
**CONCEPT PLAN FOR A FUTURE PROTESTANT
REFORMED TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM**

TED COMMITTEE

OF THE

FEDERATION OF PROTESTANT REFORMED CHRISTIAN SCHOOL SOCIETIES

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“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”—Psalm 127:1

INTRODUCTION

This document reflects the work of a number of individuals who have studied the ideal of a Protestant Reformed teacher training program. This document is designed to articulate a vision for such a program and to inspire potential supporters to embrace this ideal and to acknowledge its feasibility.

It is not the intention of the TED Committee that this document provides all the answers to the many questions and concerns that will arise. Solutions for any future challenges can and should be addressed as we follow the ideals this vision holds forth.

PROPOSAL

That the Federation of Protestant Reformed Christian School Societies develops a formal teacher training program to train Protestant Reformed teachers in the principles, philosophies, history, and practices of Reformed education as informed by Protestant Reformed principles. This training will supplement the required training that the teacher or prospective teacher receives in college, with the goal that individuals complete the program within a period of time to attain a certification recognized by all of the member schools. The intention of this program is to provide support for teachers during the early and most vulnerable years of teaching.

THE HISTORY OF PROTESTANT REFORMED TEACHER TRAINING

The endeavor to establish a formal teacher training program for Protestant Reformed teachers is not novel. It has been discussed for many generations. The *Standard Bearer* has not been silent. Valid attempts have been made. With this in mind, this current proposal does not articulate a need that is only recently felt, nor does it introduce a vision that is only recently grasped.

Rev. Herman Hoeksema, unbeknownst to many, was instrumental in establishing a teacher training school (called a normal school) in Grand Rapids, Michigan. With the strong conviction

that teacher training was not the responsibility of the church, he became president of the Society for Christian Normal Training, whose purpose was to establish an independent school for teacher training. Since Calvin College, an ecclesiastically controlled institution, had a poor teacher training program in the early 1900s and because it was the proper Reformed position that teacher training belongs in the realm of society control rather than ecclesiastical control, the Society for Christian Normal Training succeeded in establishing an independent school for teacher training. The necessity of formal, rigid, and accurate training for teachers was a conviction Rev. Hoeksema held his whole life.

Protestant Reformed parents in the Grand Rapids area did not establish Protestant Reformed schools for their children until the late 1940s and early 1950s. With the establishment of those schools, the call for teacher training was immediately sounded.

Prof. Homer C. Hoeksema began a series of *Standard Bearer* articles in the December 1, 1951 issue titled “Looking to the Future.” In those articles he began an appeal for a teachers’ training college.

We believe, as Protestant Reformed people, that our schools must not merely be separate from existing schools and from the public schools in externals, in name, organization, facilities, etc., but that they must be schools in which the instruction from the beginning to end is founded upon and permeated by our Protestant Reformed principles, which to us is the same as saying Reformed principles—which, in turn, is the same as saying the truth of Holy Scripture...

It is also self-evident that a Protestant Reformed teacher is not a person who, though he be Protestant Reformed in confession and church affiliation, has had some teacher training in any of a number of different teacher-training institutions...a Protestant Reformed teacher is a Protestant Reformed man or woman who has been trained in Protestant Reformed principles of education, positively and completely, so that he enters upon his teaching career with the equipment necessary to bring Protestant Reformed instruction.¹

The idea of a teacher training program was also initiated by the Society for Protestant Reformed Education in 1948. With such a school in mind, the society brought a letter to the

¹ Homer C. Hoeksema, “Looking to the Future: On Teacher Training,” *Standard Bearer* 27, no. 17 (June 1, 1951): 396.

Theological School Committee of the Protestant Reformed Churches. The letter asked to what extent the facilities of the seminary could be used to train Protestant Reformed teachers. The committee forwarded the request to the synod of 1948, which turned it down. The call for teacher training would be heard at the next two synods as well. In the end, however, the work of moving that ideal forward fell flat.

The late 1950s saw the establishment of the Federation of Protestant Reformed Christian School Societies. The Federation was established with formal teacher training in mind. A committee was appointed to study the matter of normal courses for teachers. The next few years that committee investigated that possibility without much fruition. At the April 29, 1960, delegate board meeting, a motion was made and passed “to drop the matter of a normal school.” Reasons for the vote were not recorded. It is possible that the obstacles for establishing such a school were deemed too great. Also, Rev. Ophoff was holding regular meetings with teachers in which educational principles were taught and discussed.

