

May Recommend Boarding School Concept in Cities

An Education Specialist investigating the new regional high school concept in Alaska is expected to deal a crushing blow to the idea of high schools in the state's smaller towns.

Instead, Dr. John Garcia of Melpar, Inc., hired by the state to report and recommend on ideas for solving the critical secondary-school education problem in Alaska, will recommend that the boarding school concept for rural students be considered.

Garcia told the Fairbanks Native Association here last

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week that he would rather see Native youths going to public schools in Fairbanks, Anchorage and other cities than in smaller high schools in bush towns.

Despite this, he said, he was, "still working within the framework of the Gravel High School Package."

"If the regional high school bond issue passes I will consider my work that much easier," he said.

Former state house speaker Mike Gravel last year pushed through the legislature a multi-million dollar state bond issue designed to build high schools throughout the state.

The schools, which will be up for a bond-issue vote in the November 23 elections, will give a chance for high school education to Native students now denied that chance because of lack of room at the BIA's crowded facilities.

"Cost in building must be considered, of course, but cost can only be considered because of the narrow resources we have to start with in Alaska," Garcia said. "What can be the cost of a decent education? It must be given, whatever the cost."

"Alaska as a state has the highest median of education in the nation, but this exists only in the urban areas. In the cities, the child can take advantage of the intellectual stimulation that is always found in urban areas. Small towns, despite the excellence of education offered, can never match a larger community for intellectual stimulus. Also, in the rural areas you would find a condition of segregated schools—despite the state running the system there would be an overwhelming majority of Native students attending class together."

"This isn't always good.

In a public school in a city there would be, probably, a majority of White students. This would help break the Native student out of his shell and force him to compete with White students. Through competition, he improves himself."

Garcia said he would recommend education from grades one through eight in the rural villages and towns, "but beyond that, they would be much better off, academically, in a city school."

"I would also say that while going to the elementary school, though, that a stronger emphasis should be put on the Alaska Native culture and tradition. Actual periods of instruction would give the students something to relate to the past, and to the future."

"It would be very bad to just bring these students in from rural areas and dump them in city schools, though."

"A carefully worked-out program of helping them through the difficult stages of transition is necessary. It will take some cooperation from governmental agencies working together."

Garcia spoke before the Fairbanks group after a swing through Nome, Kotzebue and Barrow investigating school problems.

After spending a little more time in the state, he will return to Washington, D.C., his home, and make a preliminary report to the state Department of Education. The preliminary report will be followed up by a more detailed study.