

IMPLEMENTATION OF A SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM AT
AGAPE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL, WHICH IS LOCATED IN
MARSH HARBOUR, ABACO, BAHAMAS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF TRINITY BAPTIST COLLEGE

BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

APRIL 2011

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Riley for working so closely and diligently with me these last three and a half years. She has imparted a vast amount of knowledge and opened the doors of great opportunity for myself and others.

Dr. Lindstam, thank you for your role at the college as well as for giving me a greater appreciation for Christian schools. More than ever before, I want to be sure to instill God's truth in the children He has placed under my care.

Thank you to my family who has so willingly helped me and listened to me over the years as I explained my many projects.

I am also so grateful to the students that I have worked with over the last three and a half years. They have willingly and even excitedly been a part of my many assignments and I have learned much from them.

To my principal, school board members, and co-workers I thank you for showing such an interest in my studies. The fact that this project may one day become a reality would be because of your support and interest.

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ABSTRACT

God has created every person to be a unique individual with multiple skills, talents, and abilities. These differences should be noted and worked with in order to provide the best education possible for each individual. Agape Christian School, in the Bahamas, has recognized such differences and is willing to work on a more individualized program. The possibility of beginning a special education tutorial program from grades 1 through 6 has been discussed with the school board, principal, and teachers. Everyone is open to the idea and sees the need for it (based on their students). Initially it will cost the school to begin this program; however, the success of the students is well worth the cost.

INTRODUCTION

God created each person to be a unique individual, designed to serve Him. Each one of His creatures is designed differently, with unique gifts, talents, and interests. One of the reasons people are special is because He made them different. Christian educators are responsible to love each individual and reach out and impact others with their unique gifts. They are to teach others how to use their gifts, so that they may please God with their service.

In order for this goal to be met, each student should be reached and taught how to use his unique gifts. It is the desire of the school board, administrator, and staff at Agape Christian School to meet the individual needs of the students and demonstrate to them how to live godly lives for Christ using their unique gifts.

These needs are not always met for each student within the regular classroom. Therefore, a plan has been established to implement a special education tutorial program at Agape Christian School to help meet the needs of those students who struggle academically so that they will know they are an important part of God's plan and that He has designed them as His unique and special creation.

PHILOSOPHY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

Philosophy

Man was uniquely designed by God. God formed him in His image to take after Him, to follow Him, to love Him, and to have a relationship with Him. He was given multiple abilities and was created to thrive in his environment. Adam was given a perfect home to live in, the Garden of Eden; however, he learned that he could not keep his home if he did not obey the rule God set before him. Because of his disobedience he had to leave and work the ground amidst all the thorns. It was back breaking work. He adapted to his new environment and learned from it. Since then man has learned much about God's earth and the universe beyond. He has learned how to survive in it; whether it required sun block, animal hide coats, or oxygen tanks; man has adapted to the multiple climates and terrain God has created on the earth. In each part of His creation man has the privilege of learning more about Him.

Man has also been able to expand on his learning in a wide variety of categories. Survival has not been the only reason for man to learn so much about God's creation, but man's natural curiosity has compelled him to step outside of his everyday norm and see how God is marvelous. Man has taken his own personal interest and has uncovered much about all parts of the world. Music, for example, has greatly expanded over time. Men have created new instruments to play and have written millions of songs to express their feelings (emotions) or teach lessons (passing on history and sharing learning experiences); and within this talent a variety of styles have been developed (classical, hymns, jazz, contemporary). Others have shown interest in building things. Some things of great detail that have been built are Noah's ark, the great Pyramids, Kings' tombs, the

Eifel Tower, the Statue of Liberty and so much more. Many buildings today are created to show off amazing aspects of building technology (architectural feats). These buildings were created by people who showed a unique talent for constructing great things. God has enabled them to apply their knowledge and create such wondrous works. God has given people special talents and gifts in many areas, agriculture, interpersonal, intrapersonal, verbal, visual, kinesthetic, spatial, musical skills and so much more. Each person is programmed to use the intelligence in his life and bring about a greater good for mankind (as well as to glorify God with it).

Thankfully God has not created any man the same; each person is unique and different, just like His snowflakes. Everyone is given a special purpose that only he can fulfill on this earth and He has given men the talents and gifts which enable him to complete such tasks. Christians are one body in Christ, but its members are uniquely individual to enable them to function better as a whole body or group. As Paul wrote in I Corinthians,

For the body is not one member, but many . . . But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where *were* the body? But now *are they* many members, yet but one body (12:14, 18-19).

We are to be one body with many multitalented parts, functioning together to please God, but using our different gifts and talents so that we work together to accomplish greater things, that is the way God intended us to function, as Christians and as a people in general. People are to appreciate the aspects and uniqueness of each individual. God has created each person to affect other people's lives, in a unique way that only he can.

Man must follow God's example, allowing each person to work on the gift or talent God has given him. God treats each of His creatures differently, based on His purpose for them. Able was excellent with lambs and in the fields; Cain preferred growing vegetation and working the land (Gen. 4:2). Noah was great with his hands and built an ark (Genesis 7). Joseph was a thinker and dreamer, which enabled him to save his entire family as well as his nation (Gen. 37-45). Joshua was a fighter with great vision; God used him to obtain the Promise Land (Josh.), Paul was a narrow-minded orator who never stopped spreading the good news of the Gospel (Acts) and the list goes on. George Mueller, Billy Sunday, Billy Graham, Mother Theresa, each have been used by God according to His purpose.

The point is God used all these ordinary people, who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, [and] turned to fight the armies of the aliens (Marks, 2007, p.1).

He continues to make and use a variety of people today, because God is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8). Therefore, people should be allowed to function as unique members of the body and learn and use their intelligence as God intended.

God has created everyone special and loves everyone. He has made each person unique, a different member of the body, but all part of one body, His people. It is the United States, a country that was founded on God and His principles, who first put this into practice, realizing that all men are created equal and deserving of an education. God

never stated in His word that there were some people that He could not use. It was not as if He had a few extra parts and so threw someone together and said, “There you go, that should cause some interesting things to happen on earth.” No, absolutely not! He intentionally created each person, to be who he is; He created all things and saw that it was good. (Gen. 1) So man, He has uniquely and individually created, and it was and is good.

