

# Selawik meeting focuses on education

by Eileen P. MacLean  
for the Tundra Times

I am pleased to announce that the Joint Committee on School performance, which I co-chair, will meet in Selawik Friday to address major issues relating to the unique educational needs of rural Alaska.

Inupiat Paitot  
People's Heritage

## OPINION

The committee will hear public testimony and discuss various issues relating to education.

Last year, the Legislature established the Joint Committee on School Performance on the grounds that there is widespread public concern for the condition of school performance in Alaska.

As a means for the Legislature to fulfill its responsibility to maintain a system of public schools, the committee was instructed to identify those subjects for priority legislative attention that might enable school performance to be improved.

To do this, it first was necessary to find out what is in need of betterment. This the committee has been doing — through public hearings, attendance at professional education association meetings, conferences with school and university personnel, reviews of many materials and internal work sessions.

Much of what we learned about schooling is commendable, but we have determined that all school districts need to rethink some of their approaches to improving school performance.

The committee made several recommendations and introduced three legislative measures to implement



them. After a lot of hard work, we succeeded in passing two of the three measures: House Bill 469 and House Concurrent Resolution 46.

HB 469 encompasses three of five committee recommendations. Those include:

- Having mandated state goals of education.
  - Establishing mandated measures of achievement.
  - Providing incentives for the improvement of school performance.
- In a nutshell, HB 469:
- Declares a state education policy.
  - Requires the State Board of Education to adopt statewide goals.
  - Requires each school district to adopt written goals.
  - Requires the compilation of a "school district report card" assessing the performance of school and students.
  - Creates the "fund for the improvement of school performance."
  - Establishes advisory school boards

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in Regional Educational Attendance Areas.

- Provides for the development and implementation of a physical preventative maintenance program for school facilities.

HCR 46 addresses another committee recommendation by creating a special interagency committee to:

- Coordinate health and family service programs related to school performance.
- Identify the most critical social and health barriers to learning.
- Establish plans to overcome those barriers.
- Take responsibility for implementing those plans.

Without a unified effort on the part of the various agencies charged with providing health, social, legal and educational services, there is little likelihood that we will overcome the shortcomings found in communities throughout the state.

The potential for a unified approach to work in Alaska is promising, and already, some state personnel have initiated efforts to examine problems

from an interagency perspective. However, sustained, coordinated agency, school and community efforts required to make a lasting difference among those children now unprepared or unable to learn because of environmental shortcomings require prompting and funding by the Legislature.

To that end, and thanks to Gov. Steve Cowper and the work of the Joint Committee, the Legislature added \$1.7 million for operating costs and \$3.3 million for capital costs to the Head Start Program, a worthwhile effort dedicated to helping children overcome barriers to learning.

The work of the Joint Committee is not over. This interim we hope to meet in various areas throughout the state to continue our work toward improving school performance in Alaska.

If you have any questions relating to the upcoming school performance meeting in Selawik or on any other issues of concern, please don't hesitate to contact my office at 465-4833 (collect). Thank You. *Quyanatpak taikuu.*