



ADVENTIST EDUCATION IN NORTH AMERICA:

HOW DO WE MEASURE UP ACADEMICALLY?

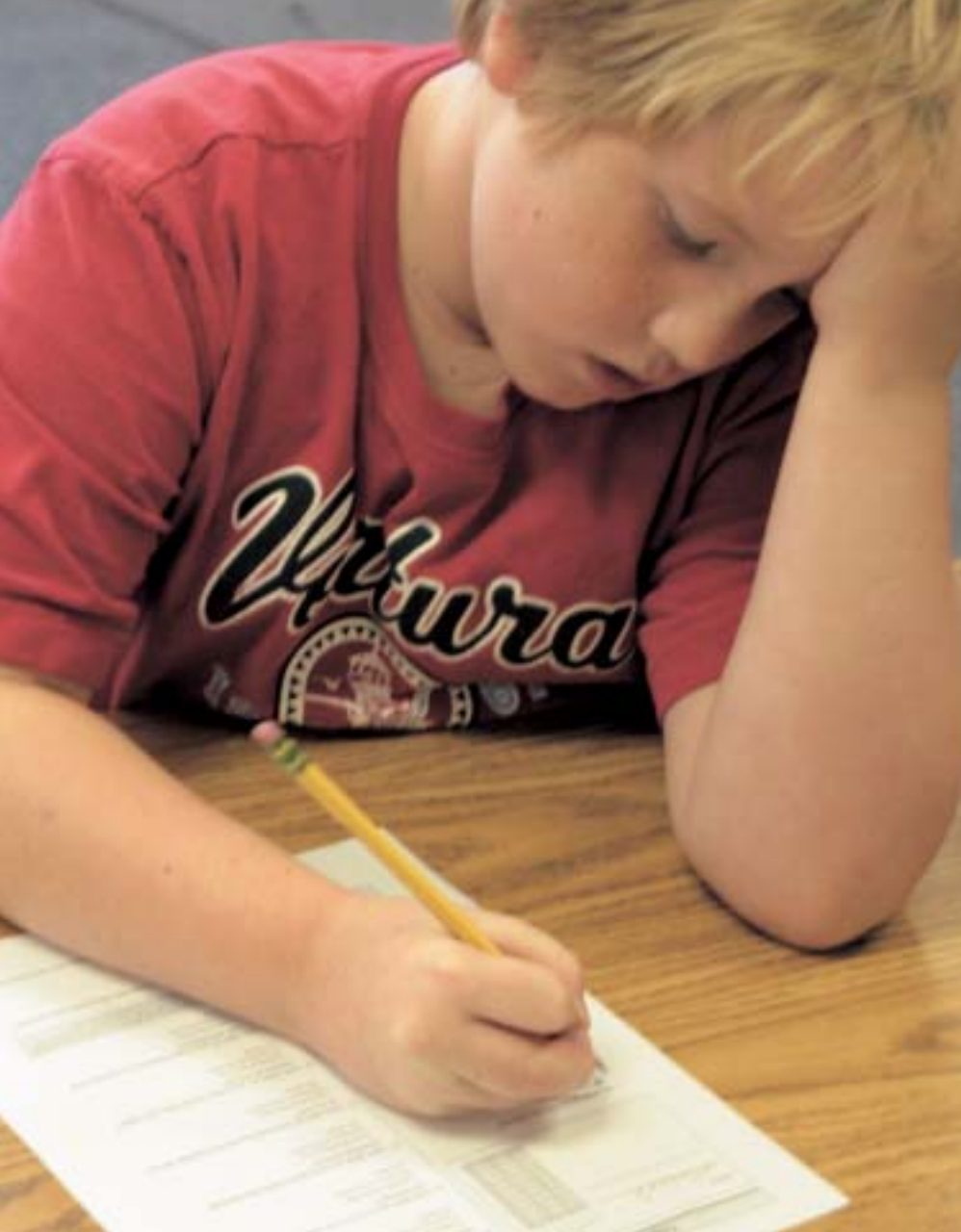
Does anyone know if the curriculum and teaching methods employed in Seventh-day Adventist elementary and secondary schools across the North American Division (NAD) produce students with top-notch academic preparation? NAD educators have long maintained that their students' Iowa Test of Basic Skills scores, pass rates, and college matriculation percentages consistently outpace most public school and comparable private school systems. At nearly every level, Adventist educational leaders cite annual Council for American Private Education reports indicating that on nationwide standardized tests, private education students routinely outperform public school students.

Are these impressive facts or well-intentioned propaganda? Parents, board members, church administrators, and constituents want to know.

BY HAMLET CANOSA

Marketing Adventist education is perceived by some as a predictable “party-line” mantra. Notwithstanding the tireless and sincere efforts of Adventist recruiters, some parents still ask, “Will my child receive a quality education in Adventist schools? If so, can you prove it?”

How do Adventist elementary and secondary schools measure up academically to their private and public school counterparts? Is Adventist curriculum inferior,



comparable, or superior to that of other school systems? Do Adventist teachers possess sufficient pedagogical knowledge to expose young minds to the wonders of Scripture, science, math, and the humanities? And what about the aspects of Adventist education that make our schools distinctive? Do they indicate that our schools are superior to the local public schools or even the parochial/private schools in the same area?

Are such questions legitimate? Absolutely! The problem faced by Adventist educators is not whether such questions should be posed but how to give convincing answers in the absence of broad-based, valid, reliable research. Many parents, upon hearing the mar-

eters of Adventist education, offer a straightforward challenge: "Prove it!"