History of Education

God began educating man from the very beginning. For Adam, He laid down the ground rules and told him he had dominion over the entire earth. God wanted man to explore His creation and to marvel at his amazing Creator. Originally, Adam and others passed down lessons verbally, by word of mouth, either in story form or in song. Moses and David both used this method to share what they had learned in their lifetimes and wrote it down to share with subsequent generations. As people began to write and interpret different written works, man studied them, expanding his knowledge and passing on wisdom from one generation to the next. This was not mandatory for everyone; mainly kings, rabbis, scribes, and leaders would study the written works and pass on the information (II Kings 23:1-2, Neh. 8:1-9). Jewish people and later Christians would educate their children to keep them free from the pagan teachings of others. As Christianity grew, others wanted the same for their children and with the conversion of Constantine, Christian schools grew. Later, when the Roman Catholics ruled the Roman Empire, education was no longer considered necessary or important. Only those who would have positions in the church or gain social offices needed to be educated. Some

people would send their children to Catholic schools and some would hire private tutors or teach their children at home.

It was not until the Reformation, when men like Luther and Melanchthon shared their beliefs that all people should be educated to learn what the Scriptures said for themselves, that education for everyone gained its foundation. Schools were eventually opened and certain subjects, based on the Bible, were taught. These schools, however, still struggled to stand apart from pagan influences and the Catholic Church. Once the printing press was invented, literature became more accessible to the public and reading and education became more important.

When Puritans and Pilgrims moved to North America, they came for religious freedom. They helped to set up a free education system where they could study the Bible and many other subjects as well.

The United States took many baby steps in the process to get to where it is now. Education became available for all as regulations were established to have schools within each community. The founding fathers wrote in the Declaration of Independence, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” (1776, p. 1) Since then it has become law that all children must attend school, even those with disabilities, because it is their right to be educated. There are some children that people consider not to be within the normal range of abilities and did not deserve an education. However, in 1975, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act, was signed, this meant that all children, not dependant on their ability, were to have access to education. God has gifted and given to everyone talents and everyone deserves to learn to use them and to learn about God’s world.

Purpose of Education

Originally, God intended for people to learn about the earth so that they may glorify Him. In early American schools, the focus was to advance children's literacy, mainly enabling them to study the Bible. That was their goal. School was

focused upon developing a Christian worldview through the careful and articulate integration of God's Word into the broader academic curriculum...[They believed that] regardless of the subject being taught, when [it was] permeated with scriptural principles, a worldview [was] being intricately etched in the students' hearts and minds, impacting their thinking and decision making for a lifetime (Haycock, 1993, p.iii).

As more denominations came to America, more doctrinal differences were noted. This caused a problem in the schools as churches did not want their children indoctrinated incorrectly. At first it was agreed upon to teach only common doctrine (that which all churches held to), but as denominations and viewpoints differed it soon became a problem and only the reading of the Bible was permitted, without discussion. This too was done away with because the Catholics disapproved of the version of the Bible being read. So as time passed, less Bible was taught and more emphasis was placed on other subjects, such as natural sciences and the arts (Kienel, 2005). Then, "following the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik in the 1950s [a huge school improvement effort began] focus[ing] on achieving technological superiority" (Fuller, 2010, p. 2). This became more important than developing character or learning about God and His Word.

Even though most schools now are far away from the original purpose of education, their goal, now more than ever before, focuses on meeting each person's

individual needs and interests. More recently schools, including colleges, have become more vocational, turning what used to be apprenticeship or on the job training, into hands-on high school or college level classes. This has benefited some people as it keeps students in school, teaching them a “trade” or showing them how to use their God-given gift, even though they may not give recognition to their Creator.

Education still has purpose. History shows a great difference between educated and uneducated nations and their capabilities. The goal in Christian education is “directing the process of human development toward God’s objective for man: godliness of character and action” (Horton, 1992, p.4). Schools for all ages continue to grow and expand in their teachings to reach each student with as much factual information as possible. The once singular focus of learning about God has become a multi-purposed focus to learn as much as you can, particularly in a person’s area of interest. The schools’ goals and purpose “change with age, environment, and the peculiarities of individual students...[and] the parents’ purposes for sending the child to school may differ significantly from the purposes of the educational agency requiring the child’s presence” (Cruey, 2006, p.1). Education is no longer to learn more about God, but is now a way to function and compete within society.

One of the goals of secular education is to help people become contributing members of society. It is important to raise up the next generation to be responsible for their country’s future and take care of the current generation as they age. Therefore, education for any person should not be questioned. Education based on status, society, or other means should not even be considered, as it was in the past, but it should be provided for everyone. In America, each person has the opportunity to learn. Within the

last few years, there has been an increased emphasis on individualizing education and making it more understandable for each person. It is the goal of educators that each person who receives an education will go out into the world and use his bit of knowledge to benefit others in society. It does not matter if a person becomes great or world renowned or whether a person is a simple common lay person; what does matter is that they have a positive influence in their world and contribute to others in society. As a Christian, it is hoped that they also serve God with the knowledge they gain and win others for Christ.

Advocates for and Against Special Education

The main goal of educators is to educate the child with as much information as possible to benefit the student and help them function within society; whether that means teaching “those students who have physical, cognitive, language learning, sensory, and/or emotional abilities that are different from those of the general population [or not]” (Ackerman, Jaeger, & Smith, 2002, p.1). The teaching road and goals begin to widen when general and special education teachers bring their many tasks into perspective. There is a huge spectrum of learning to cover when one begins to think of all God has created in this world. After that, one must think about how unique each person is and how each one is gifted and talented by God in a special way. Once that is taken into consideration, all of the varying degrees of a person’s understanding and the way he interprets information must be put together; it is then that one soon sees that educating many types of people, with the same information, in the same way, is just not possible. This is where special education and general education separate. “Special educators provide instruction specifically tailored to meet individualized needs, making education

available to students who otherwise would have limited access to education” (p.1). This is not limited to only one intelligence, but to all the areas of intelligence, agriculture, interpersonal, intrapersonal, verbal, visual, kinesthetic, spatial, and musical and to all ability levels. Each person, created by the same loving God, deserves to be taught and to be given the chance to develop, express, and share the gifts with society that God has given him or her.

