

Final Report on Regional Hi-Schools Now Under Study

A report describing a method for constructing a regional high school system in Alaska has been completed and is now being studied by the State Department of Education.

The report by the Training Corporation of America provides for building six regional boarding high schools by 1975, and eight additional

high schools and junior high schools by 1980.

Many aspects of the report are controversial, and it has already been attacked by Natives and others who favor smaller schools located in villages closer to home.

Under the program suggested in the report, schools and dormitories would be constructed in Fairbanks, Bethel, Anchorage, Nome, Kodiak, and Sitka. Whenever possible, the schools would be tied into the existing systems in those cities.

In addition, a Center for Arctic Education and Research would be established in Fairbanks to study the problems in cross-cultural education and to provide the training for teachers in all the schools. The Center would work with both the Fairbanks school and the University of Alaska.

In the second stage, regional junior high schools will be built at Metlakatla, Haines, Glennallen, Fort Yukon, Tanana, and Delta

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Junction; both junior highs and high schools will be built at Kotzebue and Dillingham.

According to the TCA report, the goals assumed in devising the program were to provide: 1. quality education in Alaska for all Alaskan students; 2. economic improvement of Alaska's rural areas, and 3. educational programs which will promote the maximum academic and economic advancement for all students.

In defining quality education, the report said "the ideal high school must have at least 500 students and graduating classes of 100 or more students; there must be a comprehensive curriculum accomodating students from varied backgrounds with varied goals; and the school should reflect an urban technological society."

TCA added that the ultimate goal of the state should be a school system with approximately 90% of the school-age population graduating from high school and 75% of these continuing their education in vocational, commercial, or academic areas.

The report noted that there would be problems in trans-

ferring a student to such boarding schools, and suggested several programs for reducing cross-cultural problems.

Teachers for the school would be given special training on Native cultures and in methods of teaching which will overcome the acculturation problem.

The dormitories would provide special training in community living. Training in housekeeping responsibilities, social programs, counselling programs, and student participation in the operation of the dormitory would be provided. Private home placements would be provided in some cases after the first year in the dorms.

The curriculum would provide for the change of culture. Special programs would be set up to allow the students to overcome any deficiencies when they enter the school, and non-graded programs could allow the student to move to graduation as his individual learning allows.

The curriculum would provide basic courses in general education and additional courses designed for vocational and college preparation.

A major counselling program would be set up to handle much of the cross-cultural adjustment. This would include both group discussion on cultural values and individual-problem counselling.

The schools would include students from other racial, social, and economic backgrounds to aid in the discussion of the cultural values of various groups.

The report also discussed a construction schedule and methods of obtaining funds. For 1967 through 1970, it suggests that the State Welfare Department find home placements for the best students in the major cities of Alaska.

Boarding facilities would be leased in the major cities, and Chemawa School in Oregon would be continued, until the dormitories at the regional high schools open in 1970.

The report provides for gradual construction of the high school facilities over a five-year period, at a total cost of \$29 million. Annual operating costs will run about \$12 million.

About \$11 million of the construction costs will be paid by the State. Part of this has already been provided for in last year's \$5 million bond proposal; other bonds would be required.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs is expected to provide the dormitory space for the schools. Other federal funds are expected to finance the Research Center and the regional school associated with it at Fairbanks. Local borough governments would provide money for residents who were attending some of the schools.

Operating expenses would be divided among the groups in a similar manner.

The report also recommends that the elementary education of the state be improved to prepare Natives for high

schools. It suggests expanding Headstart programs to break the language barrier of Native children entering school.

"Teacher aides and technical devices could be used to provide supplementary instruction and adaptive programs, even in two and three room schools," it says.

It also suggests that special programs be provided for grades seven and eight to prepare the students for the high schools. Until the regional schools have trained staffs and proper programs, it suggests the entry of students should be controlled and gradual.

"The goal of the program is to increase the number of educated Alaskans, not to run a large number of rural area students in and out of an urban school program."

Since the preliminary plan was announced in November, several protests have been made by persons who favored smaller regional high schools in more villages. These people favor a minimum school size of 250, rather than 500, located in the smaller villages where many of the students could live at home.

In discussing the economic and social impact of the regional high schools, the report actually seems to support this view! Using the movement of Arctic Coast Eskimos to Barrow as an example, it suggests that constructing high schools in the villages would increase the employment of Natives.

In discussing the high school for Bethel, the report said the construction "would probably result in the employment of a number of natives, many of whom have skills useful in such a project. . . After the construction of a regional high school, there will be a need to employ custodial and maintenance personnel, most of whom could be drawn from the native population."

In addition, the teachers and students would increase the number of consumers in the community and thus help business. The report adds that this community growth could influence governmental agencies to locate offices in that village.

"The existence of a school particularly one of the size of a large regional high school, with the specialized facilities and advantages it could provide, would be viewed as a considerable community asset and therefore would doubtless influence the movement of native population." The report adds that a smaller school would have a correspondingly lesser effect.

The report also suggests that schools in the smaller communities would be better for the students. "The advantage of at least 500-student regional high schools in communities the size of Bethel or Kodiak is that the leap from small village is not as great as it might be if the shift were to Anchorage or Fairbanks," it states.

"Location of regional high schools in larger villages might act as a 'half-way

house,' a gradual exposure to an urban social system." "After several years in such an environment, students would be prepared to go to larger cities such as Fairbanks, Anchorage, etc."

It adds that the influx of population to Bethel, Nome, or Kodiak would give the Natives contact with residents of other villages and with middle-class Americans. This would aid in their adjustment to the urban culture.

However, two of the six schools, Bethel and Nome (650 students each) will be located in small, largely Native communities. Two, Kodiak and Sitka (800 and 1000 students respectively) will be located in small, largely White communities, and two, Anchorage and Fairbanks (1000 students each) will be located in the major cities.

Both the Natives and the report recognize that the high schools will make changes in the culture of the Natives. The report suggests that the Natives will be highly receptive to changes brought by the location of large regional high schools, particularly in an area such as Bethel.

Supporters of the smaller schools believe that they will provide a better blending of the old and new cultures by allowing the students to have contact with both.

"Residence in urban areas appears to accelerate the breakdown of old village patterns, patterns which may retard the development of rural folk into a disciplined and reliable workforce," the report states.

This final report from the TCA is now in the hands of the State Department of Education. It is now up to the State to use or modify the recommendations and to begin work on the regional high school system.

If the report's schedule is followed, temporary boarding facilities will be arranged this fall, and the first parts of the permanent regional high school system will open in 1970.