
How to Revitalize the Schools: The Southern California Case

by Dean L. Hubbard

Educators in the Southern California Conference are excited about what's happening in their schools. Parents, teachers and students have been working together to develop increasing educational excellence—and they've developed a mutual enthusiasm as well. After four years of continuous enrollment declines (representing a loss of 300 students) and frequent reports of members sending their children to non-Adventist private schools, this year's enrollment showed a dramatic increase of over 150 students.¹

The turnaround began when parents and teachers began to communicate their concerns for their schools and to share ideas for improvement. Shortly after assuming presidency of the conference, Ralph Watts, Jr.,² appointed a blue-ribbon commission to study the problems facing the K-12 (kindergarten through 12th-grade) system. The commission, chaired by the associate dean of the University of Southern California Law School, Jerry Wiley, conducted public hearings during 1982 throughout the conference. As a follow-up to their report, the conference solicited proposals from several firms for a comprehensive study of all aspects of the K-12 educational program, including recommendations for specific strategies for improvement. Dean L. Hubbard and Associ-

ates were retained to conduct the study.³

The team carrying out the study examined every major facet of the K-12 program: (1) planning within the system; (2) curriculum and instruction; (3) standards and requirements; (4) testing and accountability; (5) access and opportunity; (6) finance; and (7) organization and governance of the schools. Several sources of data were utilized. Perhaps most important was the comprehen-

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sive survey mailed to 10,000 homes in the conference. The survey included 50 possible reasons for not sending children to an Adventist school, and families not using the Adventist school system were asked to rate these factors according to importance. Those sending their children to an Adventist school were asked to evaluate the schools, using the same 50 dimensions.⁴

Joan Shoemaker, an educational consultant from the Connecticut State Department of Education, conducted a survey among teachers and principals in the system. The reports of the Southern California blue-

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ribbon commission was carefully studied to provide a context for data evaluation. All major studies conducted nationally since 1980—including the *Nation at Risk* study commissioned by President Reagan, and 29 other reports—were reviewed. Added to this was an analysis of graduation requirements currently in force or being recommended in all 50 states. After recommendations were developed, a two-probe Delphi Questionnaire was sent to over 750 educational and church leaders within the conference in order to build a consensus and solicit additional recommendations.

Following are some of the more salient preliminary findings reported to date:

- Students do better as they progress through the Adventist school system, as reflected on standardized tests.⁵
- Many members without school-age children are interested in the continuing vitality of our educational system, as evidenced by their high rate of participation in the survey (44 percent of the responses received).
- Among the parents of students currently enrolled in Adventist schools, the areas of greatest discrepancy between expectations for the schools and current performance were:
 1. Evidence of planned direction for the system
 2. A positive spiritual atmosphere
 3. School discipline
 4. Adequacy of preparation for college
 5. Principals' leadership skills
- The principal concerns of all groups of parents who send their children to Adventist schools center on "climate":
 1. Control of drug use
 2. Instruction in Bible
 3. Spiritual atmosphere
 4. School discipline
- A secondary set of concerns of all groups of parents who send their children to Adventist schools centers on quality:
 1. Teacher qualifications
 2. Overall quality of instruction
 3. Instruction in the "basic skills"
 4. Adequacy of preparation for college
- Parents who send their children to Adventist schools are not concerned with "extras" such as:
 1. Intramural athletics
 2. School bus transportation
 3. An ethnic mix of students

(Also listed among the bottom 10 of 50 items were foreign language instruction, art and music.)

- Teachers and principals agree that school-wide objectives are not the focal point of instruction and that test results are not used to make program improvements.
- Significant incongruities exist between the perceptions of teachers/principals and constituents regarding:
 1. Safety and orderliness: Teachers rate this as positive; constituents, negative.
 2. The extent of parental involvement: Constituents rate this as adequate; teachers, inadequate.
 3. Home-school communication: Teachers rate this as adequate; constituents, inadequate.
- Anglo parents who do not send their children to an Adventist school gave the following principal reasons:
 1. Quality of instruction
 2. School discipline
 3. Poorly qualified teachers
 4. Lack of perceived difference from public schools
- Non-Anglo parents who do not send their children to an Adventist school gave the following principal reasons:
 1. High costs
 2. Lack of transportation
 3. Lack of perceived difference from public schools
 4. Distance from home

During December 1984, the team reviewed all of the data and formulated 30 recommendations for the Southern California Conference educational system. These recommendations (grouped under the seven categories of analysis) are listed at the end of this article.

In the spring of 1985, the conference accepted all 30 recommendations. Principals in the system were formed into teams to convert the recommendations to specific action plans. Educators were recruited from throughout the union and assigned to individual schools to work as school effectiveness facilitators. These facilitators meet with teachers on a monthly basis to aid in the process of implementing the recommendations.

