

ALASKAN NATIVE EDUCATION – AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

**BY
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**A REPORT PREPARED FOR THE
ALASKAN NATIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT IN EDUCATION
PROJECT ANNA**

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APPENDIX E

INTRODUCTION TO CHARLES K. RAY'S HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Charles K.(Todd) Ray was asked to prepare this historical paper for the Alaska Native Needs Assessment (Project ANNA). It is not one of his better known works, but I think it is one of his best. In his usual scholarly style, Ray has provided an excellent well documented history of Alaska Native education. While he starts with the 19th century he provides ample details of the time from 1940 through to 1973. He perhaps provides one of the few discussions of the lack of school facilities to many Native communities during the 1940's and early 1950's. I well remember discussions within the BIA Washington Office with individuals who taught in Alaska during the 1940's and how they were involved in assisting to plan needed village schools.

How can there be great expectations of Alaska Native education when there were no village schools to attend? Ray details the gradual increase in availability of schools to a virtual explosion of need during the 1960's and early 1970's. I experienced the increased number of applications to Mt. Edgecumbe High School during 1958 – 1963. At the end of 1963, the BIA started sending Alaska Native high school students to stateside boarding schools, and Ray has provided some details to this happening.

After some 33 years, it is a thrilling to me to read Ray's "Historical Perspective." While I experienced first-hand some of it, he provides welcome details of a total picture which a practioner from his singular position cannot expect to know. It is perplexing to ponder how to handle his extensive and valuable Appendices listed in his Table of Contents as this documents includes only the "Historical Perspective.". For the time being, I have all the documents in the Appendix in my possession and individuals who wish copies may contact me at trhrms@comcast.net. I can't promise to make hard copies available to every one but I will try.

Tom R. Hopkins

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FOREWORD

These are important times in the education of Alaskan Natives as changes are taking place almost daily. New directions are being considered and new, dynamic forces are at work in Alaska and in Alaskan Native Affairs. In view of this, it is always helpful to have a reliable and succinct history or record available so that questions about what has gone on before can be answered with greater ease. The basic purpose of this booklet is to be helpful to Alaskan Native communities and organizations, State and Federal officials, citizens of Alaska, and professional education.

There is no one person better qualified to compile and write this brief historical sketch than Professor Charles K. Ray of the University of Alaska. Dr. Ray has been intimately involved in Native education for 25 years and has made basic contributions as a teacher, administrator and researcher. His early work, "A Program of Education for Alaskan Natives" (1959) was a benchmark in Alaskan Native Education. Since then, he has continued to serve in a variety of capacities on behalf of Native Peoples. This booklet is a recent contribution and it is a pleasure for the Bureau of Indian Affairs to make it available to the general public.

I would also like to extend appreciation to Mr. Warren I. Tiffany and to Dr. Thomas R. Hopkins of the Bureau's Indian Education Resources Center (both former Alaskan teachers and administrators), who were instrumental in helping to bring the booklet to fruition.

If the reader wishes to make comments about the booklet or to inquire about additional information, they should feel free to do so.

–Emil Kowalczyk, Assistant Area Director
Juneau Area Office
Juneau, Alaska
October, 1973

ALASKAN NATIVE EDUCATION — AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The seventeen years following the American purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867 marked a period of almost complete neglect of the new Territory by the United States government. No civil government existed. Nor were civil laws or procedures for settlement of disputes available.¹

While no system of public education existed, Alaska was not without schools during this period. The Alaska Commercial Company supported schools for native children on the Pribilof Islands, and the Russian Orthodox Church maintained educational programs in the Aleutians, Southwestern Alaska, and Sitka. The principal educational thrust in Alaska prior to 1884, however, was made by the Presbyterian Church which established mission schools for Indians at Sitka, Wrangell, and other sites in Southeastern Alaska. The purposes of the Presbyterian missions included not only the spread of Christianity but also instruction designed to ultimately develop independent citizenship on the part of Alaskan natives.²

By 1884, the necessity for establishing a public system of education, as well as providing for other governmental functions, had become apparent in Washington. Consequently, Congress passed the First Organic Act which was signed into law in 1884. This act not only established a civil government for Alaska, but also provided for the creation of a public school system. The Secretary of the Interior was directed to make “needful and proper provision for the education of children of school age. . . without reference to race.”³ Schools were to be administered by the United States Bureau of Education.

With the exception of minor educational activities carried out by the Russian Orthodox Church until as late as 1887, the Federal government, by establishing public schools as well as subsidizing mission schools, provided what education was available

¹ Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1875 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876), p. 465. Hereafter these reports will be cited as Report of the U.S. Commissioner of Education.

² *Ibid.*, p. 281.

³ Act of January 27, 1905, ch. 277. 33 Stat. 616, 619.

until 1990. In that year Congress enacted a statute providing for the establishment and local control of independent schools for white children within incorporated towns.¹

In 1905 the Nelson Act was passed which provided for the establishment of schools in areas outside incorporated towns for “white children and children of mixed blood who lead a civilized life.”² These schools were under the jurisdiction of Alaska's Territorial Governor and provided the beginning of the dual system of public education — State and Federal — which exists today. Crystallization of the dual system was effected through the Uniform School Act of 1917 which established the Territorial Department of Education with a Commissioner of Education as its chief school officer. The Alaska Department of Education had legal jurisdiction over all schools not under the control of the U.S. Bureau of Education.³

The dual system of education was never one that could be divided neatly into white and native schools. From its inception, Indian and Eskimo children were enrolled in schools operated by the Territory. However, as Alaska developed, and as its resources grew, it assumed a larger responsibility for the education of all its citizens — rural and urban alike.

Little philosophical disagreement exists concerning the desirability of a single unified school system for all children in the State. Conversely, the operation of two systems by two separate agencies has always been cumbersome and has raised the nagging issue of a system of education which is segregated (at least in the federal system) on the basis of race. Many attempts have been made to unify the two systems of public education under the sole jurisdiction of the State. However, several stumbling blocks to this unification continue to exist.

