

# Special Education: A Corporate Covenantal Responsibility

**YEAR:**

2012

**VOLUME/YEAR:**

88/2012

**AUTHOR:**

Hanko Herman

**ISSUE:**

Issue: 5, 12/1/2011

**ARTICLE TYPE:**

Education Feature

Scripture References

**Book:**

Galatians

**Chapter:**

6

**Verse:**

2

*This article, abbreviated somewhat for SB length, was written at the request of the Special Education Board.*

As part of the rich and glorious inheritance of the Reformed faith is the doctrine of God's covenant of grace.

The truth of God's covenant of grace includes in it the promise of the Scriptures that God will be our God and the God of our children. We believe with all our hearts that our children "as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God;...since redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult" (Heidelberg Catechism, L. D. 27, Q&A 74).

We believe that the children whom God has given us are in fact regenerated and sanctified, and that they are possessors of the Holy Spirit. We teach them to pray when they can barely lisp a few words; we take them into the fellowship of the family when we have our family devotions; we send them off to school as those over whom God spreads His wings that they may learn God's ways. We do not do all these things with such care because we hope that at some time in the future they might decide to fulfill the conditions of the covenant so as to become truly part of that covenant; we do this, rather, because we have received them from God's hand when He

delivered them to our homes as part of His elect bride and as those for whom Christ died on Calvary.

When God gives to covenant parents their children, He gives them in infinite variety. There are those who are able to learn early, and there are those who struggle to learn the alphabet and need constant help. And there are the majority of our children who lie somewhere between these extremes, closer to the one or the other.

Within our Protestant Reformed families there are children whom God has given to us in His grace who are unable to keep up with their peers in our schools, because they are cognitively or physically impaired and sometimes both. They are special gifts of God and are very precious, because they occupy a unique place in our families, our congregations, and our schools. They are special to God and they are special to us.

These children belong first of all, of course, to the families in which God has placed them. But they are also the children of the entire congregation in which the family worships and enjoys the communion of the saints. And they are the treasure of the whole denomination in which the communion of the saints is most broadly enjoyed.

As the children of God's covenant belong to the entire covenant community, this community has the responsibility to take all the covenant children into the life of the church. But all the covenant community also has the responsibility to teach all the children born within its family. Yes, *all the children*, without regard to any other considerations.

We are a covenant family in Jesus Christ, our Elder Brother. In that covenant family we need each other and we are under solemn obligation to help each other in the difficult path of our pilgrim's sojourn. We need each other also in the education of our children—not only our own children; not only our grandchildren; but all the children of all the parents born within the covenant lines.

We establish wherever possible our own schools, because we believe that these children of the covenant must be educated to walk in the way of God's covenant. When all the children of God's covenant learn to walk, insofar as they are able, in the ways of God's covenant, it is a special blessing to the church.

Sometimes we foolishly think that children with cognitive limitations cannot learn spiritual things; but if this idea is in us, we are guilty of underestimating the power of the Holy Spirit, who is able to apply the truth to all our children whom it is His good pleasure to save.

Twenty-eight years ago this past August the announcement was made of the establishment of a special society and board for the purpose of educating those who could not keep up with their peers in the regular classes. Since that time, the program has expanded and become increasingly important in our schools.

I want to tell you a bit how it works.

The entire program is carried out in our existing school buildings. I consider this to be of great importance. All the children, regardless of what part of the program they are in, are together with the other children for at least Bible, physical education, and recess. There may be the rare exception, of course: the child that is unable to participate in recess activities and in physical

education, or the child that has behavior problems. But the point is that each child is with his or her peers as much as possible.

This has two profoundly good results. On the one hand, the cognitively and physically impaired child enjoys being a part of a group of fellow saints, to work with them and play with them, something that erases their sense of lonesomeness and mitigates their feelings of being different; and on the other hand (just as important) it gives the children in the regular classroom program training in kindness, sympathy, understanding of another's weaknesses, appreciation for one's own gifts from God, and special opportunities to be of assistance in helping others with activities they cannot do themselves. I am told by board members that, on the whole, our children respond eagerly to this need to help others and that, at times, each child who needs extra help has two or three other children who assume everyday responsibility for his or her care. I knew the other side of the coin when I was attending a Christian school, and it was not always very nice.

