

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 20, 2017

8:03 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Harriet Drummond, Chair  
Representative Justin Parish, Vice Chair  
Representative Zach Fansler  
Representative Ivy Spohnholz  
Representative Jennifer Johnston  
Representative Chuck Kopp  
Representative David Talerico

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Lora Reinbold (alternate)  
Representative Geran Tarr (alternate)

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 135

"An Act relating to school district participation in the school construction grant program."

- MOVED CSHB 135(EDC) OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 102

"An Act relating to instruction in a language other than English; and relating to limited teacher certificates."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 135

SHORT TITLE: SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION GRANT PROGRAM

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) WESTLAKE

02/20/17	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/20/17	(H)	EDC
03/10/17	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/10/17	(H)	Heard & Held
03/10/17	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/20/17	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

BILL: HB 102

SHORT TITLE: LIMITED TEACHER CERTIFICATES; LANGUAGES

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) KREISS-TOMKINS

02/03/17	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/03/17	(H)	EDC
03/01/17	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/01/17	(H)	Heard & Held
03/01/17	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
03/15/17	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
03/15/17	(H)	<Bill Hearing Canceled>
03/20/17	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

**WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE DEAN WESTLAKE

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Speaking as the sponsor of HB 135, explained Amendment 2.

JESSE LOGAN, Staff

Representative Dean Westlake

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** On behalf of Representative Westlake, sponsor of HB 135, explained Amendment 1 and answered questions.

REID MAGDANZ, Staff

Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** On behalf of Representative Kreiss-Tomkins, sponsor of HB 102, provided updated information on the bill.

HEATHER POWELL, Teacher

Hoonah City Schools

Hoonah, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support during the hearing of HB 102.

TOM HAMILL

Palmer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Speaking on his own behalf, testified in support during the hearing of HB 102.

LISA WADE, Health, Education and Social Services Director

Chickaloon Village Traditional Council; Education Director  
Ya Ne Da Ah Tribal School  
Sutton, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support during the hearing of  
HB 102.

ALICE TAFF, PhD  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support during the hearing of  
HB 102.

X'UNEI LANCE TWITCHELL  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support during the hearing of  
HB 102.

JOSHUA GILL, Director of Personnel and Student Services  
Lower Kuskokwim School District  
Bethel, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition during the hearing  
of HB 102.

REPRESENTATIVE JONATHAN KREISS-TOMKINS  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Speaking as the prime sponsor of HB 102,  
answered questions.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:03:23 AM](#)

**CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND** called the House Education Standing  
Committee meeting to order at 8:03 a.m. Representatives  
Drummond, Parish, Johnston, Fansler, Kopp, and Talerico were  
present at the call to order. Representative Spohnholz arrived  
as the meeting was in progress.

#### **HB 135-SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION GRANT PROGRAM**

[8:04:00 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the first order of business would  
be HOUSE BILL NO. 135, "An Act relating to school district  
participation in the school construction grant program."

[8:04:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO moved Amendment 1, labeled 30-LS0549\A.1, Glover, 3/9/17, which read:

Page 1, lines 11 - 13:

Delete all material and insert:

"(g) The commissioner may extend the time allowed for a district to provide the required participating share if the district

(1) applies to the commissioner in writing to request an extension;

(2) demonstrates good cause for the requested extension;

(3) pays a portion of the district's participating share that is based on available funds; and

(4) provides the commissioner with a plan for paying the remaining portion as soon as possible."

REPRESENTATIVE FANSLER objected for discussion purposes.

[8:05:48 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:05 a.m. to 8:06 a.m.

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO read Amendment 1 [text previously provided].

[8:07:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE DEAN WESTLAKE, Alaska State Legislature, sponsor of HB 135, read Amendment 1 [text previously provided].