The unique role of the Federal government to Indian groups in Alaska is still debated. Unlike Indian tribes in other regions of the United States whose leaders

¹ Report of the commissioner of Education for the Years 1918-1920 (Juneau: Juneau Daily Capital, 1920), p. 31. Hereafter, these reports will be cited as Report of the Alaska Commissioner of Education.

² Act of January 27, 1905, ch. 277, 33 Stat. 616, 619.

³ Report of the Alaska Commissioner of Education, 1918-1920, p. 31. Jurisdiction over Alaskan native affairs was administratively transferred from the Office of Education to the Office of Indian Affairs (later reorganized as a Bureau) within the United States Department of the Interior in 1931. (Annual Report of the Governor of Alaska to the Secretary of the Interior, 1931. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1931, p.96.)

negotiated agreements with the Federal government, Alaska's Indian and Eskimo citizens have not been relocated by the Federal government to reservations or otherwise removed directly from lands they once occupied. Few treaties providing for specified services or protection were negotiated between Indian tribes in Alaska and the Federal government. Nonetheless, Alaska's Indian and Eskimo citizens have been included in legislation providing for services to the Indian population and are consequently affected, directly and indirectly by the unique relationship which, exists between the Federal government and the American Indian.

The United States Constitution provides that Congress shall have power “to regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states, and with the Indian tribes.”¹ In 1790 Congress passed the Indian Non-Intercourse Act which is essentially still in effect (with minor modifications). In essence this act prevents states from obtaining Indian land without consent of the Federal government.² Federal support to Indian groups has largely taken the form of services — typically in the areas of health and education.

Historically, court decisions have supported the legality of the Federal government's unique role in the governance of Indian affairs. In the hallmark case, *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, the United States Supreme Court outlined the relationship of Indian tribes to the Federal government. The Court held, in an opinion delivered by Chief Justice John Marshall, that Indian tribes did not enjoy rights of self-government afforded foreign states despite their authority to enter into treaties with the United States. Marshall added that while Indian tribes did hold rights to lands they occupied, they could be described as “domestic dependent nations” and were in a state of “pupilage.” According to Marshall, “Their relation to the United States resembles that of a ward to his guardian.”³ Indian tribes still retain this role of “domestic dependent nations” with power to regulate the affairs of their own members within tribal territories (reservations) and as such are immune from laws of the states within which their reservations lie.

¹ Article I, section 8, clause 3.

² Act of July 22, 1790, Ch. 33, 1 Stat. 137.

³ Cherokee Nation v. Georgia, 5 Peters 1 (1831).

The Federal government continued to enter into treaties with Indian tribes until after the Civil War. However, because only the Senate ratifies treaties, the House of Representatives became concerned at its lack of involvement in Indian affairs. Consequently, Congress enacted legislation which specified that agreements with Indians would no longer be made by treaties but rather through acts of Congress. Since 1871, therefore, the method of providing for Indian affairs has been through the enactment of Federal statutes.

Pricked by public conscience, in 1924 Congress passed the Citizenship Act which proclaimed Indians to be United States citizens, without impairment of previously established property rights.¹ It is interesting to note that Indians were made citizens without their consent, although a majority of the Indian population would undoubtedly have favored such status at the time this action was taken. However, refusal by some tribes to accept citizenship in their own minds has led to such ludicrous situations as the debate by the Iroquois in 1941 as to whether they would declare war on Germany.

Alaska made clear its intention toward Indian and Eskimo citizens in the State Constitution which proclaims: "This constitution is dedicated to the principles that all persons are equal and entitled to equal rights, opportunities, and protection under the law, and that all persons have corresponding obligations to the people and to the State."² "More specifically in the field of education, the Alaska Constitution provides that "the legislature shall by general law establish and maintain a system of public schools open to all children of the State . . ."³

Whether such action by the State absolves the Federal government from any legal obligation is not clear. That the Federal government has the authority to provide educational services is generally beyond debate. Authority to administer Indian school programs was granted to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, subject to the direction of the Secretary of the Interior in 1908.⁴ The well-known "Johnson-O'Malley" Act of 1936 makes clear the authority of the Federal government to contract with any state territory,

¹ Act of June 2, 1924, ch. 233, 43 Stat. 253.

² Article I, section 1.

³ Article VII, section 1.

⁴ Act of April 30, 1908, ch. 153, 35 Stat. 70, 72.

medical, or social services for Indian citizens.¹ This act is commonly cited as authority for the Federal government's role in Alaska where treaties or other formal agreements are political subdivision, institution, or even with a private corporation for education, absent. But the question as to whether the Federal government can be compelled to assume financial responsibility for the Indian and Eskimo population of Alaska is typically answered from an emotional rather than a legal base.

Despite the legal cloud that remains concerning the Federal government's obligation to Alaskan native groups, the major impediment to the unification of the two school systems has been and remains a financial one. The State has simply not been able to assume financial responsibility for all schools operated in Alaska.

Serious efforts toward unification of the two public school systems in Alaska began during the 1940's and early 1950's. As of the 1948–49 school year, the Bureau of Indian Affairs estimated that approximately 8, 500 children who were one-quarter or more Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut were enrolled in schools in Alaska. The breakdown enrollment by types of schools was as follows:

Territorial Schools	2,948
Mission Schools	600
Government Schools (ANS)	5, 036

(*Including 963 pupils in boarding schools and 4,073 pupils enrolled in 83 day schools).²

During the 1948–49 school year, estimates were that over 1,800 pupils of school age were without school facilities. Typically, Federal schools were retained in the more isolated regions, whereas the Territory generally operated schools in the more populated areas.

The recurring criterion to determine when schools would be transferred from Federal to Territorial responsibility was one of "readiness." According to an official statement by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, "as fast as schools and communities are ready, and the Territory can assume responsibility, schools will continue to be transferred to the

¹ Act of June 4, 1936, ch. 490, 49 Stat. 1458

² "Answers to Your Questions on Alaska Native Service Educational Activities," (Bureau of Indian Affairs, February, 1950) p. 1 (Xeroxed). (Included as Appendix A).

