

Kristi is now enrolled at Covenant Christian High School, Walker, Michigan, where she is mainstreamed as a tenth grader. With joy she is pursuing her studies in hopes of continuing her education at a college level.



The Moelkers, in the preceding article, made reference to "mainstreaming." The idea there is of course that the particular handicapped student finds it possible to attend "regular" classes in a "regular" school. Kristi could do that. Students with other kinds of impairment, however, are not able to function in the "main stream." Something "special" must therefore be provided for these "special" children. In the article that follows, Deane Wassink, a teacher at our Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, tells about what the Board of the Society for Protestant Reformed Special Education (of which he is a member) is doing to make provision for that. Do you know what an EMI room is? Heritage has one. To learn all about it, from a man who has long had an interest in Special Ed, read on.

Deane Wassink

Covenant children come in every shape, size, and ability. We have in our midst a number of children who are not able to handle everything in a regular classroom. In the past, these children have not been able to function in our schools. They have had to go to the public school system for their education. Now we have begun to help these children in our own schools.

Our Christian school system as a whole stands on the principle that

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our covenant children ought to receive an education that is in harmony with the Scriptures as taught in our churches. This is a covenant responsibility of the parents that is not limited by the ability of the children, but only by the ability of the parents to provide that education where they live. This is in harmony with the truth that God in His grace sees fit to gather His children out of our children.

We believe in the unity of the body of Christ. Each member of that body has an important and necessary place. We strive to develop that unity in our schools when we teach our children to show love for one another by sharing, praying for each other, bearing each other's burdens, and caring for each other's needs. This truth is at the heart of our belief that the covenant is a relationship of friendship.

With those covenant principles in mind it is evident that the best place for the special children in our midst is in our own covenant schools with other covenant children. There they can experience the blessings of fellowship. There they can grow in knowledge and develop their talents. There the other children of the covenant learn how to work side by side with them as fellow saints. This ability can only be learned by practice, practice, practice — on the part of all the members of the body of Christ!

This basic commitment to the needs of the special children in our midst is what led to the beginning of our own special education school. The consistory of the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church called a meeting to encourage the organization of a society for special education. The Society for Protestant Reformed Education was formed. A board was formed and plans adopted to go ahead. As a member of the second board I recall a feeling of deep commitment and purpose on the part of the members as we sailed into uncharted waters. Miss Jessie Dykstra, who had many years of experience in the field, was hired to be our first teacher of the EMI room in Hope school. We began instruction in the fall of 1984. A year later we hired also Doug Boone to teach LD students at Heritage.

"EMI" stands for Educable Mentally Impaired. These are students who need a special classroom environment and a low student-to-teacher ratio. They are able to participate in regular classroom activities on a limited basis. Because we have students who vary greatly in age and ability, it takes a great deal of flexibility and innovation on the part of the teacher, along with help from aides.

"LD" stands for Learning Disabled. These are students with normal intelligence who have difficulty in particular skill areas, such as reading, spelling, or math. They spend nearly all their time in a regular class-

Jessie retired at the end of the '87-'88 school year. Because of a major change in our class makeup, and with the intention of consolidating our efforts, we moved the EMI room to Heritage this year. We also hired Deb Kuiper, a Calvin graduate with a degree in special education. Deb has four students in her room, with wide variations of ability and age. Doug is working with 10-15 students on a regular basis in his "I CAN" room.

The future looks bright, given the good beginning. We have established a building fund in order that we can purchase our own rooms in the future. Also, we are constantly assessing the needs of our covenant children to see how we can serve them. At present we are meeting student needs in two areas. If there are needs in other areas, we will do our best to meet them with the means we have available. Remember, our purpose is to serve the special children. Whether God sends us hearing impaired, visually impaired, emotionally impaired, or physically impaired we will do all we can, by the grace of God, to provide a covenant education for these children.

Please keep this special cause in your thoughts and prayers.