

VIRGINIA SCHOOLS FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND
REPORT OF THE
VIRGINIA ADVISORY LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
To
THE GOVERNOR
And
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA



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COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
Department of Purchases and Supply
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VIRGINIA SCHOOLS FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND

REPORT OF THE VIRGINIA ADVISORY LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Richmond, Virginia, July 28, 1967

To:

HONORABLE MILLS E. GODWIN, JR., *Governor of Virginia*
and
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA

For more than a century and a quarter the Commonwealth of Virginia has provided education for deaf and the visually handicapped children. Need for special education for the deaf was recognized as early as 1825 and the first legislation to establish a school for this purpose was introduced in the General Assembly in 1826. This effort was unsuccessful but proponents of this cause continued their efforts and during the 1830's those interested in special education for the blind joined forces with those concerned with the deaf, with the result that in 1838 the General Assembly passed an act providing for the establishment of a school for the deaf and the blind. With the construction in 1839, on a site donated by a private citizen in Staunton, of the present main building of the Staunton school, the State's policy of providing such special education became a reality.

The institution which is now the Virginia School at Hampton was established in 1906 and at this School also, special education for both deaf and visually handicapped children was provided for.

Opposition to providing education for both groups of handicapped children in a single facility developed, which resulted in 1922 in the creation of a Commission to consider the desirability of separation of these functions by the creation of a special school for blind children. The Commission reported favorably on the establishment of such a school and in 1924 the Legislature passed an act establishing the Virginia School for the Blind and providing funds for the acquisition of a site for the School. This land was purchased, but funds were never made available for the erection of the School and it was never actually established.

Separation of the Schools continued to be advocated and in 1948, at the direction of the Governor, the Virginia Advisory Legislative Council considered the matter again. In a report to the 1950 Session of the General Assembly the Council recommended against separation.

From the above brief resume, it will be noted that in the studies previously made of the education of the deaf and the visually handicapped, the principal emphasis has always been on the question of whether the Schools should be separated rather than on the quality of the education being offered by the Schools. With this in mind the General Assembly in 1966 directed a study of the operation of the Schools which was broader than those which had preceded it. The Resolution directing the study was as follows:

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 29

Directing the Virginia Advisory Legislative Council to study certain matters relating to the schools for the deaf and blind.

Whereas, since its establishment by the General Assembly in 1838, the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind, at Staunton, has been operated by a single board of visitors and as an institution for the education of children suffering from both handicapping conditions, which pattern was followed in the later establishment of the Virginia State School at Hampton; and

Whereas, for more than forty years the creation of separate institutions for the education of the deaf and mute and of the blind has been vigorously advocated by interested groups, but all attempts to accomplish this have failed; and

Whereas, no study of the administration, programs and policies of these institutions, as such, has been made, and a reevaluation of these appears desirable; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Virginia Advisory Legislative Council is directed to study the operations of the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind and of the Virginia State School, including all matters relating to the administration of such schools and the education of children therein. The Council shall give particular attention to the question of the facilities at the two schools, and whether the education of the two groups would be facilitated by the physical separation of the education of the blind and of the deaf and mute and the Council shall also give particular attention to the teaching methods for the training and education of the deaf and blind to determine if the institutions in Virginia are making available the latest and most effective methods and techniques presently being employed for the education and training of those so handicapped; and also consider what might be done, if advisable, to provide Virginia residents with said methods and techniques. All agencies of the State shall assist the Council, on request. The Council shall complete its study and make its report to the Governor and the General Assembly not later than September 1, 1967.

The Council selected Edward E. Willey, member of the State Senate and member of the Council, as Chairman of the Committee to make the initial study and report to it. Selected to serve with Senator Willey on the Committee were: Richard M. Bagley, member of the House of Delegates, Hampton; W. Kuhn Barnett, former Director of the Division of Elementary and Special Education, State Department of Education, now retired, Richmond; Frank O. Birdsall, former Director of the Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center, now retired, Afton; Charles P. Blackley, owner of Radio Station WTON, Staunton; A. Gordon Brooks, Director, Division of Teacher Education and Certification, State Department of Education, Richmond; Joseph Carduff, Insurance Broker, Falls Church; Dr. J. D. Hagood, member of the Senate of Virginia and member of the Council, Clover; George H. Hill, member of the House of Delegates, Newport News; S. C. Lampert, retired, a former Chairman of the Norfolk City School Board, Norfolk; Mrs. Mary A. Marshall, member of the House of Delegates, Arlington; Mosby G. Perrow, Jr., Attorney at Law and former member of the Senate of Virginia, Lynchburg; Byron N. Puryear, Contractor, Hampton; James

R. Sipe, Attorney for the Commonwealth, City of Harrisonburg and County of Rockingham, Harrisonburg; Robert W. Stewart, Attorney at Law, Norfolk; and Dr. Rudolph C. Thomason, Ophthalmologist, Richmond.

