



# NAD

## “Something Better”

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“Something better” is the watchword of education, the law of all true living.” With these words, Ellen White in the book *Education* (p. 297) described a goal for educational excellence that is possible only in Christian schools. Guiding students into a growing relationship with Jesus and the pursuit of excellence from early learning through graduate school begin here. The mission of Adventist education thus leads students on a journey to excellence; a journey to excel in faith, learning, and service.

### Students Excel in Faith

The first lessons in Adventist schools are of God’s love and care. From California to Virginia, from Canada to Florida, across the North American Division (NAD), students open the Bible, not just in Bible

class, but in social studies, science, and other classes as well. Stories abound of students learning to trust a personal God through answered prayers for tuition money, for find-

ing lost passports, cell phones, and teacher’s keys, and for safety on school trips. Students thus learn to excel in faith.

Eleven-year-old Wyan lives in Pennsylvania, U.S.A. He loves God and was thrilled when his mother enrolled him in a Seventh-day Adventist school near their home. Wyan especially liked the Bible class, where his teacher answered his questions about God in ways that he could understand. Wyan invited his mother to attend a seminar held by the school, where they learned that the Sabbath was God’s special day. Wyan wanted to go to Sabbath school, but his mother explained that Saturday was her busiest day. “I can’t afford to close my shop to attend church,” she said. Wyan prayed about it, and in time, his mother decided they should trust God. She closed her shop and went to church with Wyan.

When the church announced a mission trip to Central America, Wyan wanted to go. He asked his mother to accompany him, but again she explained that she couldn’t afford to close her shop for three weeks. “God will work it out,” Wyan said. He soon learned that some members were raising money so that he and his mother could go on the



Teachers have shared amazing stories of what happens when students pray.



CognitiveGenesis research confirms that students in Adventist schools have a learning advantage.

trip. Convinced it was God’s will, Wyan’s mom closed her shop and went with Wyan on the trip.

In Central America, Wyan spoke at the children’s meetings, and 23 children gave their hearts to God. But all during the mission trip, Wyan’s mother worried about her business. Upon their return home, God had a surprise for her. In her first week back in the shop, she earned enough to make up for the three weeks the shop had been closed. “And her business just keeps growing,” Wyan added.

Wyan’s faith helped his mother trust God. When Wyan asked to be baptized, his mother decided to be baptized, too. And to their surprise, Wyan’s grandmother decided to join them.<sup>1</sup>

### Students Excel in Learning

An Adventist school principal in Louisiana recently summed up our educational philosophy quite simply. He said, “Seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness first and foremost promises that all the other things involved in learning and growing God’s kids—the reading, writing, mathematics, physical education, etc.—will follow.” Research is proving this to be true. For the past four years, CognitiveGenesis,<sup>2</sup> a

project to assess academic achievement in NAD Adventist schools, has been conducted by researchers from La Sierra and Andrews universities. The data reveal some amazing findings.

The composite results from the nine unions and 58 conferences across the NAD confirm that students in Adventist schools perform better than the national average and half a grade level higher than predicted based on standardized cognitive ability measures. This occurs in schools of all sizes, in all regions of the division. The four-year research project of about 20,000 students also showed that the longer students were enrolled in an Adventist school, the higher they performed. Some call this “the Adventist advantage.”

### Students Excel in Service

NAD students are involved in service projects in the community and around the world. From building a school at Maluti Hospital in Africa to presenting evangelistic meetings in the Philippines, from neighborhood literature distribution in California to beach cleanup in Bermuda, our students connect with the gospel commission. Kelli Virgil, a student at Maplewood Academy in Minnesota, shares her experience:

“Despite the cool breeze and wet ground, spirits were high as van loads of Maplewood Academy students unloaded at their first stop. Imagine the surprise of the homeowners as they looked out of the window to see teenagers scattered across their yard with rakes in hand! What better way is there to reach out to the community than by doing something thoughtful. This annual outreach continues to make a positive impact on the participants as well as those who benefit from the raking. Sometimes it’s the little things in life that show Jesus’ love in the biggest way.”<sup>3</sup>

### Journey to Excellence

To empower our youth to excel in faith, learning, and service, Christian education must have schools of renown, founded on eternal principles, which are continually seeking to achieve excellence. *Journey to Excellence* captures the concept of “something better.” As a guiding theme for Adventist education in the North American Division during



Global Mission service by secondary students has expanded students’ view of the church.





Don Schneider, NAD President, challenges 6,000 Adventist educators to be “youth ministers.”

this first decade of the 21st century, *Journey to Excellence* has been more than a marketing scheme or the title of a strategic plan. This theme refocuses on the mission of Adventist schools and gives motive for investing resources for school improvement.<sup>4</sup>

In August 2006, it was the focus of the second division-wide K-12 educators’ convention. The more than 6,000 Adventist educators from across North America who met in Nashville, Tennessee, were challenged to excel in teaching and leading young people to know the Savior and to prepare for service in His name. From the opening keynote address by George Knight through the morning worship services, the six general and nearly 400 breakout sessions, to the closing consecration service with division President Don Schneider, educators were inspired to create schools of excellence for the young people in their church and community. Plans are being developed for a third NAD-wide educators’ conference in 2012.

