

## Ingredients for a Successful School

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We want to be successful. We plan, we implement, we evaluate, we adjust. Then we re-evaluate. We go through this process repeatedly, trying to hone our product, make it better, more attractive, and more effective. The process never ends, as we constantly try to identify the attributes that will ultimately make our school a success.



We most certainly are not unique, because EVERY school is involved, attempting in its own way to come to grips with what will be perceived as making it a success.

During the "Beyond the Bottom Line" seminar held the beginning of March, 2002, in Loma Linda, California, Dick Duerksen and Dick Osborn presented a breakout session called "Successful Schools Can Happen." In preparation for this session, the union directors of education and North American Office of Education leaders were polled for their responses to the following questions: what are considered to be the most successful schools in your jurisdiction? Why are these schools considered to be successful? What is happening at these institutions that makes them stand out from the rest? What five traits set these schools apart?

From the responses to these questions, Duerksen and Osborn compiled a list of the top 14 ingredients considered to be contributing factors in the success of these schools. These ingredients are listed according to the importance placed on each.

1. **Service/caring orientation** - People are happiest when they are able to do something for others. Successful schools reach past the walls of the building, into the local community and beyond; raising the awareness of the students and encouraging them to be involved in service projects to benefit others.
2. **Stability and reputation of faculty/staff** - Employing quality, qualified, caring individuals, and retaining them, provides a solid base on which to build your program. In so doing, your school will gain a positive reputation in the constituency and community.
3. **Strong financial planning/management** - Operating on a sound financial basis engenders confidence in the school and its program.
4. **Strong Christ-centered spiritual emphasis** - Seventh-day Adventist Christian Education exists so that the lessons taught in school allow for Christ to be brought into the classroom. Parents want their child's education to augment the spiritual training received at home and at church.
5. **Constituency that values Christian education** - How the local constituency views Christian education will determine the amount of support it is prepared to give to the school. The higher

the value placed on Christian education, the greater the support in terms of finance, commitment, and time.

6. **High scholastic excellence/expectations** - Parents want their child to be properly prepared scholastically to enable him or her in the pursuit of higher education and training for his or her future career choice.
7. **Stability and strength of administration** - Leadership is important in that goals are set, maintained, and reached.
8. **Shared Mission/Vision** - If you do not know what your mission or vision is, you will not be able to effectively communicate it to others, nor will anyone be able to work toward meeting it. All of the stakeholders (faculty, parents, students, constituency, conference) must know what your Vision/Mission is, and buy into it, so they are able to be part of the team actively striving to promote it.
9. **Supportive school board** - It is the school board that sets the policies for the operation of the school, and takes the time to look ahead and dream what the school could become. A school board that engages in this will promote a forward-thinking school.
10. **Conference support** - Behind everything else is the conference. Providing for the needs of the administration, faculty, and the school board, the conference acts as a resource to assist the school in meeting its Vision/Mission, while co-ordinating the overall education plan across the conference.
11. **Cohesive administration and staff** - A strong team that works together goes a long way to helping realize the goals and implementing an excellent educational program.
12. **God** - Ultimately, we need to realize that although we act as God's stewards, these schools are all dedicated to God, and are His. We have the privilege to serve.
13. **Pastors who actively promote Adventist education** - Having the local pastor as part of the team provides another avenue for sharing what the school is doing and what it has to offer.
14. **Strong extracurricular programs in music, art, and sports** - Having fine arts opportunities and extracurricular activities allow the students with specialized interests to participate beyond the regular school program. These groups also add to the marketability of the school, while providing ready vehicles for PR.

Successful schools do not happen by accident. It takes planning, organization, and a group of people working together, who are prepared to make sacrifices to achieve the Mission/Vision of the school. There is no single recipe that can be applied to every school to make it successful. It takes a melding of the above 14 ingredients, along with other ingredients that are indigenous to each unique school, for that to happen. This endeavour needs to be viewed as an ongoing process that will adapt itself to the local school, changing conditions, and needs. But never forget, "Successful Schools Can Happen."

### Resources:

- Dick Duerksen and Dick Osborn, *Survey of The Most Successful Schools in the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists*, March 2002.