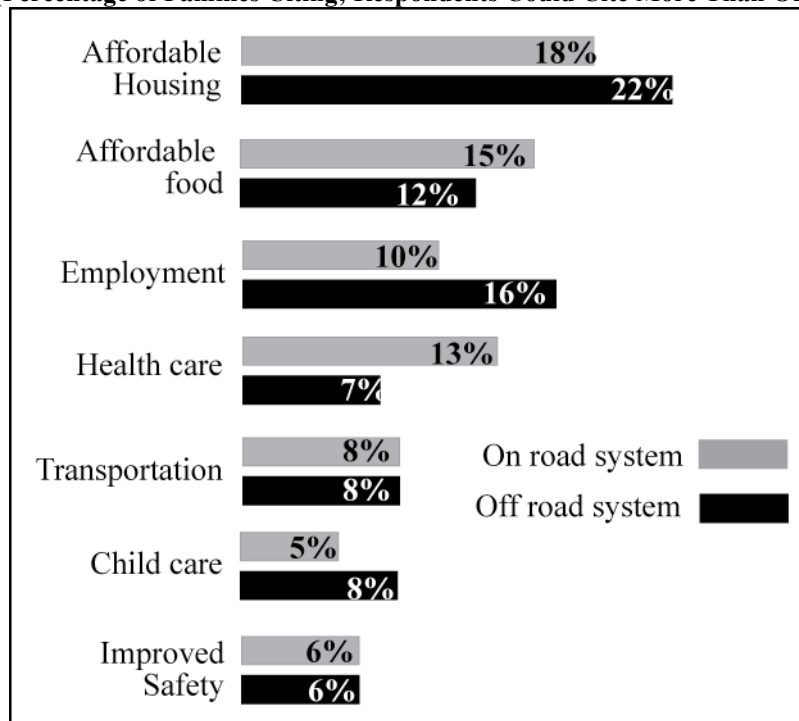
What Do New Arrivals Need?

Besides asking respondents why they had moved to Anchorage, we also asked what they needed most, now that they had moved to the city. What the respondents told us should be useful to the Anchorage School District and the Municipality of Anchorage as they consider ways to help new arrivals from other parts of Alaska.

- *Affordable housing is what respondents most often said they needed.* That included families that had moved from communities both on and off the road system, although more families from off the road system cited the need for affordable housing. We found that many survey respondents were living in trailers in lower income areas, and that some were living in motels.

Figure S-5. What Respondent Families Said They Need in Anchorage
(n=349)

(Percentage of Families Citing; Respondents Could Cite More Than One)



- *Many respondents also said they needed employment and affordable food—but families from rural off-road places were more likely to name employment as a need.*

- *Other needs of new arrivals in Anchorage were health care, transportation, and child care.* Families that had moved from communities on the road system were more likely to say they needed health care, while equal shares of all families cited the need for transportation and improved safety.

Overview of Findings

Overall, the survey data and the phenomena they represent are complex and appear to be catalyzed in part by strengthening migration chains among kin and between friends—that is, when family members or friends move to Anchorage, such moves seem to enable more of their family and friends from back home to move as well. Family and student movement also seems to have some circular patterns—that is, movement back and forth between Anchorage and rural home communities. Families and students are also moving around within Anchorage and among Anchorage schools.

Some respondents told us they were dissatisfied with rural schools and wanted to present their children with broader educational and life opportunities. But at the same time, we also found that new arrivals from other areas of Alaska said their children face different problems in the Anchorage schools—including large class sizes, lack of individual attention, and difficulties in communicating.

Major challenges new families in Anchorage face include transitioning children to urban life and schools and finding affordable housing. Anchorage is playing an increasingly central role in Alaska during these changing economic times, with many Alaskans regarding it as a springboard to better employment and education opportunities. But more profoundly, our survey data suggest a complex and evolving relationship between rural and urban Alaska as families—and particularly young people—struggle with the cultural transitions this relationship entails.

Introduction

In September 2008, the superintendent of the Anchorage School District and the mayor of Anchorage sent a letter to the governor of Alaska, reporting what they thought might be an influx of students into Anchorage from rural communities. Enrollment in the school district was higher than expected, and it coincided with the largest-ever Alaska Permanent Fund dividend and with a one-time payment of \$1,200 the state made per person, to help offset high energy costs.

Researchers at the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) at UAA have a longstanding interest in migration patterns in Alaska and the Arctic, and they saw the increased enrollment in Anchorage schools as a potential opportunity to better understand:

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- Where they are coming from
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So with the cooperation of the Anchorage School District, ISER conducted a survey of the parents or guardians of students who had enrolled in Anchorage in the 2007-2008 or 2008-2009 school years *and* who had transferred in from other Alaska school districts.

Besides finding out where students were coming from—and why—another purpose of the study was to provide information to the district and the Municipality of Anchorage about what they can do to help students and families who are new to the city. To our knowledge, this is the first survey ever conducted of people who have moved to Anchorage from other areas of Alaska.

Methods

ASD List

In October and November of 2008, the Anchorage School District (ASD) provided a list of contacts for parents or guardians who had enrolled new students in the district in either 2007 or 2008. ASD identified such students by using three criteria from student records: (1) students whose IDs started with “08,” and whose previous state was Alaska but the previous city was not Anchorage; (2) their entry code said “transfer from another Alaska school district;” or (3) their parents had authorized ASD to ask the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development for their state test records.

Our study was limited to the families from other areas of Alaska who enrolled new students in the district in the 2007-2008 or 2008-2009 school years. Unfortunately, we did not have access to data from earlier years—so we were not able to compare the number and characteristics of new students in previous years with those of new students in the most recent years.

From information ASD provided, we identified 881 students, from 791 families, who were new enrollees. We were able to use that information to:

- Determine where all the 881 new students came from, and in particular to see how many came from communities on the road system and how many came from rural, off-road communities.

- Survey parents or guardians of new students, to get more detailed information about why families and students moved to Anchorage and what problems they have faced in the city.

Because of the difficulties in expediently conducting research with minors, we decided to survey parents or guardians of newly enrolled students rather than the students themselves. Using a simple, cross-sectional survey research design, we developed three sets of questions to address (1) ISER's continuing interest in the causes and patterns of migration in Alaska and the Arctic; (2) how the Anchorage School District can best meet the needs of new students; and (3) the extent to which the Municipality of Anchorage will need to address a potential influx of families from other parts of the state. The survey was a one-page form with 17 questions (mixed forced-response and open-ended), and an open-ended comment area on the back of the form.

Because families and students from the Mat-Su Borough made up such a large share of our potential respondents, we drew a 20% random sample from that area rather than attempt to survey them all. ISER and ASD mailed out 681 surveys, and ISER followed up by phone whenever possible with those who didn't respond to the mail survey. We could only call those families that had given ASD permission to provide directory access to their contact information.

Response Rates and Respondents

About 86% of potential survey families allowed the ASD to give directory access, and from those respondent we were able to obtain an average 67% response rate. From the 14% of families that did not give permission for directory access, we got an 18% response rate.

We excluded 24 responses from military families (because they typically move not for personal reasons but because the military transfers them). We excluded an additional 25 responses that were either duplicates or that came from families who had not in fact recently enrolled new students in the Anchorage district (and apparently were mistakenly included in our list).

In the end, we determined that we had 349 responses we could use, providing information about 407 new students. About 40% of those respondents had moved from communities on the road system and 60% from rural, off-road communities.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, we employed mixed-method approaches. We entered survey data into an SPSS data file and performed frequencies and cross-tab analyses on the numerical data. We recorded the comments respondents provided in the open-ended comment area by respondent ID number in word-processing documents and analyzed them for thematic content using Atlas ti qualitative data analysis software. We did a preliminary network analysis on migration paths and community relationships using Ucinet and Netdraw social network analysis software.

Where Are Alaskans Moving From?

In October and November of 2008, the Anchorage School District provided contact and point of origin information for students who transferred into the Anchorage district from other Alaska school districts during the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years. During that period, 881 students from other places in Alaska enrolled in Anchorage—490 (56%) had moved from road-system districts and 391 (44%) from rural districts off the road system. Some census areas have communities both off and on the road system; we assigned these based on where most of the communities are.

