

## The Daunting Mission

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**"Teaching:** Let me see if I have this right. You want me to go into that room with all those kids, and fill their every waking moment with a love for learning. Not only that, but I am also to instill a sense of pride in their ethnicity, modify disruptive behaviour and observe them for signs of abuse.



I am to fight the war on drugs and sexually transmitted diseases, check their backpacks for guns and knives and raise their self-esteem. I am to teach them patriotism, good citizenship, sportsmanship and fair play; how to balance a chequebook and how to apply for a job.

I am to check their heads for lice, maintain a safe environment, recognize signs of potential antisocial behaviour, offer advice, write letters of recommendation for student employment and scholarships, encourage respect for the cultural diversity of others and, oh yes, teach, always making sure I give the girls in my class 50 percent of my attention.

I am required by my contract to work on my own time (summers and evenings) and at my own expense toward additional certification and a master's degree, to sponsor the cheerleaders, or the sophomore class (my choice). After school, I am to attend committee and faculty meetings and participate in staff development training to maintain my current certification and employment status.

I am to be a paragon of virtue, such that my very presence will awe my students into being obedient and respectful of authority. I am to do all of this with just a piece of chalk, a bulletin board and a few books (some of which I may have to purchase myself). And for doing this, I am to be paid a starting salary that, in some states, qualifies my family for food stamps.

Is that all?" (Landers, 2000)

For those of us in education, the above excerpt sounds all too familiar. Society seems to focus on teachers' salaries. But the same individuals who believe teachers are overpaid do not think twice about supporting the multi-million-dollar contracts of professional athletes and actors by purchasing theatre tickets and \$100 seats for athletic events.

What are the future implications to our church as the pool of available teachers continues to shrink due to the “baby-boomers” retiring? Those of us who hire teachers are scrambling every spring to fill our vacancies with qualified teachers, often with unsuccessful results because of shortages now beginning. In addition to shortages being created by demographics, we must also battle the shortages created by excessive workloads, low salaries, and most importantly, discouragement from the loss of “the mission.” In another word, “burnout.” Compared to nine other major professions, the teaching profession ranks last in entry-level salaries. To make matters worse, teachers’ salaries have not kept pace with inflation. (Davis, 2000)

Research suggests that although money is a contributing factor in attracting new, talented recruits fresh out of college, it is not the primary reason for teachers joining the profession. In Stephen Jacobson’s research on teacher entry-level salaries, he states that teachers’ top two reasons for teaching were “the desire to work with youngsters” (interpersonal theme) and “the desire to serve society” (service theme). Material benefits ranked next to last. (Jacobson) “The mission,” although different in some respects within our church, is basically the same within the teaching profession. In addition to the public sector, we as Seventh-day Adventist educators, seek to help our students develop a relationship with Jesus Christ. Teaching is truly a mission, but the fact remains that every year, experienced teachers are leaving the Adventist school system for the public school system.

As a school system, how are we to hold on to our current teaching staff and how do we attract the most talented students from college to join our ranks? The answer is not a difficult one. First, it starts with our commitment as a church family to Adventist education. Over the years, there has been a steady decline in support within our own church for Adventist education, from administrative personnel, to pastors, down to the grass roots level, we as parents. The recent Canadian Union Education Summit made this very clear.

Imagine if you will, every child within the Adventist church in North America attending an Adventist school. What would the possibilities be? Students would have access to the best possible resources for learning, tuition would be affordable for all, the teaching force could be increased, paid better, and given better working conditions, and we could attract the most talented students from college to join our teaching force. And it goes without saying, the higher the teaching talent, the higher the learning that takes place, the higher the quality in the work force. **The teaching profession is the root of all professions.**

I pray that all of us will take a more aggressive role in the educating of our youth. They are, after all, the future of our church!

## **References:**

Davis, Bryan, “National Salary Comparisons” (*link no longer valid*)

Landers, Ann, “A Teacher’s List of Duties is Daunting”, The Toronto Star, January 28, 2000

Jacobson, Stephen L., “Change in Entry-Level Salary and Its Effect on Teacher Recruitment”, (*dead link*)