Throughout the next few decades, calls for more formal teacher training were sounded in the *Standard Bearer* and in *Perspectives for Covenant Education*. Although they were cries for action, little action followed.

In the early 1980s a group of men began to meet with the purpose of once again picking up the banner for teacher training. These men organized into the Conference on Reformed Higher Education. Although the group was interested in Protestant Reformed higher education generally, they specifically targeted formal training for Protestant Reformed teachers. This group wrote “An Open Letter Concerning Reformed Higher Education” in the September 15, 1983, issue of the *Standard Bearer*. The letter invited interested individuals to support its work and to attend an open meeting in Iowa that September. Although that endeavor was a good start, again it bore little tangible fruit.

In the early 1990s the first long-standing effort to provide systematic instruction to Protestant Reformed teachers materialized. The Federation took up the project once again. The Federation instructed the TED Committee to seek input from teachers and board members regarding the establishment of a course for Protestant Reformed teachers’ education. The TED Committee organized a subcommittee of mainly practicing educators to create a PREP (Protestant Reformed Educational Perspectives) course that would provide a single course for Protestant Reformed teachers. Although this was not the full teacher training program that had been desired and pushed for so long, it was a good step forward.

This course finally took shape when Mr. Jon Huisken became the director of the PREP project. He presented a proposal that he would develop and teach a course entitled “Reformed

Educational Principles and Practices.”His proposal passed, and the course has been offered regularly to teachers, prospective teachers, and board members since it was first taught in 1996.

For the next fifteen years this course existed much the same as it had started. In 2011 Jon Huisken stepped down as the instructor, and the Federation approved Prof. Russell Dykstra as his successor. Although Professor Dykstra retains much of the framework built by Jon Huisken, the professor places more emphasis on the *history* of Reformed education, rather than on the *practices*. The TED Committee in 2015 changed the name of the course to “History and Principles of Reformed Education.”

As of yet the need for a formal teacher training program has not been satisfied. Over the last seventy years calls for such a program have gone out. Individuals here and there have given good efforts to respond to those calls. A single course of instruction has been established, but the reality of a thorough and systematic teacher training program still eludes us.

THE NEED

In a 1994 *Standard Bearer* article Prof. David Engelsma articulated an accurate summation of the need.

Good schoolteachers are qualified schoolteachers.

They must be thoroughly trained in their field. No one can teach that of which he or she is ignorant.

They must be gifted with the ability to impart knowledge to children, as well as to work with children in the rearing of them.

They must be Reformed believers who live and love the covenant of grace.

They must have a wide and deep knowledge of the Reformed faith as this faith is set forth in the Reformed creeds and held in the Protestant Reformed Churches. This is necessary so that they can apply the Reformed faith to all aspects of their instruction. The God of the covenant demands schools that do not merely give an education but that give a *Christian* education. This is a *Reformed* education.

In this connection, there is a lack in the training of the Protestant Reformed young people who will become teachers. There is no instruction in the distinctively Protestant Reformed principles of Christian education. I refer to

such truths as the doctrine of the covenant itself; the sovereignty of the Triune God; the Lordship of the risen Christ; the spiritual kingdom of Christ in which parents, teachers, and students alike are citizens; particular grace; and the antithesis. The young people know these truths. But they are not taught how these truths apply specifically to the science of Christian education. Existing Reformed colleges do not show how these truths bear on Christian education to the satisfaction of Protestant Reformed Christians. The secular, state colleges where some of our future teachers are being trained certainly do not concern themselves with these truths, except to reject them.²

A Reformed school built on Protestant Reformed principles requires properly trained teachers. A properly trained teacher not only has a firm grasp of what Protestant Reformed principles are, but also, more specifically, they know how these principles manifest themselves in a comprehensive educational philosophy and corresponding classroom practice.

The chief means Protestant Reformed schools use to ensure this requirement is to hire teachers who are members of the Protestant Reformed Churches. This is inadequate. When we describe a teacher (or a school) as Protestant Reformed, the descriptor *Protestant Reformed* denotes the character and practice of a teacher, not the church affiliation or membership of the teacher. Church membership is important, but it does not fill the requirement that our teachers are *trained* properly to be distinctively Protestant Reformed teachers.