Figures 1 and 2 show more detail about where these students came from. The largest numbers of students from road-system places moved from the Mat-Su Borough communities of Wasilla and Palmer. Substantial numbers also came from the Kenai Peninsula to the south of Anchorage and the Fairbanks North Star Borough in the Interior. Of the 391 new students who moved from off-road system districts, significant numbers came from the Bethel and Nome census areas—but smaller numbers came from almost every census area around the state.

Figure 1. Where New Students from Road System Communities Lived Before Moving (n=490 students)

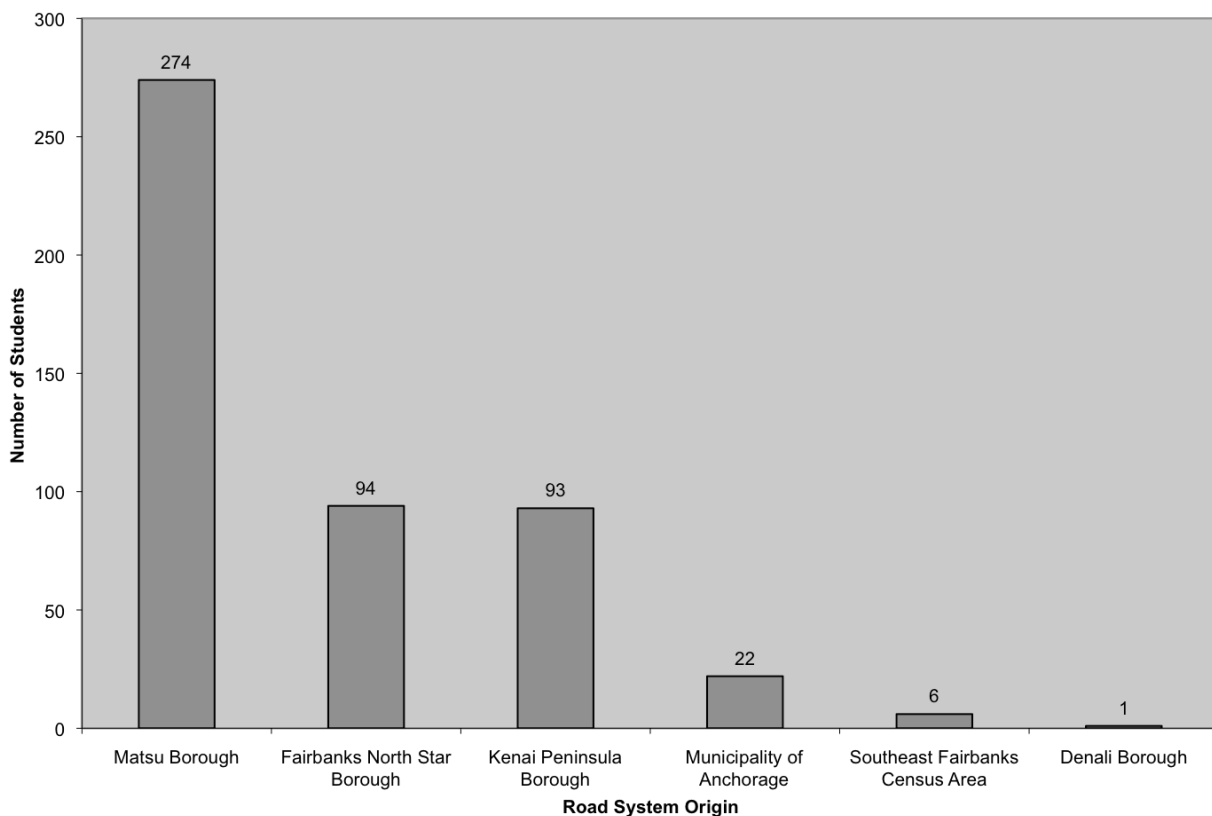
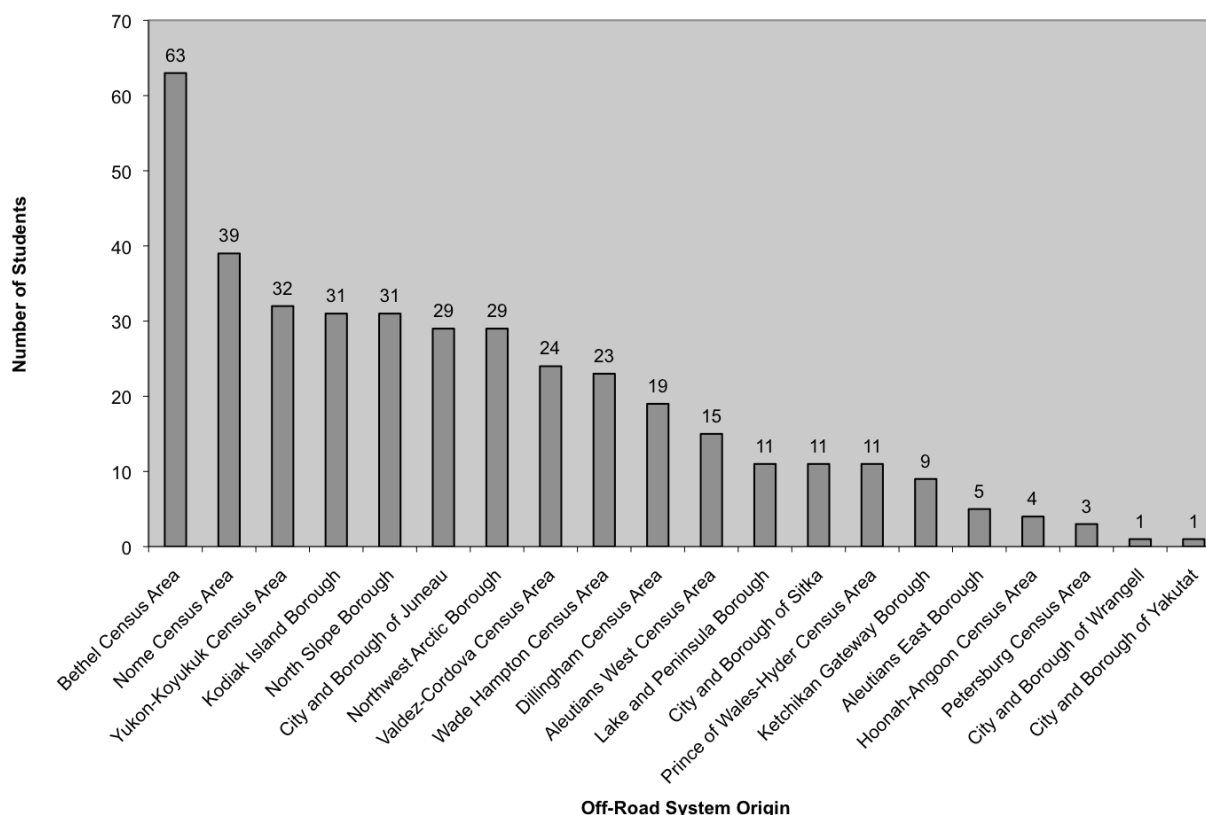


Figure 2. Where New Students from Off-Road Places Lived Before Moving
(n=391 students)



Organization of Survey Findings

As discussed earlier, we were able to get usable survey responses from 349 parents or guardians of 407 students in Anchorage schools who had recently transferred from other Alaska districts. Below we look first at patterns of movement among the respondents, then at their characteristics, their reasons for moving, and the challenges they described in making the transition to Anchorage.

