



An Update on K-12 Distributed Education in the North American Division

When the editor of the JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION suggested I write an update on what is happening in distributed education in K-12 Adventist schools, I was immediately interested. The Adventist Virtual Learning Network group has discussed kindergarten through graduate-level or birth-to-eternity education since its inception in 1999. These early collaborators believed that “together we stand; divided we fall” and “by collaborating, even the weakest school, college, or university can become a stronger influence locally and can serve the needs of individuals in the global community.”¹

So what has happened in the past eight years? Documenting K-12 initiatives is not an easy task, since conferences, unions, and individual schools are constantly moving into and out of distributed learning. If this column misses your initiatives, it's because the author has not been able to find you on the Web!

First, a definition. Distributed education occurs when the teacher and student are in separate locations, and learning occurs through the use of technologies (such as video and Internet). The program may be wholly online or a supplement to traditional classroom instruction.²

Three early K-12 providers were Adventist Education for the 21st Century (AE21)³; Silver State Adventist School (Reno, Nevada); and Griggs International Academy (formerly Home Study International or HSI).⁴

AE21 currently serves 120 students in grades 9-12. The students are located at 16 different sites—eight in Florida, the rest mostly scattered throughout the eastern U.S. Classes are delivered via live, interactive video conferences on regular school days. Other Web-based technologies such as discussion forums, webcams, instant messaging, e-mail, and a secure Website for assignments and grades make this a technology-rich educational environment. The students typically attend an Adventist school and are supervised by local teachers. Several previous articles in the JOURNAL have described the philosophy and educational processes used by AE21.⁵

It appears the staying power of AE21 is related to several factors:

1. It is fully sponsored by the Florida Conference.
2. Because it is connected with Forest Lake Academy (FLA), an accredited high school, its students receive FLA credit and an FLA diploma.
3. It is a true consortium, since 16 schools share teachers and other resources; and
4. It allows parents to keep their children in the local Advent-

ist school.

Griggs' Alternative Programs for Learning Enrichment (APLE) allows schools to offer grades 9-12, even if they do not have enough teachers or students to support a full high school program. How does this work? The students enroll in the Griggs program, but are supervised by teachers at the local Adventist school. The curriculum is available either online or paper-based, and tests are administered by Griggs—often online. Students receive their diplomas and credits from Griggs. In some cases, appropriately certificated teachers may supplement the program by teaching one or more face-to-face courses, thereby offering students a greater variety of options. Griggs works in collaboration with the North American Division and the local unions and conference offices of education to make certain that potential APLE schools have the local support to serve the students well.

Silver State Adventist Academy (SSAA) in Nevada is one of 22 APLE schools. Although it has discontinued its distance-education program, it uses the Griggs program so it can enroll 11th- and 12th-grade students. Gary Wilson, SSAA principal, says the school's enrollment is steady, and parents are pleased with the program.

Griggs International Academy offers a full high school diploma program online. Currently, 302 Adventist high school students are enrolled in this program. Griggs also provides an online high school diploma completion program for more than 700 students studying at Job Corps centers throughout the United States.

Griggs is also developing an online middle school, with the 6th grade available this year.⁶ Griggs International Academy uses the Desire2Learn course management system, a Web-based platform that allows for both synchronous and asynchronous learning. Through use of a discussion board and instant messaging, students can communicate with their teachers and one another.

Distance programs operated for a time in the Mid-American Union and the Hawaii Conference, but have been discontinued. When the grant that financed the Hawaii program ran out, there was insufficient financial support to continue it. The Mid-America Adventist Virtual School (MAAVS) began in 2000 and operated for several years. According to Melvin Northrup, who was on the committee that established MAAVS, its principal objectives were to: “(1) Provide access to a 9th-grade Adventist education for young people lacking that access; (2) Fill supplementary needs for individual high school students with offerings taught by Adventist teachers, and for students in small schools with a 9th grade

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attached to an elementary school; and (3) Provide supplementary classes to senior academies to ensure certification coverage on the campus. Course materials and transcripts were provided by Class.com and Home Study International." Northrup's assessment: "MAAVS seemed most effective at serving small elementary schools with an attached 9th grade where phone lines provided reasonable access." However, the program was not financially viable and did not attract enough teachers or students who could cope with the challenges of online delivery.

