

Factors influencing enrollment in Adventist K-12 schools: A review of the literature
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Introduction

Since the origin of their denomination in the mid-1800s, Adventists have promoted Christian education as a means to acquire knowledge from a Christian point of view. Training young people for the mission of preaching the good news of salvation to others was and is one of the main engines for the development of a fast-growing international K-20 system of education. While Adventist church membership has been increasing in North America, where the church originated before expanding overseas, enrollment in Adventist K-12 schools has been consistently declining since the 1980s. Table 1 illustrates how K-8 enrollment has decreased by 10,594 students (20%) and 9-12 enrollment has decreased by approximately 5458 students (26%), for an overall decline of 16,052 students (22%) over the last 25 years, according to the *Annual Report* of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists (2005). These trends are most severe for K-8. In 20 years (1980-2000), K-8 enrollment declined by approximately 5058 students, or about 10 percent. From 2000 to 2005, K-8 enrollment declined by 5536 students, or about 11.5 percent in just five years. Enrollment in 9-12 had a large decrease from 1980 to 2000 of approximately 4944 students, or 24 percent. From 2000 to 2005, 9-12 enrollment has fluctuated, but overall has decreased by a few hundreds students. Enrollment in 9-12 appears to have stabilized over the last five years.

Table 1. *NAD Enrollment Report 1980-2005*

Year	K-8	9-12	Totals
1980	53,304	20,557	73,861
1985	51,864	19,573	71,437
1990	50,207	14,882	65,089
1995	50,669	15,766	66,435
2000	48,246	15,613	63,859
2001	48,289	15,582	63,871
2002	46,383	14,102	60,485
2003	44,229	15,782	60,011
2004	42,922	14,662	57,584
2005	42,710	15,099	57,809

While these trends present pressures and difficulties for the Adventist K-12 system, national (USA) trends in enrollment at private and church-affiliated schools have been positive. According to the *Projections of Education Statistics to 2013* report, released in 2003 by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), private elementary and secondary enrollment increased 18 percent between 1988 and 2001 and is projected to increase another 7 percent between 2001 and 2013 (p. 6).

According to the *Private School Universe Survey 1999-2000*, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau and published by NCES, conservative Christian schools have seen an incredible 46

percent increase in enrollment. Approximately 245,000 students in those schools accounted for over 75 percent of the total increase in enrollment at private schools during the 1990s. Also, enrollments at Episcopalian and nonsectarian schools have increased by 37 and 26 percent, respectively. During the same period, schools with negative enrollment trends included Calvinist, Catholic, Lutherans, and Seventh-day Adventist schools, among others.

Having described trends in enrollment for Adventist K-12 education and national private education, the remainder of this literature review is divided into two main sections. The first section describes studies related to overseas Adventist K-12 schools, while the second section reviews national studies of Adventist K-12 schools. Both sections focus on dissertations about perception and factors affecting enrollment at Adventist K-12 schools.

Overseas Studies

In an investigation done in Denmark, Andersson (1985) explored attitudes towards Christian education among Adventist pastors, educators, and church members. She arrived at the following conclusions: (a) an important aspect of marketing Adventist education in Denmark is staff members and students at Adventist schools communicating their experiences with the Adventist school system; (b) older Adventists had a more favorable regard for their experience in Adventist schools than younger Adventists; (c) most Danish ministers and educators perceived themselves as well informed about Adventist education, while approximately one-half of the members perceived themselves as well informed; (d) a majority of Danish Adventists did not consider Adventist education to be too expensive and did not feel that Adventist schools should operate without tuition charges; (e) Danish Adventists indicated a desire for more Adventist schools in Denmark and indicated that their own experience in Adventist schools would not prevent them from sending their children to Adventist schools; (f) members considered articles in “Adventnyt” as the most important method of marketing Adventist education in Denmark; (g) a majority of Danish Adventists indicated that lack of funds would not prevent them from sending their children to Adventist schools, although not having an Adventist school in their immediate locality would prevent them from sending their children to Adventist schools; (h) in general, Danish Adventists had similar attitudes toward Adventist education; (i) Seventh-day Adventists in Denmark believed that Adventist education is a God-originated program based on principles set forth in the Bible and E. G. White's writings.

