



School Districting & Consolidation

When Colorado was just a territory, the county superintendent of schools had the authority to organize school districts. When we became a state, the state constitution gave the Colorado General Assembly the authority to establish school districts of convenient size. The first General Assembly in its general laws delegated the responsibility for establishing school districts to the citizens of the local communities. The parents of ten area children ages 6-21, could petition the county superintendent of schools to hold an election for the formation of a new school district. In 1886 there were 685 school districts in Colorado, most of which contained only a single school.

Very little planning went into creating a new district. Many of these early districts did not cover enough land and were too small to survive. On the other hand, rapid expansion of population, the Homestead Act, prompted the increased organization of school districts. By 1935 there were 2,105 school districts in the state. The districts were classified by first class districts, which had over 1,000 children of school age as measured by the school census; second class districts had 350-999; third class districts had under 350 students.

Prior to 1949, school district organizational change was based on the Consolidation Act. It was a simple process. Two or more boards would meet, determine to consolidate, and set an election. No educational plans or reasons for consolidation were required. Sometimes consolidation occurred because a school had been empty for a few years or had so few students that to continue was not cost effective. Sometimes consolidation would occur so that a district could extend its borders to include railroad property to enhance assessed valuation for property taxes. Occasionally, school districts consolidated to provide a better education for students. The General Assembly integrated the Consolidation Act into the School District Organization Act during the 1974 session. From that time on, the law has required that all school district consolidation include the development of educational plans.

During the time of Colorado's most extensive school reorganization activity, expanded educational opportunity and finances were key issues encouraging school reorganization efforts. While these issues remain important, new issues in the 1990's have compelled the state to re-examine school organization. Public concern related to student achievement and increasing desire for expanded options from which students and parents can choose are among these new issues.

During the 1992 legislative session, a new school organization bill was sponsored. This bill became the School District Organization Act of 1992, and for the first time since 1949, the new law allowed "deconsolidation" or the splitting of existing districts. However, the new law did not make it easier to reorganize. Even a simple detachment and annexation now required a planning committee and vote of all eligible electors in all affected school districts. The General Assembly felt that because any reorganization affected the taxes of all citizens, they should all have the opportunity to vote on the issue.

In November of 2000, West Yuma School District RJ-1 has dissolved by its voters at the end of the fiscal year and in July 2001, two new districts were formed. Yuma School District 1 and Liberty School District J-4. Additionally the voters in November of 2000 also dissolved the East Yuma School District and two were formed. Wray School District RD-2 and Idalia School District RJ-3.

Eventually people in Yuma County realized that centralization was the answer and people saw the solutions to their educational problems by providing larger schools which afford richer curriculums, better qualified teachers, more instructional materials and varied social experiences.

Today Yuma County has four school districts.

High School

The General Law of 1877 provided for the organization of two types of high schools:

Union high school districts were created when elementary districts from only a part of a county wanted to cooperate in the establishment of a high school. Union High School Districts were entities made up of several independent elementary school districts for the sole purpose of providing education above the eighth grade on a cooperative basis while maintaining the autonomy of the common school district. They were governed in much the same manner as today's BOCES. The governing board would consist of one representative from each of the participating elementary school districts.

County high school systems required all elementary school districts in the county to participate. A separate committee composed of one board member from each elementary school governed a County High School System.