Territory.”¹

Despite the vagueness of the term “readiness,” nineteen schools were transferred from Federal to Territorial or local operation during the 1940’s, including Bethel, Hoonah, Kake, and Klawock.²

Additionally, most Federal schools located in communities where district schools existed were transferred to local operation. Federal school facilities in communities where local schools were in operation were leased to the Territory for its use.³

As the Territory assumed responsibility for schools in the more populated regions, the Federal government utilized its allotted resources to expand educational facilities into communities not previously served. Thirty to forty such communities were still without school facilities in 1950.

Viewing several alternatives for accelerating the merger of the two systems, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Territory of Alaska considered provisions of the Johnson-O’Malley Act of 1934 to provide the best opportunity for effecting a unified school system during the 1950’s. This act allows the Secretary of the Interior to contract with “any state or territory, or political subdivision therefore with any appropriate state or private corporation, agency, or institution, for the education, medical attention, agricultural assistance, and social welfare of children in such state or territory.”⁴

While periodic revisions have been made over the years in the specific provisions for transferring schools from Federal jurisdiction to State or local control, the currently operative agreement for the administration of Johnson-O’Malley funds is attached as Appendix B. Essentially, Johnson-O’Malley funds are considered to be transitional monies allocated until such time, as the State or other political subdivision can assume the full operation of these schools. When full responsibility for costs are assumed by the State, borough, or independent district, title transfer of facilities is made. Prior to the time title to schools is transferred, funds are provided on a contractual basis and are supplementary to other revenues received for school support by the appropriate political subdivision.

¹ Ibid., p. 4.

² Ibid., p. 3.

³ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴ Act of June 4, 1936, ch. 490, 49 Stat. 1458.

The period from 1951 to 1954 was one during which extensive transfers from the Federal to the State school system took place. The following Bureau of Indian Affairs schools were contracted to the State for operational purposes.¹

Afognak	1951	Tyonek	1952
Alitak	1951	Chenega	1953
Copper Center	1951	Chitina	1953
Old Harbor	1951	Egegik	1953
Ouzinkie	1951	Ekwok .	1953
Akutan	1952	Hydaburg	1953
Anchorage Chignik Bay	1952	Levelok	1953
Belkofski	1952	Newhalen	1953
Karluk	1952	Nondalton	1953
King Cove	1952	Pilot Point	1953
Metlakatla	1952	Tatitlek	1953
Nikolski	1952	Angoon	1954
Perryville	1952	Rampart	1954
Port Graham .	1952		

By 1954 both the Territorial Department of Education and the Bureau of Indian Affairs had developed positions pertaining to the ultimate transfer of all Federal schools to Territorial control. By the end of 1954, Commissioner of Education Don Dafoe had developed cost figures required for the Territory to educate children enrolled in federal schools. Commissioner Dafoe projected a minimum cost of \$1,750,000. for operating costs, without reference to capital outlay.² The amount required exceeded the budget of the Bureau of Indian Affairs for school operations in Alaska by approximately \$300, 000.³

The revenues required for Territorial operation of Federal schools in Alaska were relatively insignificant by current standards. However, financial resources available for supporting even those schools under Territorial control were considered to be inadequate.

¹ Enclosure in a letter from Merle M. Armstrong, Director, State-Operated Schools, to Warren Tiffany, Assistant Area Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs, July 28, 1970. (Included as Appendix C).

² "Information Relative to the Financing of Contract Schools in Alaska as Requested in Commissioner's Letter Dated September 29, 1954" (Included in a letter from William H. Olsen, Area Director, Alaska Native Service, to the Commissioner, Bureau of Indian Affairs, December 23, 1954), p. 18. (Included as Appendix D).

³ Ibid., p. 19.

The Territory could not assume costs for additional enrollments without obtaining additional revenues, an extremely remote possibility.

In addition to the pessimistic forecasts for income which would allow for the ultimate operation of all public schools by the Territory of Alaska, additional problems arose which temporarily halted school transfers in 1954.

Certainly not the least of these problems was the physical condition of Federal school facilities at the time transfer to Territorial operation occurred. Many of the schools, particularly in the Aleutian chain, were old and badly in need of repair. Maintenance costs were often extremely high.

A ubiquitous problem inherent in the early transfer agreements concerned the length of time that Federal support for schools would continue. The Bureau of Indian Affairs sought a definite time-frame which would provide for a conclusion to its financial responsibilities for funding schools previously under its jurisdiction. Conversely, the Territory, facing an uncertain financial future, insisted that Federal financial support be continued until such time as the Territory had revenues adequate to support the additional burden of schools formerly operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Territorial officials based their arguments on the concept that the education of Indian and Eskimo children was the responsibility of the Federal government.

With these as well as other obstacles, transfers of Federal schools to Territorial control came to a virtual standstill. With the exception of those at Tanana and Circle, transferred in 1958 and 1959 respectively, no additional schools were shifted from Federal operation to Territorial or State control from 1954 until 1967.

Following the advent of statehood in 1959, and bolstered by a state constitution which clearly stipulates state educational responsibility for all of Alaska's children, the Alaska legislature proceeded to assume an expanded role in educational planning. In 1960 it enacted a statute providing for issuance of general obligation bonds for a regional vocational school to be located north of the Yukon River, subject to approval by a majority of the qualified voters in the State. The electorate responded affirmatively.¹

¹ William R. Marsh, North to the Future (Juneau: Alaska Department of Education, 1967), p. 84.

While obligation bonds, not to exceed \$1, 500, 000., were authorized for the acquisition, construction, equipment, and capital outlay of this vocational facility,¹ the question of funds for current operation of the school was left essentially unanswered.

Since most of the students for whom the vocational school was planned were native, the State requested that the Bureau of Indian Affairs provide operating costs. In response, Bureau of Indian Affairs officials pointed out that they had had a minimal role in planning the facilities and were not entirely clear about the fiscal or curricular arrangements implied by the creators of a vocational high school. Consequently, the Bureau of Indian Affairs exhibited considerable reluctance to assume operating costs for what was considered to be entirely a state venture.

The authorization of the vocational boarding school (which was to become the William E. Beltz School located at Nome) brought to a head some of the persistent and nagging questions caused by the continuation of the dual system of education. Who was responsible for overall educational planning in Alaska? How were rural schools to be financed? What kind of education was to be provided for rural youth?

