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# Making the Grade

## Is That Boy Ready for the Grade He's In?

By Sheila Moore

**A**bout three years ago, Tony and Linda Goodley were advised that their son, Steven, would benefit from an extra year in first grade.

"Telling him was really hard," says Linda. Her husband concurs. "We knew it would be best for Steven academically, but we were worried what would happen to him emotionally."

It was during a conference with Steven's teacher the previous fall that the couple first learned their six-year-old son was having trouble with reading. Steven, with a mid-October birthday, was younger than most of the children in his first-grade class in Hamilton Elementary School, a one-story brick building nestled in the rural community west of Leesburg, Virginia.

"Steven wasn't even five when he began kindergarten the previous year," says his father. Adds Linda, "We were really prepared to hear that he might have to repeat kindergarten."

But he didn't. Unlike many boys of kindergarten age, Steven's motor skills were very well developed. His attention span *was* somewhat short, and he was restless at times, but no more so than other little boys. A paper-and-pencil readiness test given in the spring of his kindergarten year indicated no serious learning problems.

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Sheila Moore, a former preschool and kindergarten teacher, is collaborating on a book about boys and learning.

It was in the first-grade classroom, in September, that school began to be "not so much fun" for Steven. In fact, it wasn't fun at all.

Characteristic of most five- and six-year-old boys in school classrooms is a tendency to be in perpetual motion, and Steven Goodley was no exception. It was also difficult for him to stay "on task," to keep his attention fixed on a particular exercise. Underdeveloped motor skills and a too-short attention span frequently

cause unready boys to become disruptive and turn into behavior problems.

"Not Steven," asserts his teacher, Judy Whitehouse. "He was always well-behaved. The stories he told in class were highly imaginative, and he was very able athletically."

### Reading Problems Indicate Unreadiness

By the end of the second marking period, however, Steven's

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*Recess is very important to little boys.*

unreadiness began to manifest itself. The most obvious sign was a reading problem.

"During our October conference," recalls Linda, "Mrs. Whitehouse brought up some of the problems Steven was having. At the end of the second marking period, in December, the possibility of retention was discussed."

Such on-going communication with parents is typical of the approach taken by the Hamilton school staff, and other schools who are "in tune," says Whitehouse, "about the importance of success."

"We tell parents early that it may take some of their kindergarten children three years to get to second grade, and that that's perfectly normal," says school prin-

cipal Elizabeth Decker. "Boys," she emphasizes, "frequently *need* more time."

Steven Goodley is one little boy whose parents decided in favor of giving him the extra time, and the results have more than paid off.

"We were pretty anxious about it," admits Linda, "but Mrs. Decker was very reassuring."

"And we talked to other parents, too," says her husband. "We have several friends whose children had been held back, and we turned to them to see what their experiences had been."

What they found was typical: Children held back in the early grades benefit from the extra time.

Steven's reaction to the news that he would be spending a second year in first grade was predictable.

Initially he was upset, and there were tears. For several days he appeared depressed.

"We kept explaining to him," says Linda Goodley, "that he *had not failed*. It was a choice we had made."

### Positive Results From Retention

Steven's second year in first grade was very different from his first. "Steven was at the top of his class," reports his teacher Sharon Dalton. "He was a good student all the way through the year, and became a class leader." She adds, with emphasis, "Maturity has a lot to do with a child's ability to accept what is taught."

By second grade, Steven's abilities were even more evident. "He was self-confident, sensitive, and helpful to the other children in the room. He never got 'flustered' over things that bothered some of the others," said Cathy Scott, Steven's second-grade teacher. "I think the extra time made all the difference."

The problems Steven Goodley had in first grade are shared by many little boys, especially those born in the second half of the year. Experts at the Gesell Institute in New Haven, Connecticut, estimate that one child in three may be in a grade too high for his ability level. Boys are more affected than girls by such "overplacement."

"People expect too much of little boys," says Gesell associate director Louise Ames, whose work with Arnold Gesell and Frances Ilg over the past half-century has had an enormous impact on child development. She believes that boys should be at least 6½ before starting first grade.