Currently, Atlanta Adventist Academy (AAA) operates as a conference school with campuses in Duluth, Peachtree City, and Marietta, Georgia. The use of videoconferencing equipment enables students to be taught by AAA teachers at the campus closest to their homes. All Atlanta-area students assemble two days a week at the Duluth campus for face-to-face classes.⁸

AAA also offers courses to one Georgia-Cumberland Conference junior academy and three other remote sites. These students come to Atlanta for special occasions, but normally attend a local school.

AAA's program illustrates the potential for enhancing small-school curricula with real-time interactive videoconferencing courses. This approach also enables parents and supervisors who live in the city to spend less time commuting and more time with family.

In the winter of 1999, the Connecticut Valley Adventist Church of South Windsor launched plans to begin a new strategy for Adventist education. Because so many Christians are isolated and have limited educational options, they devised an educational plan that would take advantage of the growing availability of the Internet. This plan provides families with a flexible educational program using certified Adventist teachers. The Central Connecticut Adventist Virtual School (CCAAS) initially partnered with Home Study International and Convene, the largest dedicated educational server.⁹ CCAAS currently operates under the guidelines of the Atlantic Union Conference and the Southern New England Conference and is offering grades 4-10 during the 2007-2008 school year.¹⁰

In 2006, the British Columbia Conference started the West Coast Adventist School (WCAS).¹¹ With the province's huge territory and skyrocketing home schooling, church educational leaders felt it was important to provide Adventist education to students who were not enrolled in Adventist schools. Using British Columbia (BC) provincial curriculum, the school represents a collaboration between Caribou Adventist Academy (K-12), Okanagan Adventist Academy (K-12), and other Adventist schools in the province. Currently, it serves students K-8, and adds courses as resources become available. Their commitment is to "make at least 2 home visits to all full-time, WCAS registered students within a reasonable distance of the school, to establish individual learning plans and provide assistance, feedback and advice on their progress." Parents are expected to communicate weekly with the teacher regarding their child's learning.¹²

During the past eight years, a number of NAD K-12 educators have been experimenting with non-traditional delivery methods such as videoconferencing and the Internet. The history of these initiatives suggests that Adventist K-12 educators are reshaping Adventist education to make it available to more young people.

Who provides support and guidance for these initiatives? The NAD union directors and the NAD K-12 Board of Education established the Technology and Distance Education Committee K-12 (TDEC) for this purpose. This standing committee has been given the responsibility of researching issues in educational technology; developing Adventist distance education policies and guidelines; serving as a resource for distance education course development; reviewing and evaluating technology-based courses and programs; and facilitating the integration of technology in the instructional process. TDEC meets three times a year and consists of one representative from each of the nine unions of the North American Division, Home Study International, and North American Division Office of Education. The NAD Office of Education also maintains a partnership with Griggs University so that local schools can enrich their programming with courses offered by its accredited teachers. This is especially beneficial for small schools that may not have certified teachers for some of the courses the school would like to offer.

Larry Blackmer, vice president for education and technology director for the NAD, is planning a "Distributed Learning Summit" for spring 2008 that will bring together those who are providing distributed learning in NAD. This summit will doubtless expand and enhance the AVLN vision of strengthening Adventist education through the use of technology and deeper collaboration. "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. . . . A threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, NKJV).¹

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Editorial

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all, it means getting ready to be with Him. That last dimension—the eschatological one—provides a destination point in life's journey, regardless of its many contours.

Third, Adventist education provided me with a distinct worldview.

Before I went to the Adventist school, my world goals were to climb the professional ladder and live a decent life. But Christian education provided a more wholistic worldview—I am not alone. Above me and within me is God. Around me are human beings

just like me. A vision and a mission link us all together, bidding us to march toward the kingdom of God and to help one another.

The march to the kingdom, the fellowship with Christ here and in the hereafter, and reaching out and touching one another are part of Christian education's challenge to more than a million young people today.

I cannot guarantee that Adventist education will do for everyone what it did for me, but I do believe having that Adventist advantage can make a huge difference in the lives of young people. That's reason enough to support Christian education.—**John M. Fowler.**

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