The impasse reached on these questions, resulting in large measure from the voters' mandate to proceed with a vocational school north of the Yukon, led to a meeting in Washington, D. C. on March 1, 1962 with officials in attendance from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the State of Alaska, the University of Alaska, and the United States Office of Education.² Emanating from this meeting was an agreement of understanding between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the State of Alaska.² Of primary importance in this agreement was the provision that the State would assume a primary role in educational planning which would serve as a basis of coordination between the two governmental agencies.

To honor the State's commitment to comprehensive planning, a Governor's Committee on Education was created and given two broad charges. One was to prepare a broad comprehensive plan for rural school operation. The second charge was to chart a

¹ Governor's Committee on Education, An Overall Education Plan for Rural Alaska (Juneau: Alaska Department of Education, May 1963; Revised Report, February 28, 1966), p. i. (Included as Appendix E).

² Ibid., Appendix C.

direction for the ultimate consolidation of the two school systems operating in Alaska.¹ Needless to say, the first charge was fulfilled more effectively than the second.

The Governor's Committee became entangled in the same complex issues regarding consolidation of the Federal and State school systems that had plagued previous efforts toward this goal. The Committee was in agreement with the philosophical concept that the State should operate schools for all its citizens. But the question of Federal financing — for what duration and in what amount — remained unresolved.

The Governor's Committee on Education, after periodic meetings, developed An Overall Education Plan for Rural Alaska. This report has been revised as conditions have changed but still represents a broad, basic blueprint for rural education. However, the resolution of native land claims and emergence of regional native corporations, philosophical changes on the part of the State Board of Education concerning rural education, and recent legislative efforts to totally decentralize school control throughout the State have resulted in sharp conflicts with some of the concepts presented in this overall plan. Most noticeably, the plan for regional boarding high schools has been questioned. The general attitude in the State now seems to favor the development of smaller local high schools within larger communities which would require only a minimum number of pupils to attend school away from their home communities.

The guidelines contained in the memorandum of agreement emanating from the meeting in Washington, D.C. on March 1, 1962 did accommodate the questions pertaining to the vocational boarding school. Item 11, in this agreement states, "It is especially to be noted that the Bureau in considering such plans as may be advanced by the State has no fixed objection to the location of high school facilities in any particular community, and it is hoped that State plans for school construction at Nome may be utilized within the overall program."² Subsequently, the William E. Beltz School opened in Nome in 1966.

¹ Ibid., p. ii.

² Ibid. Appendix C.

More specifically, the Johnson-O'Malley Plan previously adopted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the State on November 15, 1965, was amended to include the following statement: "The Bureau of Indian Affairs will provide financial support, subject to the availability of funds, for dormitory operation and related expenses based upon budgets prepared by the Department of Education in accordance with Johnson-O'Malley procedures."¹

The questions raised by the authorization of the Nome–Beltz Vocational School brought into focus what has undoubtedly been the most perplexing and controversial issue in rural education in Alaska, that of providing education at the secondary level for children who reside in small, isolated communities. While in some localities education at the elementary school level has faced the expected problems of overcrowded classrooms, deteriorating facilities, inadequately prepared teachers, and the like, little doubt exists that children can be provided with basic elementary education in small rural schools. But at the secondary school level, the problems become far more complex. The opportunities to provide broad electives in a small high school are limited. Financial resources typically do not permit the employment of a large enough staff to present expertise in diverse areas of specialization. Physical facilities which are adequate for teaching basic academic skills will not suffice if vocational exploratory courses are desired.

The alternatives to the extremely small, local high school are similarly complex. Should children leave home during their adolescence to obtain a high school education with all of the concurrent dilemmas this approach to education entails — estrangement from home and community, regimentation, common group–living arrangements, etc.?

Historically the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the State have approached the problem of providing secondary education in rural Alaska from quite diverse directions. In 1947, the Bureau of Indian Affairs converted the former World War II naval base on Japonski Island near Sitka to a Federally operated boarding high school, Mt. Edgecumbe, for native students. For approximately two decades (until 1966 when the Nome–Beltz

¹ "Background Material on William E. Beltz Vocational School at Nome" (Alaska Department of Education, January, 1966), p.3.

school opened), Mt. Edgecumbe was the only public boarding high school in Alaska which provided secondary school facilities for native youth from rural communities where local high school programs were not available.

The two options which the availability of a single boarding high school presented were simply for pupils to leave home to attend school or do without a secondary school education.

With improvements in the holding powers of schools for rural pupils, together with dramatic increases in the number of children of high school age, pressures for expanding secondary school opportunities increased enormously. Mt, Edgecumbe enrolled students in excess of its recommended physical capacity. Even so, many qualified students who applied for high school admission were rejected because of space limitations.

As a next step, the Bureau of Indian Affairs allowed qualified Alaskans to enter Indian boarding schools in other states. Chemawa, in Oregon, and Chilocco, in Oklahoma, received by far the largest number of Alaskan students. For example, during the 1969–70 school year, 876 secondary school students were enrolled in Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools outside the State (233 in Chilocco and 643 in Chemawa).¹ During the 1971–72 school year, out-of-state enrollments had been reduced to 428, with further reductions apparent as students currently enrolled in Chemawa and Chilocco are graduated.² However, it is doubtful that any educational decision generated more public outcry from native and non-native citizens alike than the practice of sending secondary school students out of the State for their high school education. Throughout the years concern was expressed about the deleterious effects of isolating children from their families and communities when they attended in-State boarding schools. But the practice of transporting students out of the State was psychologically offensive to the vast majority of Alaska's populace.

¹ Warren I. Tiffany, Bureau of Indian Affairs Education Program (Juneau: Bureau of Indian Affairs, Juneau Office, January, 1971), p.2

² Alaska State Board of Education, The Big Picture on Small Schools (Juneau: Alaska Department of Education, July, 1972), p.3. According to a Bureau of Indian Affairs official, no new Alaskan students had been sent to Chilocco since 1970, and those pupils attending Chemawa were there at their own option. (Memorandum from the Acting Assistant Director for Education to the Area Director Concerning the Education the Education Program in Alaska, July 25, 1972.)

