



Native Americans joined in a service of celebration marking 500 years of survival in Washington, D.C. during the Native Quincentenary. Photo by Ruth Fremson

Racism and prejudice rampant in school district

By the Tundra Times

Native parents, teachers and employees were among those addressing Anchorage School District (ASD) Acting Superintendent Bob Christal and the Minority Education Concerns Committee (MECC) in a five hour meeting recently.

The meeting was to discuss prejudice elimination in the ASD. Three of the city's schools were the sites of "skinhead" incidents. The meeting was attended by predominately Black neighborhood community activists who also expressed hurt and dismay that at Stellar School, an alternative high school, still displayed a mural depicting a lynching.

Edward Sparks, chair of the ASD Native Advisory Committee often punctuated his comments with Lakota phrases, calling on "Zero Tolerance" for racist activities. He also called for crisis intervention and cur-

riculum review and the need for appropriate text books to take education into the 21st century.

Joe Jackson, a Tlingit and a commercial airline pilot whose spouse is Inupiat, was eloquent and forceful. As the father of nine children, he fears for his children's safety, especially at Hanshew Middle School. The overcrowded school has its own racist clique, according to administrators, parents and students. "White Only" signs appear on a drinking fountain. The school grounds were visited by older "Skinheads" and, at least twice private security guards were called to screen all incoming traffic.

"My heart is heavy and angered at prejudice in the Anchorage School District. Racism has reared its ugly head. Opportunities are taken away from our children because of the shape of their bones, color of their hair and the color of their skin," Jackson said. Jackson

emphasized one point with the pounding of his fist. He said history textbooks did not have to be re-ordered but supplemented. He told the committee he sent one of his children to a high school boarding school because of rising racial prejudices.

Sherry Evans, a Hawaiian who sits on the committee, paused to contain her emotion. Her children attend Spring Hill Elementary, Hanshew and Service, another high school where a recent riot took place. Evans admitted she thought of boarding schools, too, but said she decided "No group will take away my choice of where I want my children educated. We need to empower our children to deal with situations."

Linda Hadley, a former rural school teacher and school district board member, said her child is in an alternative school. "Parental involvement is being con-

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• Promote multi-cultural understanding

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nected." In an alternative school, she provides transportation to and from, 'but being in alternative school, he doesn't interact with other minorities. Minority parents, often on an hourly wage cannot afford dependable transportation. Alternative schools exclude and disconnects minorities due to economics,' Hadley stated.

"The incident at Service is the tip of the iceberg, and has been heading this way for a long time," stated June Degnan, a second year history teacher at that school. "Racism is rampant throughout the system and must be dealt with very carefully," she added. Degnan told the committee she does not have tenure, and may feel repercussions of her testimony later. She said when 30 plus students are in a small, windowless room you send a message you don't care. My father (late Inupiat teacher Frank Degnan) said, "You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free."

Rachel Ireton, an Inupiat

educated in Hawaii and the mother of a Down Syndrome child, pointed out stereotypes of Native cultures as being compliant and good natured. She encouraged the school district to invest in life skills, and did not think the school or University of Alaska systems were doing enough to promote understanding between cultures. She did not think they were hiring Natives in administration either.

Charles Hubbard, an Athabascan, said, "Prejudice reduction must start at the top." In the school district affirmative action plan "A section states Natives must be active in tribal activities. These are probably 16 year old B.I.A. definitions. We don't ask the Irish to carry their shillelaghs," Hubbard added to a responsive crowd.

Thelma Buccholdt, a Phillipina and former state legislator, said 'The minorities are here. The problem is more involvement of the majority parents and learning to get along.'