

# Programs help handicapped student

By DEBBIE PARSONS  
Special to The Battalion  
Frustration. Anger. Hopelessness.

A student with a learning handicap struggles with such feelings as these when he is unable to adapt to a mainstream education.

The Bryan and A&M Consolidated independent school districts offer special services for students from three to 21 years of age who have a learning or physical disability.

"Many kids come in with the attitude that they can't do anything," Elise Millikin, vocational adjustment coordinator at A&M Consolidated High School, said. "They have a low opinion of their capabilities. We give them confidence."

There are 425 students currently enrolled in the special programs at A&M Consolidated and 875 in the Bryan programs.

Students can be recommended by teachers, parents, a physician or a social agency for admission into a special services program.

The programs serve students who are mentally retarded, language or learning disabled, minimally brain-injured, auditorially and orthopedically handicapped, emotionally disturbed or speech handicapped.

"The difference between handicapped students that are in vocational training programs and regular students is that the handicapped function on a lower level, so they are taught at that level," Katherine Patton, counselor for vocational education for the handicapped, said.

When a child enters the special services program, he must have a physical examination to make sure his disability is not a health problem.

The student is then considered by a referral screening committee to determine whether he should be placed in a special services program.

Both school districts have a program for those so severely or profoundly handicapped that regular classroom participation is prevented. Such students are served in a setting designed for them.

There is a language, speech and hearing therapy program to improve communication skills, and a cooperative work-study program to prepare students for employment.

Another program is academic instruction for the learning disabled. The length of time spent in the classroom, known as the resource room, depends on the severity of the student's handicap.

"The old connotation of special education being for 'retarded children' has gone out the window," Phyllis Perkins, supervisor of A&M Consolidated Special Services, said. "We've won that."

An educational diagnostician runs psychological, achievement, auditory and perceptual tests on the child after receiving parental consent.

An admission review and dismissal committee, made up of special education teachers, administrators, parents and people from social agencies who have been involved with the child, meet to review the diagnostic tests and decide

which program the child should enter.

Annual long-range goals are drawn up and shown to the parents and child. The teacher assigned to the students makes quarterly goals which state the materials to be used during instruction and the criteria for evaluation.

There is an annual review to decide if the student should continue in the current program, if he should change to a different program, or be dismissed from the special services program altogether.

Students who can handle a higher-level class than the special classes can go into lower-level regular courses, usually English or math, as well as attend their special classes.

If parents or a student request a regular program, or if the student tests out, he can go into regular classes.

It is very important that parents become involved with and understand what is going on in the program, Patton said.

Most parents are extremely helpful and involved, Rusleen Maurice, VAE program coordinator for Bryan High School, said.

"Some parents won't admit their kids have a problem," Maurice said. "They are embarrassed to admit it to their friends or family. This is the only problem we have, and it is not very common."

In the lower grades, kindergarten through eighth, special education teachers stress the skills necessary for learning, which are incorporated into academic instruction.

The middle and high school students often go into the Vocational Adjustment programs.

At Stephen F. Austin Middle School, for example, three programs are offered to VEH students. They must take two of the three courses during two years they are there. The students are graded mainly on their effort.

Students have a choice of office duplication, horticulture and building maintenance.

In the office duplication class they learn how to run the school newspaper press, which prepares them for work at the printing press on campus. They also learn such things as printing and typing.

