

October 17, 1979

Testimony by Congressman Les AuCoin  
Oversight hearings on PL 94-142  
Subcommittee on Select Education

Mr. Chairman, today I want to add to your oversight hearing record on PL 94-142, Education for All Handicapped Children, a small example that illustrates what is possible if someone gives it a determined try.

Lincoln County School District is a rural school district on the central Oregon Coast in my Congressional District. It ranks 20th in terms of student population among Oregon's 312 school districts, but 11th in identified and verified handicapped youngsters.

When PL 94-142 came into effect, school officials in this rural district took a positive, can-do attitude. In fact, School Superintendent Dr. Earl Hampton publicly lamented, "It is a shame that we need a law to tell us to do what we should have done in the past and what we should be doing now."

Program changes adopted in response to PL 94-142 have been sweeping:

- o Mainstreaming of 100 per cent of the handicapped student population within the school district, including the physically handicapped and the trainable mentally retarded;
- o Total school screening;
- o First grade screening for early identification of handicapped youngsters;
- o A program for the deaf;
- o Services available for the blind;
- o Special education equipment purchases;
- o Development of service area models;
- o Establishment of case load cut-offs for teachers;
- o Appointment of surrogate parents;
- o Implementation of a staff development program; and

- o An audit system for quality assurance.

These program changes came about after the school district, two months before the implementation date of PL 94-142, hired a full-time administrator charged with:

Developing a procedural flow for compliance with PL 94-142 in identifying, evaluating and delivering services to handicapped children;

Supervising support services and providing for identification of special needs; and

Preparing existing staff to meet the needs of handicapped students.

The five-person elected board for this school district was no doubt disposed to the idea of mainstreaming handicapped children. One member is married to a speech pathologist. Another is a former physical therapist. A third is a Shriner.

But the key ingredient to the success of the Lincoln County School District's success was that they cared enough. They showed the determination to follow through and to comply with both the letter and spirit of PL 94-142.

The results are astonishing.

The foremost achievement is 100 per cent mainstreaming of handicapped children. Dr. Mary E. Huneycutt, student services specialist, has developed data showing that in some cases the academic and social growth of mainstreamed handicapped youngsters over a two-month period equals two years' worth of growth for the same youngsters in the old special education classroom setting.

Beyond that achievement, the number of certificated personnel has increased by 65 per cent. The number of classified personnel has increased by 433 per cent. The special education budget has increased by 219 per cent, and the purchased support services by 700 per cent. Numerous support services, which most school districts are reluctant to purchase or provide, have now become a part of this district's local services.

They include: Handicapped transportation on special lift buses, removal of architectural barriers, physical therapy, occupational therapy, psychological evaluation services, family counseling, individual counseling, medical assessment, nurse services, adaptive physical education, impedance

audiometer evaluation, and vocational work-study placement with non-handicapped youngsters.

Lincoln County's compliance with PL 94-142 goes further, however, than purely increased services. A strong effort has been made to assure quality services. At the same time, an effort has been made to win and maintain positive attitudes toward these achievements from parents -- the taxpayers who are footing the bill.

In short, the Lincoln County School District has shown the job can be done. I should add that I've visited other school districts in my Congressional District, such as the Beaverton School District near Portland, where there are success stories to tell as well.

But despite these successes, Congress must own up to its responsibilities to assist in funding services and training required to bring handicapped children into the mainstream of our schools. Otherwise, we'll only have isolated good stories to point to, and that just isn't good enough.