Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Interior Assistant Secretary Ken Smith has offered to continue the Bureau of Indian Affairs' operation of 21 village day schools in Alaska in 1982-83.

In a March 10 letter to Alaska Governor Jay Hammond, Smith offered two options, both of which included BIA operation of Mt. Edgecumbe boarding high school for one more year.

Option 1 called for the 1982 transfer of 16 of the 37 village day schools now operated by the BIA and the remaining 21 at the end of 1982-83 school year.

Option 2 would transfer all 37 village schools at the end of this school year, together with approximately $5.9 million that the Bureau would otherwise spend on the schools.

In 1963, the BIA and the state formalized an agreement for the transfer of BIA schools to state administration. There were at one time, as many as 120 BIA schools in Alaska. Transfers have occurred intermittently in the past 20 years. Smith is proposing that the transfer be completed no later than 1983.

BIA officials began negotiating last fall with state officials for the completion of the transfer. They also visited 36 of the 37 villages to discuss the proposed transfers with parents and village leaders. (One village was missed because of bad weather.)

Smith asked Governor Hammond to respond by March 30 if he wanted the BIA to continue operating the 21 village schools for one more year. He explained, "We must begin issuing employment contracts."

Concerning the costs of upgrading facilities involved in the transfers, Smith wrote: "we do not anticipate any funds to be made available to the State of Alaska for purposes of capital improvements. We do, however, intend to complete planned improvements to five schools in FY 1982 valued at $2.1 million. Three of these five projects involve schools scheduled for transfer this year."