

do we maintain the family feel of our schools when students must learn at home? When they go back to school, how will they engage in community when they can't mix between cohorts/classes? These questions are on everyone's minds—superintendents, principals, teachers, parents, pastors, and church members. The fact that everyone wants to maintain our family atmosphere is a huge sign that our educational communities are still thriving and that they are important.

In *Education*, Ellen White wrote, "True education means more than the pursual of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to [humankind]. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come" (13.1).

This is the sentiment my parents expressed to my grandpa all those years ago, and, despite his lack of experience or perhaps even total understanding, he chose to support their efforts to give my sisters and me an Adventist education. There was something in the passion and determination he saw in my parents that he could get behind, and something in my sisters and me that he noticed and wanted to continue to develop.

"The classroom may look different, but the education and community provided through our schools are still as valuable and beneficial as ever," said Datha Tickner, SECC associate superintendent for education.

Our schools have never been tested this way before. This is new territory for everyone. The answer is not to give up and look for other means of education for our children; the answer is to chip in, support, and believe in our schools, our teachers, and our education leaders. It may not be easy or clear-cut, but with all of us working together, it's much more likely that we can build a new-normal-version of the communities of Christian education we so greatly desire for our kids.

We believed in what God could do through our schools before COVID-19; why wouldn't we trust Him now?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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WHAT WE KNOW: STEWARDSHIP ADVENTIST EDUCATION THROUGH THE UNKNOWN

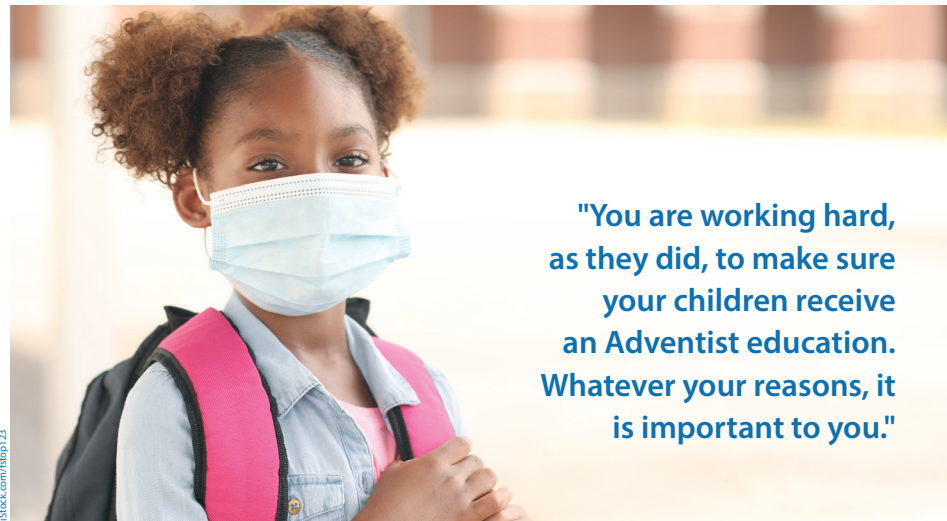
BY BECKY ST. CLAIR

When I was around 11 or 12, my grandfather came to visit. On evening, after my sisters and I had gone to bed, I heard him talking to my parents.

"So, tell me why you choose to send your daughters to private school when you could send them to public school for free?" Grandpa inquired, genuinely trying to understand. (My grandparents were in no way religious. My mother had converted to Adventism after meeting my Adventist father.)

"Well, because we believe in it," my parents told him. They continued, calmly explaining to Grandpa the benefits they saw in Adventist education—a smaller community environment, teachers and families with similar Christian values to ours, Bible teachings in every class, no school activities on Friday nights, and a strong connection to the church my

STEWARDSHIP is a total lifestyle. It involves our health, time, talents, environment, relationships, spirituality, and finances.



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parents wanted us girls to stay in touch with as we grew.

"But, it's expensive!" Grandpa protested, still not quite getting it.

"Yes, it is," my parents agreed. "But so far, God has provided a way. We trust He will continue to do so because we think it's important to Him, too."

The conversation meandered on to other things, a day or two went by, and my grandfather's visit came to an end. As he was hugging us all goodbye and walking to the car, Grandpa handed my mom a small slip of paper. It turned out to be a check with a note in the memo line: "For the girls' school." It was the first of several regular checks that came for quite some time.

Grandpa still isn't a professing Christian, but he heard in my parents' determination their simple faith and deeply rooted passion for something they believed in with their whole hearts. And he supported that.

Many of you reading this probably feel similarly to my parents. You are working hard, as they did, to make sure your children receive an Adventist education. Whatever your reasons, it is important to you.

Today, I'm a mother who values Christian education. My two older children have been attending an Adventist school, soon to be joined by my youngest who starts kindergarten this fall. Of course, right now school looks very different from when I was a student. As I'm writing this, we don't even know what that "very different" looks like yet for the 2020-2021 school year. The level of unknown in our collective future as a community, as a society, and as a world is, frankly, a bit frightening.

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But let me tell you what we do know:

- The Adventist church still values its children as tomorrow's leaders, both inside and outside the church.
- Teachers in Adventist schools across the world want nothing more than to give their students the best education and most positive school experience possible.
- Adventist educators love Christ and want to pass that love on to their students.
- Teachers and administrators are working nonstop (and losing sleep) to figure out how to keep providing the Christian community and quality education their students need.
- We all want what's best for our kids. Period.

How do I know this? Well, first, I'm a mother. I've talked at length with several of my kids' teachers and school staff, and I know the above to be true. Secondly, I'm a writer, and some of my assignments have involved interviewing teachers, superintendents, and conference instructional coaches on their thoughts and plans for the upcoming school year. Their comments echo the statements above. Third, I have worked on three different Adventist university campuses, I am friends with both professors and administrators, and I know they want exactly the same things we as parents and supporters do.

"Health and safety in our schools is, as always, a top priority, and right up there alongside it is high-quality and effective instruction," said Amy Cornwall, director of instructional coaching for the Southeastern California Conference (SECC).

School staff are making adjustments for our new reality, even as that reality shifts constantly. Teachers and administrators are researching, not only what the medical world knows and continues to discover about COVID-19, but also technology they can introduce into their classrooms to provide effective and consistent online instruction.

One great concern is the atmosphere of our educational system. How



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