

# State To Drop Village Schools?

## *Hensley And Sackett Call For Guarantees*

Alaska Natives who have been held off at arm's length for so many years on so many issues are suddenly having everything dropped in their laps all at once. The latest drop is the entire rural school system.

Commissioner of Education, Marshall L. Lind, has recommended to the state legislature a total phase-out of the entire State Operated Schools, placing

rural schools under the jurisdiction of local school districts, contracting the state boarding home program to Native regional corporations, and transferring military base schools to nearby boroughs.

Lind proposes abolishing SOS by July 1, suggesting that areas which do not now have school districts be organized along geographic lines in units of six to nine villages.

State Senator John Sackett is in favor of the transitional turnover, as long as there is no loss

of state funds.

"Commissioner Lind has presented one concept of how to regionalize and how to get local control," said Sackett. "There are other concepts to be considered, in particular one that is being put forth by myself, Senator Willie Hensley, and others."

Sackett and Hensley's plan differs in the amount of "leeway given, of flexibility."

"A single village may wish to take over the school completely,

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without combining with other villages," he stated. "Some villages are more capable, some are larger. On the other hand, you shouldn't force local control if it isn't desired."

"We are researching to guarantee that the funding be granted in the same manner that existing districts are now funded. We've always depended on yearly appropriations by the legislature. What we want to do is set it up so that each administrative unit will get x number of dollars and a stated amount of subsidizing by federal funding."

Sackett said that although the concept of transfer through transitional school districts is to begin on July 1, it will not be fully accomplished until 1975.

"Getting local control," he said, "is part of the entire process of self-determination."

Tanana Chiefs' Executive Director, Sam Kito, was recently elected to the Fairbanks North Star Borough School Board. Commenting on Commissioner Lind's announcement, Kito said, "There has to be some reorganization within the state system. I'm not sure, however, that we

should have the development of districts that are either too large or too small. So there needs to be some thought given to the size of these districts."

Although bush legislators have been clamoring for a long time for local control, it has been only recently that SOS has promoted local involvement and local advisory boards.

Some leaders have expressed concern at the time-frame for the village-level take-over.

Sam Kito, however, was optimistic. "I think if you have policy-making boards in the villages, there is always time for education."

On February 16, John Sackett will conduct hearings in Fairbanks on the transfer of SOS. The hearings will cover three main points: (1) transferring military schools from SOS operation to existing borough school boards; (2) teacher tenure and the evaluation of teachers; and (3) transfer of schools from SOS to newly formed local school districts.

Lowell Thomas, Jr. will hold hearings simultaneously in Anchorage covering the same three points.