

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 29, 2019

8:01 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Harriet Drummond, Co-Chair  
Representative Andi Story, Co-Chair  
Representative Grier Hopkins  
Representative Chris Tuck  
Representative Josh Revak  
Representative DeLena Johnson

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Tiffany Zulkosky

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 24

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

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 24

SHORT TITLE: LIMITED TEACHER CERTIFICATES; LANGUAGES

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

02/20/19	(H)	PROFILE RELEASED 1/7/19
02/20/19	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/20/19	(H)	EDC, L&C
03/29/19	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106

**WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE JONATHAN KREISS-TOMKINS

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, introduced HB 24.

JOHN SCANLON, Staff

Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented HB 24 on behalf of Representative Kreiss-Tomkins, prime sponsor.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:01:35 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR HARRIET DRUMMOND** called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 7:37 a.m. Representatives Revak, Tuck, Story, Johnson, Hopkins, and Drummond were present at the call to order.

**HB 24-LIMITED TEACHER CERTIFICATES; LANGUAGES**

[8:02:25 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND** announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 24, "An Act relating to instruction in a language other than English; and relating to limited teacher certificates."

[8:02:47 AM](#)

**REPRESENTATIVE JONATHAN KREISS-TOMKINS**, Alaska State Legislature, introduced HB 24 as prime sponsor. He said identical legislation passed the House by unanimous vote during the Thirtieth Alaska State Legislature and, due to great interest in the subject, it is being reintroduced as HB 24. He remarked that rural and urban districts are unified in their interest in the subject of HB 24. He said there are immersion language programs in the Anchorage School District and immersion language charter schools in the [Matanuska-Susitna] area. He stated that there is concern about getting fluent language speakers into classrooms to support these programs. Representative Kreiss-Tomkins explained that HB 24 would create a new avenue for acquiring a Type M limited teacher certificate for individuals who are fluent in a language but who are not yet fully certificated. Under the proposed plan, a school district could opt to apply for a Type M limited teacher certificate for a specific person; the state Board of Education would consider that request; the Type M limited certificate, if granted, would last one year. He indicated that a number of school districts have expressed that HB 24 would allow them an important tool to "further their goals of immersion education."

[8:05:43 AM](#)

JOHN SCANLON, Staff, Representative Kreiss-Tomkins, Alaska State Legislature, said high-level language immersion programs are an educational model used widely across the country and increasingly across Alaska. He explained that in these programs at least fifty percent of learning is conducted in a target language, such as Spanish, German, or Yupik. Mr. Scanlon said there is a limited pool of fully certificated teachers who also have the necessary language abilities. He further explained that there are many fluent speakers who are well suited for language immersion programs but do not have full certification for reasons such as limited English proficiency, advanced age, or familial responsibility. He said HB 24 would address that issue by amending the state's limited teacher certificate program, allowing certificates to be issued at the request of the school district for teachers with a specific subject area expertise for which there are "very few fully certified, bachelor-degree trained teachers." He said the limited teacher certificates would allow schools to identify known local talents not generally available in local teacher applicant pools and bring them in to the classrooms.

MR. SCANLON stated that currently there are limited teacher certificates for technical or vocational education, Alaska Native culture and language, and military sciences, such as [Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps] (JROTC) programs. He stated that HB 24 would authorize the State Board of Education & Early Development to create a new type of limited certificate specific to teaching in language immersion programs. He said the board would be authorized to author regulations to ensure the certificate holder demonstrates "instructional skills and subject matter expertise sufficient to assure the public that the person is competent as a teacher." He noted that under HB 24, the board would be empowered to write the regulations and create the certificate, but it would not be required to do so. He added that school districts would retain complete discretion as to the people for whom they request - or do not request - the limited certificates. He stated that a limited certificate would be valid only within the school district for which it is issued. He said the limited certificate would be good for a one-year probationary period with an option for renewal pending the school district's affirmation of the holder's instructional skills and subject matter expertise, as borne out from a year of experience. He stated that HB 24 was drafted to address specific needs faced by language immersion programs.

