

# Forum Concludes SOS Should Be Decentralized

One point that was unanimously agreed upon by all participants in a forum on "Education in the Unorganized Borough", was the decentralization of the present Alaska State Operated Schools System (SOS). The concept of decentralization is based on the precept that would allow for the improvement and responsiveness of existing systems. The forum, conducted by the Center for Northern Education Research, which was held on December 10, 11, and 12, 1973 was an expression of the feasibility of decentralization in different areas of Alaska.

These areas included all ten of RurAL CAP's regional development corporations. Position papers were presented by the regions, the State Department of Education, SOS Board of Directors, Teachers of District One Education Association Bureau of Indian Affairs, Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood Grand Camp, Military Alaskan Command, and RurAL CAP.

One of the greatest concerns expressed by the regions was the establishment of local control and authority of the school

system. This endeavor entails options on 1st and 2nd Class Cities, borough, municipality, or some type of government body to support the school system.

If a particular region or village wanted to be independent from SOS but did not have a sufficient tax base to support the school system then it is the State's moral responsibility to provide capital improvement programs in the training of local school policy boards so they can handle all aspects of school administration and support the maintenance and operation of school facilities.

The regions further contended that existing State statutes will have to be amended in order to encourage sovereignty in the development of rural government structures that are responsive to the needs of residents. If there is any legislative action of policy making by the Department of Education, it must have the input and consent of the rural people that it will affect.

The North Slope Borough's experience with the transition of responsibilities from State and federal agencies to local control offers little support to

transitional plans covering more than a one-year period. They also stated that the basic problem appears that there tends to be a let-down in overall effort on the part of the "transferor" during the transitional period resulting in additional expenses and problems to the "transferee".

Robert Clark of the Bristol Bay area voiced strong criticism of the SOS inability to provide proper materials for the schools, and payments to persons who had worked for SOS in maintenance and operation of school facilities. Not only were these requests ignored but there was virtually no correspondence from SOS as to whether these requests were approved or denied. Bottle necks in communications must be eliminated.

Mike Harper, Executive Director for RurAL CAP, stated that it will be the position of the agency to try and reflect those positions of the sub-regions that bear common interest in this endeavor and to leave specific positions or requests to each respective region.

He said that RurAL CAP is in favor of establishing independent school districts only if

and when the people in the community feel it proper. In order to accomplish this, the communities could be encouraged in their efforts in several ways, such as local school board effectiveness training should be immediately undertaken; appropriate legislation should be enacted to allow second class municipalities to form independent school districts without encumbering them with the financial and management burdens of first class city status.

Also, where appropriate, clusters of small communities should be encouraged to form independent school districts, third class borough status should not be a prerequisite for this arrangement. Other possible models of municipalities have to be developed with the input of the people in the planning stage.

RurAL CAP strongly endorses course context that is relevant to the rural Alaskan experience. This would include the Alaska Native Settlement Claims Act, bi-lingual programs, cultural heritage programs, and local government training. Additionally, courses should be offered that prepare students

for the realities of 20th Century life. Mr. Harper commented.

Adult education should become a function of the school system.

There must be a program which will train and develop people for positions that will be created on school boards, teaching positions, administration positions, etc. A curriculum was advocated that deals with the totality of each individual community; and which, at the same time, maintains a high standard of education comparable to any western school.

Additionally, the agency desires a highly developed communication system organized between all educational institutions within the State. This could include increased research into the feasibility of satellite communications, local control of media development, etc.

RurAL CAP also feels that capital improvement programs should be continued, especially in those areas that have been deprived of their tax base and monies should be made available for training local school policy boards.