

Mt. Edgecumbe Statewide Board

Next year Mt. Edgecumbe, Bureau of Indian Affairs school in Sitka, will have a statewide school board. According to Morris Thompson, head of BIA for the state, the board will be elected by parents of attending high school students and will meet at least four times a year.

The BIA is also organizing a school board training program at the University of Alaska. Through it a team of specialists will travel to interested communities to demonstrate how they can be effective in planning for the education of their children.

"We're asking a representative of the Kotzebue School Board to come down to the University of Alaska to help plan the program," Thompson reported.

Why Kotzebue? Because that school is an excellent example of how effective village people can be, he answered.

Thompson had just met with the group and been vowed by the entertainment they provided. It was the first public performance of their Eskimo dance class, which is part of the \$80,000 Eskimo cultural program they're backing.

"Those kids should go to the Eskimo Olympics!" Thompson told the Tundra Times. "I was

immediately excited about it. And not just the dancing. The parents are actually involved in the school. That has always

been a criticism of the federal programs ... that the community didn't get involved. Yet here

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was the whole community; parents, interested Eskimo people, students, teachers, visitors ... all gathered in one classroom. If that isn't community involvement, I don't know what is."

About three years ago advisory boards to BIA schools began to organize. They don't have full power to hire and fire or to budget, but according to Thompson, they throw a lot of weight.

"I've been very impressed with boards I've talked to in Kotzebue and in Unalakleet. They're very sophisticated; knowledgeable as to what some of the curriculum, working closely with the school superintendent. They can get involved at a level where federal employees cannot.

"Unalakleet is a surprise. Did you know they had 17 graduates this year? Six National Honor Society and one student accepted to Stanford on scholar-

ship?"

It wasn't until after Thompson saw the Kotzebue dance program that he learned the school had been under fire by some residents for backing the class.

"We have about 20 bi-cultural programs in BIA schools and this is the first time anyone has ever complained about one. I've seen too many Indians trying to be non-Native and I think the school setting really dignifies a very beautiful culture ... gives it stature. I'm glad the board backed it."

Next year, he hopes the Eskimo cultural program can be given for high school credit in Kotzebue and that similar programs can be established elsewhere.

As for a charge by a church group that Eskimo dancing involves witchcraft, well, Thompson just didn't notice.



MORRIS THOMPSON

"All I can tell you is that I had a safe flight up there and a safe flight back," he smiled.