

*"I got up at
5:00 a.m.,
Lord. I made
it to the school
by 6:30.*

*I had a quiet
35 minutes
to prepare —
including
my short
talk with*

You. Thanks, Lord.

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At a little past seven, one of my two col-

leagues came in to talk. How can I help her?

*By 7:30, the three of us had worship and reviewed the
day's activities and duties.*

*By 8:15, the rush was on! It continued unrelentingly
until 4:00 p.m., when I had a break to prepare for the
board meeting tonight. I made copies for everyone, including
those long minutes by Mrs. "T" and the agenda.*

*I decided to eat my soggy sandwich while preparing for
classes tomorrow.*

*Guess who walked in early? The board representative.
. . . Oh well, so much for the well-prepared agenda.*

*Did I make it to the rest room more than once today?
I'm so tired, . . . can I drive home without falling asleep?*

*Got home at 11:00 p.m. after closing the school. The
house was dark and quiet. The cat was begging to be fed.*

*Lord, why did the board spend so much time deciding
what to do about the copier?*

*Help me, Lord. I must be ready for the kids in the
morning. I have to teach well.*

Yours truly,

One of the Best Teaching Principals You've Got!"

**So which hat
does a teaching
principal wear—
and when?**

BY MARTHA L. D. HAVENS

This "letter" reflects the complexity of a teaching principal's job in the Seventh-day Adventist education system. Many educational administrators say, "So what!? I have plenty of 18-hour days." Yes, but do you have to add six teaching hours a day, in a multigrade classroom, to administering a school?¹

Our system is not alone in dealing with this challenge. A 1996 study by Ivan Muse and others² found 379 one-teacher schools in rural, often remote,

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The North American Division Principal's Handbook lists 78 activities as "Significant Areas of Responsibility" for a school administrator.

areas in 28 states in the U.S. The public school teachers they surveyed did not fare any better than our teachers. The average teacher lived 25 miles from the school and up to 320 miles from the closest parent. He or she had to drive 50 miles to go shopping. The one constant in one-teacher schools that has not changed was that these teachers lived in isolated areas. More than half of them had the following duties to perform: remedial reading, testing of students, purchasing supplies, supervising physical education activities, plus art and music instruction—all without district or service center support. Out of ne-

cessity, many of the teachers in Muse's study performed custodial duties, drove buses, prepared lunches, maintained the buildings and grounds, and performed secretarial functions—usually without additional pay.

Does this sound familiar? Adventist teachers do all these extra activities plus helping children with special needs.

In the yearly North American Division opening report, Dallas Kindopp reported: "From a total of 1061 schools in the nation, 692 are in the category of the one-, two-, and three-teacher schools."³ This does not include the four- and five-teacher schools that many conferences count as small schools. However, we can say with certainty that, in the North American Division, the vast majority of our elementary

schools are and most likely will continue to be small schools run by a local school board and administered by a teaching principal.

So which hat does a teaching principal wear—and when? Unquestionably, the most important hat for a well-run and well-supported school is the **Teaching Hat!** A satisfied group of parents and students can be called upon to help you accomplish some of the many necessary administrative tasks in a small school. But without good teaching, everything falls apart.

Did you know that the North American Division *Principal's Handbook*⁴ lists 78 activities as "Significant Areas of Responsibility" for a school administrator? (Not to mention responsibility for finances, personnel, and curriculum and instruction.) In my experience as a principal at all levels, I know that the teaching principal is expected to accomplish all 78 and more! About the only exception to all these responsibilities would be the supervision of instruction (teacher evaluation) and academy student-association activities. Furthermore, if you happen to work in a small school far from the local conference office, you probably have even more responsibilities. The local conference may not have the resources or personnel to help with mandated state or provincial regulations and other bureaucratic activities otherwise known as "the paper chase."

So how does wearing the **Teacher Hat** first help? As a small-schools supervisor, I have seen good teaching skills come to the aid of the administrator. Borrowing the style of Robert Fulghum, author of *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kinder-*

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garten, I quote from one of my teaching principals: "All I needed to know for good administration, I learned in the multigrade classroom."

Let's take a closer look at those "survival skills":

- You must **lead** in your room/school. You set the goals, the vision of what you and your students want your room to be for the year. You discuss, agree on a vision, set a mission (including classroom rules), and you and your students move forward with those goals in mind every day!

- You must **prioritize and manage your time well**. No multigrade teacher would survive otherwise. Countless daily decisions involving people and things all need to be arranged in order of importance and urgency. You make a decision and move in that direction after getting as much information as you can. A good rule is to prioritize according to the direct benefit to students.

- You must **communicate well** in writing as well as publicly. Making the best of your people skills with parents and students depends on listening and caring.

- You must **plan ahead and organize your classroom and your materials**. Both a classroom and a school must reflect organization and planning. Activities do not just happen. They are made to happen in the class or school at the right time and with the right materials.

