

Planning Is Foremost—

Nulato's Education Experiment

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Staff Writer

(Second of Two Parts)

Recently, the Tundra Times described a unique school building program now going on in Nulato. Today, we describe villagers' views of various schools in Kenai, Anchorage, Soldovia, Tyonek and other villages and cities—and what they mean to Nulato.

Ivan Sipary is chairman of the Change Agent Team (CAT) in Nulato. He is not married and represents the unmarried residents of the town in this planning group which is developing ideas for a new school in the village.

In the Tundra Times office, Sipary, along with other village members of the CAT described a hectic week-long site visitation which took 9 Nulato residents to elementary and high schools in Soldotna, Homer, Soldovia, Tyonek and Anchorage.

"For a week, we gathered ideas on how we want our school constructed and what will be taught—questioning students and teachers as well as principals," Sipary said.

To complete a "Change Process" in Nulato, the Division of State Operated Schools and the Northwest Educational Laboratories educators they worked with decided Nulato residents would not be half-participants in planning their new school. Rather than having second-hand descriptions of what was going on in other schools in Alaska, they would have the residents go to the schools, see the programs in operation and form their own opinions.

During the site visitation, the Change Agent Team members from Nulato encountered some of Alaska's most innovative school programs, as well as large schools like East Anchorage H.S. State Operated Schools Administrator Showater Smith guided the tour, along with Ray Jungeward, a Research and Development specialist from N.W. Regional Laboratories.

In Soldovia, Nulato residents saw the individualized teaching program at work.

In this program, students utilize an Instructional Materials Center to do most of their work. They collect information from the books, audio-visual aids and other sophisticated learning aids available in the center, meeting with teachers periodically for guidance, special instruction and help.

The school itself is built on the open pod concept, with classrooms opening off the materials center. There is almost no limit to the subjects students can study. Teachers often serve as resource people for up to 24 different subject areas, working with their students on a contract basis. With the contract system, the student and teacher together decide what work must be covered in what areas for each grade. Often, students will complete their work in one subject area in less than the assigned time, then go on to more advanced work or to different subjects.

While students use the classrooms for help and instruction, most work is done in the materials center.

CAT members from Nulato hope to incorporate many of these advances into their new school. They found carpeted classrooms a boon in schools built with contiguous open classrooms. Besides a decrease in noise, younger children liked to work in groups on the floor, increasing their freedom of move-



SCHOOL PLANNER — Representing an important segment of the Nulato population, the students, Melvin Sommer traveled with the Change Agent Team from the village to visit schools in Anchorage, Kenai and various villages and towns in Alaska. After a week, he was no longer impressed by the 'outside', but spoke favorably of the large gym at Tyonek.

ment.

Sliding doors were another plus, they found. Relocated walls, partitions and furnitures made the school buildings more adaptable.

In Kenai, they found schools where community residents are invited in, not locked out. Parents are always welcome to participate in the school program.

Most impressive to Nulato residents was the Indian community of Tyonek. After sale of their oil leases several years ago Tyonek villagers consolidated their over \$6 million in funds for investment.

"It was like a dream," Sipary described the village of Tyonek and was echoed by other CAT members. Tyonek villagers own an office building in Anchorage, their own air line, stores, schools and homes. Prefabricated, completely furnished homes house every family, with sufficient space for all.

"Community spirit is very high," Sipary explained.

Nulato residents found their site inspections turned up problems that administrators did not mention in their talks to the group. Sufficient storage space was often lacking in schools. Teachers described the extra work needed for the individualized teaching program—which requires more planning time.

Curriculum changes in Nulato, explained principal David Schutt, will start within two months after the CAT's return and recommendations.

Special seminars and workshops will be necessary to acquaint teachers with new methods. Other changes, which depend on space and sophisticated audio-visual learning materials, will have to wait for a new building.

This month, Nulato CAT members, who have analyzed what they want in a school, will meet with architects to describe specifications. They are excited about the "Change Process"—about instructional packages which can teach a student a subject without a qualified teacher in each field. They feel the school will reflect their community and be part of it.

On their final day in Anchorage, CAT members met with the State Board of Education. They seek a regional high school in their village—an innovation which would increase the number of students several fold and require greater funds than their present school plan.

Probably, an answer will not come before plans for the new Nulato school are complete—for the over 100 students they expect their school to house.

Fire Protection System for Tanana Hosp.

A new fire protection system will be installed this year at the U.S. Public Health Service Native Hospital in Tanana.

According to Senator Mike

Gravel (D-Alaska), the Indian Health Service recently awarded a \$66,525 contract to Fire Prevention Systems, Inc. of Seattle to install the system at the Tanana Hospital.

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Grants Tlingit-Haida

The economic development administration has approved a \$54,965 grant to the Central Council of the Tlingit - Haida Indians.

Purpose of the grant is to help the council carry out recommen-

dations of an EDA funded study regarding the spending of \$4 million for social and economic development.

The council is providing \$121,119 to complete the \$176,084 total cost of program.

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