

## Protestant Reformed Annual Society Meeting Secretary's Report

April 27, 2023

Good evening and welcome to the annual meeting of the Society for Protestant Reformed Special Education. As a board, we can report to you that the state of the Special Education Program remains strong. Strong, not because of the efforts of the board or of our teachers, but it remains strong because the Lord has and continues to graciously provide for our needs. So, as we open this report, we praise God first and foremost for His care for this program, for the students He has given us, and the capable teachers and para-pros He has provided to labor on our behalf with the aim to accomplish the purpose of this Society, which is to provide God-centered education for those who cannot at the present time receive instruction in our present schools because of mental and/or physical handicaps.

Accomplishing this purpose is not possible with only a few. Rather, it requires a broad base of support, incredibly dedicated teachers, and para-pros to complete the rewarding, yet arduous, work and a board to guide the program with wisdom.

The Special Education Society administers the Special Education programs at Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI and Covenant Christian High School in Walker, MI. This year we have 12 students at Heritage and 11 students at Covenant. Running these programs is the primary work of the Society and the costs to do this make up 64% of our annual budget.

In addition to these two programs, this Society provides meaningful funding and support to Special Education programs at 4 other Protestant Reformed Christian schools – Trinity Christian High, Loveland, Northwest Iowa and Dyer Indiana. For these Special Education programs, we provide funding that covers 50% of the programs cost, comprising 14% of our annual budget.

The Society also supports the Academic Support programs at 13 of our schools across the US and Canada, funding 15% of each program's cost. This makes up 22% of our annual budget.

The program at CCHS continues to prosper under the guidance of Amanda Haney, now in her 11<sup>th</sup> year faithfully serving as teacher leading the SPED program at CCHS. Amanda is supported in the day-to-day activities of the program by 3 fantastic para-pros who have formed a great team – Stephanie Adams in her 6<sup>th</sup> year, Kara Dykstra in her 4<sup>th</sup> year and Nikki Holstege in her 2<sup>nd</sup> year. The high school years in Special Education are different from the grade school years. There is a more deliberate focus on acquiring necessary life skills and learning independence to maximize the students' abilities and future independence. There is also much for the student and the parents to think about and prepare for; topics ranging from college attendance to independent living and managing of finances to occupation and what is needed to be successful at a job begin to appear on the horizon. We are thankful to Amanda and the staff of the Special Education program at CCHS for their diligent labors again this year!

The program at Heritage is under the guidance of Carli Engelsma, in her first year as our teacher. Carli faced a daunting challenge at the beginning of the year filling the shoes of Grace Kaptein and Jordan Pettit who both stepped away from the program last year as the Lord blessed them with newborn children. We are thankful for Carli's willingness to take on this added responsibility and are thrilled to report that she has been doing an excellent job! We also have an excellent staff of full time and part time parapros who work with Carli to ensure that the students are growing as much as possible in both their general education class periods as well as during their time in the Special Education classroom. Also playing a role in the success of the program this year was the new role of Teacher Consultant in which Courtney Jessup has been able to utilize her specialized knowledge and expertise to assist the teachers and improve the administrative processes behind the scenes. This year also had

some staffing changes with the hiring of Alex Brower and Katie Dykstra at the beginning of the year; then in December Amber Griess was married and moved out of state, ending her time with the program. Kara Gritters took over Amber's workload and Alex Brower took on the role of para-pro plus, assisting Carli in lesson planning and other activities to aid in the day-to-day business of the HCS SPED room. This year will also mark a transition away from the program for 3 paraprofessionals: Carol Boeve, who has been serving our program for the past 6 years, as well as Arianne VanOverloop and Katie Dykstra. I would like to express our gratitude and appreciation to these ladies for their years of loving service. If I can speak personally for a moment, Arianne has worked closely with my son Levi over the past 3 years. There is a bond that forms between a special education student and those who love them and dedicate their time and energy to them. For my family and more specifically for Levi, Arianne has been a wonderful blessing from God. And I know that this is the case with each of our teachers and paraprofessionals with the families and students whose lives they touch directly. So as a father and as a board member, I express hearty thanks and appreciation to the entire staff in our SPED program.

Over the past year the board has remained busy attending to the regular work of running the program as well as some fun activities. We kicked off the school year with a lovely dinner with the full staff and board on Sept 29<sup>th</sup>. We had an enjoyable evening eating, laughing, and fellowshiping together. The board also visits each classroom 4 times each year. The classroom visits this year have again proven to be a joy for the board members. We are able to observe the program in action and get a first-hand appreciation for the work that occurs in our classrooms each day. We observe that sometimes this work is pure joy and other times it is incredibly trying and frustrating. We walk away from these visits with a renewed appreciation for our staff and their selfless dedication and service to the program.

For the board, this year marks the end of 3 years of faithful service for Joe VanOverloop and Jon Mingerink. Joe has served as board President for 2 years and also has served on building and education committees; Jon has served on the education committee for 3 years and also on the building committee. It has been a pleasure to work with these men over the past 3 years and to see their love for the program shown thru their selfless labors.

Last year, Glenn Kooima gave a fundraising presentation which was a great success and Glenn continued this support of the program this year by holding another presentation at Dordt College with paid admission and proceeds going to the SPED program. We would like to thank Glenn for his continued efforts and support of the program!

But our thanks for financial support does not end with Glenn, but that is a good starting point. The success of this program each and every year comes from a very broad base of incredibly generous supporters, many of whom are sitting in the room tonight. With a budget in which 80% of the revenue comes from church collections and drives, we are reliant upon these generous donations and we praise God for His care over the program again this year. We can report that we have collected \$300,000 of the \$370,000 drive goal for this year.

Giving from our supporters has not only been limited to donations made during their lifetimes, but in the past two years, we have received sizeable donations from the estates of supporters who have gone on to glory. This is a wonderful way to consider supporting the program in addition to the collections and drives. The board also manages an endowment fund which has had a steadily increasing balance and aids to support the annual budget.

One of the more unique things about our Special Education program is the purposeful approach to integrating the students in the Special Education program into the general education classroom. In our board visits to the Special Education classroom, we also make it a point to visit a general education class where our Special Education students are being taught. From this, we observe a mutually beneficial relationship. The special education students, often assisted by one of our para-pros, are not only learning from the teacher's presentation

of the material, but they are learning from their peers – how they are to behave, interact and engage. The general education students are also learning. They are learning that the students with special needs, are in many ways, just regular kids. They are learning to see the ‘able’ and not just their label – the ability rather than the disability. Learning this at a young age, going through 13 years of education being around students with varying degrees of disabilities, gives them perspective and understanding that God has fearfully and wonderfully made each one of them, each with certain abilities, certain challenges, certain limitations.

As a parent of children in the special education program, it is easy to, in a sense, take the excellence of this program for granted. 3 John 1:4 says “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” And Proverbs 22:6 instructs us to “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” This is a godly parent’s goal with all their children, and the good, Christian schools play a large role in this mandate. For a child with special needs, this program enables them to attend a school where they learn the Bible, memorize Psalter numbers, and establish Godly friendships. I am filled with gratitude when I hear my son singing Psalter numbers that he learned at school as he plays around the house. This is something that does not come with an education in the public schools, no matter how excellent the academic aspect of the education itself is. Truly God has blest us with this program. Isaiah 25:1 says “O Lord, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things.” It is the testimony of the board that again in this school year, God has done wonderful things for us.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nate Pastoor

Secretary, PR Special Education Board