

Some ABC's in education

by Ron Inouye

(Editor's Note: This weekly column is being written to provide you with general information about educational issues and topics. If you would like to comment on the column, or if you would like to suggest additional topics to be covered, please write to the author at the Center for Northern Educational Research, University of Alaska-Fairbanks, 99701 or call (907) 479-7185.)

Today's column and the one next week discuss the types of schools in Alaska. They include city and borough districts, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the Regional Educational Attendance Areas (REAA's) and the private and church schools. The source of information is from a publication entitled "A Primer on Laws Important to Alaska Native Education," written by David Getches and published by CNER in 1976. (25 pages, ERIC number ED 144747, \$2.50)

Regional Educational Attendance Areas (REAA Schools)

In June, 1975, a bill was passed by the Alaska Legislature (Senate Bill 35) to end the centralized Alaska State-Operated School System. The state was divided into regional educational attendance areas (REAA's), each operating under locally elected boards. As of July, 1976, twenty-one school boards took over most of the duties of running the schools in their regions. The greatest single reason for the new act was to give communities more local control.

REAA schools are fully funded by the State of Alaska. They get an amount equal to their "basic need" under the State Foundation Program, plus the average amount of local contributions per student in the borough and city schools of the state. REAA schools are controlled by the REAA school board, which is elected by the voters of the REAA. The board makes contracts, appoints employees, provides an educational program for each child, develops a philosophy of education, and prepares periodic reports. Operation of schools is subject to approval by the State Commissioner of Education. Each REAA school has a community school committee (CSC) that makes recommendations to the board concerning general school operation. It may be given additional duties by the board. There is an administrator who is responsible for the daily operation of the schools.

Next week the city and borough schools and the private and denominational schools will be discussed.

Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Schools

In Alaska there are 43 elementary day schools operated by the BIA. In addition, there is one high school with boarding facilities at Mt. Edgecumbe. These schools are funded and staffed by the federal government. Enrollment is limited to Native children who live in communities with BIA schools. Children from other communities, such as those with no high school, can attend BIA schools by arrangement with the state.

Some non-Natives attend BIA schools where there are no other facilities. The state reimburses BIA for their education.

Under the Alaska Constitution, education is the job of the state government. Before statehood, most rural schools in Alaska were operated by the BIA. Many BIA schools have continued because the state has not had the money to do the job in every village. Several BIA schools have been turned over to the state or to city and borough school districts when the state or districts have agreed to take over school programs. A 1962 agreement between the Bureau and the State of Alaska recognizes a duty of the BIA to remain until its schools can be replaced adequately.

The longstanding policy of the Bureau is to eliminate its education functions when the Native students it serves can be educated in the state system. But the BIA believes it should continue operating a school until a local community wants it to withdraw. A current federal policy of self-determination allows tribal and village groups to assume control of BIA education programs and functions by contracting with them under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act.

Each BIA school has an advisory board which can make suggestions and recommendations to the staff. How this board affects curriculum, personnel, and evaluation of academic standards varies according to the school, its principal, and the interest of the community.