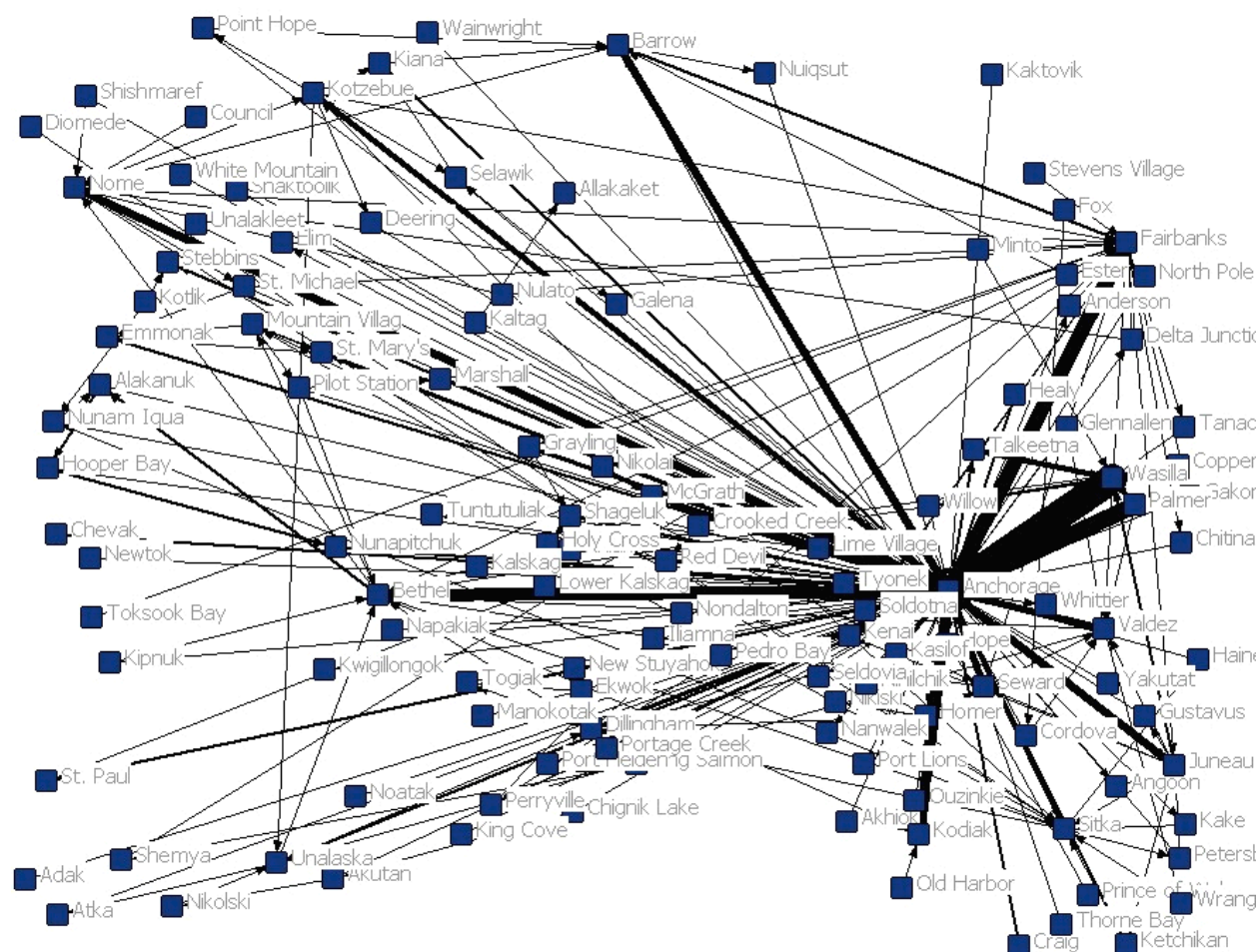
Migration Patterns

We conducted a preliminary network analysis on the survey data, as Figure 3 shows, and found a complex pattern of movement around Alaska among the respondents.

Each line in the figure represents the moves by a respondent or group of respondents who now live in Anchorage. The arrows indicate movement to a particular community and show in a finer analysis that many respondents have moved between Anchorage and other communities more than once. The thickness of the line connecting the communities indicates the number of moves between communities.

These data demonstrate strong ties between Anchorage and the Mat-Su Borough communities of Wasilla and Palmer, but also significant movement to Anchorage from regional hubs such as Bethel, Nome, Barrow, and Kodiak and the larger cities of Fairbanks and Juneau.

Figure 3. Alaska Community Network
(ISER survey; n= 349)



We moved because we both work in Anchorage and with high gas prices it was costing a lot to commute. My husband and I are both medical professionals with very steady jobs. We feel our son has better educational opportunities in Anchorage. —Former Mat-Su resident

The movement between Anchorage and regional hub communities raises further questions.

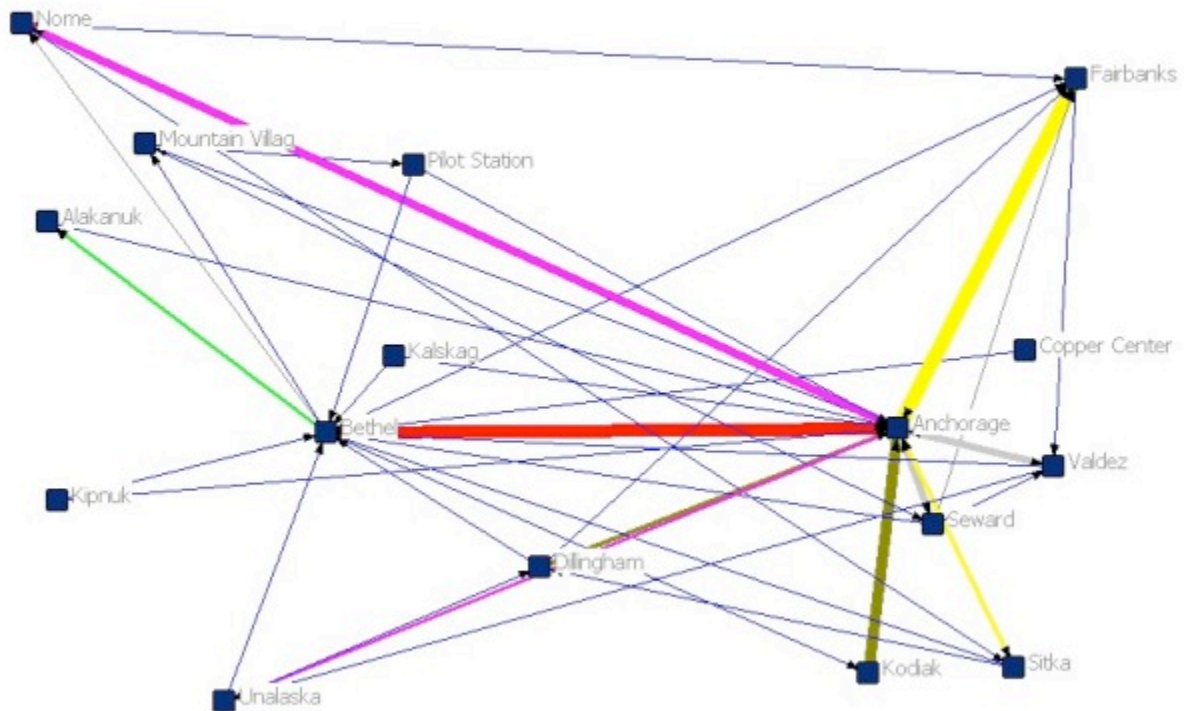
(1) Are more people moving from regional hubs simply because those communities have larger populations? (2) Or do people in regional hubs have more resources at their disposal, making it possible or them to move? (3) Or have resources and services (jobs, housing, medical care) in regional hubs reached their capacity? This last question could serve as the basis for further examination of possible population “tipping points” for rural Alaska communities—whether at some point rural communities with limited resources cannot sustain growing populations and some people will be forced to move.

Figures 4 and 5 show focal node networks for the communities of Bethel and Nome—that is, the moves of survey respondents into and out of these communities during their lifetimes. When compared with the larger network shown in Figure 3, these diagrams and associated data do not show the “step-wise” pattern of migration that recent migration studies of arctic Alaska based on U.S. census data have shown (Howe 2009). Examples of such step-wise migration would be people using Bethel as a regional steppingstone to get to Anchorage—or regional hubs in general acting as “way-stations” for people ultimately intending to move to Anchorage (Hamilton and Seyfrit 1993).

But Figure 4 shows that respondents in only two communities in the Bethel census area—Kalskag and Kipnuk—seemed to use Bethel as a regional steppingstone for moves to Anchorage. By contrast, survey respondents who moved to Anchorage from the Bethel census area communities of Aniak, Napakiak, Red Devil, Nunapichuk, Kwigillingok, and Tuntutuliak did not use Bethel as a steppingstone.

