

CREATING A 21ST CENTURY CURRICULUM FOR ADVENTIST SECONDARY SCHOOLS

THE CURRICULUM FUTURES COMMISSION

By James Epperson
and Richard Osborn

Will the new millennium arrive ahead of schedule for Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools? Or will we still have a curriculum and delivery system like that of the 1960s? How should we plan for the future? Should we just strengthen our current program? Or should we develop a "cutting edge" curriculum that emphasizes the latest research in education while still remaining distinctively Adventist? As college admissions standards mandate higher academy graduation require-

ments, how much more can we expect of our academies? Should they have a well-defined and required core curriculum? If we decide change is needed, should it be gradual or revolutionary? "Top down" or "bottom up"?

Appointment of Curriculum Futures Commission

Brainstorming by union educational administrators at curriculum committee meetings led the North American Division to form a Curriculum Futures Commission focused on secondary education. The group began work during the 1994-1995 school year and expects to continue for at least three years.

Many observers feel that the secondary level curriculum and delivery systems pose one of Adventism's greatest educational challenges. Accordingly, the purpose of the commission is

To develop suggested changes for curriculum reaching into the 21st century in Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools. This curriculum will prepare young people for effective Christian service and character development. The Commission will study educational principles found in the Bible and the writings of Ellen White in relationship to the changing needs

of the world and the church. The Commission will bring recommendations to appropriate educational entities responsible for implementation. Summary materials will be prepared for distribution to the educational system.

The 16-member Curriculum Futures Commission has at least one member from each North American Division union and includes academy teachers and principals, conference superintendents of schools, education professors, and several union directors of education and their associates. To show its commitment to the importance of the commission, the North American Division is funding all travel costs for the non-union representatives.

Because of the commission's huge task, two union educational directors were appointed as co-chairs. Jim Epperson (Southern Union) chairs the Core Curriculum Subcommittee, and Richard Osborn (Columbia Union) chairs the Research, Trends, and Development Subcommittee. On some issues, the two subcommittees work together.

Involving Teachers

Usually, commissions work quietly for several years and then produce a dramatic report, hoping this will pro-

duce desired changes. However, early on, the Curriculum Futures Commission decided to publish an inexpensive newsletter after each meeting. Through the newsletter, teachers get rough drafts of proposed documents and an insider's perspective on the ideas and discussions taking place. Teacher input is obtained through surveys, which provide regular feedback to the commission.¹ To minimize costs, each union office receives laser originals to reproduce and send to their teachers of grades nine to 12. In addition, the General Conference Department of Education also receives copies for division leaders.

Initial Recommendations

At the conclusion of three two-day meetings held in 1994-1995, the commission voted to focus on three major goals:

To identify the learnings and skills every graduate of a Seventh-day Adventist secondary school should possess.

To define the most efficient ways to teach these learnings and skills.

To develop methods for measuring the identified learnings and skills.

The commission is asking classroom teachers to identify the most important learnings and skills every student should know by graduation. Rather than being content or discipline specific, the skills defined will be general in nature. More specific goals will also be prepared, either through the division's curriculum guides or at the local conference or academy level.

The commission struggles with issues that, in many cases, parallel the debate about public education in the

United States and elsewhere. How should we define competency? Should we promote outcome-based education, or is this approach too controversial? What about control? Should the North American Division set national standards, or should standards be established at the local conference or school level? Does the local level have the time, expertise, or finances to develop detailed standards? Or perhaps we should establish minimum standards at the division level, leaving room for the local level to go beyond them. How should we define the unique goals of Seventh-day Adventist schools in establishing a required core? What about time? Since everyone learns at a different rate and style, should we go to a competency-based program? Should we do away with seat time based on lecture and recitation as the key criterion for earning credit for an academy class?

Getting secondary schools and teachers to actually make changes is one of the biggest challenges facing the commission. Studies can be produced and recommendations made, but how will they be implemented? Undoubtedly, some of the recommendations will be enacted as policy by various unions. However, the greatest impact might result from creating a

church-wide culture that fosters responsible change through networking, peer support, staff development, pilot studies, and model schools and programs, rather than from mandates. Change takes place gradually and through persistence. Church organizations sometimes give up on change because of a lack of perseverance, patience, and motivation. The commission hopes to deal with these challenges in a realistic and pragmatic manner, using some of the best research on change theories.

