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Educators strive to assist students with special needs

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

When Susan Kryger was in fourth grade, she had poor marks and a hard time keeping up with her course work, despite her best efforts.

The consequences for Susan — and for her brother, Tom, who later experienced similar problems — were frustration and low self-esteem, noted their mother, Cathleen Kryger.

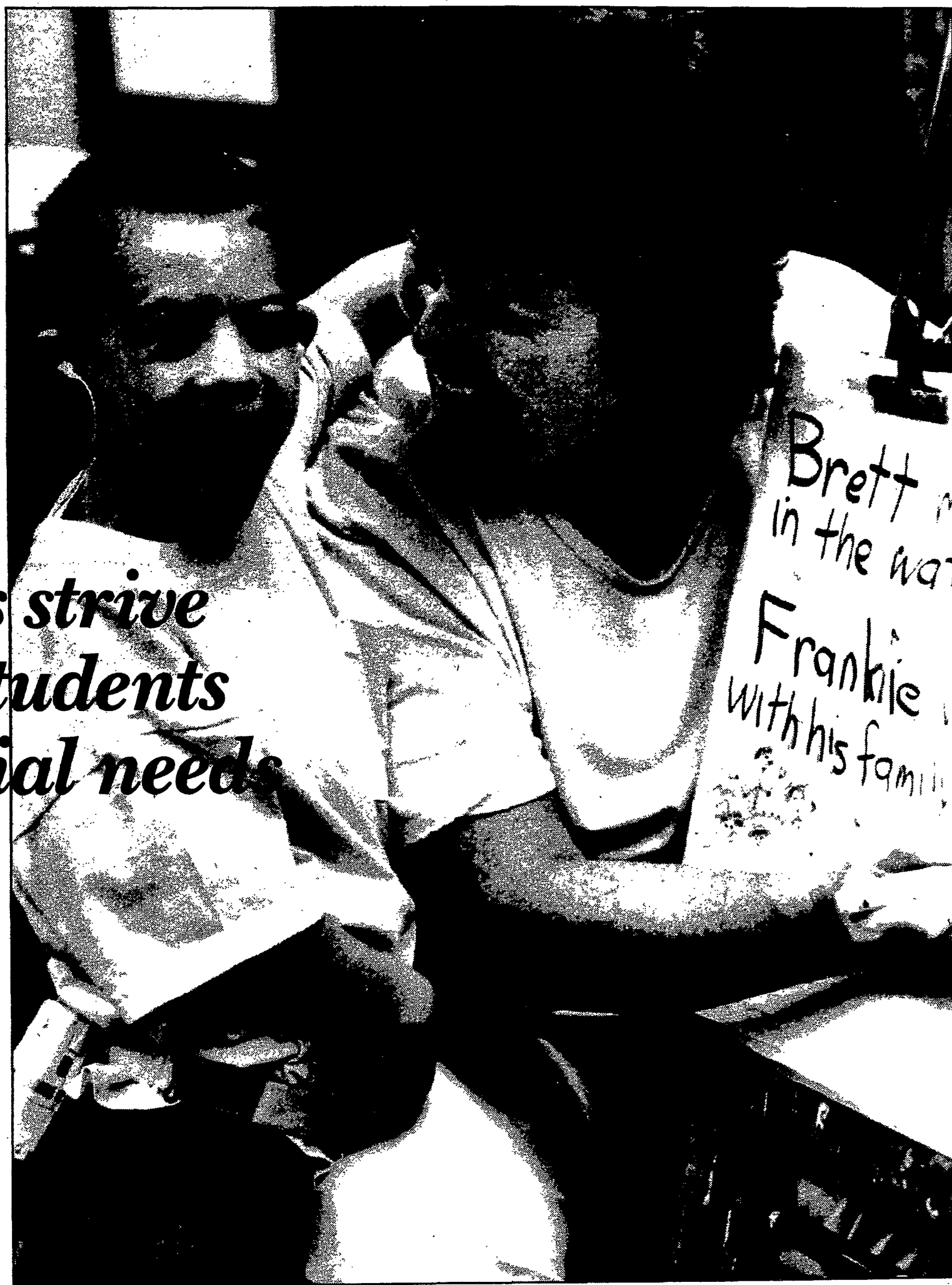
"These kids used to come home in tears," Kryger recalled. "They wouldn't try out for sports. They wouldn't volunteer in class. They wouldn't raise their hands."

But this year Susan will be entering her senior year at Nazareth Academy. At Nazareth, she has consistently been on the honor and high honor rolls. She has been involved with the school's bowling team and the ski club. And she is looking forward to going to college — something she would not have considered just a few years ago, her mother said.

Meanwhile, Tom is entering Bishop Kearney High School this year. He, too, has been earning good grades, and was on the basketball teams at St. Ambrose and St. Charles Borromeo schools.

This transformation in the two Krygers' academic lives came about as a result of the Mastery in Learning program they entered at St. Ambrose School. The program taught them study skills, broke down the curriculum into more easily assimilated units, offered smaller class sizes, and provided them with the support and encouragement they needed to succeed.

"I have no qualms about it," Cathleen Kryger said. "I have nothing but good



Marilyn Barge (right), a teacher at School of the Holy Childhood, part of the Center for Exceptional People, shares a light moment with Frankie during a lesson on forming sentences.

to say about the program."

The Mastery in Learning program at St. Ambrose is one way diocesan schools meet the special needs of students like Susan and Tom. Those needs arise out of such problems as developmental disabilities, physical limitations, dyslexia (impaired reading ability) or attention-deficit syndrome.

The St. Ambrose program involves separate classes at the fourth-, fifth- and sixth-grade levels. In some other schools, students with special needs spend part of their day in regular classes and the rest in special classes.

Among other responses are the MAX (Meeting All eXpectations) program at Northeastern Junior High School. Based on the concept of "mainstreaming," it keeps students with special needs in regular classes with other students, but also

offers them extra study-skills classes, tutoring and study sessions.

Diocesan programs likewise address the needs of children with physical difficulties in a variety of ways. To assist a hearing-impaired student, for example, a teacher may wear a sound-amplification device. Alternately, a sign-language interpreter may accompany the hearing-impaired student to classes, as was done at Siena Catholic School this past school year.

Other schools work with local school districts to provide supplemental classes and support from counselors and therapists, as well as special classes to which the children are sent by bus. Some programs even enable students to participate in special classes or receive assistance by means of computer hookups.

Meanwhile, diocesan boundaries also

encompass independent programs that have no direct links to the diocese but do have historical ties to it.

The School of the Holy Childhood, part of the Center for Exceptional People, provides education for developmentally disabled students. This fall, Sister Diana Dolce, SSJ, will open Hope Hall, a school based on the Mastery in Learning program, which she created at Nazareth Academy and St. Ambrose.

Furthermore, the needs of students with special needs are also being addressed in religious-education programs. St. Ambrose, for example, offers a specific program for developmentally disabled students. Other parishes quietly provide special sections or modify religious education to accommodate these students. In some cases, the programs

Continued on page 12A