

Perceptions of Local Church Children's Ministries Leaders

Table of Contents

Purpose of Study	1
Executive Summary	2
Methodology and Demographics.....	3
Sabbath School Workers by Divisions.....	4
Quarterly Program Helps Use	5
Materials Report Card	6
Training Event Attendance	8
Perceived Need of Training.....	9
Use of Non-SDA Produced Material	10
<i>Kid's Stuff</i>	12
"The Sabbath School exists to . . . "	13
Children's Church	15
Inviting and Preparing Children for Baptism	16
"Missing the Boat?"	17
Marketing Ideas	22
Recommendations.....	23

Purpose of the Study

The North American Division has asked the Church Resource Center to conduct a study measuring perceptions of local church Children's Ministries leaders toward the effectiveness of materials and support supplied them by the denomination. Items to be addressed include:

1. Present use of lesson quarterlies and program helps.
2. Perceived quality of Adventist produced Children's Ministries resources.
3. Present use of non-Adventist produced Children's Ministries resources and materials.
4. Perceived effectiveness of the local church in inviting and preparing it's own children for baptism and church membership.
5. Present use of leadership training offered.
6. Perceived need of additional training.
7. Views regarding Children's Church.
8. Concerns and areas needing greater attention.

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Executive Summary

- Nearly all (98%) children's Sabbath School leaders use the church-produced lesson quarterly. Three in four use the church-produced program helps.
- There is overall satisfaction with the quality of church-produced Children's Ministries materials. Leaders ask that a greater quantity of active learning ideas be included in the program helps.
- Six in ten (64%) leaders have attended a workshop or training event within the past two years. Eight in ten see no need for additional training, most believing materials should be "self-training."
- Nearly a third (29%) use non-church produced materials in developing and presenting the Sabbath School program. Two in three leaders have never heard of the magazine title "Kid's Stuff".
- There is no consensus as to the primary purpose of Sabbath School.
- Most (nine in ten) leaders believe the mechanisms used for inviting and preparing children for baptism are successful. Less than two in ten, however, see the Sabbath School leader or teacher as sharing responsibility for *inviting* children to be baptized. Only one in twenty see the Sabbath School leader or teacher as sharing responsibility for *preparing* children for baptism.
- The preferred method of keeping the leader advised of resources is a picture catalogue.

Methodology and Demographics

Four focus groups were conducted during the week of May 14 - 21, 1994. Participants were local church Children's Ministries leaders, serving in or around the following cities:

- Orlando, Florida
- Indianapolis, Indiana
- Houston, Texas
- Seattle, Washington

Participants were randomly selected from a list of names provided by pastors serving churches in and around each city. Care was taken to insure that participant representations included all major ethnic groups.

A phone survey was conducted in July, 1994, to quantify focus group findings. Participants for this phase of the study were selected as follows.

Churches were randomly selected from a list provided by the North American Division Distribution Center. The pastor

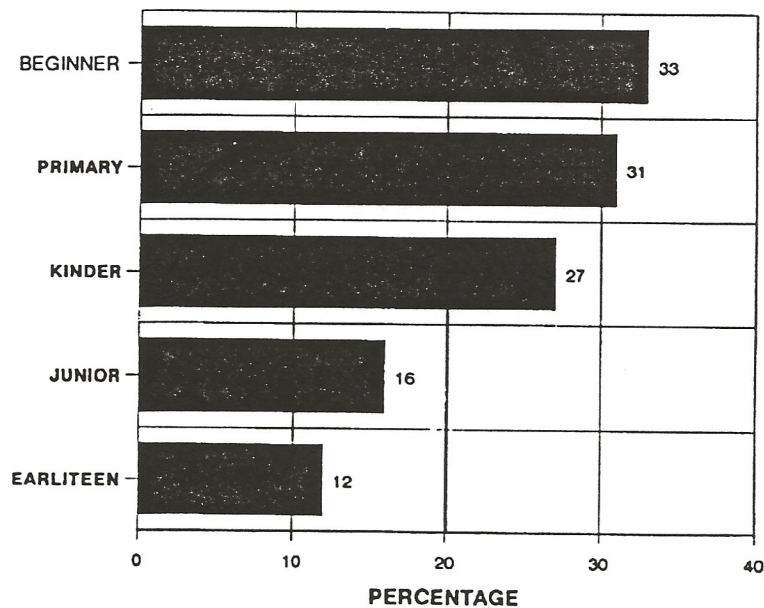
of each church was asked to supply as many as three names and numbers of individual members involved in ministry to children at their church.

