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THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION (ISSN 0021-8480) publishes articles concerned with a variety of topics pertinent to SDA education. Opinions expressed by our writers do not necessarily represent the views of the editors or the official position of the Department of Education of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Issued bimonthly, October through May, and a summer issue for June, July, August, and September by the Department of Education, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 6840 Eastern Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20012. (202) 722-6407 or 6412. Subscription price, \$10.95. Single copy, \$2.25. Price may vary where national currencies are different. Printed by University Printers, 537 Grove St., Berrien Springs, MI 49103, to whom all communications concerning change of address should be sent, giving both old and new address. When writing about your subscription, please enclose the address label from the wrapper in which you received the journal. Address all editorial and advertising communications to the Editor. Copyright © 1986 by University Printers.

# EDITORIAL

## Will SDA Education Still Pay?

If Christian education is to retain its effectiveness, its power to attract the support of our church members and to inspire dedication to its values and vision, then it needs to remain true to its nature. Over the decades the pressures of accreditation, excellence, and professionalism have worked to strengthen in large measure the academic and technical offerings of Adventist schools. Yet today many parents and students still complain that our schools are not providing what their constituencies need.

We would not question the fact that because of the changes that have affected the church socially, spiritually, and fiscally there has been some lack of congruence between supply and demand. But as educators we need not think that the lapses are all or mainly on education's part. Changing social mores, tighter financial constraints, and a smaller census of traditional students have all played their part.

Nevertheless, certain factors do lay some responsibility at our doors. Our attitude toward marketing has lagged behind the times. Our willingness to refocus our offerings to meet new interests and careers was not as keen as it should have been. But one of the most serious concerns has been what some constituents have perceived as a loss of distinctiveness. Whether or not the accusation is true, if our clients believe it, they will send their children to other institutions.

In its latest publication, *What Works: Research About Teaching and Learning*, the U.S. Department of Education notes that "schools with high student achievement and morale show certain characteristics:

- vigorous instructional leadership,
- a principal who makes clear, consistent, and fair decisions,
- an emphasis on discipline and a safe and orderly environment,
- instructional practices that focus on basic skills and academic achievement,
- collegiality among teachers in support of student achievement,
- teachers with high expectations that all their students can and will learn, and
- frequent review of student progress.

Effective schools are places where principals, teachers, students, and parents agree on the goals, methods, and content of schooling."

Seventh-day Adventist education will need to recapture as one aspect of its renewal and growth the spirit and image of shared mission, goals, and objectives with its constituents. Excellence, yes! Cost effectiveness, without doubt! But embracing and extending the effectiveness and attractiveness of our institutions will also call on us to exalt our distinctiveness in order to persuade our people that SDA education in its difference pays, rather than costs.—V.S.G. □