"Boys are physical," she says. "They need vigorous exercise—jumping, running, and so on. They play rough, and they make lots of

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### Is He Ready?

These questions were compiled by child-development experts to help parents and teachers assess children's adaptation to school. If a child exhibits two or more of the behaviors described, he *may* be overplaced in his grade.

1. Does he seem immature for his age, in his physical development or behavior?
2. Is he a late teether? Does he often put things in his mouth?
3. Is he more comfortable with younger children? In social situations with his peers, is he more often a follower than a leader?
4. Does he cry over seemingly inconsequential matters?
5. Do his responses to social situations often seem inappropriate—laughing too hard at jokes, making out-of-place comments, or exaggerating his actions or feelings?
6. Has there been a change in his behavior or his health since the beginning of school?
7. Does he ask to stay home, or complain regularly of being "sick" or not feeling well in the morning?
8. Does he say the work is too hard; the kids don't like him; the teacher is too mean?
9. Does his teacher feel that he should be doing better in school? Does he have an attitude problem; is he too aggressive?
10. Does he have a problem with organizational skills at home and at school? Does he lose papers, find it difficult to follow directions, lose his place in the book, et cetera?
11. Is it difficult for him to sit still, or does his attention span seem too short for his age?
12. Does he ask to bring nonschool items ("touchy-feely" toys, small cars, et cetera) to class to keep at his desk, which he may need to feel more secure?

If you suspect that a child is in the wrong grade, a developmental test may help determine his proper placement.

numerous reports have charted a modest increase in 1983 enrollments, along with a big jump in applications for [1984].

“Two factors get most of the credit: the steadily improving economy has made families more willing and able to afford college; and the college population is getting older. A third of all [U.S.] college students are over 24.”—Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges *Notes*, May, 1984. □

## UNCLE SAM AND YOUR SCHOOL

By Gary M. Ross

By now it is well known that the U.S. Supreme Court pronounced February 28 on the application of Title IX, the section of the 1972 Education Amendments that bars sex discrimination by recipients of Federal assistance. Simply put, the decision is this: *Aid* must be read broadly, but *program* can be read narrowly. That is, schools become beneficiaries of government through means as minimal as the acceptance of Pell-supported students, but the compliances required thereby are limited rather than institution-wide.

This decision must not be viewed in a vacuum. First, it raises fundamental questions about the internal structure and external autonomy of almost any school. For example, it may check bureaucratic overkill to regard antidiscrimination laws as program-specific, but what will it do to an institution's accounting procedures if not expand them at great

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cost in order to trace and track programs that Federal funds might be supporting? If we have reached the equivalent of saying that a veteran's pension check spent on groceries now constitutes Federal aid to the supermarket, what school can claim independence any longer?

Second, the ruling inevitably touches other (although not all) types of discrimination, for the wording in Title IX is identical to that of statutes affecting minorities, the handicapped, and the aging. Many indeed are the rights thus placed in jeopardy. On the other hand, the requirement of racial nondiscrimination remains unique and exceptional, given its elevation to the level of “public policy” in the May, 1983, Bob Jones University ruling—few foresee *its* rollback to a mere program of an institution.

Third, as is often true when rendering a decision, the Supreme Court rests its case on “congressional intent”—the purpose of the law the application of which is being determined. But *that* is interpreted in a manner contrary to all Administrations since 1972—except the current one. Understandably, therefore, the matter cannot be considered settled. Recently a large bipartisan coalition of Senators and House members introduced legislation to change the words *program or activity* in the statute to *recipient*, thus affirming that the entire institution is obligated to comply with the law. □

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## School Libraries

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will prepare them to use nearly any library anywhere. This should help make them more successful in both their school and future careers.

7. The project has possibilities as a pilot program for other

unions and conferences.

At the beginning of 1984, the elementary schools and junior academies in the Florida Conference joined those in Georgia-Cumberland as members of ANGEL. In addition, two schools from regional conferences in the Southern Union have made special arrangements through their conferences to be included with one of the member conferences, bringing the total membership in ANGEL to 115 schools. Response has been overwhelmingly positive.

