

# ***Bilingual education costly***

By LAEL MORGAN

Over the last two years the federal government has invested over \$4 million in bilingual programs in Alaska—mainly in individual grants to schools or school districts—with little coordination.

A coordinated, statewide program would cost in the neighborhood of \$1 million, according to Elaine Ramos, vice president for Rural Education, University of Alaska, who is currently applying for federal Title 7 and Title 4 funds for a statewide bilingual agency.

“Millions more would eventually be saved if educators could eliminate duplication of effort in the field,” she maintains. “It’s so fragmented. So much non-communication. Each little place trying to develop thier own wheel.”

Her proposal comes at a time when Alaska’s State Operated School system is being decentralized, leaving 21 independent school districts to fend for themselves and, since,

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under state law, bilingual education is required when 15 or more children speak a language other than English, most of these inexperienced school districts will have to deal with it.

Under the decentralization plan, the state department of education is suppose to provide expertise to help districts with bilingual programs, but at this writing no such help is available.

"It's tough sledding for bilingual money in legislature," reports Sam Kito, Alaska Federation of Natives president and legislative lobbyist.

A recent survey of bilingual programs by this reporter showed extraordinary duplication of money, effort and frustration. In Bethel there are the University of Alaska Yupik Language Workshop and the Bureau of Indian Affairs Bilingual Education Center—both doing an excellent job—but duplicating overhead in the extreme.

The North Slope Borough School District's dedicated, under-funded, understaffed bilingual department is struggling over ground already well covered by Bethel agencies. And the Nome Bureau of Indian Affairs bilingual project is apparently not aware that the much needed tests they've been trying to produce (unsuccessfully) already exist for the Kuskokwim Yukon Delta.

Recently the pioneering Alaska Native Language Center (ANLC) has been brought under the arm of Ramos' Rural Education department and is Ms. Ramos' hope this program can be expanded to fit the state.

There is already considerable cooperation between ANLC and other bilingual entities, but until Alaska's myriad of bilingual projects officially have a central office, the state is in for a very expensive "babble" of duplicated effort.