

THE HISTORY OF ROOSEVELT JR. HIGH SCHOOL

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Eugene's first junior high school opened its doors to seventh and eighth grade students in September, 1916. Although, according to a member of the first teaching staff, "It wasn't really a junior high school but only a departmentalized grade school," it did set the stage for the development, in less than ten years, of the 6-3-3 system that was to characterize the Eugene school system for the fifty-seven years between 1925 and 1983.

In 1923 the Eugene schools were facing the problem of growing enrollment, and in order to reduce enrollment pressures on both the high school and the grade schools, a plan was adopted to build two new junior high school buildings to house grades seven, eight, and nine. The high school was to retain grades ten through twelve, and the grade schools were to teach grades one through six.

Funds were approved in a close budget election on February 20, 1924. Benjamin Franklin, later named Woodrow Wilson, was to serve the west side of town, and Theodore Roosevelt, located at the corner of Agate and 18th Streets, was to serve an attendance area on the east side. On March 17, upon the recommendation of the Eugene Post of the American Legion, the name of Theodore Roosevelt Junior High School was officially adopted. In a public ceremony on November 6, 1924, the Knights of Pythias laid the cornerstone. Building proceeded smoothly, and the newly-completed two-story brick structure opened its doors to 160 students in September, 1925, with Margaret Halvorsen serving as the first principal. The school's student population grew to 320 in 1930 and then fluctuated between 300 and 400 for the next 20 years. With the two new junior high schools, all seventh and eighth grade

students in Eugene were for the first time attending junior highs. The prestige of the schools was enhanced by the inclusion of ninth graders from the Eugene district as well as some ninth grade students from some of the rural districts around Eugene.

The new three-year junior high schools with new facilities made possible broad and attractive exploratory courses and extra-class activities that were not available before 1925. Especially noteworthy was the expansion in physical education and the arts. Otherwise the curriculum for seventh and eighth graders was much the same as in the original junior high. At Roosevelt those students had classes in English, geography, arithmetic, history, penmanship, and spelling. In addition to electives, the ninth grade courses included Latin, algebra, science, and world history. Physical education and the arts were given to all.

For the first few years the teaching methods and school activities at Roosevelt resembled those used in high school. The pupil's day was completely departmentalized. Much stress was placed on earning high grades. Special blue colored report cards were given to those who received no grade less than a "1" or a "2" for the nine-week reporting period. The names of all students receiving blue cards were printed in the Rough Rider, the school newspaper. An honor society was formed in 1930 to recognize these scholars, and Roosevelt became affiliated with the National Junior High Honor Society in 1934.

Students in their third year at the school were called "seniors." Commencement exercises were held jointly with Wilson Junior High and Eugene High School at MacArthur Court on the University of Oregon campus until 1935. At that time Roosevelt's graduation exercises moved into its own auditorium. The importance of this ceremony was indicated by the recognized

community and educational leaders who addressed the graduating ninth graders and their parents. Graduation exercises were to remain an important function at Roosevelt until the late 1960s.

Like their older counterparts at high school, Roosevelt students had a complete program of athletic activities for boys. Interschool contests were held in football, basketball, baseball and track. Games were played against Wilson Junior High, St. Mary's Catholic, Springfield, Salem, Roseburg, Corvallis, and Cottage Grove. The girls had a similar but less extensive program.

Entering seventh graders participated in a school supervised initiation, had an opportunity for three busy years of academics and activities, and participated in a formal graduation exercise at the end of their ninth grade year--all a prelude to their three-year high school experience. It appeared that early Roosevelt was truly a "junior" high school.

By 1931 Miss Halvorsen, James Notter, and Harold Allison had been principals at Roosevelt. During these early years close ties with the University of Oregon School of Education were developed. The two worked closely together to provide training for prospective teachers. Roosevelt students were also able to use several University facilities and most Roosevelt graduates went on to attend University High School. This remained true until University High was closed in 1953. Cadet teachers continued training at Roosevelt through 1983.