It has not always been accepted that people who did not fit into the “norm” could receive an education; people have had to work for that right. Parents in the past have had to bring their child to school and insist or demand that they receive an education. Special needs students have experienced a similar inequality and discrimination as that of the colored people in the United States. Someone, at some point, had to say that these people were God’s children too and that they had just as much a right to learn as anyone else. Therefore, in 1975, a law was passed in the United States that “mandated all school districts to educate students with disabilities” (Peterson, 2007, p.1), or as one could call them, children who learned differently from the average person. They now had equal rights to access education. Since then many steps have been taken to stand up for the rights of those who have disabilities or different learning styles than that of the average student.

Hogan, a special education teacher, believes that it is important that children with disabilities – seen or un-seen – are given the education they deserve. They need to be given an education to try to make it on their own in society. The theory is a few dollars spent now, will help these kids not only not be a burden on society – but be contributing members (1999, p. 1).

How important it is for God's children to become a functioning part of the body, to take their place and fulfill the plans that God has laid out for them from the beginning of time. (Eph. 2:10) They too must take their God-given place in society.

It is only because of the people, the advocates, that stood up for their loved ones, the children who did not learn the same as everyone else, that these people were awarded the right to learn and be educated as other students. Although their purpose or work may not be the same as the others, they are still learning to become an important functioning part of society and God's plan. When it comes to being fair about educating people, "fairness is not [about] everyone getting the same thing, but everyone getting what he or she needs" (Dover, 2005, p.10) to function.

Noah spent 120 years building an ark, to save his family and the animals from the flood (Gen. 6). Joseph spent years as a slave and a prisoner before he became second in command of Egypt and was used to save his family, God's chosen people, and many other nations (Gen. 42). Moses spent forty years in the wilderness before God could use him to lead the children of Israel through that same wilderness (Exodus). Elisha followed Elijah around until Elijah was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot; he then continued his ministry with a double portion of Elijah's spirit (II Kings 2:9). Paul spent years under a learned teacher, Gamaliel, and another three years in the Arabian desert in preparation for his ministry to the Jews and Gentiles (Gal. 1:17-18). God provided the circumstances and the education that each person needed in order to perform the tasks He had laid out for them in their lives. Today God does the same; He gives educators wisdom in order to teach the variety of students found in God's creation, His children. These educators must have wisdom to determine what to teach as well as how to teach it, in order to reach each

student. Each one deserves a unique and individualized education to help prepare them for what God has planned for them.

Unfortunately, there are some people who do not see people as God's special creation. They do not feel that each person should be treated equally, that time should be taken, nor money wasted on educating them. There are plenty of cultures in the past who have destroyed children or made them outcasts because they did not fit into society. Even within in the United States, children have been refused education or adults have lost jobs because they were considered "unfit," not able to learn or not right for the job. Some people ask, "Why do my tax dollars pay for kids that can't learn – can't do what other kids do . . . ? This money could be better spent on kids that contribute to society" (Hogan, 1994, p. 1).

In Japan, a caste system has been established for centuries, and the outcasts are considered to be the lowest in the caste system. They are called the untouchables or burakumin (village people) and are often not talked about or talked to (Larimer, 2001, p.1). Some of them are deformed and have been sent out of the city because of their deformity. This is not how God desires His people to be treated. Thankfully, in the United States there is far less tolerance for such demeaning behavior towards God's people. Laws have even been established to rid the country of such prejudices. However, it does not mean that some do not feel that way towards others on the inside. The main problem is that they simply do not get to know and understand people who are different from them. If time were spent with them, they would see that, even though they may not communicate or express themselves in the same way, they still have emotions and feelings and are capable of doing many of the things that they do. They would learn

that these people are a vital part of the body, which when put together creates an amazing whole (one functioning body).

Arguments For Special Education

Biblically. Easom says,

We know God has uniquely designed each one of us. We have been given "everything we need for life and godliness" (II Peter 1:3). That is God has bestowed on us the gifts and talents we can use to bring Him glory. Once we recognize that each person is sovereignly designed by our Creator, our appreciation for each other's value is greatly enhanced. God has designed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be. . . . Too often . . . certain parts of the body – those children whose needs are different from others – are excluded. (2007, pp.4-5).

Society today does not have the same appreciation for people as it did in the past. People are no longer looked at as made in God's image; they no longer have the same value or care that should be given to each individual. Unfortunately, newspapers, television programs, movies, and games portray that it is okay to harm other people or to look down on them; they have stealing, fighting, killing and all kinds of cruel behavior represented in them. Because today's generation spends so much time observing this behavior and reenacting it through games and virtual worlds, they have lost their appreciation and respect for human life on a day-to-day basis.

Even in the work force, the established mentality has been to step on everyone else's toes in order to make it to the top. It is believed that each individual must be greater than everyone else, and in order to be that way, they have to turn off their

conscience, climb over everyone else, and tear others down rather than be a team and build each other up.

Never in the Bible does God condone such behavior. “For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45). He does not give His blessings only to those who follow Him, perfectly or not; He gives it to all because He loves everyone and has given them a choice whether or not they desire to follow Him. The people of Ninevah were an evil people who did not follow God, but God gave them a second chance. He sent Jonah to tell them they would be destroyed if they did not repent. Jonah did not think it was fair for God to save such evil people; however, he had to obey God and show kindness to them, because that is part of God’s character that He asked Jonah to demonstrate (Jonah). If God only gave and blessed those who were perfect, no one on this earth would deserve any benefits from God; it would then be understandable why people would not treat each other with kindness. However, that is not the case; people have a perfect example in Him and it is up to them to follow it or not. Jesus said, “This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:12-13). So it is for all mankind, that they should have a sacrificial love for each other in order to function to their fullest capabilities as part of God’s body.

God commanded, in Deuteronomy, that the Israelites were to diligently teach their children all of His ways, not just some. They were to learn to love God above all else and serve Him by obeying His commandments. They were to not just do this at home,

but while they were out in the streets, whenever they lied down and when they rose up, in other words, all of the time (Deut. 6:6-8).

In New Testament times, it was the rabbis who educated the young men, teaching them the Scriptures and having them apply the words to their daily lives. Spangler and Tverburg (2009) share how the rabbis expected the young boys to accomplish this task. The students were often given a passage/portion of Scripture to read over and then they discussed it. They often took different points of view, trying to question and understand all parts of the text. They applied it to themselves as if it had happened to them and they worked out all aspects of it. This method not only ingrained the text into their minds, but it also became a part of who they were, so they could discuss the text with others, in the future, and again apply it to their lives. This is true teaching, making the information more than just knowledge by turning it into wisdom for the future. This Biblical wisdom is what causes people to influence society and not just to be a functioning part of it. As educators and God's children we should strive for all students to reach this goal.

