

Eek asks new school

On Dec. 14, the Eek IRA Traditional Council submitted an application for school construction to the Bethel Office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This action follows numerous attempts to acquire a decent school for Eek children, according to Eek IRA president Tom McIntyre.

During February 1978, the people of Eek met and decided that something must be done to improve the school their children attend. It was believed too small, too cold, and too much of a fire trap by community residents.

Food for the children was stored in a non-insulated attic and went through a continuous freeze-thaw cycle all winter long. The school's kitchen was called small and unsanitary by villagers because of the condition of the countertops and the limited space.

The people of the village agreed to boycott the school during the Fall, 1978 semester unless BIA agreed to build a new school. On April 10, 1978, villagers sent U.S. Senators Stevens and Gravel and U.S. Representative Young a petition calling for a new school and stating their intent to carry out a boycott of the present Eek school until BIA agrees to build them a new one.

Subsequently, employees of BIA in Bethel contacted Walter Brown, a member of the Eek Traditional Council. The informed Walter that there wasn't any money available for BIA school construction in Alaska, but promised that they could repair the school, and insulate the attic, and build the kitchen during the summer of 1978. This was never done.

In late August, 1978, the BIA school opened and Eek's school children attended. Eek's boycott was broken, not because the parents lost interest in securing a new, better school for their children, but because they didn't

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think their children should have to sacrifice their education to force BIA to provide a decent school for their village, residents said.

The parents summed up their feelings with the following words taken from a petition they signed November 29, 1978:

"Education is too important for our children and we do not want them to fall behind in their studies. We feel very strongly that our children deserve a safe, healthy and comfortable building in which to learn. We shall do everything we can, short of sacrificing the education of our children, to insure that our children get the new school that they so desperately need."

According to the BIA area office in Juneau only two villages are considered to have a chance of receiving new BIA schools this fiscal year. Almost all of the new BIA school construction occurs in the lower 48. BIA Education Assistant Area Director, Emil Kowalczyk, stated that there just isn't any money in the BIA for new school construction in Eek unless Congress makes an appropriation.