The Committee organized and elected Mr. Hill as Vice-Chairman. G. M. Lapsley and Wildman S. Kincheloe, Jr. were appointed to serve as Secretary and Recording Secretary, respectively, to the Committee.

The Committee made a physical inspection of each of the institutions and conferred at length with the governing boards of the two institutions and the superintendents and staff members of each. It held a public hearing at which it heard those interested in the operations of the two Schools and the quality of the education there provided. Also, opinions of experts from other sections of the Country were expressed at this hearing.

The Committee considered the information before it and, after completing its deliberations, made its Report to the Council. Having reviewed the Committee's Report, the Council now makes its Report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We believe that every effort should be made to implement the present plans of the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind at Staunton and the Virginia School at Hampton to complete their capital outlay programs, upgrade salary schedules and modernize instructional equipment for continuing their present programs at their present sites. We do not feel that sufficient benefit would be obtained from providing for instruction for deaf and blind children on separate campuses to justify such a program at this time.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council is satisfied that the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind at Staunton and the Virginia School at Hampton are being satisfactorily administered by able superintendents and that the instruction given to handicapped children at the two institutions is as good as could be expected with the equipment and facilities now existing at these schools. Despite the relatively low salaries which the institutions can offer, the authorities of the two schools have been able to attract and retain dedicated and competent staffs and the quality of their work is well illustrated by the excellent reputation which graduates of the schools have achieved.

We should like especially to commend the members of the governing boards of the schools for the deaf and blind. They have given unstintingly of their time and interest toward the development of the schools and are zealous in seeking to forward their plans for improvements. We especially mention the Board of Virginia School at Hampton which, although in existence less than two years, has done an outstanding job of acquainting itself with the present operations and future plans of that School.

Virginia can be proud of the achievements of the graduates of the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind and the Virginia School at Hampton. From all we have been able to learn, the national reputation of the schools is excellent and their graduates, we are told, compare favorably with those from any other state institutions at Gallaudet College and elsewhere.

We do not mean, however, to imply that the State should in any way relax its support of or efforts to improve the programs at the two institutions. For instance, at Hampton classes are being conducted in a building which we understand has been condemned and which is certainly woefully antiquated and dilapidated. The modest capital outlay programs for the two institutions look to the modernization or replacement of such structures and we heartily endorse the implementation of these plans.

In the field of personnel also, we found that the schools are experiencing difficulty. There is a nationwide lack of trained teachers for the deaf and blind and in trying to attract and hold teachers, Virginia is competing with similar institutions throughout the Nation. If the excellent instructional quality which exists at the schools is to continue, the salary scales for teachers must be made competitive. Similarly, we found that salary schedules for other employees of the schools, such as house parents and dormitory counselors are not in our judgment high enough to attract and hold employees of the caliber needed in institutions of this kind.

We found the schools deficient in one other respect. Specialized education for these types of handicapped children requires equipment and training aids different from and more expensive than those necessary for the education of normal children. The schools have been able to provide some very excellent equipment but more is needed. In some areas, however, especially in the field of vocational training, the equipment which the schools are forced to make use of is antiquated and in some instances completely outdated. We urge that attention be given by the governing bodies of the institutions and the State Board of Education to an attempt to provide more adequate and modern equipment for this activity.

In the 1838 Acts of Assembly which established the "Virginia asylum for the education of the deaf and dumb and of the blind", there was a provision that there should "be two schools, each separate and distinct from the other in all respects whatsoever". This has been substantially the law ever since as to both of the institutions. It is also recognized by all knowledgeable persons in the field as being an essential policy for the successful operation of schools of this nature.

We found that the law is being substantially complied with at the institution at Staunton. Only one facility—the infirmary—is used jointly for the care of deaf and of visually handicapped children at the same time. Others, such as the gymnasium and the auditorium, are used for both groups at different times. We are advised that this has not created any major problems in the administration of the School.

