

MEMORANDUM

To: Fort Carson Regional Growth Plan Phase II file
From: Doug Jeavons
Re: Prevalence of special needs among Fort Carson children
Date: Updated October 2, 2009

In addition to planning for changes in total school enrollment resulting from changes in the number of soldiers stationed at Fort Carson, school districts are also concerned about the number of those children that may have special educational needs. Although the districts receive additional funding for children with special educational needs, these supplemental funds are often far less than the actual cost of educating children with disabilities.

This memorandum provides information on the prevalence of special educational needs among Fort Carson children. The memo summarizes information from three sources: a telephone discussion with the Exceptional Family Member Program coordinator for Fort Carson, surveys of incoming 4th Infantry Division (4th ID) troops and their spouses, and data gathered from local school districts for the 2008-2009 school year.

Summary of key findings. Overall, the incidence of special needs among Fort Carson children during the 2008-2009 school year (11 percent) was about two percentage points higher than the incidence among all El Paso County school children (9 percent) and about one percentage point higher than the statewide incidence (10 percent). This overall average is somewhat misleading, however, as it masks the considerably higher incidence of special needs among Fort Carson children attending the Fountain-Fort Carson D-8 school district (13 percent). District 8 also reports an incidence of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) that is about double the national incidence rate for this developmental disability. Children with ASD can require expenditures of \$50,000 or more per year to educate, depending on the severity of their condition. The survey of incoming 4th ID families indicates a somewhat higher incidence of special needs than the overall El Paso County and statewide incidence rates. The survey also indicates an incidence rate for ASD that is about three times the national average. This higher ASD incidence rate is consistent with District 8's experience.

Interview with Susan Moyer, Fort Carson Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) Coordinator

Susan reports that, as of August 20th, there were 443 children with registered special educational needs among the Fort Carson population. She also indicated this figure likely underestimates the total number of special education children because some families are not aware they need to register

with her office and a substantial portion of the troops recently transferring to Fort Carson from Fort Hood may not have yet registered.

As Susan suggested, this number does appear much lower than expected. Given that there are approximately 8,500 school age children of Ft. Carson soldiers, and given rates of special education that appear to range from 8 to 14 percent among the school districts in the region, we would expect about 700 to 1,300 children with special education needs among the Ft. Carson population.

Susan's view that EFMP is under utilized is consistent with national reports on the program. A 2003 assessment of Tricare Management Activity noted that "Though [EFMP is] a 'mandatory' program, there is little administrative consequence of not enrolling." Further, enrollment may be "viewed by some as a career limiter." This assessment also noted that total EFMP enrollment among all services was in the range of 50,000 to 60,000 compared to projected needs of about 134,000 based on the 2000 incidence rates for qualifying conditions. Finally, the assessment noted that the EFMP program, which gives EFMP families preferences regarding assignments, "results in concentrations of special needs children in focused locations near metro areas."¹

Surveys of Incoming Troops from Fort Hood

BBC conducted two surveys with members of the 4th ID relocating to Fort Carson. The surveys were conducted in May, 2009 (in Texas) and in July 2009 (at Fort Carson). A total of 952 surveys were completed (899 by soldiers, 53 by soldiers' spouses). One hundred and twenty six households completed the survey at both locations and were included in both survey samples. Netting out families that completed more than one survey, the combined survey results represent 836 households consisting of a total of 1,994 soldiers, spouses and children.

The surveys asked families with children whether their children had autism, ADHD or any type of developmental disability. Results are summarized in Figure 1, on the following page.

The surveys of incoming 4th ID troops indicate that the incidence of disabilities among their children is about 12 percent. This figure appears to be slightly higher than the national incidence of children with special educational needs (11 percent) based on the most recent National Survey of Children's Health funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and completed in 2007.² The statistics shown in Figure 1 do not include households with children with asthma (reported in about 10 percent of all households with children).

The reported rate of autism among 4th ID families with children coming to Fort Carson (2.9 percent) is about three times the estimated national incidence of autism among children (1 percent), although this difference may be inflated by differences in the survey methodologies.³ The relatively high rate of

¹ *Serving TRICARE'S Most Vulnerable Beneficiaries* Presentation by Geoffrey W. Rake, Col., USAF, MC, FS. TRICARE Medical Director. January 2003.

