

Native educators want to shape education

BY MARGIE BAUMAN

FAIRBANKS—Alaska Native educators, concerned about trends in public education, are banding together in a statewide organization to work as a group on issues shaping Native education in Alaska.

"We want to inform the membership and the public about various educational issues in Alaska," said Dennis Demmert, acting chairman of the fledgling Alaska Native Education Association (ANEA). "If we can inform them, I would consider that our highest goal."

Demmert, who is director of Native Studies for the University of Alaska, said that the ANEA was formed as a result of ideas generated by educators who met during the Alaska Federation of Natives convention in Anchorage in November. That was followed by more discussion at the recent bilingual conference in Anchorage, the outcome of which will be a membership meeting in convention of the ANEA, March 3-4, at the Cook Inlet Native Association building, 670 Fireweed Lane, Anchorage.

"The main purpose of the ANEA is to provide a chance for Native educators to work together on issues that affect Native education," said Demmert, who is organizing the convention with Edna Lamebull, Flore Lekanof and Bill Peratovich, all of Anchorage. "Ultimately, this can be beneficial for all Alaskans."

"We need support from all those who are interested in those same issues and provision is made for persons other than Native educators to join as associate or contributing members."

Demmert said cross-cultural problems were at the

root of ANEA's concerns. "There are ways of communicating that are culturally derived that are there, (but) we're not aware of them. They vary from culture to culture and they're not being understood."

"We'd like to highlight some issues in Native education, to show that Native students don't do as well as others, but they are as capable as the rest. Some students I'm in contact with now are starting to get a handle on it, but that's after 12 years in the system," he said.

Despite a history of struggle by Native youngsters in the state's public education system, formation of the ANEA represents the first effort to organize Native educators as a separate group.

If it was a long time coming, there was a reason. "Through most of the 1960s, there were very few Native educators," Demmert said. "There was very little involvement of Natives in the educational process until the late 1960s and things really accelerated with the land

claims settlement."

Progress of Native students in education up to that time was more likely due to efforts of parents and peers than federal and state dollars poured into Native education, Demmert said.

At the March 3-4 organization meeting, the ANEA will put major emphasis on drawing in Native teachers, teachers aides and administrators of educational programs as regular members. Associate membership status is reserved for Natives serving on school boards, advisory school boards, parent committees and educational agencies, plus students and other persons or organizations involved in educational matters.

Membership fees will be \$25 annually for regular and contributing members, \$15 for associate members other than students and \$5 for students.

The two-day convention will feature ten workshops on various categories of Native education and an address on March 4 by Byron Mallott, president of AFN.