



**W**ithout data, they say, you're just another person with an opinion. Seventh-day Adventist education around the world runs better because we deal with good data.

## **N a P**

As of December 31, 2015, the Adventist Church was operating 5,705 primary schools, 2,336 secondary schools, 53 training schools—such as hospital-based nursing programs and some nondegree ministerial training schools—and 114 tertiary colleges and universities. In our 8,208 schools around the world, 102,779 teachers educated nearly 2 million students (1,922,990). What is the mission of these schools? Or, as put by church historian George Knight: “Education for what?”<sup>1</sup>

Adventist existence and purpose are biblically grounded. While education must develop students mentally, socially, physically, and vocationally, this goal is shared by all schools, religious or not. Christian education aims higher, seeking to restore the image of God in students and to prepare them for service in this life and the next. Its aim is to return to God's original purpose in creating humans.

Adventist education shares this spiritual and redemptive goal with other Christian schools. But a third aspect of education makes Adventist education unique: it is the denomination's apocalyptic mission to the world. George Knight observes that the denomination's two schools in 1880 became 16 in 1890, rapidly expanding to 245 in 1900, more than 600 in 1910, and 2,178 by 1930. Adventist mission, he says, grew exactly the same way, showing “a growth curve that goes nearly straight up beginning in the 1890s. . . Both the birth and the expansion of Seventh-day Adventist education were stimulated by the explosive fuel of apocalyptic mission as the denomination sought to educate the coming generation of young people not only about that apocalyptic mission but [also] to dedicate their lives to it.”<sup>2</sup>

Today, more than 140 years later, we still believe that mission and education are one, that the work of redemption and education are one, and that the Adventist Church is a movement of prophecy with an end-time mission to all the world.

Our enrollment patterns present a great challenge to such belief.

As of December 31, 2015, Adventist Church membership stood at more than 19 million members, but less than half of them (47 percent) have had some Adventist education. Fifty-two percent have had none. Enrollment varies by division. Con-

# Adventist

Division (NAD), where only 29 percent of members have never attended Adventist schools, with the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division (SID), where 76 percent have had no Adventist education; or the Inter-American (IAD) and West-Central Africa (WAD) divisions, where 66 percent report having no Adventist education. This is partly explained by the numbers of adults who join the church in these places. We could hope that children of these adults are benefiting from being enrolled in Adventist education, preparing them for service and mission. This is an opportunity for enrollment growth.

Of Seventh-day Adventist pastors, 36 percent report having only five to eight years of Seventh-day Adventist education. Only 14 percent reported having completed 13 or more years of Adventist education. Astonishingly, 8 percent of



Some are working, some are at home, others are in rural populations farming or caring for family. Yet if the UNESCO higher education enrollment rate of 26 percent is applied to that 6 million, an estimated 1.5 million who could be in Adventist higher education are studying somewhere else. We now estimate that 5 percent of all of those Adventists who are studying in higher education attend one of our schools. Our schools cannot possibly offer every degree, but we still need a better enrollment ratio.

### M - T a

Our third priority is mission-focused teachers. data show that this is the area of greatest concern. All teachers need to develop their capacity to achieve the redemptive purpose of Adventist education and to model Adventist values and lifestyle. The data show that we also need systems and deliberate effort to increase, where needed, the percentage of Seventh-day Adventist teachers who work in the system.

The past 14 years show a clear downward trend for primary, secondary, and tertiary teachers. We increasingly employ people of other faiths, or no faith at all. As of 2014 almost 30 percent of teachers were not Seventh-day Adventists. The annual decrease is on average 1 percent per year, sometimes more. Thus, of our 100,000 teachers, we have been exchanging 1,000 Adventists every year for 1,000 who have not committed to our faith by baptism.

As Knight has asked: “What is Christian education without Christian teachers?” “What is Adventist education without Adventist teachers?” Teaching is an incarnational process. It’s not just teaching how to add numbers, but also how to live a life of faith and carry out the unique mission of Seventh-day Adventist education.

Percentages of Adventist students are declining; less than half of enrollment is Adventist. We might celebrate this as an evangelism opportunity! But the two trends are going down together. Some say that these teachers are more caring or better role models than Seventh-day Adventist teachers. They may indeed have superior academic qualifications, and be effective educators in their discipline. They may even be warm Christians who share the love of Christ with students. But how can these teachers share the unique vision and mission of Seventh-day Adventist education if they do not subscribe to it themselves?

The expansive proliferation of degree offerings—a whole alphabet soup just at the graduate level, going all the way to medicine, pharmacy, doctors of theology, and Ph.D.s in a variety of areas—has required employment of

professors with specialized degrees. But we have not found enough Seventh-day Adventists to supply that need.

The Adventist Professional Network (APN) is one initiative to monitor the preparation of future teachers, and a tool to recruit teachers and other personnel. Every Adventist with at least a bachelor’s degree, is invited to the simple 10-minute task of registering in the database [APN.adventist.org](http://APN.adventist.org). It gives us a way to find you and help you with your own professional development. Mission-focused teachers is an area where the walls are broken and the gates burned. But you can help us redouble our efforts so that Adventist education can achieve its unique apocalyptic purpose.

### E a a L a

Our fourth and final priority is to strengthen educational leadership. Principals, presidents of colleges and uni-

## **R a , , C , , T , , E a ,**

In a final consideration, the role of education as a means of mission to big cities cannot be overstated. Of the global urban population, approximate 1.7 billion people live in cities. Three million of them are Adventist. In the cities there are 547 people for every single Seventh-day Adventist.<sup>4</sup>