

TT asks —

What kind of shape other REAA's are in

Just how are the Regional Education Attendance Area's (REAA) doing as they approach the end of their first year as independent school districts? Are they providing quality education to students while staying within their financial boundaries? Or are instructional services suffering due to lack of funds?

The Tundra Times contacted a number of the REAA's to find out if the problem confronting the Bering Straits School District is the exception

or the rule for the new REAA's.

John Farley, Chairman of the Aleutian Region School District was confident that his schools will stay within their budgets. "We've been on top of the situation from the beginning. We're in the black now and hope to come out of the year within our budget," he said.

Funding Not Adequate

"Funding was not adequate," Farley continued. "In order to make it we had to cut trans-

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How well the REAA's are doing ...

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portation costs and minimize staffing in the administrative areas, but not in the teaching areas."

The Aleutian Region School District eliminated the hot lunch program from their budget at the beginning of the school year. "We realized we couldn't afford it and it was felt the communities didn't want it then," Farley said, "So far we've had no negative responses."

In the Bethel area the Lower Kuskokwim School District deals with the hot lunch program in another way. "We went from providing a Type A lunch (main course, potatoes, vegetable, dessert, milk) to pro-

viding a Type B lunch (soup, sandwich, fruit, milk)," said Richard Hazen, Business Manager for the REAA. "The meal is still nutritious and this has resulted in a savings of about \$140,000 alone this year. The savings was not so much in the food as in the cost of personnel to prepare the meal." Hazen continued.

Jim Zuelow, Superintendent of the Iditarod School District said his schools also switched to the Type B lunch program.

"In general we look forward to ending the year with a balanced budget and our policy is to provide the best quality education with the resources we have," Zuelow said. "We are, though, concerned with the

adequacy of the current financing system."

BIA Transfer

The Northwest Arctic School District not only assumed control of the state schools, but also picked up two Bureau of Indian Affairs schools. Mary Schaeffer, a board member of the REAA commented, "We'll make it through the year although we started out with a deficit. We've had to make cuts in maintenance and upgrading of schools, that will have to wait until we get more funding," she said.

"We would have been ok if we hadn't had to take over the two BIA schools. We didn't get any transitional funds from the BIA," said Mrs. Schaeffer.

Dennis Tiepelman, Executive Director of Mauneluk Association agreed with Mrs. Schaeffer and commented on the statewide situation. "Everybody came in with budget constraints and problems. We had to look closely at our funding and manage," he stated.

Robert Clark, Chairman of the Southwest Region School District commented his REAA was fortunate that their schools were close to the regional center (Dillingham). "We anticipated carry-over funds from last year and we had made plans to

use the money to help us get through this year," Clark said, "But some regions ended last year with large deficits and we had to give the funds to them."

Careful Management

Clark went on to say that his REAA would make it through the year "with careful management and tightening of the purse strings."

It appears that, although

the new school districts are operating on limited and carefully managed budgets, they are not sacrificing quality educational standards.

Perhaps feelings of the many involved in administering education in the rural areas were summed up best by Robert Clark when he stated, "things are a hell of a lot better than they were two years ago."