In September, an audit was conducted with a review of each recommendation to measure performance to date. The results

were exciting and somewhat astonishing. There is clear evidence that the teachers and principals of the conference have pulled together to accomplish the goals, even when it means considerable personal inconvenience. For example, one school did not have the staff needed to teach some of the additional requirements recommended. The faculty decided to rearrange their workloads and each assume additional responsibilities in order to come up to the recommended standard.

At the secondary level, the recommended requirements for religion, language arts, mathematics, science, fine arts, foreign language and vocational education are all being met or exceeded. Only the social studies requirement is less than what was recommended (two instead of three units). Since the recommendations were formulated after reviewing graduation requirements for all 50 states, it can be stated unequivocally that Southern California Conference secondary schools have a curriculum as demanding as that in any state.

At the elementary level, the suggestion that reading occupy a minimum of 15 hours a week has been implemented. The math requirements are being successfully tested in 16 schools and will be adopted throughout the conference next year. The school facilitator plan described above has also been fully implemented.

The next major challenge is in the area of assessment. Joan Shoemaker, co-author of *Research-Based School Improvement Practices*,

will be working with conference education staff in identifying appropriate test instruments so that quality within the system can be assured and reported on a regular basis to the constituency.

Overall, the project is ahead of schedule. Enthusiasm is high among the conference office staff, principals, teachers and parents. Major credit for this turnaround belongs to conference administrators, and in particular to Ralph Watts, Jr., former president;

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Lorenzo Paytee, vice president for administration; and Relious Walden, vice president for finance.

In the judgment of the research team, the future of K-12 education in the Southern California Conference is bright. It is hoped that the reforms implemented will set the pace for a revitalization of the church's entire elementary and secondary educational system.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The Southern California Conference operates one of the largest K-12 systems in the North American Division. Nineteen elementary schools and four junior academies serve approximately 3,400 pupils, while five secondary schools enroll 910 more. A total of 241 teachers are employed at a cost to the conference of over \$2.6 million annually, with an additional \$6.8 million coming from tuition and church subsidies.

2. Ralph Watts, Jr., was recently appointed director of ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) in Washington, D.C.

3. The principal participants in the study included Dean Hubbard, president of Northwest Missouri State University (planning and evaluation); Pasqual Forgione, bureau chief, Bureau of Research, Planning, and Evaluation, Connecticut State Department of Education (secondary education and assessment); Joan Shoemaker, educational consultant, Connecticut State Department of Education (school effectiveness programming and elementary education); Paul Hugsted, professor of marketing, California State University, Fullerton (attitudinal assessment); LeVerne Bissell, registrar and director of institutional

research, Union College (data analysis); and Lorita Hubbard, graduate student in urban anthropology (comparison of graduates from Adventist academies with graduates from public high schools).

4. Several techniques were used for analysis of survey data. These included frequency tables, percentages, medians, "T" tests of significance and Pearson's Product Moment Correlation. Since respondents were asked both to evaluate a particular dimension of the school and to note how important that dimension is, mean differences were used to compare such scores. For example, if the schools scored low on an item which was rated as unimportant, there is little cause for concern. On the other hand, if the school scored low on an item rated to be of great importance, special attention would be necessary.

Adequate responses were received for confidence at the .05 level for the conference as a whole and for

Appendix

Recommendations for Improvement in Southern California Conference Schools

by Dean L. Hubbard and Associates

I. Planning

The conference should establish clearly stated educational goals that are widely shared by teachers, students, administrators, parents, pastors and general constituents.

Individual schools should develop yearly action plans which build on the needs identified through the School Effectiveness Assessment process. The categories included in the assessment were:

- Safe and orderly environment
- Clear school mission
- Instructional leadership
- High expectations
- Opportunity to learn and student time on task
- Monitoring of student progress
- Home/school relations
- Spirituality

The conference should annually integrate individual school action plans into a conference-wide action agenda to insure that adequate resources are available and that progress on the local level is systematically monitored and assured.

II. Curriculum and Instruction

Irrespective of changing demographic patterns within the Los Angeles basin and the Southern California Conference, mastery of the English language should be at the heart of the elementary school curriculum. Language skills include reading, writing, speaking and spelling.

the Anglo ethnic group. This was not true of the black, Hispanic and Asian/Filipino constituencies. However, there were enough responses from each of these groups to provide a good indication of group opinion, and these responses are being separately analyzed.

5. Southern California Conference students compared favorably with all other public and private school students on nationally normed standardized achievement tests. In grades one through eight, 75 percent of the students were at or above grade level on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. In addition, the proportion of students scoring above grade level increased as students' years in school increased. For example, 43 percent of third-grade students were above grade level in reading, but 62 percent of eighth-grade students were above grade level in reading.

