

**FAI Elders and Youth
Roundtable: Boarding Schools**

Question 1: Where do boarding schools stand today compared to the past?

Existing Schools:

- Mt. Edgecumbe (voluntary; mixed ethnicity)
- Nenana (closer to local villages)
- Galena
- Bethel (BABS)

Former Schools:

- St. Mary's
- Haines
- Sheldon Jackson
- Copper Valley
- Wrangell Institute
- Covenant HS
- Chilocco (OK)
- Chemawa (OR)
- Other Mission Schools

Current Issues:

- Suicide (School Environment?)
- Cultural curriculum or supports
- Out-of-state vs. In-state
- Goals of the "middle" generation (between youth and Elders)

Changes over time:

- Expectation of family connection to students in boarding schools
- No censorship of mail
- Support to fly home for family events, deaths, or holidays

Question 2: How do we feel about the future of regional boarding schools?

- State moving toward regional boarding schools
- State legislation sponsored in part by Rep. Joule (Galena, Nenana, Bethel)
- State Board of Education Resolution affirming regional boarding schools (2006)
- Need for prevention of further abuse, as well as healing

Important Considerations

Big Picture Questions and Considerations

- What do we mean by education?
 - What do we want to have happen in the education of our children?
 - Consider Maori models: help Maori community succeed along with individual students
- Ensure respect for students at all times; how do we ensure our children are respected at all times?
- How do we ensure our children know and are proud of their Alaska Native culture and heritage?
- Need for community responsibility for education
- Need for spirituality in education

Structural Considerations

- Who sits on the oversight boards of the schools?
- Who will teach?
- What is the appropriate age to send children to boarding schools?
- How will discipline be applied? By whom?
- “I don’t know how I got to boarding school”; making sure children and families understand their rights and decision-making
- Need for research on graduates’ success from Mt. Edgecumbe (80-90% postsecondary completion and high job placement); how do we know it is successful?
- Connection to local villages hosting regional schools
- Impact on “sending” villages

Programmatic and Policy Considerations

- Shouldn’t call it a “boarding” school; leadership school; school of excellence; share positive expectations
- Need to ensure a home-like setting with parents, Elders, and counselors in place; no dorms
- Need to infuse language and culture; look to staff of cultural camps, parents, and Elders
- Curriculum is key
- Need for peer counselors (Upward Bound); role models
- Build schools in villages with a lot of traditional knowledge and culture, not hubs (access to drugs and alcohol); location is important
- Keeping families (specifically siblings and cousins) together; work against hopelessness and loneliness

Current Realities and Issues that Lead us to Raise Questions about Regional Boarding Schools

- Staffing and funding of rural schools; ensuring our students are challenged by the curriculum
- Large size of city schools
- Different educational experiences by generation
- Need for personal and community healing
- Need for ongoing dialogue about past, present, and future impacts
- Ongoing conversations lead to decision-making
- Many Native leaders came from Mt. Edgecumbe
- “We do need some sort of system.”
- NCLB’s impact on “culture” in the schools; need for a Native role in school policy (IEA), funding, and advocacy
- Multi-generational loss to families and communities
- How do we address wellness? Where does it come from?
- Other social/community issues point back to same question; what will it take to raise up good human beings?

What must schools have to produce/support current and past Alaska Native leaders?

- Strong cultural component; from leaders and Elders
- Counseling for students given cycle of grief and loss
- Have high expectations and clear structure (re: discipline and programmatic)