[8:08:46 AM](#)

JESSE LOGAN, Staff, Representative Dean Westlake, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Westlake, sponsor of HB 135, explained Amendment 1 allows for a waiver if there is a plan that a portion of the matching grant will be paid [by a school district]; the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) would decide if available funds are sufficient, and would approve a payment schedule. He acknowledged there is concern from some school districts regarding the requirement of available funds. Mr. Logan stated the intent is for the department to clarify "what available funds would mean" and what portion the district would pay.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON concurred with the concern and confusion expressed by the districts because it seems the department would decide whether a project is viable and warrants an extension, based on the local contribution and a district's long-term plan.

MR. LOGAN agreed.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON surmised a community may not wish to tie up their funds on hand, and might ask for minimum participation.

MR. LOGAN said correct.

[8:11:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO explained he offered Amendment 1 in the hope school districts could set aside designated construction funds for the purpose of leveraging grant funds; however, noting school districts are unsure of the effect of the amendment, he offered to withdraw Amendment 1.

REPRESENTATIVE FANSLER withdrew his objection to Amendment 1.

[8:12:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TALERICO withdrew Amendment 1.

[8:12:19 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:12 a.m. to 8:13 a.m.

[8:13:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH moved Amendment 2, labeled 30-LS0549\A.2, Glover, 3/13/17, which read:

Page 2, line 4:  
Delete "on"  
Insert "before, on,"

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON objected for discussion purposes.

REPRESENTATIVE WESTLAKE explained Amendment 2 would direct that the current language of the bill would not be applicable to any current active or issued grants. If Amendment 2 is adopted, school districts and boroughs with active grants may apply for an extension under the provisions of HB 135. There are two schools with active grants; Amendment 2 would only apply to

current, active grants that have been recently appropriated, and which would lapse after three years if participating shares have not been identified.

[8:15:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON withdrew her objection. There being no further objection, Amendment 2 was adopted.

CHAIR DRUMMOND, after ascertaining no one else wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 135.

[8:16:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH moved to report HB 135, as amended, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, CSHB 135(EDC) was reported from the House Education Standing Committee.

[8:16:23 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:16 a.m. to 8:19 a.m.

**HB 102-LIMITED TEACHER CERTIFICATES; LANGUAGES**

[8:19:08 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 102, "An Act relating to instruction in a language other than English; and relating to limited teacher certificates."

[8:19:42 AM](#)

REID MAGDANZ, Staff, Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins, prime sponsor of HB 102, informed the committee the bill is a repeal and reenactment of statute; he directed attention to a document provided in the committee packet entitled, "HB 102 - Comparison to Current Law" [undated], that clarified HB 102 is not all new law. In response to previous committee discussion and to comments received from the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), the sponsor will offer an amendment that would remove language in the bill related to the academic policy committees of charter schools, as the department seeks to work directly with districts and to avoid tension between charter schools and districts. Mr. Magdanz directed attention to a document provided in the committee packet entitled, "HB 102

- Response to concerns of Department of Education and Early Development," [undated]. He stressed two key points within HB 102 are: 1.) the Alaska State Board of Education & Early Development (state board) holds regulatory authority; 2.) discretion is held by school districts related to limited certificates. On the first point, HB 102 requires a teacher to have the identical skills that are currently required by existing limited certificate law; further, the state board is empowered to write regulations to interpret the language related to the standards of the limited teaching certificate. On the second point, HB 102 provides flexibility so local school districts can staff their language programs as needed, recognizing that the needs of districts differ for a variety of reasons. The bill is designed to provide school districts complete and total discretion over whether to hire a teacher holding a limited teaching certificate, and a school board can impose additional prerequisites.

[8:24:56 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND opened public testimony.