Prof. Russell Dykstra made the following generic, but convincing statement concerning the importance of properly trained teachers: “The teachers *are* the Christian school.”³ In essence he meant that a school is distinctively Reformed only when the *activities* of that school are distinctively Reformed, and overwhelmingly it is the teachers who provide those activities in the school.

David Engelsma, James Lanting, and Lamm Lubbers wrote the following concerning the need for Reformed higher education:

It is our conviction that college-level instruction of prospective Protestant Reformed Christian schoolteachers in the truth set forth in the Reformed Creeds,

² David J. Engelsma, “The Need for Good Christian Schoolteachers,” *Standard Bearer* 70, no. 20 (September 1, 1994): 460–61.

³ Russell J. Dykstra, “Teacher Training,” *Standard Bearer* 90, no. 17 (June, 1994): 391

as maintained by the Protestant Reformed Churches, is part of our calling in the covenant, to the extent that God enables us to provide it. This Faith is God's own truth that must be the foundation of all teaching.

The education of our teachers in State universities and colleges is unsatisfactory, since the Word of God is not the light in which these schools teach the students to see light. The teaching of existing Christian colleges is widely and seriously weakened by the errors of the doubt and denial of the infallible inspiration and full authority of Scripture (“higher criticism”); of theistic evolution; of the philosophy of the A.A.C.S.; of common grace; of socialism, if not Marxism; of the current “liberal” dogmas of revolution, feminism, pacifism, and sexual permissiveness; and “of the lack of zeal for godliness of life.”⁴

Finally, Prof. Homer C. Hoeksema wrote the following concerning the need for teacher training:

But let us now understand that we may not and must not be satisfied as long as our teachers receive their training in Reformed or Christian Reformed or even outright worldly institutions. It may be granted that such institutions may train teachers. But it lies in the very nature of the case that such institutions cannot train *Protestant Reformed* teachers, that is, train them to be Protestant Reformed in their teaching. You don’t get cookies at a hardware store. You don’t get Protestant Reformed teachers from a non-Protestant Reformed college.⁵

Our schools have been around for many decades. The chief means of training teachers has been *informal* training that takes place on the job. Young teachers learn how to be Protestant Reformed teachers through any of the following methods:

- Remembering and replicating the training they received from their Protestant Reformed teachers as children
- Self-teaching
- Learning from experienced colleagues and administrators
- Teachers’ conventions and/or Federation sponsored summer seminars

⁴ David Engelsma, James Lanting, Lamm Lubbers, “An Open Letter concerning Reformed Higher Education,” *Standard Bearer* 59, no. 21 (September 15, 1983): 497.

⁵ Homer C. Hoeksema, “Looking to the Future: The Teacher Problem (Suggestions toward Solution),” *Standard Bearer* 28, no. 15 (May 1, 1952): 351.

Although these methods can impart some knowledge of what Reformed education is and how it manifests itself in the classroom, it is not ideal. A formal training program has the following benefits over the past informal methods:

- Over time all the teachers will have a common and unified body of knowledge that will inform their practices.
- Systematic training ensures that teachers will have a grasp of Reformed education early in their careers, rather than relying on experiences alone.
- Systematic training provides instruction in principles and philosophies that inform the practice.
- A training program can become a vehicle by which Protestant Reformed education is developed and promoted. Instructors who are regularly engaged in the development and promotion of the teacher training program can educate the populace through writings in the *Perspectives*, *Standard Bearer*, and other fitting educational publications.

WHY NOW?

Some Protestant Reformed schools have been in existence for over sixty years, so why push for a teacher training program now?

This is a legitimate question that demands an answer. The answer is straightforward.

First, as indicated above, the desire and need for a Protestant Reformed teacher training program is not a recent development. The desire and need has been with us from the beginning. We are convinced that such a program could have benefited our schools ten, thirty, or even sixty years ago. The past attempts gave evidence of that.

Second, in the past Protestant Reformed schools were generally in the emergent stage. Although today some Protestant Reformed schools are still trying to get their feet securely on the ground, generally the Protestant Reformed schools as assembled together in the Federation are mature. As mature schools they have the capacity, both financially and experientially, to work together as a Federation to develop the schools in ways that previously were impossible.

The Christian Reformed Church, our mother church, established a distinctive training program for teachers in Christian schools within a decade of establishing a federation of Christian Reformed schools. She was wise in establishing that program early on, since it helped supply the growing schools with qualified teachers who fit the philosophical ideology and theology

that church wanted in the schools. It is high time that we as Protestant Reformed people establish a program of our own.

