

Mankiller has been involved in several educational projects during her time in office, including Oklahoma Task Force 2000, a citizens group started to influence education in the state. She and others with the task force went around to schools in the state and talked to teachers, administrators, students and parents. They brought the concerns back, incubated them, and came up with some legislative proposals to present to the state, among them higher teacher pay and higher educational requirements.

She has also been involved with the Cherokee language and literacy project, which started as a summer program to teach the language to teachers. It has grown rapidly into the Division of Cherokee Language and History in Tahlequah. The building inhabited by the Division has dramatic historical significance. It was a government building when the Cherokees arrived off of the Trail of Tears.

Mankiller has been involved in work to make Sequoyah High School, named for the author of the syllabary, a magnet school. Until eight years ago the school was administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The school needs more space before it can become a magnet school, though. The number of students has grown to the school's capacity, about 300. There are a larger number of day students than ever, plus many traditional boarding students using the 12 buildings.

Mankiller would like to see some future curriculum modifications in the Cherokee Nation's schools. She sees a need for a strong core curriculum of English, math and science to start earlier and for solid college preparation to be ensured. She feels intramural sports should not start at such a young age, as the need is already met by physical education classes.

There has not been overwhelming help from the U.S. government, as usual, in Mankiller's and the Cherokee's educational achievements, but, at least, the climate has improved during the Clinton Administration. Tribes have had greater access to cabinet members than in the previous two administrations, Mankiller said. This has resulted in some help with Head Start and summer youth employment programs.

Mankiller is wary of the new Republican majority in the House and Senate. "I have to be very concerned," she said. "I have to hope that the rhetoric is just that." She said the message coming across from the new legislators is that they have little concern for people who cannot completely care for themselves. "I hope people are just posturing," she said, and the lack of compassion will not be implemented in actual policies.

The Chief has not endorsed anyone to be her successor. Whomever it is, though, "should pay more attention to education, should be more involved." When she came to the Cherokee Nation, there were so many things to be done across the board that she wasn't able to concentrate on any one thing. Mankiller would like to see her successor make education a focus, one of the top two or three priorities. "I would not endorse anyone unless they did make education a priority," she said. Some areas needing attention are the student-teacher ratio and low teacher salaries.

Her first project out of office will be to teach at Dartmouth, in its celebrated Native American Studies Department. She plans to teach for one semester in the Spring of 1996. Mankiller received an honorary degree from Dartmouth in 1991 and has been on the advisory board to the Native American students for some time.

"I will be a relaxed teacher," she said. "I don't ever tackle an issue that I'm not very familiar with," she said. She has a great repertoire of experience to share with her class. Indeed, her originally conceived lesson plan outline was so extensive as to be indomitable, and she had to shelve it for a bit. Now she may have that time to reflect, and her class will be blessed.