

Andrews Academy

An Exemplary Private School

By Greg Dunn

When the Council for American Private Education announced its selections of exemplary secondary private schools in America in June of 1985, months of anticipation on the part of Andrews Academy officials finally ended with the news that their school was indeed one of the nation's outstanding private secondary schools. The honor validated the continued efforts of Andrews Academy personnel to provide an excellent education for academy students.

Former U.S. Secretary of Education Terrell Bell developed the exemplary private school recognition project, designed to meet challenges proposed by the well-publicized "Nation at Risk" report on the quality of education in the United States.

Sixty schools were selected for recognition in 1983-1984, the first year of the project. To launch its second year, the program was announced to more than 6,000 eligible schools. Nearly 260 applications were submitted, with 65 being selected as exemplary private schools in America.

"Private schools help substantially to achieve the

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***U.S. Secretary of Education
William Bennett congratulates
Principal Richard T. Orrison
on Andrews Academy's selection
as an exemplary secondary
private school.***

rich pluralism which distinguishes American education," said Robert L. Smith, executive director of the Council for American Private Education (C.A.P.E.), which managed the private school recognition project through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Smith stressed that the schools selected did not necessarily represent the best schools in the country but rather reflected a profile of the nation's private schools. The schools chosen included secular and denominational schools, traditional and nontraditional, coed as well as single sex, day and boarding schools, alternative schools, and schools for exceptional children.

The schools that were recognized had much in common. "All were vitally interested in and attentive to their students as growing human beings, their values, their goals, their character, what they believe in, where they are going, and why and how. In short, the long tradition of private education in giving equal emphasis to intellectual and moral growth is clearly reflected among these schools," Smith explained.

In the first year of the project no Adventist schools were included. However, when the project was announced the second year, several Seventh-day Adventist schools decided to participate. Dr. Richard T. Orrison, Andrews Academy principal, filled out a lengthy application form detailing exactly how the academy met the requirements that the project committee was looking for in outstanding schools. Ques-

tions regarding the school's statement of philosophy, its academic standards, and how it promotes values and ethics, were asked. The criteria that C.A.P.E. was looking for in outstanding schools were laid out clearly and specifically. Among the things they were assessing were whether

1. The school has a clear statement of philosophy that is periodically reiterated by its governing body.
2. The school offers educational experiences consistent with its mission; it stresses the acquisition of basic skills and also challenges its students to engage in complex reasoning and helps them grow in intellectual and moral judgment.
3. The school maintains rigorous academic standards and stresses the development of each student's talents.
4. The school is able to demonstrate its quality. This is evidenced by student achievement consistent with its philosophy and the needs of the community it serves. Indices of quality include, but are not limited to test scores, college entrance exams, participation in academic contests, graduation requirements, length of school day and year, job placement, acceptance into military service, extracurricular activities, service projects, truancy rates, et cetera.
5. The school believes that its teachers are measured by both their effectiveness in teaching subject matter and by their capacity to affect student growth.
6. The school promotes values and ethics for com-

plex as well as simple situations.

7. The school encourages faculty and staff to play an active role in counseling students to help give them a sense of perspective on a wide variety of personal and ethical concerns.

8. The school stresses and practices social and community responsibility.

9. The school strives to maintain a multicultural and multiracial environment and works to provide financial aid for a broad range of students in an effort to build a diverse student body.

10. The school regularly evaluates itself, involving both faculty and staff in this process.

11. The school's continuing commitment to staff development is reflected in its annual budget.

12. The school evidences sound and prudent financial management and is candid with regard to the use of its resources.

13. The school regularly and substantially involves parents in school affairs.

In addition to all these clearly stated criteria, the selection committee was also interested in knowing of any specific environmental, physical, or other strenuous challenges to the school's ability to fulfill its goals over the past five years.

From the 260 applications received in 1985 by C.A.P.E., 120 schools were selected for on-site visits. In the end, approximately half of the schools visited were named outstanding schools.