God created all of mankind and He desires each one to learn and function within the community or body of the world He created with the talents and gifts that He has given to each of them. He did not create each person to be the same; He wanted them to be different. He made them different. He desires to teach each one about Himself through their differences that they may glorify Him in multiple ways.

God has made each one unique. If educators can teach children using their intelligence to get through to them better, they can alleviate the stress and help them focus on skills and concepts that truly matter. Easom and Irwin (2007) believe that, "when the child's learning needs are being met, the child can focus more clearly on

spiritual matters” (p.5). This is what God would desire to have everyone focus on, developing his character and glorifying Him.

God has given each person a specific purpose to fulfill. It is not rational to think that a class of twenty students would all know as much information as each other and work at the same job when they graduate, just as it is not rational to think that someone who did not fit in with those twenty students could not learn at all. It is up to parents, educators, and advocates of special needs children to see that they reach their potential and purpose and that they receive the education they need to achieve their God-given goals. It is not dependent on man to determine a person’s value, for God has created everyone for a purpose.

Also, a person’s age does not determine their significance. People always want to be considered valuable or needed by someone. A young child desires to be by their parents side helping them, a young adult wants to participate in society, to work and spend time with friends. The older generation, once retired from the workforce, still desires to have a voice, to participate within the family and community. Therefore, why should others, during these same stages in their life, who may not be able to communicate as well, be any different. Joy is brought to their hearts and lives when they are allowed to interact and function as a part of society. Society needs the influence of these ones to gain a new and different perspective on life, to show love to one another as God commanded. It is the role of educators and individuals everywhere to accept them as part of society and to work along with them, making them feel important, needed, and a necessary part of God’s creation. What greater joy can be found than in working together as God intended?

A person who was having trouble or pain in his feet or ankles would not readily cut them off without first seeing many doctors and specialists in order to find out what could be done. Only as a last resort would anyone wish to remove a part of his body. Even when someone is paralyzed, he does not remove his legs; he leaves them, even though they may appear useless. They have a purpose, as do the people who have been classified as different or disabled. They are special to God and should be to us too. God would want everyone to treat them as an important individual and function together as one. They have value and purpose, God made them that way, so they should be educated that way.

This means that all people, no matter their color, their language, their origin, or their understanding, should be treated in love. Whatever education can be offered to a person to help him better himself and function in this life in society, as well as develop his intelligence or gift, it should be provided for him, not withheld. This will help him become the person that God intended him to be, and it will help others demonstrate the love God asked them to show. We should be as children, recognizing no difference, but coming in love and trying to teach each other and better each other, fulfilling each one's purpose and glorifying God.

Philosophically. As special needs has been studied a huge variety of needs have appeared. There are no longer just the basic needs of hearing, sight, and speech disorders that require their own learning specialties. There are now also intelligences that need to be thought of as well as other disabilities such as autism, Down syndrome, Asperger's, attention deficit problems, musculoskeletal disorders and other brain dysfunctions. As researchers find out more and more about these problems it is the job of other people to

step in and be an advocate for these individuals, fighting for their rights to learn about God and His creation just as much as anyone else. No matter how severe their case may be, there is always an element of learning that can occur and that they deserve. These people with disabilities are capable of learning and should/must be given the opportunity to be educated.

Ethically. Once a person realizes and admits how unique each individual is, it does not take long to realize that each person deserves a chance at the best education (and life) possible in order for them to be able to function to their fullest potential. In order to provide this opportunity for all children certain factors must be changed. Educators cannot simply continue with the same type of education in their classrooms, hoping to reach the majority of the students in their classroom while leaving others behind. Things must change and services must be provided for all children to excel to their fullest potential. God never forced His children through the same mold, family, circumstances or education; each was unique, fit to best suit that person. Jeremiah did not have to live in the desert for 40 years or reside in the belly of a whale for 3 days and nights. Paul did not have to follow Jesus with the twelve disciples and a multitude of other people just to share His glorious gospel. So it is with children and people today. They should not be expected to conform to the same classroom standards and same activities as everyone else. They should be treated fairly, given what they need to learn and function in society, in a way that they will learn it best.

This is where the ethical question arises. Can educators today continue to expect all students to perform at the same level in a classroom setting with the same books, activities, desks, and instructor? The answer should be no; we cannot expect to have

each individual achieve the same results with this limited type of instruction. It is important for other services to be provided, services that meet each child's individual needs. If a child learns best through music, he should be provided the opportunity to create songs to help him memorize facts, concepts or events in history. If a child is a kinesthetic learner, he should be able to build structures and use manipulatives in order to improve his math and language skills. If a person is an interpersonal learner, he should be able to work in groups and use his people skills to learn more and excel in all activities.

It may seem complicated to provide such a variety of services, yet if that were the way a person learned, would you that person want education to come in a way that made it easier and more understandable to him? Would he not prefer being in his comfort zone and learning the same information in a way that he would grasp it better because he could relate to it?

Would not an educator prefer to teach in a way he was most comfortable with and that came across best? The people educating are just as different as the students being educated. Does it not seem fair since God would design everyone differently that each person should be given a chance to excel in a different way, as he was created? God made each person a unique individual that is valuable to Him. People have made sacrifices so others could be educated and learn about Him. He wants to see people excel in life, giving praise and glory to Him. As Easom said, "When the child's learning needs are being met, the child can focus more clearly on spiritual matters" (2007, p.5). Is that not what God desires of His children – that we focus on our character and our lives by giving glory to Him? Does He give His people worth? Logically and biblically it makes

sense that He would want people to help one another. It is what He has written in His Word to follow. Is it not then a Christian's responsibility as His child to see that each child, each person, no matter his difficulty or need (less or more severe) be taught to function as a part of the body of people that God has created?

Let His people then work together, helping one another achieve the goals He has. Each person can help another person reach his God-given potential.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

Rationale

God has created each person unique. People are designed to be different, because God made them that way and He loves them that way. It is the Christian educator's responsibility to help mold these unique characteristics in each individual and shape them into the person they were created to be. Therefore students who find classroom work too easy or too difficult should be accommodated appropriately in order to help them achieve their full God-given potential. It is important that no child be lost in the system or shuffled around or set aside simply because they struggle to complete work that other children seem more capable of completing.

