

ALASKA LEGISLATURE

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HB 102 — Response to concerns of Department of Education and Early Development

HB 102 allows teachers to be certified without evidence of content area expertise.

HB 102 requires teachers who are issued limited certificates to demonstrate content area expertise, and provides multiple checks to ensure that teachers do not enter the classroom without such expertise.

HB 102 requires a person receiving a limited certificate to demonstrate “instructional skills and subject matter expertise sufficient to assure the public that the person is competent as a teacher.” This language is nearly identical to current law on limited certificates. The state board of education is empowered to write regulations interpreting this requirement.

The only restriction HB 102 places on the state board’s regulation is that a person teaching in a non-English language may not be required to pass an English-language exam. Existing limited certificate regulations, found at 4 AAC 12.370-375, provide good examples of how expertise can be demonstrated through means other than written tests. For example, limited certificate applicants are currently requested to provide resumes and letters of recommendation demonstrating experience in a particular content area, offer evidence of industry or military certifications, or have work experience in a relevant field.

Second, a teacher will only receive a limited certificate upon specific request from a school district. Most if not all current districts that utilize limited certificates require applicants for such certificates to meet district-set prerequisites. This would not change under HB 102, and our expectation is that districts would continue to set locally-relevant standards for issuance of limited certificates. For example, at the March 1st hearing, Brandon Locke from the Anchorage School District testified that ASD would continue to fully vet limited certificate candidates.

Third, HB 102 includes a one-year probationary period for limited certificate holders (subsection (e)). This provides school administrators an opportunity to review the performance of the certificate holder. Should the certificate holder demonstrate lack of competency, the school district can decline to renew its request for a limited certificate and the person will no longer be eligible to teach.

Finally, HB 102 does not require DEED to issue limited certificates, as can be seen by the use of the word “may” on pg 1, line 6. As a last resort, if the Commissioner of Education and Early Development believes limited certificates are being misused in a particular case, he or she may decline to issue one.

Many of the goals of HB 102 could be met if districts established bilingual programs.

The state’s current bilingual program, in law at AS 14.30.400-420 and in regulation at 4 AAC 34, is targeted at students with limited English proficiency. *See* 4 AAC 34.090(c): “In AS 14.30.400, ‘bilingual-bicultural education program’ means a program of instruction in elementary or secondary education that is designed for children of limited English speaking ability and whose primary language is other than English.”

Most immersion programs, such as Fronteras and Anchorage School District’s World Languages Program, are targeted at native English speakers. In most of the state, even an Alaska Native language immersion program would be primarily enrolling students who are native English speakers. Therefore, it is not apparent to us at this time how establishing bilingual programs would adequately serve the needs of existing or future immersion programs.