Difficulties are clearly inherent in establishing cause-and-effect relationships when dealing with political and behavioral phenomena. However, little doubt exists that the public outcry which accompanied the "deportation" of native high school students out of Alaska generated rapid innovation in the provision of additional alternatives for secondary school education within the State.

For example, as previously noted, the Nome-Beltz Vocational School opened in 1966. Another option for providing secondary school opportunities included expanding the number of grades offered at the local school level. Junior high school programs were added to the elementary school grades in the larger communities of Barrow, Hooper Bay, Unalakleet, and Nunapitchuck. And Kotzebue developed a senior high school program as well as adding junior high school grades to the existing school.¹

In 1967, the Alaska Department of Education initiated a Boarding Home Program whereby rural students who reside in communities with no high schools may live with selected families in larger centers and attend local secondary schools.² Monthly stipends, available largely from Johnson-O'Malley funds, are paid to families who provide boarding facilities for students. This program is administered by the Division of Regional Schools whose director is responsible for screening applications, assigning students to communities and to specific foster parents, and making the necessary financial arrangements.³

In each local community liaison officers or coordinators are available to supervise students, to provide communication with the students' parents in the villages, and to work with local school officials to ease the students' transition to a new school setting.

The Boarding Home Program was originally designed to last only until such time as adequate local or regional facilities were available to accommodate all eligible youth of high school age. Currently, its administration is in a state of flux; the State is considering the option of contracting with native organizations for the operation of the program. However, despite the fact that it was conceived as an interim or "stopgap" measure over 1, 200 students were participating in this program during the 1971-72

¹ Tiffany, Bureau of Indian Affairs Education Program, P.2.

² Coordinators' Guide to the Boarding Home Program (Juneau: Alaska Department of Education, February, 1970), p. 1. (Included as Appendix G).

³ Ibid., p. 1.

school year.¹

While many arrangements to provide secondary school opportunities for all youth were implemented or proposed, planning activities for the development of long-range guidelines for secondary education were intensified.

Perhaps the most influential study relating to secondary education in Alaska was conducted by the Training Corporation of America with headquarters in Falls Church, Virginia. The Alaska Department of Education commissioned this corporation to analyze educational problems in rural Alaska and to develop recommendations for their solution.

The TCA report is based on a number of assumptions which, if invalid, raise serious doubts about the validity of the recommendations made by the principal investigators for the study. A basic assumption in this study was that rural youth should be integrated with students from varied racial and socio-economic backgrounds. And a key assumption undergirding the recommendations was that each child should attend a high school with a minimum enrollment of five hundred students and a staff of no fewer than twenty-five teachers.²

From these assumptions, the recommendations logically followed that regional high schools be established in Fairbanks, Bethel, Anchorage, Nome, Kodiak, and Sitka. Dormitory facilities, as well as new schools or expansion of existing facilities, were to be provided for students residing in the regions of the proposed sites.³

In accordance with the recommendations outlined in the TCA report,⁴ the Bureau of Indian Affairs planned for the expansion of facilities at Mt. Edgecumbe High School to accommodate one thousand dormitory students. Construction funds were obtained, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs was ready to proceed with the project when public objections to the entire concept of large secondary boarding schools developed: Although such objections focused on plans to expand the capacity of Mt. Edgecumbe High School, several developments in the State brought into question the entire boarding-school concept.

¹ Education in Alaska (Juneau: Bureau of Indian Affairs, Juneau Area Office, March, 1972), p. 4.

² J. Kenneth Commiskey and John Garcia, "State of Alaska Regional Secondary School System: Implementation Plan," (Training Corporation of America, February 3, 1967), p. 12. (Mimeographed).

³ Ibid., p. 18.

⁴ Ibid.

Under the Mandatory Borough Incorporation Act enacted in 1963, some rural schools formerly operated by the State were transferred to the jurisdiction of newly formed boroughs. Extensive leasing of mineral lands by oil companies brought new revenue to the State and held promise for the development of rural areas. Settlement of the native land claims provided additional impetus for local determination and emergence of native leadership.

Efforts to challenge the regional school concept intensified. In December, 1968, members of the Alaska congressional delegation scheduled a meeting in Sitka to discuss the regional school construction program.¹ The Congressmen heard extensive testimony, most of it in opposition specifically to major expansion of Mt. Edgecumbe School and generally to the perpetuation of boarding high schools. Statements favoring additional construction at Mt. Edgecumbe came primarily from residents of Southeastern Alaska where this facility is located.

The Sitka meeting resulted in a basic philosophical change in the approach to secondary schools in Alaska. The large regional school complexes recommended in the TCA report gave way to the concept of smaller school facilities, such as the sixty-to-eighty student high schools at Tok, Ft. Yukon, and Dillingham, to be located closer to pupils' homes.² Despite the change in direction that resulted from the Sitka meeting State plans for regional facilities had either been completed or had proceeded too far to be altered in certain areas. The Kodiak-Aleutian Regional High School opened in 1968 and a third regional school was completed at Bethel in 1972 with boarding facilities for two hundred pupils.³

However, resistance to the boarding school concept intensified. Rural parents joined together in a legal suit against the State to require that their children be provided with a secondary school education in their home community of Emmonak.⁴

Little doubt remains that prevailing public opinion today favors educational programs which enable the high school youth to remain in his home whenever possible,

¹ Alaska State Board of Education, The Big Picture on Small Schools, p. 8.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p.2. (The Beltz School at Nome was the first regional high school operated by the State).

⁴ Hootch v. Alaska State-Operated School System, et. al. (Case no. 72-2450 in the Superior Court for the State of Alaska, Third Judicial District, October 5, 1972). (Xeroxed). (This is still pending).

with a minimal amount of pupil relocation. A complete cycle in educational philosophy has occurred. The 1949 administrative manual published by the Territorial Department of Education outlined methods by which one teacher could provide the basic courses required in a small high school by rotating courses on an odd–and–even year basis.¹ *Small Secondary Schools*, an administrative manual published by the Alaska Department of Education in September, 1971, details a similar plan for one–and two–teacher high schools.²

Improved means of transportation, innovations in programmed instruction, and the advent of educational multi–media cause the small high school today to differ markedly from the school of the 1940’s. Nonetheless, the maintenance of family and community ties is considered to be of greater importance to the student’s educational development than his access to a large comprehensive school curriculum.

