

Jefferson County Special Education School

History

TO SEPTEMBER, 1960

Jefferson County consists of more than 650 square miles of rural-urban communities directly west of Denver, extending north and south in a relatively narrow strip which takes in the area just east of the Rockies and also includes considerable mountain territory. Between these communities there is friendly rivalry, but since 1950 they have been united in one respect; they all belong to one large school district. This was made possible by a state school-district reorganization law which enables the people in many small school districts to vote for unification into one large district. One of the arguments for reorganization in Jefferson County was that a larger area could provide special education.

Prior to 1950 there had been several efforts to get the four largest urban school districts in Jefferson County (Golden, Lakewood, Wheat Ridge, and Arvada) to start classes for handicapped children, but each district claimed that it hadn't enough children nor enough money to support even one class. The handicapped children from the entire county were educated either in Denver Public Schools (the tuition being paid partly by the child's home district and partly by the Colorado State Department of Special Education), the Colorado State Training Schools at Ridge or Grand Junction, The Colorado State School for the Deaf and Blind at Colorado Springs, or in private schools. There were also some children who were taught at home by a visiting teacher (paid by the state) who spent two hours a week with each child.

For a number of years some of the parents who had been trying to send their handicapped youngsters to private schools where the tuition was quite high, had appealed to the Jefferson County Society for Crippled Children and Adults for financial aid. Also, those whose children had to attend school in Denver had asked for transportation to help so members of the Society had taken turns driving some of these pupils to and from school in the city. As a result, many of the officers and members of the Society became convinced that there was great need for public school education for the handicapped children in our county and began saving their funds toward the promotion of this aim.

As soon as Jefferson County became one large school district in 1950, The Society for Crippled Children and Adults pointed out to the superintendent that previous reasons given for not being able to organize special education classes for the handicapped were no longer valid and asked for permission to finance a survey. This survey was made under the direction of two superintendents of school (elected and appointed) and when finished, it proved that a number of handicapped children were not adjusting in public school or were not enrolled in any school. However, the Society was informed by the appointed superintendent and his assistants that it was still impossible to finance or find space for a special class, but that the public school system would provide books and supplies if the Society felt that it wanted to operate a school with its own funds. The selected superintendent was to be the liason between the Society and the Jefferson County Public School system in case the Society decided to go ahead with a school of its own.

As a result, a demonstration class called The School for Handicapped Children was conducted in the building of the Junior Chamber of Commerce in Arvada during the second semester of the school year 1950-51. The community of Arvada took the school "under its wing" and many other interested citizens

throughout Jefferson County also helped a great deal. The teacher wrote a detailed report which the Society presented to the Jefferson County Board of Education during the summer of 1951. Members of the board then voted to incorporate The School for Handicapped Children into the Jefferson County School System in August, 1951.

The teacher who had organized and taught the demonstration school under The Jefferson County Society for Crippled Children and Adults was asked to become Head Teacher of the special classes for the handicapped in the Jefferson County Public School System and to organize the new Special Education School in that system. Although school officially opened September 1, 1951, the rented classrooms in the basement of the Wheat Ridge Methodist Church were not ready until October 22nd. From that time on the classes for handicapped youngsters became the tangible symbol of a united county, since they came from almost every community.

Since that time the Special Education School has progressed to a remodeled brick home in 1953 and finally, in 1955, to one wing and five offices in Eiber School in Lakewood. This wing was constructed especially for special education classes, including such aids as drinking fountains, sinks, washrooms, boy's and girl's lavatories and radiant floor heating in every classroom. Handrailings run along all the hallways and the lavatories. In the rooms for the deaf and hard-of-hearing a multiple hearing aid was installed during the fall of 1955 when this group was admitted. In 1956 a principal was assigned to our building alone to take charge of both the special education wing and the three wings of regular classes. (Up to this time we had shared a principal with three other schools located some distance from us.)

In September, 1958, the school will include one more wing at Eiber School, making nine classrooms for mentally retarded children, two rooms of deaf and hard-of-hearing, one room of orthopedically handicapped and one

room of blind and partially seeing. In addition, two new groups will be organized at the Junior High School in Lakewood; one for deaf and hard-of-hearing and one for retarded. Two psychologists and four speech therapists working in both the special and regular schools complete the present picture.

In September, 1959, the staff at Eiber consisted of fifteen teachers of mental retards. Classes of mentally retarded children ranged from pre-primary to two junior classes, one at Lakewood Junior and one at Alameda Junior; two intermediate centers were at Lumberg and Vivian. There were two teachers for the blind and partially sighted, with one counselor resource teacher for the blind and partially sighted. We had four psychologists and four speech therapists. A total of 270 children were enrolled.

In September, 1960, there are twenty-one teachers for the mentally retarded children with four classes in junior high schools - Lakewood Junior, Alameda Junior and two at O. B. Drake and two classes of high school mental retards - one at Jefferson High and one at Alameda High. There are three intermediate centers - Lumberg, Vivian, and Foster. We have five classes of deaf and hard-of-hearing, two classes of blind and partially sighted, and two classes of orthopedic. This year we have a new principal and director of special education with an assistant for regular school, four school psychologists, one clinical psychologist and four speech therapists. A total of 337 children are enrolled.