A team of two members visited each of the selected schools. One member was to be familiar with the type of school being evaluated; the other had to be an expert on excellence in other aspects of private education. The two individuals who visited Andrews Academy were Stanley Chace, at that time Chairman of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction for the School of Education at Andrews University; and

Ronald Cook, Superintendent of the Catholic Diocesan Schools in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The two visitors spent one complete day at the academy. Their activities included attending classes, visiting with selected faculty, eating lunch with students, observing extracurricular activities such as intramurals, and meeting with administrative personnel.

In describing the school's philosophy, the site visitors said, "Immersed in the scholarly climate of the university campus school, these high-school students are guided in developing the concepts that all truth originates with God, that there is no dichotomy between sacred and secular knowledge and that its pursuit is worthy of one's best efforts. Sensitive to the dynamics of modeling, the faculty are committed to being all that they would have the students become, demonstrating open-mindedness in the search for truth, manifesting sensitivity, empathy and compassion in dealing with others and witnessing to the personal fulfillment found in lives dedicated to the service of others."

The site visitors went on to say that the school is quick to address major challenges to its goals, and this process is enhanced by the explicitness with which its goals are stated. "Continuous process formative evaluations in the form of faculty evaluations by students, student performance reports, parental input via questionnaires and personal contact, public input at faculty and/or school board meetings provide valuable feedback. The administration is quick to appoint ad hoc committees to address emerging challenges." Among these challenges have been:

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anchors to hold children steady when they feel adrift.

But even more important, the deep loyalty of a Christian teacher will make it easier for love to be displayed with all of its persuasive power at a time when children need it most. When Jesus taught on this earth, He modeled a crisis curriculum Christian teachers would do well to emulate.

"In every human being He discerned infinite possibilities. He saw [children] as they might be, transfig-

Children should be encouraged to share their feelings about the person or the event and to formulate their memories.

ured by His grace,—in 'the beauty of the Lord our God.' [Psalm 90:17]. Looking upon them with hope, He inspired hope. Meeting them with confidence, He inspired trust. Revealing in Himself man's true ideal, He awakened, for its attainment, both desire and faith. . . . To Him nothing was without purpose. The sports of the child, the toils of the man, life's pleasures and cares and pains, all were means to the one end,—the revelation of God for the uplifting of humanity."⁹ □

FOOTNOTES

¹ Marta Vogel, "Growing Through Grief," *Washington Post* (February 3, 1986), p. B5.

² Richard Cohen, ". . . For Our Children An Exposure to Death," *Washington Post* (February 8, 1986), p. A21.

³ Vogel.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Quoted by Lynn Olson, "Encourage Students to Express Their Feelings, Experts Suggest," *Education Week*, 5:21 (February 5, 1986), p. 7.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View,

California: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1903), pp. 80, 82.

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Organizations

Good Grief, 295 Longwood Ave., Boston, MA 02115. (617) 232-8390.

Living Through Loss, Park Centre Counseling Center, 12114 Greenleaf Ave., Potomac, MD 20854. Judith Frank and Robert Lazun (301) 762-0145.

Andrews Academy

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1. The struggling student

The unique environment of Andrews Academy generates many college-bound students, the report says. "Some are children of university students, a significant number of which represent overseas cultures. These students bring special learning problems which have been identified and are being addressed. Another class of struggling student is that of American students who have developed learning disabilities prior to admission. Not only is concern shown for these struggling students, positive programs of remediation and assistance are being provided."

2. Demands on faculty time

Committed to serve a widely spread student population in terms of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, the faculty are severely taxed by demands upon their time outside the regular schedule to meet the varying needs. Dedication to the

school's goals is seen in special tutoring sessions, supervision of and participation in extracurricular activities, student social events in faculty homes and the faculty's ready availability via telephone during non-teaching hours.

3. Financial assistance for students

"Although Andrews Academy has excellent facilities, a unique curriculum, and quality in-house and extended campus resources, vis à vis the university, the school is limited in serving its potential student population due to the high tuition costs in an area of economic recession. A number of innovative and creative ways are being explored by which greater financial assistance may be provided to students."

Andrews Academy has an unusually high percentage of students who go on to postsecondary education; in the past four years some 89 percent of academy graduates have pursued a college education. Fewer than one percent of the students dropped out of school, and on any given date 97.5 percent of the students are in attendance.

