

BUSH SCHOOL MEET AT UA



GETTING READY FOR THE BIG EDUCATION MEETING AT Fairbanks July 16-17 are at left, Gordon Jackson, vice president for Human Resources, Alaska Federation of Natives, Inc. and Mitch Demientieff, conference chairman. The cooperative conference on "Education and the World of Our Children" was organized by the AFN Human Resources. — Photo by MARGIE BAUMAN

Strategy Session To Discuss Bush Education

By MARGIE BAUMAN

A strategy session billed as a conference on bush education gets under way at the University of Alaska July 16, in hopes of making recommendations for improved rural education a reality.

At the heart of the conference is a report recommending that enabling legislation for the Alaska State Operated Schools System be amended to make the system a transition one and laying out the steps of transition.

The report was prepared by the University of Alaska's Center of Northern Education on request of the Alaska Legislature Interim Committee on Pre-Higher Education and the Alaska State Department of Education, in cooperation with the AFN Human Resources Committee.

More than 1,000 copies of the Pre-Higher Education Report have already been distributed and the July 16-18 conference at the Fairbanks campus will deal mainly in strategies to make recommendations with in the report a reality.

"Hopefully some recommendations will go in August to the Legislative Budget and Audit Committee and candidates (for political office) will take a position on pre-higher education in the unorganized borough," said Gordon Jackson, one of the key organizers of the conference.

Jackson is the vice president for Human Resources, Alaska Federation of Natives Inc., which is the major sponsor of this conference on "Education and the World of Our Children."

Mitch Demientieff of Nena, who was hired on a contract basis to organize the conference,

will serve as its chairman.

Given full participation from the regional Native corporations, "I don't think the Alaska Legislature or state administration can deny the rural Alaska people control over the educational system," Demientieff said. "Therefore, I would encourage everyone to come and participate," he said.

Over 700 invitations to the conference have been mailed out, to individuals and organizations involved in rural education.

"The strategy (for implementing these recommendations) will be developed by the whole conference," said Jackson. "The Human Resources Committee will take a look at its recommendations and do everything in its power to implement them."

What troubles Jackson most, he says, is the present "tri-partide system" of delivering educational services to the bush.

"The State Department of Education deals with about 29 municipalities; SOS provides education to over 100 rural communities in the unorganized borough and the Bureau of Indian Affairs also funds several schools in the unorganized borough," he said.

"Delivery in a tri-partide system can only be an unequitable way of providing services in the

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unorganized borough," Jackson concluded. "Providing educational services in the unorganized borough with local control will solve a lot of problems. With the state and federal government in charge, the curriculum has been often irrelevant and educated students right out of the villages," Jackson said.

Scheduled speakers for the three-day conference include President Roger Lang of the Alaska Federation of Natives Inc., Dr. Frank Darnell of the Center for Northern Educational Research; Frank Peterson, director of the Kodiak Area Native Association, Kodiak; Bobby Schaeffer, Kotzebue; Mayor Eben Hopson, Barrow; Bob Clark, Dillingham; Frank Degan, Unalakleet; State Rep. Willie Hensley, D-Kotzebue; State Sen. John C. Sackett, R-Galena; Superintendent of State-Operated Schools Stan Friese and several others.

The Pre-higher education report made a number of recommendations dealing with the phasing out of the present State-Operated Schools System, noting that neither SOS or the BIA should be responsible for primary management of the transition process to local school district status.

Rather, the report said, a new division of school district development should be established within the Department of Education, to manage the transition process. The new division should be funded, the report said, with an amount equal to two per cent of the current budget necessary to operate rural schools.