

Youth to address question of future

Fifty to 75 Native high school students are expected to attend a two-day conference sponsored by the Alaska Federation of Natives, May 10 and 11 at Alaska Pacific University in Anchorage.

The students, primarily high school juniors, are being drawn from school districts throughout the state to attend the conference, which will focus on issues and concerns common to Native youth.

The students will hear speakers and break into small groups to discuss the three major subject areas of education, health and social issues and Native culture and heritage. On the final afternoon, the small discussion groups will present their findings and recommendations and elect regional representatives to an AFN Youth Council.

AFN President Janie Leask said the idea for the youth conference grew out of repeated

expressions of frustration that she has heard from young Natives over the years.

"Over and over again, the questions arise," she said. "Where are we going as Native people? Do our young people have the desires and skills to take over for the current Native leaders? How can we create opportunities for them now? Why do we see such an alarming increase in suicide among Native youth? And, finally, how do we manage and balance the overwhelming changes taking place in many of our communities?"

The Youth Conference is designed to tackle some of those questions and to start young people talking about their concerns. Although speakers will be used to start off the discussions,

Leask said that it is crucial that the conference structure reflect the importance of hearing from students, themselves. "We need to know their thoughts and concerns," she added.

To ensure free and open discussion, the small groups will be closed to the general public. However, the public may attend the talks presented by invited speakers. The speakers will be Sam Kito, Jr., on education; Doug Modig, Alice Abraham and Joan Hamilton-Cannelos on health and social issues; and Reggie Joule, on Native culture and heritage.

Each student attending the conference is being sponsored by his or her school district, Native regional corporation, regional non-profit association or by grants from the Rural

Alaska Community Action Program, out of the University of Alaska.

The Native Youth Council formed at the conclusion of the

conference will work with AFN on 1991 issues and, on an ongoing basis, identify and act on youth concerns about major issues affecting Alaska Native in general.
