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Training Center for Retarded To Open on Island in Fall

By KENNETH FANIZZI

An occupational training center for Staten Island's mentally retarded youths will open in September.

School Superintendent Bernard E. Donovan announced yesterday four portable classrooms at PS 8, Great Kills, will be used temporarily to house 60 retardates until permanent facilities can be found here.

The establishment of a job training program for these 17-to-21-year-olds fills a need existing in this borough for many years.

Such services are long overdue on Staten Island, a board spokesman declared.

Dr. Donovan stipulated the present arrangement is still a

temporary one.

The city school system is moving ahead to set up permanent job training centers for older retardates in the five boroughs. Such a facility is in operation in Manhattan and another is scheduled to open this fall in Queens. Similar centers are planned next year for Brooklyn and the Bronx.

State law requires the Board of Education to educate the retarded until they reach age 21.

However, money, staffing and housing problems forced the school system to drop most of these pupils at age 17. The National Association of Social Workers reported that each year 900 mentally retarded pupils enrolled in pub-

lic schools are usually stranded because of a lack of training facilities.

It was reliably reported that of the 32 CRMD (Children with Retarded Mental Development) on Staten Island, half are covered by teachers who hold common branch licenses, rather than specialized ones.

This points up the shortage of such personnel, a borough school administrator said. To teach CRMD classes, a regular teacher must have additional training and college courses, but the system has been forced to use out-of-license teachers to fill vacancies.

School authorities are optimistic, and hope the increas-

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ing migration to this borough will bring more specialized teachers. The board is now conducting a crash program to get 10,000 additional teachers into the system in September.

"Once we establish the service on Staten Island, the other things will follow," an assistant director of the CRMD Bureau, said. "Things will go up—not down."

Only 15 retarded pupils here, those with emotional maturity and higher mental capabilities, are transferred each year to the high school level. A similar number are forced to leave the system.

The establishment of the vocational training center will provide space for all such youngsters.

Dr. Donovan's announcement was immediately hailed by the parents of retarded children as well as teachers and social agencies pushing for the facility.

Robert Gilson, director of the social services department at Willowbrook State School, and spokesman for the committee on mental retardation for the Staten Island members of the National Association of Social Workers, said this is "one example of what concerted community action can accomplish."

The group consists of social workers who live or work in this borough.

The committee sought support from federal, state and city legislators.

A reply from Sen. Robert F. Kennedy disclosed that he had looked into the matter and found it distressing.

"We are using every means at our disposal to get something done as quickly as possible to alleviate this disturbing situation," the senator wrote.

Island agencies concerned with the problems of the mentally retarded protested the lack of a job training program and urged immediate relief.