



# *Journey to Excellence:* Mission, Curriculum, and Collaboration

BY GERALD KOVALSKI

**T**he world changed dramatically during the 2000-2005 quinquennium. Nowhere has that change been felt more than in the North American Division (NAD). The new reality of a dangerous world has made us more aware, more careful, and more focused. Adventist education has responded to this change.

One of the Adventist Church's great gifts to its members is Christian education. This ministry unifies the efforts of the home, church, and school to save our youth. As educators, we have correctly set our sights on academic excellence, but our primary mission is salvation.

The division and union education leadership are processing all policy, relationships, and curriculum development through this mission perspective. Because "In the highest sense the work of education and the work of redemption are one . . ." (Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 30), we must aspire to excellence in everything we do.

### ***Journey to Excellence***

To ensure high-quality education, NAD has embarked on a new journey, a *Journey to Excellence* (J2E). This is the basis of curriculum development, marketing, professional development, and school improvement. J2E is not a program; rather, it is who we want to be and how we plan to achieve our goals. (See <http://www.journeytoexcellence.org/>.)

*Journey to Excellence* presents 10 goals every student should realize, all focused



A student from Battle Creek Academy in Michigan demonstrates his model of a dam at the school's science fair.

on personal growth and eternal values:

1. Acceptance of God
2. Commitment to the Church
3. Interpersonal Relationships
4. Responsible Citizenship
5. Healthy Balanced Living
6. Intellectual Development
7. Communication Skills
8. Personal Management
9. Aesthetic Appreciation
10. Career and Service

J2E materials provide teachers with preferred practices to help them achieve each goal in their classrooms. Unions are implementing the J2E initiative by in-servicing personnel and leading schools to develop improvement goals.

All school accreditation/evaluation instruments have been revised to reflect the J2E model. Through agreements with the regional accrediting associations, Adventist schools may now choose to be accredited by those bodies along with their Adventist accreditation. The evaluation instruments, with all NAD education documents and forms, have been placed on the Office of Education Website in interactive PDF format, making it easy for administrators to submit their data.

### **Marketing**

NAD has embarked on a marketing initiative, developing research-based

materials that highlight the purpose of Adventist education, its value to the church, and its focus on excellence. Research has included holding focus groups across NAD with parents, educators, pastors, students, and board members. Additionally, a telephone survey of Adventist parents whose children are not enrolled in church schools asked how we could make the system more attractive to them. The data will be used for school improvement and marketing. A new NAD Adventist education logo and theme have been adopted, and a marketing video with accompanying materials is now available. In February 2005, the first of a biannual series of marketing seminars was held for school and conference leaders. Through this ongoing initiative, we hope to grow enrollment and make Adventist education available to more children and young people. (For more information, see <http://www.nadeducation.org/marketing>.)

Christian service and outreach continues to be a very important emphasis in NAD schools. Students from secondary schools and colleges serve in many locations around the world, as well as in their local communities. They have built churches and schools, assisted in communities struck by disasters, and held Vacation Bible Schools and evangelistic meetings, leaving each venture with hearts committed to service.

### Technology

Adventist education has adopted an integrated approach to technology. Students are using the Internet, PowerPoint, robotics, and other resources to enhance their educational experience. Teachers are increasingly connected to Web resources and one another. A Technology and Distance Education Committee monitors and recommends directions for the division's elementary and secondary schools. (See <http://www.nadtdec.org/>.)

The CIRCLE Website service, sponsored by the NAD Office of Education and General Conference Department of Education, functions as a clearinghouse and resource for curriculum and other instructional resources. There are currently more than 4,000 links to resource materials at the CIRCLE site,



An Idaho student works hard at his studies.

which had nearly six million hits in 2004. (See <http://www.circle.adventist.org/>.)

### New Textbooks

The Crossroads Series secondary religion textbooks, completed in 2000, are now in use. The last of the elementary religion textbooks are currently being introduced. These books represent a major commitment of time and resources by NAD, which continues a strong focus on the study of the Bible,

salvation and related history, and practical life issues.

A new K-8 integrated reading, phonics, spelling, and language-arts program will be introduced in schools for the 2006-2007 school year. It will have an intentional Seventh-day Adventist and nurturing focus. The NAD Office of Education is working with the Ellen G. White Estate to identify ways to incorporate more prophetic studies and denominational history into the curriculum.

### Higher Education Collaboration

In November 2002, representatives from the administration of the 15 NAD colleges and universities, along with the NAD vice president for education, established the Association of Adventist Colleges and Universities (AACU) to enhance system-wide cooperation and collaboration. AACU has adopted four initial strategies: (1) strategic enrollment management/marketing, (2) distance education collaboration, (3) young adult job placement/church renewal, and (4) human and financial resource utilization. The Adventist Distance Education Consortium is enabling enhanced institutional cooperation by offering students easy access to distance-education courses, regardless of where they are studying or the courses being taught. (See <http://www.adventistedu.org/>.)



Teachers' editions of the new elementary Bible textbooks.



Mission trips enable students to help people and learn new skills.



Multigrade schools give children a chance to make new friends and help each other learn.

### Adventist Colleges Abroad

Despite concerns about terrorism and political unrest, Adventist Colleges Abroad (ACA) continues its dynamic programs, which enable NAD students to study languages and cultures in 11 other countries, and benefit participating colleges in Europe and South America. Since 2000, 1,565 students have participated in summer and academic-year ACA programs.

As NAD develops materials and curriculum resources, we remain mindful of the possible benefits to other divisions. We want to grow, to ensure excellence, and to incorporate the latest innovations, but most important, we want to do everything possible to help our students and teachers experience a personal relationship with the Master Teacher. That is our true calling.

For more information about Adventist education in the North American Division, visit our Website at <http://www.nadeducation.org/>.



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Graduating class 2004, Highland Academy, Portland, Tennessee.



As an important part of the *Journey to Excellence*, North American Division students become proficient in using the Internet, PowerPoint, robotics, and other resources.



Hands-on science and nature study are part of the curriculum in NAD schools.



At Pacific Union College and other Adventist colleges, fine arts, academics, and spiritual life are combined to ensure a wholistic education.



Students from Milo Academy in Oregon help neighbors in the community.



LSU students celebrate the La Sierra University Chamber Singers' performance at Carnegie Hall in New York in November 2004.



Participation on medical mission trips stirred the passion of Dr. Michael Duehrssen, director of the new international rescue and relief program at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, to create an academic program that would prepare students for a variety of service-focused careers.