

CES: The Lord's Educational System for His Church

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May 19, 2016**

I am very happy to be here today. I love you very much, and I love this place. I count it as a great blessing to have the opportunity to come here and share in the marvelous Spirit that is here.

I want to speak today about education in the Church Educational System. I begin with a simple message that came to me last summer as I began serving in my assignment as Commissioner of Education for the Church. The message was for me, but I felt that I also should share it with everyone involved in CES. And so, I want to share it with you. I pray that the Holy Ghost will be with us as we consider together the message and its implications.

Here it is: whatever level of spirituality we now enjoy in our lives; whatever degree of faith in Jesus Christ we now have; whatever strength of commitment and consecration; whatever degree of obedience, or hope, or charity is ours; whatever level of professional skill and ability we may have obtained, it will not be sufficient for the work that lies ahead.

Brothers and sisters, you and I need to be much better than we are now. The scriptures teach us that the world is now and will be in commotion. Wickedness and darkness will increase. Yet in that darkening world there will be increased divine light. The Lord Jesus Christ has a great work for us to do with the rising generation. It is a greater work than we have ever done before. The Lord is working in power to strengthen teaching and learning in His true and living Church. He is hastening His work, and He is preparing the earth and His kingdom—and us—for His return.

This is all part of a beautiful pattern we see from the beginning of the Restoration. In 1820 God the Father appeared with His Son Jesus Christ to the boy Joseph Smith. Since that day in the Sacred Grove, Jesus Christ has built up His Church and His people line upon line, precept upon precept, step by step.

Here is what He has said:

For I will raise up unto myself a pure people, that will serve me in righteousness;ⁱ

That the work of the gathering together of my saints may continue, that I may build them up unto my name upon holy places; for the time of harvest is come, and my word must needs be fulfilled.ⁱⁱ

My people must be tried in all things, that they may be prepared to receive the glory that I have for them, even the glory of Zion;ⁱⁱⁱ

This is the Lord's pattern: He is raising up, building up, and preparing His people and His Church. I felt that very strongly when I became the president of BYU–Idaho in 2005. I want to read something I said at my inauguration in October of 2005:

When I think of the growing world-wide Church, I see in my mind little girls and boys sitting in Primary classes all over the world. These children will make sacred covenants with the Lord, and they will keep them. I believe the Lord desires to bless them and, like the army of Helaman, raise them up as a righteous generation of disciples of Christ and leaders in His Kingdom all across the earth.

That will take education—deep learning of the kind we have talked about today. Now, I realize that most of these young children will never come to BYU-Idaho, or to any of the CES campuses. But they will be blessed by

what we learn here and what we do to create educational opportunities for them.

Brothers and Sisters, that day has come. The Lord is opening more opportunities for education to many more of His children. In that spirit, I believe there are two overarching assignments we have in the Church Educational System:

First, we need to educate more deeply and more powerfully than we have ever done before or than anyone has ever done before. That work must be done in all the CES programs: religious education, secondary education, Pathway: Academic Start, technical and skill-based certification, and in undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

As President Eyring said many years ago, education in God's Kingdom is the "struggle for perfection." It only happens through learning that enlightens the mind, deepens spirituality, and strengthens understanding of the heart. That kind of learning leads to increased skill and capacity to act, and increased strength of character. Education of this kind is inherently a spiritual experience.

Second, we have a sacred responsibility to do all we can to help many more of the rising generation in the Church, and many of the older generation, obtain that kind of education. Increased opportunities for education are vital for building up the Kingdom of God and establishing Zion.

The responsibilities that rest upon us to educate more deeply and powerfully and to make education far more accessible to God's children were foreseen by prophets many years ago. You who know and love BYU-Hawaii know of President McKay's prophetic vision for this school. He saw the day, and it is our day, when BYU-Hawaii would influence millions of people in Asia and the Pacific for good.

That vision will become a reality because of you and your consecration and devotion to the Lord. Over the years that lie ahead, you will teach thousands of great young people from all across Asia and the Pacific, many more thousands than ever before. They will go forth as disciples of Christ, educated and prepared to be leaders in their families, in their communities and in God's Kingdom. And they will touch millions of hearts and lives. It is God's plan for this place. This is what President McKay saw and what he proclaimed would be.

The CES Initiative

What you can feel happening here, this sense of God moving in power to accomplish His work, is happening all across His Kingdom. It is happening in the Church Educational System. I would like to share with you today an initiative in the Church Educational system that addresses these responsibilities and opportunities. The initiative has been inspired and guided by our experience in Seminary and in Pathway: Academic Start. The combination of online learning with local gatherings, all under the direction of priesthood leaders, Church-service missionaries, and S&I teachers and coordinators, has given us a framework for taking additional educational opportunities to members of the Church wherever the Church is organized.

In order to provide some context for the initiative, and to help you see the scope of CES, I want to give you an up-to-date account of enrollment and employment in the whole system.

