

## **Why is it Working Here?**

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Adventist Education is dying. We have even written a guidebook on how to kill it. It doesn't take a few teachers who have taught in our system, very long to come up with some examples of what is crippling the system we chose to belong to.

The pace of life today makes it too easy to forget to see the upside of what we do. The Adventist teacher gets pulled in many different directions, and each direction is the most important from someone's point of view.

There are pockets of Adventist Education that are struggling with more positive "problems". Places where the facility cannot keep up with the demands placed on it. Places where there are more students than spaces to put them. Places where legal loopholes in bylaws are flushed out to allow for program expansion. Places where outreach in the classroom occurs for a minority of "Adventist" students, and a significant majority of families from outside of our faith.

This article is not intended to provide a quick fix or a cure-all formula. The challenges that face our system obviously require more than the practice of some basic fundamentals offered in an obscure article authored by a renegade principal. It is a snapshot of what I believe contributes to the success of a program that is currently an exception to what has become a disturbing trend.

Perhaps the single biggest factor in a school's ability to succeed is the level of support it receives from its constituent church(es). Unfortunately for some of our schools, "support" is defined as not actively attempting to dismantle the school program. Too often our schools are merely the middle ground for a massive power struggle between groups of people who don't attend the same church for very apparent reasons. We have all heard of, or worked in, schools that have a less-than-supportive church community. After all, how many of our church members don't send their own kids to "their own" school?

I am very fortunate to have a fairly open form of communication with my pastor. Upon his return from some recent pastor's meetings, he indicated that information had been shared with the clergy that noted the correlation between the success of a school and the cooperation level shared between the pastor and the principal. But what is "support"? I would suggest that offering to come into the school a couple of times a month for a worship thought falls a little short.

When my church hired its last pastor, the *main* consideration was how that person could help the school. The constituent church for Peace Christian School in Chetwynd, BC has chosen the school as its *primary* method of outreach to the community. My pastor is at the school as much or more than any other "school staff" member. He is still a "real" pastor, but clearly one who is on the same page as the chosen mission of the local church. Does the definition for support need to go this far? Perhaps not, but it sure gives us a huge advantage. In a town of roughly 2500, our K-10 school has grown in excess of 80

students, more than it should hold, with over 85% of the students from a non-Adventist background. Pretty sure there is an opportunity for some outreach there.

Another prime contribution to the success of the program at PCS is the staff. We all know teachers who are at school when it is in session but are visibly absent when the “extras” are going on. Should we expect otherwise? Probably not; besides, who knows how many boxes of work they took home with them? What I do know, is that it is a lot easier to get my students to believe that the extra curricular programs are worthwhile when they see large numbers of the staff in non-required attendance and taking their turn initiating various programs. The reality is the extras are not sustainable unless the staff as a whole buys into the importance of such programs. Bringing Christ into the classroom is essential, but building a relationship in less-structured environments really seems to find a place in our memories. A staff who know more about the students than simply their names share time and space with students who benefit from *relationships* with Christian mentors.

We have all experienced parents. How your last encounter went will determine how you just reacted to that statement. For the most part, the next two statements are applicable: Parents want to be involved. We need parents to be involved. The parent committee at PCS provides significant and tangible support. Although the church family is very accommodating, the financial input it is able to provide has limits. This reality has forced many parents - most from outside the Adventist community – to take a more proactive role in providing for the educational opportunities available to their children. A prominent recent example of this dedication came with the purchase of a portable computer lab this school year. As is the case with staff, many hands make light...

Is it Shangri-La? Have we arrived? Definitely not. Is asking for tangible support from church, staff, and parents more than we should expect? These are some components that will allow our programs to continue to survive and to thrive. Can they be found in your school? What can you do about it? I would suggest that you should challenge yourself to find out.

There are conditions we can encourage that will allow us to thrive in Adventist Education. Is Adventist Education worthwhile and unique? It must be. Is it in crisis? Depends on where you look.