Reuben Hilde has warned that Adventist education must grasp one reality: The school will shape the child.<sup>5</sup> It will shape him academically; it will shape him spiritually—and in large measure will determine whether he will become a scholastic winner or loser. A program like ANGEL can help prepare students to be winners. □

### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Iris Farrell Denison, “Literature in Seventh-day Adventist Secondary Schools,” *The Journal of Adventist Education*, 43:1 (October-November, 1980), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Reuben Hilde, *Showdown* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1980), pp. 18, 107.

<sup>3</sup> William Glasser, *Schools Without Failure* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Moore, *Adventist Education at the Crossroads* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1976), p. 103.

<sup>5</sup> Hilde, p. 19.

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## Making the Grade

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noise. Recess is very important to them.”

### Developmental Lag

Girls, who are able to sit quietly and who do not seem to have the same need for vigorous activity as boys, fare much better in first grade. One reason for this difference in readiness for the demands of formal academic learning is a natural developmental lag that occurs in males who are, on the average, a half to a full year behind girls at the age of six.

In a first-grade class, this developmental lag places boys at a disadvantage right from the start. First grade requires a lot of writing; boys' fine motor skills are often not sufficiently developed for writing. Much of the instruction is verbal; boys are less likely to follow verbal directions and they do not always understand exactly what the teacher means.

Another important difference: Unlike their ginghamed, pig-tailed classmates, boys do not seek adult approval nearly as often as girls do.

### Testing for Behavioral Age

While educators have known for years that boys are not as ready for first grade as girls, very little was done to compensate for their readiness short of retention. The developmental experts at Gesell and elsewhere have been busy, however, devising ways to determine a child's *behavioral* age; that is, the age at which a child is *behaving*.

Establishing such developmental markers has been a major goal of researchers, and experts are agreed that predictable patterns of development are followed from birth.

Individually administered developmental tests give a teacher information about a child's motor, language, and social growth as well as his intellectual performance.

A complete developmental test often is able to indicate that a child is not ready even if a paper-and-pencil readiness test shows that his scholastic achievement seems to be up to par. *By itself, reading readiness is not the same as readiness for the first grade.*

### Unable to Cope?

A little boy's ability to cope with the social and emotional demands of an all-day situation may be far more important than his score on a readiness test. Dealing with the

cafeteria, for example, can provide anxiety in the most ready of first-grade children.

Just getting to school can be traumatic for the typical first-grader, and classroom tasks pose their own sets of problems. For the ready child, coping with such demands consumes all of his energy.

Being ready for the experience, however, these children soon adapt. Being ready, as well, for the intellectual demands of first grade, these more mature children experience fewer reading problems. The work required matches their ability to accomplish it.

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### *One child in three may be in a grade too high for his ability levels.*

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Imagine the plight of the unready first grader, often a little boy. For this child, social situations like the cafeteria line continue to be major hurdles. Inappropriate responses can make them worse. He may cover up his uneasiness by being aggressive, causing many of his classmates to avoid him. If he is unable to do the work, he may scribble in desperation on his papers or "act out" in other ways. Those around him react in predictable ways. Teachers give reprimands and call parents. Classmates begin to isolate him.

The unready child does not adapt. He continues to be unduly fatigued at the end of the day, and may become more, instead of less, fearful of new situations. Children who are in the wrong grade are under stress. Like stressed adults, they often develop physical symptoms such as colds or headaches. An informal survey of local public school systems in the Washington, D.C., area indicated that between 5.7 and 11.5 percent of first-grade

ers were retained in 1982-1983. In jurisdictions that kept records based on sex, figures show far more boys than girls were retained.

### Alternatives to Retention

Are there alternatives to retention for the immature child? "Yes," Gesell's Louise Ames emphatically asserts. Replacing a child in a lower grade is often a good way to deal with unreadiness.

But what if he's ready for a whole day of school? Or—and this is a very real consideration, especially for single parents—what if there is a baby-sitting problem, or an unwelcome choice between day care and first grade?

In Fairfax County, Virginia, a combination kindergarten/first grade program is sometimes provided, in which the child attends a morning kindergarten and spends the afternoon in the first-grade classroom. According to Bob Pantall, who coordinates special education, "This type of program provides an acceptable solution for the child who is ready for a full day of school, but developmentally unready for all of the academic work of the first-grade classroom.

