

What JOM Means To Native Education Programs

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JOM? Indian Ed? What are they? What do they do? These are questions parents, students and teachers have been asking. Whether or not there is a need for any of the three is a question school administrators and some

members of the public have been asking. This is the first in a 6-part series of articles designed to answer these questions and help Alaskan Native parents and students know more about educational programs available to them.

The Johnson-O'Malley Act (JOM) and the Indian Education

Act (IEA) are acts of the U.S. Congress, each designed to give education programs to the American Indian and Alaskan Native students. Project Now is an educational program operating in Fairbanks under JOM. This article will explain the background of JOM. Later articles in the series will talk about IEA, current programs under both Act, whether there is a need for these, programs, and how we might improve them.

Historically, dealing with Indian people in any way was the business of the U.S. Government. Education programs were mostly reservation boarding or day schools at first. But by 1894 many Indian students were going to schools off the reservations, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs contracted with the public school districts to provide money to educate these extra students, and give the school districts reasons to offer special programs for them.

By 1928, there were more Indian students in public schools than in BIA schools. A document called the Meriam Report

was published by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, stating that the idea of educating Indian students in public schools was good, but contracting with the individual districts rather than the states was not the way the Federal Government should do it. So, in 1934 the Johnson-O'Malley Act was passed by Congress, to give the BIA legal authority to contract with the states for educational services to Indian students.

Working out the actual application of the JOM Act had problems from the beginning. The touchy nature of Federal-State relationships, with each guarding its own turf, jealous of real or imagined inroads into establishing powers, produced many problems. In addition it soon became apparent that many states were more interested in the extra money than in providing services to the Indian students.

In the WWII years, P.L. 81-874 was passed to provide money to schools in areas where a large number of students moved into an area because their parents worked for

the Federal Government. This law provided money for Indian students also, if their parents lived on reservation lands. Thus, it took away the original need for and intent of JOM. JOM monies, then, began to be used mostly to provide supplemental, or extra services to Indian students, or as incentive to start programs to meet their special needs.

In Alaska, JOM has a peculiar recent history. In the 1970's JOM funds went almost entirely to fund the State's Boarding Home Program. In 1973, the State Board of Education directed the State to stop being the prime contractor for JOM and asked BIA to set up a review committee for the purpose of maximizing Native input to JOM Programs. This review committee decided that the Boarding Home Program was basic, not supplemental education, and then began awarding JOM contracts to a variety of Native organizations, school districts and other non-profit corporations. They funded bilingual, cultural heritage, experimental school and other programs.

Last summer, a change in BIA basis for funding JOM occurred. Instead of awarding funds on a project basis, through the State review board, BIA began to offer contracts on a per capita basis. That means, a certain amount of money is given per child served. Of course, a series of other rules and regulations must be followed in order to contract for educational services under JOM. These rules and regulations are published in the Federal Register, Nov. 4, 1975. One of the most important rules is that each organization contracting for JOM funds must have a Native parent committee, consisting of parents of Native students and possibly including teachers of Native students. This committee has the power of setting policy for the JOM project contracted to the organization it serves.