

Local

Special education challenges students and teachers

Editor's note: This is the second of a three-part series on the special problems of handicapped children.

By MARJORIE MCLAUGHLIN

Battalion Staff
The room is littered with half-finished projects. The walls are lined with crayoned portraits. A cardboard voting booth labeled "Vote for Somebody" dominates one corner.

This is a typical, late-afternoon elementary school scene. But this class is anything but ordinary; it is a special education resource room.

In the resource room, handicapped and learning-disabled children get special individualized

help, in addition to their regular classroom instruction.

"The (handicapped) children have very low self-concepts," said Carol Brackett, educational diagnostician for the College Station Independent School District.

"They're always being told what they can't do. We take them out of situations (normal classrooms) where they are failing ... and put them into resource rooms where they can achieve success," she said.

"The resource concept is success-oriented," said Merritt Cole, a special education math teacher at Oakwood Elementary School in College Station. She teaches children with perceptual, motor, hearing and general learning disabilities.

"They come in here and we provide materials and they work on their own levels," she said.

Cole, who teaches fifth and sixth graders, said that misunderstanding is the major problem faced by special education programs.

"You say that you are a special education teacher and people think that you teach retarded children," Cole said. "But, it is not that. We deal with all types of learning disabilities, from severe to mild or those who just need help to learn self-discipline or better study habits."

"When I was in school, there was no special education program as such," said Virginia Young, a special education language arts teacher at Oakwood. She said that

children with learning disabilities were kept separate from the other children.

"The portable building out in the field is a classic example," she said. "Here, the situation is ideal because the special education classes are in the regular school building."

Brackett said that children accept the special education students because so many of their friends are in the program.

"It is still somewhat of a stigma, being a resource kid," said Cole. "But, we try to avoid that. We tell them that they are here to improve and maybe eventually, go back into regular classes."

Parents also cause problems for their disabled children.

Brackett said that she has to

deal with several types of parents when she diagnoses a learning-disabled child.

"You run into parents who say the kid will outgrow the problem," she said. "You run into parents who say that there is no problem or that the problem is bigger than it really is. Some parents blame the children, others, the school. Then there are some parents who are realistic about their child's limitations."

Brackett said that once a child is diagnosed as learning-disabled, the choice for special education is left up to the parents.

"They're the parents," she said. "If the problem is severe enough, the district can go to the Texas Education Association for a hearing, but if the problem is mild and the parents are adamant, we don't force them."

Karen Cooper, a special education reading teacher at Oakwood, said that many parents don't bother to check on their child's progress.

"We need parent support like any other program," said Cole. She said that parent interest is vital to the success of the special education program.

In addition to misconceptions and lack of concern about the special education programs, teachers must face frustrations that arise from teaching the disabled.

Brackett said that "burn-out" is more common among special education teachers than regular classroom teachers.

"A lot of special education teachers feel like they need to go back into regular classrooms to re-adjust their perspectives. But, quite a few principals don't like them to go back and forth because of the lack of qualified special education teachers," Brackett said.

"You're dealing with kids with problems and it is often frustrat-

ing," Cole said. "You make a lot of gains at first because the child is responding to the individualized programs. But, then you hit plateaus." But she said that her interest in disabled children will keep her in the special classroom.

Cooper agreed, saying, "I get frustrated. When the child fails to progress, you feel like you've failed. At least in regular classrooms, you see constant progress."

"But, I don't think I'll ever want to go back into the regular classroom. I don't know why. It is very rewarding to (finally) see gains made."

Next: The parents and children

Mosher extends visitation hours

The convent dorm has changed its habit.

Mosher Hall residents have decided to align Mosher's visitation hours with those of other campus dormitories by opening the hall to males two hours earlier, 10 a.m.

Known as the convent dorm because of its traditionally strict visitation hours, Mosher is the last dormitory, other than those on the Corps Quad, to adopt the University's maximum visitation policy.

Last year Mosher was the last hall to extend its night visitation hours from 9 p.m. to 10 p.m., Sunday through Thursday.

This semester Mosher residents voted 374-138 to change the morning visitation hours from 12 noon to 10 a.m., Sunday through Thursday. The earlier visitation hours will be easier to enforce because they match the hours of

other halls, Mosher Head Resident Susan Vanecek said.

Mosher's male visitation hours are now 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., Sunday through Thursday, and 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Friday and Saturday.

Spence and Briggs Halls are the only civilian dormitories that have not extended their visitation hours to the University maximum.

Since they are located on the Corps Quad, their visitation policies are influenced by the Corps of Cadets. As a result, weekday visitation is non-existent in Briggs, and limited in Spence.

Spence and Briggs Halls are the only civilian dormitories that have not extended their visitation hours to the University maximum.

MSC "Keep off the grass" signs erected, lack letters

By CARLA SUTTER

Battalion Reporter
Two unlettered signs have been put up at the Memorial Student Center, and within two weeks the "Keep off the grass" message will be finished.

The student senate decided two years ago to buy signs asking passersby not to walk on the grass in honor of Aggies who died in war. The tradition of not walking on the grass followed but was never made official, Dr. Carolyn Adair, director of student activities, said. The signs will make it official, she said.

Many former students and visitors are not aware of the tradition, and the signs are a nice way of telling them, Eric Langford, vice-president of student services, said.

"Hopefully visitors will avoid getting yelled at and getting a bad impression of Texas A&M when the signs are finally finished," Langford said.

The signs cost \$1,265. Funding came from the University Center Complex.

"I don't know if we wanted

something so big and expensive, but we got it," Langford said. "I think the reason we got the signs we did is so they would match the others around the MSC."

The 5-by-2 signs are anodized aluminum and will have bronze

lettering.

"We've been expecting the signs to be up for about a year," Adair said. "Jean Ray with maintenance had to do the ground work, and we had to wait for our turn in line with everyone else."


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