"Retention for the very young child is not a real problem," he continues. "With a somewhat older child, he does realize that he is no longer with his age group, but even more important is his sense of relief that he no longer faces the threat and competition that are so devastating."

### Prevention Is Important

Prevention is a goal of many school jurisdictions. In some locations, entering kindergarten children are given an individually administered readiness test; hand-eye coordination, physical development, perception, and overall concentration are assessed. Pre-school programs can help target

children at risk before they reach kindergarten age.

In view of the differences between boys and girls, developmental guidelines would seem to be a better basis for first-grade admission than age. Such guidelines *are* used in the case of early admission programs.

### Self-Esteem and Success

Children need to be in the right grade in order to deal with what is expected of them. Feeling competent and confident contributes to a child's self-esteem—the most important ingredient for success. A second year in first grade gives many children the extra edge they need. For boys like Steven Goodley, it works well.

"I really like school," Steven says. He shows a picture he has drawn of two stylized insects. They have smiling faces and intricately patterned shells.

"My teachers are really nice, and I have a lot of friends."

For this boy, understanding parents and the caring staff of his school have made all the difference. Sums up Judy Whitehouse, "Children today grow up fast enough without being pushed. They need time—time to grow—and time to do what *they* need to do." □

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## School Safety

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to become familiar with child labor laws. In several instances, State authorities have learned about possible violations of the child labor laws at our schools and have subsequently inspected the operations and work practices at these academies. Unfortunately, such inspections have often uncovered

violations that resulted in stiff fines.

Most Adventist principals and administrators seem to be aware that there are State and Federal laws restricting the employment of children, but they are generally not sure exactly what the laws require. It would be wise for every administrator to become knowledgeable about the restrictions for different age groups. Following is a list of Federal guidelines:

A worker who is 18 years of age or older may hold any kind of job with no restrictions (other than overtime pay) on number of hours worked or time of day.

#### ● 16- and 17-Year-Olds

There is no limit on the number of hours or the time of day worked by 16- and 17-year-olds; however, they may work only in jobs not declared hazardous by the Secretary of Labor. Hazardous jobs include those involving or connected with explosives and radioactive materials, power-driven wood-working, metal-working, paper converting, and other machinery; power-driven saws and shears; motor vehicles; most power-driven hoisting equipment, including non-automatic elevators, forklifts, and cranes; brick and ceramic manufacturing processes; wrecking, demolition, excavation, and roofing.

#### ● 14- and 15-Year-Olds

Fourteen- and 15-year-olds may be hired only in jobs that do not interfere with their schooling, health, or well-being. This includes office or sales jobs, nonmotorized delivery work, and cleaning and maintenance work. Maintenance work, however, may not include the use of power mowers or cutters, or other power-driven machinery. Fourteen- and 15-year-olds can in *no case* work in an area

where manufacturing or processing operations are taking place. This is an area in which a number of our schools are in violation of Federal child labor laws.

Young people in the 14-to-15 age group are allowed to work only between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. They are allowed to work no more than 40 hours a week or 8 hours a day from June 1 through Labor Day. When school is in session these hours are further restricted from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., with a three-hour limit on school days, eight hours on non-school days, and a maximum 18-hour week.

#### ● Under 14

Students under 14 years old may work only if their jobs are exempt from child labor standards or are not covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). Exempt occupations include newspaper delivery, acting jobs, and work in a business owned by a parent (except where that work is in manufacturing or a hazardous occupation).

#### ● Wages

Minimum-wage standards apply to all occupations that fall under FLSA, though an employer may apply for certification under the subminimum wage program. Under this program, an employer can pay workers who are also full-time students at 85 percent of the \$3.35 Federal minimum wage for work in retail stores, agricultural enterprises, some educational institutions, and service establishments. Certification can be obtained from any regional office of the Department of Labor's wage and hour division.

State labor laws apply here also, since in some cases they are more strict than Federal laws. Your State's labor agency can inform you regarding child-labor laws in