At the Hampton School, however, complete separation of the students has not up to this time been achieved. Some of the staff members are required to instruct both deaf and visually handicapped children. This is a condition which should not continue, and funds should be made available to correct it as soon as possible. When this institution receives sufficient funds to carry out its long-range plans, we are advised that there will be in effect completely separate institutions at that site for the education of the visually handicapped and the deaf. This goal has high priority in the planning for the development of the School and is so reflected in their current capital outlay budget request.

In the light of the conditions which were found to exist at these institutions we do not recommend the establishment on different campuses of separate schools for the education of the deaf and of the visually handi-

capped. If the State were embarking for the first time on a program of providing such special education, it might be that serious thought should be given to establishing schools as completely separate entities at different locations. We feel, however, that the needs for funds for the continued development and improvement of the two schools along the lines discussed above is so acute that the diversion of any funds which might be available for this purpose to the creation of totally separate schools would be damaging to the very children in whose behalf it is advocated.

We are advised that the schools as they now exist are generally meeting the needs of most of the children suffering from these handicaps throughout the State. There is a small waiting list at both institutions. There are some children who by reason of emotional disturbances or other conditions cannot be handled at the schools. There are a very few suffering from the dual handicaps of deafness and blindness for whom neither school is able to offer any program.

In connection with the adequacy of the services being offered, however, we call attention to the fact that there appears to be no source from which accurate information concerning the number of children suffering from these handicapping conditions can be obtained. Especially in view of the fact that there was an epidemic of Rubella (German measles) a few years ago which could have resulted in a sharp increase in the birth of infants who suffered damage in the early months of their mothers' pregnancy, which could result in severe overcrowding of the institutions, we feel that State and local health and welfare authorities might do well to attempt to locate such children, and advise the schools, so that plans to meet this situation, if it does exist, can be made. We also urge that local health and welfare departments intensify their efforts to search for and identify children who are afflicted with visual handicaps and deafness.

CONCLUSION

In summary, we should like to reiterate that while we found conditions at the two schools under study far from ideal in many respects, we believe that working with the tools at hand the authorities of the schools have done an excellent job of providing special education for the visually handicapped and the deaf and that every effort should be made to improve the present program rather than to institute another.

There has been considerable expression, by parents of deaf children, of a desire for oral instruction of the deaf in the public schools. Such a program is not wholly within the purview of this study. However, we realize the need for this, and are of the opinion that leadership in this field should come from the State Board of Education. Therefore, we recommend the adoption of a joint resolution requesting the State Department of Education to conduct a study of the whole subject of oral education of the deaf in the public schools and elsewhere. Copy of a Joint Resolution to that effect is attached to this report.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank the members of the Committee for the time and effort which they gave to this study. We also express our appreciation to those who gave the Committee the benefit of their views on the subject, and especially to the Boards of Visitors of the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind and the Virginia School at Hampton and to those members

of the staff of each institution who were most helpful to the Committee during the course of its study.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Frost, Chairman

Charles R. Fenwick, Vice-Chairman

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John Warren Cooke

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Charles K. Hutchens

J. C. Hutcheson

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Sam E. Pope

Arthur H. Richardson

William F. Stone

Edward E. Willey

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO.

Requesting the State Department of Education to investigate the possibility of developing improved programs for the education of the deaf in connection with the public schools and other non-residential facilities.

Whereas, the Commonwealth of Virginia provides excellent education for deaf and hard-of-hearing children at the residential schools at Staunton and at Hampton, but the capacities of these institutions are limited and the programs do not meet the needs of all children suffering from these handicapping conditions; and

Whereas, experiments which have been conducted by various groups interested in the field of education of the deaf indicate the possibility that wider use of local facilities for the training of children with hearing impairment, through the public schools and treatment centers, could be of great benefit both to children, such as those of pre-school age, who cannot attend the residential schools, and to the parents of children afflicted with these handicaps; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate of Virginia, the House of Delegates concurring, That the State Department of Education is requested to initiate a study of the possibility of developing, in connection with the public schools or through special education facilities or otherwise, programs for oral education or such other training as appears appropriate for the deaf in local non-residential facilities; and if it is found feasible to develop such programs, the Department is further requested to make recommendations to the General Assembly for the implementation of such programs.

