

The Park County Republican and Fairplay Flume

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Study: Edith Teter building inadequate

Re-2 superintendent to create facilities committee

January 19, 2007

by Linda Bjorklund – Correspondent

A Denver foundation has found that the 127-year-old Edith Teter Elementary School building in Fairplay is inadequate, that other district buildings have many needed repairs, and that the obsolete facilities are partly responsible for parents in the area opting for Breckenridge schools.

Re-2 School Superintendent Chuck Soper agreed with the general findings and plans to establish a Facilities Research Committee by the end of January to help figure out what to do.

Class-size, wiring, plumbing, ventilation need help

Denver-based Donnell-Kay Foundation published the findings on Edith Teter's building as part of a comprehensive study on the condition of classrooms for grades K-12 in Colorado's public schools. The study is part of an effort to encourage funding to solve the problem of inadequate school facilities.

A recent press release highlighted a Web site that includes the findings. In Park County, primary emphasis was placed on Edith Teter, the only public elementary school in Fairplay. On the foundation's Web site, www.crumblingclassrooms.com, the building undergoes the following scathing review:

classrooms.com, the building undergoes the following scathing review:

"Edith Teter Elementary School in Fairplay, Colo., was built in 1880 and is the oldest continuously operating elementary school in the state. The district would like to donate the historic stone building to the town or state historical society to serve as a museum. It is a fine example of 19th century architecture, but it is not an adequate educational



A photo believed to be taken in the 1950s of Edith Teter Elementary School gives a good idea of the type of construction used when it was built in 1880. (Photo from the Park County Archives)

facility for 21st century learning. To begin with, the school is 25 percent over capacity, requiring classrooms in trailers for the overflow. Inside the antique building are tiny classrooms, sufficient for the population of a 19th century mining town on the frontier, but not nearly large enough to allow for modern educational curriculum.

"The heating system is an historical artifact and not functionally adequate. Ventilation amounts to opening and closing the single-pane windows. The wiring is an ineffective afterthought since the building was built without electricity. Plumbing is rudimentary, not dependable, and only available on the first floor.

"In addition to desperately needing a new modern elementary school, the other district buildings have a long list of needed repairs and renovations as well. Due in part to its obsolete facilities, the district has lost 10 percent of its students as some parents would rather drive their children over the pass to Breckenridge and its new state-of-the-art schools."

Superintended responds

Re-2 School Superintendent Chuck Soper agreed with the general findings of the study - that the elementary school is inadequate for today's educational needs - but he noted discrepancies in the report.

The elementary school was built in 1880, making it the oldest school in the state. Never mind Boulder's claim to that distinction; the Boulder school was built in 1882.

The Fairplay school was not then, however, an elementary school, but the school for all the grades. The school, recognized as an example of 19th century architecture, has been officially listed on the register of historic buildings.

Soper indicated that donation of the building as a museum would create a number of logistical problems, since several other buildings and facilities have been built onto and around the original school.

The classrooms are small and will hold no more than 15 students, but today's average enrollment exceeds 20 students per class, Soper said. To address that issue a modular unit has been put to use which houses two classes.

Contrary to what the report says, there is plumbing on the second floor of the school. That plumbing includes toilet facilities, but does not include water fountains in the halls or wash-up facilities in classrooms. Commercial bottled water has been installed for those areas that don't have plumbed drinking water. Wiring has been added as evidenced by conduits on the building exterior.

Facilities committee

Soper indicated that he plans to establish a Facilities Research Committee by the end of

the month made up of teachers, parents, administrative personnel and local interested parties. The committee would research and discuss the community's needs for future school facilities. The expectation is for a conservative 2-5 percent growth each year, based on the previous year's enrollment. Soper said that the trend is toward a centrally located complex, although the charter schools in Lake George and Guffey have been quite successful for the lower grades.

New security

The upgrades to the school buildings for security cameras were recently underway, as wiring was being installed into the administrative offices for an exterior camera on the day that Superintendent Soper was interviewed on Jan. 15.

Asked about his reaction to the Missouri kidnapping of a student after he got off a school bus, Soper replied that the security system in his school requires bus drivers to make certain that a parent or known adult is at the school bus stop to pick up every child. Each bus driver has a roster and is expected to know the students. Any student not picked up by a known adult is brought back to the school and his/her parent is notified.

The Fairplay school complex houses a mixture of buildings, each facility added in its time to meet the needs of the community.

Whether to relocate and upgrade will be examined by the new Facilities Research Committee.

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