

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE LABOR AND COMMERCE STANDING COMMITTEE

February 17, 2020

3:16 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Ivy Spohnholz, Chair
Representative Louise Stutes
Representative Zack Fields
Representative Sara Hannan
Representative Andi Story
Representative Mel Gillis
Representative Sara Rasmussen

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

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)	PREFILE 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
03/29/19	(H)	Heard & Held
03/29/19	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/01/19	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
04/01/19	(H)	Heard & Held
04/01/19	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/03/19	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
04/03/19	(H)	Heard & Held
04/03/19	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/05/19	(H)	EDC RPT 5DP 2NR

04/05/19 (H) DP: TUCK, ZULKOSKY, JOHNSON, STORY,
DRUMMOND
04/05/19 (H) NR: REVAK, HOPKINS
04/05/19 (H) EDC AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 106
04/05/19 (H) Moved HB 24 Out of Committee
04/05/19 (H) MINUTE(EDC)
04/24/19 (H) L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124
04/24/19 (H) Heard & Held
04/24/19 (H) MINUTE(L&C)
05/03/19 (H) L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124
05/03/19 (H) Heard & Held
05/03/19 (H) MINUTE(L&C)
05/13/19 (H) L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124
05/13/19 (H) Heard & Held
05/13/19 (H) MINUTE(L&C)
02/17/20 (H) L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124

WITNESS REGISTER

REPRESENTATIVE JONATHAN KREISS-TOMKINS

Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, explained the changes in the committee substitute (CS) for HB 24, Version M, and answered questions.

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Commissioner
Department of Education & Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 24 and answered questions from the committee.

ERIN HARRINGTON, Staff
Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the hearing on HB 24, on behalf of Representative Kreiss-Tomkins, prime sponsor.

SONDRA MEREDITH, Teacher Certification Administrator
Teacher Certification Section
Department of Education & Early Development
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the hearing on HB 24.

BRANDON LOCKE, Director

World Languages and Immersion Programs
Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 24 and answered questions from the committee.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:16:09 PM](#)

CHAIR IVY SPOHNHOLZ called the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:16 p.m. Representatives Stutes, Hannan, Story, Gillis, Rasmussen, and Spohnholz were present at the call to order. Representative Fields arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 24-LIMITED TEACHER CERTIFICATES; LANGUAGES

[3:16:46 PM](#)

CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ 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."

[3:18:05 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES moved to adopt the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 24, labeled 31-LS0290\M, Caouette, 2/10/20, as the working draft.

[3:18:18 PM](#)

CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ objected for the purpose of discussion.

[3:18:23 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JONATHAN KREISS-TOMKINS, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, explained the changes to HB 24 proposed under Version M. He stated that version M replaces version A, which was previously heard and amended in the House Labor & Commerce committee. Version M incorporates the committee's amendment, which included a title change and new language. The amendment addressed a name change for the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council (ANLPAC). This CS would also add one more change related to ANLPAC, increasing the number of seats on the council from five to

seven. He noted that this last change was not previously discussed in committee but has been requested by the council. He said "the meat" of the bill relating to limited teacher certificates remains the same.

[3:19:26 PM](#)

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Commissioner, Department of Education & Early Development, reported that the state is having difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers. He said he appreciates the creativity and insight that HB 24 represents in terms of addressing those issues. He expressed his support for HB 24 moving through the committee process and the legislature to assist school districts and the Alaska state Board of Education & Early Development as they address this problem.

[3:21:24 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked how the Department of Education & Early Development (DEED) can provide technical support to school districts to implement and discover innovative programs. He asked how the department helps school districts find the best way to develop local talent, whether it's an apprenticeship program or another model.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON pointed out that over the last year, the state board has been reviewing all the regulations associated with teacher certification to find any hindrances that might deter potential candidates. He further noted that the governor has called for a working group to explore existing programs, alternative pathways, quality maintenance, and to address the [teacher] shortages.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS questioned whether existing funding streams are being fully utilized.

COMMISSIONER JOHNSON discussed "micro-credentialing," as well as the possibility of a certificate being a culmination of various opportunities through different kinds of teacher training programs.

CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ removed her objection. There being no further objection, Version M was adopted as the working draft.