² Note, however, that the surveys of 4th ID households asked whether the family had any children with special needs. Since some families likely have both children with special needs and children without special needs, the incidence rates from the survey of troop households are not directly comparable to the incidence rate from the NSCH survey about individual children.

³ See footnote 2 above.

autism reported among 4th ID households coming to Fort Carson, however, tends to confirm anecdotal reports from school districts in the region that Fort Carson is a posting of choice for parents with autistic children because of the strong treatment and support services available in Colorado Springs and Denver. The incidence of children with ADD/ADHD (7 percent) also appears to be slightly higher than the national average (6 percent), although the results from the initial survey (May 2009) of incoming troops from Fort Hood indicated a lower incidence rate for this disorder than the national average.

Figure 1.
Prevalence of Special Needs Among 4th Infantry Division (1st BCT) Troops Relocating to Fort Carson

Households with children with special needs	4th ID Survey				National Incidence
	Survey Location		Percent		
	Ft. Hood	Ft. Carson	Ft. Hood	Ft. Carson	
Children with Autism (ASD)	10	5	2.8%	3.2%	1.0%
Children with ADHD	21	17	5.8%	11.0%	6.4%
Children with other developmental disability*	8	3	2.2%	1.9%	3.2%
Children who are deaf/hard of hearing	1	1	0.3%	0.6%	1.4%
Children with other physical disability**	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	
<u>Children with other disabilities***</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0.8%</u>	<u>0.6%</u>	
Total households with children with a disability	42	21	11.6%	13.5%	11.2%
Total households with children	361	155			

Note: *Excludes households that also indicated their children had Autism or ADD/ADHD.

**Excludes households that indicated a specific physical disability (e.g. deaf/hard of hearing).

***Excludes households that indicated their children had a more specific disability.

Source: BBC Research & Consulting, 2009; National Survey of Children's Health, US Department of Health and Human Services, 2007.

Data from Regional School Districts

Note: BBC is still seeking data from several more districts in the region. We will supplement the following discussion and table if we obtain additional data.

BBC contacted the five school districts that educate approximately 90 percent of the children of soldiers stationed at Fort Carson: Fountain-Fort Carson District 8, Widefield District 3, Harrison District 2, Colorado Springs District 11 and Cheyenne Mountain District 12. We requested information from each district on the total number of army children that attended their district and the number of those children with special educational needs. The districts provided data from their 2008-2009 federal impact aid applications. These data represent the number of army children attending the districts in October 2008.

Figure 2 summarizes the data provided by the districts. Overall, the incidence of special educational needs among Fort Carson children is about 11 percent. This figure is very close to the national average incidence rate for special educational needs, but is about two percentage points greater than the overall special needs incidence rate for El Paso County in

2008 (9 percent) and one percentage point greater than the special needs incidence rate for Colorado as a whole (10 percent).

Figure 2.
Number of Fort Carson Children and Prevalence of Special Needs in Selected School Districts 2008-2009

District	2008-2009 Count		Percent in Special Education	District Share of Fort Carson Children*
	Special Education	Total		
El Paso County				
Cheyenne Mountain D-12	24	336	7.1%	4%
Colorado Springs D-11	51	714	7.1%	8%
Fountain-Fort Carson D-8	497	3,762	13.2%	44%
Harrison D-2	74	916	8.1%	11%
Widefield D-3	179	1,949	9.2%	23%
Total	825	7,677	10.7%	90%
Estimated total Ft. Carson kids*		8,530		

Note: *Reflects estimate from Regional Growth Plan Phase 1 that 10 percent of Fort Carson children are educated in other districts, private schools or home schooled.

Source: BBC Research & Consulting, 2009 based on data provided by the districts from their 2008-2009 Federal Impact Aid applications.

As shown in Figure 2, there is considerable variation in the incidence of special needs among Fort Carson children by school district. Fort Carson children attending Fountain-Fort Carson District 8 have a considerably higher incidence rate for special needs (13 percent), while Fort Carson children attending the other districts have an incidence rate for special needs that is comparable to or below the state average. These differences likely reflect District 8's reputation within the Fort Carson community for having excellent resources for special needs children.