

Bering Straits REAA in cash crunch

Village students boycott classes over cutbacks

From Our Anchorage Bureau

Students in Shishmaref, White Mountain and Teller boycotted classes last week and effectively closed schools protesting the termination of 25 school employees and the elimination of the hot lunch program.

The sharp cutbacks were made by Superintendent Ron Hohman in an effort to reduce a projected June deficit of \$600,000 for the Bering Straits Regional Education Attendance Area (REAA).

According to Hohman state funding to the REAA was insufficient at the beginning of the school year and they were forced to start out with a \$900,000 deficit. Cuts made in administrative and other areas reduced the deficit to an estimated \$599,000 and last weeks move terminating teacher aides, cooks, custodial personnel and cancelling the hot lunch program is expected to drop the deficit

by another \$142,000.

Hohman traveled to Juneau late last week to meet with Education Commissioner Marshall Lind and members of the State Legislature. The school district is seeking a supplemental appropriation to help balance out the year.

Following hearings held by the House Health, Education and Social Service Committee on the financial status of the REAA's Hohman appeared confident of the outcome. "We were very well received by the Committee," he said, "I'm very

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optimistic that corrective action will be taken."

Commissioner Lind disagrees with Hohman's allegations of inadequate state financing of the school district. "I see no legitimate grounds to support a request for a supplemental appropriation at this time," Lind said, "They need to take another close look at their total budget and report to the Department what the real deficit is."