Valuegenesis I and II assessed the faith and values of Adventist youth. Data from these two studies resulted in system-wide programs to help youth integrate faith and to cultivate lives of service, commitment, and loyalty to the Adventist Church. Now, a new study called *CognitiveGenesis*, spearheaded by Elissa Kido, Ed.D., former dean of education, and Robert J. Cruise, Ph.D., research director, both researchers in the School of Education at La Sierra University in Riverside, California, seeks to answer the question, "What impact does Adventist education have on the academic performance of students?" A definitive answer, based on valid, reli-

able, empirical data, will lead to one of two possible outcomes, either of which will prove beneficial to Adventist education and the church:

1. the validation of Adventist education in terms of students' measurable academic performance, and/or
2. the identification of areas needing improvement.

CognitiveGenesis, from its inception, quickly gained strong, broad-based support. The North American Division Office of Education partnered with the

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lead proponents of the project, providing forums in which *CognitiveGenesis* was introduced to, and ultimately supported by, every union in the NAD. When it was presented to the North American Division Committee at its annual meeting of delegates in October 2005, the project was warmly endorsed.

"Assessing Adventist Academics," the motto of the research project, is an apt, brief descriptor of *CognitiveGenesis*. The project was unveiled at the August 2006 K-12 teachers convention in Nashville, Tennessee. At this time, thousands of Adventist educators learned much more about the project and the role each would play in advancing this vital education initiative.

With the start of this 2006-2007 school year, the three-year window of testing, surveying, and data collection has begun in grades 3-9, and 11. Five sources of data: ITBC/ITED/CogAt tests, and surveys of school administrators, teachers, parents, and students, will allow *CognitiveGenesis* researchers to measure a select set of variables and reduce bias. The information gathered

from the standardized tests and the surveys will establish a large database to identify which features of Adventist education contribute to academic achievement. Not only will the quality of Adventist education be measured, but comparable studies of other school systems will also be explored to see how Adventist education measures up academically.

Once results are available, we can end the speculation and uncertainty about whether Adventist education successfully promotes intellectual development of its elementary, middle, and high school students. Everyone will know whether Adventist education is truly a *Journey to Excellence* or if our curriculum and/or teaching methodologies need to be changed.

Based on preliminary findings in one conference, elementary students whose schooling was exclusively Adventist appeared to have higher test scores than those in the same conference whose schooling was not exclusively Adventist. *CognitiveGenesis* re-

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search will, among other things, determine if this is just a regional phenomenon or if it can be generalized across the North American Division.

A *CognitiveGenesis* Advisory Committee, which is listed at the end of this article and composed of Adventist educational leaders and researchers, has been established to approve appropriate data use. These advisors will ex-

ercise exacting diligence, along with sensitivity to individual privacy, to ensure proper diffusion of information. The *Cognitive Genesis* Website, <http://www.cognitivegenesis.org>, will permit educators, parents, students, and other interested parties to read a description of the project and to track developments as they occur. Questions about the project can be posed on the site, with timely responses provided by project assistants.

Drs. Kido and Cruise believe this invaluable research initiative to be “a step toward better understanding where we are as an educational system and where we want to go academically.” Kido and Cruise have traveled across North America describing how Adventist education will benefit from this research. As lead proponents of *CognitiveGenesis*, they will make themselves accessible to those wanting to know more about the project.

According to Cruise, “*CognitiveGenesis* will help Adventist educators determine if Seventh-day Adventist schools





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are developing ‘thinkers and not mere reflectors’ of other people’s thoughts.” Isn’t it the calling of Adventist education to develop true thinkers—young people equipped with sound academics to serve God and humanity?

CognitiveGenesis could reap a har-

vest of blessings for the church. The research design now in place will allow Adventist education to (1) objectively address parental questions about how well Adventist schools prepare students academically, (2) provide study findings and conclusions based on valid, reliable data that should enhance the credibility of Adventist education

among constituents, (3) identify best curricula practices consistent with the new *Journey to Excellence* curriculum initiative, and (4) better equip students in Adventist secondary schools to successfully meet the challenges of university academics by crafting advanced teaching methodologies. We must position students to compete in an ever-changing, fast-paced world.

CognitiveGenesis is an important opportunity to find answers to significant questions about academic achievement in Adventist schools, develop teaching strategies, and chart the best course for educating our youth and teachers. Combined with the benefits of Valuegenesis, *CognitiveGenesis* can help us prepare youth to choose service to God and society as a life calling. When youth and

parents see that Adventist education delivers spiritually and academically, there may well be a growing cadre of young people determined to work for the Lord as a life calling. ✍

The *CognitiveGenesis* Advisory Committee

- Larry Blackmer, M.A., Associate Director of Education, North American Division
- Kelly Bock, Ed.D., Director of Education, Pacific Union Conference
- Kathy Bollinger, M.Ed., Associate Professor of Education, Union College
- Ian Bothwell, Ed.D., Professor of Education, Atlantic Union College
- Paul Brantley, Ed.D., Assistant Vice President, Florida Hospital
- Hamlet Canosa, Ed.D., Vice President of Education, Columbia Union Conference
- Robert Cruise, Ph.D., Research Director, La Sierra University
- Debra Fryson, M.A., Associate Director of Education, Southern Union Conference
- Bailey Gillespie, Ph.D., Director, Hancock Center for Youth/Family Ministry
- Edwin Hernández, Ph.D., Professor, University of Notre Dame
- Elissa Kido, Ed.D., Project Director, La Sierra University
- Linda Koh, Ed.D., Director of Children’s Ministries, General Conference
- Charles McKinstry, J.D., Director, Trust Services, Southeastern California Conference
- José Vicente Rojas, M.A., Director, Volunteer/Young Adult Ministries, General Conference
- Ella Smith Simmons, Ph.D., Vice President, General Conference
- Jerry Thayer, Ph.D., Director of Center of Statistical Services, Andrews University



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