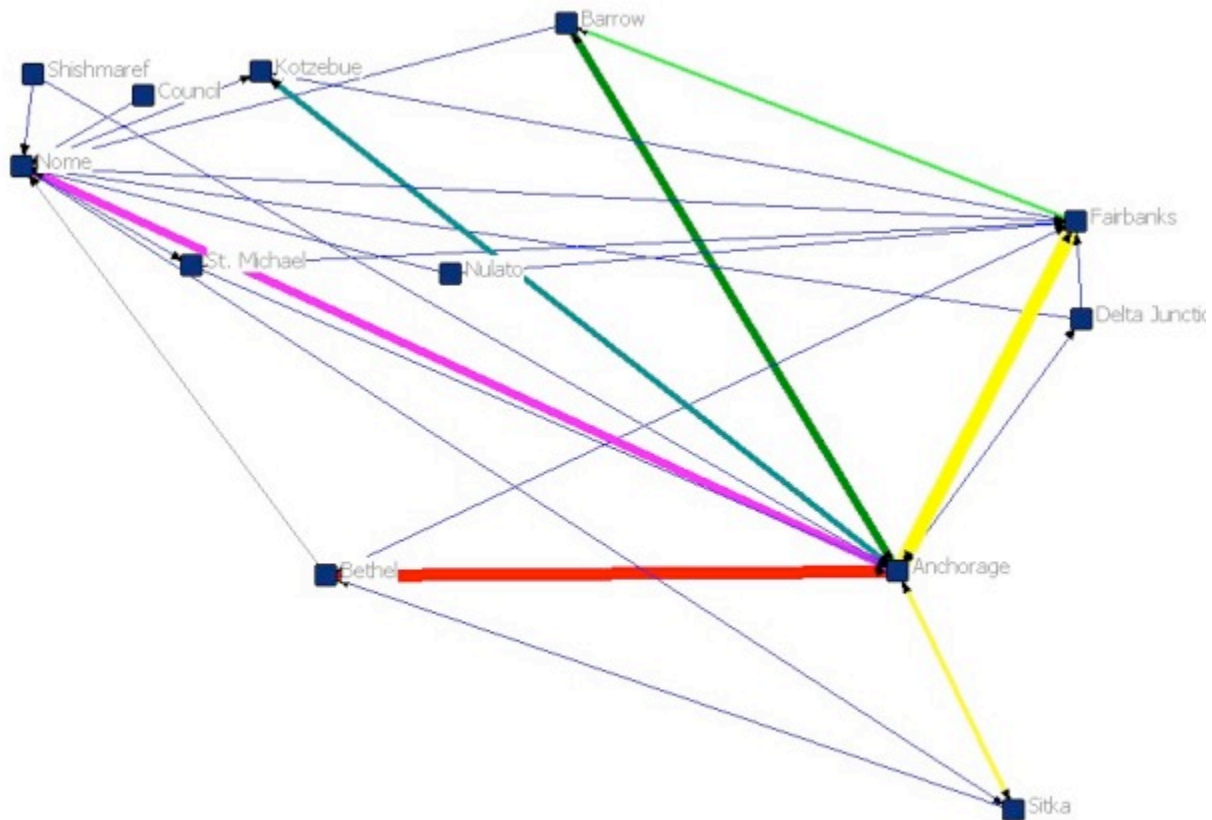
That same pattern is also noticeable in the moves of survey respondents from the Nome census area, depicted in Figure 5. Respondents from Shishmaref and St. Michael seemed to move to Nome before moving to Anchorage, but respondents from Elim, Unalakleet, Stebbins, and White Mountain but didn’t use Nome as a steppingstone before their moves to Anchorage.

Figure 4. Focal Node Network for Bethel, Alaska
(ISER survey; n=22)



First, the economy in Bethel is difficult and cost of living is very high. Second, I wanted my kids to have better educational opportunities than they had in Bethel. Yes, a handful of people plan to leave in 2009 and come to Anchorage for the same reasons. –Former Bethel resident

Figure 5. Focal Node Network for Nome, Alaska
(ISER survey, n=11)



Life in Nome was ok but hard to save money... Together we made over \$150 K per year, but to live and buy a home, our money went to fuel, very expensive food and if something broke (car, snow-go, furnace, etc) our savings went for it. So we could have stayed but who the hell wants to work till they're 70 just to stay afloat? I think before pipelines are built, our state needs roads to the rural hubs. It will give our kids a chance to build their future and lower cost of living by trucking ...to the village and not air freight or barge. Taikuu/quyanna. -Former Nome resident

Other research has had similar findings. In a 2009 analysis of Alaska's rural population and school population trends, the Alaska Division of Community and Regional Affairs (2009) found no evidence of step-wise migration. Also, in 2008 the Alaska Native Policy Center surveyed 1,051 people attending the annual conference of the Alaska Federation of Natives, and significantly more people reported recent moves from villages to Anchorage than to regional hubs (Alaska Native Policy Center 2009).

Further study could examine how eventual moves to Anchorage might be accelerating, as the cost of living increases in hubs and services and resources become limited. The study of migration in Alaska would benefit from further regional analysis, since Alaska regions differ culturally and geographically, as well as in access to resources and economic development.

Though limited in scope, the survey data from this study demonstrate migration paradigms that have been identified in other research—migratory chains (Hendrix 1975; Wilson 1994; Haug 2008) and circular migration (Vertovec 2007; Howe 2009). Migratory chains link networks of movers through kin or other close relationships. Circular migration means people move back and forth between their original home communities and the communities they had moved to. We'll discuss these migration phenomena in more detail later.

Who Is Moving?

In determining where new Anchorage students lived before transferring to Anchorage, we looked at how many came from communities on the road system and how many came from rural roadless communities. That's partly because one of the things we were interested in was how road access affects families and students. So unlike some other researchers, we included larger communities like Juneau in the rural category; even though it is one of Alaska's largest communities, it is off the road system. We recognize that Juneau and some other communities in Southeast Alaska have more heterogeneous populations than those Goldsmith et al. (2004) identify as "remote off-road system," in which 82% of the residents are Alaska Native (quoted in Huskey, forthcoming).

The respondents to our survey identified themselves as 49% White/Caucasian, 35% Alaska Native, 4% Alaska Native and some other ethnicity, 2% African-American, 4% Asian, 1% Pacific Islander, 3% Latino, and 2% multi-ethnic. The majority of road system families identified themselves as White/Caucasian, while the majority of off-road families were Alaska Native.

One of our key findings (and a very unexpected one) is that many of the new students moved independently—that is, they moved but their families didn't. The 349 parents and guardians who responded to our survey reported they had recently enrolled 407 students in Anchorage schools. Of those students, 43% moved but their families didn't; 57% moved together with their families.

That finding is supported by a 2009 report from the Alaska Division of Community and Regional Affairs (2009), which points out that while both the rural school population and the overall rural population are both declining, the school population is declining more rapidly.

Several other studies have also found a greater tendency in Alaska among teenagers and young adults than among other groups to move away from their home communities (Kruse and Foster 1986; Hamilton and Seyfrit 1993; 1994; Seyfrit and Hamilton 1997; Huskey 1994, 2009). Hamilton and Seyfrit (1993) found a greater expectation among "town" young people in Alaska that they would move than among "village" young people, and greater expectations among town young people that they would go to college.

These findings may help explain the high level of movement from regional hubs. It also deepens questions about the effects of road access and resources on student outcomes, which we'll talk about more later. Other studies that don't look specifically at Alaska have found that the more educated the parents are, the more likely their children will move (Elder et al 1996; Domina 2006). Conger and Elder (1994) stress the lack of local jobs as primary impetus for young people to leave their home communities.

Why Did Students Move Alone?

Parents and guardians who responded to our survey said students moved alone for a number of reasons, including (1) being sent into Anchorage from another community to live with other family members; (2) moving because of a change in custody arrangements; (3) coming to Anchorage to live in foster families; (4) having been home-schooled but now enrolling in a public school; or (5) transferring between schools in Anchorage. We included in that last category only students who had recently moved from a district outside Anchorage— not the many other students who changed schools within the district but had lived in Anchorage longer.

Table 1 shows that the largest number of students who moved alone were those sent from another Alaska community into Anchorage to live with other relatives. These relatives might be parents working in Anchorage, grandparents, uncles and aunts, or adult siblings.

Table 1. Numbers of Students Moving Alone and Reasons for New Enrollment, n=177

Sent in to family	Transferred in district	Custody change	Previously home-schooled	Moved to foster family	Other
69	39	30	22	14	3

Table 2 shows the number of respondents (parents or guardians), by ethnicity, who told us about students moving alone. (Keep in mind that a single respondent may have told us about more than one student—so the number of students moving alone and the number of families reporting student movement may differ.) Alaska Native respondents were the most likely to report students moving alone— 41 said students been sent to Anchorage to live with them.

