

Choosing where their child will go to school is arguably one of the most important decisions parents make. This decision is bound not only with considerations for their children's academic education, but also heavily complicated by factors such as worldview, peer influence, safety, and a myriad of other concerns that affect the child's success in school. We have seen many parents overwhelmed by the responsibility of this choice, turning from friends to family members to colleagues to certified professionals to help them decide what school, what system, what option would be best for their child.

Those of us who are passionate about Adventist education believe that Adventist schools make this decision easy,

Coria-Navia and Jerome Thayer, began a Strengthening Adventist Education (SAE) research project with NAD support to study the same issues concurrently. They collected data from 27 interviews (about half with educators and half with non-educators), 16 focus groups (with 184 K-12 educators and 108 conference and union officers), and online surveys

that make it difficult for pastors and educators to cooperate, such as not involving evangelistic and educational ministries in each others' strategic planning, need to be eliminated.

Finance

The matter of cost and affordability of sending a child to an Adventist school is a recurring theme in the literature. Mainda⁵ found that parents, regardless of school choice for or against Adventist education, have indicated that the cost of tuition is unaffordable, requiring "financial sacrifice and/or financial aid. In the absence of either or both of these, parents are more inclined to select public education. In a study by Marshall,⁶ high tuition cost was the most common reason given by parents for not enrolling their children in Adventist schools.

The pricing model for Adventist education must be brought into focus and properly examined, given current conditions. Mainda⁷ highlights the need for a pricing restructure in light of the effect on enrollment of an increasing number of parents who find that Adventist education is unaffordable.

Financing Adventist education should be the responsibility of the whole church, as it is an important part of our denominational mission and a practical expression of both stewardship and evangelism. To deal with increasingly higher tuition, lower average income levels, and societal changes, a new model for financing Adventist education is needed.

Recommendations

We believe that the problem of low enrollment can only be addressed if there is less reliance on tuition and more emphasis on other sources of revenue. In particular, we recommend that more of the financial burden should be shifted from parents of children in Adventist schools who are members of a constituent church to all members in all churches.

For greater transparency and increased accountability, we recommend that all schools be required to adopt and implement a financial dashboard, use a standard accounting/financial reporting system, require yearly assessment of school sustainability and viability, and include financial accountability in the accreditation evaluation process.

We also recommend the development of a comprehensive plan for strategic placement of boarding academies to address whether certain schools should be consolidated or closed.

School Quality and Accreditation

Adventist schools should be held to high academic standards. In order to achieve academic excellence, there should be

to ensure that all Adventist schools provide quality educational offerings, have adequate facilities, and that rigorous accreditation standards are applied consistently. We specifically suggest the following:

- € Ensure that the membership of the NAD Commission on Accreditation includes persons who are not involved in Adventist education, including lay persons and other impartial members committed to education;
- € Evaluate adherence to standards using objective measures in order to reduce subjective bias;
- € Institute accountability for adherence to standards across organizational boundaries within the NAD;
- € Apply rigorous accreditation standards consistently;
- € Restructure the evaluation process for elementary schools to align with the current secondary/junior academy model.

Leadership Development

Leadership has been likened to a "silver bullet" in enrollment growth.⁸ Osborn⁹ embraced the assertion that "the way a school is operated" ultimately impacts the school's success. Effective school leaders must master and employ good management and leadership skills.¹⁰ They must be empowered to carry out a clear vision and mission; uphold high academic expectations; and cultivate mutually supportive connections between the school, the home, and the church.¹¹ This vision must convey to everyone that a high standard is expected, facilitated, and celebrated.¹²

Good leadership is an essential component of a quality school. The development of Adventist school leadership must be a top priority for the Adventist Church. This development process must include attracting good leaders, training them before they assume a leadership position, continual professional development, and supporting and affirming them.

Recommendations

We recommend the following to enhance the quality of leaders for Adventist schools:

- € Develop a recruitment plan to attract educational leaders.
- € Develop a plan to address the following areas to help retain quality educational leaders:
 - Address educator burnout, especially for teachers in small schools, principals of boarding academies, and teaching principals;
 - Give adequate support that would include necessary support staff, additional conference assistance, and fostering networking with other educational leaders;
 - Provide the 7e revised compensation package.
- € To improve the quality of leaders, we recommend the following:

The NAD Adventist educational system is uniquely positioned to both academically educate and spiritually nurture the children of our church. The complexity of this task rests on the shoulders of our educators, who must be provided with adequate training and resources to effectively fulfill this responsibility.

- o Develop a well-defined, high-quality, educational leadership institute, an intensive program that includes practical training, a competency-based path to administrative certification, and a formal mentorship/coaching program.

School Personnel and Accessibility

A prevalent challenge to Adventist education worldwide is attracting, retaining, and professionally developing teachers and academic leaders.³ While part of this challenge is financial in nature, it is not an impossible barrier to overcome. The approach taken by the Inter-American Division to devise financial initiatives geared toward teacher training, increasing teacher salaries, implementing a bonus for top elementary teachers, alongside other non-personnel initiatives is evidence of this.¹⁴ An investment in securing and further developing quality educators has the potential to yield significant dividends. In addition, recruitment, training, and mentorship deserve considerable attention in order to improve the quality of teachers who are hired and retained.

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Recommendations

To develop a system-wide framework that supports educators, upholds high standards, and strengthens schools, the following are recommended:

- € Develop a plan to identify, recruit, and groom quality persons (teachers and principals) who can be placed in a prospective candidate pool from which to draw when vacancies arise. This would include attracting quality undergraduates to the teaching profession, perhaps by providing tuition loan repayment when they are officially employed by a conference.

- € Include in the teacher-training curriculum the unique mission and value of Adventist education, skills needed to teach in small schools, and more emphasis on practical skills.

- € Devote more attention to teacher quality in employment decisions, both for initial hiring and for continuing employment.

- € Enhance financial and curriculum resources (especially online) to facilitate professional growth. Continual professional growth should be expected for all teachers.

- € Address teacher burnout, especially for teachers in small schools and for boarding academy and teaching principals.

Distance Learning

Collaboration is a key to strengthening schools at all levels.¹⁶ But since most K-12 Adventist schools in the NAD are small schools with few teachers and are not close to other Adventist schools, it is difficult to have face-to-face collaboration with other Adventist teachers. Given the growing technologies increasingly available, the ability to make global resources accessible to teachers and students is an effective way to bring teachers and students together. However, Haerich¹⁷ found great resistance to the idea of adopting a particular brand of online education because conferences and unions do not want their constituents to pay an entity outside their territory for education. Open-mindedness toward cooperation has great potential to increase enrollment opportunities, enabling students to be educated in Adventist schools even if they live outside a school's particular territory. Beverly¹⁸ advances the concept of partnership by proposing the engagement of distance-learning opportunities, with other institutions providing advanced placement courses² and even institutional interfaces and programs outside of the Seventhday Adventist world.²

The potential and attractiveness of distance-learning opportunities suggest a need for additional development and coordination in this area.

Recommendations

We recommend increased funding for and development of distance-learning resources through the NAD's Adventist Learning Community (ALC). Additional materials and courses can be developed for students, whether or not they are enrolled in Adventist schools, and to promote the professional growth of teachers, pastors, and school board members.

Currently, there are several division-wide approved dis-

A companion article with recommendations for pastors and church administrators will be published in the June 2017 issue of Ministry magazine.

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