

# A fair chance

In the latest round of debate about the future of Mt. Edgecumbe BIA Boarding School in Sitka, there has been a lot of talk about parental responsibility, about cost-effectiveness, about giving rural schools a chance, and about alternatives for the big old school building.

All that talk is legitimate. Edgecumbe is, after all, a big and old and expensive building to run. It is a big financial burden to be taking on at a time when state money is getting tight and needs are growing.

And it is a legitimate concern of many educators that their schools may feel a pinch when some state money is diverted to Mt. Edgecumbe.

The concerns about parental control of educational offerings is especially important at a time when control of our lives seems to be made farther and farther from our homes.

These are all legitimate concerns to have about Mt. Edgecumbe and have led some rural school board members to urge that the school be kept closed.

But we feel that all this debate seems to be, in the words of an old saying, missing the forest for the trees.

There are many young students growing up in the villages who simply are not finding their needs met by the schools in their areas. They are young and bright and deserve a solid chance to receive a good education which is simply not available in their local schools.

This is in no way meant to say that the Mollie Hootch schools are bad. They aren't, but they can not and really were never meant to be a replacement for a four-year multi-course high school of the caliber of Mt. Edgecumbe.

For this reason we are disturbed by the talk coming from rural school boards about keeping the old school closed.

Such talk from such an official body can carry great credence in official circles.

We understand the concerns raised by the school districts about brain drain and about the slashing of state aid to the schools.

But we also understand the reasons that many of these students have gone to Mt. Edgecumbe. We listened to the past students talk when they mounted a very effective drive to keep the school open. They praised the school and the educational offerings there.

The quality of that education can be seen by reading a list of graduates who have gone on to make their mark on the state.

We also heard the more than 900 parents and friends of these students when they voted at the Alaska Federation of Natives convention to support keeping the school open.

They all felt that many students weren't getting in school what they need to continue their education or to conduct their lives.

These students deserve the chance to develop to their full potential.

We think a school like Mt. Edgecumbe gives them that chance.