The school year 1931-32 saw the beginnings of change in Roosevelt's program. Although Woodrow Wilson was to remain a traditional "high school-like" junior high for the next ten years, Roosevelt experienced a decade of noteworthy changes. Wendell L. VanLoan became principal of the school in 1931 and soon changes were instituted. Mildred Williams, a long time

Roosevelt teacher, high school department head, and University professor, described the Roosevelt program in her doctoral dissertation:

Ability grouping was abolished, social studies which had previously been elective in the ninth grade, was required of all pupils at all grade levels and a unified social studies program...replaced the former separate subjects of American history, civics, geography, and world history. Literature, grammar, and spelling, which previously been taught separately, were fused into a single English course for each grade...Electives were reduced and emphasis was placed upon general education. Eventually, no electives were permitted. Pupils took art and music on alternate days; industrial arts and home economics alternated with mathematics; science alternated with physical education; and general language, which replaced electives in French and Latin, alternated with orientation. French, Latin, German, and Spanish were introduced in the general language course.

A counselor period was established and an activity program begun.

In the February, 1932, issue of the Rough Rider, VanLoan explained the need for the counselor period. "When the departmental system is used in junior high schools it is necessary for the students' interests to be looked after by one person, and that person should be the counselor." One period every Friday was set aside for the counselor meeting. This home room period was responsible for the pupil's integrated educational opportunity, for experimentation and practice in parliamentary procedure, participation in community life, guidance in all matters pertaining to health, social, recreational, and vocational needs.

At the same time an activity period became part of the school day, and each student could participate in an activity without staying after school. In 1932 students could select from 27 different clubs and activities. Meetings were held one period a day, four days a week. On the fifth day that period was given over to the counselor meeting.

At this same time a strong intramural sports program for both boys and girls was introduced, with a corresponding de-emphasis on interscholastic sports.

Efforts at correlation of subject matter continued, and in 1936-37 block scheduling was used and assignments were made to English and social studies in such a way that each teacher had one section of pupils in both English and social studies, though not for consecutive periods. The following year a unified social studies program with bloc scheduling during consecutive periods was in place, and the name Social Living came into use. The orientation classes were discontinued and the counselor's functions were assigned to the Social Living teachers.

Events at Roosevelt during the 30s received attention throughout the state, and in May, 1940, Mildred Williams, a leader in the changes that had taken place, explained the Roosevelt plan to a Junior High Principals' Conference meeting in Salem.

In May, 1941, Roosevelt Junior High School became the first junior high in Oregon to be evaluated by the Oregon State Department of Education. It received an excellent rating.

World War II brought changes in the Roosevelt Administration. In 1942 Wendell VanLoan moved to Vanport, Oregon, to serve as superintendent of that new school system. Mildred Williams served as acting principal for the rest of the 1942-43 school year, and George Nelson became Roosevelt's new principal in the fall of 1943. Under Nelson's leadership the school carried on much the same curriculum as before. High achievement continued to be stressed in a program that was academically oriented. Ability grouping for academic subjects returned to the program, and within the structure of the traditional seven-period day had the effect of grouping for all classes. During Nelson's tenure, school spirit among students continued to grow stronger. It was also a time when the school's enrollment grew rapidly and a new Roosevelt building was constructed. Increasing enrollment

pressures brought some modifications in the Roosevelt program. Gradually the activity period was discontinued and the intramural program disappeared.

In 1945 a consolidation election resulted in the merger of Eugene with a number of small adjoining school districts. The enlarged junior high population was only temporarily accommodated by the construction of Colin Kelly Junior High. By 1948 two new enrollment problems existed. The elementary enrollment was growing larger also, and it was necessary to replace the old, wooden Condon and Lincoln buildings which had been in use since 1909. It was decided to build a new Roosevelt building at 24th and Hilyard. The old Roosevelt building was remodeled for Condon's use. The new Roosevelt Junior High School was completed and ready for classes in September, 1950.