The total sample of the study includes thirty-six Children's Ministries leaders who participated in focus groups and additionally two-hundred and one leaders surveyed by phone.

- The scope of this study does not involve Pathfinders or Senior youth programs.
- Unless otherwise noted statistical data represents only those respondents who participated in the telephone survey. Verbatim quotations used throughout the report were contributed by focus group participants.
- Data was entered and analyzed using SPSS, a cross-tabulation and analysis program for microcomputers.

S. S. Workers by Division

"In which Children's Ministries activity are you currently involved?"



Sabbath School Workers by Division

Many respondents indicate they are involved in more than one Children's Ministries activity.

Nearly one in seven (15%) of respondents indicate they also assist in such activities as Pathfinders,

Adventurers, Children's Church, VBS, or Puppet Ministry. None of these sub groups have sufficient representation as to consider their responses projectable to a larger number of that sub group.

"As far as Cradle Roll is concerned, most of the material is not age appropriate. It is targeted to the upper end of Cradle Roll instead of the lower end"

- Florida

Use of Quarterly, Program Helps

"Do you use the Sabbath School Quarterly developed by the church for your department?"

Yes 98%
No 2%

Nearly all respondents indicate using the denominationally developed Sabbath School lesson materials. Only four (two Cradle Roll, one Junior, one earliteen) leaders answered this question "No".

"Do you use the Sabbath School Program Helps developed by the Church for your department?"

Yes 74%
No 26%

These two questions were asked of Cradle Roll teachers:

"Some have suggested that Cradle Roll materials target too large an age span. Do you agree?"

Yes 28%
No 72%

"Would you be willing to pay more for materials if they were separated for children ages birth to two years, and children two to three years old?"

Yes 20%
No 80%

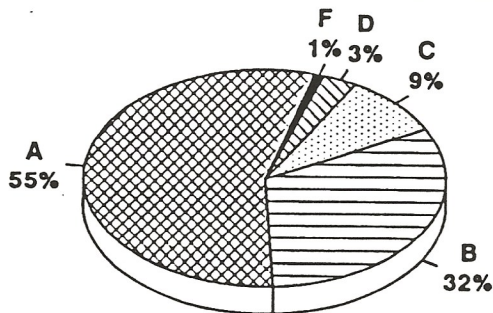
Table 1

	Yes	No
Beginner	64%	36%
Kindergarten	70%	30%
Primary	74%	26%
Junior	72%	28%
Earliteen	76%	24%

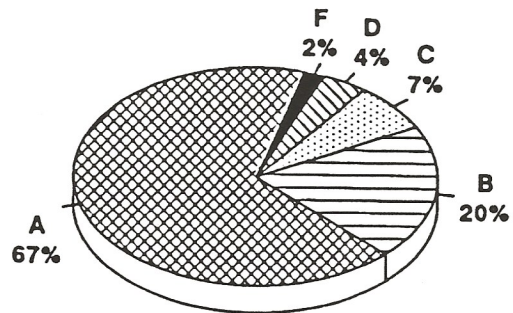
Use of Program Helps by S. S. Department

The Report Card

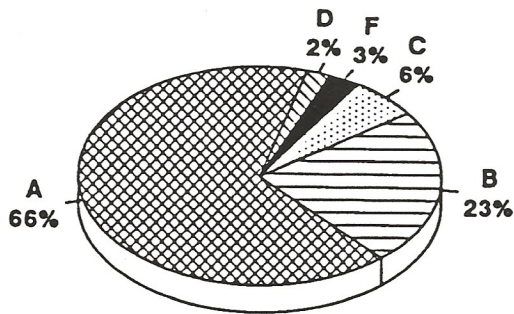
"What grade would you give to the program materials developed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to help in your area of Children's Ministries?"



