



Late Placement Of Students Causes Difficulty

Walter Peter, 16-year-old Fort Yukon youth, is going to high school this year.

Like millions of other American teenagers Walter will be going to classes at a public school.

Unlike his counterparts, though, it was only be a "lucky break" that he will be able to continue his education this fall.

While many Native young-

sters are unable to continue high school classes this year because of overcrowded facilities at BIA schools in the state, the "lucky break" came to a few who are being placed in public schools in the cities.

And while the state Department of Education's foster-home project will be placing probably 17 rural youngsters in Fairbanks homes to attend Lathrop High School, the new pilot-program seems to be having its share of troubles.

Walter narrowly missed being left out of the project. When he discovered he would be unable to go on to school in BIA classes this year, he wrote a letter to the Fairbanks Native Association, saying: "I would like to go to school in Fairbanks. Could you please find me a place to

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stay?"

Members of the association took the letter to state officials.

Funded

\$128,000 were set aside last February in Juneau to enable the state Department of Education to bring roughly 100 rural children in from the villages, pay board and room in foster homes plus tuition to local borough school systems.

\$8,000 of the \$128,000 was set aside for a "Coordinator."

The man selected for the job was Merle Armstrong.

Although the plan was evidently prepared well in advance, a late start this summer in laying groundwork is causing a last-minute rush to place youngsters in classes.

Classes at Lathrop High School are now going into their second week, and the Tundra Times has learned that the only student yet enrolled under the foster-home project is a non-Native girl from along the Alaska Railroad.

Seventeen are yet to come in, according to latest reports.

Of the 17 who Education Department officials have cleared for bringing to Fairbanks, only seven have actually been sent travel allowances for flying from their home villages.

Lois Meyers, coordinator for the project at Lathrop High School, told the Tundra Times yesterday that, "we're holding the room for them here. All they have to do is

come on into town."

"We have class schedules and everything already arranged for them."

And indications are, with only a few youngsters being brought to Fairbanks, that many others will be left out in their home villages to miss this year of school.

Investigate

Members of the Fairbanks Native group decided to look into the foster-home project when they began receiving frantic letters from Native youngsters in villages.

The group's education committee began an investigation about two weeks ago, and now members say, "We are only sorry we didn't start delving into this earlier. We weren't aware that a problem existed."

Mishandle

Three Association members, Mrs. Jules Wright, Mrs. Ralph Perdue and Mrs. Hugh Fate, told the Tundra Times that all evidence seemed to point out that the project had been "mishandled" by the Department of Education.

"I just wish we had discovered this mixed-up mess a little sooner," Mrs. Wright said. "Maybe we really could have done something."

"While we were told that everything was going fine, it looks now as if the program has been messed up right from the start."

The first notification rural people had that the program was coming was in July. Then, letters were not sent to the villagers or to the vil-

lage councils, but to the BIA teachers in the villages.

"What they didn't realize, evidently, was that most of the BIA teachers would be out of the villages during the summer months," Mrs. Fate said.

"For that matter, few of the villagers were there themselves. Most people were out in fishcamps or off on jobs during those months."

Although state officials in Juneau maintain some letters were sent to village chiefs, members of the Native group found after checking that no letters were mailed to any but BIA teachers.

Names

The first query to teachers was an attempt to secure names of youngsters not able to attend school.

Earlier this summer, it became public information that 200 Alaska Native students in rural areas would be out of school this fall because of space at Mt. Edgecumbe and Chemawa, Oregon. The number is actually much greater, many feel, because the BIA's statistics showed only this year's eighth grade graduates for whom there was no room.

The statistics failed to mention the older students for whom no room was available last year. Reports indicate there may be many hundreds of students such as these.

On Their Own

When it became apparent to some students in the bush that unless they acted themselves, there would be no

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school for them this year, many came into Fairbanks on their own to sign up for classes at Lathrop.

Most of the "loners" who came on their own were taken in by members of the Native Association. But when, in turn, these members applied for foster-home status they were at first met with a cold rebuff.

It took phone calls to Education Commissioner Zahradnick in Juneau before members were told that "there wasn't any reason" why they couldn't become official foster homes under the program, also.

Homes Here

Many families in Fairbanks have applied for the "foster home" status to take in a Native youngster, but apparently few of them have been selected.

William Mailer of the Department of Health and Welfare, said his department could only find 16 applicants who could qualify under the rigid requirements of the program.

Many families who wished to apply were so confused by the bewildering lack of organization connected with the project, they said, that they withdrew their applications.

One family phoned the Bureau of Indian Affairs only to be told that the BIA had "no part" of the project other than helping to inspect the homes.

A call to the Health & Welfare revealed that that state agency was also only inspecting homes and approving them.

Meanwhile

Meanwhile, out in the villages, reports are reaching here that large number of village youths are being sent to a BIA school in Oklahoma, in many cases against their wishes and the wishes of their parents.

"What can we do?" a BIA official here said, "It's either that or no school at all."

1,000 Outside

With roughly 750 Alaska Native children at Chemawa school in Oregon and another

250 evidently slated to go to Chilocco School in Oklahoma, roughly 1,000 Alaska Native youngsters are being sent out of state this year for a year of schooling outside.

For many, apparently, the choice wasn't theirs.

During a recent trip to Huslia a member of the Fairbanks Native group met several Native teenagers who, in early fall, didn't yet know where they were going to school.

One girl ran to the visitor just as she was leaving, "I don't know where I'm going," she said, "I think they're going to send me to Kansas or someplace."

In Fairbanks, a BIA official told another member of the Fairbanks Native group that selections as to just which youngsters were going where were made by learning capabilities.

The "slower" students were being sent to Oklahoma, the official said.

Vocational

After that, the Fairbanks group wrote to Chilocco requesting information on the school and found that Chilocco is actually a vocational school offering courses in carpentry, painting, auto repair, agriculture and other non-academic fields.

They also found, they said, from a local source who knew the school, that Chilocco was in itself a school for "slow" Indian students, and offered vocational training.

A letter from the Oklahoma state Department of Education revealed that most Indian youngsters in that state attended public schools. In places where there were no schools, the youths were sent to boarding facilities in public school districts.