

New therapy unit opens at Willowbrook

Completion of an intensive therapy center to serve 750 mentally retarded children at Willowbrook State School was announced today by Gov. Rockefeller.

The \$1-million project provides additional therapy space—two large recreation areas and 35 classrooms for physical and occupational therapy—for children who live in four residence buildings at the school.

Serving boys and girls between the ages of 3 and 10, the center reflects the state Mental Hygiene Department's desire to give intensive therapy to mentally retarded children at an early age.

Previous projects at Willowbrook, which resulted in federal grants to the school, proved the value of offering educational and therapeutic programs to children of pre-school age.

The 17,500-square-foot therapy center was financed and built by the Health and Mental Hygiene Facilities Improvement Corp. for the Mental Hygiene Department.

The four double-winged residence buildings which the center serves are grouped in a square.

The one-story building in the center of the residences consists of two identical sections joined by a connecting passageway. It connects with each of the residential buildings to provide sheltered passage for the children. Two pyramid-like projections containing skylights rise from the roof, one over each of the large recreation rooms. Additional skylights, in two parallel rows, provide illumination for the classrooms.

The center will have a pre-school program that includes such nursery school activities as singing, circle games, marching and similar activities to develop hand and eye and muscle coordination. There will also be training in the activities of daily living and in arts and crafts.

Physical therapy to overcome physical disabilities which often accompany retardation include use of parallel and horizontal bars, pulley weights and steps on which to practice walking. Recreational therapy includes bike riding, slides, running, rhythm band and an active sports program.

Open spaces on each side of the center are being developed into play areas with outdoor equipment.