

# Support weighs heavy at Mt. Edgecumbe hearing

By LOUISE DONHAUSER  
Tundra Times Staff

Support for keeping Mt. Edgecumbe School open for several more years outweighed the voices urging closure for the school, when a teleconference hearing was held throughout the state on the matter last week.

The teleconference had hearings in Anchorage, Bethel, Sitka and other locations for people to voice their opinions on the controversial plan to close the Bureau of Indian Affairs school which has been the only alternative education school for many rural and Native students for three decades.

Mt. Edgecumbe has not received the \$5.8 million federal funding it needs to keep open

beyond the 1981-82 school year.

Sen. Frank Murkowski, R-Fairbanks, recently told leaders of the Alaska Federation of Natives that Mt. Edgecumbe could be kept operating past the deadline if Native leaders would agree to turning 33 BIA operated schools in Alaska over to state control. Murkowski said there isn't enough money in the federal budget to keep Mt. Edgecumbe and the BIA schools operating.

At the hearing, Rep. Al Adams, speaking from Kotzebue, said "There may be a time for a Mt. Edgecumbe closure but the time is not now. If it's necessary, we will ask the Legislature to address this." He added "I am pleased to be a graduate of Mt. Edgecumbe."

But Bethel school board member Robert Nick (a Mt. Edgecumbe alumni) said, "Although I feel Mt. Edgecumbe is a good school the time is now for REAA's (Regional Education Attendance Areas) to operate at their full optimum. The position of the Lower Kuskokwim School District is for Mt. Edgecumbe to close at the earliest date."

Alaska Commissioner of Education Marshall Lind said the State Board of Education was also in favor of a closure.

"The State Board of Education has a policy which supports a ~~nd endorses a~~ single concept of education. They supported the closure of Mt. Edgecumbe. They would support it with certain conditions. If the

school is to be closed, there should be adequate transition. If the school is closed, a careful analysis must be made of the students needs."

Lind also said the board recommended money be put into enrichment programs if the school is closed. "We feel there are programs that could deal with youngsters at Mt. Edgecumbe."

Bethel Representative Tony Vaska outlined some Mt. Edgecumbe problems although he supported the continuation of Edgecumbe.

"The responsibility of educating Natives falls on the federal and state government. The Reagan administration is cutting a lot. The state has a constitutional problem." A race distinction

is made at Mt. Edgecumbe Vaska said.

State Sen. Frank Ferguson from Kotzebue also was concerned about federal funding.

"I am very concerned about the closure. These funds are not being requested by Congress. Closure or transfer shouldn't be based strictly on economic reasons."

Sheldon Jackson Jr. College President Hugh Halloway said. "Many of the students would go to schools equally segregated."

Halloway added students have "scope of courses" and teachers enjoy teaching. He added, "They have a quality of life that comes from 24 hour supervision."

State Rep. Jack Fuller from  
(Continued on Page Twelve)

# Edgecumbe draws praise from most speaking at teleconference hearing

(Continued from Page One)

Nome said, "The closure should be at the 'will of Native people. We must meet with Native people and listen to their input.'"

A Barrow parent said, "I am very proud to have a son who graduated from Mt. Edgecumbe. I plan to send my daughters there."

A Mt. Edgecumbe graduate from Barrow, Dora Brower said, "I have a variety of skills that weren't taught in village high schools. I'd like to support Mt. Edgecumbe 100 percent for all the things I learned."

Rep. Ben Grussendorf (D-Sitka) said the Molly Hootch case (which required high schools in villages) "created a lot of premature buildings." He added, "It is

the staff that gives the education not the buildings." He said, "The state is not prepared to offer such education. We have to start looking at a task force."

Carol Burger who represented Gov. Jay Hammond said, "The governor's primary concern will be quality education for Alaska's youth. She later added, "No policy decision has been made."

Rosita Worl who is with the Alaska Native Education Association said, "We do not feel students should be penalized for lack of funding. Mt. Edgecumbe should be made available."

The mayor of Sitka had few favorable words for village high schools.

"I visited many rural schools. They were inferior to Mt. Edgecumbe. When I travelled up there, it was a high turnover of teachers."

He also mentioned the drastic employment impact it would have on Sitka since 145 people will become unemployed.

A Mt. Edgecumbe teacher said, "I am concerned as to whether the state can guarantee a good education. I saw a Native community that was lacking pride. The students here have a pride in themselves. That you will not find in state's schools. Discipline is very strong where they are expected to lay off the bottle or leave."

North Slope Borough member Emily Wilson said, "We

support Mt. Edgecumbe. It's too crucial to close it now."

Another Edgecumbe teacher said, "Mt. Edgecumbe has been able to offer at buffer zone for cultural shock. The teachers felt a relationship with rural places." She added, "The variety of programs are better than rural schools. Mt. Edgecumbe has provided the state with Native leadership."

A number of the speakers discussed establishing a task force to study the matter. Vaska and Grussendorf also stressed the need for a task force.

AFN leaders were told last week that Interior Sec. James Watt would be discussing the future of Mt. Edgecumbe with Gov. Jay Hammond when the

two met for talks. But, a spokesman for Hammond on Friday said no discussions on the school took place and that most of the talks covered the Outer Continental Shelf oil exploration leasing schedules and the problems of Bristol Bay fishermen.

A BIA/Department of Interior representative had been recalled to Washington from his planned talks with the AFN because Watt had been scheduled to discuss the school's future with Hammond. At that time, AFN leaders went on record as opposing any recommendations that might come out of the talk regarding the federal government's trust responsibility to the Natives if representatives of the Native groups were not included.