

ALASKA LEGISLATURE

Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins

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Sponsor Statement | HB 24 – Limited Language Immersion Teacher Certificates

Language immersion education is an increasingly popular educational model that also produces impressive academic outcomes. In an immersion program, some of the academic subject matter is delivered in a language other than English. HB 24 provides needed flexibility to school districts operating language immersion programs.

HB 24 gives the state board of education the tools necessary to tackle one of the biggest challenges facing Alaska’s immersion programs: finding fully certified teachers also fluent in an Alaska Native or foreign language. Under HB 24, the Department of Education and Early Development could provide school districts case-by-case flexibility to hire language immersion teachers they know are qualified to lead a classroom but who — for reasons such as limited English proficiency, advanced age, or familial responsibilities — are unable at the time to get a full teacher certification. To do so, the state board would have to create a new certificate along the lines of the existing “Type M” or “Type I” limited certificates.

Alaska already has a variety of successful and popular immersion programs, including Wasilla’s Fronteras, Anchorage’s Rilke Schule, and Anchorage School District’s highly regarded world languages program.

Immersion is also central to Alaska Native language revitalization efforts. In Israel, New Zealand, and Hawaii, immersion education was at the core of indigenous language revival. At Ayaprun Elitnaurvik in Bethel, instruction is done in Yup’ik, and interest in Alaska Native language immersion education is growing elsewhere in the state.

HB 24 will help Alaska’s language immersion programs continue to provide high-quality dual-language education.

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