Table 2. Number of Families Reporting Student Movement Alone, n=160

Ethnicity of Parent or Guardian	Sent in to Family	Custody Arrangement	Foster Child	Previously Homeschooled	Within District Transfer	Other	Total
Alaska Native	41	9	7	0	15	1	73
White/Caucasian	11	12	5	20	15	1	64
African American	0	0	0	1	2	0	3
Asian American	2	1	0	0	1	0	4
Pacific Islander	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Multi	4	2	1	0	3	1	11
Native American	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Latino	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
Total # Families	62	24	14	21	36	3	160

Among White/Caucasian respondents, the largest number reported that they hadn't moved when their students did because those students were shifting from home-schooling to Anchorage public schools. These home-schooled students may already have been living in Anchorage, before they enrolled in the public schools. But they appear in the school records as coming from other areas

of Alaska. A number of Alaska school districts offer programs for home-schooled students, and students from other districts can enroll.

These students are included here should further discussion on this issue be warranted, because no comparative data exist on numbers of home-schoolers entering the district annually—making this number difficult to assess. Whether the “previously home-schooled” number represents a new trend or is a common yearly amount is unknown. Our data can serve as a benchmark, should there be future research on home-schooled students in Alaska.

Many parents of these previously home-schooled children told us the children wanted to enroll in public school, because they believed public schools could offer more activities and opportunities. That’s the same reason many parents from rural areas cited for their moves to Anchorage.

A number of families surveyed (36) also said their students had changed schools within Anchorage during the 2007-08 or 2008-09 school years. We included these families because their children had school records showing that they had also recently transferred from other districts in the state (Table 3). These in-district transfers may also show that some young people new to Anchorage are facing instability of economic, home, or social life. In the open-ended comment area of the survey, some respondents told us about moving to Anchorage and then moving within the city, until they could stabilize job and living arrangements.

These in-district transfer students had originally come from both on- and off-road communities throughout Alaska—which was the same pattern we found when looking at all the newly enrolled students in the Anchorage district (see Map S-1 in the executive summary).

Table 3. Families Reporting In-District Transfers and Students' Previous Districts

Students' Previous School District	# Families Reporting Transfer w/in ASD
Barrow	1
Bethel	3
Big Lake	1
Chugiak	1
Craig	2
Dillingham	1
Fairbanks	5
Homer	1
Hoonah	1
Juneau	1
Ketchikan	2
King Cove	1
Klawock	1
Kodiak	1
Kotzebue	2
Nenana	1
Nikolai	1
Pilot Station	1
Red Devil	1
Seward	3
St. Mary's	1
St. Paul	1
Valdez	1
Wasilla	1
Wrangell	1
Total	36

The survey also revealed both young people and families moving back and forth between rural communities and Anchorage—the same pattern we saw in the earlier network figures. The survey questions did not directly ask reasons for this back-and-forth movement, but respondents gave us rich anecdotal detail in the open-ended comment area at the end of the survey. Below are a few examples they described.

One mother described how she and her son moved to Anchorage from the Aleutians in 2005 while the father stayed behind. The son stayed with the mother for only a short time and then returned to the Aleutians to finish the school year. In September 2006 the son came back to Anchorage and attended school there for the 2006-2007 school year. He then returned to the Aleutians for the 2007-2008 school year. He then came back to Anchorage to attend middle school for the 2008-2009 school year. The mother says the son may continue spending a year with his father and then a year with her until he reaches high school, but they have not reached a final decision yet.

One uncle described how his niece came from a Southwestern Alaska community in August of 2008 to try attending school in Anchorage. She had previously been enrolled at Mount Edgecumbe High School in Sitka, but had difficulties there and returned to her parents' home in Southwest. In September 2008 she started at Dimond High School in Anchorage, but about a month later she left because she was not able to get the academic help she needed. She has now returned to Southwest to live with her parents and is attending school there.

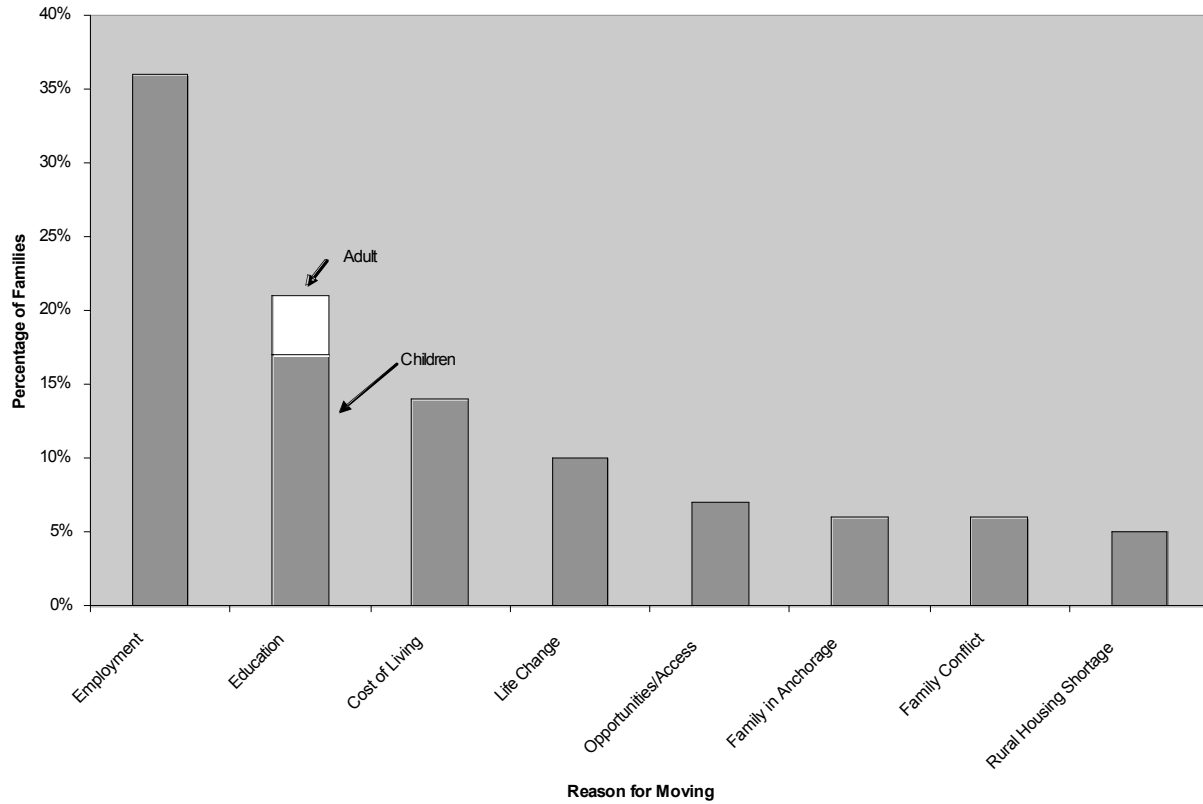
One 18-year-old student described to our interviewer how her mother had moved to Anchorage from a Southeast community in 2002 and how she, the daughter, followed her mother in 2003 while she was in middle school. The daughter started using drugs and because of resulting behavioral problems was sent to a rehabilitation center outside the state. After four months at the center, she was sent back to Southeast Alaska, where she lived with grandparents. She returned to Anchorage in 2005 to begin high school. She started at Service but then transferred to East. After her junior year, she was again sent to drug rehabilitation for several months. She returned to East High in 2008, transferred to West High after four months, and then dropped out. She has tried the 9-Star and I Grad programs but is currently attempting to complete a GED while living on her own in hotels, with the help of public assistance.

Why Did Families Move?

As Figure 6 shows, survey respondents most often cited the following reasons for moving to Anchorage: employment (36%), education opportunities (21%), and the rising cost of living in communities outside Anchorage (14%). Note these categories are not mutually exclusive and that respondents often offered more than one of these reasons for their move to Anchorage.

Figure S-4 in the executive summary shows that while families from places both on and off the road system cited employment and education opportunities as major reasons for moving, those from off-road places were substantially more likely to say they had moved for employment, education, or other opportunities. Families that had moved from places on the road system were more likely to say they had moved for health care.

Figure 6. Reason for Family Move to Anchorage
(Respondents could cite more than one reason; N=230)



We also asked survey respondents whether they knew about other people from their home communities who were planning to move. We asked that question to help the Anchorage school district and the city of Anchorage assess possible future migration to Anchorage.