Third, the society in which we live is spiritually and morally eroding faster than at any other time in recent history. This is manifested to a great degree in secular colleges and universities, but equally so in many Reformed colleges. Protestant Reformed teachers gain all their formal training from these institutions. We must not only combat these assaults, but we must also positively set forth the ideal of what a truly and distinctively Reformed education looks like.

Finally, as a whole the people who support Protestant Reformed schools have the finances and capabilities that were not experienced generations ago. Even as our forefathers sacrificed to build our current schools, so it is our calling to support those schools and to take up the cause of teacher training to protect what our grandfathers and fathers have built and to prepare our schools for the tumultuous future that threatens their very existence.

THE FORMAT

The proper structure of a Protestant Reformed teacher training program is critical. Many students in this program will be from across the United States, so the training program must be accessible to them.

Another important consideration is that many students in the training program may be attending college or be in the beginning years of teaching. Consequently, they will be burdened with college course work or the work of a beginning teacher. The format must be flexible for such studying and working adults.

Some possible methods to make the program accessible and flexible for our teachers are the following:

- Summer mini-courses
- Online courses at various times during the school year, using a platform such as Moodle or an equivalent
- Workshops at the annual teachers' convention
- Mentorship by a retired teacher or master teacher, who would work with a small group of new teachers and challenge them to integrate Reformed principles and worldview into their instruction

It is possible that the program could be a one-, two-, or three-year training program, depending on the available resources and format(s) chosen.

A PROPOSED COURSE OF STUDY

1. History of Christian education

- A thorough examination of education from the Old Testament and the New Testament through western civilization and ending in North America in the twenty-first century

2. Reformed educational philosophy and principles

- A study of the philosophies, principles, and foundations of Reformed education, with particular focus on Christian education as developed in the Christian Reformed schools and the positive development in the Protestant Reformed schools

3. Reformed worldview

- An examination of what a Reformed worldview is and how it relates to Christian education
- An examination of false worldviews and how they impact practices in Christian schools

4. Classroom management and pedagogy

- A practical course with its foundation in scripture, the Reformed creeds, and the Reformed education principles articulated above
- An examination of the nature of students and how we view and treat them in discipline and instruction
- A study of educational psychology

5. Curriculum theory

- An examination of the content of education
- An examination of how to organize that content and to what end

6. Creation studies

- A study focusing on math, science, history, literature, and fine arts
- An examination of these subjects in the light of scripture and the Reformed creeds to give the student a better understanding of how to view and to teach them in the light of scripture

THE INSTRUCTORS

1. Retired teachers

- Many retired teachers in our circles have a wealth of knowledge and experience to share.
- Since they are retired, they would more than likely have time to devote to the cause of Protestant Reformed teacher training.

2. Master teachers

- Teachers who desire and have abilities to teach young teachers

3. Outside experts

- Men and women outside the Protestant Reformed school system who are working in education or science and have much to offer toward the development of young Protestant Reformed teachers

4. Protestant Reformed seminary professors

- Professor Dykstra is the current instructor of the course in history and principles. Likely, he would continue to be an instructor in the training program.
- Other current or retired professors may find a place too.

THE GOALS

The goals for the teacher training program and any instructor in it are the following:

- Hold the academic integrity and rigor of the program to high standards
- Have stability in one's area of instruction
- Have a desire to grow and to develop in one's area of instruction
- Achieve an advanced degree in one's area of instruction

THE GOVERNANCE

The Federation will govern the teacher training program.

This is appropriate and valid, first, because article 2 of Federation's constitution explicitly lists this type of activity as one of the purposes of the Federation:

The purpose of this organization in general is to deal with those matters pertaining to Protestant Reformed School Societies in common.

And specifically point C says that the Federation should seek “ways and means for a more thorough training of teachers and prospective teachers in Christian principles.”

Second, ensuring that schools have well-qualified and trained teachers is the responsibility of the school boards and the societies they represent. Since the Federation is an organization of school societies, it is appropriate for the Federation to govern the training program.

We propose that the Federation creates a permanent board to govern the teacher training program. We do so for the following reasons:

- The Federation is made up of board members who are busy serving in the capacity of board members in their local schools. The time and energy they have to invest in a project of this magnitude is limited.
- Since Federation delegates serve for a limited time, there is a lack of stability with the Federation.

Both of these reasons create challenges for direct Federation governance over a program of this magnitude.

