

BIA conducts study on drop out problem

To assist native students who have left school before graduating from the 12th grade, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has been conducting a phased three-part study of the drop out problem. Presently college students from the University of Utah's School of Social Work are working under contract with BIA Social Services and traveling throughout the state to interview students who are interested in re-entering a school system, acquiring a general equivalency diploma (GED), or participating in technical training beyond the 12th grade level.

The first phase of the study began in December 1975, when the education division of BIA conducted a survey of all Alaska natives between the ages of 14 and 21 years of age. More than

14,000 questionnaires were mailed to young natives in Alaska and throughout the rest of the United States. The questionnaire requested information regarding past and present school attendance, and whether the student desired to continue if he, or she, had dropped out.

The second phase, in operation at the present time, involves the counselor-interviewers who are scheduled to meet and interview over 1,000 individuals, who in responding to the questionnaire, expressed an interest in obtaining help in terms of their future education plans. The counselors are traveling to BIA agency headquarters in Bethel, Fairbanks, Juneau, Nome and Anchorage. From these points they will travel to small villages either by airplane or boat.

The third phase will include establishing a data retrieval system to be coordinated between BIA Education, Social Services and Employment Assistance to facilitate planning in the areas of placement for those who wish to return to school or take training, and the development of a drop out prevention program. BIA Education Specialist Bertha Lowe is coordinating the data collected by the interviewers.

In discussing the program, Specialist Lowe explains, "The project has two major objectives, the first objective is to provide the drop out student with an individual counselor contact which hopefully will assist in making concrete plans. Once the student has initiated the plan, it will be processed through a referral system. The

second objective concerns the gathering of data on drop out students to facilitate program planning in the area of prevention."