

Students

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use parents or siblings to carry out the education, or to assist the teachers.

Moreover, the Diocese of Rochester's newly developed curriculum guide for schools and religious-education programs (related story, page 1 of the main section) includes 30 pages of material devoted solely to addressing the needs of students with special needs. That curriculum is to be unveiled in October.

The new curriculum calls for educators to be "flexible and accommodating in programs for children with special needs, mainstreaming where possible and to the extent possible while allowing for other options."

In meeting the needs of students with special needs, educators in the diocese are responding to the call issued by Bishop Matthew H. Clark, noted Sister Margaret Mancuso, SSJ, assistant superintendent for instruction and staff development in the diocese's Department of Catholic Schools.

"Our main philosophy is what Bishop Clark said a few years ago — to teach as Jesus did," Sister Mancuso said. "We are open to all children. We strive to meet the needs of every child."

In recent years, Catholic schools and catechetical programs have been following public schools' lead in moving away, where possible, from isolating students with special needs. This trend emphasizes including students with special needs in the mainstream — that is, in classrooms with students who do not necessarily have the same special needs.

"Overall, the main focus (in schools) is on inclusion, with supportive services in the building," Sister Mancuso said of diocesan schools. "There is a mix, but with as much inclusion as possible. Probably all schools have children with special needs."

"We're emphasizing mainstreaming where possible, but to be flexible in recognizing that mainstreaming may not be possible in all cases," acknowledged Mary Britton, catechetical consultant with the diocese's Department of Evangelization and Catechesis. "It's not



Marilyn Barge (left) instructs a class on forming sentences during a summer session at the School of the Holy Childhood.

black and white. The particular needs need to be taken into account."

Marybeth Mancini, director of the Department of Evangelization and Catechesis, pointed out that the diocesan response with respect to catechesis is not merely a philosophical position. It also comes in response to the desire of parents. "Parents have become vocal in advocating for the children," Mancini observed. And parents have pushed for mainstreaming — as happened at St. Louis Parish in Pittsford, which ran a separate catechetical program for students with special needs in the early 1980s, but then phased it out when parents asked that their children be included in "regular" classes with the other children.

Much of this advocacy takes place in the parishes, Mancini added. Thus the students' needs are met by catechetical leaders on site, and diocesan officials may not be aware of what has been done.

Beyond the curriculum, teachers are expected to take workshops and to keep up with the latest in educational theories and practices, noted Sister Patricia Carroll, SSJ, the diocese's assistant superintendent

for government services and administration.

"A good teacher today is challenged and expected to be able to teach the average child, and also the child with special needs and the child who learns quickly," Sister Carroll said. "I feel that if we're going to be good teachers and good administrators, we have to be able to alter our programs to meet the needs of the child."

The MAX program at Northeastern Junior High School is one attempt to mainstream students while still addressing their special needs. Teacher Kathy Walker noted, for example, that classes in study skills are conducted during free periods. The program also includes study sessions to help students prepare for tests, and the MAX teachers serve as liaisons between other teachers and students who have to stay at home for long periods due to illness.

Many of the students simply need encouragement and added support.

"A lot of kids I work with, once they find success with working with me, they come back," Walker said.

Some educators, however, Continued on next page



Annie O'Reilly helps Tony count out his age in jumps on a trampoline during an occupational therapy class.

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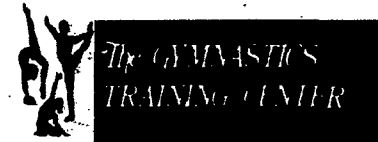
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