Li (1986) studied Adventist church members in Taiwan and noticed that the enrollment of students in the Adventist educational system had declined. Both pastors and members seemed to be acquainted with the philosophy and goals of SDA education. Although enrollment had declined, the respondents saw Christian education as conducive to spiritual and intellectual growth. This contradictory situation was attributed to long distances between schools and homes, as well as the high cost of tuition.

Cho (1987), in similar research, studied declining enrollment trends in Taiwan between 1972 and 1986. He found five reasons why church members did not attend or did not send their youth to Adventist schools: (a) the schools were not officially recognized by the Taiwan government; (b) job opportunities after graduation were limited; (c) the cost for Adventist education was too

burdensome; (d) the curriculum was limited; and (e) teachers were inadequately qualified. He also discovered four major attitudes among parents, teachers, pastors, and church members. First, ministers and teachers had a more favorable attitude than did members in other occupations toward the support of Adventist education. Second, parents who were members of the Adventist church had a more positive attitude toward Adventist education than parents who had other religious affiliations. Third, church members who had attended an Adventist school for a longer period of time reported a higher degree of support for Adventist schools than those who had attended an Adventist school for a shorter period of time. Finally, church members who had attended an Adventist college had a more negative attitude toward Adventist education than those who had not.

Chuah (1992) studied religious attitudes and problems as perceived by current and former Seventh-day Adventist students at Adventist 9-12 secondary schools in Hong Kong. This study identified attitudes towards other select variables such as Bible classes, spiritual assemblies, church services and activities, doctrinal beliefs, relationships with parents, teachers, and pastors, self-perceptions, and peer and media influences. The most negative attitudes were towards uninteresting sermons, unhappiness while attending an Adventist school or church, restrictive church standards, not feeling accepted at church, and unenjoyable church youth activities. Eight of the 13 highest correlations dealt with church influences; school-influence variables ranked second. The influence of media and peers ranked 12th and 15th, respectively. Home-influence variables ranked no higher than 17th. The best predictors for alienation that may affect enrollment were lack of church involvement, lack of personal interest of teachers, authoritarianism in pastors, unbelief in Adventist doctrines, lack of personal interest of pastors, negative media influence, lack of religious sincerity of teachers, and family disharmony.

Gregorutti (2000) studied the influence of the degree of identification with values of Christian education on enrollment at Adventist schools in Asuncion, Paraguay. He concluded that Adventist parents would enroll more children if the following conditions were present: (a) high degree of identification with the principles and values sustained by Adventist education, (b) high levels of understanding of Adventist education identity, (c) high amount of information about a particular school to send children to, and (d) low levels of financial problems and distance to the school. Knowledge and understanding of the value and identity of Adventist education is essential for building higher levels of identification with the values of Christian education. A member who identifies with these values will attempt to overcome financial and distance barriers.

North America Studies

In an early study, Metcalfe (1969) investigated Adventist parents' attitudes toward Christian education in seven eastern states. He arrived at the following conclusions: (a) mothers tended to be more favorable toward Adventist schools than fathers; (b) as a group, farmers were most favorable towards Christian education, while professionally employed fathers were the least favorable, and stay-at-home mothers were more positive toward Christian education than mothers employed outside their home; (c) the more highly educated the parent, the less favorable was their attitude toward Adventist schools; (d) parents' religion did not affect attitudes toward

Adventist schools, although non-Adventist parents were slightly more positive toward Christian education; (e) the attitudes of parents with children enrolled in grade levels 1-4, 5-8, and 9-12 were identical; (f) parent's age was not a significant factor affecting attitudes.

Stephan (1979) arrived at six major conclusions in his study of several Adventist schools in Midwest states. First, financial assistance was a major factor determining enrollment at church schools. Church schools with greater availability of financial aid had higher numbers of students enrolled. Second, the further the distance from home to a school, the less likely a student would be to attend. Third, schools with kindergarten were more likely to have higher enrollments. Fourth, children of new church members who are not aware of the advantages of Christian schools were less likely to be enrolled. Fifth, there was a greater chance of enrollment among families in which both parents were Adventist. Finally, parents who believed that secular humanism was having an increasing negative influence on curriculum in public schools were stronger supporters of Christian education.

