



Tara Snyder, 13, above, and Darcy Reed, 9, below, are Colorado handicapped students featured in a PBS television special tonight examining special education.

Tim DeFrisco/
Special to the
Rocky Mountain
News

PBS special questions special ed

By Christopher Broderick
Rocky Mountain News Staff Writer

A Down syndrome teen-ager in Golden and an autistic child in Denver are the focus of a national PBS TV special airing tonight that questions whether special education programs really work.

Tara Snyder, 13, is profiled at Bell Middle School in Golden, where she was mainstreamed with other sixth graders. But her family decided she would be better off with other handicapped students and transferred her to Fletcher Miller School in Lakewood.

"I'm not willing to sacrifice any more of Tara's school years to a cause," said Tara's mother, Christy Ochs.

Fletcher Miller is one of only

three special ed schools left in Colorado compared to 25 such schools two decades ago.

Brian McNulty, assistant commissioner for the Colorado Department of Education, said research shows that children with disabilities do better if they are mainstreamed into regular classrooms rather than segregated into special schools.

The debate over special education has centered chiefly on rising costs. An estimated 5 million children in the United States are classified with special needs — most of them with learning disabilities — at a cost of more than \$30 billion.

But tonight's program, *What's So Special About Special Education?*, questions the trend toward

mainstreaming and how well schools track the progress of special needs students.

For example, another child profiled is Darcy Reed, 9, of Denver. She was mainstreamed in a regular second-grade class last year at Park Hill Elementary. Darcy is autistic, can't always control her behavior and doesn't speak, although she reads above her grade level and does honors work in math.

Darcy's parents, Les and Carolyn Reed, were unhappy with her progress and pulled her out of the classroom. She is now educated at home with the help of a teacher's aide from Denver Public Schools.

One scene from tonight's program illustrates the special education debate more than the interviews — a closeup of a classroom poster Darcy drew for an assignment on what she wanted to accomplish in the second grade: "I want to be a regular kid."



Darcy Reed