

FNCC TO SUE N. S. BOROUGH

Bilingual Program Is Aim of Law Suit

By MARGIE BAUMAN

Fairbanks Native Community Center will file suit in Alaska Superior Court in an attempt to force the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District into instituting a bi-lingual program at Lathrop High school.

The suit will charge that by failure to act in an orderly manner in considering a request for a bi-lingual program at Lathrop, the school district lost out on federal funds totaling \$102,643.

The funds were made available recently under Title 7 of the federal education act. Georgianna Lincoln, executive director of FNCC, said that the center decided to take the matter to court because of the manner in which school superintendent Chuck Smith and the school board handled the request.

"There was no reason to have lost that funding for the school district and for the state," she said.

Word that the bilingual funds were available, but that the requests had to be in Washington, D. C. by August 23 reached FNCC in the second week of August.

"We found out about it not through the school district, which had the information, but through LaDonna Harris of the Americans for Indian Opportunity," Lincoln said.

FNCC decided to push for funding of a course in Koyukon Athabascan for up to 23 students at Lathrop High school.

"We worked through the weekend preparing it, but we didn't have the proper forms until Aug. 13 or 14," Lincoln said.

The forms were obtained for the center by Jerry Morang, federal programs director for the North Star Borough School District.

Meanwhile, FNCC contacted North Star Borough Schools Superintendent Chuck Smith and the school board and requested time to speak on the proposal at a special meeting of the board August 22. FNCC planned to have one of its representatives then hand carry the proposal to

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FNCC and Borough . . .

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Washington to meet the deadline.

But, Lincoln said, they were just given the run-around.

Smith said that the proposal had to go through the school board and that the school board had to have 24 hours notice in order to consider the proposal at its special meeting. The next scheduled meeting of the board was in the last week of August, after the deadline for the proposal had to be in.

"It turned out that Chuck Smith did have the authority to approve it. The school district could have acted, but they didn't," she said.

"If they had just listened to us for five minutes, they would have said 'hey Chuck, you have the authority. . .,'" Lincoln said.

Ironically, at the next scheduled meeting of the board, the proposals was given unanimous approval. Board member Nancy Brown, in fact, urged that if the school district felt strongly enough about the bilingual program, it could be funded through normal budget channels.

"At that meeting, we found out there was a provision giving superintendents the authority to act on behalf of the school board in cases of an emergency," Lincoln said.

Sufficiently irked, FNCC decided to take the matter to court and force initiation of an Athabaskan language course at Lathrop.

"Every single time the Native groups try to get money, it's a real fight," Lincoln said.

"Unless the Native organizations get out there and say 'you do have the authority, you can act and you will act, nothing is done,'" she said.

"There was just no reason to have lost that funding.

"In most minority programs, when the money becomes available, it is usually in the last minute and you have to fight and scramble for those dollars.

"It may be unusual for the school board to prepare a proposals in one or two weeks, but not for us," she said.

"Community officials in general have not been that responsive to the needs of the Native population," she said.

"Every time I go before the city or borough for funding, they say 'Doyon's got a lot of money. . .,'" she said.

(Doyon, the regional Native corporation of the Interior, is restricted along with other regional corporations on how its funds may be used.)

But Lincoln is somewhat optimistic that something will be done. On Tuesday morning she received a call from Bill Talbert of the community relations service of the U. S. Department of Justice in Seattle. Talbert said he had heard of the dispute over the bilingual program and that he is going to look into it for himself.