

## How Fare the Handicapped and the Gifted in Today's Crowded Schools?

As school overcrowding increases and places greater strain upon facilities and personnel, some areas of serious need are very likely to be neglected. Often the gifted or the handicapped child or youth is made to suffer serious deprivation of opportunities as a result of demands in other more obvious areas of need.

IT HAS taken a long time to sensitize the public to the need for special education of the handicapped and the gifted. At present, however, the public has become aware of the needs of these deviating children. In most states legislation has been passed which authorizes school districts to organize special classes and special services for handicapped and gifted children. In many states legislators have appropriated large sums of money to pay the excess cost of these extra and special services.

But now, just when parents, legislators and the general public have become aware of the importance of this service, the organization of programs for the handicapped and gifted is being postponed. Many school districts have been unable to take advantage of increased public interest and increased funds to organize special classes for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, the mentally handicapped, the visually handicapped, the orthopedically handicapped, the speech defective, and the gifted. This delay is largely caused by two major factors: shortage of teachers and shortage of classroom space.

The United States Office of Education reports that there were only 25,000 special teachers in the United States in 1952. It is estimated by that office that 100,000 such specialists are needed in the schools. This estimate indicates that less than one-quarter of the handicapped and gifted are being taken care of through special classes or special services in public schools. In spite of funds which are available for the employment of teachers, it has been impossible for many school systems to organize such classes or to give extra services to these children because space in public schools is not available.

It has been estimated that there are between 12 and 13 percent of school children who are handicapped or gifted to such a degree that they require special classes or special services within the regular grades. Based on the estimate of 35,000,000 school children in the United States between the ages of five and seventeen, it is obvious that there are approximately 4,000,000 exceptional children in the United

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States. Provision for the education of these children requires extra classroom space not now provided in the public schools.

With the lack of classroom space, and with overcrowding for non-handicapped and gifted children, it has been very difficult for school systems to organize special classes fast enough to meet the demand.

By way of a concrete example, the experience of one city school system of 23,000 can be given. In this city, state funds were available for the operation of classes for crippled children, classes for the mentally retarded, and other special classes. Parent-teachers' organizations, the school board, and others requested that such classes be organized. Teachers could be found in that particular school system since a teacher-training program was operating in that community. In spite of the interest of the public, no classroom space could be found. Some of the classes in that school system had enrollments of 45 children per teacher. After several years a referendum was held. The citizens voted an additional school building. No sooner had this building been completed than they discovered that it was too small to handle the additional enrollment of average children. A second school building was built; and they found that there was *still* overcrowding of the regular grades and so there still could be no special classes. The increase in population and an influx of children into the school resulted in a seemingly never-ending overcrowding of the schools, thus leaving little room for special classes for the handicapped and gifted.

### Special Teachers, Special Rooms Are Needed

In one state the legislature asked that classes for trainable mentally retarded children be organized within public school systems on a trial basis. A questionnaire to city school systems of 10,000 or above requesting the superintendents to indicate their desires concerning such a class, resulted in the following response: Besides the philosophical reasons for not wanting such a class, 21% of the superintendents in this questionnaire study stated that the schools were already overcrowded and that it was impossible to add additional programs because of lack of classroom space. This study is only an example of the reasons why one-quarter of the superintendents could not organize such classes. Others who did not have room for such classes, however, gave other reasons for not desiring such a class. Those who did organize such classes resorted to the renting of a room in a church, a house, or remodeling some undesirable room for the pilot study class. In only a few centers was classroom space available in the public schools for such additional services to children.

Taking one child out of a class of 35 for a special class in a school that has 15 classes means an addition of one classroom in that school. Where services are given to children within the regular class such as is done in the case of speech correction, a small individual classroom or office space is necessary for that work. Regardless of whether the provision is for a special class or additional service, extra classroom space is needed.

Provision for handicapped and gift-

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ed children requires additional classroom space. It is no longer considered satisfactory when classes for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, or the mentally retarded, or any other special class for exceptional children are placed in a basement room, or a room which is considered undesirable for normal children. Many states require that classes for handicapped and gifted children must be just as adequate as classes for all other children.

After much promotion, after the public has become conscious of its responsibility to handicapped and gifted children, after many meetings and hearings, and after the program has been organized financially and administratively at the state level, it is now discovered that classroom space is not available for these children. Until the public can provide this additional classroom space, handicapped and gifted children will suffer along with—and perhaps more than—normal children.



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