[8:25:20 AM](#)

HEATHER POWELL, Teacher, Hoonah City Schools, began her testimony speaking her first language. She informed the committee she is a Tlingit language teacher in the Hoonah City Schools district currently teaching students in preschool through 12th grade. She said she began her language training as a child taught by her grandmother, who was one of the first Tlingit language teachers in the Sitka School District. At that time - 1992 - her grandmother overcame the trauma of her experience in school, and was one of few elders willing to teach in schools, and in 1995, Ms. Powell began student teaching with her. Ms. Powell noted the importance of her language instruction and further instruction from other elders who, along with language instruction, taught the value of land and important public policy such as the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, the Alaska Native Brotherhood, and the Alaska Native Sisterhood. Along with math and cultural traditions, place-based learning also teaches kinship with family and the land, using Native language to teach skills for life and reality. Ms. Powell has continued this path and has raised three bilingual children. She noted the difficulty for emergent programs that do not have the capacity of sufficient certificated teachers to share their knowledge with children. She pointed out Alaska Native

languages are recognized official Alaska languages, and this is the time to value languages. Recently, seven of her eleven students expressed their interest in becoming Tlingit language teachers. She said the number of Native language speakers is declining and expressed the urgency of this loss. Building capacity by allowing teachers to be valued by ancestral and educational systems is important for children. She said [the bill] provides an opportunity to value teachers and language, and to bring language into everything one does. Ms. Powell closed her testimony speaking her first language.

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ asked for clarification on [the number of Native language speakers.]

MS. POWELL said last year there were 120 documented fluent language speakers on a list; this year there are less than 60 on the list. In further response to Representative Spohnholz, she confirmed the speakers were elders who are now deceased.

[8:30:49 AM](#)

TOM HAMILL said he is the Education and Training Director for the Knik Tribal Council, however, he is testifying on his own behalf as a concerned citizen. He provided a short background of his education, and said he is a certified teacher. Mr. Hamill said he has worked with certified and noncertified instructors as the director of the School to Work program at the nationally recognized Chugach School District, and as the education director of the Cook Inlet Tribal Council, directing fifty staff in eight schools serving approximately eight hundred Native students in the Anchorage School District. More recently, he served as principal of the Alaska Military Youth Academy, Department of Military & Veterans' Affairs, overseeing a nationally recognized academic team of noncertified instructors. Mr. Hamill opined a credential is not the only or best measurement of teaching skills when correlated with [student] learning success, and gave an example of an exemplary noncertified instructor who is now a successful principal. Mr. Hamill stressed the importance of providing the best instructors available who can teach content and also ensure each student learns, progresses, and can demonstrate proficient performance and application of their new knowledge. Alaska is facing the loss of many of its Native languages and thus must locate Native speakers, many of whom are elders who would be challenged to obtain a teaching certificate; however, in its present crisis, the state must use all the talent available. [HB 102] would allow schools and districts to use the best available teachers

of Alaska Native languages. In most cases, the Native language teachers hired are well known by the school community; in addition, their presence in the classroom would allow Alaska Native students to identify with, respect, and observe indigenous language speakers as they teach language and culture, which is an opportunity that was not possible for others. Through his research into the Upper Inlet Dena'ina dialect, Mr. Hamill said he is finding very few speakers today, although there is a rising interest in the language, and cautioned that if speakers are found, they will not hold a teaching certificate. He stated passage of the bill is "the right thing to do for the people whom we serve."

8:36:24 AM

LISA WADE, Health, Education, and Social Services Director, Chickaloon Traditional Village Council and Education Director, Ya Ne Da Ah School, began her testimony speaking her first language. Ms. Wade informed the committee Ya Ne Da Ah School was founded in 1992 by her grandmother who was the last elder fluent speaker of the Ahtna language in her region. She estimated less than 40 fluent speakers remain at this time, many of which are elders. Ya Ne Da Ah School currently is an immersion-style program - working towards a full immersion program - using certified and noncertified staff to teach. The noncertified teacher is a natural Dena'ina speaker, and the school is using all methods to retain and teach the Ahtna language. The noncertified teacher is responsible for managing a classroom and teaching language, and brings a wealth of life experience into the school. Due to her caring style of teaching and her experience with students affected by [fetal alcohol related neurodevelopmental disorder], the Ahtna language program is blooming, and some students are advancing to college. The teaching method at the school is a recognized teaching method using total physical response (TPR), and the school is developing its curriculum for the Ahtna language. Ms. Wade said students at her school are aged three years through twelve years and use a jigsaw method of teaching. A language apprentice is also present in the classroom and many elders visit to help ensure that every spoken and learned word is a healing word, in order to address intergenerational trauma. Students at Ya Ne Da School are Native and nonnative, some are Tribal citizens and some travel from other regions to attend. She stressed when students from other regions speak the Ahtna language it is powerful and healing for the community, as a generation ago many residents attended boarding schools and were prevented from speaking or studying their language. She spoke of the

