

Willowbrook Getting New Therapy Unit

Gov. Rockefeller announced yesterday that bids for construction of a new intensive therapy center for Willowbrook State School will be opened June 21.

Four contracts, valued at about \$900,000 for construction, heating and ventilation and sanitary and electrical systems, will be awarded. The bids are now being accepted by the State Department of Public Works in Albany.

The center, said Dr. Jack Hammond, director of the school, has long been needed and will serve about 750 youngsters aged 3 to 10.

"It is an intensive therapy unit designed to acquaint preschool children especially with their environment," he said. "We have held such therapy in every possible available space here for the past two years. The results were so rewarding that we were convinced of the worth of investing in such a center."

He added that teachers had tried to pursue their training in the school lobbies and store rooms and that recreational therapy was even held in the basement of the school.

The inconvenience was considered small in relation to the progress those youngsters receiving the care showed "in comparison with those who did not," said Dr. Hammond.

"Retarded children at the age of 3 should be made aware of the common objects and ideas familiar to normal children their age and younger," he added.

Rockefeller said that "the goal of the intensive therapy program is to bring each child up to his maximum capabilities so that he can gain from the formal educational and therapeutic programs offered at Willowbrook."

According to Dr. Hammond, there will be classrooms for 15 teachers, 10 occupational therapy rooms and 8 rooms for physical therapy, plus two large indoor recreational areas.

"Eventually, he added, "we hope to have two outdoor play areas."

The one-story, 17,500-square-foot center will have identical sections joined by a connecting passageway. It will be joined with nearby existing buildings. Skylights will rise from the roof over each recreation room and skylights will also illuminate the classrooms and will be set in rows on each side of the roof.

Merz and Pasanella, Brooklyn architects, designed the center under the direction of the Mental Hygiene Facilities Improvement Fund, which will finance and build the project for the Department of Mental Hygiene.

Classes will include singing, circle games, marching and other activities designed to help hand, eye and muscle coordination. Arts and crafts, motivational development, training in the activities of daily living and an active sports program also will be featured.