Kromann (1983) explored parental attitudes regarding Adventist secondary boarding schools in mid-American states. He found a significant difference between parents who did not send their young people to Adventist schools and parents who did send them in their opinion of quality of academics, cost of attendance, parental church attendance and length of membership, work program, faculty dedication, witnessing training, and the dormitory concept. There was no significant difference found between the two groups in socio-economic levels, effectiveness of teachers, and parental perceptions of the schools' uniqueness in teaching Christian beliefs and values. The study revealed that the cost of the boarding school and dormitory-living were two negative variables that may have contributed to non-attendance.

Roesel (1983) examined Adventist K-10 Caucasian schools in Pennsylvania. He also included, in addition to parents, perceptions held by teachers, pastors, head elders, and school board chairpersons. He concluded that (a) pastors were perceived as unsupportive of Christian education at the local congregation level, with a negative impact on enrollment; (b) charging tuition had a positive effect on enrollment; (c) teachers' dedication and involvement were perceived as positively influencing enrollment; (d) distance and transportation to schools had little impact on enrollment; (e) recruitment activities were perceived as lacking and did not necessarily have a positive effect on enrollment.

Rhoads (1986) studied student and parent perceptions of the educational philosophy, academic program, social climate, spiritual climate, moral climate, and staff adequacy, among other factors, that contributed to enrollment and attrition at selected Adventist secondary day schools in Northern and Central California. He concluded that (a) there was a perceived absence of value placed on Adventist education, (b) decisions to transfer from Adventist schools were not related to religious or philosophical issues, (c) parents wanted more school staff assistance with academic, social, and spiritual concerns, (d) parents desired greater participation in school procedures, (e) Christian behavior and social morality was perceived as lacking in the schools, (f) parents and students desired improved disciplinary practices and an expanded curriculum, and (g) administrators' and teachers' performances were perceived as inadequate in many areas of Adventist secondary day school education.

Fink (1989) analyzed perceptions held by Adventist pastors regarding Adventist K-12 schools in eight southern states. The main findings were as follows: (a) pastors felt positively about the creation and maintenance of school; (b) schools were perceived as essential for the inculcation of Adventist doctrine; (c) pastors assumed the responsibility of promoting Adventist education at church and conference levels; (d) ministers believed that all Adventist members should be expected to support Christian education whether or not they had school-aged children; (e) pastors were reluctant to close schools or to be funded by public monies; (f) ministers showed disagreement regarding present support for education compared with the past; and (g) pastors believed that the main reasons for low enrollment levels were related to lack of commitment, tuition costs, and distance to schools.

Araya (1991) also studied the pastoral attitudes related to the Adventist system of education in five southeastern states. He concluded that (a) pastors did not agree with the idea of enrolling more non-Adventist students to balance budgets; (b) pastors did not consider Christian education as primarily an evangelistic medium, although they saw themselves as having strong participation in it; (c) pastors did not believe in preaching more often on topics related to Christian education; (d) pastors of Caucasian groups tended to respond with a higher level of satisfied conviction about Adventist education; (e) pastors who have served longer in the Adventist church were significantly more convicted than younger ministers about the value of Christian education; (f) older pastors viewed education more as an evangelistic medium than younger fellows; and (g) academic quality was not viewed as a restriction for members who could send their children to church school. However, personal relationships and finances were perceived as critical factors for enrollment.

Hunt (1996) examined factors that parents with children attending an Adventist K-10 school in eastern and southern states considered important in determining whether their child will attend an Adventist boarding school. Results of this analysis revealed that parents considered a spiritual environment to be the most important factor, followed by concerned and caring teachers, safety, and school climate. Cost, availability of work opportunities, availability of financial assistance, the presence of a spiritual environment, and a multicultural environment were found to be related to a number of personal and demographic variables. Parents deciding not to send their children after their children had been accepted cited reasons of cost and location.