[8:09:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK commented that HB 24 is a "repeal and replace" bill that appears to open up certifications for immersion programs. He asked Mr. Scanlon to discuss the obligations HB 24 would place upon the State Board of Education & Early Development regarding the creation of regulations.

MR. SCANLON said HB 24 would authorize - but not require - the State Board of Education & Early Development to create a limited certificate for teaching in a language that is not English. He added that the board would have a great deal of latitude in drafting the regulations. Mr. Scanlon went on to say that certificate holders for language immersion programs would not be required to achieve a minimum score on an examination unless that examination is given in the instructional language for which the limited certificate is valid. He expounded by saying that a Yupik-speaking certificate holder would not be required by state law to pass an examination in English.

[8:12:10 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY disclosed for the record that her daughter is a Tlingit speaker who currently teaches in a preschool immersion program. She commented that there are people of all ages with an interest in this issue. She asked for additional information concerning the one-year probationary status of the limited certificate and how the renewal process would look.

MR. SCANLON responded that the initial limited certificate would be valid for the one-year probationary period. He explained that the renewal periods would be regulated by State Board of Education & Early Development. He said the local school district would retain full discretion regarding the decision to renew a holder's certificate.

CO-CHAIR STORY asked how the renewal process would differ from the initial application process.

MR. SCANLON explained that the criteria for renewal would be determined by the State Board of Education & Early Development.

CO-CHAIR STORY commented that the application process for things like a teaching certificate can be - and ought to be - quite rigorous. She opined that the renewal process should be less time-consuming, assuming the person is qualified. She noted that the goal of an immersion program is for instruction to be conducted in the target language for the full day. She mused

that the holder would have to receive permission to teach many subjects, such as mathematics and science. She expressed her expectation that the State Board of Education & Early Development would list the subjects the holder would be authorized to teach.

8:15:58 AM

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND commented that an immersion language teacher not only has to be fluent in the language of instruction but must demonstrate subject matter expertise in the academic subjects they teach. She expressed concern that a person teaching mathematics in Yupik could not be sufficiently evaluated by a non-Yupik speaker, meaning it would be impossible to determine if the mathematics he/she teaches are being taught properly. She posited that English-speaking teachers would supplement the immersion language teacher, so that mathematics would be taught in both Yupik and English. She asked Mr. Scanlon if that assumption is correct.

MR. SCANLON referred to language on page 2 of the bill beginning at line 6. He said that language would require the certificate to specify not only the language for which it is valid, but also the specific subject areas. He stated that HB 24 contains two checks for the situation offered by Co-Chair Drummond. First, he said, the local school board would have the discretion to nominate an individual based on its own evaluation of the individual's qualifications to teach a specific subject, such as mathematics. Secondly, he said, the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) could be authorized by the State Board of Education & Early Development to assess the subject matter expertise of a potential limited certificate holder. He opined that this two-fold process would address the situation outlined by Co-chair Drummond.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked if the State Board of Education & Early Development would develop an examination process to assess an applicant's qualifications.

MR. SCANLON said that is one option, as long as the test it administers is not in a language other than the one in which the potential certificate holder would be instructing. He noted that, regarding other existing certificates, the board has a variety of ways to assess a certificate holder's subject matter expertise, such as an evaluation of the person's resume and letters of recommendation.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS added that to institute an examination would be the State Board of Education & Early Development's prerogative under the provision of HB 24 that empowers it to craft regulations it deems appropriate. He said the board would have the additional power to ultimately grant or deny a limited certificate in specific instances regardless of what regulations it might promulgate.