Therefore programs such as Gifted or Special Education Programs should be implemented in schools, especially Christian Schools, to help meet various needs and allow each child to reach their full potential (Schaefer & Riley, n.d., p.21). Either great or small accommodations or modifications need to be determined and implemented in order to help these students (all students) succeed. It is the goal of the Bahamas NCOSE (National Commission on Special Education)

to promote Special Education as a fundamental right and to seek to ensure that individuals with special needs have access to educational and support services . . . to provide all persons in the Bahamas the opportunity to receive the education and training that will equip them with the beliefs, attitudes, values, knowledge, and skills required for work and life in a democratic society (2005, p. 16).

However, "the present system waits for the children to fail, instead of utilizing a model based on prevention and intervention. . . When a system places little emphasis on early

and accurate identification, learning and behavioral problems seem to progress” (p. 69). Therefore preventative methods must be taken. Children who are advanced or who struggle should be assisted as much as possible before the situation worsens. A special education program in each school would help to solve this dilemma.

Decision Makers

Regular education teacher. The regular educator (homeroom teacher) is normally the one to discover a student is experiencing difficulty, although parents may also notice that their child is struggling with school work or in other areas. Before an educator takes her concerns about a child to others, she should first take careful note of a child’s progress or lack thereof, including his specific struggles. Samples of work should be kept for examples of specific needs that are not being met (Schaefer & Riley, n.d., p.25). As the teacher is documenting the child’s progress, she should record any modifications that she has made within the classroom in order to help the child succeed. These modifications may include allowing extra time for tests, giving formulas to help in solving math problems rather than requiring memorization, reading tests to a student (Easom & Irwin, 2007, p. 94), or teaching using another type of learning modality. This record will become extremely helpful later if the student requires more assistance than the regular teacher is able to give. It is this documentation that will be looked at to determine if the child needs a place in resource, or the pull-out tutorial program.

Teachers are encouraged to ask other educators or the special educator for alternative ideas and teaching strategies (other adaptations or accommodations) to use in the classroom. The teacher should document each accommodation or modification including the length of time implemented and how successful or unsuccessful the

outcome. (A Screening and Intervention Form from Kovaleski and Marco, 2005, would best meet this need – see Appendix A.)

After four to six weeks of intervention and documentation with little to no improvement or unsatisfactory progress, the child's parents should be contacted and a conference arranged. At this conference, after school tutoring should be suggested. (If the child is already a year or two behind his grade level, after school tutoring should begin immediately, along with the classroom accommodations.) The number of days a week, as well as the length of the after school tutoring session is dependent upon how far the child is behind. Of course, this would be discussed between the parent, the teacher, and the tutor.

It is important for the teacher to specifically explain the child's deficit to the parent and the tutor. She should show examples of some of the work collected over time or refer to her notes taken during her work with the student in class (the Intervention Form). The teacher should continue to keep in close contact with the tutor to let him know the progress that is being made as well as specific areas that need further attention. If the classroom teacher is not the one to tutor the child, then she should explain how to record and document the intervention with the tutor. This documentation is an excellent way to see progress. These notes are also helpful if another person steps in to give assistance, because they will know what has been tried, what works, what does not work, and how far the child has progressed or still has to go. If the child does end up needing further assistance, these notes can be given to the special education teacher and they will assist in her testing and decision making. (These notes would include strategies implemented, curricula used, subjects taught, objectives, time spent on topic, and

explanations of how successful or unsuccessful each session was). If, after five to nine weeks of after school tutoring there does not seem to be adequate progress, the teacher should take her intervention notes from class as well as a copy of the tutor's notes to the administrator and ask that more assistance be given to the child. However, if the student does seem to be improving it would then be up to the child's teacher and parents to decide how long they wish to continue after school tutoring and to what degree. The teacher would also alter the classroom accommodations when necessary.

Administration. The administrator is approached by the teacher (occasionally the parent) concerning a student's progress. The administrator would then look over the child's progress reports from that current year, the intervention notes from the teacher and the after school tutor, along with any work collected that reveals the problem. If necessary, she will also look at the child's file from past years, looking over former report cards, notes on file, and possibly even speaking with past teachers. She may also have some other knowledge of the child, from working with him, seeing him around school, knowing his family history, or testing him. (Each child at Agape takes an entrance exam if he or she applies to attend the school after the first grade. This exam is administered by the principal.) If the information presented shows great concern for the child falling behind his or her grade level, it is then the administrator's responsibility to contact the parents and recommend a conference to discuss further help for their child. This meeting would include the regular teacher, the after school tutor, the parents, the administrator, the special education teacher and depending on the circumstances, the student. Other people that may also be included may be therapists, counselors (Department of Education, 2009, p. 17), or other family members who contribute to the

main care of the child. This meeting should be called within two weeks of the teacher presenting her concerns about the student in order to keep things flowing and quickly provide the child with the extra help he needs. The administrator would recommend that the child be referred to a special education teacher to be tested (not the entrance exam) to see whether or not the child should participate in a part time pull-out tutoring program during the school day. This will give the child a few extra hours of concentrated time to grasp difficult concepts.

Parents. Parental involvement is crucial. Occasionally it will be the parents who ask for a meeting with the teacher and administrator concerning their child. This meeting should occur within a two week period in order to best assist the child and meet the parents' needs. In this case the administrator may approach the teacher for details about a student, including any previous meetings with the parents and any intervention completed. Once facts are learned, the administrator may call a school meeting out of concern for a child. This meeting should include the administrator, the regular teacher, possibly the special education teacher and the tutor, if there is one. Each person on the school team should be made aware of the concern and should come prepared with a plan of intervention. The school team will discuss a plan together to bring before the parents that will assist the child. (It may mean beginning with modifications in the classroom, or depending on the severity, it may jump to the testing for extra help during the school day. Changes for the student will be determined on an individualized basis.) Once the school team has a tentative plan, they will call a conference with the parents and discuss their ideas together. As a team, they will finalize the plan and begin putting it in to action, helping the child as much as possible.

Many times, however, it is the administrator who has been approached by the teacher, who calls for a meeting between the school and the parents. During this time it is important to have a unified plan outlined to present to the parents. When a conference occurs, the data collected should be shown to the parents; this includes the completed intervention as well as a strategy or plan for giving the student further assistance. (A plan should be presented to the parents showing them the course of action those at the school would like to take to assist the child, as well as objectives to be met.) Ultimately, it is the parents' decision if they wish their child to receive further help in a pull-out class or if they wish to continue on as they have been thus far throughout the school year. It is only with the parents' consent that further testing can be completed and that possible pull-out programs during the school day can be attended by the child. This consent or decline of further assistance should be given in writing. If testing is agreed upon, a two week time frame should be given in which it should be completed. An updated plan should then be drawn out by the special education teacher, and another conference should be called to discuss the actions that will be taken to assist the student.

