

Special Education Philosophy

Many have asked, "What is unique about special education in our WELS schools." This requires us to look at special education in our midst and address what distinguishes special education from regular education in our WELS schools, and what distinguishes special education in our WELS schools from that in public schools. This document has been prepared to address these issues and to help us celebrate the ministry which is the heart of all education, special or regular, in our WELS. The continuity of mission as we serve all our students is something for which we ought to thank our God.

Philosophy of Christian "Special" Education

Christ, in His life here on earth, showed great concern and love for children. He called the children to come to Him. He even told His disciples to make sure they would come to Him so He could bestow on them His blessing. Through the apostle Paul He also spoke of how vital all of His people are, regardless of the special gifts they may have, even calling those who need special treatment "indispensable" to His kingdom (1 Corinthians 12).

As Christians, we attempt to meet the uniqueness of each member of Christ's flock by providing appropriate services. To that end, the mission of Christian Special Education would be:

to teach students with special learning needs and styles in a Christian environment in which they can grow spiritually, intellectually, socially, physically and emotionally to ultimately reach their fullest potential so they can join the Psalmist and say, "I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Psalm 139:14

Principles

I. God Has Made Every Person in His Own Fashion.

We recognize and accept that each individual has differing gifts and abilities. Each individual brings a unique set of needs to the learning environment every day. Uniqueness is not something which gives rankings of importance, but expresses God's wisdom in making each individual which reveals the glory of the body of Christ.

The children God has given us are redeemed children of God, and should be provided with a Christ-centered education program which meets their individual needs. Not all children learn at

the same rate, nor do they learn in the same way. A knowledgeable awareness and practical sensibility of these facts suggests the implementation of strategies and programs which will enable children with special needs to make the best use of these various gifts. God allows us the privilege of working with indispensable members of His kingdom. The uniqueness of each individual is expressed in the words of Job:

Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese, clothe me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews? You gave me life and showed me kindness and in your providence watched over my spirit (Job 10:10-12).

II. There Needs to be a Plan for Delivery of Services to God's Special People.

The planned educational program should be committed to providing each child with appropriate educational opportunities. Normally this means providing each child with a modified educational program in the regular classroom with a regular teachers. In some cases, however, additional services beyond the regular classroom may be necessary.

III. Special Resources Work Cooperatively with the Classroom Teacher.

The classroom may need additional support personnel to deliver the necessary services to meet the special needs of each individual. Members of the education team develop education programs encouraging children with special needs to learn through the areas they have in common with their peers, while providing extra support in the areas of deficiency or expanded opportunity in areas of giftedness.

The program may provide a setting outside the classroom where individual counseling, testing, tutoring, or enrichment would take place. Educational mainstreaming and an outside setting such as a resource room, are to be partners in the educational process. This partnership connects special education teachers, the child, and regular teachers in a joint effort to provide optimal educational experiences.

The degree to which the child is provided services outside the regular classroom is determined by all of the personnel involved.

IV. Each Child Needs to Develop to His/Her Fullest Potential.

A strong program will help each child recognize and respect his/her own God given talents. An attempt would be made to instill a deeper and more accurate understanding of who they are and assist them in achieving their place in God's Kingdom of Grace and their place in society. For this to happen all of God's children want to appreciate and use their gifts to the fullest. All of God's children also have obstacles to overcome that they might be faithful stewards of God's gifts (cf Matthew 25:14-30) The parable of the talents).

For the challenged student some of the obstacles which must be confronted are: sin, poor study skills, unique learning styles, health problems, poor personal habits such as eating and sleeping patterns, poor self concept, as well as limited academic gifts. For the gifted and talented student some of the obstacles which must be confronted are: sin, feelings of ostracism, feelings of being different, poor self concept, boredom, as well as the pressure to excel. In our ministry to both groups of students we need to assess what the obstacles are for each individual student AND develop a plan to help that child succeed.

With a view toward preparing the student with special needs for successful integration into the Church community and the community at large, an emphasis is put on developing the child in a multidimensional way: spiritually, intellectually, socially, physically and emotionally. In conjunction with educating the unique individual, all of the involved communities need to be educated in the topic of diversity.

V. The Center of Responsibility for the Nurturing of the Child Rests with the Parent.

Parents with a child who has special needs are met with unique challenges; still God has given the primary responsibility for the nurturing of the child to parents. Therefore, parents need to take an active role in the education of their child. Expectations for parents are high as they: worship with the child to provide the child with a Christ-centered and prayer-filled spiritual life; encourage their child when the trials of life are hard; cooperate with the educational systems in place; assume the financial obligations; initiate and cooperate in the multi-disciplinary evaluation and subsequent programs and reevaluations.

Christian educators can be very instrumental in helping parents with these tasks. They are privileged to assist the parent in a cooperative effort bringing up the child in the fear and instruction of the Lord.

Psalm 145:3,4 Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts.

Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.