

Education doesn't answer real student needs

One of the reasons that Alaska Native students are doing so poorly in school is that schools today are geared to parent success and not to the practical success of students, according to a member of the Alaska Board of Regents.

Sam Kito, a regent, a member of the board of Doyon Ltd., and a consultant, told the AFN delegation last week that schools today are more interested in pleasing parents than educating children.

Schools today spend more time appeasing parents who want their children to receive an education to prepare them for college and little time providing non-college bound students with the skills many of them will need because they aren't entering college, says Kito.

"The educational system doesn't work for us. We are putting many in the front of the education system and we aren't getting many who come out at the end of the schooling," he said.

The education system isn't geared toward the success of students in the world they actually live and work in, says Kito, because the school system spends more time on college-bound classes.

"Every parent wants little Johnny to go to college so we spend more time on college classes and very little time on

classes that the 70 percent of students will need to make a living when they get out of high school," he says.

"Seventy percent of the programs are geared to the 20 to 30 percent of students who will go to college. And it is only about 15 percent of those who will graduate," says Kito, so the majority of students are losing the kind of education that will enable them to cope in a working world.

Add to that the equation of Native students who graduate from college — 3 to 4 percent — and you have a mass of students who have been to school but have not received an education.

Native students further suffer, said Kito, because the school system doesn't teach them about their heritage, says Kito.

"There is no way we go to school to learn about the way we are . . . we learn about someone who conquered Europe, but not about who we are and what we have done in the state."

He says that to change this parents must get involved in their school systems on advisory committees to work change.

"Change doesn't just happen. The administration of schools is geared to be resilient to change. They deal with

certification of teachers and administrators. As a result of this certification it's a matter of exclusion of teachers and new ideas.

But, Kito added, much change that could be beneficial to Native students has been fought by Native parents who believe that if their children speak in their Native language and English they will be hindered in later business life.

"It's hard to change without the help of people who demand the services," and if parents want their children to have an education in traditional matters they must work to change the system or develop an additional education system of their own — whether it be in the schools or in an alternative school.

Kito cited the example of different ethnic groups in New York City which run stores and schools which teach the ethnic values and speak in the languages.

"You go to New York and there will be a Russian section . . . an Italian section . . . they all speak their languages and eat their own foods."

Many of the groups have night schools for their children to attend to learn of their past.

"It all shows that you can live in a society where you can have something other than English or a Romance language to speak.