difficulty of operating a small Tribal school in Alaska, but the school is the heart and center of the Tribe. Ms. Wade stated her strong support for the bill because every method should be used to retain the state's languages, and she invited the members to visit the school's Facebook page or web site.

8:42:19 AM

ALICE TAFF, PhD, informed the committee she is a certificated teacher with 14 years of experience in Alaska and is now working as a linguist. Dr. Taff said she is representing herself and is retired from teaching, and from the University of Alaska. She said many schools in rural areas are struggling and there is evidence worldwide that indigenous language immersion schools can help. In fact, research indicates the strongest immersion programs - in which 80-100 percent of content is delivered in the indigenous language - have the highest levels of overall academic achievement. Immersion education is the most reliable approach, and more education correlates with higher socio-economic status, better health, and increased safety. A new field of study links indigenous language use to health, and she described research that revealed lower suicide rates among First Nation communities in Canada in which at least one-half of the members had a conversational knowledge of their Native language, and lower diabetes rates in communities with strong [indigenous] language use. Therefore, immersion schooling in Alaska will become cost effective when the state pays less for healthcare after immersion schools are in place. Dr. Taff advised Alaska schools have been modeled after a Lower 48 system of education; Alaska Natives must adapt to this system, and this has not been successful in many parts of the state, as shown by academic and healthcare data. She suggested the Alaska education system should adapt and change to support education in the language and culture of its Native peoples. Because children only have one chance for their education, immersion programs recommend programs start now and persist while overcoming hurdles. The first hurdle to Alaska is to find teachers certified to teach all content in Alaska languages, and HB 102 can help schools do so. Dr. Taff closed, noting that the United Nations has designated 2018 as the Year of Indigenous languages and the bill would allow Alaskans to proclaim progress to positive results

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked how the programs in Canada approach indigenous language instruction.

DR. TAFF offered to provide further research.

[8:48:55 AM](#)

X'UNEI LANCE TWITCHELL began his testimony in an Alaska Native language. Mr. Twitchell informed the committee he is a professor of Alaska Native Languages at the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS), and a doctoral student of Hawaiian and Indigenous Language & Culture Revitalization at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, and is testifying on his own behalf. Mr. Twitchell said HB 102 brought to his mind the dire need to support Alaska Native language movements to prevent languages from dying. He recalled historical attempts to "kill" languages and the need to ensure better lives for all Alaskans by recognizing that Alaska Native languages are necessary and are linked to the health and wellbeing of Alaskans. He made the following recommendations:

- elevate the status of teachers of indigenous languages, which are official languages of the state
- include an Alaska Native language class in high school graduation requirements
- form a board of Alaska Native language education focused on language nests, K-12 education, higher education, and teacher development

MR. TWITCHELL cautioned the problem with an overreliance on existing educational systems is that THE existing systems were active in the genocide of Alaska Native languages, and he described methods used against students in schools to prevent the use of indigenous languages. However, in Hawai'i, language revitalization has allowed thousands of children to speak in language schools that have a 20-year history of 100 percent graduation rates. Mr. Twitchell said language fluency equals life for indigenous people. Alaska is at the bottom of educational success rates; to rise to the top, HB 102 would take the state in the right direction by elevating teachers of indigenous languages. Currently, knowledge bearers are seen as paraprofessionals and optional elements of curriculum, and therefore are due unequal pay. It is time to recognize that indigenous language teachers have worked hard to become qualified in indigenous knowledge systems: Alaska is on the cusp of successful language movements and needs state support to further advance. Although every successful language movement begins at the local level, widespread support and equity in education are needed to progress. Mr. Twitchell urged the committee to show that the state values and supports teachers of Alaska Native languages by legislating equal opportunity and systematic equity.