Schools should incorporate study skills and higher-order skills (reasoning, problem solving and critical thinking) into the curricula at all levels, but especially in grades 4 and above.

Reading, writing, listening, speaking and spelling should occupy half of the instructional time available during the primary grades (i.e., 15 hours per week).

The English proficiency of all students should be formally assessed before they enter academy. A pre-matriculation summer term and an intensive freshman year remediation program should be provided for students who are deficient in the use of English.

III. Standards and Requirements

At major transition points from one level of schooling to another (e.g., grades 3, 6, 8) key learning outcomes in reading, mathematics and language arts (including writing) that can be reasonably expected of all students should be defined and adopted by the conference. This should be achieved as part of a conference-wide K-12 curriculum alignment study.

The conference should adopt as a minimum standard for academy graduation the completion of 22 units of credit, distributed as follows (effective for the class of 1989; i.e., the freshman class of 1985):

- 4 units of religion/ethics
- 4 units of language arts
- 3 units of social studies
- 3 units of mathematics (including at least 1/2 unit of computer science)
- 2 units of science
- 1 unit of fine arts, foreign language or vocational education
- 1 unit of physical education
- 4 units of electives

The school year should be lengthened to 190 days, with the equivalent of 5 additional days designated for staff development.

Explicit, firm and demanding policies concerning compliance with behavioral standards, attendance requirements, discipline, grades and other essentials of effective schooling should be established by each school following conference guidelines. A written statement outlining these policies should be distributed annually to parents and students.

Explicit, firm and demanding policies for daily homework and independent study should be established by each school following conference guidelines.

The process of "social" or chronological promotions should be abolished; specific standards (at least in the basic skills) should form the basis for grade-to-grade promotion. These standards should be communicated clearly to parents and students.

IV. Testing and Accountability

A conference-wide criterion-referenced assessment program should be developed or adopted to monitor the established learning outcomes. The purpose of such testing should be to identify problems and opportunities promptly so that carefully designed programs of remediation and enrichment can be implemented.

The norm-referenced testing program currently in place should be augmented to provide administrators and teachers with additional analyses of student achievement in order to pinpoint specific problems and opportunities.

To ensure accountability, the conference should participate regularly in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) program. Scheduled to begin in the spring of 1986, this program will biennially measure student progress in mathematics, reading, writing and science and will provide regional and national performance comparisons at grades 3, 7 and 11.

In order to ensure accountability and enhance communication, an annual report on the condition of education in the conference and in each local school should be prepared and widely distributed. This report should include: measures and trends in student performance, the quality and adequacy of resources available, an outline of the instructional processes being used in the school(s), the characteristics and needs of students and in-service training opportunities provided for teachers.

Standardized procedures and criteria for evaluating teacher performance should be adopted by the conference. These should focus on prevention rather than discipline.

Principals and master teachers should be trained in the methods of clinically supervising and evaluating teaching.

V. Access and Opportunity

In order to meet the specialized needs of those students with learning disabilities or severe handicaps that require intensive and expensive intervention, the conference should work

with existing local agencies rather than try to provide these services.

In order to prepare students for effective entry into college and/or targeted post-secondary vocational training, the secondary school curricula should concentrate on the essential skills outlined above. A consensus is emerging in the nation that these skills represent the best preparation for life, including the traditional vocations.

A carefully designed marketing action plan should be developed with the aid of professional counsel which will communicate to the parents of potential students the benefits of an Adventist education.

Churches where there are heavy concentrations of Adventist parents should be encouraged to operate day-care centers as a way of inducing children into the Adventist educational system.

The conference should sponsor a summer program for pre-school and pre-academy students who have demonstrated language and/or basic skills deficiencies.

VI. Finance

The conference should establish a K-12 endowment with the proceeds of the sale of excess academy property. This fund should be administered and distributed by the conference.

Since the K-12 system lies at the heart of the conference's mission and therefore represents a responsibility shared by all members of the church, a plan for general church support of the educational system should be adopted.

As the above programs are phased in, local schools should be encouraged to reduce tuition by one-half in current dollars over the next seven years.

Each school should develop a 10-year physical plant maintenance master plan which includes remodeling, renovation and restoration schedules, and encompasses roof, ceiling, floor, electrical, heating, ventilating and air conditioning systems. The conference should develop guidelines for these studies.

VII. Conference Organization and Governance

One of the conference educational staff members should be designated as director of educational planning and evaluation. The duties of this office should be to:

- Recruit and coordinate school effectiveness facilitators
- Oversee the implementation of regular needs assessments within the schools and the development of appropriate objectives and action plans
- Review and organize individual school effectiveness action plans
- Incorporate individual school action plans into a conference action plan for education
- Serve as an advocate to local constituencies and the conference for resources to accomplish the goals