Nearly a third of respondents said they knew about more people who were considering a move to Anchorage for the same reasons they themselves had cited, and 18% said they knew of people who were considering a move but for different reasons. They listed many possible reasons why more people from their home communities were considering a move to Anchorage, including better education opportunities, access to college, no commute, lower cost of living, dealing with domestic issues, employment opportunities, lower fuel prices, better housing, improving their kids' future, getting medical care, retiring, school closing, shopping, and better weather. These responses make it clear that while the search for jobs was the single biggest reason respondents moved, it is only one factor in the decision to move.

For many people, the reasons for and causes of migration are multiple and often non-economic (Wilson 1994; Huskey et al 2004; Domina 2006). When these multiple reasons are combined with the continuing relationship many movers have with their home communities, migration is also necessarily complex.

In their 2008 study, *Fuel Costs, Migration, and Community Viability*, Martin, Killorin, and Colt of ISER note that for Alaskans, “Migration is not a one-time event.” Howe and Huskey found that in arctic Alaska, the number of out-migrants equaled 60% to 80% of in-migrants between 1995 and 2000, and therefore “migration is not one way” (Huskey 2009). Martin (2009) further stresses how the 2003 Survey of Living Conditions in the Arctic found rural Arctic residents returning home primarily to live near family, and men in particular returning for subsistence activities and the overall way of life in rural areas.

But while we can see that migration is fluid in Alaska and that some Alaskans may divide their time between rural and urban areas, at present the characteristics of this dual urban-rural way of living remains largely unexplored in northern studies. Some studies have focused on the reasons why many women are leaving rural areas (Martin 2009) and on how aspirations of young people affect migration (Hamilton and Seyfrit 1993; Seyfrit and Hamilton 1997). But more attention could be devoted to understanding how rural-urban connections in Alaska affect livelihood strategies, rural development, stresses on urban areas, kinship and social networks—and particularly for this study, both the enculturation and life-making practices of the next generation.

Challenges and Transitions

We’ve seen how many new students from other areas of Alaska enrolled in Anchorage schools during the most recent school years, where they came from, and why they moved. Those new students and families in Anchorage also face many challenges in transitioning to the city. To help the Anchorage School District and the city government better understand how they might help these new arrivals, we asked our survey respondents what they most need in their new city.

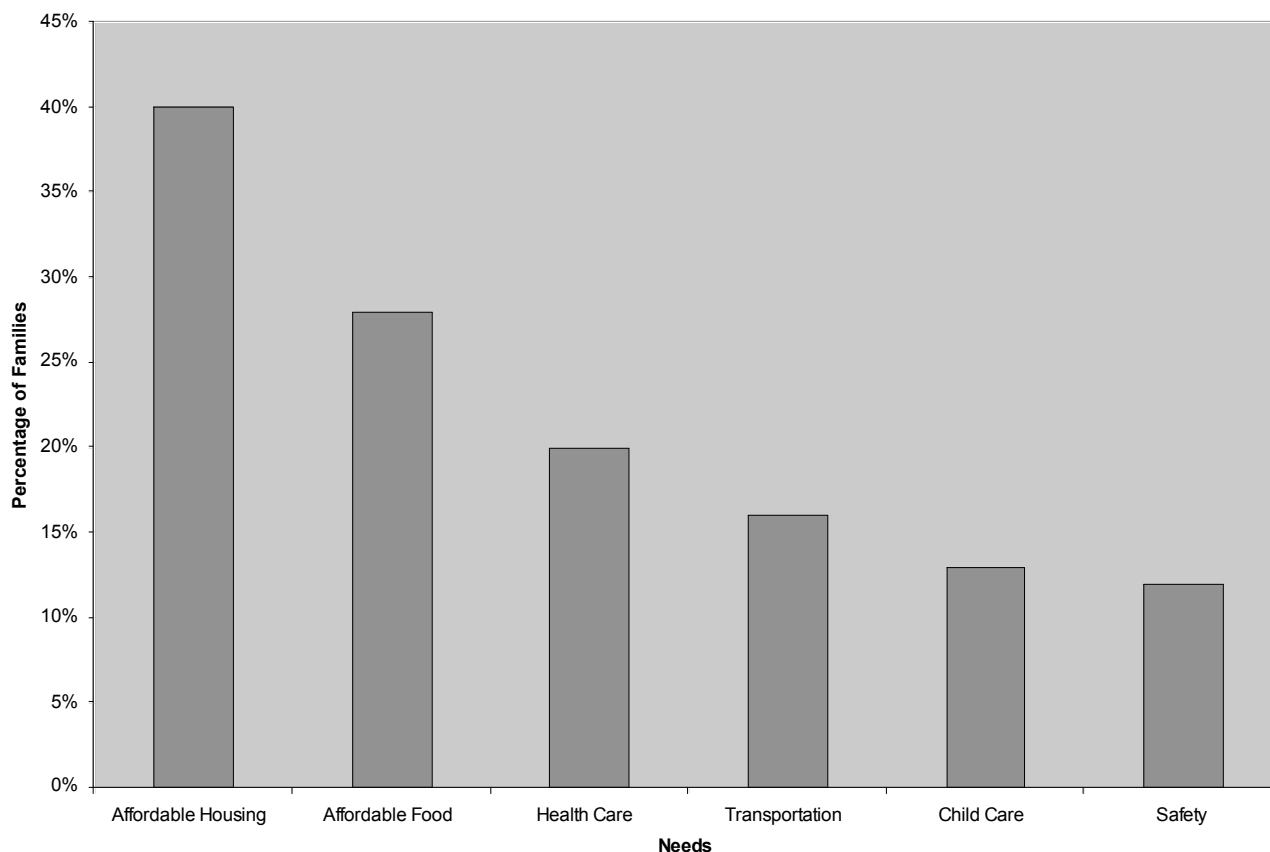
What Do New Arrivals Need?

As Figure 7 shows, lack of affordable housing in Anchorage was the survey respondents’ primary concern in response to the question: “In Anchorage, I need...” with the choices: employment, affordable housing, affordable food, child care, health care, transportation, or to feel safer. These choices are not mutually exclusive, and respondents could cite multiple needs. Many survey respondents are living in the lower income areas of Anchorage, many in trailers, and some families are living in motels.

One mother, for example, has been moving back and forth between a village in the Northwest Arctic Borough and Anchorage since 1993 because of the high cost of living in the village, particularly high prices for oil and food. She said that the village store often ran out of essential food items. She lives in a motel in Anchorage and finds work as a front desk clerk. She has been trying to save money to buy a trailer. She wanted to move out of the motel where she was living as soon as possible because she didn’t feel safe there and characterized it as “*a freaky place to stay long term. The month-long people are okay but the nightly guests are scary.*”

Figure S-5 in the executive summary shows that respondents who had moved from off-road communities were more likely to say they needed affordable housing and employment, while those from places on the road system were more likely to cite affordable food and health care.

Figure 7. Needs of New Families in Anchorage
N=349



Potential Effects of Moving on Students' Achievement

The literature on student mobility shows a correlation between mobility and poverty (Kerbow 1996), and that such mobility is prevalent among certain ethnic groups and disadvantaged populations, such as African Americans (Kerbow 1996), Native Americans and Alaska Natives (Zehr 2007), and Aboriginal Australians (Prout 2009).

Research also shows that when students move frequently, that mobility can hurt their educational achievement in many ways. Many studies attribute low achievement among students who change schools frequently to the problems they face when schools have different curricula (or students enter at different stages of the curricula), and when schools have different standards or expectations (Kerbow 1996; Mao et al., 1997; Wright 1999; Engec 2006, South et al., 2007). Higher mobility has also been found to reduce graduation rates (Mao et al., 1997; Rumberger and Larson 1998; Osher 2003; South et al 2007). Moving frequently has also been associated with emotional and behavioral problems in students (Osher 2003; Malmgren and Gagnon 2005; Engec 2006; South et al 2005).

The research on student mobility also shows that high mobility has serious adverse effects on schools. Schools with many students who have moved frequently have lower standardized test scores overall, less school involvement and classroom learning among students, and negative effects on administration and teachers' morale (Kerbow 1996; Wright 1999; Rumberger 2003; South et al. 2007).

