

They're handicapped for a day

By Tom Baer
staff writer

Let's pretend . . . the youngsters at Farmington's Eagle Elementary School played a special variation of that game last Monday.

Eagle's students — normal, healthy children, most of them — played at being handicapped in an attempt to understand what it's like to be not so normal or not so healthy.

For one period of one day, the children maneuvered wheelchairs through an obstacle course, communicated their needs on equipment used by those

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Claire Albertson
Eagle School

who can neither speak or write, tried to hit typewriter keys with a stick pro-

truding from their heads and were asked to tie their shoes using only one hand.

Pretending your handicapped. That's the idea behind the third annual Change Places Day at Eagle, a school which has 35 physically handicapped students in its 300-pupil population.

"We want the normal students to get a feel for what a handicapped child has to go through to do things that they can do so easily," said Claire Albertson, acting principal of the Physically-Or-Otherwise-Handicapped (POH) unit at Eagle.

"It's so the regular students will have some empathy for the physically handicapped. We're not looking for sympathy. But by trying to manipulate a wheelchair or use one of the communicators, they'll get to see that a handicapped child does have a few extra problems."

THERAPISTS, who normally work with Eagle's handicapped, guide the normal children through six stations in

the gymnasium, each designed to give them a feeling of being handicapped.

At one station, Laura Barker, an occupational therapist for the Farmington Public Schools, ties down a child's arm and weights his leg and then has him try to keep his balance while sitting on a one-leg stool.

"We're trying to show the children what it's like to have one side of the body weaker than the other as in some forms of cerebral palsy," Barker said.

"We also play ADL (Activities of Daily Living) games. That's everything we do to be independent. I have them try to tie their shoes with just one hand. None of them can do it."

At another station, a therapist demonstrates a tilt table, a stretcher-like affair which allows a strapped-in child to be tilted into a vertical position.

"It's important for the kids to see this equipment," the therapist said.

"It's important for them to know that we're not torturing the handicapped when we use it."

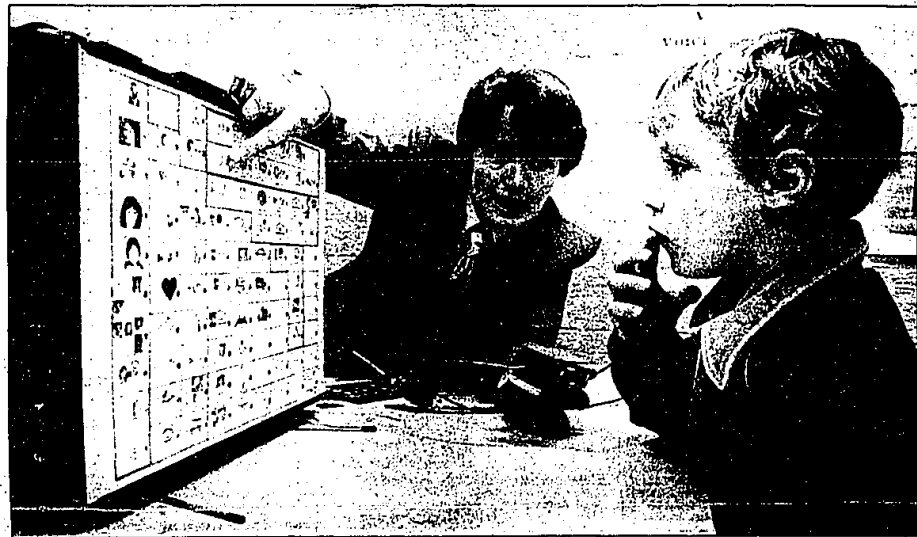


Mamdoh Naas learns a new way of typing from Norma McLellan.



photos by RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Joan Hinkle straps Erik Dillard onto a tilt table during Change Places Day activities at Eagle Elementary School.



Kindergarten Mike Ramsey looks puzzled as he learns how some handicapped children communicate. Carol Carlson provides the instruction.

In Farmington district Optometrist has vision of himself on the board

By Tom Baer
staff writer

Dr. Leonard M. Stein, an optometrist with a practice in Novi, is setting his sights on an opening on the Farmington Board of Education.

Stein, 34, hopes the district's voters will see their way clear to pick him from a field of six candidates in the June 13 election. The top vote getter will serve a four-year term.

What made Stein want to get involved in school politics?

"We moved here because we knew the school system provides a quality education," said Stein, who lives on Mayfair with wife Rita, a former teacher, and son Andy, who will start kindergarten next term.

"I think it's important to maintain what you have," the candidate said.

Stein, who's been knocking on doors and distributing fliers in his neighborhood, echoed the sentiments of most of the other candidates when he said that declining enrollment is the biggest problem the board faces.

"The decreasing enrollment is going to reduce the funding," he said. "On the other side of the scale

are increased operating costs.

"You have a problem of rising costs and inflation versus decreasing enrollment. It's not a great situation."

STEIN, WHO'S been active in the Camelot Courts and Kingspoint homeowners' groups since moving to Farmington Hills, said he would like to see the high school programs for vocational students strengthened.

"We need programs with computers, high technology, robotics . . . things that'll help the college-bound students," he said. "But we also have to do something for the vocational students."

"When I was in school, if somebody didn't want to go to college and they didn't have a family business to go into, they used to say, 'Well, I can always get a job on the assembly line making cars.'"

"But they can't do that anymore and they can't go to the corner gas station, either. Even the grocery stores are becoming computerized with the new checkouts. I think we're going to have to look at some programs for the non-college-bound students."

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the little black dress

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