

# SUNDAY NEWS

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## Willowbrook School in Peril,

## Awaits State Budget

The Willowbrook School of Practical Nursing, perhaps the finest in the state, is living on the edge of an economy ax. Its fate will remain uncertain until the state budget is unveiled on April 1.

The school must weather budget cuts, which may force it to close down at the end of its school year. However, students and faculty, proud of an unbroken record of excellence, are urging legislators to keep the only state-run PN school open.

"To save \$49 million, the state must do a lot of cutting," said Dr. Jack Hammond, Willowbrook State medical complex director, noting that he hopes the state will consider the school's record, as well as its appropriations.

During its 10-year existence, the school has maintained the highest over-all average in statewide licensing examinations. Of its more than 500 graduates, only two failed to pass the exam the first time. "They passed the second time," observed Hammond.

The school, opened by the Department of Mental Hygiene to an initial 40 students, has been a way up for minorities as well as for people in this area, he said.

Elizabeth Johnson, Newark, worked at Willowbrook as a psychiatric staff attendant for over five years, before finally entering the school. Separated from her husband, she supports her children, ages 8, 9 and 10.

### Worked as Attendant Five Years

"The PN school is all most of the attendants talk about," she said. "It's a way to better pay and community service." Mrs. Johnson says she wants to make a career of working at Willowbrook, noting that when you graduate from its PN school, you do so because you've earned it.

While enrollment starts at about 90, the attrition rate is around 30%. There are presently 61 students at the school, including four men. Students fall into three categories Hammond said—Willowbrook employes, community persons referred to the school by the state Division of Employment, and state employes from other institutions.

The PN school is housed in building 4 at the

Willowbrook State School for Retarded Children. It is affiliated with three island hospitals, said Vera Magee, acting principal. The PN school's total budget is between \$250,000 and \$300,000. State employes in attendance also receive a \$3,360 stipend, Hammond said.

### Supplies Nurses for Island

The 10-member faculty boasts four masters degrees and six bachelors, said Miss Magee of Great Kills, a Columbia Teachers College graduate in nursing education.

"After graduation, I want to work in Richmond Memorial Hospital," said Lynda Pidgeon, Great Kills. "The PN school supplies many island hospitals with licensed practical nurses."

Mrs. Pidgeon, 29, mother of three, says she married early, and now that her children are in school she wants to be useful to the community, while helping ease the family budget strain.

Closing the school will hurt island hospitals by cutting off a supply of practical nurses, she said, noting that this is compounded by a registered

nurses shortage, which, in many cases, means LPNs actually fill RN slots.

"Closing the school would be a tragedy," said Hector Ramos of the Bronx, noting that the course work is very hard, which tends to attract those genuinely interested in nursing.

Upon graduating, Ramos, 30, hopes to return to the Frances Schevier Home for the Aged, a Bronx-based Catholic institution.

The school originally accepted only state employes. In 1965, at the request of Gov. Rockefeller, it began accepting community applicants and state division of employment referrals, said Hammond.

Presently, enrollment is made up mostly of islanders who attend the 12-month course beginning in September, he said.

Students at the school receive additional training at three island hospitals: Sea View for basic skills, such as bed making and patient care; the Clifton Marine Hospital for psychiatric training and Richmond Memorial for medical-surgical, obstetrical and pediatric training, said Miss Magee.

Mrs. Angela Trunzo, instructor, noted closing the school would break up a proven institution and scatter its faculty, at a time when the island is in need of expanding its hospitals and staffs.

Mrs. Katie White, Bay Terrace, who served in the Royal Air Force during WW II, said closing the school would be a bitter disappointment to persons living on the island who want to enter nursing and yet have family responsibilities.

Mrs. White, 46, from County Clare, Ireland, said that there were several persons attending the school in her age bracket, although most were in their late 20s.

They are a mature and responsible group, who not only want to finish their own course work, but want to see others get a chance, said Miss Magee.

Meanwhile, state legislators continue to search for ways to cut Gov. Rockefeller's \$3.5-billion budget. About 40 million may come from the State Department of Mental Hygiene budget.