Haakmat (1995) noticed that despite the numerical growth of Adventist church members in British Columbia, Canada, the enrollment at parochial Adventist schools actually decreased. The main findings regarding members' perception were that (a) older members of the church had a better disposition toward Christian education than newer members; (b) respondents for whom Christian education was a conviction rather than a preference were more favorable in their attitude toward the support of church schools; (c) church leadership was not a factor that contributed to a more positive attitude toward church schools; (d) respondents who favored and who opposed accepting government funds for church schools were not significantly different in their attitudes toward church schools. These results led Haakmat to conclude that respondents in general seemed not to have strong positive attitudes toward the support of Adventist church schools, that church schools were perceived as playing a significant role in the spiritual nurture of students, and that many respondents viewed Christian education as a conviction rather than a preference.

Baker (1996) examined attitudes and perceptions of Adventist pastors toward Adventist K-12 education in southern California. This study concluded that (a) Adventist ministers' philosophical and attitudinal support for denominational schools was generally strong, although tangible, demonstrated support was at a lower level; (b) ministers were generally satisfied with their local church school; (c) there was no correlation between a minister's age, the number of Adventist parents he had, the number of years he attended denominational schools, and self-perceived levels of value and support; and (d) issues related to financial support of the denominational school system was an area of dissatisfaction for many ministers. Most ministers held a strong belief that the denominational educational system was critical to the future health and survival of the church.

Mainda (2001) studied factors influencing school choice among the Seventh-day Adventist population in southwest Michigan. Mainda concluded that the following factors predict enrollment in Adventist schools: (a) beliefs that Adventist education was the best and that teachers should be spiritual; (b) the stronger the influence of children on their parents, the more likely it was that parents would enroll their children in an Adventist school; (c) the more information parents had about the school, the more likely they were to enroll their children at an Adventist school; and (d) parents who perceived Adventist education as worth the cost and who had less need for financial aid tended to enroll their children at Adventist schools. Also, there was no significant relationship between parental school choice and parents' perception of social factors or school proximity. Parents with and parents without children in Adventist schools tended to differ in the area of academic programs. Both groups of parents believed in the superiority of the Adventist educational system over the public one. As a general conclusion, this study found that the declining demand for Adventist education is attributed to perceptual decline in its marginal value.

Booker (2004) examined factors influencing Adventist African-American parents who support Adventist primary schools in the states of Ohio and Pennsylvania. He concluded that (a) parents who attended an Adventist school tended to have a more negative perception of the quality of Adventist education than those who did not attend an Adventist school; (b) the belief of Adventist parents in development and integration of faith was probably the most important aspect in sending their children to an Adventist school; (c) cost and distance were predictors that influenced enrollment among Adventist Afro-American parents; (d) parents with education equal to a high school diploma or less had the greatest variance and most negative predisposition toward Adventist education; and (f) parents who attended an Adventist school were more likely to send their children to an Adventist school.

Lekic (2005) investigated perceptions and attitudes toward Adventist schools in Canada. He compared the differences among Adventist parents with and without children in Adventist schools as well as non-Adventist parents who sent their children to a Adventist school. He concluded that non-Adventist parents, especially mothers, had a more positive attitude toward Adventist schools than did parents in families in which both parents were Adventist, whether or not those Adventist parents had children in Adventist schools. Furthermore, younger single parents who earned less than CAD\$30,000 a year or were unemployed were more positive than older married parents who earn more and were employed. Spiritual focus was perceived as the most positive aspect of Adventist schools, followed closely by interpersonal relationships and

student personal development. For Adventist parents, the top three reasons for sending children to Adventist schools were spiritual focus, a safe and caring environment, and dedicated school personnel. For non-Adventist parents, the three main reasons were safe and caring environment, high-quality academics, and spiritual focus. Adventist parents who did not send their children to Adventist schools gave the following reasons: distance from home, high cost of tuition, and lack of high-quality academics. Other areas of concern about Adventist education were affordability, bullying, availability of extracurricular activities, facilities, variety of available resources, and availability of provisions for special education students.