[8:20:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON said she supports language immersion schools, but stated that HB 24 is not about full immersion programs. Rather, she said, it deals with "bits and pieces" of the curriculum being taught in another language. She asked how Representative Kreiss-Tomkins envisions HB 24 playing out once passed. She also asked if there are currently any full Native Alaskan language immersion programs.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS replied that he knows of a successful elementary school program in Bethel with a target language of Central Yupik. He added that the Anchorage School District recently began a Yupik immersion program. He said there may be others but those are the two he can recall. He spoke to interest in Southeast Alaska for a Tlingit immersion program but noted that "nothing has gotten off the ground." Addressing Representative Johnson's first query, he said HB 24 would relate to immersion programs "as we know them." He stated that immersion programs involve a blend between the target language and English, with the ratio potentially as high as 95 percent target language and 5 percent English. He envisioned a scenario in which 70 percent of the academic day is in the target language and 30 percent is in English. He relayed his understanding of how the language blend "stair-steps" as students move through the program and develop increased target language proficiency.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON asked how Representative Kreiss-Tomkins envisions the provisions of HB 24 working in schools if a full immersion program is not possible.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS responded that the goal and intent is for HB 24, upon passage, to apply only to immersion programs. He established a scenario in which a school district wants to bring in a community member who speaks fluent Russian for a one-time lesson in Russian. He said there is no need for that individual to be certificated under HB 24 because the scenario would be a "piecemeal, non-immersion" situation. He remarked

that HB 24 is designed for school districts that have established a bona fide, long-term immersion program.

[8:25:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS noted that the bill does not specify languages to which it would apply. He asked a clarifying question about how HB 24 would treat Native Alaskan language immersion programs compared to how it would treat a Spanish immersion program.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS said HB 24 is inclusive to Native languages and world languages. He noted that the HB 24 is being championed as much by the world language community in Anchorage as it is by those interested in Native language immersion.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS commented that it is hard to believe there is a shortage of people certified to teach Spanish, French, or Russian. He noted that there are a bevy of language immersion programs in Anchorage for a variety of world languages. He asked why it is necessary for HB 24 to include world languages and not solely indigenous languages.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS deferred to written and public testifiers regarding the need for certified instructors. He named several people involved in language immersion programs. He commented that he was surprised to learn how difficult it is to run those programs. He stated that the initial impetus for HB 24 was Native language immersion programs but noted that the challenges faced by Native language and world language immersion programs are the same. He spoke to the process through which he became aware of the world language community in Alaska and the influence it has had on students and alumni of immersion programs. He expressed interest in providing that community an extra "tool in the toolbox."

[8:29:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK said "Alaska Native Languages and Culture" is already in statute. He commented that HB 24 would "expand it" to other immersion programs. He invoked the Japanese Immersion Program at Sand Lake Elementary School and the Rilke Schule German Charter School of Arts & Sciences, both in Anchorage, and discussed the successes achieved and challenges faced by each program. He noted that Rilke Schule receives funding from the Consulate of Germany. He said he envisions HB

24 expanding regulations for immersion programs and expressed his approval.

8:30:58 AM

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON asked if a limited certificate holder who is not a certified teacher in a traditional subject, such as mathematics, would be able to teach that subject.

MR. SCANLON referred to lines 9 through 11 on page 2 of the bill and, which stipulates that a request for a limited teacher certificate must specify the subject and instructional language for which the certificate is valid.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON asked if the certificate would be grade-specific or if it would allow instruction in any level from kindergarten to twelfth grade.

MR. SCANLON responded that most immersion programs in Alaska are targeted at the earlier years of education. He stated that the State Board of Education & Early Development could address that issue in its regulations.

8:32:50 AM

CO-CHAIR STORY opined that the goal would be for students to proceed in the program year after year. She discussed the topic of funding for preschool involvement in a language immersion program. She also expressed interest in the committee hearing about different language immersion models.

8:34:04 AM

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND asked if there are currently programs that are not being delivered due to the lack of available teachers with a certificate like the one proposed in HB 24.

MR. SCANLON deferred to invited testifiers to speak to the particulars of that question. He shared that Representative Kreiss-Tomkins' office has heard from several language immersion programs that have spoken to that topic.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS relayed that he has spoken with Anchorage School District representatives who say that the inability to be flexible in recruiting suitable teachers is often the limiting factor that prevents the starting of immersion programs. He noted that there is considerable demand

for language immersion programs from Anchorage School District parents. He said the lack of certified instructors often prevents other school districts without existing language immersion programs from starting them.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND said she assumes that invited testifiers would be available for the next time HB 24 is heard in the House Education Standing Committee.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS said that is correct.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND noted that Representative Kreiss-Tomkins had previously commented on the limited pool of teachers fluent in target languages, particularly in Alaska Native languages. She remarked that Alaska is losing fluent speakers in many Alaska Native languages. She spoke to the importance of preserving those language skills and empowering elders who are fluent in a target language but not necessarily fluent in English. She opined on the importance of preserving the "precious skills of the elders." She shared her "amazing experience" learning French in school from a teacher who only spoke to the class in that language. Co-chair Drummond noted as well that she did not speak English until she attended kindergarten. She reiterated the importance of utilizing the language skills of elders before they are lost.

