

Special Education

The Board for
The Society of Protestant Reformed Special Education

God has richly blessed us and given us the means to provide Christ-centered education for our children. Even so, we have been neglecting a small, but very important, number of His children; those born with special needs. As a result our mentally handicapped children have been attending schools that do not teach the truth. This is a concern for the parents of these children.

In past years there were not very many handicapped children in our midst. From a practical standpoint it may not have been possible to provide Protestant Reformed education. However, our denomination has grown and has a greater number of children with special needs. Being members of the covenant, these children also must be educated in the fear of His Name.

A movement has begun to accomplish this undertaking. It was initially spearheaded by the consistory of Hudsonville Church. For some time they had been concerned about the lack of spiritual training for the handicapped children in their congregation. With the help of Mrs. Gertrude Hoeksema as teacher, the consistory initiated weekly Bible study classes. Instruction was given on a one to one basis for four of their special children.

Enthused with the progress the children made in these weekly sessions, the consistory believed it was time to expand this teaching to include godly academic training. The Hudsonville Consistory concluded that this training should not be exclusive to their children, but should include all special children in the area of Protestant Reformed Churches.

Hudsonville's Consistory held a meeting at the church on March 16, 1983, for all parents, relatives, and friends of mentally handicapped children. After some discussion, it was the consensus of this group to proceed and lay the groundwork for achieving special education.

On April 20, 1983, a second meeting was held. At this time a constitution was adopted, a society was formed and school board members were elected. This new society requested the board to achieve Protestant Reformed special education as soon as it was feasible.

For several months the board has been working to complete items that must be accomplished prior to beginning formal education. An im-

portant task is the accurate evaluation of potential students. This is necessary to determine the individual needs of our children. It is also required to ascertain class size and the number of teachers which will be needed. The board is being assisted in this activity by one of our church members, Miss Jessie Dykstra, who is qualified in special education by training and experience. The board is also presently involved in evaluating prospective teachers, obtaining funds to meet expenses, and purchasing teaching materials.

Much discussion has taken place as to where this school should be located and options are presently being pursued. It is the desire of many of the parents involved that this school be operated in conjunction with one of our existing schools. This appears to be the most ideal situation in that facilities would be shared and social interaction with other students could occur. Also, some of our special students with near normal ability would have the opportunity to participate in a regular classroom environment.

With God's help the board for special education will continue to labor, anticipating the education of His special children in the near future.

We covet your prayers and your support.

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Is not the great defect of our education today — a defect traceable through all the disquieting symptoms of trouble that I have mentioned — that although we often succeed in teaching our pupils "subjects," we fail lamentably on the whole in teaching them how to think: they learn everything except the art of learning. It is as though we had taught a child, mechanically and by rule of thumb, to play "The Harmonious Blacksmith" upon the piano, but had never taught him the scale or how to read music; so that, having memorized "The Harmonious Blacksmith," he still had not the faintest notion how to proceed from that to tackle "The Last Rose of Summer." Why do I say, "as though"? In certain of the arts and crafts we sometimes do precisely this — requiring a child to "express himself" in paint before we teach him how to handle the colors and the brush. There is a school of thought which believes this to be the right way to set about the job. But observe: it is not the way in which a trained craftsman will go about to teach himself a new medium. He, having learned by experience the best way to economize labor and take the thing by the right end, will start off by doodling about on an odd piece of material, in order to "give himself the feel of the tool."

"The Lost Tools of Learning" by Dorothy Sayers
National Review, January 19, 1979