

ALASKA COUNCIL



OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Alaska Council of School Administrators

Leadership, Unity, and Advocacy for Public Education

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Members of the House Education Committee,

On behalf of the Alaska Council of School Administrators (ACSA), we are writing to express our support for House Joint Resolution 25. We appreciate your continued focus on one of the most urgent challenges facing public education—retaining and recruiting qualified educators across Alaska.

As you've heard throughout this session, staffing shortages remain a significant issue, especially in our rural and remote districts, and for hard-to-fill positions like special education. However, we are seeing some promising developments, with international hiring emerging as one of them.

School districts across Alaska are finding success through the J-1 and H-1B visa programs. International educators are not only stepping into hard-to-fill roles—they are making lasting contributions to our schools and communities. They bring strong instructional skills, a deep commitment to students, and valuable cultural perspectives that enrich our classrooms.

As ACSA develops into a statewide hub for retention and recruitment, we have formalized that work through the new **Alaska Educator Retention and Recruitment Center (AERRC)**. DEED is a partner in this initiative, which emerged as a recommendation from the Governor's TRR playbook. Jennifer Schmitz, Director of AERRC, is working to support districts every step of the way, including the complex process of international hiring. AERRC will assist with logistics, legal navigation, and professional development. Our goal is to ensure these educators feel supported, welcomed, and successful once they arrive.

AERRC is committed to enhancing Alaska's pipeline of educators. We're focusing our efforts on strategies and pathways, including "grow your own" initiatives, to make teaching more appealing to Alaskans. However, developing local capacity takes time. International hiring assists us in meeting immediate needs and stabilizing schools today while we work on long-term solutions.

HJR 25 acknowledges the vital role international educators are currently playing in Alaska. It also conveys a strong message that we appreciate their service and wish to support their success.

At ACSA, we are fully committed to helping school districts find—and retain—high-quality educators for our students. International hiring is a key component of that broader effort.

Thank you again for your leadership on this issue and your support of HJR 25.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lisa Parady". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr. Lisa Parady
ACSA Executive Director



Kuspuk School District

Calillgutekluta Ciutmurnnartukut | Let's go forward, working together

Upper Kalskag | Lower Kalskag | Aniak | Crooked Creek | Chuathbaluk | Stony River | Sleetmute

May 12, 2025

Dear Honorable Members of the Alaska State Legislature,

On behalf of Kuspuk School District, I write in support of House Joint Resolution No. 25. This resolution acknowledges, supports, and promotes the continued recruitment, program completion, and retention of international educators serving on J-1 and H-1B visas in Alaska. It also reflects the lived reality of many rural districts, including Kuspuk, where critical staff shortages have threatened our ability to provide equitable, high-quality education to students in our remote communities.

In 2020–2021, Kuspuk experienced its highest teacher attrition rate—53% of staff either left or retired. At the time, I was serving as Director of Special Education and faced critical vacancies with no applicants. In response, we made a pivotal decision to hire our first international teacher on a J-1 visa. Since then, international recruitment has become a strategic and essential component of our staffing efforts. What began as a crisis response has evolved into a long-term solution to ensure consistent, qualified instruction for our students. Today, every special education teacher in the district serves on a J-1 or H-1B visa, and international educators hold positions across all grade levels and content areas throughout the district.

These educators have not only filled critical vacancies, they have become essential members of our schools and communities, building trusted relationships with students and families, and often remaining for multiple years. Many of our international hires, particularly those from the Philippines, have shown remarkable resilience, cultural adaptability, and a deep commitment to life in some of the most remote and logistically complex parts of Alaska.

Despite their positive contributions, international educators face persistent barriers, including significant delays in federal immigration processing and ongoing uncertainty over their future. For rural superintendents and school boards, these are not abstract policy challenges, they are direct threats to our ability to staff classrooms, maintain operations, and uphold Alaska's constitutional obligation to provide a system of public education for all students.

We are grateful HJR 25 acknowledges the vital role international educators play in Alaska's schools and recognizes the leadership of districts like Kuspuk, Kodiak, Bering Strait, and North Slope, where international hiring has become a strategic necessity, not a temporary fix. We urge the Alaska Legislature to pass HJR 25, as it sends a powerful message not only to state and federal policymakers, but also to the educators themselves—their contributions are recognized, valued, and needed.

Kuspuk stands ready to partner in shaping policies ensuring Alaska's schools remain places where all educators, regardless of visa status, are supported, respected, and empowered to serve.

Dr. Madeline Aguillard
Superintendent
Kuspuk School District