These benefits of having special education in our schools are of great importance for the education of our children. Our children are being taught to live as covenant people in the communion of saints. Part of that teaching is to learn to live with others in peace and unity, but part of that learning is also "to bear one another's burdens" ([Gal. 6:2](#) <sup>(1)</sup>).

The Society for Special Education, through its Board, supports two programs. The one program is named "Special Education," and it is set up to teach those children who are unable to master the material in almost every subject of the normal curriculum. Although each child is evaluated separately, the usual "cut-off" point for a child to enter the special program is an inability to learn with his or her classmates in more than three subjects in the curriculum. These children are taught separately by teachers who have been specially trained for this work, and whose success with the education of these children is phenomenal. The education of these children is financed through the gifts of many, as only a small fraction is supported by tuition. For this current school year a mere 6% of the costs of Special Education is attributable to tuition, as opposed to our day schools, where tuition income is in the 75% range. The remainder of the cost for Special Education is brought up through gifts, drives, and other means of income.

In the Western Michigan area this part of the program is carried out in Heritage Protestant Reformed Christian School in Hudsonville, Michigan. Several schools in the denomination have started or are starting their own special education program due to growing need. This includes Covenant Christian High (which is investigating the start of both a special education room and a resource room) and elementary schools in Loveland, Doon, Dyer, and Randolph. With the exception of the program in West Michigan, each local school board retains complete control over its own special education program. The board and staff of the Special Education Society offer their services and expertise to help other schools with this project and further support with financial gifts. Much of the texts and supplies that are used in this program are obtained from Elim Christian School in Illinois, a school that has a long and successful history of educating children with special needs.

The result is that these children, so important in the life of the church, are trained to function in society and in the communion of saints to the full extent of their abilities. They add to the spiritual life of the church in immeasurable ways.

The program is very expensive, for most of the work is done with these children on a one-to-one basis. And, while the parents are grateful to pay some of the cost, they cannot pay it all, especially when they have other children in the educational system.

The Special Education Board also supports resource rooms. This program is set up to help those students who have difficulty in one, two, or three subjects. There are students who, while able to master the curriculum in the regular classes, are deficient in certain areas. They have trouble learning to read; or they need help in math. They need help in conquering these subjects beyond what they receive in the classroom. To meet these needs, many, if not most, of our schools have now added a "Resource Room" to the many classrooms in the school.

These resource rooms are also staffed by teachers who may share time with the regular classrooms or may teach full time in a resource room. But they also are trained and skilled in their own area of teaching and do a wonderful job of helping children with the additional instruction they need. I have been in these resource rooms, and I marvel at the means these teachers use to help children in reading, math, etc. And I have talked with parents whose children have made use of these resource rooms and to whom it seems almost as if miracles have been performed in them.

Each resource room is operated by the society and board of the school in which the room is set up. All decisions are made by the school board as to how they are to operate and who is to teach in them. The financing of these resource rooms is also the responsibility of the local school; that is, 80% of the financing. The Special Education Board provides 20% of the financing.

Members of the Board for Special Education periodically visit a resource room to encourage the work and to offer assistance where possible. And the board and staff in the Special Education program are always available for consultation, advice, and help. They eagerly share their expertise with those who ask for it.

We all owe a debt of gratitude to the teachers and staff who are involved on a day-to-day basis with our covenant children in special education and resource rooms.

But what needs to be stressed more than anything else is the need for all our people to know of these programs, to realize their importance, and to contribute to them, whether to the resource rooms in their own schools or to the special education programs wherever they are set up as a part of the school. I know that the cost of educating our children is high. I know that families already sacrifice many worldly possessions for the sake of Protestant Reformed education. But I know too, and our people without exception ought to know, that the education of all the children is not a burden to bear, but a privilege God gives us. We cannot spend our money on anything of greater value in the kingdom than on the education of the children of the covenant, the ministry of the Word alone excepted. If we love God's covenant, we love our schools. If we love our schools, we love the covenant children taught in them— *all the children*. We will learn to pray more fervently for our schools—societies, boards, teachers, and children, and we will learn that to support these educational enterprises carries with it untold blessings of our faithful God and an enrichment to the life of our churches by the addition of those children who have challenges, but are so precious to God, to their families, and to us all.

**Source URL:** <http://standardbearer.rfpa.org/articles/special-education-corporate-covenantal-responsibility>

**Links:**

[1] <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=9&search=Gal.+6:2>