Last BIA school to close this summer

One hundred years of Alaska history close this summer when the last Bureau of Indian Affairs day school is turned over to operation by the State Department of Education. Official announcement came on March 8 in a joint notice issued by Alaska Commissioner of Education Harold Raynolds and BIA Area Director Jake Lestenkof.

At one time BIA operated as many as 137 day schools and three boarding high schools throughout the state. That was the high point in an education activity that started in the 1880's with assignment of Sheldon Jackson as General Agent for Education. The first school turned over to local operation was the Douglas school in 1938.

All schools being transferred this summer are in the Bethel area. Included are schools operated by contract at Akiachak, Akiak, Chefornak, Chevak, and Tuluksak, and the BIA-staffed schools at Kasigluk, Kipnuk, Newtok, Nunapitchuk, and Toksook Bay.

Also affected by the transfers will be education-related jobs at BIA's Bethel Agency and the Facility Management Office at Juneau. One hundred seven BIA education staff members at the schools, Bethel Agency, and Juneau Area Office will be reassigned, offered other positions, or released from their current positions as a result of the transfers.

"BIA is proud of its accomplishments in providing education for Alaska Natives," Mr. Lestenkof said. "Many of today's Native leaders are a product of that system. Our education employees many times worked under trying conditions and devoted their careers and sometimes their lives to the program and their students. Nothing exemplifies their dedication under adversity better than the teaching couple taken prisoner by the Japanese during World War II operations at Attu."

"Over recent years, working closely with the State Department of Education, we have developed confidence in the Regional Educational Attendance Area management's ability to provide a quality education program for Alaska Natives in rural areas of the State," he concluded.