

Goodnews Bay students boycott class

By PAUL JENKINS
The Associated Press

Yupik Eskimos in Goodnews are boycotting their elementary school classes in support of their village council's continuing war with federal and state authorities over control of their school.

The Goodnews Bay Elementary Day School was one of 17 Bureau of Indian Affairs schools handed over to the state in June as part of that agency's continuing effort to get out of the education busi-

ness in Alaska.

That move has met stiffening resistance from the Goodnews Bay Traditional Village Council, which is suing the BIA in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., to force the school's return to federal control.

BIA attorney Bruce Landon said a bid for a temporary injunction to block the transfer failed, and the case is pending in federal court, with no decision expected before the end of the month.

Landon said if the council can force the school's return to federal control, the council wants to run the kindergarten-through-eighth-grade facility under a BIA contract, as is done in four other villages.

In a show of support for the council, some of the 27 elementary pupils in the village have refused since Monday to attend class.

Lower Kuskokwim School District officials in Bethel on Tuesday dispatched a team to determine the extent of the problem in Goodnews, a fishing village about 425 miles southwest of Anchorage.

"I don't really know how many are involved," said Carl

Peterson, the sprawling district's superintendent. "Our position is that school's open and will remain open."

Oscar Kawagley, a higher education specialist and planner for the Association of Village Council Presidents Inc., said about 10 students attended class Monday.

He said his organization has joined the fray at the request of the village council.

"This was not a way to get anybody's attention. They are just trying to initiate and maintain self-determination in school," he said. "They don't want it transferred, they want their culture to become a part of the community education

curriculum.

"The Bureau of Indian Affairs made the decision that the school would be transferred without consultation," he said. "They went out to the village and informed them that the transfer was being made. They are required to consult with villagers and parents before making such a decision."

But Jake Lestenkof, the BIA's area director in Alaska, said villagers are consulted before schools are transferred and each village is asked for a resolution supporting the action before the transfer is carried out.