Core Curriculum Subcommittee

The Core Curriculum Subcommittee plans to define core elements of the fundamental principles unique to Adventist education. The subcommittee debated at length the purpose and potential outcomes of this mandate, as well as how to make the product practical and usable for teachers. Their conclusion: Effective change must come from the bottom up; therefore, input from educators, division-wide, is essential.

Members agreed that the end product must help Adventist educators to meet the demands of the rapidly emerging world of technology and information management. As new subjects are added, the curriculum will continue to change. How can we promote and facilitate change while maintaining the unique philosophy and goals of Adventist education? Considerable time has been spent studying the goals in America 2000, which identified key elements of the curriculum for public schools in the next century. The subcommittee has also reviewed Spirit of Prophecy statements that identify the essential and unique elements of Adventist education.

The Core Curriculum Subcommittee is studying five major areas relating to the essential core elements of Adventist secondary schools in the 21st century:

1. *Core*—A review of the existing



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core curriculum in such areas as career development, foreign language, at-risk students, exceptional children, and most essential learning. Possible new core elements include distance learning/technology, multicultural/global education, and interdisciplinary/thematic instruction.

2. **Credits**—Study of information retention, time versus competency, and graduation requirements.

3. **Standards**—A review of the implications of America 2000 and recommended standards by various professional organizations.

4. **Scripture/Spirit of Prophecy**—A search for principles relating to integration of faith and learning, service, and faith maturity.

5. **Interaction**—Recommendations for greater cooperation with the elementary and higher education levels will be developed.

After intensive discussion and debate, the Core Curriculum Subcommittee developed the first draft of a philosophy and goal statement for Adventist education, which may eventually lead to suggested revisions in the philosophy included in the *NAD Working Policy*.²

The statement of proposed goals is a new document. An early draft is being printed here for reader input. The subcommittee has already received suggested revisions from 80 educators based on a newsletter survey, including the recommendation that the document be made more gender inclusive.

Research, Trends, and Development Subcommittee

This subcommittee reviews the latest research proposals and current trends, identifying implications for Adventist schools. Commissioning pilot studies is part of its assignment. The subcommittee has identified 11 broad trends for further study.

More than 330 Adventist educators responded to a survey ranking in order from "1" through "11" the trends that would have the greatest impact in their classroom, school, or organization. In addition, 121 educa-

tors volunteered for pilot programs related to the trends highlighted in the survey.³

The survey revealed that teachers' greatest needs were in the area of *delivery systems, staff development, and student assessment*. The numbers given each trend by the educators were totaled, meaning that the lower the score, the higher the priority. Key words related to the trends are noted after each score.

1. **Delivery Systems** (1,313)—student learning styles, cooperative learning, integrated curriculum.

2. **Staff Development** (1,357)—more than "one shot" meetings; teacher learning styles.

3. **Student Assessment** (1,616)—portfolios, performance assessments, norm-referenced testing.

4. **Administrative Leadership/Development** (1,737)—Total Quality Management, transformational leadership, school culture.

5. **Technology** (1,884)—information superhighway, use of computers in the classroom, school libraries, teaching methodologies.

6. **Time Allotments** (1,989)—length of school day and year, required time to receive credit, seat time or competency.

7. **Partnerships** (2,190)—home, church and school, business-school, work-study programs.

8. **Diversity** (2,503)—multiculturalism.

9. **Distance Learning** (2,530)—satellite and interactive classrooms.

10. **Role of Division/Union in Change** (3,107)—"top down" or "bot-

Proposed Goals of Seventh-day Adventist Secondary Schools First Draft

The goals of Seventh-day Adventists are based on the general statement of educational philosophy stated above, and conceptualize the philosophic commitments that make Seventh-day Adventist education unique.

The core of Seventh-day Adventist education will provide a variety of learning experiences appropriate to the needs of each individual, which will assist students in:

Spiritual Development

- Discovering the great principles of God's Word, accepting those principles as the basis for all decision-making and the development of values.
- Creating a desire to know and live out the tenets of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to enjoy service, outreach, and witnessing to others.

Mental Development

- Acquiring optimum competency in English, mathematics, science, history, geography, foreign languages, fine arts, applied arts, civics and government, and economics, all within a Seventh-day Adventist Christian context.
- Adopting a systematic, logical approach to problem-solving, emphasizing the development of critical thinking skills.
- Acquiring knowledge and skills in the use of technology to communicate and facilitate learning.
- Developing lifelong learners with aesthetic appreciation.

