

Senate Bill 122 May Change Bush School System

By MARGIE BAUMAN

Imagine your children in a village school, studying subjects you know will be useful in village life, because you helped

decide what and how they should learn.

Imagine the outdoors as their classroom, with the children studying science and mathematics by using them for sur-

vival in the rugged lands of Alaska — for camping, hunting and exploring.

All this and more are possible with the revised legislation before lawmakers in Juneau this

week, in the form of Senate Bill 122 — the revised version, that is.

It was written by village people who studied in the village schools and therefore

know their good and bad points. And this legislation, if passed, will stand a good chance of changing the course of education in the bush for a long

(Continued on page 6)

Rural School System...

(Continued from page 1)

time to come.

Probably the most important point in revised Senate Bill 122 is the "waiver clause," which would allow — indeed encourage, innovative teaching methods which might teach children more quickly and more successfully.

The legislation would dissolve State Operated Schools and establish educational service areas with a board of directors of the unorganized borough school district. The idea behind this is to provide the best possible education by encouraging maximum public participation in the program.

There are still a number of options open to ways of operating bush schools under the village school board system and for any of these to be put into effect, the legislature must take the initial step.

But basically, the problem has been too many experts... or so-called experts, telling village residents what is best for them.

A group of rural Alaska Natives who helped produce the revised education bill, put it like this:

"Each of us could write a book on experts who thought they know better than local people. The experts have proven wrong time after time after time, with disastrous consequences.

"But it is not the experts who have to live with the consequences of their mistakes — it is the local people.

"In the field of education, outside experts have made, and are continuing to make, the same kind of mistakes as the housing authorities and physical engineers and for the same reasons.

"We have been very patient. We have sat back year after year and allowed mistakes to be imposed on us which we knew were mistakes, but were powerless to alter. Our patience, however, is growing thin," the bush group said.

What the bush education caucus asks is this:

1. Local control over any local educational programs in planning and decision making.
2. Authority for each village to develop its own educational policy, personnel and program.
3. Put representatives from each village on district education boards; not on a one man — one vote bases, but on a per village, since the needs, peculiarities and requirements of each village are sufficiently unique to require individual representation.
4. Give local school boards the chance to take on complete autonomy for local decisions and additional specific responsibilities as they request.
5. Provide a minimum of any statewide rules and regulations with powers over local school

boards, to allow plenty of flexibility for local self-determination and program design.

State Senator John Sackett of Galena, writing about the education legislation recently in *All-Alaska Weekly*, offered this priority schedule:

1. 1973 — Service area created for those desiring them this year.

2. 1974 — Transitional period for remainder of service areas desired, coupled with intensive training on all aspects of administration and school board responsibilities.

3. 1975 — School not wanting service area would return to the department of education and SOS would be dissolved. In addition, I believe that after one year a school district should have the option of local control if it is desired," Sackett wrote.

Sackett noted that funding for these schools could be designed similarly to our existing public foundation act which guarantees every school district a certain amount of money per pupil.

The revised act provides all the options mentioned by the rural education caucus. It would give local community school boards the same powers and duties as city or borough school district boards, along with the option of contracting with existing city or borough school districts or private corporations to provide "any or all educational services to their children.

The revised bill calls for the legislature to fund the educational service areas and the unorganized borough school district (that is, the present state operated school district).

The revised bill would provide \$2,500 for each school board and \$10,000 for each service area board to organize and develop programs. Each local school board or service area board would have the say as to how those monies would be spent.

Predominately Native Communities, for example, might want their funds contracted to the regional native association — this is one option.

Just what the final bill to come out of the legislature will be is being decided in Juneau.

What is the purpose of all this work? Perhaps bush education caucus member Robert Clark of Clark's Point summed it up best in a report to the Legislators.

"The goal should be to prepare each and every student to live whatever life he ultimately chooses to live. Any of the western education that is (and should be) in the rural school should be from the villages and the peoples' standpoint.