[8:53:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked whether the bill would ensure that more culture bearers would be teaching in schools across the state.

MR. TWITCHELL said yes. He opined the Type M [limited] certificate has served a purpose, but the system often results in a stratification of qualification and value. He gave an example of an Alaska Native language teacher who receives very low pay when compared to that of other teachers, which implies the superiority of one over the other. Further, the design of core curriculum that excludes indigenous languages, and the structure of teacher certification, denies equal status to teachers of indigenous languages.

[8:55:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON remarked:

... you seem to have embraced academics, to get to where you're going, and a number of the elders, to me, have, have a degree in, in not only the language, but have a degree in living, but it's, it's not as definable as what you're doing. How do you ... mesh those two as far as certification and as far as education?

MR. TWITCHELL said the knowledge bearers are fluent speakers who grew up speaking the language. Those who learn a second language are qualified to document, and can learn methods to teach, but "our language is contained within our first speakers." From his research, especially of Hawai'i, New Zealand, and Norway, indigenous peoples have equity in education and thus [indigenous language and culture] content is fully integrated in the educational systems, and is not excluded or omitted in a covert way, as it is in Alaska, where "Alaska Native people and their content, their ways of knowing their languages, are outside of the door." However, when highly-educated teachers are working from within the structure of higher education, the systems can be changed, so that language can be reintegrated into households, day care centers, and schools - and through a holistic approach - prevent the death of 20 Alaska languages.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSTON observed a redefinition of education is approaching, including the modernization of education and providing access to information for all Alaskan students. She asked how language instruction - mostly through a distance learning model - could include participation by cultural standard bearers so they can provide culture and mentorship.

MR. TWITCHELL questioned the belief that English is modern and indigenous languages are ancient because both languages come from ancient beginnings. About 50-60 years ago, indigenous languages stopped being the languages of daily use of communication in Alaska. He pointed out all languages evolve, but with disuse the ability to communicate in modern terms, even in English, would be lost. In Hawai'i there is a lexicon committee working to ensure indigenous languages have words for concepts such as gravity, for example. However, for one to believe science and math can't be taught in indigenous languages is nothing but ignorant and prejudiced. He related examples of how science is congruent with Native life in past and present times. Mr. Twitchell urged for an institutional change to value and support indigenous languages.

[9:03:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked for an opinion on the forthcoming amendment that would remove academic policy committees of charter schools from the bill.

MR. TWITCHELL was unsure whether the intent of the amendment is that charter schools are not specifically tied to HB 102. He related the method of teaching through language - as is done in New Zealand and Hawai'i - instead of teaching about language, results in a rise in fluency. As an aside, he noted indigenous languages in Australia are dying. He questioned the effect of the charter school model on teaching indigenous languages, or on schools governed by Tribes. In a time of self-governance, partnerships may make funding available through Tribal sovereignty, and with some control from the indigenous population, methods better than the current models may emerge. Mr. Twitchell expressed the need for a network of Alaska Native language advocates who would work to ensure that language teachers are trained to achieve fluency, that language nests are successful, and that there is state support for related initiatives.

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked for the definition of a language nest.

MR. TWITCHELL explained a language nest is a preschool or daycare that is a home where children are raised in a language. Adults and children learn language differently, related to the grammar aspect of each language, and language nests enable children to learn multiple languages simultaneously. He advised in a language nest kids, ranging in age from six months to three or four years, learn fluent language skills in three months.

CHAIR DRUMMOND thanked the speaker in her native Greek language and stated her strong support for teaching language at an early age in an immersion program.