[3:25:03 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS stated that HB 24 is a bill relating to limited teacher certificates for immersion language programs. He noted that this bill is substantially similar - and in many ways identical to - a piece of legislation that unanimously passed the House in 2017. That legislation, however, died in the last committee of referral in the Senate. HB 24, he said, is its encore act. This bill relates to the growing interest from parents and school districts in immersion language education, and the growing body of research that shows immersion education leads to excellent outcomes for students. He stated that the success of the Anchorage School District's immersion language program speaks for itself, adding that immersion language education is the only way to address the endangerment and extinction of Alaska Native languages because it creates a new generation of fluent speakers. He further noted the difficulty of getting teachers into immersion classrooms. HB 24 effectively serves teachers who have language fluency and knowledge and allows them to get into the classroom. He said the intent of the bill is to be a steppingstone for teachers on the path to getting fully and traditionally certified. He went on to discuss the certification application process, which consists of a "triple-layer review." First, the school district must affirmatively approve and apply on behalf of the teacher; second, the state board must review the application coming from the school district and approve or deny it; and finally, the certificate must be reapplied for after one year. He reiterated that HB 24 addresses the problem of flexibility in teacher certification.

[3:31:10 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN sought clarification on the intention of the one-year renewal requirement. She asked if the goal is for teachers to ultimately obtain full certification within a certain timeframe.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS said that because the certification process is so arduous, there's no expectation that a teacher would reapply year after year indefinitely.

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN inquired as to what's preventing teachers from obtaining their full teacher certificate.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS explained that the Praxis exam is administered in English, which is a limiting factor to getting certificated for non-English speaking teachers. He added that the thought behind HB 24 is that while an individual is

obtaining English language fluency to pass the Praxis, he or she could teach in their native language under a limited teacher certificate during "the interim."

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN pointed out that it could be difficult for young children to communicate with a teacher who is not fluent in English.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS replied that if someone were certified to teach in Spanish under a limited language certificate, that certification would not extend to teaching English. He said in many immersion programs the day is split between instruction in English and the target language. He directed attention to page 2, lines 11-13, which read as follows:

A request for a limited teacher certificate under (a)(4) of this section must specify the subject and instructional language for which the certificate is valid.

[3:36:10 PM](#)

CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ recounted her daughter's experience in a Spanish immersion program. She explained that half of the day was taught in Spanish and the other half was taught in English, which switched during the second half of the year so that all subjects were taught in both languages.

[3:36:47 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN directed attention to Section 1 of Version M. She asked if this would only allow Alaska Native culture to be taught in language immersion programs.

[3:38:07 PM](#)

ERIN HARRINGTON, Staff, Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Kreiss-Tomkins, prime sponsor, replied that paragraphs (1), (2), (3), and (4) are not exclusionary. She said it does not take away the Alaska Native Culture, instead it adds a fourth paragraph, which is (a)(4), "any subject if the language of instruction is not English." This would give the department the ability to issue a new type of certificate that speaks specifically to the immersion language component.

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN expressed her concern that the way Section 1 is written, teachers of Alaska Native culture would not be able to teach Native culture and language outside of an immersion school.

[3:40:41 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS acknowledged that there wouldn't be any harm in adding "language and culture" to page 1, line 11. He said that was the intent of the bill.

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN reiterated that she does not want to change the statute and therefore lose 65 language and culture teachers.

CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ assured Representative Hannan that the bill sponsor is amenable to her suggestion.

[3:42:52 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES directed attention to page 1, line 14, and asked if that means a French speaker, for example, could teach any subject in French without a teacher certificate.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS stated that is the nature and definition of immersion language programs - to take in everything in the target language for at least part of the day, which makes for full fluency in that language. He added that immersion language programs are generally primary schools, grades K-6, and different subjects are taught in the target language.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES said she's not familiar with the concept of immersion language programs, adding that she finds it interesting that someone could potentially "come off the street and teach these kids without a teaching certificate."

