

Mixed Feelings at Convention

By MARILYN RICHARDS

Mixed feelings were the result of the educational conference jointly sponsored by the Alaska Federation of Natives' Human Resources Committee, the Center for Northern Educational

Research, the Alaska Native Human Resource Development Program and the Department of Community and Regional Affairs.

Attending the three-day conference, entitled "Education and the World of Our Children," were representatives from AFN, Alaska State Operated Schools, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the North Slope Borough, the Department of Education and the Coalition of Indian Controlled School Boards.

Mitch Demientieff, conference chairman, called the conference "a continuing analysis in the issue but if things work out well the conference will be the last of its kind."

Demientieff, Robert Schaeffer, Gordon Jackson — AFN's Human Resources vice president, are planning for a bill drafting session for the next legislature to improve the atmosphere of rural education.

Demientieff also called for and demanded the resignation of Stanley Friese, superintendent of state-operated schools, for his gross neglect of the education of Alaska Native children.

Friese was to attend the conference but was called away on another commitment according to Dave Lanigan, his representative and assistant superintendent. Demientieff said Friese was

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on vacation.

Dementieff also expressed disappointment and disgust at the non-attendance at the conference by the state legislature.

The conference endorsed Dr. Marshall Lind as Commissioner of Education. The appointment will be decided next month at the State Board of Education's meeting.

The conference also endorsed the \$40 million bond issue coming up in the general election to provide for additional schools in rural Alaska.

The conference included a panel discussion on local control and the decision makers. Workshops were also held on eight topics: perspectives of the Department of Education, the BIA, SOS, Community and Regional Affairs, and on rural experiences of local school districts, legislative procedures, local government and on strategy planning.

A panel of nine Upward Bound students displayed a wide cross-section of views. The students disagreed on the benefits and problems confronting rural students when they leave the villages for school.

In a speech before the conference, Archie Gottschalk of Prince William Sound complained that, "This whole conference is about local and rural control of education but what is the conference going to do about Hootch versus State-Operated Schools."

Molly Hootch, a student from Emmonak, is suing State-Operated Schools because she was denied the right to attend school in her village. There is a rumor that she is a fictitious person symbolizing rural students in that position.

Gottschalk charged that "the State of Alaska is oblivious to rural Alaskan students," and the Department of the Interior are "ripping off" the students by not meeting their obligations.

Dr. Lind summarized that "The water's rough, the going's tough. We should not spend our time on nuts and bolts issues which could be handled at the local level. Local control is a hell of a lot of responsibility. We have to communicate with the legislature. The conference was positive along with the major issues. Education is the most important business we've got."

Dementieff had a different attitude. "It was difficult to keep a positive nature throughout the conference."

Gordon Jackson, in an earlier interview said the present "tri-partite system" of delivering educational services to the bush is very troubling.

"Delivery is a tri-partite system can only be an unequitable way of providing services in the unorganized borough. Providing educational services in the unorganized borough with local control will solve a lot of problems. With the state and federal governments in charge, the curriculum has been often irrelevant and educated students right out of the villages."

"The tri-partite system" includes the State Department of Education serving about 29 municipalities, SOS serving over 100 communities in the organized borough and the BIA also several in the unorganized borough.