### Projects and Initiatives

To support a focus on school improvement has required an investment in up-to-date materials and relevant professional development to equip K-12 teachers and administra-

tors with best practices to meet student learning needs. Young learners have benefited from special projects in curriculum resources aligned with our Adventist beliefs and values. Pedagogy changes, but truths are eternal.

Increasingly, technology is being harnessed to improve instruction and organizational effectiveness. A renewed Website for the NAD Office of Education<sup>5</sup> and the expansion of



The integration of technology in Adventist schools has grown exponentially in the 21st century.

CIRCLE<sup>6</sup> are connecting Adventist educators across the division and around the world. The division has provided a free Website for each K-12 school. Several schools have developed new distance-education programs, and a digital Week of Prayer presentation has been created and distributed in each of the past three years. Technology has enhanced our

ability to fulfill our mission and more effectively market our schools.

Improving curricular materials continues to be a division-wide initiative. In 2007, an elementary religion curriculum was completed. NAD has shared the text material with the other world divisions. Completed in 2009, *Pathways: A Journey to Excellence Through Literacy*, a comprehensive integrated language-arts program (reading, writing, grammar, and spelling) uses thematic literature that upholds Christian faith and principles. *By Design: A Journey to Excellence Through Science*, a K-8 science curriculum that is aligned with the biblical perspective of God’s creative power, is currently being developed. Kindergartners will soon benefit from the release of a new, fully integrated faith-based curriculum.

Other recent NAD projects: comprehensive new learning standards for all secondary subjects, enhanced mathematics instruction, and strategies to REACH (Reaching to Educate All Children for Heaven) challenged learners.<sup>7</sup> All of these and more are tools in the hands of God to evangelize His youth.

### Early Childhood Education and Care—Where the Journey Begins

For years, churches and schools have met the needs of young families through childcare and preschool education. Educational leaders have recently been asked to develop a cohesive organiza-

tional strategy to support these endeavors, infusing them with excellent resources and ensuring safe practices. An Early Childhood Education and Care program is an emerging part of the work for NAD educational leaders in the new quin-  
quennium.



The La Sierra University SIFE Team (Students In Free Enterprise) was named a Regional Champion at the SIFE Los Angeles Regional Competition (one of a dozen such competitions around the U.S.), qualifying them to compete at the SIFE U.S.A. National Expo May 11-13 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

### College and University Awards

The journey to excellence for NAD education encompasses early learning through graduate degree programs. Adventist colleges and universities in North America have received numerous awards for stellar programs and successful student achievement. *U.S. News & World Report's* rankings of America's Best Colleges have frequently been populated with Adventist schools. Awards for community engagement and service, outstanding educational programs in specialty fields and recognition for contributions in a variety of scholarly pursuits have headlined reports from NAD's 15 colleges and universities. Especially exciting are awards for excellence in student learning. Regional, national, and international competitions have awarded top prizes to students from NAD colleges and universities in areas such as music performance, free enterprise business development, engineering, creative writing, tax accounting, and general academic knowledge.

The reward for true higher education is eternal. Throngs of youth in our colleges and universities have shown their commitment to the mission and ministry of the church through volunteer assignments around the globe and in the local community.

This is another way that Adventist education makes a difference.

### Charting the Future

For many people, a knowledge of Adventists comes from our hospitals and schools. In recent years, community members have shown that they see "something better" in our in-

stitutions by enrolling their children in increasing numbers. However, this has often masked a declining enrollment among Adventist families that has resulted in the closure of some small schools. Higher education has not been exempt from this phenomenon, particularly liberal-arts programs. Given that church membership has grown across North America, enrollment declines in Adventist schools are a very serious concern at all levels.

From elementary schools and academies to colleges and universities, we are experiencing unprecedented pressures. Factors underlying this trend are topics of frequent discussion. Some families are simply too far from an Adventist school. In an earlier era, boarding schools mitigated this problem, but today, fewer parents are choosing this solution. Others believe the decline results from local churches' decreasing emphasis on the distinctiveness of Adventist education, and despite data from the CognitiveGenesis study that demonstrate otherwise, some people question whether academic excellence can be achieved in small schools.

Clearly, financial challenges do affect young families' ability to pay for education. Church statistics also show that membership growth is

most pronounced among lower socioeconomic groups. Improved marketing initiatives and expanded scholarship programs have not made the dramatic difference desired. The church must continue to pursue a partnership with families that choose to home school their children or turn to other educational options.

These are challenging times. But our apparent extremity is God's opportunity. So it is with confidence that we look forward to continuing with the Master Teacher on a journey to excellence through new uncharted waters in the coming months and years. The kingdom of heaven is our destination, and we want to be there soon with all God's youth. ✍

### REFERENCES

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