

ALASKA LEGISLATURE

Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins

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rep.jonathan.kreiss-tomkins@akleg.gov

Committees:
State Affairs, Co-Chair
Arctic Policy, Economic Development, and Tourism
Fisheries
Community and Regional Affairs



Juneau, Alaska 99801 (Jan. – April)
State Capitol, Room 411
907.465.3732

Sitka, Alaska 99835 (May – Dec.)
201 Katlian Street, Ste. 103
907.747.4665

Sponsor Statement | HB 19 – Limited 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 19 provides needed flexibility to school districts operating language immersion programs.

HB 19 gives the State Board of Education and Early Development 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 19, the state board 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 Spanish Immersion Program, Anchorage’s Rilke Schule German School of Arts and Sciences, and Anchorage School District’s highly regarded World Languages and Immersion 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 19 will help Alaska’s language immersion programs continue to provide high-quality dual-language education.