Bryson (2006) studied the most important factors related to increasing and declining enrollment trends in Adventist boarding academies in North America. The author worked with 8 key factors: Academics, Climate, Cost, Facilities, Leadership, Location, Mission, and Support. According to this research, the most decisive factors influencing enrollment for the respondents were Climate, Mission, and Academics. Cost was the weakest. Contrasting respondents from increasing or declining enrollment academies seemed not different on levels of satisfaction and perceptions of the factors influencing enrollment. These findings confirmed several theories that postulate enrollment as a combination of persons, belief systems, academics, and social influences interacting together to keep a student enrolled in a private or parochial school.

Based on this literature review, it can be inferred that Adventist enrollment is affected by the following set of beliefs, perceptions, and factors:

1. *Parents' perceptions.* Several studies have pointed out that limited curriculum, staff, and amount of available involvement were among the reasons for withdrawal; however, at the same time, parents seemed to agree that Adventist education is very good. Perceptions about teachers' and administrators' training and qualifications are mixed and in some cases might negatively affect enrollment. Perceptions of spiritual environment, such as teachers and school climate, were considered important factors in the decision to enroll children at Adventist K-12 schools.
2. *Identification with Adventist education.* Parents exposed to Adventist education tended to send their children to an Adventist K-12 school. Also, having both parents Adventist increased the probability of a child being enrolled at an Adventist school. A paradoxical situation was observed that affected enrollment. Namely, parents had a tendency to agree that Christian education is good as a conviction rather than a preference, since many of them did not enroll their children at Adventist schools.
3. *External factors.* Whether in international or national settings, distance and cost of tuition were the most often cited and influential factors affecting enrollment. For most K-12 students, distance is a very difficult obstacle to overcome, as was analyzed and demonstrated in the majority of the studies. Beyond a certain distance, parents tended to hesitate to enroll their children in or tended to withdraw their children from Adventist schools.
4. *Promotional factors.* Greater availability of information through pastors, teachers, and church leaders, especially to newly converted parents, would improve enrollment rates.
5. *Church leadership.* Pastors and church leaders perceived themselves as cooperative and supportive of Christian education; however, some parents saw these leaders as less supportive, which negatively impacted enrollment.

Conclusion

This literature review gives a general overview of some factors with positive and negative effects on enrollment at Adventist schools. It can be inferred that the decreasing demand for Adventist education is linked to a perceptual decline in its marginal value, as pointed out Mainda (2001). Parents' perceptions were and will be the strongest factor for overcoming obstacles such as cost, distance, and relationships (Gregorutti, 2000). Administrators, pastors, and teachers have to focus on the distinctive feature of Christian education, which is the incorporation of faith into academic, spiritual, and environmental quality. The question that has to guide schools is *what is our distinctive difference in our approach to educating young people?* Yes, spiritual values and faith are the core of Christian education. But the challenge is to relate these values to good curricula, facilities, teachers, administrators, leaders, and environment.

Table 2 shows another dimension, the organizational one. The situation of Adventist schools in North America illustrates the struggles and problems that teachers and administrators may face in running almost 1000 K-12 schools. Dividing the 2005 North American enrollment of 57,809 by the total number of schools, 966, gives an average of about 60 students per school. Some boarding academies have enrollments of less than 100 students! How are administrators and teachers going to be able to maintain quality with so few students? Schools need computers, updated libraries, training opportunities, facilities for programs, and innumerable other resources.

Table 2. *NAD K-12 schools by type and size, 2003-2004 school year*

School Type and Size	Average Teacher/Schools					Total Schools				
	K-8	K-9	K-10	K-12	9-12					
NAD Totals	679	53	111	68	55	281	186	117	368	966

Over 60% (584 units) of K-12 schools in the NAD have one through three teachers, and so are very small institutions. Will teachers and principals be able to manage the increasing pressures for resources within such limited environments? Will the church be able to cope with these pressures?

Christian education is no longer attractive when parents are asked to send their children only because it's Christian. Other reasons are needed. Resources and management seems to be key factors that require further research.

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