

## **Making Our Good Schools Great**

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Someone once said to me the challenge that we have with growth in our Seventh-day Adventist churches is that we have no competition. While other churches are trying to find ways they can be more relevant and how they can meet the needs of their community we haven't always been attuned to this necessity. As we know in business, competition causes people to look at how they are meeting the needs of their customers to evaluate if things can be accomplished in a more efficient manner. I was therefore very encouraged to be part of a marketing and visioning session at the Education Council meetings this past March in Oshawa. Unlike our Seventh-day Adventist churches our schools do have competition and it is time to evaluate why enrollment is dwindling and what we can do to compete.



By being involved with our church and its school system for around 30 years I have witnessed some troubling things that in my opinion have led to the decline of our schools. I will share some brief thoughts and opinions on this issue as to why our schools are often in trouble.

### **1. Finances**

Finances seem to always be an issue with our schools and churches. While some conferences have financial support from the provincial government for their schools, most do not. Having these extra government funds makes operating a school a little easier but to me the discussion should not be focused on having funding or not. For me the most important pressing issue that our schools face is how we handle our money. Too often we put people in roles where they are simply not qualified or do not have the training to complete their responsibilities properly. While this has greatly improved in our church in my estimation, we must be vigilant to have qualified people managing our schools finances. I firmly believe until we become good stewards of God's resources He will not fully bless us like He is capable of blessing us. Furthermore, people who have the financial means will not donate to our institutions unless we are handling money responsibly. We must treat all aspects of God's work in an organized and professional manner.

### **2. School board**

In my travels across Canada I have experienced and also witnessed several examples where I believe school boards forget what their role is within the school. Far too often school board members invest a disproportionate amount of energy working to keep the moral standards high to the detriment of their other responsibilities as school board members. I have worked with several school boards and without a doubt the boards that are the most successful guard themselves from micromanaging schools. There are so many other responsibilities for a school board to engage in besides ensuring moral standards. These responsibilities are very well described in *The Journal of Adventist Education* summer of 2008 edition. I believe that if more school boards used these principles described in this article we would have more healthy and efficient meetings and in turn vibrant schools.

### **3. Vision**

It seems to me that visioning and planning for the future is an exercise we sometimes neglect whereas this is an integral process for many non-Seventh-day Adventist institutions. We know that Jesus is coming again and that we want our students to be taught our curriculum but often times that

is where we stop. However, it is vital in my opinion that we plan how we are going to improve our product, improve how we are going to educate young people, and how to have a healthy and vibrant relationship with our Savior. This may require us to take bold steps to do things that have not been done before but as we see in the Bible, Christ was an innovator in how He did things. The founders of our church Joseph Bates, James and Ellen White were all innovators. We too need to act boldly and be innovative so that we can improve our schools and hasten the soon coming return of Christ.

It is good that we are beginning to look into why we are experiencing declining support and enrollment in our school system. However, we have to go beyond asking the questions and start making the difficult changes that will honour and glorify God and make our school system vibrant and healthy.

### **Recommended Resources:**

- Anderson, S. (2009). *How to kill Adventist Education and how to give it a fighting chance*. Review and Herald Publishing.
- Boyatt, E. (2008, Summer). The challenge to lead. *The Journal of Adventist Education*, 5-12.
- Knight, G. (2008). *The Apocalyptic Vision and the Neutering of Adventism*. Review & Herald Publishing.