

Nenana Busing Flap—

Thirty Students Reassigned to Healy

As school began last Thursday in the Nenana High School the high school was missing an estimated 20 to 30 students. At the last minute, they were reassigned to the high school in Healy (60 miles south) or remained in Anderson (30 miles away) to attend 9th grade.

Why so many high schools in such a small area of Alaska, asked State Rep. Mike Bradner, chairman of the State Budget

and Audit Committee.

Natives in the Nenana area suggest that the proliferation of high schools may be due to racial problems. There appears to be resistance in the mainly white Anderson and Clear areas to their high school students going to school in Nenana—where attendance is about 50 per cent native.

Less than two weeks before

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school began, the State Operated School Board, with jurisdiction over the students along the highway, reclassified the attendance center for students in Anderson and Clear from Nenana to Healy.

Five years ago, there was no high school in the valley. Then, with a high state subsidy (close to 100 per cent) the city of Nenana started one. The school is 20 miles from Anderson and Clear, a short bus distance in Alaska, according to Bradner and other knowledgeable officials.

When the SOS Board changed its attendance center, Nenana school protested. Each student lost meant a loss in state revenues. Then, Anderson decided to keep its ninth grade students in town, rather than send them to high school in Nenana.

"It's a sticky set of human problems with racial overtones," commented an observer.

As students started the school year last week a tentative compromise had been worked out. Bus routes would not change, according to Nenana school superintendent Richard Leath. Students who wished to attend other schools than those served by the bus route in their area would have to provide their own transportation.

Attorney General Havelock, in an opinion on the jurisdictional dispute last week, decided that the Alaska Statutes appear to give the board of the State Operated School final authority over the students in the highway area.

As busing disputes go on across the nation the one in Nenana stands out as extraordinary. Alaskans, with vast distances between populations, must tolerate an amount of school busing which would be intolerable in most other states.

Hundreds of native students must attend boarding schools and programs due to lack of facilities close enough to their homes.

Thus, when a busing dispute requires more mileage per school child, may be more expensive for the state and does not seem to provide any better education for the children—people wonder.