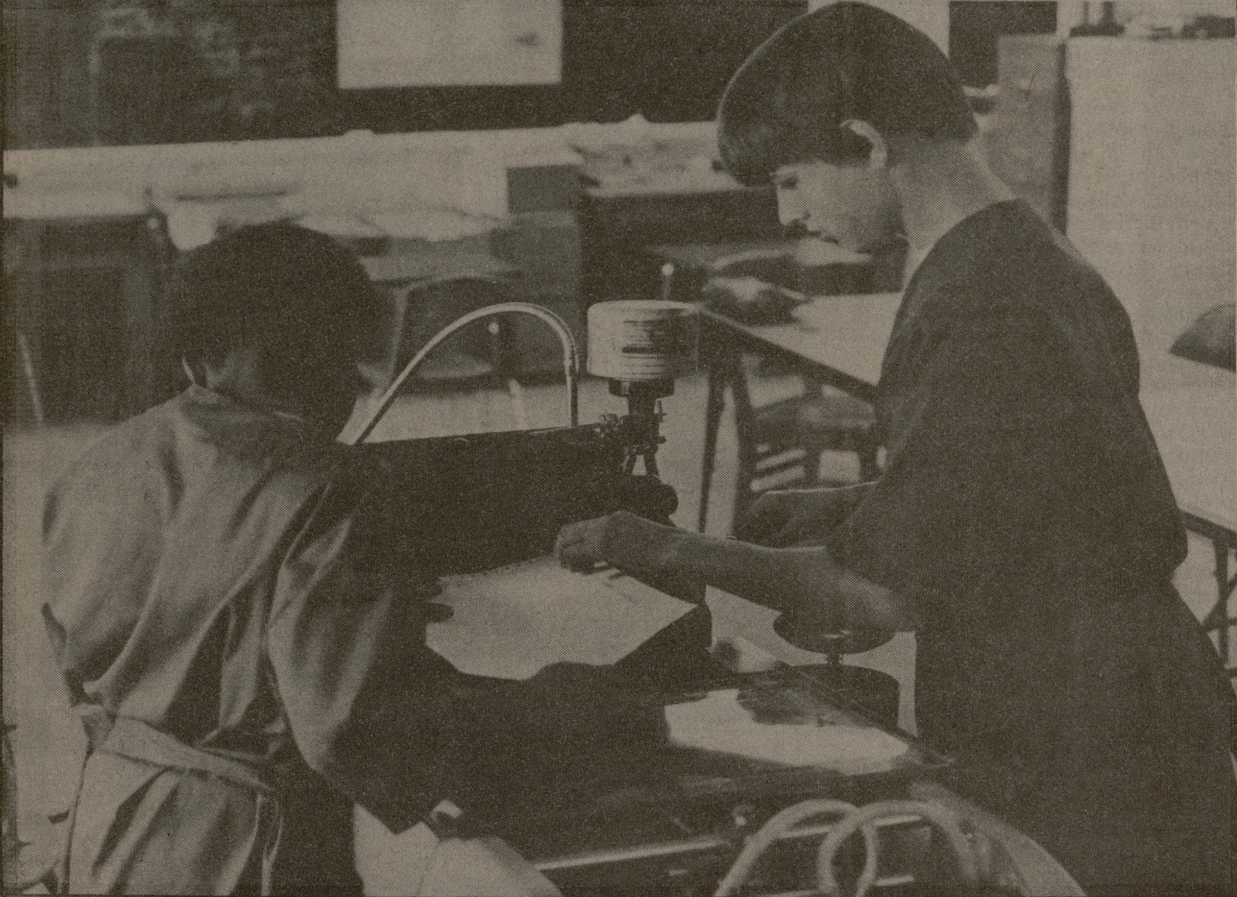
Students work in a school greenhouse in the horticulture class. They work with plants and learn about potting, germination, fumigation, tilling and planting. They take care of the school grounds and grow vegetables in the spring.

In the building maintenance class, students learn about small motors by repairing lawnmowers. They work with wood making bookshelves, tool boxes, facial tissue box holders and key holders. The students do everything from sawing the wood to applying the finishing



Emory Rice strips an old chair in order to refinish it for building maintenance class. The students also learn carpentry and how to repair lawnmowers.

Battalion photo by Debbie Parsons



Warren Jefferson (left) and Jim Rice set up the multith off-set press in the office duplication class. Students learn how to run the press and print the school newspaper on it.

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touches. They also learn how to refinish furniture.

Upon graduating from Stephen F. Austin, the students can stay in the VEH program and go into food services at Bryan High School, or they may choose to go into a regular vocational program if they are capable of it.

When a student enters the vocational program at A&M Consolidated High School, he takes a vocational adjustment class in which he learns job-seeking skills, such as how to be interviewed, how to fill out an application and how to shop wisely. He also learns about possible careers.

During the sophomore year, the students work at a job station on campus. This includes such jobs as working in the office, library or cafeteria.

In their junior year, the students work part-time off campus. During their senior year they work full-time off campus.

Students receive credit toward graduation for their jobs and must successfully complete a year of full-time employment in order to be eligible for graduation.

Millikin said she finds a job opening for the student, and makes the initial call, but the student has to make the second call and fill out the application himself.

"People in the business community are super," Millikin said. "A lot of people say 'I'd love to help these kids' and when they do, the kids love them, too."

There is an 85 percent of 90 percent success rate in placing students in jobs, Millikin said.

This year there is a student station, one at the University of Texas at Austin, one at a nursery and another one at a bakery.

The students enjoy their Millikin said.

"A student with a learning problem in school sticks out like a thumb," she said. "But a student with a learning problem in a mechanic shop doesn't." The diploma the special student receives is no different from the diploma which other graduates receive. Only if someone wants to check the student's records will it be clear that the student was in a VEH program.

The Vocational Adjustment program at Bryan High School is exactly the same, except the student cannot work off-campus until senior year.

Bryan High School also has a commercial food services program specifically for the handicapped which they work in a small kitchen at the school and learn about things from the parts of a menu, preparing and serving the food a week to the faculty.

Most students do very well on their jobs, Maurice said.

"One of the greatest things about the program is the change in students after they are working a job and are away from the environment," Maurice said. "They have a higher regard for themselves and from their family and other students."

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