1. This first slide shows the number of individual students who were enrolled in seminary and institute and on the campuses of the universities during 2015. The number was significant. Over 780,000 students participated in S&I, and the number of students on the campuses ranged from just under 3000 at LDSBC, to 43,000 at BYU.
2. There are also many students enrolled in the various CES distance and online programs. These include secondary education courses offered through BYU, Academic Start, various technical and skills-based courses offered largely by LDSBC, independent study

college courses through BYU and undergraduate degree programs offered primarily through BYU–Idaho, but also through the online general studies degree at BYU.

3. Taken together, CES enrollment in 2015 totaled *1,064,854*. You can see the breakdown by the types of programs in this slide.
4. There are thousands of people who work and serve in CES; in fact, 81,197 to be precise. This slide shows the number of full-time, part-time, and student employees, as well as the number of missionaries, and the number of volunteers (largely teachers who are called to serve in wards and stakes). I think a couple of things are noteworthy here: you can see the very large number of people who are called to teach seminary and institute — 45,000 in 2015. We also see the large number of Church-service missionaries in the Pathway: Academic Start program — 1,770 and growing. There are 8,800 full-time employees, and a little under 5,000 people who work part-time. We employ over 20,000 students in CES.
5. Tremendous work has been underway, and tremendous investments have been made, for many years to create new ways of teaching and learning, in S&I, on the campuses, and in our online programs. We have learned a great deal about how to extend the reach of the Church Educational System in a way that is both cost effective and of high quality. This is the initiative I want to share with you today.
6. Beginning in August and continuing through October, I met in council several times with the members of the CES Presidents’ Roundtable, including Mark Woodruff, assistant to the commissioner; Clark S. Gilbert, President of BYU–Idaho; J. Lawrence Richards, President of LDSBC; Kevin J Worthen, President of BYU; John S. Tanner, President of BYU–Hawaii; and Chad H Webb, who runs S&I. We discussed how we might reach out much more broadly across the Church to offer many more members the kinds of educational opportunities we can provide through the Church Educational System. These were inspiring sessions and the presidents came to agreement on a proposal for the executive committee of the Board.
7. Perhaps the most precious resource we have in CES is the trust and confidence of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve. This is the Board of Education, which is

also the boards of trustees of the universities. President Monson chairs the Board; his counselors are the vice chairs. The executive committee is chaired by Elder Oaks, with Elder Holland, Elder Hallstrom, Sister Burton, and Sister Oscarson as members.

8. In late October we presented to the executive committee of the Board the following proposed concept:

The Church Educational System (CES) will seek to provide opportunities for education to the members of the Church wherever the Church is organized.

The proposal was approved, and went to the full Board in November; the Board approved the concept on November 11, 2015.

9. The opportunities we envision include religious education as an essential and foundational part of every program we might offer; secondary education, English language instruction, Pathway: Academic Start, technical and skills-based training and certificates, undergraduate degrees in selected fields (both associate and bachelors) and eventually masters degrees. As we do in Academic Start, tuition for these programs will be set low enough to make them accessible. We also anticipate working with Self-Reliance Services and PEF to help students gain access to the opportunities they need.
10. Along with the concept and the set of opportunities we also laid out a set of guiding principles for the initiative. I have summarized them here in four principles:
11. Principle #1: Education – the struggle for perfection – is a spiritual experience and is essential for building the Kingdom of God and establishing Zion. Religious instruction, gathering experiences, and a spiritual focus to online learning will be essential.

12. Principle #2: The initiative will be a collaborative, system-wide effort, involving all CES institutions. We will also partner with Self-Reliance Services, the Missionary Department, (and other Church departments as appropriate) and will build as much as possible on resources, courses, and programs that already exist.
13. Principle #3: Instruction will be delivered online and in local gathering activities at institutes and chapels. Study at local schools, combined with religious education at an institute, is an important part of this initiative.
14. Principle #4: Students will access programs through their local Church units, guided by priesthood leaders, supported by CES and Self-Reliance Services. This ensures that Area Presidents, Area Seventies, stake presidents, and bishops/branch presidents make this initiative part of their ministry. Then, the work takes place under the direction of priesthood keys.
15. Much of what will be offered in the CES Initiative already exists. There are two significant development efforts underway: one in English language learning, and the other in secondary education.

The English language program is an effort in which BYU–Hawaii is playing a significant role. We are developing a suite of programs with the potential to take individuals with no English all the way to the ability to speak, comprehend, read, and write English at a college level. The vision we have is that these programs will be used all across the Church — for students in CES programs, of course, but also for missionaries at the MTC and in the mission field, in companionship study and teaching local students, and in Self-Reliance Services. There will be a common assessment system for placement and certification, and we will also run an online system called English Connect for speaking partners and for students in the EIL (English as an International Language) certificate program.

16. This is truly a collaborative effort:

- i. BYU–Hawaii — is responsible for content for courses, exercises and instructional design.
- ii. BYU — is responsible for developing assessment tools
- iii. BYU–Idaho — is responsible for instructional design, development and online faculty
- iv. SRS — is responsible for project management, instructional design, development and the delivery platform in Self-Reliance Centers for the beginning English courses.
- v. MTC — is responsible for content for courses, exercises, and instructional design.

