

ALASKA LEGISLATURE

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HB 157 Sponsor Statement (ver F)

Language Immersion Schools and Teacher Certification

Language immersion education is an increasingly popular educational model, especially in today's rapidly globalizing world. Language immersion education also produces impressive educational outcomes. Decades of experience from around the world have shown that language immersion education can create second-language fluency while also contributing to academic success in other subjects.

Alaska already has a variety of successful and popular immersion programs. Fronteras in the Mat-Su (Spanish) and Rilke Schule in Anchorage (German) are both planning moves to new facilities as interest grows. Anchorage School District's world languages immersion program teaches three languages – Japanese, Russian, and Spanish – and is in the process of adding French and Chinese. In rural Alaska, interest is growing in immersion as a way to teach endangered Native languages, Ayaprun Elitnaurvik in Bethel leading the way.

HB 157 creates a charter school designation with the specific mission of delivering a curriculum in a foreign or Native language, and holds these schools to a strict immersion standard. It requires fully certified teachers in these charter schools to have the specialized skills necessary to successfully teach in an immersion setting, and it includes provisions that will put in the classroom language speakers who know how to teach but may not be able to get the necessary formal qualifications to become fully certified. HB 157 also allows teachers in immersion charter schools that teach an Alaska Native language to be certified through processes developed by local communities.

Immersion education broadens students' knowledge of the world, gives them skills to help them succeed in their future careers, and often improves their academic performance not just in language classes, but in all subjects.