Physical Development

- Accepting personal responsibility for achieving and maintaining optimum health through balanced living.

Social Development

- Developing a sense of self-worth while affirming a belief in the brotherhood of mankind, the dignity and worth of others, and responsibility for one's environment.
- Developing skills in interpersonal relationships needed for meeting the responsibilities of family membership, and responding to the needs of others.
- Developing an awareness of career options and opportunities as they relate to the mission of the Church, and to the ever-changing world of work.

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tom up," interdependence, chaos theory.

11. *Philosophy* (3,124)—job preparation or general education, workplace competencies and foundation skills.

Subcommittee members have already made formal presentations on several of these areas, including student assessment, learning styles, theories of administrative leadership, Total Quality Management, business-school partnerships, and staff development. The subcommittee will continue to refine and develop recommendations while commissioning pilot studies by several secondary teachers. As these pilot studies are completed and released, other academies will have resources upon which to draw.

Shared Concerns

The full commission has met to study two major issues intersecting the work of both subcommittees—technology and time.

In a time of declining enrollments and challenging finances, technology has been seen as a way to maintain high academic quality while reducing costs. Using satellite dishes is one potential application of technology. Many academies have difficulty hiring certified teachers for foreign languages, physics, and calculus. Junior academies have special needs in mathematics and science. All of these could benefit from satellite classrooms. The full commission viewed a satellite classroom as part of its work and has received analyses of this area of future growth. Having fiber optics linking several small high schools also offers potential for the future.

What role will technology play in Adventist schools in the 21st century? The field is changing so rapidly that predictions are hard to make. With the rapid expansion of fiber optics into neighborhoods and telephone companies becoming part of the information superhighway, who knows what possibilities might exist in a few years? Currently, it seems too expensive to offer our own live daily programming, although more investigation is needed. However, the commission feels that

many commercial programs have possibilities. They will prepare a list of resources, including the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Prisoners of Time?

The commission has studied recommendations from the National Education Commission on Time and Learning in the United States, which released its report in April 1994.¹ Since Adventist academies parallel the basic structure of American high schools, the analysis of this time commission is of particular relevance. They concluded that

The fixed clock and calendar is a fundamental design flaw that must be changed.

Academic time has been stolen to make room for a host of nonacademic activities.

Today's school schedule must be modified to respond to the great changes that have reshaped American life outside school.

Educators do not have enough time to do their job properly.

Mastering world-class standards will require more time for almost all students.

In order to resolve these design flaws, the time commission recommended such changes as a core academic day of 5.5 hours with added time in the school day for other activities, and more professional time and opportunities for teachers by having a longer school year or hiring excellent substitute teachers.

The curriculum-futures commission also considered the recommendations of Donald Chalker and Richard Haynes, who have compared schools in the United States to nine other countries as part of their attempt to develop world-class standards.⁵ In

many areas, the United States meets or exceeds the standards, such as pupil-teacher ratio, average minutes of instruction per day, and weekly teaching time. However, these authors recommend a 200-day school year for students and 220 days for teachers. The commission is also considering the possibility of encouraging block scheduling for classes as one of the most dramatic ways to help schools change their methodologies, after proper staff development.

Conclusion

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's educational system is entering a time of exciting reassessment of mission and goals. Whenever a new millennium arrives, people and institutions carry out intense self-analysis. As we build upon the strengths of the past and seek new ways to offer an Adventist-based curriculum for the next millennium, the Lord will bless these efforts through the prayers and active involvement of secondary educators throughout the world. ⁶

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. If you are not currently receiving *Curriculum Futures*, the commission's newsletter, write the North American Division Office of Education, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904 to get on a free mailing list.

2. Because this statement of philosophy is readily accessible in the *North American Division Working Policy*, it is not reprinted here. Reactions to the proposed goal statement can be sent to James Epperson, Southern Union Conference, P. O. Box 849, Decatur, GA 30031, FAX (404) 299-9726; CompuServe: 74617,2534.

3. If you would like to share your reactions to these trends, please write to Richard Osborn, Columbia Union Conference, 5427 Twin Knolls Rd., Columbia, MD 21045; FAX (410) 997-7420; CompuServe: 74617,545.

4. National Education Commission on Time and Learning, *Prisoners of Time* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1994).

5. Donald M. Chalker and Richard M. Haynes, *World Class Schools. New Standards for Education* (Lancaster, Penna.: Technomic Publishing Company, Inc., 1994).