

Educator resigns in NW Arctic

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Fireworks over a proposed trip by Northwest Arctic School District administrative personnel retreat to Anchorage has led to the resignation of School Supt. George White.

White submitted his resignation effective June 30, 1982, at the Sept. 15 school board meeting. At that meeting, White had asked the board to buy up his contract and the contracts of his top administrative aides but, according to School Board Chairman June Nelson, "We didn't want the school system to

be disrupted," and the board and White negotiated a compromise.

That compromise calls for White to receive a \$10,000 bonus plus another \$10,000 which he will return to the district for a scholarship fund. That \$10,000 will be tax deductible for White, said Sophie Ferguson, another board member who wanted White dismissed on Sept. 15.

The agreement also restates White's authority and states that the board will not interfere with his administrative duties other than the board's regular statu-

tory authority, according to board member Rachael Craig.

The dispute grew out of White's plan to take 15 of his top aides to Anchorage for a retreat. Ferguson said she was never notified of White's intent and she became disturbed about the potential cost of the retreat.

Ferguson said she objected to the cost of the retreat because "He was always telling us we didn't have enough money for the programs yet there was enough money for the retreat." Ferguson said she was concerned

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Retreat prompts resignation

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about the bilingual education and the "Here's looking at you," programs.

Ferguson said the figure \$11,000 was mentioned as the cost of the weekend retreat but she said she began to doubt that amount because it included flight between Kotzebue and Anchorage for the group plus hotel accommodations, plus several meals at expensive restaurants including the Captain Cook Hotel, Elevation 92 restaurant and the exclusive Josephines in the Calista Sheraton Hotel.

She said that the board held a special meeting to stop the retreat but that White called another meeting to get the board to approve the retreat. She said she felt that was improper.

Nelson, who was out of town on vacation, said she returned to Kotzebue one day before the Sept. 15 board meeting and found that White had an attorney at the board meeting.

She said that the money scheduled to be used for the retreat was coming from some extra federal grant money designated for programming. "It wasn't coming from the kid's school programs," said Nelson.

Ferguson said "I guess his feelings were hurt" when the Board ordered the retreat stopped.

The board went into executive session and no one will say what happened in that closed-door meeting but at the end, White agreed to remain until the end of the year and leave at that time - one year before the end of his contract was due to expire.

The only thing everyone seems to agree upon is that the resignation was unexpected.

White's quick demise came as a surprise to Nelson who said she felt he always worked well with the board. White has held his job since the school district was

founded in 1976. He was paid \$76,992 annually, making him one of the highest-paid public employees in the state.

Nelson said that White had been a fighter for the school district's move toward education focused on traditional Inupiat values and the system's bilingual program but she admitted there had been some friction about the NANA Spirit Committee movement.

"It came as a complete surprise," said Craig, "We were just happily working at our jobs and then this."

Craig said she saw nothing wrong with a retreat because such sessions had been seen as beneficial in the past. A similar retreat had been held in 1978 when the board asked the administration to respond to a public demand for basic education.

"They met and did an integrated discussion of the planning structure," said Craig. She said the retreat included discussions of pooling finances, and the additional needs for special education," and came up with plans that are in use today.

After White's resignation, talk started surfacing about his alleged reluctance to implement the wishes of the NANA Inupiat Spirit Committee which is made up of the NANA Regional Corp., Mauneluk Corp. and the district.

One source stated that White had tried to thwart the wishes of the committee and had played favorites to get the board to do his bidding.

Nelson contends that is not so and that White always had worked well with the directions of the board. "If anybody, they might be mad at me because we had some disagreements with the Spirit Committee."

She said she felt that the Spirit Committee wasn't giving enough credit to the school system and was being critical of

what was a good job.

Craig said that when young and old people alike in the NANA region wanted more emphasis on the Inupiat culture, White took two student council members to Juneau and received \$1.8 million for their programs.

Whatever was discussed in the executive meeting changed the apparent good will between White and the board and "as a result of that George felt we didn't leave him much choice but to resign."

Ferguson said that she and two others wanted White terminated immediately but the other six board members persuaded him to stay. The three who wanted White gone were

Ferguson, Mary Schaeffer and Calvin Moto, said Craig.

The views also differ on White's powers from now until the end of his contract. Ferguson said he has complete no holds barred authority in administration. Nelson and Craig say their termination agreement merely restates White's statutory powers and says that the board won't meddle other than setting policy.