Particularly salient for this study is that research has also shown a relationship between housing instability and student mobility, low achievement scores, high dropout rates, and school instability (Hartman 2002; Crowley 2003; Nichols and Gault 2003). One survey respondent gave us an example of the difficulties of finding affordable housing near a good school.

Affordable rental housing near schools that are performing above district was very difficult to find. We are renting a house (near an excellent school) that belongs to acquaintances living elsewhere. If we need to seek another rental in the future, I expect to have a challenging search.
— Former Kenai Peninsula resident

Access to Resources

Many families—especially those who moved from places off the road system—told us they moved to Anchorage for better job and education opportunities.

It isn't surprising that the search for jobs would draw rural Alaskans to Anchorage: there just aren't enough jobs in rural areas, especially in the many small, remote communities scattered across the vast reaches of western and northern Alaska. The population of those areas is largely Alaska Native, and in recent decades many more young Alaska Natives have been moving into the labor force. Unemployment is high, and cash incomes are low. For example, per capita personal income in the Bethel census area—where a substantial number of Anchorage students in our survey had moved from—was under \$27,000 in 2007, or about two-thirds of the state average.

Schools with the lowest achievement scores and graduation rates also tend to be in those same remote census areas in western and northern Alaska, where there are dozens of very small, remote Alaska Native communities and poverty is widespread. The districts where more students meet state proficiency standards tend to be on the road system or to have ports or well-served airports. Those are generalities, of course, and there are exceptions. Students in some small off-road districts score considerably higher than those in other districts.

Respondents' Concerns about Rural Schools

In a 1993 study of the aspirations of high-school students in the Northwest Arctic Borough, Hamilton and Seyfrit found students at that time worried about being adequately prepared for college. In 1995 Seyfrit and Hamilton surveyed 649 students in the Northwest Arctic Borough, and they published their findings in a 1997 study. They reported that the majority of the students they surveyed were dissatisfied with the quality of rural education, and that 85% planned to live somewhere other than their home communities after high school.

A number of our survey respondents also had concerns about whether rural schools were adequately preparing their children for the future, and some described those concerns. Below is a sampling of their comments.

Kids struggle to their grade level because they had poor education in [village name withheld]. We had moved to Anchorage August 2007 for a better education for my kids. During the summer times we go back for subsistence fishing, hunting, and harvesting! Our struggle here in Anchorage is keeping our traditional values.

The school system out in the bush is a joke. The children out there are not receiving a good education and the opportunity for a better life that comes with it. There are no grades and there does not seem to be any way to fail a grade level. There is little or no control over the students by the teaching staff and there were children cursing at the teachers on a regular basis with no disciplinary actions taken. I will never move to the bush again while I have school age children.

Schools in [village name withheld] did not prepare kids for anything. In fact, the school didn't even have grades. Kids are not doing well. There is also a very high teacher turnover rate out there and this creates many problems. There is a general lack of education in the bush communities.

Overall, survey respondents appeared happier with Anchorage schools, but keep in mind that our respondents are all people who had moved *to* Anchorage. We did not survey any people who moved *from* Anchorage, to learn about what role local schools may have played in their decisions to move.

How Do New Students and Families Feel About ASD?

ASD Questions

The Anchorage School District hoped to use ISER's survey results to better understand the experience of new students and families and asked us to include the following questions:

- *Does your child feel welcome at school?* About 86% of parents or guardians (n=349) said their children feel welcome at their schools.
- *Do you feel welcome at your child's school?* Among respondents who answered this question (n=338), 90% said they themselves felt welcome at their children's schools.
- *Please rate how your child is adjusting to the new school. Do you think your child is receiving the help he/she needs to be successful in school?* Of those who answered this question (n=335), 82% thought their children were receiving the help they needed to succeed in school.

But if we to look at what respondents said about how students were adjusting to new schools, using a scale rather than a single question, the results are more mixed: 47% of parents or guardians noted their children were adjusting "Very Well," 22% "Well," 18% "OK," 10% "Poorly," and 3% "Not At All."

Overall, the parents and guardians of new students reported that they and their children felt welcome at Anchorage schools and were getting the help they needed to be successful in school. Many felt their children now had access to resources and opportunities they didn't have in other communities. Respondents were concerned, however, about their children being academically behind their new peers and the difficulties they face in adjusting to the new setting.

Respondents made a variety of positive comments about the Anchorage School District; below is a sampling of those comments.

The teachers do such a great job with my kids. I want to be sure and thank them. They have really helped my kids a lot and my wife and I are very grateful.

Quality of education here in Anchorage is more advanced than back home.

Attendance and grades are better than they were in [village name withheld].

They really enjoy school and developmentally delayed daughter doing much better here.

Problems with ASD

But some respondents also described problems they or their children were having in Anchorage schools. We analyzed the qualitative data we collected, from comments of respondents, and divided them into the categories shown in Table 4. Problems respondents most commonly reported were that classes or schools were too large; that there were difficulties in communication; and that students didn't get enough individual attention.

In conjunction with the responses, we also looked at specific variables—whether the respondents came from on- or off-road system areas, their ethnicity, and why they moved. We found that more families from off the road system and more White/Caucasian families reported problems. Also, students who had moved because their families moved were more likely to report problems.

These responses likely reflect in part adjustments new students and their families inevitably have to make. Transitioning to urban schools in which class sizes are considerably larger than in rural schools would necessarily make communication with faculty and staff more challenging, and preclude the individual attention students might receive in smaller rural schools.

**Table 4. Family Problems in Anchorage School District
(n=349)**

Problems with ASD	Student Origin		Ethnicity				Reason for Student Move					
	Road System	Off Road	White /Cauc	AK Native	Multi	Latino	Sent to Family	Custody	Foster	Home-Sch	Transfer	Moved w/family
Access to Sports	1	1	1	1				2				
Before/After Care		3	1	2							1	2
Bullying	2		2				1			1		
Class/School Size	4	4	7	1				1			2	5
Communication	4	7	5	6			5	1		1	1	3
Discipline Policy	1	1	1		1		1					1
Don't Feel Welcome	2	2	2	2					1	1		1
High Expectations	2	2	2	1		1		1	1		1	1
Individual Attention	1	7	5	2	1		1	1			2	4
Transportation		1	1									1
Total # Families	17	28	27	15	2	1	8	6	2	3	8	17

Transitioning to Urban Life

What Help Did Respondents Ask For?

Both families and students can also face challenges in making the sociocultural transition to urban life and schools. Surveyors conducting telephone follow-up calls encountered many stressed respondents—enough so that they began to keep a list of the municipality’s social services contact numbers nearby to offer during their telephone conversations.

Difficulties in transition were what respondents mentioned most often in the open-ended comment area of the survey—we counted 62 comments about children’s difficulties in transitioning. That was particularly true for Alaska Native respondents and for those families with high-school students. Some respondents reported their children leaving Anchorage to go back to their home communities after only a short time, because of the hardships in transitioning created by cultural differences. The problems older students face in adjusting to the new setting are logical, because their enculturation experiences are more firmly rooted than those of younger children, and they have to leave their established social networks behind (Elder, et al., 1996).

The faster pace of urban life is an issue for many families new to the city. Respondents talked to us specifically about the difficulties of finding affordable housing, dealing with traffic, loss of social networks, and the lack of resources to help orient them to living in the city or starting in new schools.

Many respondents asked for help in orienting themselves and their children to life in the city. Respondents wanted help for their children in navigating the school system and its transportation

system and understanding school rules and expectations. They also wanted more opportunities for students and parents to talk with teachers and counselors. Parents of new students were also concerned about their children's ability to make friends in the new setting.

Respondents' Comments About Adjusting

The following comments reflect some of the concerns our respondents had for themselves and their children in adjusting to life in Anchorage.

With more families moving here they face larger challenges. Most do not understand paying rent plus utilities. When you live in a village, people support one another and know that the family next door will share what they have. You will not go without shelter, heat. Classroom have friends/family that you grow up with. A peer pressure support group. When something happens to one it happens to all. When in the city you get evicted, families don't know about food bank or are too ashamed to go. People are moving because there are no jobs, they want better education for their children. Price of travel is outrageous. The price of food is like going to a 7-11 on steroids! But what families don't see is the hardship it is on the children to take out of their environment leads to trouble with the law, drinking, smoking, using drugs and suicide.

Took 2-3 years to feel safe; older ones were scared; younger were easier, difficult with older. Coming from small schools, difficult for kids to "stick their neck out" in bigger school. Wish there were jobs in the village so I could move back.

