

Coup: good and bad

A proposal has been put forth to start a Native alternative school under the direction of the Anchorage School system.

On the surface of this proposal, it sounds like a very good and worthwhile idea for educational leaders to explore. After all, the proposal has worked in the Lower 48 in various Indian Heritage schools throughout the country.

But there are thorny issues that have to be faced when one is considering such a proposal, and one of them is the way of the world.

The aim of the Heritage School program in Minneapolis is to prepare Indian students to make their lives in one of two worlds — in the urban business world or in a subsistence setting.

According to Clyde Bellincourt, a Heritage school founder who spoke in Anchorage last month, "We train our students to be doctors, lawyers, and businessmen but we also give them the tools to be hunters and fishermen."

A delicate balance seems to have been struck in the Minneapolis program that should be sought in any plan to institute such a school in Alaska. Any school should never forget where the students came from and their cultural background but if it fails to recognize where Native students are going and what they will have to face when they go out into the world, it will have failed them equally.

It should aim at helping Native students learn and adapt to their studies and the world, not provide a shelter which to hide from the world.