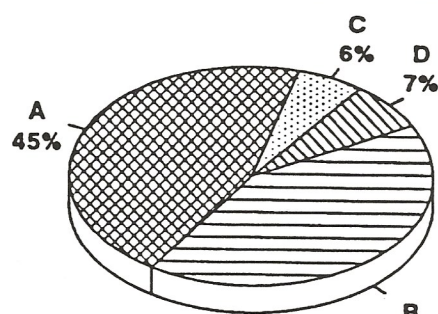
Beginner
G.P.A. = 3.51



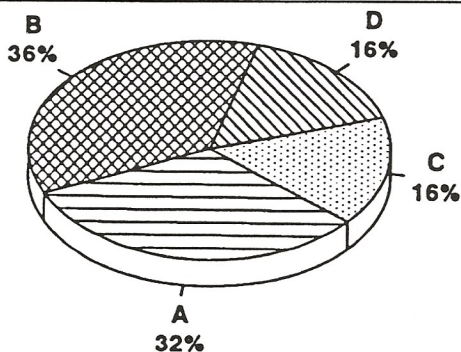
Kindergarten
G.P.A. = 3.46



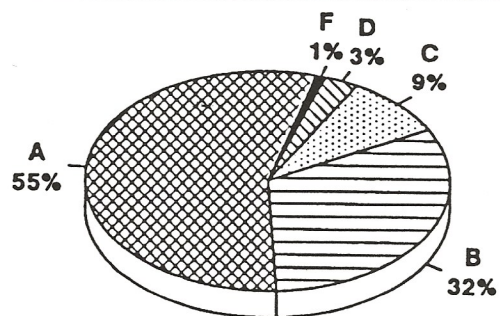
Primary
G.P.A. = 3.47



Junior
G.P.A. = 3.23



Earliteen
G.P.A. = 2.84



Total Sample
G.P.A. = 3.37

Focus Group Comments

"I used 'Kids in the Kitchen' last summer and it was terrific"

-Texas

"I used a program called 'Something for Jesus'. It was written by Noelene Johnsson and it was wonderful!"

-Washington

"I like the 'Jesus Taught' series."

-Florida

"I think that the 'Earth Makers' series is terrific."

- Indianapolis

"The only thing I've really been impressed with as far as SDA products is the 'As Jesus Taught' series, and they are not available in Indiana. I had to send to Florida to get them."

- Indianapolis

"I like the changes they have made in the memory verse cards."

- Florida

Training Event Attendance

“Have you attended a Children’s Ministries Workshop or training session within the last two years?”

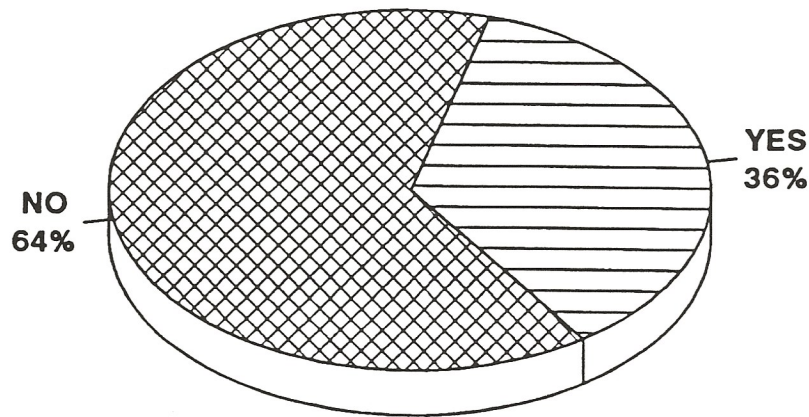


Table 2

	Yes	No
Beginner	43%	57%
Kindergarten	33%	67%
Primary	32%	68%
Junior	38%	62%
Earliteen	28%	72%

Training event participants by division

Perceived Need of Training

"Do you feel the need for more training in the use of Sabbath School materials?"

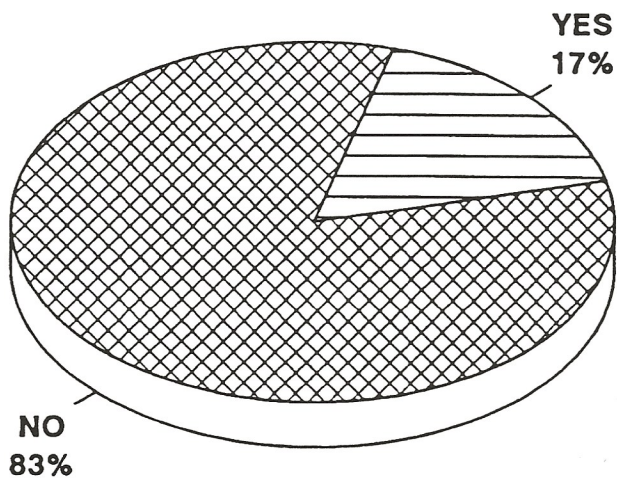


Table 3

	Yes	No
Beginner	18%	82%
Kindergarten	15%	85%
Primary	6%	94%
Junior	16%	84%
Earliteen	20%	80%

Perceived need for more training by S. S. Division leaders

"Other professional Children's Ministries do more research and marketing. They target their market better. They also make it easier for adults to use what they produce."