The characteristics of the governing board and its members would be as follows:

- Board receives authority from the Federation
- Federation has representatives on the board
- Men who have the time, desire, and capabilities to see the training program thrive
- Men who love Protestant Reformed education
- Men not currently serving as school board members
- A hired director to implement the directives of the board
- Director has an advisory role

We are convinced that the creation of such a board is critical to the success of the teacher training program. Dedicated men who are willing and able to dedicate time to this project must be found.

We also see the governing board as the chief body that will give the initial legs to this program, as outlined in “Moving the Program Forward” below.

THE FINANCING

A teacher training program will incur expenses. We foresee the majority of the expenses attributed to the cost of a staff—director, technology coordinator, and instructors. Since this

will be an added expense to the Federation's annual budget, additional sources of income will be needed.

Possible sources of income would include increased membership dues, church collections, donors, fees, and teachers' training foundation.

It would not be wise to place the burden of these expenses on the student. Most of them will likely have college expenses and/or student loans. Also, as new teachers their salaries are typically small.

SOME CHALLENGES

There are reasons that a comprehensive teacher training program has eluded our school communities for almost seventy years. There are legitimate challenges to organizing and maintaining a program of this sort. We acknowledge that these challenges are real.

Some challenges are as follows:

1. Expenses

- Director's wage
- Technology support
- Materials
- Instructors' wages
- Facility rental
- Instructors' development

2. Extra workload for prospective and new teachers

- Obtaining a teaching degree is a four- or five-year program. The training program would be an additional load to either college work or teaching.
- Are individuals willing to enter the Protestant Reformed teaching profession with this added load?

3. Enforcement

- Should the school boards make this training program mandatory?
- Are school boards willing to demand this added load from their future and current teachers?
- Should the program be voluntary?

4. Procuring the right people

- The right people will have to step up and fill the positions needed. Instructors, directors, technology support personnel, and board members must be retained to see this project succeed.
- It is not sufficient to have willing individuals. They must also be capable and competent and have a motivation and love for this project.

OTHER MODELS

There are two other teacher development programs that provide models for the teacher training program the TED Committee is proposing. The school communities that have developed those models share the same concern that the Christian schools have properly trained teachers in their schools.

1. Canadian Reformed

- Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College in Hamilton, Ontario
- www.covenantteacherscollege.com
- Offers three programs
 1. One-year program for prospective teachers with a Bachelor of Arts or Sciences
 2. Three-year program for prospective teachers with a secondary school diploma
 3. Professional development program for practicing teachers
- \$6,633 yearly tuition

2. ACSI (Association of Christian Schools International) Model

- ACSI Certification
- www.acsi.org
- No brick and mortar location
- Partners with Christian colleges in the United States and designates certain courses from these colleges as “ACSI approved”
- Compilation of college courses, online courses, and video lectures
- Utilizes the student’s local school administrator to facilitate and sign off on the student’s completion of certain online videos and courses
- Student must write a final paper to complete the ACSI certification process

STEPS FOR MOVING THE PROGRAM FORWARD

First, the TED Committee plans to bring the proposed teacher training program to the member schools at the fall 2015 Federation board meeting. At this meeting school board members can ask any questions regarding the program. However, the real purpose of the meeting is that the school board members will bring the proposed plan to their local schools for discussion.

Second, during the 2015–16 school year the TED Committee will mail out a document by which member schools can provide input. The committee also wants to establish an open forum meeting at the spring 2016 delegate board meeting. Correspondence between member schools and the TED Committee can take place throughout the 2015-2016 school year.

Third, the TED committee will gather the feedback from the member schools and communicate with other school organizations (see “Other Models”) that have established such programs and modify the current plan as necessary.

Fourth, The TED Committee will present a final plan to the Federation board at the fall 2016 board meeting.

Fifth, the TED Committee will communicate this project to the broader school constituencies.

Sixth, after receiving authorization from the Federation, groundwork for this program will begin to build. The first phase will be to organize the governing board of the teacher training program so it can start the detailed organization process of the program. Boundaries will have to be created regarding the scope of the board’s authority. The Federation through the TED Committee will give the board the viable vision for the teacher training program. The second phase will be the work conducted by the newly created governing board. Staff will have to be procured and curriculum developed. There will be many other details that will have to get worked through. This board will report its progress to the TED Committee for input and accountability.

The goal for the Teacher Training Program start date: **Fall 2019**