

October 1, 2019

Report of the Teacher Training Committee to the Federation and Newsletter

The Constitution of the Federation of Protestant Reformed School Societies states that the overall purpose of the organization is “to deal with those matters pertaining to Protestant Reformed School Societies in common.” In the fall of 2016, the delegate board of the Federation authorized the formation of the Teacher Training Committee (TTC). This committee, which would work under the Teacher Education and Development Committee (TED) was appointed to develop two very important parts of the Federation’s constitution. The charges given to the TTC were the following:

- II. B. Providing seminars to promote the development, understanding, and presentation of distinctive Christian education.
- II. C. Seeking ways and means for a more thorough training of teachers and prospective teachers in Christian principles.

The TTC is composed of members from several school societies. Joel Langerak (Hope and Covenant) is the president, Kyle Bruinooge (Heritage and Covenant) is the teacher representative. Rick Noorman (Heritage and Covenant) is the Managing Director of the committee. The other committee members are Nathan Vis (PRCS and Heritage Christian High, Dyer), Duane Huisken (Redlands), and Brendan Looyenga (Heritage and Covenant).

One of the committee’s tasks was to clarify the mission of our committee. The following statement was produced to limit our scope of work and give us direction:

TTC Mission Statement: The Protestant Reformed Teacher Training Program, operating on behalf of the Federation of Protestant Reformed School Societies, provides for the professional development of teachers and aspiring teachers who are called to integrate a distinctively Reformed and confessional worldview into all facets of the classroom.

To help set the direction of the committee, we surveyed all of our teachers to seek their input and to prioritize our work. The results from this survey can be viewed on the Federation’s website (www.prcs.org) under the Teacher Training tab. Based largely on the results of this survey, the work of the TTC is moving forward in four areas. The first area is a teacher mentoring program. Second, we are working on the development of the “History and Principles of Reformed Education” course into an online resource that can be accessible to all teachers in Federation schools. We are also planning to expand this course to include some practical applications of the principles to the work in the classroom.

Third, we have begun to formulate a new course that will help teachers apply Reformed doctrines to their subject area and to the methods used in the classroom. Finally, on the PRCS website there are many valuable Federation produced materials on various topics of Reformed education. We believe these resources are underutilized in our Christian school community, and we intend to proceed with making them more accessible.

Our main focus over the last twelve months has been on the development of a teacher mentoring program titled A Mentoring Program for Protestant Reformed Christian Education. A sub-committee consisting of Kyle Bruinooge, Randy Kuiper, and Mike Feenstra have taken on the task of developing this program. The mentoring program contains three tiers that focus on the needs of the prospective teacher in college, the first-year teacher, and the second-year and third-year teacher. We believe that the young people currently entering the teaching field are of a very high quality and well trained in many aspects of the work of teaching. The goal of the mentoring program is to emphasize the development, in our new teachers, of their ability to understand and apply the Reformed principles of education to their work. Through this program we hope that all new teachers will have the opportunity to participate in a consistent program of professional development focused on the principles of Reformed education. This would be done with the guidance of an experienced who has been trained to mentor.

We began the development of the mentoring program with the second tier called, “Walking Alongside the First-Year Teacher.” Since the first year of teaching can be overwhelming, the purpose of the second tier was designed to provide the first-year teacher with a mentor to walk alongside and to assist the teacher navigate the first year in his or her new role. The goal of this program is to promote the growth and development of first-year teachers by helping them, through an experienced teacher and trained mentor, gain an understanding of the principles that guide Protestant Reformed teachers.

Along with the development of the second tier mentoring, we have created a training program for mentors. Our intention is to ensure that we will have mentors who can provide a mentoring experience with a consistent platform of instruction and assistance wherever it takes place.

Our first mentor training took place in June 2019. Nine teachers and six administrators attended the full-day session. This fall we offered another training session and had nine additional mentors trained. We were able to place nine teacher mentors with new teachers in six Protestant Reformed schools. The initial feedback on the mentoring program, coming from the mentor-teachers, has been positive.

We are now actively developing the third tier of the mentoring program, so that we can work with teachers in their second and third years of teaching. This tier is called “Grounding and Refining the Teacher’s Craft.” The main objective of this tier is to guide

these teachers to become more grounded in the application of Reformed principles into their teaching and to articulate a personal educational platform. Last year two teachers in their first year of teaching were mentored by two committee members in a pilot of the second tier program. These teachers are continuing to pilot the program using the third tier material.

Another initiative involves the “History and Principles of Reformed Education” course that has been taught by Prof. R. Dykstra for several years. This work is taking place on two fronts. The first is comprised of producing a high-quality video presentation of the classroom lectures, so that teachers, who are unable to take the course in Grand Rapids, can take the course online in their location and on their own time. We are also working to develop a method for follow up and dialogue with anyone who would take the course in its online format. This work will be ongoing as the course is taught during its next session. Second, we intend to develop a new and separate segment to this course that would consider how the various principles that are set forth should be put into practice in Federation schools.

The third area of development involves producing a new course that would guide our teachers in applying various Reformed doctrinal principles to their work in the school. This course is a response to an area of need that was expressed by teachers in our early survey. One hundred thirteen (80%) of the teachers who responded to the survey expressed their interest in a course that would help them in the application of Reformed principles in their subject area.

Finally, we would like to make you aware that there is an extensive amount of writing about various aspects of Reformed education by our teachers and ministers that is available on the Federation’s website. This site contains writings about the philosophy and foundations of Reformed education as well as material that would be helpful in the teaching of many subject areas. The website can be viewed at www.prcs.org. We recognize the need to add to and organize this collection as well as to enhance its search capability in the near future. We also hope to make this the platform for any online courses that are taken by teachers.

All of this work taking place to help our teachers grow in their understanding of Reformed educational principles and in their ability to apply these principles to the work they do in Protestant Reformed schools does not come without a cost. The Federation has committed to the development of these programs and to the implementation of the mentoring program. The TTC is committed to compensate for the professional services of those who accept this work for the betterment of our teachers and our schools. This involves giving wages to those who develop the programs and to the mentor-teachers who assist the new

teachers in Federation schools. As more new teachers are hired into the schools, more funding will be needed to compensate the mentors for their labors.

Currently, the only source of funding for TTC projects and mentoring work are the dues paid by Federation member schools. Federation dues will continue to increase to meet these needs unless other sources of income can be established.

We encourage those who support any of the Federation member schools and who have a conviction for teacher training to also consider giving directly to this cause. Anyone who is willing to contribute to this cause should contact Rick Mingerink, the executive director of the Federation, or Rick Noorman, the managing director of the TTC.

The TTC members appreciate the support and the direction that is given to us by the Federation and the TED Committee. We are always open to suggestions that come from any of the Federation schools and their members. We believe that this work will be of value to all of our member schools for many years by working toward the growth and development of the most valuable resource that we all have; our teachers. It is our desire that as our efforts are established, the covenantal young people will benefit, and the Protestant Reformed schools throughout North America will thrive for future generations.

In the service of our King,

Rick Noorman, TTC managing director