- Indiana

"We don't need more training. Just make the materials easier to use."

- Seattle

"Our things are easy to understand and read, but we need more ideas."

- Florida

I would like to see lesson helps that have more hands-on active learning things. That's the main reason I look other places because I'm not finding that in our materials. It's getting a little better but it's not near there.

- Seattle

Use of Non-SDA Produced Material

"Do you use non-SDA produced materials in your Children's Ministries?"

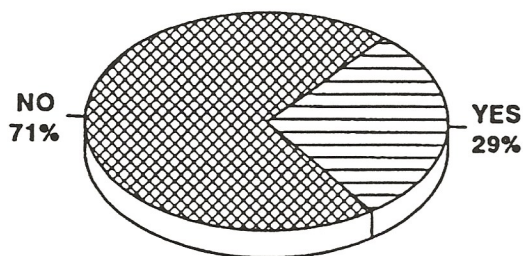


Table 4

	Yes	No
Beginner	25%	75%
Kindergarten	19%	81%
Primary	31%	69%
Junior	25%	75%
Earliteen	42%	58%

Use of non-SDA produced materials

"The reason I use other sources is that we're dealing with kids of the 90's."

-Washington

"Our material is not always quality. It is not always easy to use for the adults or the children."

-Florida

"In Primary we stick to the same old thing over and over again."

- Indiana

Use of Non-SDA Produced Material (continued)

Non-Adventist Materials Mentioned

Janet Sage	10
Group "Hands On . . ."	8
Visual Aids and Charts	7
National Geographic Magazine	5
Focus on the Family	5
Crafts	5
Coloring Books	5
David C. Cook	3
Children's Bulletins	3
Ranger Rick	3
"As Jesus Taught"	3
VBS Materials	2
Stickers	2
Lamplight	2
Gospel Light	2
Standard Publishing	2
"Snap Sessions"	2
"Shining Star" by Good Apple	2

"We have found great success with kindergarten *Lively Ways of Learning*. This is put out by Group. It puts in action truths. It's like an Oreo cookie when you pull away the center always sticks to you. Like Christ, even when you pull away from Him. This has probably been the most useful tool I have found."

- Florida

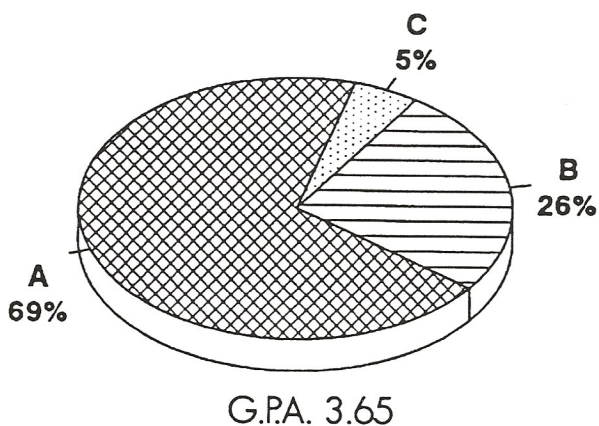
"The first idea that I get from hearing Kid's Stuff is that it's ideas and full of things I can do with the kids. I don't know what the magazine is, but if that is it the title seems appropriate for me."
 - Indiana

Kid's Stuff

"Are you acquainted with the Children's Ministries magazine titled 'Kid's Stuff'?"



Respondents who were acquainted with Kid's Stuff were asked to give a grade (ABCDF) rating the quality and usefulness of the magazine.



