



## Kodiak Island Borough School District

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**To:** Board of Education  
**From:** Kim Saunders, Assistant Superintendent  
**CC:** Dr. Cynthia Mika; Superintendent  
**Date:** March 23, 2026  
**Subject:** Immigration Visa Update and Request for Expenditure over \$50,000

KIBSD has hired thirty-three teachers on either J-1 or H-1B visas since FY22. Six teachers have left KIBSD either by personal choice, District decision or due to regulations requiring a home residency requirement related to their specific circumstance. The Board of Education voted to begin the green card process for the six teachers (\*) with the longest service to the District in the spring of 2025.

Visa Type	Number of Teachers	Left the District	Retention
FY22 J-1	6	2	3 transfers to H-1B * 1 pending H-1B*
FY22 H-1B	2	0	2 *
FY23 J-1	2	2	0 *required home residency
FY23 H-1B	6	1	4
FY24 H-1B	8	2	6
FY25 H-1B	9	0	9
Totals	33	6	26

This memo is requests approval of an additional \$100,000 to support long-term workforce stability through the green card process.

Kodiak Island Borough School District (KIBSD) continues to rely on international teachers to fill critical vacancies, particularly in rural schools and hard-to-fill positions.

- KIBSD currently employs 26 international teachers.

- We are in the process of submitting 11 visa renewals before the end of the current school year, with anticipated approvals ranging from 1–3 years.
- Five teachers are actively in the green card process.
- One teacher transitioning from J-1 to H1-B remains pending.

Legal services for immigration support have transitioned from Ford Murray to Fisher Phillips, as approved by the Board on November 3, 2025. This change supports continued access to specialized legal expertise in immigration and employment law.

### Current Context and Considerations

The variables identified in the prior memo remain relevant, with several key updates:

- **Federal Immigration Volatility:** The immigration system continues to shift unpredictably, impacting timelines, approvals, and costs.
- **Rising Visa Costs:** Visa-related costs continue to increase. Notably, fees associated with H1-B applications have risen significantly, with some costs reaching \$100,000 per application.
- **Legislative Efforts:** Senator Lisa Murkowski has introduced legislation to waive these fees for Alaska school districts following denial of prior waiver requests to USCIS.
  - This would apply only to new visa applications, not renewals or extensions.
- **Green Card Cost Stability:** Employer-related costs for the green card (PERM) process have remained consistent and predictable, unlike visa-related expenses.
- **Individualized Timelines:** Each teacher continues to have unique visa timelines, requiring ongoing legal support and flexibility in planning.
- **Recruitment and Retention Challenges:** Declining applicant pools—especially for the rural settings—continue to necessitate every effort for stability.

Based on guidance from legal counsel, the District is prioritizing the PERM (green card) pathway as a long-term workforce strategy.

While the PERM process itself does not immediately extend a teacher’s current visa status, it is a critical step given that H-1B visas are limited to a maximum of six years. Initiating the PERM process early increases the likelihood that:

- Teachers can remain in the United States beyond the six-year H-1B limit, ideally transitioning to permanent residency
- Green card approval is secured before additional H-1B extensions would otherwise be required

This approach reduces the risk of employment disruption due to visa limitations and supports long-term retention. Additionally, bundling PERM applications allows the District to reduce recruitment-related costs and improve efficiency in processing.

Overall, this strategy strengthens workforce stability by providing a clearer, more sustainable pathway for retaining experienced educators in Kodiak.

Administration requests approval of an additional FY26 expenditure in the amount of \$100,000 to initiate the green card process for all 20 teachers currently under contract for the 2026-2027 school year.

- Estimated Total Cost:
  - Approximately \$10,000 per teacher over two years (district cost)
  - Reduced per-teacher cost due to group processing efficiencies

This investment supports the District's long-term staffing strategy by strengthening stability, reducing costs, and increasing workforce flexibility.

- Workforce Stability and Retention: Supporting teachers through the green card process increases the likelihood that they will remain in Kodiak long-term, reducing turnover and maintaining continuity for students, schools, and communities.
- Reduced Recruitment and Onboarding Costs: Teacher turnover carries a significant financial impact. A 2017 University of Alaska study estimated the average cost of teacher turnover at approximately \$20,000 per position, with over \$11,000 attributed to training and onboarding (University of Alaska Anchorage, 2017). By increasing teacher longevity, the District can reduce recurring costs associated with recruitment, hiring, relocation, and onboarding of new staff. *Reference: <https://scholarworks.alaska.edu/handle/11122/7815>*
- Increased Teacher Longevity in Kodiak: Providing a pathway to permanent residency encourages teachers to invest in the community and remain with the District beyond the limitations of temporary visa programs.
- Staffing Flexibility and Certification Growth: Teachers with long-term status are more likely to pursue additional certifications, including special education endorsements, which directly supports District initiatives. This increases flexibility in staffing assignments and helps address critical shortage areas.
- Sustained Access to Qualified Educators: By reducing turnover and strengthening retention, the District ensures continued access to experienced, highly qualified educators for Kodiak students, particularly in rural and hard-to-fill positions.

Overall, this investment aligns with District priorities of stability, fiscal responsibility, and strategic workforce development.

KIBSD remains committed to recruiting and retaining highly qualified educators while prioritizing U.S.-based candidates. Given current conditions, investing in the green card pathway represents the most sustainable and strategic approach to maintaining a stable workforce.

Please contact the administration with any questions or for additional details.