

**WASHINGTON STATE
SCHOOL FOR THE
DEAF:
CAPITAL FACILITIES
STUDY**

REPORT 02-8

**REPORT DIGEST
SEPTEMBER 18, 2002**



STATE OF WASHINGTON

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BACKGROUND

The Washington School for the Deaf (WSD) provides educational services to Washington students ages 3 to 21 who are deaf or hard of hearing. The School operates from a 17-acre site in Vancouver, Washington, with an adjacent 11-acre play field.

WSD is in the process of redesigning its aging campus. New residential cottages were completed in 1999 (at a cost of \$4.8 million), and the major renovation of an older building should be complete by the end of 2002 (at a cost of \$2.8 million). The School submitted its Predesign Study to the Office of Financial Management (OFM) in June 2000 and approached the Legislature for design funds (\$1 million) in the 2001 Legislative Session.

The Legislature appropriated the design funds, but it did so with a caveat. The Legislature directed OFM to hold the design funds in reserve pending the completion of two legislatively-mandated studies: (1) a study by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy on alternative models for WSD education and service delivery, and (2) a Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) study of WSD's capital facilities planning, conducted in conjunction with the Institute study of alternatives.

The Governor vetoed the Legislature's hold on the design funds, and the School continued with design work while the two studies have been conducted. WSD released its most recent design in July 2002. The School estimates a cost of an additional \$27.2 million to build the new campus.

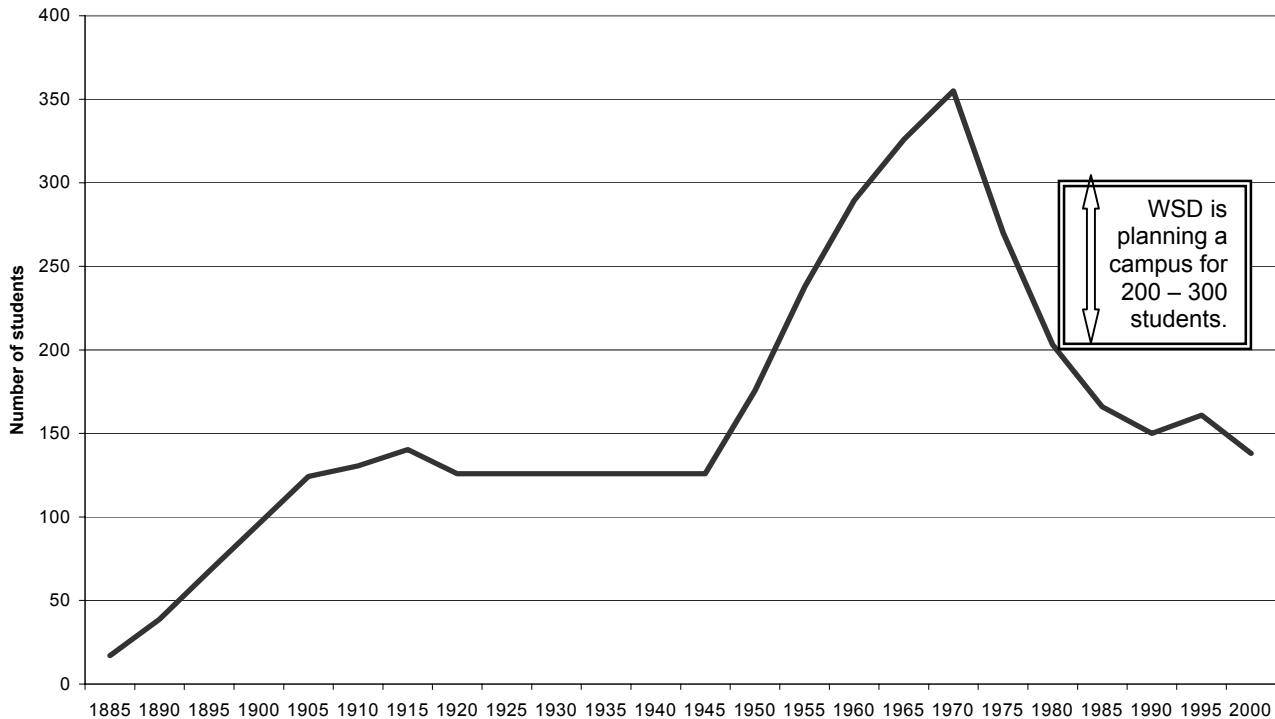
INFORMATION STILL MISSING FROM THE PLANNING EFFORT

JLARC's review of the School's capital facilities planning efforts finds that some key information has not yet been incorporated into the plans:

- **Enrollment** – WSD's enrollment peaked in the late 1960s at 355 students and has since been declining (see figure, next page). Residential schools for the deaf in other states have experienced enrollment declines as well, as public schools responded to the federal mandate in the 1970s to offer programs for students with disabilities. WSD has not incorporated this long-term enrollment decline into its planning efforts. The School's plans are for a campus for 200 students, with flexibility in design to expand to 300 students. Enrollment in 2001-02 was 113 students.

- **Cost Analysis of Viable Alternatives** – OFM's capital facilities planning process directs state agencies to identify the alternatives available to address a capital facility need and then to evaluate the alternatives using life-cycle cost analysis so that decision-makers can see the operating and capital budget impacts of the alternatives. WSD has not yet undertaken this important step.

Enrollment at the Washington School for the Deaf, 1886 - 2000



INSTITUTE STUDY ALTERNATIVES

The companion study by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy identifies seven models for WSD education and service delivery, one of which is the current model. Two of the alternatives focus on outreach and do not have additional capital facility implications. However, four of the alternatives would reduce the number of students served on the Vancouver campus, with a corresponding reduction in the need for additional new capital facilities.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR WSD AND OFM

Washington has a process for the design and review of state agency capital facilities proposals. The three recommendations below are logical next steps so that the WSD proposal completes the full process before submission to the Legislature:

Recommendation 1 – If the WSD Board of Trustees, OFM, or the Legislature wishes to explore one or a combination of the alternatives in the Institute study, they should make these intentions known. Even if policy makers retain the current model, Recommendations 2 and 3 below need to take place.

Recommendation 2 – WSD should reevaluate its capital facility needs. This JLARC report provides specific factors that should be considered in the reevaluation, including the long-term decline in enrollment and a cost analysis of alternatives.

Recommendation 3 – OFM should prepare a thorough written evaluation of WSD’s revised capital facility development plan.

Following these steps should put the WSD Board of Trustees in a position to bring to the Legislature a campus plan that accomplishes the School’s goals and that is appropriately-sized, well-reasoned, and cost-effective.