

Gov. studies state take-over of Mt. Edgecumbe

The Associated Press

Juneau — Gov. Bill Sheffield has ordered a study to determine whether the state should take over Mount Edgecumbe, a Sitka boarding school now op-

erated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

"We have to make some recommendations to the legislature on this in the next three weeks or so," the governor told

cabinet members this week.

More than 300 high school students are enrolled at Mount Edgecumbe. The facility employs about 135 people.

The school was opened in 1947, but the BIA is closing its few remaining "off-reservation" schools around the country, mainly because of high costs.

In Alaska, BIA officials say the availability of new village schools is another reason for closing Mount Edgecumbe, said Harry Gamble, a spokesman for the state Department

of Education.

The state agreed to build high schools for nearly every village in Alaska following the 1976 Molly Hootch decision in which the Alaska Supreme Court ruled that all students have the right to attend school near their hometown.

This year, Alaska assumed operations of 17 BIA elementary schools at a cost of \$7.9 million. Because the BIA wants to turn 20 more schools over to the state, and because the future of Mt. Edgecumbe is in doubt, Sheffield said state of-

ficials need to develop a plan for rural education in Alaska.

"We don't really have an education plan for Alaska because the Molly Hootch act led us down a different path," he said.

The cost of running Mt. Edgecumbe is \$6.5 million a year, Gamble said. Repairs, remodeling and safety modifications at the school could cost the state an additional \$25 million, he said.

Sens. Ted Stevens and Frank Murkowski have told Sheffield it is likely the BIA will cut all funding for the school next year, Deputy Press Secretary John Greely said.