

SOS's Stanley Friese Moves to Cut Off Rural School Lunches

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Staff Writer

The State Operated School Board under the direction of Stanley Friese, Superintendent, has passed a new policy on rural school lunches.

In the past, most rural students were automatically eligible for free lunches. Under the new ruling, families will now be required to submit applications in order to qualify.

The Board ruled to establish minimum Type A lunch costs of 10 cents per student effective July 1, 1972.

Although free lunches will still be provided under the federal guidelines on eligibility, opponents of the new measure feel it will be impossible to keep the applications anonymous as in a larger city.

A bush teacher, writing in protest, states: "Apparently Mr. Friese and the members of the state board are ignorant of village life and are unaware of the great hardship the lunch charge will impose on all concerned."

"BIA schools," he continues, have never charged for lunches. This new policy will discriminate between villages and BIA schools will be reluctant to become state schools."

At the time that a number of villages chose to change over to state schools, they were concerned about the state charging for lunches. They were promised that any lunch charges would be set by the local school board.

The question was raised, "Where are the school board members who are supposed to represent rural schools? Do they wish to destroy the smooth takeover of BIA schools?"

"Here goes our good school-community relations right down the drain! Friese has undermined local school boards and local autonomy, what little they had anyway."

The spokesman for the rural boards said: "The power to decide on charging for school lunches was given to local advisory boards. Now the power is being taken away and places the local boards in an impossible position with the rest of the community."

Opponents of the plan question the cost of accounting and extra employees needed to administer the new lunch program. The charge recommended by Mr. Friese was 20 cents. The Board amended this to 10 cents.

One rural teacher commented: "It is questionable that it is the least bit profitable. The complication of mailing all those dimes to Anchorage was obviously not considered."

"Undoubtedly, the philosophy is let's make these people pay their way. Their children are getting a 'free education'. Let's make them buy lunch."

"Is the state of Alaska in such dire circumstances," he asks, "that we must collect lunch money from children in rural

schools to help finance the state budget? There must be another way."

A bill now before the House Finance Committee would offer a free meal a day to all Alaska schoolchildren.

Called the "Alaska Child Nutrition Act", the bill has won support from food service association members, led by Bernice Bantz, president of the group.

Mrs. Bantz said, "We as a nation need to do something about malnutrition. And it should start with the food service."

Hundreds of letters have been sent to the legislators urging support of the bill measure.

"We feel this is a very im-

portant bill for Alaska children."

In contrast, Mr. Friese's new policy ruling appears to be ill-timed.

There will undoubtedly be families in villages whose pride will prevent them from making a formal application for free lunches. There are others whose income will be just on the borderline.

The new system will penalize the wage-earner and make welfare more attractive.

"The hard feelings caused in a small community," the bush teacher said, "when some families must pay for lunch while others receive free lunch will do serious damage to the educational program and community-school relations."



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