

## **Limiting the School to Expand the School**

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It is a modest looking building surrounded by portable classrooms set in an agricultural environment just outside of Chilliwack, BC. The school offers Kindergarten through grade twelve and has gained a reputation as one of the finest Christian schools in the eastern Fraser Valley. The school is filled to capacity and has the maximum number of portables. Students are being turned away and parents are eagerly signing their names to waitlists. The financial health of the school is excellent. The school authority has healthy reserves and is ready to build a new and larger facility as soon as a suitable plot of land can be found.



I was recently talking to an official from the school and our conversation turned to the secret of the success of her school. I asked her why her school is so successful while so many other schools seem to struggle for survival. As she responded, I discovered something so very basic, yet unfortunately often forgotten in many of our schools.

All students wishing to attend her school must receive a home visit from a school official to determine if their expectations are compatible with the school purpose and mission. Students from over a dozen Christian denominations attend the school – including some Adventists. It is a requirement of admission that every student must attend and be an active participant in their home church. This must be confirmed in conversation followed by a written letter of recommendation from their local pastor. The school does not accept anyone from non-Christian religions or from those not affiliated with a Christian church. When I asked about this I was told that as a Christian school they have determined that they want to focus on supporting the local Christian parents and churches by helping grow stronger Christians. Since all students are actively involved in church they understand Christian references and terminology and the terms of reference for all classes. The expected tone of the school is already familiar to the entire student body. This school has decided to focus on a specific segment of the population. They then focus all their energy and resources on supporting the success of the program.

As I have discovered many times, the schools that are able to maintain long-term success are those who understand why they exist, effectively communicate this to their community, and consistently operate within an operational framework that effectively helps them deliver and support the mission.

Everyone involved with a school needs to fully understand the mission and purpose of the particular school, otherwise issues and problems begin to affect the health of the school and restrict growth. Some schools operate very well as outreach schools, taking in students who through proper teaching and guidance learn to accept Jesus into their hearts and minds. Other schools choose to concentrate on building up the faith maturity of children coming from committed Seventh-day Adventist homes. Either type of school can be very successful as long as the school administration and staff are working together and

are understood, supported, and encouraged by their local church membership. Different types of schools often require different modes of operation. Also, some staff are more suited to a particular type of school.

Often our schools, in their desire to maintain or increase enrolment, begin to accept students from outside the group identified as the target of the mission. This tends to weaken the ability of the school to adequately focus on the mission, and fragmentation of the school begins.

It is important that local Seventh-day Adventist churches in the area have a role in helping determine the mission of the school and identifying the segment of the population it is trying to reach. When the church and school understand the importance of working together, powerful things can happen. I would encourage every church and school community to set aside time each year for S.W.O.T. analysis to measure how well the school is meeting the needs of the identified population.

By concentrating on a local need and resisting the urge to expand the program beyond what can reasonably be supported, the school may actually experience the glow of positive public recognition for providing an Adventist school of excellence.