

STATEWIDE EDUCATION SURVEY



ATHABASCANS EXPRESS EDUCATION NEEDS — Dr. Ken Linsey from the Worldwide Education Research Institute conducts a study to determine what rural Athabascans rate as their highest education needs. Similar groups met all over the state of Tlingits, Haidas, Eskimos

and Aleuts. Coming from all walks of life, the Native people contributed their ideas on what is needed for their children. Results of the survey will be used by the State Board of Education to plan new programs for Native schools.

—Photo by COLLEEN REDMAN

Despite Some Criticism Hurriedly Assembled Survey Brings Surprises

By JACQUELINE GLASGOW
Staff Writer

FAIRBANKS — Native self-determination played a part in a statewide survey on education conducted for the State Board of Education throughout Alaska this month.

A team from Worldwide Education Research Institute in Salt Lake City, Utah, conducted native-attended seminars Fairbanks, Nome, Bethel, Juneau, Kodiak and other localities throughout the state.

The survey was ordered by the state as part of a needs assessment analysis, taking into account cultural and regional differences. Rather than having outsiders assess their needs, an attempt was being made to have Eskimos, Aleuts, Tlingits, Haidas, Athabascans, and so on express their own idea of the needs in education for their areas.

Participants in the program were asked to rate a list of subjects according to importance. Each cultural group then chose those of the most critical priority for intensive discussion.

Native groups were asked to select people from all walks of life to aid in the survey: trappers, fishermen, homemakers, students, government workers,

etc.

In Fairbanks, the Native Association contacted 15 Athabaskan Indians. FNA's Education Chairman, Emma Widmark, was given only two days notice to make the selections and notify the people. Hurried phone calls and flights were arranged.

Colleen Redman from the Boarding Home Program quickly contacted Athabascans living in town and arranged for others to come in from the bush. Some delegates were flown in on charter flights.

Victor Nickolas of Kaltag said, "In general the output was great." He said the discussions in Fairbanks included such items as the need for Native youngsters to be able to get up and speak, to voice their opinions in a group.

Another suggestion by villages was the need for a gym in

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connection with village schools. Nickolas, who spent a winter in the village last year, felt that even adults could benefit by having a place to work off energy.

Eliza Jones brought up the problem of special education teachers for children in the bush.

Mrs. Jones has a partially blind daughter of 15 who must now live away from home in Anchorage a good part of the year to get special education. "There is no school for the deaf and blind in Alaska," she said.

Linda Williams of Allakaket thought that "the delegates who came in from the bush had a lot to say about what they wanted."

Among the things they wanted were classes in the Athabascan language and Athabascan history. Linda told how some of the older people in Allakaket came into the schools, told stories, and taught the little children Athabascan.

Colleen Redman who brought in some of the delegates, felt the survey had great value.

"It was all tied to the learning of the child. The group themselves chose the topics and voted on which they wanted to discuss."

There was some criticism from Native leaders that the Utah group knew nothing about Alaska or Alaskan Natives, and that the survey was attempted without adequate planning.

Most of the participants agreed. The research people, they said did not know "there was a difference between Tlingit and Haida, for example."

Nevertheless, Dr. Ken Linsey who conducted the session in Fairbanks received praise from most delegates. He was described as a "pretty understanding, a bright guy."

One participant said: "He didn't know anything about Alaska but he helped us word our ideas right."

A local educator pointed out that quite often in taking a survey, the people too close to the problem have a hard time keeping their own opinions out.

"By not knowing any of their background, the people have to offer Dr. Linsey more information. They have to contribute."

No one seemed to have an explanation why the meetings were arranged in a rush. It was obvious that the people from Utah were unfamiliar with the vast distances one has to travel in Alaska to cover the state.

The Native people, nevertheless, came from all parts of the bush. They put in the best of their ideas. It remains to be seen how the State Board of Education will act on their expressed needs.