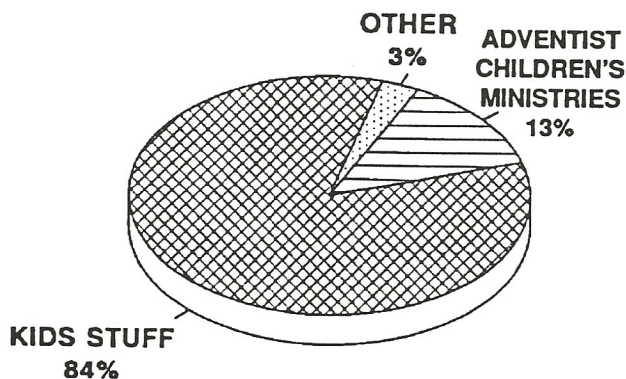
Only five of the Earliteen leaders were acquainted with Kid's Stuff. The number is too small for results to be considered projectable.

Table 5

	Yes	No
Beginner	26%	74%
Kindergarten	35%	65%
Primary	37%	63%
Junior	34%	66%
Earliteen	20%	80%

Leaders acquainted with Kid's Stuff by Division

"How do you feel about the name 'Kid's Stuff'? Would you prefer the name 'Adventist Children's Ministries', or do you have another name to suggest?"



“The Sabbath School exists to . . .”

Respondents were given three optional endings to finish the above sentence.

“ . . . transmit Bible facts and information.”

“ . . . provide a warm, caring and happy environment.”

“ . . . allow children to discover spiritual realities for themselves.”

When forced to choose one ending as their primary answer, phone survey participants responded as follows:

- 27% “Transmit Bible Facts . . .”
- 45% “Provide . . . environment”
- 29% “Discover . . . themselves”

Nearly half (45%) believe the primary function of their Sabbath School is to provide a warm, caring and happy environment. Neither of the other options was chosen by more than 1 in 3 leaders.

Those called were then asked to rank (prioritize) the statements to reflect their personal opinion of the importance of each statement. Eight in ten (85%) selected the “environment” statement as their first or second choice. Six in ten (60%) gave the “transmit Bible facts” statement either a first or second place. Less than six in ten (57%) chose the “Discover themselves” statement as either number one or two.

	First	Second	Third
“Transmit Bible facts”	27%	33%	40%
“Environment”	45%	40%	15%
“Discover themselves”	29%	28%	43%

Total Sample

Focus group participants were also asked to prioritize the above statements. Older and more experienced leaders were twice as likely to place high priority on the “transmit” statement than were their younger counterparts who nearly always listed this statement as their third choice.

*"If we're missing the boat, it is in the area of vision. It's a vision of what Children's Ministries could be for our children. More than babysitting, but a program for salvation and life eternal."
- Orlando*

"The Sabbath School exists to . . ." (continued)

Beginner	First	Second	Third
"Transmit Bible facts"	27%	40%	33%
"Environment"	43%	43%	14%
"Discover themselves"	30%	16%	54%
Kindergarten	First	Second	Third
"Transmit Bible facts"	19%	45%	36%
"Environment"	57%	30%	13%
"Discover themselves"	24%	25%	51%
Primary	First	Second	Third
"Transmit Bible facts"	27%	42%	31%
"Environment"	47%	31%	22%
"Discover themselves"	26%	31%	43%
Junior	First	Second	Third
"Transmit Bible facts"	29%	23%	48%
"Environment"	36%	45%	19%
"Discover themselves"	36%	32%	32%
Earliteen	First	Second	Third
"Transmit Bible facts"	38%	8%	54%
"Environment"	42%	50%	8%
"Discover themselves"	21%	42%	37%

Children's Church

"Do you believe a Children's Church program for those over the age of 5 should be provided?"

Table 7

	Yes	No
Beginner	46%	54%
Kindergarten	33%	67%
Primary	31%	67%
Juniors	59%	41%
Earliteen	52%	48%

Leader responses by Division

Of those leaders identifying themselves as "parents" of children who are currently in a children's division, better than 8 in 10 (86%) answered "yes".

Of those who said "yes" to the "Children's Church" option, few believe it should be offered weekly (7%). Most, including the "parents" group mentioned above, believe it should be offered once or twice per quarter (59%).

"Our pastors desperately need to be taught how to make children a part of their worship service."

- Washington

'Something should be done separate and special for the kids. You cannot expect a two year old to sit in church and be quiet. If you don't have something you're constantly saying 'No, no, no, quiet, quiet, quiet.' The kid is going to hate church and not want to go. My dad would yank my hair if I made a noise. I didn't like church and I didn't want to go . . . '

- Florida

Inviting and Preparing Children for Baptism

Respondents were asked to identify the individual/s in their church most involved in inviting and then preparing children for baptism.