[8:38:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK invoked the topic of Alaska Native code talkers, as several family members of code talkers had been introduced as guests during that day's House floor session. He noted that there is existing statutory language referring to limited teacher certificates for military science. He asked for clarification of "military science."

MR. SCANLON confirmed that "military science" relates to JROTC programs.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS added that the provision referenced by Representative Tuck may refer as well to the Alaska Military Youth Academy (AMYA).

[8:39:23 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND discussed cuts to educational programs proposed by Governor Michael J. Dunleavy. She asked if there is any consideration or contingency for if those cuts actually

happen. She remarked that such cuts would make it more difficult to implement HB 24.

8:40:08 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS said every district will weigh their priorities in the event of cuts. He noted that auxiliary programs are usually the first to be cut. He deferred to the school districts on what their priorities would be.

8:41:04 AM

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS asked if it is correct that many of the language immersion schools in Alaska are charter schools.

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND said not all of them.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS said it is a mix. He listed various examples of programs housed in charter school and others housed in traditional schools.

REPRESENTATIVE HOPKINS shared that he has concerns about the financial ramifications for school districts related to the opening of "numerous charter schools for additional languages with uncertified teachers to teach in them." He said school districts have a very limited ability to say "no" to opening up new charter schools, and that charter schools have a hefty financial impact on school districts. He said he understands and is supportive of the need to create opportunities to learn Alaska Native languages. He spoke to the diversity of the Anchorage School District and the diverse needs of its students. He reiterated his financial concerns related to charter schools and his concerns related to the potential broad application of HB 24. [Due to technical difficulties, the last portion of Representative Hopkins' statement was not recorded.]

8:43:15 AM

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND discussed her experience on the Anchorage School Board and spoke to the "long, involved process" around chartering new schools. She said that there are generally startup costs in addition to the basic operation of the school. She said the base student allocation (BSA) "follows the child" from the "regular" school program to the charter school program, so funding is not increased when the total amount of students remains the same. Shifting back to the topic of immersion programs, Co-Chair Drummond expressed interest in seeing a

comprehensive list of language immersion programs throughout Alaska. She mentioned various programs focused on Japanese, Spanish, and Yupik.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS said his office would follow up with that request.

[8:45:32 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY commented that the [Association of Alaska School Boards] (AASB) has been trying to help school districts meet the desire to revitalize Alaska Native languages. She discussed successful efforts in New Zealand to preserve and grow the Maori language. She spoke to the lessons and guidance that success can offer. She expressed interest in learning about different models of language immersion and language preservation.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS noted that AASB supports HB 24. He commented that AASB has done great work on language education and has developed partnerships with rural school districts. On the topic of the Maori language in New Zealand, he noted that the success rate for language revitalization efforts is "infinitesimally low." He opined that a sober understanding of that fact is important. He said successful efforts to revitalize Maori, Hawaiian, Gaelic, Manx, and Hebrew are exceptional. He expressed interest in efforts to revitalize Tlingit in Southeast Alaska. He said he is motivated by the urgent state of Alaska's Native languages.

CO-CHAIR STORY added that it took New Zealand 30 years to go from 30 fluent Maori speakers to 4,000 fluent Maori speakers. She spoke to the necessity of "deep desire" and persistence to achieve success. She opined that HB 24 is the sort of legislation aligned with such desire and persistence to protect Native languages.

[8:50:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOHNSON commented that she would like to hear input from [DEED] regarding the issuance of limited certificates.

[8:50:56 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS said he would pass along that request.

8:51:04 AM

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND announced that HB 24 would be held for further review.

8:51:38 AM

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 8:52 a.m.