

'Keep Eye on It'—

Center for Northern Education Warning

By LAEL MORGAN
Staff Writer

FAIRBANKS—"Keep your eye on the Center for Northern Education at the University of Alaska," Mrs. Eleanor Ouzts, chairman of the Fairbanks Native Association Committee on Education, warned the Tanana Chiefs early this summer.

"You have to demand that Natives be in that program. Every phase of it from the first planning on what kind of research can be done to putting out the final reports."

In response, the Chiefs passed a resolution asking for Native input into the program which is, according to an initial Ford Foundation proposal, supposed to chart a direction for education in the north.

But Mrs. Ouzts is still concerned.

"I feel it's too vague an open ended contract," she explained. "I know it's a circumpolar study which is to include Canada and Greenland. But it's supported partly by Ford Foundation funds and partly by state funding. If it's going to be supported partly by the state of Alaska, Alaskans should be the ones to benefit the most by it!

"The Alaskan people feel they have been studied enough. I think it's about time someone listened to what the people have to say. Whether they're educated or not, they know what's happening around them."

Another major concern voiced by Mrs. Ouzts is that the center might not get enough attention from the university.

"The university is really doing some very meaningful things but I feel they need more publicity on some of them. The Native people don't know many of the things they're doing. Their project need coordination. I don't think anybody in any department really feels responsible to anyone as far as ethnic studies are concerned."

"We'd like to advocate setting up a separate department for Northern Studies. We talked with Dr. Kenneth Rae on this but he said there were just too many problems. We'd have to cross too many lines."

Since Mrs. Ouzts' interview, however, the University has come around to her way of thinking. The Center for Northern Education will become an entity in its own right—"like an institute," reports Dr. Frank Darnell who has just taken on

the job of director.

Existing programs in northern education are to be coordinated through the center, he added. Included are the Bilingual Program of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Alaska Rural School project, a BIA Advisory School Board training program and a university backed study on the Boarding Home Program.

Although the center will not be fully implemented until 1972, Dr. Darnell has taken half a year's sabbatical leave from his job as head of the Department of Education at the university to gather information for the center through a Ford Foundation Grant.

Funding for the survey is for one man, only, but Dr. Darnell has made arrangement with the Alaska Federation of Natives for one of their staff to travel with him to visit regional offices.

"I'll be explaining the concept of the center and seeking direction on how programs should come about," he said.

The second half of his sabbatical will be spent abroad studying northern education programs in other lands.

"We're trying to determine those programs that parallel programs in Alaska and maybe save some intermediate steps," he explained. "The Danes have been teaching first through fifth grades in Eskimo for a long time and now they've decided to change. We want to learn why. The Laps have an elaborate boarding home program we're interested in. The Siberians have published a great many instructional materials for their Native people."

For this research Dr. Darnell will be based at the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge, England. He chose it, he said, because it places a great deal of emphasis on human resources.

The research material will be brought back to the center and policy will not be set until it is evaluated. To help with the job, a council is being formed which includes the Commissioner of Education, the BIA director of Education, head of the AFN, a member of the OEO Board and regional representatives.

"Plans for the center have not been formed overnight for this purpose," he said. "We are looking for local involvement and anyone interested should contact me through the University."