

No decision yet on Mt. Edgecumbe

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Tundra Times

Uncertainty about the future of the present U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs Mt. Edgecumbe High School near Sitka continued last week. Gov. Bill Sheffield did not announce a decision, as he previously indicated he would, on whether to seek the Alaska legislature's concurrence and funding for state operation of the facility as a boarding school for grades nine through twelve.

On Friday the governor said he would make a decision on this "difficult problem" in the next 10 days. That would be approximately May 1.

The governor said at his cabinet meeting earlier in the week that he was exploring some additional alternatives, and that he planned to be meeting with some State legislators to "thrash around with them some ideas," before making his decision.

In a meeting between the governor and Commissioner of Education Marshall Lind last week Sheffield was cautioned that "the possibility of a September opening under any circumstances is extremely marginal," given the magnitude of the problem and the tight time frames now operating.

Federal funds for operation of the school cease on June 30.

On March 30 the new Alaska State Board of Education passed a resolution urging the state to appropriate funds "for the continued operation of Mt. Edgecumbe in the 1983-84 school year and the years thereafter."

State policy has not always favored Mt. Edgecumbe. In September of 1980 the State Board of Education, endorsing the concept of a single system of public education in Alaska, passed a motion supporting the closure of the Mt.

Edgecumbe school at the earliest possible date.

This post-Hammond turnaround has not given the state time to prepare to take over the transfer of the school from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The new Board of Education was clear that it wants the continued operation of Mt. Edgecumbe to include "a comprehensive educational program for grades nine through twelve available to all Alaskan students whose academic and personal futures require such a program."

What is not clear is whether the State can afford to provide this program at Mt. Edgecumbe.

The facilities at Mt. Edgecumbe do not meet state fire safety or sanitary standards and have additional architectural and engineering deficiencies.

The State Department of Ed-

ucation told the governor last week that a minimum "health, fire-life safety" upgrade necessary for the school to open its doors next fall would cost \$7.1 million. Total rehabilitation and replacement costs are estimated at some \$26.6 million to \$48 million.

Additionally, educational program and facilities operating costs for the first year are estimated at \$8.8 million, Lind told Sheffield.

Assuming that the educational program would not change significantly from that provided by the BIA, the Department of Education estimated for the governor that staff, equipment, food, supplies, and student travel costs for a student body of 350 would amount to \$3.5 million dollars. Facilities management costs were estimated at another \$5.3 million for the total of \$8.8 million.

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of Education member, said he thought the governor's delay on a decision was because he was waiting for the Federal government to make a move on a one-time appropriation to rehabilitate the facilities. "That commitment has to be made for the state to move into the next phase," Kito said.

Allen Blume, a special assistant to the governor, confirmed that a figure of from \$9 to \$15 million is being discussed with the state's U.S. Senator Ted Stevens.

Alaska's other senator, Frank Murkowski, in a newsletter from Washington, D.C., April 18, praising the State Board's action, appeared to want another move from the state. "I hope the state can make a speedy decision on funding for the school so that important funding decisions can be addressed quickly in Washing-

ton," he wrote.

John Tabor of the governor's office in Washington, D.C., said that one of the biggest problems he had heard about was that the one-time appropriation being discussed is a Federal fiscal 1984 appropriation. Federal fiscal 1984 funds are not available until after October 1, 1983.

"Nobody is in favor of closing Mt. Edgecumbe as a school and as a social institution," explains Ernest Polley, Director of Education Design and Delivery for the State Department of Education.

Without any facilities upgrade, the program and operational costs to the State per student would amount to \$25,000. When the minimum facilities upgrade is figured in, the per pupil costs rise to \$45,800. This compares to an average per pupil cost at State Rural Education Attendance Areas of \$9,200 per student.