

Special Education Teachers Are In Demand All Over

More teachers are needed for children with special needs.

Special education teachers are needed virtually everywhere. Over the past 25 years, there has been a steady and substantial increase in students identified in need of special services, according to Joseph Price, Ph.D., GVSU professor of special education programs.

"There's a high probability these students will be employed immediately, because the demand is



Joseph Price

so great," Price says.

In some areas, up to 25 percent of a district's students are in need of some type of special education. Because of the growing number of children diagnosed with special needs, an emphasis has been placed on providing adequate services for these students.

GVSU is in the forefront with its special education programs and classes aimed at preparing students to work with and foster a supportive learning environment to those with physical and learning disabilities.

The School of Education offers prospective teachers extensive instruction in areas of emotional impairments, hearing impairments and mental

impairments at the undergraduate level and primary impaired, mentally impaired, emotionally impaired and learning disabled programs at the graduate level. Each curriculum provides strategies, support networks and guidelines to prepare future teachers for this ever-expanding field of special-needs professionals.

"As a group, students come to this program with some exposure to special education or have been touched by the needs of kids," Price said. "It's a personal commitment to service those with special needs. There's a lot of pride and satisfaction in developing the skills and helping the needs of these children, but it's a long-term investment."

What Goes Around, Comes Around ...

Kelly J. Owen vaguely remembered his first grade teacher at Woodside Elementary School, then discovered himself in her classroom once again — more than three decades later.

The 38-year-old Owen, who graduates from GVSU's School of Education this spring, did his student teaching in the primary classroom of one Phyllis Reyburn at Ferrysburg Elementary. As it turns out, it is the same Phyllis Reyburn who signed Owen's first-grade report card.

"As the saying goes, it was like *deja vu* all over again," Owen said. "I told her that I hoped to get better marks this time around."

Thirty years is a long time. It took a little longer before the former student and teacher made the connection.

"At the end of the semester, we were sitting around talking about our backgrounds and she said that she first taught at Woodside Elementary School," Owen recalls. "Then the bells went off."

Reyburn, 53, is a 31-year teaching veteran who completed her post-graduate work at GVSU. She began teaching in January of 1966 after another teacher at Woodside Elementary School took a maternity leave.

Owen attended Woodside and was in first grade at the time.

"The more we talked, the more we realized that I could have been his teacher," Reyburn recalled.

A little investigative work — aided by an old report card his mom had saved — revealed that Reyburn did indeed teach Owen's first-grade class.

"He brought his report card and picture to school and I was floored," Reyburn said. "It was quite a coincidence."

"I've had a lot of student assistants in the past, but this was the first student teacher and he happened to be a former student. It was a lot of fun."

"I told him he had to recycle through my class twice to raise his satisfactory marks to outstanding."

Owen is a former construction worker who was paralyzed from the waist down after a fall from a broken scaffold at a building site. He became inspired for teaching during his physical therapy and rehabilitation sessions at Mary Free Bed Hospital in Grand Rapids.

"I found out that I really relate well with kids and enjoy working with them," Owen said.



Kelly J. Owen, left, finds himself in the classroom of his first-grade teacher, Phyllis Reyburn, for a second time.

He enrolled in the School of Education in 1992 with a special education emphasis focusing on emotionally impaired and mentally impaired children.

"It's wonderful to see a former student that returns to the teaching profession," Reyburn said. "It is very satisfying."

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