

Alienated School Child

Student Is a Future Dropout

By MARY MOSES

An "alienated" student is a future drop out. "Alienated" is the word educators use to describe the child who has decided that school has nothing to do with his real world. School is not for him. He hates it.

What makes a child alienated? Usually it's the school itself. The school does not fit the child's world. It does not seem to have any real purpose for the child.

Many times the teachers are people totally unlike the child's family. They may seem to dislike the child and his people. Perhaps the school even forces the student to leave his own language and customs, punishing him if he does not.

Usually, the child learns to fear the school, because he does not understand what it wants of him. He knows he does many things wrong, but they are often things he has learned in his home. When this happens, the child may decide that the school, not his family, is wrong. He learns to hate the school.

Alaska's rural school system in the past has been almost tailor made for alienating children of our Eskimo and Indian families. Teachers have come from a different culture, and

have tried to teach things fitted to a totally different way of life, often in strange languages. Even very young children have been forced to leave home and live with strangers to attend school.

What can be done to prevent alienation? The school can be made to fit the child better while he is young. After he has already learned to like the school, and learned the basic skills, the child can start to learn another culture, another language.

There are several ways to accomplish this. The bilingual program has been one recent way of easing the alienation problem. Native culture classes are another way.

Training teachers to recognize and respect cultural differences is a third way. Perhaps the most important way to lessen the chances of alienation in the school for Native children is local control.

If the local community has independent control of its own school, the people are free to work out the best possible program for that particular group of children. They do not have to try to fit the needs of children all over Alaska, as the present system does, but only those of their own students.

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Parents, too, can help their own children. Very small children can learn that their teachers may be different from their own families. The parents can teach their children to see the differences, and think of them not as being right or wrong just different.