<u>Invite</u>		<u>Prepare</u>	
The Pastor	50%	The Pastor	87%
Church School Teacher	12%	Church School Teacher	2%
S.S. Teacher	19%	S.S. Teacher	6%
Parents/Others	19%	Parents/Others	5%

Leaders of younger age level divisions are more likely to believe the Sabbath School leader is involved in the invitation process than those leaders in divisions with children of baptismal age (i.e. one in four Primary teachers believe the S.S. leader is involved as opposed to one in twelve Junior and Earliteen leaders).

"Is the preparation for baptism of children in your church being done successfully?"

Yes		89%
No		11%

Leaders for younger age level divisions are far more likely to answer "yes" than leaders in divisions with children of baptismal age (i.e. 98% of kindergarten leaders answer affirmatively while only 75% of Jr. leaders.)

"If we ever wonder if we are missing the boat we just have to look at the kids that are graduating from our academies to know. They have come up in Christian homes, gone through Sabbath School, church school, and still they do not know what they should."

- Florida

"Have we missed the boat in Children's Ministries? If so, where?"

Relevancy

"The stories and lessons in our materials seem to indicate that all our kids are perfect little Adventists. They don't eat meat, they don't go to movies, they don't do a lot of things. But that is not real. They do eat meat, they do have sugar. Get real! I think that the materials need to be updated and revised."

- Indiana

"The daily experiences of children today are much different than it was even when I was younger. It is important that the lesson study, stories, and other activities help children know how to handle problems from daily stress that we maybe never had."

- Texas

"The lessons for the Earliteens are not practical for this age."

- Florida

"I think right away of primary age. We need to make things relevant so that they can apply Bible stories to their own lives. The examples we give in the lessons are not the real things. The examples used are the same things that they've used for years. Kids are fighting at school, getting pushed around, and we talk about sharing your *Little Friend* or whatever with a neighbor."

- Washington

"Our Jesus is too ancient."

- Florida

“Have we missed the boat . . .?” (continued)

Boring Sabbath Schools

“The Church is in a three-year cycle with our lessons. By the time they get to Primary they have already heard the same stories, the same characters. We need to be bringing in new characters from the Bible that are *ordinary* people.”

- Florida

“I have a 10 year old, and most of the time she doesn't want to go to Sabbath School because she's bored with it. She is so used to a stimulating world in school and everywhere she goes that it's just not lively enough for her.”

- Washington

“We live in a different time now. If they do come to Sabbath School we better have something that is unique, catchy and interesting. Not something just put together at the last moment, or the same old stuff.”

- Texas

“I feel that our materials are repetitive. There also needs to be more variety. We are so heavy on doctrine we cease to make sharing the information fun. It doesn't hold their attention.”

- Florida

“Have we missed the boat . . .?” (continued)

Service

“We need to talk and do more in the area of service and helping others. We should have role plays, and be holding up models of service for them. We should be working with the parents in providing ideas of what kids can do for others.”

- Washington

“We don't teach our kids enough about helping in the church, at school, or in their neighborhoods.”

- Texas

“There is no service orientation. We go, we entertain, we go home. Sabbath School needs a Bible Lab. If we don't get them involved in service their religion is irrelevant.”

- Indiana

Parents

“The main place where we are missing the boat is in working with the parents. There seems to be a lack of time and interest on the part of the parents.”

- Florida

“... helping parents know how to encourage children in Sabbath School. There are a lot of helps available, but parents are at a total loss when it comes to using them at home. Helping them should be part of our responsibility.”

- Indiana

“If we are really interested in helping the kids we should be helping the parents know what to do with them on Sabbath afternoons. How can they have family worship? What materials can they use?”

- Washington

“Have we missed the boat . . .?” (continued)

Grace Orientation

“These children need to know about Jesus. It needs to be fun, it needs to be exciting. It needs to be down at their level, and it needs to be about current issues, especially when it comes to Earliteens.”

- Florida

“I always want to make sure that they leave knowing Jesus as their friend. I think we need to focus more on internals like helping the children know Jesus is real in their lives. We don't have enough of that emphasis.”

- Indiana

“We are not making Jesus tangible to them.”