[3:44:59 PM](#)

CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ clarified the concept of an immersion program. She acknowledged that Representative Stutes identified a main concern - that people could be teaching subjects without any training in education. She noted the importance of trying to figure out how to meet Alaska's educational goals while accommodating access to language and cultural programs.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS added that the Kodiak Island Borough School District would never approve anyone off the street because they care about the quality of education. He pointed out that the bill specifies that the DEED sets regulations requiring that candidates have subject area expertise, which creates a vetting process. He opined that there are enough safeguards built in to strike a balance with the issue that Representative Stutes identified with.

CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ asked for a description of the Type I, Type M, and Type W certificates.

[3:51:59 PM](#)

SONDRA MEREDITH, Teacher Certification Administrator, Teacher Certification Section, Department of Education & Early Development, explained that Type M is, "defined in statutes that talk about three different areas: the Alaska cultural and language piece, there's also the military science, and also the CTE, or career and technical education." That allows the district to find local expertise that they want to bring into their classrooms. It also allows for the expert not to necessarily have the testing, the teacher preparation program, or the bachelor's degree that's required in statutes for regular certification. Type I is a specialized certificate that's outlined in regulation and allows for an individual with expertise in a Native language who's also working towards their bachelor's degree to be employed as an associate teacher. The Type W allows an individual with a bachelor's degree who's interested in becoming fully licensed to enroll in a program. It provides that person with allowances around the testing and gets them in the classroom sooner rather than later.

[3:54:46 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN asked for insight on why the Type I isn't used more in districts other than the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD).

MS. MEREDITH replied that the Type I program requires a strong desire at the local level. LKSD, she said, has invested a great deal of time into their "career ladder," which allows for paraprofessionals to pursue that route to certification. She added that institutionalizing it requires the prioritization of a strong desire for a multi-lingual classroom opportunity for students.

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN asked how many people have become fully licensed professional teachers that started from the Type I pathway.

MS. MEREDITH said she does not have that information at this time. Nonetheless, she offered her belief that the numbers aren't large.

[3:56:58 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked how many support staff help with the [Type I] program. He recalled that LKSD had staff who travel to different villages and provide instructional support. He surmised that not as many districts have the same capacity to support a labor-intensive program. He asked if Ms. Meredith shared that impression.

MS. MEREDITH said that is a good reflection of it.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS offered his recollection that fewer than 50 percent of participants were completing [Type I] within a 10-year window at the University. It's great that the University program worked, he said, but what was lacking was support for the associate teachers at the entry and mid-levels. He added that the pathway was not entirely practical, which is where there's an opportunity for the state to provide resources so that people can complete it.

[3:58:19 PM](#)

CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ asked how many people are currently certificated under Type M.

[3:58:48 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN answered 65.

[3:59:16 PM](#)

BRANDON LOCKE, Director, World Languages and Immersion Programs, Anchorage School District, stated the Anchorage School District has been doing immersion programs since 1989. At the elementary level, students receive half of their core instruction in the target language and the other half in English. They receive their entire English language arts curriculum, as well as their math curriculum, in English from an English-speaking teacher. The target languages in the current immersion programs are

Japanese, Spanish, Russian, German, Chinese, French, and Yupik. He explained that at the elementary level, the students are taught science, social studies, and language arts, in the target language by a native speaker of that language. The secondary level is a continuation model where the students receive one course, as well as social studies, in the target language. Finally, in high school the students take one period a day of a theme-based, advanced language course in the target language. He continued by saying that in a district of about 48,000 people, 8,000 students are enrolled in a world language or immersion program. In immersion specifically, there are 2,300 students. One of the biggest concerns, he said, is that there are a number of [immersion] programs and no pool of teacher candidates. He stated that there is a shortage of teachers and the immersion programs are near impossible to fill. He explained that they have attempted to remedy this issue by sponsoring people on visas; however, one of the catch-22s is that the teaching certificate must be in-hand before the U.S. government will issue a visa. He added that the visa process itself can take up to 6 months if not longer. He pointed out that many of the people applying to teach are coming into education from a different career. He offered his belief that HB 24 is a way to get people certificated in a timely manner.

[4:04:18 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN asked how many funded unfilled positions are currently in the budget for immersion teachers through the world language program.

MR. LOCKE said that he is not aware of any right now.

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN asked, "what the cost is for bringing someone on board and getting them up to speed if they don't decide they want to stay in Alaska and continue the teaching path."