George Nelson contributed much of the planning for the new building and did much to plan for and supervise its enlargement during the time between September 1950 and 1965 when he left Roosevelt to become principal of the new Monroe Junior High School. The new Roosevelt was designed specifically for junior high-aged students and boasted two gyms, a cafeteria, a library, homemaking room, woodshop, and fourteen classrooms. Enrollment in 1950 was 567 students and that number grew to 654 in 1951 and 725 in 1952, necessitating the addition of new rooms. Before he left Roosevelt, Nelson had overseen the addition of a metal shop, and an enlarged homemaking wing, a large music room with elevated seating, a science wing of four rooms, and four other classrooms. Under the evaluation criteria of the 1950s, the Oregon State Department of Education called Roosevelt "...one of the best in the state," following an evaluation in 1958.

Further additions to the building were made in 1968. When Roosevelt became a middle school in 1983, it had thirty-three classrooms, including

three shops. It had three gyms, one cafeteria, one band room, one small theater, one library-media center and several small group-working areas.

In 1965 David Mortimore became principal at Roosevelt, and during the next few years he gathered together a staff interested in curriculum changes. Under Mortimore's leadership and stimulated by the writing of staff member, Ray Scofield, the staff and administration developed a philosophy of education and explored ways to implement changes that would teach democracy rather than teach about it. During the two years, 1967-69, experimental classes were conducted and evaluated. Ideas from all sources were investigated. The Meadowbrook Junior High Program in Newton Centre, Massachusetts, and the writings of Dr. William Glasser, author of Schools Without Failure, were especially influential. A summer workshop of Roosevelt teachers in July, 1969 produced a philosophy statement and a program of instruction to implement it. This new program received the approval of the 4J directors and the Oregon State Board of Education and went into operation in September, 1969, when Don Jackson became principal of Roosevelt. Jackson nursed the program through its first years of experimental status and into its status as an alternative educational program.

The new program was built on the goals of motivation, scholarship and creativity. To this was added the goal of helping students learn how to take charge of the development of their potential and to understand that they, in the long run, are responsible for their own learning. The curriculum was totally elective. Students working with their parents and advisor, and using test data and teacher recommendations, were expected to select a program of study which best met their needs and interests. The Roosevelt catalog for the school year 1981-82, for example, contained descriptions of 279 separate nine-week courses from which students could

choose. The school was ungraded in the sense that there were no seventh, eighth or ninth grade classes as such. Students were encouraged to know their levels of achievement and to take classes on the basis of their needs in order to make continuous progress. In a second sense the school was ungraded. Roosevelt did not assign letter grades. Instead, each student received a written evaluation for each course on completion of nine weeks' work.

Roosevelt students had a longer day than did other Eugene junior high students. Part of the added time was devoted to the guide period which was central to the Roosevelt Program. The Program placed the student in an active role of discovering and weighing alternatives, making choices, and accepting the consequences.

The Roosevelt Program operated for fourteen years and served as a role model for many other schools in the state. Hundreds of visitors from throughout the state, the country, and from several foreign countries visited classes and interviewed students and teachers regarding the Program during the first years of its operation.

The Program was attractive to many students from other Eugene attendance areas. With the district's open transfer policy, Roosevelt operated at building capacity, accepting as many as 220 transfer students a year. At one time the building housed 875 students.

Donald Jackson served as principal from 1969 to 1976. Principals Wayne Flynn, Pam Inskeep, and Ted Calhoun continued to promote the idea, developed by Mortimore, that the staff should function as a democratic body, helping the administration refine the school's goals, select new staff members, and develop new curricula. Under Calhoun's leadership, the staff helped build the new middle school program that marked the end of Theodore Roosevelt Junior High in the spring of 1983 and introduced the new Theodore

Roosevelt Middle School that opened its doors to sixth, seventh and eighth grade students in September of 1983.

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