

# Hassle May Be Brewing Over Vocational School

A controversy appears to be developing over the opening of the William E. Beltz Vocational School in Nome as vocational high school this fall.

William T. Zahradnicek, Commissioner of Education, has announced that the school will open on September 12 this fall with 152 young students who will pursue high school "with heavy emphasis on vocational subjects."

The bone of contention appears to lie in the fact that vocational training for adults who have not had the opportunity of education will probably cease at the school soon.

In an interview with Tundra Times, Zahradnicek explained that when the school was first built that it did not have dormitories and that the state did not have money to operate it. But he said that it was originally intended for a high school and for this reason, the Bureau of Indian Affairs constructed the dor-

mitories.

"We shifted some MDTA programs into the school for the first two years to take the 'white elephant' off our hands until the dormitories were constructed," the Commissioner added.

There have been rumblings from Northwest villages that

the school was built with the purpose in mind of occupational training for the "lost generation." Some indicate that confusion has resulted because the exact purposes of the school were not spelled out when a bond issue for its construction was passed.

The other bone of contention in the growing controversy appears to be the manner in which the students are being selected for the school.

Here is a sample of a letter that is being sent to prospective students:

"April 25, 1964.

"Dear \_\_\_\_\_

"You have been chosen to attend William E. Beltz Vocational High School. This school opens for the first time in September, 1966, and it will be an exciting experience to be one of those who start a new school.

"The William E. Beltz Vocational High School is located three miles from Nome, and has beautiful new dormi-

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tries and classrooms. It is not a large school, and you will receive good instruction and live in a pleasant home. Everything possible will be done to make your school courses and your life there pleasant and profitable.

"If you are not interested in going to a school nearer your home and family, it is possible to refuse this appointment with the hope that you may be accepted in one or another of the boarding schools provided by the State of Alaska and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but your chances of getting into Chemawa, Mt. Edgecumbe or Wrangell are not good at this time.

"Please reply to this letter before May 15, 1966, and tell us whether you accept or refuse this appointment. If you accept, we will send you detailed descriptions of your school and its curriculum and directions for getting there with the date on which you will be expected to arrive. Your transportation will be furnished.

"Sincerely, Wm. T. Zahradnicek, Commissioner of Education."

One village spokesman who declined to have his name used described the selection as "brutal" and said that he did not feel the Commissioner of Education had a right to "seal the future" of a student, that the student should have a real choice, not a choice between vocational training or nothing.

"This is something I would expect in Russia, not here," said another.

Zahradnicek said that high school spaces were going to be critical this year and that countless elementary school graduates were going to be turned down for placement at BIA high schools. What we are trying to do is balance out the schools on a basis of choice, he said.

He pointed out that a num-

ber of students in the 9th, 10th and 11th grades at Mt. Edgecumbe had requested to be transferred to Nome and that already applications had come in to completely fill the school in Nome.

While he said that it was unlikely that MDTA program would be carried on at the school this year, he said there was nothing that would prevent a night program there and that the MDTA program was not being phased out of the state, that courses would be held in other places—Juneau, Fairbanks, and Anchorage.

For the past two years, Alaska has gotten a much greater share of MDTA monies than would normally be the case because other states did not have MDTA programs. Recently, he said, other states had set up these programs and planned to use all the monies allotted them.

This will result in a relatively small amount of MDTA training funds coming to the state this year, he said.

The Nome Vocational School will have about 11 teachers and 22 other personnel, including supervisors and counselors, employed this fall.

Here is one student's acceptance to appointment at the school, according to a release from the Department of Education:

"I am very happy to be selected to attend high school. Many thanks for selecting me. I will do my best."

—Hilda N. Wood, age 15, Shungnak.