

Allegheny East Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
A PK-12 Report from the Office of Education
For the 14th Constituency Session on September 28, 2008

Change and Changes

Change is the thrust for this year's political cycle in America. It has captured everyone's attention around the world. The United States of America is set to elect a new president this Fall and the world is watching to see what type of change will take place. Will the citizens of America elect a young man or a septuagenarian; a mixed race African-American out of Chicago, IL or the long term white haired statesman out of Phoenix, AZ? Either way, change will happen politically in America, and based on each presidential hopeful's personal ideology, strategic approach, and political philosophy, changes in the governance of America will occur. It is guaranteed that change and changes will take place.

Adventist education is not immune to change and changes. We are currently engaged in a study designed to bring about change. It is a study sponsored by the North American Division Office of Education referred to as ***Cognitive Genesis***. If you recall, four years ago I shared with you results of the second study known as *Value Genesis* which revealed significant growth among our students as it relates to Christian faith development. Adventist education is strong in helping students develop their faith while in our schools. *Cognitive Genesis* is the first comprehensive study assessing *academics* of our students throughout North America. Does Adventist education provide for our students academically? We began in the Fall of 2006 submitting our Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) scores to the research team located at La Sierra University. Assessment was made of students in grades 3 to 9 and grade 11. Thus far we have been highly encouraged by the results of the first two years of this study. Our students throughout the Division, when compared to students in public, private, and parochial schools score **above the national norm in all grades and in all subject areas tested!** The results also show that our students at all levels of ability, on average, have higher achievement scores than predicted by their ability. This information not only encourages us that Adventist education meets the academic needs of our students, it also enlightens us to forge ahead with bolder approaches, and/or needed changes, in areas of our curriculum that can be further strengthened. Take time to check the web site of the Cognitive Genesis study located at www.cognitivegenesis.org.

We have been and are in the phase of implementing the new reading program from the North American Division. It is called ***Pathways – Journey to Excellence through Literacy***. Over the past twenty years change has been slow in upgrading and updating an acceptable reading series that compliments our values as Seventh-day Adventists. However, through God's guidance a company was found that has provided us an exciting series and system for effective reading instruction in our schools. In 2006 the Division launched the new integrated language arts program which includes all the key elements of reading, writing, phonics, spelling, word study, comprehension and study skills, grammar, vocabulary, and handwriting. The training of our teachers began in earnest in 2006-07, the first year of implementation for grades 1 and 2, and will continue as the phases are

launched. This past 2007-08 school year, implementation was done for grades 3 and 4. Each year we are targeting implementing the new program for the next two grade levels up to 2009-10. It is expected that in the year 2010-11 the reading series will be complete with the implementation for kindergarten. Those teachers who have trained in this reading program exclaim that it has revitalized their teaching experience and they are ecstatic! For an in-depth review of the reading program check the web site at www.pathways.nadeducation.org, or visit any of our elementary classroom teachers (grades 1 to 6) for a live demonstration.

Personnel changes have occurred since the last quadrennial. **Mrs. Gloria Perry** replaced Dr. Lolethia Kibble as Associate Superintendent of Schools. Mrs. Perry is an experienced educator in both public and Adventist schools. She previously served as Principal of the Sharon Temple School in Wilmington, DE for 12 years. Not only is she qualified with teaching and administrative skills, she comes with training as a reading specialist. This particular specialty is proving to be very valuable in helping our teachers implement *Pathways*, for which they are very excited. This summer, 2008, Mrs. Perry served as **adjunct professor with Columbia Union College**, specifically for the purpose of providing formalized Pathways training for our teachers. Allegheny East Conference Office of Education was the proverbial head, not the tail through Mrs. Perry's training, and a few other teachers in the Union were happy to also benefit from her instruction, and they gave her high praise for her added service.

Teacher certification has experienced a change in our Conference. In 2004 there were approximately 79% of our elementary and junior high teachers certified under our denomination's system of certification. The academy had approximately 72%. Since then greater emphasis has been placed on the importance of this professional piece. Collaboratively, teachers have worked with the Office of Education in achieving certification. As of the March 2008 PK-12 Board of Education meeting we are able to report that 62 of our 64 teachers at the elementary and junior high levels are certified. That means that approximately **97%** of our teachers at this level have achieved certification. Seven of 10 academy employees are certified (70%). Continued and heightened emphasis is being made to raise both the elementary and junior high teachers, as well as the academy teachers, to 100% certification under the denomination's system of certification.