- Florida

“We are not making Jesus real enough to them so that they leave Sabbath School more able to carry Him with them everyday.”

- Washington

“I think our denomination is weak on grace. And I think that this weakness is reflected in our children's material.”

- Florida

VBS

“It's a standing joke at our church that you plan your summer vacation around VBS so you can have Day Care. And that's how our people look at it. They're not looking at it as an outreach. It's because it's old fashioned.”

- Florida

“We come to VBS to have fun and games. Somehow we miss getting them to take Jesus home with them.”

- Indiana

“We are really missing the boat when it comes to VBS follow-up.”

- Washington

“Have we missed the boat . . .?” (continued)

Miscellaneous

“We are just seen as a babysitting service.”
- Washington

“We don’t get any support from our pastoral staff.”
- Florida

“We’re missing the boat by not looking at what we can do with high technology today, what we can do with video, what we can do with music, and then there are the interactive learning activities.”
- Indiana

“We have no materials to draw on. When I ask my pastor where the stuff is he says to go to the Book and Bible House and look . . .”
- Florida

“There needs to be a concerted effort to look at the Sabbath School curriculum in light of what is being taught at the church school.”
- Indiana

“We have been brought up in an Adventist culture that is intent on just telling people what is right. Off hand I know of nothing that is being done in a structured way to help our children learn spiritual truths on their own.”
- Washington

“We need better materials for Juniors and Earliteens. We are losing them!”
- Florida

Survey respondents were asked what specific areas of ministry to children the church needs to address more vigorously. By far the number one response was a plea for greater attention to the needs of Juniors and Earliteens.

Marketing Ideas

"How can the church keep you better informed of what ministry tools are available, and make it easier for you to get these resources?"

Ideas mentioned (more than once)	Number of people mentioning (of 201 surveys)
"Send me a picture catalog"	78
"Show me more materials at workshops"	30
"Get the materials to us on time!"	14
"We need an 800 number for ordering and support"	12
"Send materials directly to leaders and teachers"	9
"Send me a Sabbath School newsletter"	5
"Cut the cost"	5
"Make materials in Spanish"	5
"Use videos for promotion and training"	3

"Our resources are hard to get a hold of. I mean, I haven't heard of many. They need to be marketed better."

- Florida

Recommendations

1. The purpose of having Sabbath School for children needs to be more clearly identified. It should become highly visible and regularly placed in resources that are made available to parents and church leaders.
2. Greater emphasis should be placed on producing "easy to use" or "self-training" resources for leaders, including additional ideas for expanding active learning options.
3. Significant numbers of leaders indicate using other materials that, in their opinion, are more action oriented or more user friendly. To prevent the preemption of Adventist curriculum, which presents the distinctive values and doctrines of our church, we must be more aggressive in the production of materials that appeal to leaders or are perceived as of higher quality and usefulness.
4. A review of the present curriculum of all age levels should be conducted to address the issue of repetitiveness. If necessary, materials may need to be revised, offering more alternatives and options within the program helps and teaching aids. The present curriculum rotation (cycles) needs to be studied to determine how best to group the age levels.
5. Departmental directors should be encouraged to move from seeing themselves primarily as trainers to individuals specializing as information brokers, researchers, and administrators of networking.
6. Research should be done to compare the effectiveness of Vacation Bible School with alternative methodologies of community outreach to children.
7. Greater priority should be placed on compiling leader's names and addresses for marketing and information sharing. Less dependence should be placed on using the church office and/or pastor for these purposes. Direct mail should be used whenever possible.
8. As far as possible, materials and resources should list the 800 numbers of the ABC and NAD Distribution Center for orders and ordering information. The 1-800-SDA-Plus number could also be identified as a number to call for support and consultation.

Recommendations

(continued)

9. A "safety net" mechanism must be established to ensure that every child be offered an opportunity to give his/her life to Jesus and be baptized. Sabbath School leaders should be made aware of their responsibility to be part of the invitation.
10. Materials could be developed that focus on the issue of children and the Divine Worship time, targeting parents, pastors, and other church leaders.
11. Detailed research should be done to qualify and quantify the use and effectiveness of materials handed to children as they leave Sabbath School. Further studies should include focus groups to qualify perceptions of leaders and parents toward specific children's materials being produced by the church.
12. A system of training and support for parents should be established by the denomination. This dimension of family life should be seen as a valid and integral part of the Children's Ministries program.