

Mandated by new law

State school changes its name

By SUSAN FRY

Willowbrook State School has changed its name to Willowbrook Developmental Center to comply with a new state law mandating state hospitals and schools to be known as developmental centers.

The change of name reflects the public's change in attitude toward mental retardation, according to an associate commissioner of the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene.

"Contrary to what many people think, this is not a cosmetic change. The term state school had come to mean a place to which retardates were sent to stay forever," Harold Wolfe explained.

"Our facilities are becoming less and less what state schools connoted, which were isolated, separate communities — institutions — for the retarded," he added.

Wolfe suggested that the public's impressions of mental retardation in relation to a state school or hospital are wrong since many residents are victims of developmental disorders rather than profound retardation.

"There are a wide range of disabilities at Willowbrook that are related to physical and intellectual development and neurological damages," he said.

The developmental center concept, however, Wolfe said, connotes a facility that is part of a network of services linked with other programs in the community.

"The state schools are becoming increasingly involved with local, public and voluntary groups and organizations like the United Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State," he said.

"Willowbrook will be doing this more and more as time goes on."

Wolfe claimed that state hospitals, too, have changed significantly to justify the change in name. Once meaning a "custodial institution, a rest-of-life facility providing in-patient care in an isolated community," state hospitals, he said, are now returning more and more patients to the community from where they came.

"Today, our state psychiatric centers have more out-patients on their rolls than in-patients," he explained.

The bill, which was signed into law May 23 by Gov. Wilson, was sponsored jointly by Assemblymen Bruce F. Caputo (R-Conn., Bronxville), Chester

R. Hardt (R-Conn., Buffalo) and Robert C. Wertz (R-Commack).