Special education specialist. Once a conference has taken place and the parents have given permission, the special education teacher is now able to take on a more active role. At this time, she will complete a more thorough questionnaire concerning the child's background (Schaefer & Riley, n.d., p. 12), asking the parents as well as the child information that may have an effect on how the child learns. She will also question the child's teacher, attempting to gain as much insight as possible. The intervention records and journals kept throughout the weeks of modifications and after-school tutoring along with the saved work will be pertinent at this point for the specialist. GLAT (a

standardized test in the Bahamas, that is taken in grades three and six) scores may also be looked at; however, they are not likely to be as crucial/influential a factor due to the nature of the test. The special education teacher will then analyze all of the collected data, including observations of the child and tests.

The specialist should give “enough tests ... to accurately evaluate the student’s level of functioning and his strengths and weaknesses without depending on the scores of any one test” (p. 24). These tests should reflect the child’s achievement, general and specific abilities in each major academic area, his potential, his modality strengths and weaknesses, any physical factors and his behavioral characteristics (p. 24). From there the special education teacher will determine the next steps to take.

She will formulate an IEP (Individual Education Plan) which will include the necessary steps and goals to be met in order for the child to be brought up to par or above the standards of his classmates. If the case is more severe, the IEP may include information that will help the child to function within society (less academic and more social behavior oriented) as it may not be possible for him to keep up academically with his classmates. The IEP will also include the information (problem) that was initially recognized, goals and objectives for the student, projected dates for these goals to be met, strategies that will be used (Department of Education, 2009, p. 23), and when the next conference should convene to discuss the child’s progress and further goals for continued growth. This helps keep the teachers accountable and focused on helping the child reach these achievable objectives. The parents should also be informed that they are permitted to request an educational evaluation to determine if their child may need to be placed in a full-time special education classroom. (This testing can be completed by the special

education teacher, the special education school in Abaco, or for a complete report it may be completed by a designated professional in Nassau). The special education teacher and administrator would guide the parents to the place where this testing can be completed as well as the type of testing that would be the most beneficial for the student.

The student's needs will determine the necessary action to be taken; of course, no two children are alike, and therefore each case must be treated independently, focusing on that particular child's needs. In more minor cases (mild remedial status, students who are one grade level below, but not because of a disability) may be recommended for more in-class modifications or accommodations as well as after school tutoring to continue. For more severe cases (moderate remedial status – students two grades below, but not because of a disability) may be recommended to participate in the pull-out program for the subject area that is a struggle. If the student is not significantly behind his classmates, two to four hours a week of extra help may be all that is required with the specialist. However, if a greater gap is present between the child and his classmates then one to two hours during each school day may be recommended. Serious Remedial Status students, who are three or more grade levels below, not because of a disability, may be required to seek help elsewhere (at another school) until the child can make great gains academically or until the special education department grows at Agape and can accommodate them accordingly. At this time a student that far behind would be difficult to help reach the same level his classmates; therefore, another school would be recommended rather than acceptance at Agape.

Special education is “designed instruction which may include alternate curricula, adapted materials and access to a special education teacher and individualized

instruction” (Bahamas NCOSE, 2005, p. 18) – in other words, “education by special methods appropriate for persons suffering from that disability” (p. 96). The special education teacher would be responsible for writing lesson plans with objectives that are based on the IEP, fulfilling the goals that were created for the child, and helping him or her learn using various methods. She would also be responsible for creating a schedule, accommodating the other teachers’ and students’ schedules to assist a number of students throughout her day. It may also work to take a group of up to four children who are struggling with similar concepts (in similar grade levels) and teach them together. This would allow for more students to be helped (on a more individual basis) outside of the classroom and hopefully brought up to their grade level or beyond their grade level.

The information gathered from the intervention forms, observations, questioning and testing, the IEP, and the plan for assisting the child would be presented to the parents at a conference. The parents would then share their opinion about the matter. The necessary actions would then be taken at the school and the goals that were set out would begin to be achieved. Throughout the next few weeks (depending on the timetable set for the child to reach his goals) communication between all parties (teacher, parents, tutor, administrator, and special education teacher) would occur. This communication is necessary for this experience to be the most successful and for the child to reach his ultimate potential.

The Program

Present situation. Currently at Agape Christian School teachers work with modifications in their classrooms to best help their students. These ideas are self-generated, received as advice from co-workers (teachers, administrators) or discovered

from searching online websites. If these modifications or adaptations do not work, after school tutoring is then suggested. Many students receive this type of help. It would be beneficial for the school and the students to adapt a program to further help these struggling students. Many times when students come from other schools, the child is significantly behind. It requires a great amount of effort for these children to catch up and complete the work presented to them at their grade level. Therefore, a part-time pull-out program (initially) would be of the greatest benefit as well as an excellent way for Agape to begin to grow a special education program.

In the beginning only students of greatest concern, those with a large gap in their academic knowledge, would be considered for the program. Past records as well as the administrative team and teachers would be asked to suggest such students. The program would best be brought into grades 1-6, being foundational years, with hopes of later growing and being established in the high school and possibly kindergarten. Due to limited spacing, one room and one teacher would be all that would be possible at the moment to begin the program until further interest and growth in the program were possible.

There is a school in Abaco which does focus mainly on special needs students. It would be ideal to work with them and create an in-between program – something to help struggling students who could do some mainstreaming with partial pull-out; then the other school could focus on helping students with greater physical and mental needs.

Types of students. The types of students which would be included in this tutoring program at Agape would be those with learning disabilities, slower learners, students with ADD, ADHD, and mild Asperger's and autism (slight behavioral problems as well).

The focus would be to teach them coping, studying, and life skills to help them succeed in the mainstream classroom, and in the world they will one day function in as an influential adult.