In October, 1985, the academy held a convocation to celebrate the school's award. Chace and Cook both attended. Chace commended the student body for their beautiful spirit of service and of family and added "but there can't be true Christian education without Christian teachers, administrators, and faculty, as well as student body." Cook stated that at the time of his visit he had been especially impressed with parents' involvement and with their knowledge of the goals and ideals the sponsoring church officers had delineated for Seventh-day Adventist education. "Catholic parents and church educators have traditionally followed the pray, pay, and obey cliché, a cliché that doesn't exist here," he said.

David W. Bowell of the United

States Department of Education, representing William Bennett, Secretary of Education, was also present to congratulate members of the student body and faculty. Bowell spoke highly of the involvement he observed among Andrews Academy parents: "Schools like Andrews Academy point to academic excellence. You deserve a round of applause for a job well done. You have proved that excellent education is worth reaching." Responding for the academy Principal Orrison said, "We shall continue to strive for a program that will be considered excellent in the divine eye. What has been accomplished is a strong statement about Seventh-day Adventist education." □

Orrison Interview

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and what was unprofitable.

Then, there's a lot that I could say about the personal interview that I conduct each year with each of the faculty. I don't want to overemphasize it, but I feel that it really is a key to the program here. One of the things we talk about is what they think the strengths and weaknesses of Andrews Academy are. Their ideas are worked up into a list that we relate to during our postschool week. Subcommittees of the faculty are set up, and every one of those weaknesses or improvement ideas is considered by the faculty. Through the years we've seen significant forward steps taken through this process.

You expect a lot of your teachers, especially in these days of financial belt-tightening. Yet, teachers tell me that faculty morale is quite good. What do you see as a key factor to keeping or developing a positive faculty morale?

I think trying to maintain an atmosphere of openness and trying to follow a plan of making decisions together. Now, obviously, sometimes when we come to the end of the line, the administrator has to make the decision. If the faculty think their voice has been heard, it helps them to say, "Well, we did the best we could, and I'm willing to do my part to see that it works."

When a teacher is not meeting your expectations, how do you handle the situation?

Through personal interviews.

For your annual interview with each faculty member, you require each to fill out a lengthy evaluation questionnaire. What is accomplished by this process?

Lots of things. I referred to one of them when discussing school evaluation. In addition to that, the interview covers an area where the teacher and I identify personal professional objectives for the next year. Usually, and especially if the teachers' programs are satisfactory, they choose those objectives themselves. But if I see an area I feel they need to improve, then I inject my feeling by saying, "I'd like this to be one of your objectives for next year."

I think one of the greatest values of this plan is that it provides an opportunity for teachers, especially those who may be too busy or too reticent, to come talk with me for a long period of time. They know that for that period of time, they have my undivided attention and any topic that is important to them, as well as those on the outline, can be covered.

Every principal must wrestle with financial concerns. What are you having to cut and what are you doing to maintain a quality academic program?

This is probably the greatest challenge that we are faced with at the present time. I have been so very

pleased with the selective curriculum concept that has been operable here. However, I fear it is in jeopardy.

Will you define that?

Yes. After the freshman year, students may choose the courses they can take within the guidelines of the requirements of graduation. Obviously there has to be a limit on the selection available.

This has had a lot of psychological value because students feel that they are in charge of some aspect of their education.

I think that financial pressures are placing that concept in jeopardy right now. Three years ago when we were really faced with financial constraints, we found it necessary to reduce faculty and increase the instructional load of those who remained. I told the faculty that this plan would operate for three years. If they would give me three years under these circumstances, we would get through it or we would change our plan. Well, we're coming to the end of the three years, and there is really no bright enrollment increase on the horizon. We have maintained our enrollment, with modest increases here and there, but certainly nothing to crow about. The prospects of an enrollment increase in the future are just not there. So, very regretfully, we are just now entering into serious discussions about changing the plan.

How many Seventh-day Adventist academy-aged students in this area are attending public high school and why? What do you think it would take to get them into this school?

That is a tremendously complex situation. I don't know for sure exactly how many Adventists are in public school, but I wouldn't be surprised if there are 50 or so. In order to make it possible for them to be here, there would need to be addi-