A gradual but accelerating change has occurred during the past two decades in the determination of educational policies for rural Alaskans. Traditionally, schools were established in remote areas by an outside governmental agency the policies of which determined largely what was taught and by whom. Since formal schooling was considered to be essentially a “white man’s innovation,” those who availed themselves of educational opportunities accepted them with varying degrees of enthusiasm.

Interviews conducted by Ray and others in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s revealed strong faith in education on the part of Alaskan natives, even though some expressed disillusionment with a particular school situation.³ In fact, education was often viewed as a panacea to relieve unemployment, improve health practices, and provide a sense of identification which would enable citizens with multi–cultural backgrounds to participate actively in a modern society. When results failed to meet expectations, critical reappraisal of education programs began.

During the past decade several emerging factors have resulted in increased participation by rural Alaskans in formulating educational policies. Some of these

¹ Administrative Manual, Territory of Alaska (Juneau: Alaska Department of Education, 1949), p.11.

² Small Secondary Schools: Administrative Manual, First edition (Juneau: Alaska Department of Education, September, 1971), pp. 11-12.

³ Charles K. Ray, A Program of Education for Alaskan Natives, Revised ed. (College: University of Alaska, 1959); Charles K. Ray and others, Alaskan Native Secondary School Dropouts (College: University of Alaska, 1962).

developments have been referred to previously. Community Action programs financed by the Office of Economic Opportunity provided legal aid to local governmental bodies. “The Alaska Federation of Natives,” established in 1966, represented native interests in reference to their aboriginal property rights.¹ The settlement of the Alaska native land claims provided for the creation of local and regional native corporations to assume management of lands and monies provided under the Land Claims Act.²

New young native leaders from northern Alaska have exerted increasing influence on educational policy through attainment of elective and appointive offices. In 1970, William Hensley, a state representative, was elected to the Alaska Senate, and Charles Degnan and Frank Ferguson won seats in the State House of Representatives. Eban Hopson was appointed to a special post in the Office of the Governor.³

In 1969 the hearings of the United States Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education provided a forum for the public statement of Alaskan opinions. Native and non-native leaders expressed a wide range of viewpoints; but if one theme emerged, it was the call for greater self-determination of educational policies by Indians and Eskimos in Alaska than had been permitted in the past.⁴

Examples of the emerging role in policy-making assumed by native leaders are numerous. One dramatic illustration of militant native posture, more evident than in previous years, was that of the previously described Sitka conference, held in December, 1968. Speakers at this meeting openly challenged, both State and Bureau of Indian Affairs leaders when official policies conflicted with citizen interests.

An educational planning proposal submitted to the Bureau of Indian Affairs by the Northwest Alaska Native Association (one of twelve regional native associations which will participate in the native land claims settlement) states the issue most succinctly: “Thus, the question now is not as to whether or not local control of schools can be given to the Village people, but rather deals with how can the State prepare itself and the regional corporations to accomplish this power transfer gracefully and smoothly without

¹ Laurel L. Bland, The Northern Eskimos of Alaska (Juneau: Alaska Department of Education, June, 1972), p. 75.

² Ibid., p. 76.

³ Ibid., p. 77.

⁴ U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Indian Education, 91st Congress, 1st session, 1969 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1969).

disturbing in any way the continuity of school programs.”¹

Partially, as a response to the numerous calls for change, and partially to initiate such changes, both the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the State have effected major innovations and structural reorganizations designed to provide a stronger voice in educational determination to native citizens.

The following statement expresses the intention of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to include native leadership in policy decisions; “It is the policy of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to promote maximum participation in and control of services to Native people by those whom the programs serve. In the field of education this is accomplished through one or more of the following procedures: (1) Transfer from Bureau of Indian Affairs to public school operation, (2) contracting for the provision of services, and (3) strengthening of School Boards.”² The statement of intent to transfer schools was a reaffirmation of a long-standing commitment. But official Bureau of Indian Affairs encouragement to communities to contract for services and the expansion of local advisory school boards involvement in educational affairs came as later developments.

A recent example of a contractual relationship between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and a native corporation charged with providing educational services can be found at Wildwood, on the Kenai Peninsula. Wildwood was a former military base which was inactivated. The Kenai Native Association was authorized by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to utilize these vacated facilities to provide living accommodations for students which would enable them to attend nearby local public schools. Other examples also exist in which this policy has been translated into practice. Contracting procedures for such practices are included as Appendix I.

The State also responded to the call for a stronger voice on the part of rural Alaskans in educational decision-making. Rural schools, which had previously been, administered through the State Department of Education in Juneau, were transferred to a newly created Alaska State-Operated School System which was formed to provide for

¹ “Northwest Alaska Education Planning Project Proposal” (A proposal submitted by the Northwest Alaska Native Association to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, October 6, 1971) (Included as Appendix H)

² Warren I. Tiffany, A School to Serve the People: Guidelines for Community Control of Bureau of Indian Affairs School Operations (Juneau: Bureau of Indian Affairs, Juneau Area Office, January, 1971). P. 1.

education in the unorganized borough of the State. The governing body of this school system is a seven-member board of directors appointed by the, governor from the areas served. At least four of the seven directors are appointed from rural areas outside organized boroughs and off military reservations.¹

Additionally, in order to provide more effective local direction to school affairs, the Alaska legislature provided for local advisory school boards in communities where State schools were in operation.²

The move toward greater local control, by both the State and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, in contrast to earlier centralized administrative systems, was but one of many, apparent educational changes. As curricular innovations representing marked departures from earlier practices were gradually adopted, subtle changes occurred in the roles of the State and the Bureau of Indian Affairs as agents for change.

Traditionally, the Bureau of Indian Affairs had a deserved reputation as an enormous bureaucracy with most decisions affecting schools made by officials far removed from the problems. As a consequence, of a complicated budgetary process, which required financial requests to be anticipated far in advance of expenditures, resources were frequently unavailable to meet unanticipated circumstances. Curricular guides for use in all Indian schools, from Window Rock, Arizona, to Barrow, Alaska, were issued from headquarters in Washington, D.C. And although education specialists attempted to work with teachers in providing for local innovation, distances, isolation, limited financial resources, and other factors caused instructional supervision to be far from effective.