Facilities

Classroom. Ideally a small trailer at the side of the school would be an excellent place to meet, such as the one I used to teach a Down syndrome child in (although it would be a bit small for encouraging small group learning). However, the one that was there is no longer available. If possible the rooms in the building with the office (one of the nursery rooms) or an upstairs room could also be converted into a meeting place. These rooms are easily accessible; they are right within the main buildings and have a sufficient amount of space (12'X12', 12'X28', and 12'X10'). They could easily be converted by adding and rearranging furniture, no construction would be required. It is important that the room be set aside for this sole purpose and not be used for multiple purposes so items are not misplaced or the room becomes unorganized; therefore, some rooms would need to be rearranged or moved elsewhere.

The layout of the room would be slightly different, depending on the size of the room that was chosen (see Appendix B). The basic arrangement would be a group work table that would remain on the opposite side of the room from the individual working stations (computer area, or listening center). The computer and listening areas may also be opened to a wide variety of students for a minimal fee. (Perhaps \$5 per ½ hour) this would allow extra practice for the student but it would not require a teacher's direct assistance. This would allow for students to practice individually, as well as provide another workspace for a second special education teacher when the program grows.

Materials and supplies. A wide variety of supplies will be needed to begin the special education or tutorial program. Many of these items can already be found in the school or borrowed from teachers' personal belongings and supplies until the special education department can build up its own supply of materials. Regular classroom items include tables or desks, chairs, a teacher's desk, bulletin boards, shelves, baskets, filing cabinets, storage cabinets, a bookshelf, hooks or cubbies for students, whiteboards, markers, and possibly an area rug.

Supplies that would be geared towards the students' use during tutoring, focusing on math and reading initially, would be base ten kits, blocks, math manipulatives of various objects, fraction manipulatives, games, charts, phonics kits, letters (magnetic and not), multiple levels of books, a CD player, books on CD, head sets, computer, computer games, bean bag chairs, plastic baskets (for sorting), and mini magnetic boards. Also included in this would be a teacher's set of curriculum for each grade level in math and reading, as well as multiple resource books in these subject areas. Testing kits to administer tests to the students prior to entering the program would also have to be purchased (kits such as the DTLA and the Woodcock-Johnson).

Implementing the Program

Individual Education Plan (IEP). The IEP is "a written plan for a particular student that takes into consideration his levels, his abilities and his limitations for learning" (Schaefer & Riley, n.d., p.13). It "describes how the student will participate in the general education curriculum and identifies the special education and related services that the school will provide the student" (Department of Education, 2009, p. 30). It should be established (in part) with consideration to the child's uniqueness. No IEP can

be written and used for more than one person; each plan must be well suited for a specific child. The IEP should include some personal information about the child.

Some other things that are important to include in an IEP are recent evaluations and work that demonstrate the student's performance, objectives and goals that can be measured and met within a designated time period that emphasize the child's needs, specific modifications for the student during class times or testing times, the beginning date of service, the amount of service the child will receive, a projection date for the next meeting (with administrative team and parents) (Schaefer & Riley, p. 13), and ways to measure academic, developmental, communicational and functional needs of the child (Department of Education, 2009, p. 30).

Creating an IEP for each student enrolled in the tutorial program at Agape Christian School will be required. The form, which has been adapted from Easom and Irwin (2007, p. 96), can be completed on the computer or by hand after a child has been tested (Appendix C). Basic information such as the student's name, grade level, teacher, and parent information is located at the top of page one. Each child who gains admittance into this program will be tested using the DTLA and the Woodcock Johnson. The results will be placed on the first page of the IEP. Their strengths and their weaknesses will be noted in both learning styles and academic areas. Following this will be a list of suggested interventions along with the date and place such interventions will begin. A projected date, in which the child should be able to meet the objectives in order to re-enter the regular classroom, is also to be set.

On the second page will be the list of objectives to be met, along with specific plans or ways to meet those objectives. The chart on this second page will be copied

numerous times throughout the child's tutorial sessions. Dates will then be marked in the next column along with a number for the level of mastery. If this is done frequently, it will not only keep the teachers accountable for meeting their goals, but will also be an excellent assessment instrument to measure whether or not the objectives that were originally set are being met in a timely fashion. It will also be a simple way to observe the child's progress over time and an excellent way to show the parents or administrator the accomplishments or struggles of a student.

Extra notes can be kept along with this sheet in the student's file. This sheet can then be used to determine whether or not the plans originally discussed are meeting the objectives and accomplishing the goals set for the child based on the projected date or if some objectives need to change and dates need to be adjusted. Based on this data, meetings can be called and further decisions about the child's education can be discussed and planned. On the bottom of the second page is where the teacher, special education teacher, parent, and administrator should sign. Once they have all agreed on this course of action, tutorial help should begin as soon as possible.

The students' needs will determine whether the special education teacher will coincide her lessons with the scope and sequence or curriculum followed by the school or the child's teacher. The IEP must give a basic guideline of the rate at which the child is expected to master certain skills. These goals are to be shared with the regular teacher, the tutor, the parents, and the special educator; all of them are to work together for the success of the child. Ultimately the goal is for the student to return to the regular classroom and function well independently (in the least restrictive environment). Other arrangements may need to be made for those students who, after much time in and out of

tutoring programs, still do not seem to be coping, adapting, or progressing as well as hoped.

In order for a student to return to the regular classroom, he must be working at or above grade level, with or without accommodations. The special education teacher must evaluate the student and believe that the child would be able to manage being back in the classroom. The administrative team must also consider the child's progress and discuss it with the teachers involved and the parents before the child can be placed back in the regular classroom. It is also important for the student to reflect a positive attitude about returning to the classroom and he must feel that he is capable of accomplishing the transfer (Schaefer & Riley, n.d., p.26).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). It is important "to ensure that children are not unnecessarily removed from the regular classroom or isolated from other non-disabled children of their age. LRE decisions are made based on children's learning needs and vary from child to child" (Logsdon, 2011, p.1). When a child is capable, he or she should then be assimilated back into the classroom. The goal of the tutorial program at Agape Christian School would be to assist struggling students during the school day to help them master skills and to teach them strategies to use when they come across difficult concepts. If this can be accomplished, as the child ages, there would be less need for a pull-out program. He or she would have mastered the basic learning building blocks, which would then aid them in future grades. It is not to say that all problems would be eradicated, but that many areas that cause difficulty can be minimized with remedial assistance.

