

At St. Joseph the Provider, Retarded Students Enrolled in 'Mainstreaming' Program

by Kevin Duffy of the Rutland Herald — 10/9/78

Brandon Training School has taken its initial step toward "mainstreaming" retarded students into the public school system.

For the first time, the school is conducting special education classes at St. Joseph the Provider College for 40 of its wards.

The move is principally the result of a recent federal law called 94-142 which states that handicapped and non-handicapped students should attend school together, if possible.

But it is also part of another trend in the state to de-institutionalize the handicapped, with hopes of having them become involved in the regular course of living.

Joseph Kavanaugh of the training school said last week this is the "first step into the community" for the 40 students. Those students represent all levels of mental retardation, he said.

They attend the college five days a week, five and a half hours a day, according to Dr. Will H. Burrow, who has been superintendent of Brandon Training School for about a week.

Travelling to the college, the students are becoming accustomed to community life simply by riding a bus each day and being away from the training school, according to Kavanaugh.

Eventually, those students will be absorbed into the public school system, but the training school has established no timetable as to when that might occur, the officials said.

Mingling retarded students with their non-retarded peers benefits both groups, explained Burrow.

For the retarded individual, "The opportunity to learn appropriate social behavior...would be far greater," he said. "Peer modeling is an extremely effective teacher."

As for the so-called normal student, it is very likely his or her personal growth will be accelerated by coming in daily contact with the handicapped, remarked Burrow.

Mainstreaming, as 94-142 is commonly called, does not necessarily mean the handicapped and their normal peers attend the same classes in school, Burrow said. It means their schooling should be as common as is appropriate.

Ideally, instead of occupying part of St. Joseph the Provider College, the training school wanted to acquire space in a public school building in Rutland so the retarded could be close to their non-retarded peers.

But no such space was available, said Kavanaugh.

Burrow said that in addition to being humane, mainstreaming makes good economic sense. It costs at least \$10,000 a year to house and feed an individual in an institution, be it the training school or a prison.

If the institutionalized individual lives in a home and becomes an integral part of the community, though, the cost of that person to his guardian or the taxpayer is less, Burrow said.

Having the institutionalized become active in the community is the common goal of the 94-142 and the deinstitutionalization trend.