17. Our development work in secondary education is focused on three pilot projects in the Pacific. Building on the secondary education online courses and programs created by BYU, we are focusing on educational support for at-risk students, and also on developing English capability:

- Samoa — English Language Learning Support (August 2016)
CES and SRS will jointly implement 1–2 learning sites to help students increase their English language capacity to a level required for higher education.
- Vanuatu — After School Education Support (September 2016)
Students in grades 7 through 10 will gather for 1.5 hours per day, two days a week to get support in English, math, and other basic academic skills.
- Papua New Guinea — Daytime Education Support (February 2017)
For five hours daily, we will provide education support to at risk students and dropouts based on the local public school requirements for grades 7 and 8. The focus will be to help the students qualify to enter grade 9 in the public schools.

I began this talk with a simple message: In order to accomplish the great work that lies before us, each of us needs to be better than we have ever been. That is not the first time that I have received that message. Let me share a personal experience from many years ago.

In a very difficult time in our lives, I felt under attack from the enemy of my soul. It was an awful time. One night I had a terrible nightmare. I awoke very anxious and concerned, and I knelt and prayed to my Father in Heaven for help. As I prayed, there came into my mind a passage from Ephesians, chapter 6:

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.^{iv}

In the morning I looked up the scripture and read these words:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.^v

When I read the words: “put on the whole armour of God,” I felt a powerful witness of the Spirit that this was the answer to my prayers. I needed to put on the whole armour of God, every bit of it.

And so, Sue and I talked about what that might mean, and we prayed for guidance. I learned that we needed to ask ourselves two questions. I believe these are the questions whose answers will lead us to do what we need to do to prepare for what lies ahead. Here they are:

1. What am I doing that I should stop doing?

And

2. What am I not doing that I should start doing?

As we asked those questions in prayer, we received very specific answers. We changed how we spent our time, what media we allowed into our home, how we served in the temple,

how we studied the scriptures, and how we served the Lord. We needed to increase our spirituality. Through this process of repentance, the Lord Jesus Christ reached out and changed our lives. We felt His mercy, His grace, His love, and His power. Through His matchless power He changed our hearts and our minds and lifted us up to Him. It was a turning point in our lives.

Brothers and sisters, I know that I am speaking to faithful, covenant-keeping Latter-day Saints. I know that you are very, very good at what you do. Yet I know from my own experience that we need to ask ourselves these two questions regularly. We need to change and repent so that the Atonement of Christ can work even more powerfully in our lives. If we do, our Heavenly Father will bless us with greater spiritual power. I know that is true.

And that, I believe, is the whole key to meeting the great opportunities and responsibilities that lie before us. There are many practical things we will need to do. We will need to think hard and plan and work and counsel and prepare to do our very best. But it will be the power of the Holy Ghost that will bring the redeeming and strengthening power of Christ into our lives, and into the lives of our students.

The rising generation in this marvelous world-wide Church needs education, including the plain and simple truths of the gospel. They need to experience education with increased love, with greater spiritual power, and with deeper impact in their lives. I believe that impact will come because the gospel of Jesus Christ will be more powerfully rooted in our hearts and in our minds and because the Holy Ghost will be our constant companion. Our lives will more fully and completely reflect the teachings of the Savior. Then—when we administer programs, or develop curriculum, or implement new methods, or hire or call and train new teachers or missionaries, or counsel students, or open up a new area, or walk into a classroom to teach God’s children—we

will receive the revelation we need, and we will do the work with the pure love of Christ by the power of the Holy Ghost. The rising generation will learn deeply; they will rise up!

We know this will happen. We know how this all turns out. The Lord Jesus Christ will come, and His people and His Church will be prepared to receive Him.

When I think of you and what you are going to do in God's kingdom, I think of that marvelous experience in 3 Nephi, chapter 17, when the Savior gathered the children around Him. I want you to picture that scene in your minds, because you are in that scene. The parents bring their precious children to the Savior; He gathers them around Him; He is at the center; He prays for them and their parents in a miraculous way; and He blesses the children one-by-one.

Then angels descend from Heaven "as it were in fire"^{vi} and minister to the children; and that holy fire encircles the children.

In a powerful sense, this is what we do in the Church Educational System—parents bring their children to us; the Savior is at the center, the heart of everything that happens to the children; He prays for them and for us; He is our Advocate with the Father. We are the angels—you are the angels—who come to minister to those children in holy fire. That, my dear brothers and sisters, is who we need to be.

And that is who we will be because there is a God in heaven. He is our Father. His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind. He lives! I bear witness of His holy name. I have seen Him work; I know His mercy and grace; and I feel His love. He has all power to cleanse us from sin, change our hearts and lift us; and strengthen us to become everything He wants us to be. I know that if we turn to Christ, who always stands with His arms outstretched to us, He will bless us to be better and to do more in this, His holy work. I so testify, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

ⁱ D&C 100:16

ⁱⁱ D&C 101:64

ⁱⁱⁱ D&C 136:31

^{iv} Ephesians 6:12

^v Ephesians 6:10-11

^{vi} 3 Nephi 17:24