Finances

Students participating in the tutorial program at Agape Christian School would be charged extra based on the number of times per week they receive extra assistance. Currently, individuals in after school tutoring sessions lasting an hour are charged \$15. If it is a small group, students are charged \$10 each. Agape's tutorial program could begin on the same basis, \$10 for a ½ hour concentrated session (\$8 per student if attended by more than one student with a limit of four students). If the student comes every day of the week they could be charged a flat rate of \$40 per week or \$160 per month. Since, the main goal is to have the child functioning back in the classroom independently as soon as they are capable a set rate for the entire year's services would not be necessary at this point (although it could be established depending upon the needs of the child as well as the growth of the program).

This fee allows for flexibility in the student's as well as the teacher's schedule. If for some reason the child did not receive extra help one day, or perhaps they needed an extra session, the child could then be billed accordingly. The number of sessions would be recorded and given to the office on a weekly basis to be included on the bill with the child's regular school fees. The parents could then pay for these sessions at the same time as the rest of their child's school fees. Upon request, a parent may ask for an itemized list of the days and times the student received extra help (although they should be informed of their child's regular tutoring schedule or any changes prior to their occurrence).

At \$10 a ½ hour, with a minimum of 11 students or sessions per day, the school would still need to assist the program with about \$8,000-\$10,000 per year. As the

program grows and small group sessions increase the amount of money the school would be responsible for would lessen. Not included in this initial figure is the cost of testing the children for the program; the price of this testing would range between one and two hundred dollars, depending on the length of the test as well as the type of test. This would add to the income brought in through the program and therefore decrease the amount of money in which the school would be responsible to provide. In order for the program to run independent of the school's help, there would need to be approximately sixteen to twenty students enrolled on a daily basis.

Advertising

Initially advertising and promoting of this program would be brought before the school board, the administrative team, and the staff at Agape Christian School. A meeting would be held in which the objectives and benefits of this program would be presented. It would then be a collaborative effort to implement this program at Agape Christian School.

The students' parents of Agape Christian School would be introduced to the program as a whole in a parent-teacher meeting held at the school. They would be given the objectives and benefits of the program, including the reasons Agape feels led to begin this program. Each teacher's goal is to help each child succeed to his fullest potential; the tutorial program could assist with this goal. Students who struggle would be pulled out for a short thirty minute period of time, for a set number of weeks (based on the child's needs and academic standing), with the goal of returning full time to the regular classroom once they are capable of keeping up with the curriculum taught, keeping up

with the other students, when they are able to understand the material, and when they learn strategies to help them cope in the classroom.

Flyers (Appendix D) will also be posted around the school and possibly the community, letting others know that a program is available to work with their child's unique needs in the areas of math and reading. (Until the program has been implemented for a year, it is best not to advertise outside of the school; that way the program has a chance to be established and the kinks worked out. It will also stop an influx of children from enrolling at Agape who need extra assistance, as an increase in such students may not be able to be accommodated immediately upon enrollment. It could also be discussed if Agape would allow students from other schools to participate in its tutorial program, since there is no special education program within any other the other schools.)

CONCLUSION

All people are important, created unique by God and deserving of an education. Those who struggle deserve extra help, those who find things easy deserve to be challenged. Beginning with a small tutorial program during the school day would help to build up Agape, helping our own students and catching other students from falling between the cracks and not gaining the education that they deserve and this world demands. What glory God could receive by helping these children learn about Him and His world as they learn how amazingly special He has created them.

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Appendix A

A Screening and Intervention Form

Tier 1 Screening and Intervention Record Form

Date: _____ Meeting: Beginning Midyear End of Year Grade: _____

Meeting Attendees	Position	Meeting Attendees	Position

Target Skill: Percentage of students at proficient level based on benchmark/standard

Strategies Selected for Implementation This Quarter (Tier 1)

Logistics for Implementation of Strategies Selected ("To-do's")

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Appendix B

Special Education Classroom

10 feet



Appendix C

Individual Education Plan for Agape Christian School

Individualized Education Plan Form

Agape Christian School

Name _____ Grade _____ Teacher _____

Parent's name(s) _____ Phone _____

Current learning center services _____

Special Education Teacher _____ Date Referred _____

Psychological testing Yes No Date _____

Diagnosed learning need _____

Instrument				
DTLA	General Ability		Motor-Enhanced/Reduced	
	Optimal		Fluid Intelligence/ Crystallized Intelligence	
	Verbal /Nonverbal		Simultaneous / Successive Processing	
	Attention Enhanced/Reduced		Verbal Scale Performance Scale	

Relative Strengths	Relative Weaknesses

Achievement Testing

Initial Testing:

End of the year:

Instrument		GE	%	Instrument		GE	%
Woodcock	Reading: WR				Reading: WR		
Johnson	Comp.				Comp.		
	Spelling				Spelling		
	Language				Language		
	Math				Math		

Interventions _____

Initiation date _____ to _____

Objectives	Plans	Date	Mastery

Level of Mastery:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1- Mastered | 4- Continued – Minimal Progress |
| 2- Mastered – Occasional reinforcement Needed | 5- Not yet addressed |
| 3- Continued – Satisfactory Progress | 6- Inappropriate at this time |

LC teacher _____ Date _____

LC director _____ Date _____

Parent _____ Date _____

Principal _____ Date _____

Appendix D

Advertisement for Agape Christian School

Special Education Program

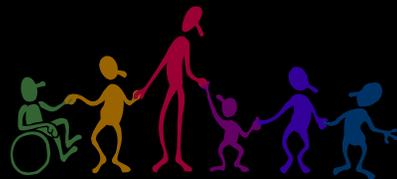


Agape Christian School

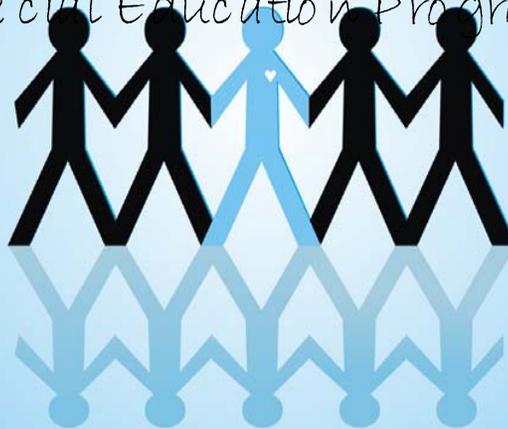


Meeting the needs of your child on an individual basis.

Assistance in Math and Reading.



Special Education Program



dare to be different

Helping them succeed in all academic areas.

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Contact Mrs. Cecile Albury or Miss Sarah Stapley for more information