With improved health practices and increased knowledge of disease control and treatment, infant death rates decreased while birth rates remained constant or increased. Consequently, enrollment pressures stretched the resources available for Bureau of Indian Affairs schools in Alaska so that additional handicaps were imposed on overburdened teachers. During the 1950's, it was not uncommon to observe one teacher instructing a class with forty or more elementary school pupils in attendance. And typically, classes included a wide range of grade and age levels.

¹ Sec. 1, ch. 46, SLA 1970.

² Sec. 1, ch. 98, SLA 1966; Am. Sec. 10, ch. 46, SLA 1970; Am. Sec. 1, ch. 101. SLA 1971.

But as the transfer of school from Bureau of Indian Affairs to State operation progressed, it was State teachers and staff who became over-extended and needed to exert all energies and resources merely to cope with immediate pressures and problems. And the Bureau of Indian Affairs, with a decreasing number of schools for which it was directly responsible, became free to innovate. Doubtless, the intense criticism heaped upon the Bureau of Indian Affairs for its early failures to respond to local concerns contributed to a climate amenable to educational change. Nonetheless, the availability of resources, coupled with responsibility for fewer schools, permitted the initiation of innovative instructional practices not commonly found in the State system of rural education.

For example, in fiscal year 1973, the Bureau of Indian Affairs had budgeted eighteen million dollars for the education of six thousand native children in fifty-three village day schools, Wrangell and Mt. Edgecumbe Boarding Schools, and the Wildwood dormitory. In 1949, by contrast, the Bureau of Indian Affairs operated 102 day schools. The eighteen million dollars budgeted for fiscal year 1973 does not include monies provided to the State for boarding home and dormitory care for native students; nor does it include the two million dollars made available for special programs through Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.¹

A personal example of the improved resources made available to rural teachers in Federal schools in Alaska can be cited. In 1951, when the writer of this paper was a teacher at Savoonga, two teachers, an instructional aide, and a maintenance man were authorized for a school enrollment of some ninety pupils in grades one through eight. During the 1972-73 school year, Savoonga had an elementary school enrollment of approximately 105 pupils and a ninth-grade enrollment of fourteen.² The staff now includes a principal, four teachers, four education aides, two maintenance men, and a cook.³

Opportunities for educational innovation provided to the Bureau of Indian Affairs

¹ "Highlights of Bureau of Indian Affairs Programs," (Bureau of Indian Affairs, January 26, 1973). P.1. (Mimeographed).

² Enrollment Statistics, (Bureau of Indian Affairs, September, 1972), p. 1. (Mimeographed).

³ Juneau Area Directory (Juneau: Bureau of Indian Affairs, Juneau Area Office, November 15, 1972), p. 35.

resulted in numerous pioneering efforts by this agency. Kindergarten programs now operate in ten rural communities where Bureau of Indian Affairs schools are located. In Akiachak, one of fifteen programs in the nation enrolling two- and three-year-old children has been initiated.¹ Bilingual programs, whereby children are taught in Eskimo and English, have been implemented and evaluated. Teacher aides are utilized extensively in Bureau of Indian Affairs schools. Adult education programs were initiated as early as 1957.²

Despite improved student-staff ratios, educational experiments with promise for success, and heightened efforts at the State and Federal levels to improve educational opportunities afforded rural Alaskans, serious problems remain unsolved.

Considering administrative problems first, policy regarding the responsibility of the Federal government to Indian citizens has vacillated from one of complete termination to the present policy which rejects termination of the government's role in Indian affairs. President Nixon's position, stated in a release from the Office of the White House Press Secretary on July 8, 1970, is as follows:

Because termination is morally and legally unacceptable, because it produces bad practical results, and because the mere threat of termination tends to discourage greater self-sufficiency among Indian groups, I am asking the Congress to pass a new Concurrent Resolution which would expressly renounce, repudiate and repeal the termination policy as expressed in House Concurrent Resolution 108 of the 83rd Congress. This resolution would explicitly affirm the integrity and right to continued existence of all-Indian, tribes and Alaska Native governments, recognizing that cultural pluralism is a source of national strength. It would assure these groups that the United States Government would continue to carry out its treaty and trusteeship obligations to them as long as the groups themselves believed that such a policy was necessary or desirable. It would guarantee that whenever Indian groups decided to assume control or responsibility for government service programs, they could do so and still receive adequate Federal financial support. In short, such a resolution would reaffirm for the Legislative branch—as I hereby affirm for the Executive branch—that the historic relationship between the

¹ Interview with John Turner, Project Designer, Akaichak Community Child Development Program, June 13, 1973.

² Education in Alaska, p. 9.

Federal government and the Indian communities cannot be abridged without the consent of the Indians.¹

Nixon further reaffirmed the Federal government's responsibility Indians by stating, . . .
"We have turned from the question of whether the Federal government has a responsibility to Indians to the question of how that responsibility can best be fulfilled."²
However, the means have yet to be determined.

The impasse in transferring Federal schools to State operation was broken in 1967 when administrative control of ten schools were transferred from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to the State. Eighteen additional schools were transferred to the State system in 1969 and 1970.³ (See Appendix K for the names of specific schools, year of transfer, and pupil enrollments).

Currently, schools can be transferred by four methods: (1) voluntary incorporation as a borough or first-class city, (2) mandatory incorporation as a borough or first-class city, (3) voluntary transfer to the State-Operated School System, and (4) contracting to native groups.

Funding for schools transferred to State operation are provided through a combination of Public Law 874, State foundation support, and Bureau of Indian Affairs funding, with Bureau of Indian Affairs funding to terminate after a specified period of time.⁴

Instructional problems in Alaska's rural schools remain serious. There is no doubt that a gap exists between the average native student and his caucasian counterpart. The Alaska State Commission for Human Rights visited the William E. Beltz School in Nome in 1969 and reported:

Students who come to Beltz are ninth graders in name only. Among the faculty whom the Commission consulted, estimates of the actual grade level of entering students ran as low as the second grade, with most students falling in the 5th and 7th grade range. At

¹ "To the Congress of the United States," (Office of the White House Press Secretary, For Release at 12:00 Noon, EDT, July 8, 1970) p. 1. (Mimeographed.) (Included as Appendix J.)