- You must be a **team builder**. This means that your students/teachers must view you as a fair person who listens and values each person's contributions. No member of the team is elevated above others, and due recognition is given when appropriate. In the Christian model, you are a servant before you are a leader. You work hard with and for students. You have expectations, but you also provide the resources to fulfill those expectations in your room or your school.

- You cannot do it all; therefore, you must **delegate**. Allow others to help you. First, take a hard look at yourself. Analyze your strengths and weaknesses. This is crucial to leadership. When you know what you cannot do, you will know where to look for help. A good administrator surrounds himself or herself with people who can do the jobs that he or she cannot! The idea is to focus on the outcome, the goal, and the vision for your school, not on your image. In a multigrade classroom, you assign jobs according to preferences and abilities. Classroom success depends on the success of everyone working together. Why not do the same as the principal?

- You must be a **spiritual leader**. Daily worships, weeks of prayer, and witnessing in the community all contribute to the spiritual atmosphere of the school. Most important is your daily walk with God. All these reflect the kind of God you serve.

- **Don't take things personally**. Don't get so

wrapped up in the problem that you can't react impartially. Remember when you helped students who were not getting along? You asked questions. You didn't take sides. You talked about compromise, fairness, and consequences rather than punishment.

- Be sure to **take care of yourself**. It's easy to get so busy with your 78 areas of responsibility that you forget your own physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs. Connect with the Lord every day; eat right, take time for friends and family, pursue a hobby, and don't forget to exercise.⁵ This helps you not only avoid burnout and enjoy better health, but also sets a good example for your colleagues and students.

- Finally, don't forget your **sense of humor**. What a wonderful help is to be able to laugh at situations and at ourselves! These moments can make or break a day! They made you a great teacher and fun to be around, and they will help make you a great teaching principal.

An excellent teacher is often seen as a candidate for administration. Unfortunately, it is often a mistake to promote such individuals to the teaching principal position. Soon, they feel overwhelmed. They think that as the teaching principal they must "do it all." They fail to transfer skills from their successful teaching techniques. And they often do not get the necessary training and support.

Joan McRobbie,⁶ in her 1990 study, found that the multiple roles of the teaching principal produce conflict and ambiguity, and often lead to stress and anxiety. I see this when a newly hired or "old-timer" teaching principal is struggling to decide what is most important, teaching or administering. This conflict is invariably compounded by work overload and mandated paperwork.

However, on a positive note, teaching principals do enjoy having a lot to say about their school program. It can be very rewarding to shape things through your creativity and to recommend a direction to the board and then see your vision take shape.

Another positive aspect comes from the teaching side. There are many benefits in teaching a multigrade classroom: the family atmosphere, the ability to individualize instruction and use creative techniques, getting to know students well over several years, more opportunities for students to learn leadership skills and personal initiative in doing research, and being able to utilize teamwork and peer and cross-age tutoring. This can be a growing experience for you and the students as well.

I have observed that in small schools where the teaching principal is functioning successfully, there are a number of common contributing factors be-

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sides good teaching. Some of the most important factors include:

- **Support from the pastor(s) and the churches.**

The school is often the focus of evangelism and growth. These pastors are tending their sheep! These members see their school as part of the total church picture, contributing to the security, salvation, and education of their children. The church community sees the students as “our kids” and works together to ensure the school’s success.

- **An active and supportive local board.** Such boards go beyond just monthly meetings. They help the teaching principal or make sure that other church and community members lend a hand. They provide the needed resources to ensure success for the total education program of the school. While allowing the teaching principal to administer, they set the standards and guidelines based on the recommendations of the principal, parents, and students and the example of other successful small schools.

- **An active Home and School Association.** They are involved in fund-raising and other supportive activities.

- **A supportive local conference.** Its superintendent or associate superintendent can be contacted by phone any time, day or night, to advise the teaching principal when he or she has to make a difficult decision and needs to discuss ideas immediately.

- **Supportive, involved parents.** Before they jump to conclusions, they stop and listen to the their child,

the teacher, and others. Then they come together, as Christian adults, to search for solutions rather than to blame.

In summary, as one excellent teacher put it, “A combination of **preparation, perspiration, patience, and prayer** will accomplish miracles.” ✍

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. This is not as uncommon as some would think. In the North American Division alone, at least 692 educational administrators would say “yes” to this question.

2. Ivan Muse, et al. “One-Teacher Public Elementary Schools in America: A 1996 Study.” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Rural Education Association, October 13, 1996.

3. Dallas Kindopp was, until recently, the Opening Report Statistician for the North American Division.

4. *Principal's Handbook* (Silver Spring, Md.: North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, 1990).

5. For additional information on taking care of your own needs, see Christine Neish, Suzanne E. Perrin, Bryan Haddock, and Kim Knowlton, “Looking Out for Number One: Helping Teachers Stay Healthy,” *Journal of Adventist Education* 59:4 (April/May 1997), pp. 4-11.

6. Jean McRobbie, “The Rural Teaching Principal: Meeting the Challenges of Multiple Roles” (Washington, D.C.: Office of Educational Research and Improvements, 1991).

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