[9:09:05 AM](#)

JOSHUA GILL, Director of Personnel and Student Services, Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD), stated LKSD opposes HB 102 because the district has addressed language and Native languages across Alaska by showing its students can learn in English and in Yupik; in fact, LKSD is working to keep the Yupik language in its communities through a partnership with schools, the communities, and parents. One of the reasons for opposition is just because a person speaks a language, or is a genius in math, that doesn't make them an excellent teacher of a language or math. The ability to teach is a specific skill and minimum proficiencies in language should be tested to ensure a teacher can provide the best education possible. Mr. Gill referred to Alaska standards in education that require the integration of standards in academics and [Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools] to ensure students are provided a well-rounded education. He said HB 102 would remove the minimum proficiency of a sixth-grade test to ensure students are taught by the strongest language instructors. [LKSD] seeks to maintain the standard of the Type [I] teaching certificate that was designed to ensure teachers complete teaching methods courses, so teachers can teach not only their language, but can teach other subjects in their language, such as math and social studies, as is happening at LKSD. Mr. Gill stated the current law ensures the best education possible for students.

[9:11:56 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked for the percentage of the population that is now fluent.

MR. GILL said LKSD is about 20 percent Alaska Native certified teachers, which is the highest percentage in the state, but more are needed. The district has developed a proficiency test and

has determined LKSD students are at about a 45 percent proficiency at a sixth-grade Yupik level.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH restated his question as to the percentage of the overall population that is fluent in Yupik.

MR. GILL said he did not know.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH inquired as to how the bill would interfere with the district's efforts.

MR. GILL responded that the bill removes the testing to determine teachers' proficiency in the language they are teaching. Currently, the state uses the ParaPro Praxis assessment which is equivalent to a sixth-grade exit test in math, reading, and writing. [LKSD] requires a teacher or associate teacher who is entering its language program to pass a minimum proficiency level in reading and writing in Yupik, which is administered at the time of their [job] application.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH pointed out the bill stipulates that school districts are not subject to the limitation on testing.

MR. GILL acknowledged the exception; however, minimum standards ensure students across the state are getting the best language instruction and the best education possible.

[9:14:59 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked for the name of the test referred to by Mr. Gill.

MR. GILL was unsure.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked whether the bill directly addresses the concern that culture bearers receive a lower rate of compensation than other teachers.

[9:16:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JONATHAN KREISS-TOMKINS, Alaska State Legislature, prime sponsor of HB 102, said [the compensation] issue is not directly changed by the proposed legislation, but would be indirectly addressed. As noted by previous testimony by the Fronteras Spanish Immersion charter school, Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District, there are no pathways for teachers who are fluent in their subject matter - and have

teaching ability - to be placed in classrooms. As a result, Fronteras school hires language teachers as long-term substitutes, although they are providing the same experience for students as do teachers who are fully certificated. He advised the ability to do so would be an indirect consequence of the bill. Although the bill does not mandate levels of teacher compensation, it allows more flexibility and options to local districts which choose to place a teacher holding a Type M certificate.

MR. MAGDANZ added his research has shown that language teacher placement in Alaska varies by district; for example, in the Anchorage School District (ASD), teachers holding a limited certificate are paid on the same pay scale as certified teachers. Other districts do not, and he offered to provide additional information on this issue from DEED at a future hearing.

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH asked for comment on the aforementioned amendment that would delete "or the academic policy committee of the charter school."

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS assured the committee the amendment is supported by the sponsors and does not affect the intent of the bill.

[9:20:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FANSLER referred to testimony in support of minimum testing and asked how competency [to teach a certain subject] should be demonstrated.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS explained the underlying premise of the bill is that one size does not fit all; in fact, nothing about HB 102 forces a school district, such as LKSD, to change its procedures. The bill creates more options for Alaska school districts to use the resources to which each school district has access. For example, the Yukon-Kuskokwim [Delta] area is the heartland of knowledge for Alaska Native languages, and thereby has a larger pool of expertise on which to draw. On the other hand, in the Annette Island School District, there are fewer than 20 fluent speakers of Sm'algyax, so more flexibility is needed. Representative Kreiss-Tompkins restated the intent of the bill is to allow school districts and school boards, that do not have the immense expertise available to LKSD, to be responsive to local expertise.

MR. MAGDANZ added that the renewal period, and any other provisions in the bill, will be addressed to ensure there would be no effect on LKSD's programs.