I think all the young Native kids have a chance in the city. Expect some live harder here because they miss out on the tradition and life style the elders teach them, no more Native get-togethers like Eskimo dances, Christmas potlucks, Native Christmas games, no more hard core basketball for students that like sports; some young girls and boys can't even join sports because it costs too much money; in the villages its free to join sports, we can't even go to open gym evening time not like the villages. Our Eskimo food subsistence food we can't even eat them here. Most of the families end up moving back to the village due to the different living style. I even wish they had a high school here for young Native boys and girls only, they would feel more comfortable and play sports like everyone else in the city and have the confidence for sports. Maybe even better education if they had high school for Natives that move from the village, they wouldn't be scared.

Took about 6-8 months to adjust; harder on the older kids finding and making friends.

Kids don't feel welcome. It was different. Need counseling for the kids because they still get homesick. (Note: This family tried to move back to the village but couldn't).

All of my kids read poorly. My boy, who is in the 7th grade, only reads at a 3rd grade level. In the village all the teachers would read to the kids in Yupik. They would not read to them in English and they would have the kids read aloud in English. I complained about it all the time. Now they are all having problems reading but my oldest boy is the worst! All three children have ADHD. It is hard for them to concentrate. I have no child care at home so if my boy is suspended I can't work and I'll lose my job. Even though the kids are a bit older they can't be

trusted to be on their own. They are too hyperactive and get into trouble. Because of his behavior my son keeps getting suspended from school.

Not many friends, homesick for [village name withheld], poor attendance, low grades, no/little social contact with peers, schools too large, counselors' case overloaded.

Culture is very exclusive and high-pressure. No one really cares about my kid or my family. She wishes she felt more welcome and more included. Wish she had more friends. School is not about helping kids just holding them to "white" standards.

My daughter couldn't adjust and didn't get help in school. She is leaving to go back to [community name withheld]. East (High) is too big, too many students, not enough personal attention from teachers.

Child in school not only challenged by transition, but also limitations due to unequal education (rural vs. urban), sociocultural changes, and unrealistic expectations. Choices do not stabilize (as an adult may have opportunity) and self-identity and worth degrade, creating emotional dysfunction and relational instabilities.

What's So Different About Rural and Urban Life?

We've seen that many respondents from rural Alaska found the move to Anchorage difficult in many ways, even though they were willing to make that move to gain more opportunities for their children or themselves. But what is it that sets life in rural Alaska apart?

Varenne notes: "A theory of culture is a theory of education, and vice versa" (2008:357). Preparing for life in rural Alaska necessarily entails first, being able to rely on a tightly knit and well-connected community and second, acquiring different skills from those needed in an urban setting. Such skills will not necessarily be reflected in standardized test scores.

In rural Alaska, learning to be a generalist is important: a person with varied skills has the flexibility to take advantage of serendipitous opportunities when they present themselves. Surviving in rural Alaska requires having opportunistic survival strategies (Lowe 2008). But how does the generalist cope in an urban setting where there is necessarily a greater degree of and need for specialization?

Young people arriving in Anchorage from rural Alaska today often face not only the problem of inadequate academic preparation for life outside rural communities but also the inevitable stretching or even severing of critical, strong social ties. There are new expectations for young people in Alaska to pursue higher education, as either opportunities for or interest in traditional occupations diminish—and the question of acculturation inevitably expands to include survival in a global context rather than merely an American one (Spring 2008).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Our study both answers and raises questions about rural-to-urban migration in Alaska. About 56% of the new students who enrolled in the Anchorage School District in the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years transferred from districts on the road system—especially the Mat-Su district, just north of Anchorage. But the other 44% of the new students came from a wide range of communities off the road system, including regional hubs.

From the ASD survey data, we can't say whether migration from rural Alaska to Anchorage is increasing. We were not able to get data on new students in earlier school years. Also, to really assess migration trends would require a larger statewide survey that would also include people who moved from rural areas but don't have children enrolled in Anchorage schools.

Such a survey should look at what appears to be significant migration from regional hub communities, even though those hubs have economies that are much larger than those of the many small, remote rural communities. Are moves to Anchorage accelerating as the cost of living increases in hub communities as well as in smaller communities and as services and resources become limited?

The study of migration in Alaska would also benefit from more in-depth regional analysis, because the economies and demographics are much different in different regions of the state. Finally, more attention could be devoted to understanding how rural-urban connections in Alaska affect a range of economic and cultural factors—including livelihood strategies, rural development, kinship and social networks, and stresses on urban areas. Of particular interest for any future study looking at students who transfer from other Alaska districts to Anchorage would be examining the opportunities and constraints migration places on the next generation.

The families who moved to Anchorage in recent years came primarily for better employment and education opportunities, and because of the higher cost of living in communities outside Anchorage, especially small remote places. But their reasons for moving were more complex than that. Some also wanted better health care; some wanted a general life change; others wanted access to the range of resources urban life offers. Some came because they had family in Anchorage or had experienced family conflict in their home communities.

We were also surprised to find significant numbers of children and teenagers moving independently to Anchorage or changing schools within the Anchorage district, with no accompanying family move. Some of this movement appears to be related to family conflict, such as divorce or separation or behavioral problems with children or teenagers. But some families are also sending their children to Anchorage to live with family members here, for access to opportunities and a more well-rounded education. Some respondents said they were dissatisfied with rural schools and worried about their children's preparation for the future.

Many respondents also asked for help in orienting themselves and their children to urban life. Some of the Alaska Native respondents talked about how helpful they found the after-school programs of the Cook Inlet Tribal Council. Since it is high school students who appear to have the most difficulty in transitioning, perhaps the district, schools, and parents could engage with

and help develop existing ASD transition and peer mentoring programs, with the goal of enabling students themselves help other students adjust to a new school.

Families themselves also encounter difficulties in transitioning to urban life, and many commented on their own or their children's homesickness. They also asked for orientation (often in the form of a "how to" guide) and help in understanding how to use public transportation, to find housing, and to find employment. Alaska Native children and high-school students appear to have the hardest time overcoming culture shock and fitting in with their peers at Anchorage's large schools. Parents worry about their children being academically behind their urban peers.

Parents and other relatives also told us that some of the older students do not succeed in the transition to life in Anchorage and move back to their home communities. It seems there are a number of young people and families living a dual existence between their home communities and Anchorage, moving back and forth. This circular movement should be considered an important policy issue for Alaska, because of the potentially harmful effects of this instability on family and school life.

Migration data do not usually take into account what appears to be an evolving, complex relationship between rural and urban life. Likewise, school district enrollments (both rural and urban) do not reflect the movement between two worlds some young people in Alaska find themselves experiencing. Both families and students encounter difficulties in transitioning to urban life. They are particularly compromised by the lack of affordable housing in Anchorage, and often feel trapped between a life of few employment and other opportunities in their home communities and living on the margins in the city. We hope this study can give policymakers some useful insights about who is moving to Anchorage and why—and in particular, what help they need in making what for many is a very difficult transition.

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Appendix A: Survey Form



Note: \$20 Gift

1. Age 2. Sex: Male Female 3. Ethnicity

4 a) Where did you live before you moved to Anchorage? 4b) What years did you live there?

5. Please list any other communities in Alaska you've lived in and the years you lived in each:

6 a) Your move to the Anchorage area is (check one): Permanent Temporary. 6 b) If “Temporary”, how long will you stay? _____.

7. Where I live right now in Anchorage, I (check one) Rent Own Stay with Family
Stay with Friends Other

8. Why did you move?

9. Are other people planning to leave the community you moved from for the same reasons? (check one)

Yes No I Don't Know

10 a) Are there other people planning to leave for different/other reasons? Yes No I Don't Know

10 b) If yes, please write the
reasons

11. Are you working in Anchorage? (check one) Yes No Looking for work

12. What is your job? _____

13. What kind of transportation are you using the most? (check one)

My own vehicle Bus Sharing rides Walking/Bicycle
Other

14. In Anchorage, I need (please check all that apply):

Employment	Affordable Housing	Affordable Food Transportation	Child Care	Health Care	Better
To feel safer	Other		None of the Above		

15. a) Does/do your child(ren) feel welcome at school? Yes No I Don't Know
b) Do you feel welcome in your child's school? Yes No I Don't Know

c) If “No” to either 15 a) or 15 b), please explain: _____

