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PUBLIC COMMENT CONCERNING PROPOSED REGULATION

4 AAC 34.010-.080 UNDER CHAPTER 34,
BILINGUAL BICULTURAL EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

- I. Hearing-by-hearing recommendations
- II. Summary of revisions needed
- III. Appendices: Hearing schedule,
list of participants

Revised draft of regulations attached

October 6, 1977
Alaska Department of Education

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to synthesize public comment concerning proposed regulation 4 AAC 34.010-080 under Chapter 34, entitled Bilingual-Bicultural Education, in such manner as to assist the Alaska State Board of Education in making a decision on whether to adopt, modify, or reject the proposed regulation.

The regulation in question, more specifically, the "Minimum Guidelines" has been highly controversial for two reasons: 1) the regulation is a result of negotiations between the U.S. Office for Civil Rights-Region X and the Alaska Department of Education; and 2) the "guidelines" do not address non-indigenous language groups. In order to present as clear and objective a picture as possible, under these circumstances, the report has been organized into three sections.

The first section deals with major recommendations and concerns brought forth in each of the eleven public hearings. Section two includes a summary of areas needing revisions, cross-referenced to public testimony. Section three, the appendices, includes the schedule of public hearings, opening statements, and lists of participants. Also enclosed with this report is a new draft of revised regulations designed to meet both public concerns and federal and state guidelines.

It is important to note here that the proposed regulation was announced throughout the State. Several informational meetings were held in addition to the public hearings to discuss the regulation prior to the public hearings. It is clear from the response that there are varying views on what the general public expects the proposed regulation to do.

The eleven public hearings were attended by a cross section of concerned parents, bilingual education advocates, bilingual educators, school board members, administrators, elementary and secondary teachers, Alaska Native leaders, interested groups, organizations, and other observers.

It is clear from the testimony received that some people considered the process used in developing the proposed regulation, i.e., negotiations between the U.S. Office for Civil Rights and the Alaska Department of Education more important than the regulation itself while others felt it necessary to draw attention to definitional type issues, such as "Bilingual-Bicultural Education" or "Preservation of Language and Culture."

What follows is a composite narrative which collects the issues in broad subject areas and presents them as if they had been made in one continuous discussion.

BILINGUAL-BICULTURAL EDUCATION

The term "Bilingual-Bicultural Education" has not been adequately defined for general use by the public. Some view the term as an educational goal, others see it as a focus to the total educational offering; while others treat the term as an emotion-raising slogan. Some questioned the effectiveness of the bilingual-bicultural education approach to educating youngsters and have pointed out the lack of evidence that this approach to education is a positive one. The term "bilingual-bicultural education" as used by practitioners simply means the use of two languages and two cultures in instruction.

BILINGUAL EDUCATION

A number of participants in the public hearings pointed out that the "Handbook" emphasizes bilingual education more than it does bicultural education; and that the two could not be distinctly separated. The term "bilingual education" generally used by educators in the field means the use of two languages as a method of instruction.

BICULTURAL EDUCATION

Many participants pointed out the lack of emphasis on "bicultural" education in the "Handbook." Others raised the issue of all students needing multicultural education, not simply those enrolled in bilingual programs.

PRESERVATION OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

An overwhelming majority of the testimony offered from rural Alaska underscored the need to "preserve the language and culture." A number of persons testifying stated that their school districts are doing just that without regulations by the State Department of Education.

LOCAL CONTROL OF EDUCATION

This issue was raised not only by Regional Educational Attendance Area (REAA) school board members and administrators but by independent school board members and administrators as well along with some representatives of interested organizations. Although testimony varied, with some feeling that the regulations strengthened local control through local advisory committees, the majority stated that the regulation, as proposed, would usurp local control of educational programs.

FUNDING

Stable and reliable funding for bilingual-bicultural programs is a major concern throughout the state. The concensus is that such funding needs to come under the state foundation formula.

STATEWIDE APPLICABILITY

Witnesses repeatedly raised the issue of regulations needing to possess statewide applicability and appropriateness.

EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY/NON COMPLIANCE WITH TITLE VI OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964

Testimony raised the issue that adoption of the regulations would possibly contribute to student segregation. In particular, the employment of teachers with little training to teach students appeared to witnesses to be a way of increasing inequitable educational opportunity. Districts also stated that the Office for Civil Rights had yet to demonstrate that they were in non-compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

OTHER ISSUES

Other issues were raised, including the role and training of paraprofessionals, parental options about student participation, community and parental involvement in educational decision-making, federal encroachment in education, and regulatory format and flexibility. Comment on these issues was extensive and is covered in the hearing-by-hearing recommendations.