

Villages to Subcontract To Run Their Schools

Native communities in Alaska will be given the opportunities to run the Bureau of Indian Affairs schools in their villages, according to BIA Deputy Director of Community Services, Flore Lekanof.

Speaking at a meeting of the AFN Board of Directors in Anchorage, Lekanof announced he would be flying to four villages in Alaska this week to speak to

school boards and village councils.

He will offer them the opportunity to subcontract to run the village schools, controlling personnel and curriculum.

Villages who accept will assume control of BIA funds earmarked for their school and be offered aid from Bureau technical personnel to oversee opera-

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tions.

The BIA officer, who is in Alaska this week from Washington, D.C., will fly to Barrow, Kotzebue and Unakleet during the next few days to explain the contract proposal and how it will effect each village in Alaska.

"From now on, if a community wants to run their own school," he explained to the AFN Board, "they can do it with BIA money, for as long as a subsidy is necessary."

The community will have options on personnel, curriculum and school policies.

Lekanof also announced a planned expansion of the bilingual program presently operating in the Bethel area to include 18 communities.

Presently, he explained, the BIA is committed to turn its schools in Alaska over to the State Operated Schools. Under the new contract policy, however, communities will first be offered the option of running their own school.

One of the purposes of Lekanof's attendance at the AFN meeting last weekend was to explain recent policy changes and reorganization in the BIA to Alaskan Native leaders.

He referred them to last week's Tunura Times which outlined the changes developed by BIA Commissioner Louis R. Bruce which are presently being enacted.

About 20 Field Administrator positions, out of the 63 available, have opened up due to the change in this job from that of Superintendent and the policy of rotating Superintendents who have been in office over two

years, he said.

He explained the policy of rotating of Field Administrators and how it will effect local Native groups.

Some of the questions asked how to retain present Superintendents in the new job, a question which concerns at least one area which fears disruption of promising new programs if a new man comes in.

At the present time, about 75 per cent of the higher echelon BIA administrative staff in Washington is Indian, for the first time in the Bureau's history.

According to Lekanof, Commissioner Bruce has support from the White House staff. This should insure his permanence and the success of his changes after the firing of Secretary of the Interior Walter Hickel who strongly advocated the Bureau's "new look".

AFN officials were encouraged Sunday to take advantage of the contract provisions of the BIA change.

"Beginning immediately," announces a recent statement by Commissioner Bruce, "all vacancies at all levels of BIA operations will be held open and monitored by Mr. Billy Mills (head of a new Washington office to negotiate contracts with Indian groups) and his staff so that tribes first are offered the fullest opportunity to assume these positions under contract."

Reaction to the new BIA changes was generally favorable among AFN Board members, most of whom asked specific questions as to how the policies would affect their home regions.