Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Interior's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Roy H. Sampsel, will begin negotiations February 10 with Alaskan state officials in Juneau for the transfer of 37 Bureau of Indian Affairs schools to the state education system.

In addition to the 37 elementary schools located in Alaska Native villages, the Bureau now operates one boarding high school, Mt. Edgecumbe, at Sitka, Alaska it is expected that Mt. Edgecumbe would continue operation at least through the 1982-83 school year to allow the state to develop suitable alternative plans for the high school students.

"The Bureau of Indian Affairs' schools for the Alaska Natives were established to meet needs until the state was ab le to assume the responsibility," Sampsel said. He noted that the Alaska Constitution requires the state to "maintain a system of pub lie schools open to all children of the state."

Sampsel said that the BIA and the state formalized an agreement in 1963 for the transfer of Bureau schools to state administration. There were at one time as many as 120 BIA schools in Alaska. Transfers have occurred intermittently since 1963.

Topics for discussion with state school officials and representatives of the Governor's office, Sampsel said, would include the transfer of BIA school buildings to the state, personnel issues, scheduling, and the possible need for special legislative authority.

Sampsel and BIA education officials initiated discussions with state officials on the transfer of BIA schools this past fall. At that time BIA representatives visited 36 of the 37 villages to talk with Native leaders about the proposed transfers. The one village was missed because of bad weather.

Sampsel acknowledged that reduction in the BIA's education budget made further delays in the transfer of the schools undesirable. ''We have to make substantial reductions, so it seems reasonable -- and beneficial to the state school system and the Native children -- to simply complete the transfer."