

“Securing the Future of Adventist Education” (rev. 2)

Paragraph format

Adventist education is a vital part of our heritage in Mid-America and without our schools, the church would face a dim future. In fact, we would lose much of the best of Adventism here and now.

These are the best of times and the worst of times for Adventist education. The best of times in that God is working wonderfully on the campuses of our academies and elementary schools and Union College. Students and faculty are engaged in missions near and far. Faculty and students are winning awards for academic excellence.

Indeed, we can be thankful and proud in the Lord for our schools—for what they are right now. I am optimistic about what we can do to secure their future.

But as I stand before you today, Adventist education is in crisis—not just here in Mid-America but throughout the North American Division. The fact is that our schools are slowly losing students. Enrollment is slipping. We need to find out why. Then we must take bold steps to remedy the situation and brighten the future of Adventist education.

I don't claim to know all the answers. Sometimes the best thing leaders can do is to get the right people together and ask the right questions.

That's why we are here today—to begin the process of securing the future of Adventist education. I'm going to explain the situation as I see it and then challenge you to join me in seeking solutions.

Purpose of Adventist Education

First let's remind ourselves of why our schools exist. More than anything, we need them for our children. Much is at stake in their spiritual nurture.

Adventist education seeks to provide “something better” for our children. First and foremost, Adventist education partners with parents and churches providing an environment where students can develop a life of faith in God. It is a safe place where students can learn to honor Christ, become like Him and work for Him. The work of redemption and the work of education are one.

Second, Adventist education seeks to build character so that students can serve the Lord fearlessly and stand for His principles in all situations.

Adventist education is a place where students and teachers can look at today's problems in light of Scripture. Faith and learning coincide and are interwoven into the curriculum. It nurtures the development of thinking skills and the development of each individual's potential.

The situation is abundantly clear, my friend. We must educate our children in our own school system. Adventist kids need Adventist schools!

Our churches need our schools, too. Not just the church of the future. Adventist schools bring excitement and energy to a church community. Through witnessing and other related activities, students become committed to the church. They develop a desire to know, live, and share the message and mission of the Adventist Church. The longer a student is in Adventist schools, the stronger the likelihood that they will remain committed, involved Seventh-day Adventists as adults. As your leader I am committed to facilitating a process that will preserve and brighten the shining light of Adventist education in Mid-America.

For that to happen we must solve our enrollment crisis. Not enough students means not enough income. Church subsidies can only go so far. It takes a certain number of tuition-paying

students to sustain a school. If a school clearly doesn't have enough students to survive, what happens next? Do we care?

Together we must find a way to achieve our goal of building attendance in our schools. I am proposing a commission on education in Mid-America to oversee three great tasks: 1) assessment; 2) remedial adjustment; 3) marketing. Let's look at each of them in turn:

1) Assessment: Both Assets and Challenges

Assessment involves identifying and examining all the issues surrounding Christian education. It includes but is not limited to the following:

- Focus group discussions with:
 - Educators / Parents / Parents / Pastors / Students / Non-attending Adventist teens
 - (we must particularly listen better to the views of parents of young children)
- Cognitive Genesis Study (testing to begin Fall 2006)
- Demographic studies to help know which schools have a future and which may not
- Status of ethnic and cultural diversity
- Morale of faculty
- Morale of students
- How the church is supporting the school
- How the school is supporting the church
- Maximizing benefits from the church's financial investment in Christian education
- Equity of constituent rates in multi-church schools
- "Worthy student" subsidies

2) Remedial Adjustments

We can be proud of our schools even as we recognize that everything on this earth can be improved. We must adapt ourselves to changing circumstances. With recognition and gratitude for the excellence presently evident in our schools, we must improve everything that we can, beginning with relationships. Realizing the value of working together, I propose that the first of these remedial adjustments would be synchronizing and synergizing relationships between:

- Churches and schools
- Pastors and teachers
- Parents and teachers (includes Home & School Associations)
- Faculty and students
- School boards and faculty
- School administration and faculty
- Conference superintendents and school boards/staff
- Union education department and conference superintendents

Specific areas worth exploring to see if they can be enhanced would include:

- Spiritual atmosphere and sense of mission
- Academic quality
- Uplifting our teachers
- Facilities
- Equipment

- Curriculum (such as the new curriculum in *Pathways: Journey to Excellence*)
- Student activities
- Websites

Miscellaneous adjustments:

- Ongoing educational conferences
- Support for home schools in the context of supporting church schools
- Showcasing schools with turn-around success

3) Marketing

After we assess our situation and make any adjustments indicated, we must vigorously promote awareness of our schools among our own constituents. Since each school belongs to all members of the sponsoring church—not just students and parents—I challenge every constituent church board to adopt the goal that every child will somehow have opportunity to receive a Christian education.

We need to reach out to non-Adventist families in our communities as well. Many wonderful people are as concerned as we are about public schools and would be willing to entrust to us the education of their children. This is a magnificent form of evangelism, reaching not only students but parents. We can increase non-Adventist enrollment without compromising our Adventist culture. And tuition from non-member students makes it easier to sustain our schools.

So let's start there with our marketing and move forward with a creative, comprehensive and energetic marketing plan that includes:

- Academy students traveling to churches to attract students from their own age group
- Elementary school recruiting by 7th and 8th graders
- Education featured in *Outlook*: news and stories of teachers, students, schools
- Providing resources through the Center for Church Life and Growth at the Union.
- Upgrading school websites
- Recruitment videos
- Promotion at camp meetings, summer camps, and pastors' meetings
- Conference, union staff members and teachers promoting schools in our churches
- Education newsletters from the union and local conferences
- Publicity booths for each academy
 - (even elementary schools can have an ongoing booth in their church lobby)
- Assemble complete database of potential students in our churches
- TV spots (in Spanish, too)
- Bulletin covers
- Defusing resistance to the cost of Christian education by promoting its benefits
 - (Lonnie Hetterle has done this effectively for the Rocky Mountain Conference)
- Winning publicity in local papers through doing community services and missions

Timeline of plan

Discussion rollout:

July 5 - 9 / Union Retreat / Duluth

Aug. 7 – 8 / Education Convention / Nashville (Teachers reaction and input)

Nov. 15 / Year-end Meetings / Lincoln (Education leadership reaction and input)

Jan. 30 – Feb 2 / Union Office Education Council / Lincoln (Adding parents to the mix)

Assessment; Remedial Adjustment; Marketing
Ongoing emphasis over the next five years

Question and Answer Session with the Union President
(As time is available)

Closing challenge:

My friends, as we have candidly discussed the challenge before us, I say this in conclusion. When it comes to securing the future of Adventist education in Mid-America, *there is no other option for us than to succeed*. You can take that as a commitment from me to do all I can on behalf of Christian education. I invite you—I urge you—to join with me.

Seventh-day Adventists have a grand heritage of Christian education. Based on that solid foundation from the past, there is no reason we cannot burn brighter in the future.

Any sacrifices we must make will be worth the outcome—a secure Adventist educational system in Mid-America. That's our goal. So let us recapture the vision of our pioneers and implement it in bold and creative ways. And then let us unite as the family of God, called to accomplish His mission in such a time as this.