Enrollment is of mounting concern because the change in this area is on the decrease. While this is occurring in Allegheny East, it is reflective of a Union and Division-wide pattern within the Seventh-day Adventist system of education. In some areas of the Allegheny East system the decrease is less than others. However, among our one and two teacher schools any decrease is difficult in meeting personnel and operational costs. Overall, during the past four years, we have experienced a loss of 206 students in our elementary and junior high schools. The academy has experienced an overall loss of 12 students during this time. As a result of the decreases we have had to reduce staff at some schools. Staff reduction usually leads to program constriction. The need to market our valuable product called "**Adventist Education**" is critical. Changes will need to be made by giving more attention to executing a well defined and robust marketing strategy at the local level, improving delivery of instructional service, and increasing investment in

Adventist students whose families are not endowed to provide for them a quality Adventist education.

The Office of Education is appreciative to those persons and entities that support Adventist education. We appreciate the volunteers and churches that provide in-kind services to our schools. However, we would like to highlight those who, in the past four years, made **substantial investments** in Adventist education:

- In 2006 we honored the leadership provided by the Pine Forge Seventh-day Adventist Church of Pine Forge, PA and the Walnut Street Community Seventh-day Adventist Church in Pottstown, PA. Under the leadership of Brother Bennie Mann, Pastor Joel Johnson, and Pastor Vernon Waters, the membership of these two churches combined their resources to provide for the construction of a brand new school building in Pine Forge, PA. No longer is their school known as “The Little School.” Instead it has been renamed in honor of one of the first teachers of an Adventist elementary school in Pine Forge, PA. It is now the Jessie R. Wagner Seventh-day Adventist School.
- At the end of 2006-2007 we honored the leadership of the alumni of Pine Forge Academy for supporting the “extreme makeover” of J. H. Wagner Hall – the administrative and classroom building of Pine Forge Academy. Their efforts generated over \$1.2 million used to completely modernize the interior of the building, providing a new science lab, a new computer lab, and wireless internet access throughout the building.
- In 2008 we honored the leadership of the constituent churches that support Baltimore Junior Academy. With the steady leadership of constituent Pastor Charlie Jenkins, a brand new gymnasium/auditorium was constructed next door to the school. It is already being put to good use by the school and the community of churches for recreation, special meetings, and physical education classes.
- **The 3-Way Scholarship program** received a major boost from the Allegheny East Conference (AEC) in 2008. For years scholarships have been provided for those Allegheny East Conference student members who qualified. The scholarship was funded equally between the local church, conference, and school (\$200 apiece for Oakwood University attendees, \$150 apiece for Columbia Union College, and \$100 apiece for Pine Forge Academy). In an effort to respond to the needs of our members, AEC added enough to the amounts given by the church and school to provide each student at the college level up to \$1,000.00 in scholarship money and at the academy level up to \$500.00. Also, over the past four years we have established the practice to provide 2-way scholarships of up to \$800.00 for those attending Oakwood University. The 2-way scholarships are given due to the limited scholarship slots Oakwood University can honor from year to year. Therefore, everyone who applies on time and qualifies is assisted with a scholarship.

The change and changes in the educational system of Allegheny East Conference highlighted above are all (but one) positive examples of God’s blessings

of His program. The Cognitive Genesis program is yielding exciting concrete data that statistically gives evidence to the great value of Seventh-day Adventist Christian education. Note: the group of students with whom our students were compared included public schools, both urban and suburban, and private schools (which often cater to the elite) equipped with vast resources. Our students not only scored above the national norm, but **performed better than expected for their tested ability levels**. These results are truly exciting! God loves to use simple things, which is His specialty, as vehicles to show His glory. The schools of Allegheny East Conference are simple instruments in His hands that help to produce in children a strong Christian faith and academic success. The appeal to every Seventh-day Adventist member of this conference is to turn around the change of decreasing enrollment by strongly supporting God's program of education: putting our children in our schools; financially supporting children of the congregation who cannot afford tuition; contribute to subsidize school operations, etc., and watch Him work in blessing the educational program. As Isaiah 43:19 states in *The Clear Word*, "Watch for the new thing I'm going to do. It's already beginning to happen. Can't you see it? I will make a road through the wilderness and give you streams in the desert."

Submitted by:

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