

Bush Education Caucus Knocks School Control Bill

By MARGIE BAUMAN

Anchorage — A State Senate bill purportedly aimed at encouraging maximum local participation in education is under fire from a bush education caucus on a number of charges.

The caucus of nine men and women familiar with problems of bush education in much of Alaska was in Juneau Monday through Thursday (March 5-8)

to fight the so called "Marshall Plan," State Senate Bill 122.

The bill, which has the support of the State Department of Education and teachers associations, was submitted to the Legislature for Commissioner Marshall Lind of the State Department of Education. The Center for Northern Education was to hold a rural input meeting Monday, followed by hearings of the joint Senate

House subcommittee on Health Education and Social Services Tuesday and Wednesday.

The problem, in a nutshell, is who will control education in the Alaskan Bush?

The bill provides that the unorganized borough (all those parts of the state not already organized into boroughs) be divided into educational service areas by the state Board of Education on recommendation of the Department of Education.

The bill further states that where the Department of Education determines that it is not feasible for an educational service area to operate schools... The schools shall be operated by contract with an existing city or borough school district.

These and several other points of the bill are under protest from the bush education caucus.

Funded by the Center for Northern Education, the bush

education caucus met in Anchorage the weekend before its presentation to the Legislature on request of the Education Board of the Alaska Federation of Natives Inc.

The reaction of the caucus to the 14 page bill was that it needed complete revision—In fact ought to be burned and an entirely new bill written on bush education. Its arguments were:

No village input was asked in writing the bill.

None of the villages were advised the bill was being written. They only knew that State Operated Schools were to be phased out by summer of 1973.

There is no definition of local control in the bill specifying that the village school boards have ultimate power to direct whom shall make final decisions in different areas affecting education. (The caucus felt local school boards should have the power to give this direction and also to withdraw such power as it sees fit).

The bill actually provides in several sections for imposition of unilateral state control over village school boards.

The caucus agreed that any bill pertaining to the transfer of bush education from State Operated Schools toward more local control should include guaranteed training funds for the initial school board development, along with expertise and materials for all regions to do their own training of school boards.

The caucus said the education measure should also include a "Waiver Clause," so that any individual school board or district which devised a "Viable Education Plan" differing from the norm might have plenty of flexibility to try innovative education programs. Several villages, among them Anaktuvuk Pass, Allakaket, Selawik, Bethel and Ft. Yukon, are anxious to try new programs in education not authorized under the present system. A waiver clause would allow some of that "self-determination" the Bureau of Indian Affairs and other government agencies said they were offering American Indian groups a year ago.

Also with protests and suggestions on the education legislation, legislators will be presented a booklet on the future of rural education in Alaska, subtitled "Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Alaska State-Operated-School System But Were Afraid To Ask."