² *Ibid.*, p.3.

³ "BIA Schools Transferred to State of Alaska, 1967-1971," (Bureau of Indian Affairs, November, 1971), p.1. (Xeroxed)

⁴ "Meeting on Turnover of BIA Schools to State or Independent School System," (Statement for the Record by Acting Deputy Assistant Area. (Xeroxed). (Included as Appendix L).

present, teachers simply lower their standards and expectations and plunge ahead with their high school textbooks. Although no follow-up studies have been made on Beltz graduates, it is known that only two or three Beltz graduates have gone on to college, and none of them has stayed in college for longer than a year.¹

Similar conclusions have been drawn in other regions and from other schools.

As discouraging as achievement records of rural students may be, mental health problems give cause for even greater alarm. Pupil consumption of alcohol remains the greatest concern in boarding schools and boarding homes. Although incidences of drinking vary from school to school, estimates have been made that as many as seventy percent of students in any given boarding school drink in a socially unacceptable manner on occasion. Suicide attempts, periods of deep depression, and emotional stress with which pupils cannot cope are frequently reported. Judith Kleinfeld, who has engaged in intensive studies of boarding school and boarding home students, stated that initially she had considered school dropout as evidence of failure on the part of the school. But now, for some students, she considers school dropout — for they have at least survived emotionally.²

In summary, many questions remain unanswered and may be categorized under the title, “Where Do We Go from Here?” The dual system of education is still in existence, albeit the number of rural schools administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs continues to be reduced. However, resistance by State legislators to the continuation of the two systems of education remains strong. As regularly as geese return to the North each spring, resolutions are introduced in the Alaska legislature to determine means to phase out Bureau of Indian Affairs educational activities in Alaska. The most recent example is House Joint Resolution No. 8, included as Appendix M. This resolution calls for yet another feasibility study. But little assurance exists that an additional study will provide the means for resolution of problems which heretofore have been insoluble and which impede the merger of the State and Federal school systems.

¹ Alaska State Commission for Human Rights, “Study of William E. Beltz School, Nome, Alaska,” (Anchorage: Alaska State Commission for Human Rights, December 11, 1969), p.9. (Mimeographed).

² Interview with Judith Kleinfeld, Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, June 1, 1973.

Future directions seem somewhat clearer in regard to the Bureau of Indian Affairs two boarding schools remaining in Alaska. As previously described, Mt. Edgecumbe is the only Federal government boarding high school in the State. As opportunities for secondary education have expanded, enrollments at Mt. Edgecumbe have declined steadily from a peak of 673 students in 1967-68¹ to a November, 1973 figure of 376 enrolled in grades nine through twelve.² Evidence suggests further decreases in the number of students who will attend high school at Mt. Edgecumbe.

Since Mt. Edgecumbe was constructed to serve as a naval installation rather than a school, problems have persisted since its conversion. What was adequate for a military base (e.g. a hangar) was not necessarily desirable for an instructional facility. Similarly, military barracks, with minimal privacy, leave much to be desired when used as dormitories for adolescents. Maintenance costs have always been extremely high for the number of students served. And with many of these buildings now over thirty years old, costs have increased markedly.

Serious doubts can be expressed concerning the wisdom of retaining Mt. Edgecumbe as a public school facility. Equally questionable is the alternative of finding other uses for the deteriorating facility which can justify the high costs of maintenance.

Similar questions relate to the retention of Wrangell Institute, a middle, ungraded school for children without access to other facilities or for pupils who are social referrals. As in the case of Mt. Edgecumbe, enrollments at Wrangell have declined steadily since 1966-67 when 250 pupils were in attendance.³ In November, 1973, 142 pupils were enrolled.⁴ Clearly costs required to staff and maintain a boarding school for so few pupils are enormous.

Alternate uses for these two boarding schools have been considered. A memorandum dated October 4, 1972, included as Appendix N, outlines some preliminary suggestions. And, of course, the possibility that these facilities should simply be deactivated must also be considered.

¹ Education in Alaska, p.4.

² "Total Enrollment in Bureau of Indian Affairs Schools," (Taken from November School Reports, School Year 1973).

³ Education in Alaska, p. 4.

⁴ "Total Enrollment in Bureau of Indian Affairs Schools," (November 1973, School Reports).

The promising practice of shifting educational decision-making to those most directly affected — native citizens — gives rise to some measure of optimism regarding the educational future of rural Alaska. However, native citizens are no more homogeneous in attitude than are non-natives. Therefore, the naive assumption that greater involvement of rural citizens in policy determination will provide a consistent, uniform educational plan appropriate for all is totally unrealistic.

One might conclude that the wisest course to follow in planning is to make educational alternatives available, with the appropriate choices selected by children and their parents. For example, a child with strong emotional family ties should be provided the opportunity for an education in his home community if he chooses not to leave home. Conversely, many children (with the consent of their parents) want to leave the villages. And, of course, schools with curricular specializations in various fields will be attractive to students with compatible interests. The well-conceived vocational education program available at the Kodiak–Aleutian Regional High School may well attract students from various regions of the State. The Boarding Home Program can serve as a vehicle for permitting students from rural areas to attend schools in virtually any population center where the instructional program is appropriate for them.

Systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of various educational plans is essential. Sufficient evidence now exists to permit tentative hypotheses as to the types of children who succeed best in different school settings. Follow-up studies and objective evaluation based on “hard” data will assist in establishing or rejecting these preliminary hypotheses.

Education is not static, as a review of the development of Alaska’s school systems and programs of instruction reveals. It is unlikely that future developments in the State will result in any greater degree of stability than has the past. A continuous appraisal and reappraisal of current practices is necessary. Additionally, more effective means must be developed to permit schools to reflect the society they serve. The voice of rural Alaskans has been too silent in the past. It must now be heard.