MR. LOCKE sought to clarify the meaning of "up to speed."

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN asked how children in kindergarten or first grade communicate with their target language teacher. She asked if there is another adult in the classroom.

MR. LOCKE reiterated that teachers don't speak English to their students in immersion programs.

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN asked what happens if there is a communication issue. She surmised that the teachers in the system can communicate in English if needed.

MR. LOCKE affirmed that. He said that the English partner teacher will be there too, as well as the administrators and many English speakers in the school that could assist. Nonetheless, he reiterated that in the immersion classroom, the instruction is never done in English.

[4:06:37 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN sought clarification on how the two teachers split up their students during the day, and how that affects costs.

MR. LOCKE established a scenario in which there are 50 first graders. He explained that 25 of them are receiving their instruction in English in the morning while the other 25 are receiving their instruction in French, for example. The two groups will then switch halfway through the day. He said the cost is the same as the traditional setting of one teacher in one classroom.

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN asked if the two teachers share one classroom or if each one has their own.

MR. LOCKE replied each teacher has their own classroom and the students rotate halfway through the day.

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN questioned whether the temporary licensed teachers have a teacher's aide.

MR. LOCKE said it depends on the program. Many [teachers] will have interns from overseas working with them. He shared an anecdotal example about a teacher from France who has been working as a substitute teacher for 5 years because she doesn't qualify for certification in Alaska.

[4:10:01 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN asked what it costs the district when someone reapplies for a temporary license every year. She questioned whether that person would receive full benefits.

MR. LOCKE said yes, if that person is certified.

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN, again, asked how much that would cost the school district.

MR. LOCKE explained that the school district doesn't incur the cost of teacher certification. He said the only cost to the district would be maintaining that person's employment through teacher benefits.

[4:11:30 PM](#)

CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ pointed out that a Type M certificate already exists. She asked what HB 24 does that's different and how it allows more access for educators.

MR. LOCKE explained that Type M's language limits the certificate to military science, like ROTC, and "Alaska Native language and culture."

[4:12:37 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN asked what's stopping the aforementioned French teacher from becoming either fully certified or becoming a world language teacher.

MR. LOCKE said the teacher prep program that the French woman took isn't recognized in the U.S. because she received it in France. He explained that when her transcripts were evaluated, the evaluation company indicated that she hadn't completed an American approved teacher certification program.

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN asked if the school district has encountered that situation with every foreign national.

MR. LOCKE said yes, in many other countries teacher training programs look different than they would in the U.S. Furthermore, different terminology is used that doesn't translate.

[4:17:58 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS asked where the non-immersion Spanish language program in his district could go in terms of continuation through middle school, and how the limited certificate in HB 24 could expand language programs throughout Anchorage.

MR. LOCKE offered his belief that HB 24 could assist with finding staff who could continue to teach and speak Spanish in the Spanish language program. Where it will continue, he said, is not his area of expertise.

REPRESENTATIVE FIELDS said, "right now, the district is already bearing significant costs and inconvenience of continuously recruiting and replacing teachers in world languages." He surmised that this new program will not cost more than what they are already paying.

MR. LOCKE confirmed that. He added that HB 24 could be a temporary fix for individuals who require a work visa. He shared an anecdotal example.

[4:21:22 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STORY mentioned indigenous languages and her daughter's work in the Tlingit preschool immersion program. She asked how teachers are found and prepared for the Yupik [immersion] program.

MR. LOCKE noted that the Yupik program is in its second year. He said it's a unique situation for the teachers, as all three went through the UA system. He expressed concern that it will be challenging to find qualified teachers as the program grows.

CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ noted that the Yupik immersion program is in her neighborhood. She said it's exciting to see a Native language immersion program in Anchorage where there's an incredibly rich diversity of Native traditions. She shared a personal anecdote about her daughters' experience in the Spanish immersion program.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY offered her belief that the current education system resulted in the loss of [Native] language. She stated that it's important to be flexible and move quickly to bring more teachers into the classroom to prevent the continued loss of Alaska Native languages.

[4:26:20 PM](#)

CHAIR SPOHNHOLZ announced that HB 24 was held over.

[4:28:14 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at [4:28] p.m.