REPRESENTATIVE FANSLER surmised the concern raised by LKSD is that the bill removes the "floor" as to the qualifications of a classroom teacher; the school board - or without the aforementioned amendment, the academic policy committee - can decide that a teacher is qualified to teach any subject because he/she can speak a certain language. He asked if the sponsor is opposed to having minimum proficiency [requirements] placed in the bill.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS said testimony from ASD, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District, and others revealed that having to pass a nonexistent calculus exam in Tlingit is an unreasonable expectation. He opined [the bill ensures there is a floor] because the floor is a qualitative evaluation, and a procedural floor, in that to be certificated one must receive approval from the school board and DEED on a case-by-case evaluation. Therefore, the qualifications of a highly specialized teacher are reviewed by the community, the school district, and the school administration, and he concluded [the foregoing] comprise a reasonable standard.

MR. MAGDANZ restated the State Board of Education retains regulatory authority related to teacher qualifications under the proposed legislation. In regard to the Praxis testing, he pointed out teachers hired to teach a non-English language and who may have learned English as a second language, are currently required to pass a test conducted in English.

[9:29:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP turned to a larger issue: the danger of attempting to separate fact from meaning. Human understanding includes facts in context and in meaning; the bill offers spiritual healing to those who learn an indigenous language, and offers a capacity to heal and a powerful feeling of wholeness for peoples and culture. He opined the accountability piece - the [teacher qualification] floor - can best be judged by the local school boards and the parents of the children who are learning a language. In fact, the program will not be supported if it does not promote success in the lives of the children when they go out in the world. Representative Kopp stated the bill recognizes that people seek meaning in education and that the

most important aspect of a child's education is not found in a textbook, but in a teacher.

CHAIR DRUMMOND read from a document included in the committee packet entitled, "HB 102 - Response to concerns of Department of Education and Early Development" as follows:

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.

CHAIR DRUMMOND asked how teachers would demonstrate content area expertise.

MR. MAGDANZ referred to the current language in limited certificate regulations related to the expertise that is required for certificates issued for Alaska Native languages, Alaska Native culture, and vocational education. He said the regulations state documents that demonstrate subject area knowledge can be industry certifications, or evidence of work experience. In the case of Native language and culture, the certification can be based on letters of recommendation from knowledgeable sources, and resumes that reflect past related experiences. Mr. Magdanz said there are "creative and different ways to determine on a case-by-case basis whether someone has the skills to be in the classroom ...." He provided examples such as a demonstration of language fluency, the use of a sixth-grade level written test, classroom observation, and a review of student outcomes.

[9:36:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ directed attention to HB 102 on page 1, beginning on line 13, which read:

(b) A person may apply for a limited teacher certificate under this section if the person is the subject of a request made under (c) of this section and demonstrates, as required by regulations adopted by the board, instructional skills and subject matter expertise sufficient to assure the public that the person is competent as a teacher.

REPRESENTATIVE SPOHNHOLZ opined [demonstration of expertise] can be achieved at the local level by local priorities that are not defined by the state, and pointed out the priorities of Hydaburg

[City School District] would be different from those of ASD. She related how two of her children expanded their view of the world by their experience in a Spanish language immersion program, and expressed her confidence the bill would not [lower] the skill level of classroom teachers.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS, speaking from personal experience, said he is inspired by language immersion programs, which bring a meaningful cultural education, as well as language, in a transformative way. He opined the opportunity for students to reconnect with their language and culture is the deepest form of education, and can change students' lives for the better.

[9:41:35 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PARISH moved Amendment 1, labeled 30-LS0237\D.1, Glover, 3/7/17, which read:

Page 2, lines 7 - 8:

Delete "or the academic policy committee of the charter school"

Page 2, line 20:

Delete "or academic policy committee"

There being no objection, Amendment 1 was adopted.

[9:42:04 AM](#)

CHAIR DRUMMOND closed public testimony.

HB 102 was held over.

[9:42:47 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:42 a.m.