**MENNONITE EDUCATION AGENCY REPORT TO THE WESTERN DISTRICT CONFERENCE| MAY 2019**

Greetings from MEA! In this report, you can get a glimpse of some of the work we do in cooperation with six colleges/universities/seminaries, two Ministerios Hispanos programs, more than two dozen primary and secondary schools in the Mennonite Schools Council (MSC), Mennonite Early Childhood Network (MECN), and others. Some of the activities and initiatives of the past year include the following:

**MEA Board Strategic Planning Direction**

Mennonite Education Agency (MEA) has identified its guiding values and strategic goals for a “new MEA” that aims to adapt to the evolving needs of education within the Anabaptist and Mennonite context. At a March meeting, the MEA board described the new MEA as “cultivating energy and synergy for the whole of Anabaptist/Christian education by communicating compelling stories, coordinating services and collaborating with partners.”

The MEA Board and staff, administrators from elementary, secondary and higher education schools, MCUSA Executive Board and staff members, as well as other representatives from the broader church gathered in October 2018, for a Strategic Planning Direction Day. Presentations were made and considered that day along with information from prior conversations with stakeholder groups (MHEA, MSC, CLC, Hispanic Ministries) and their own best insights in a planning process.The following four points were agreed upon to help guide the further development of a new strategic plan for the MEA:

1. **Community and Opportunities -**

MEA and its partners believe that learning happens best in communities of shalom. They partner together to develop schools with Anabaptist/Christian values where Jesus is the center of faith; community is the center of life and reconciliation is the center of work. They break down barriers that divide, including systemic racism, and strive to be communities committed to intercultural competence.

As MEA and its partners work together and develop a deeper connection, opportunities become evident that can be seized by parts or all the MEA community to join together with God in the work of the kingdom. This requires all to be flexible, nimble, contextual, to move quickly, and to have a broad vision where working together creates a synergy that is greater than the sum of the individual parts.

1. **Communication**

MEA will increase both internal and external communication, including a new focus on branding and marketing. It will cultivate an understanding of and commitment to Mennonite education, will listen deeply to the desires of all stakeholders, and will celebrate and communicate achievements of the schools and educational programs. It will boldly communicate a positive Christ-centered message that combats the fear-based mentality of church and society. A compelling advocacy of Anabaptist/Christian education enables the communication of a core message which will help persons in and beyond the Mennonite church to understand the purpose and gift of Mennonite education to both the denomination and the world

1. **Collaborative Initiatives**

MEA partners receive support from the MEA as needed to develop the collaborative initiatives they desire. The MEA will walk with them, empowering them and, when helpful, being a member of the collaborative effort. MEA will also, when appropriate, suggest collaborative efforts that serve to further enhance the mission of Mennonite education and its partners. The purpose of the collaborative efforts is to increase academic excellence, build a stronger early childhood-16 plus graduate school system, and to decrease costs so that Mennonite education is more affordable. Collaborative efforts will also focus on ways of making Mennonite education more accessible. Partners will receive support and encouragement from the MEA to successfully develop desired collaborative efforts.

1. **Services and Resources**

MEA partners will receive the services and resources that are requested by them.

An analysis of the notes for the strategic direction planning day, the various presentations, the previous input from stakeholders and the group agreements at the end of our time together led to the development of the following values that the MEA adds to the mission of Mennonite schools and educational programs.

**Value 1:** *Identity*- MEA, along with its partners, develops, fosters and communicates a common vision of Anabaptist/Christian education with values of Christ-centeredness, community, and reconciliation.

**Value 2:**  *Communication* – MEA advocates for Anabaptist/Christian education by amplifying the vision, programs, progress, and successes of Mennonite schools and educational programs

**Value 3**: *Collaboration*- MEA encourages, enhances, and provides support for collaborative initiatives among MEA partners.

**Value 4**: *Service*- MEA provides resources and services that are valued and requested by schools, educational programs, and the church.

Some of the goals for the new MEA include functioning in the role of “community collaborator” and bridge builder between schools, the church and world; developing a network of grassroots initiatives to connect experts in MEA-affiliated schools and educational programs with others seeking best practices; and providing training in diversity and intercultural competence on school campuses, including audits and recommendations for growth.

As part of the strategic plan, MEA and its partners — the Mennonite Higher Education Association (MHEA), the Mennonite Schools Council (MSC) and Hispanic Educational Programs (HEP) — are developing a new mission statement and vision statement to more clearly focus and guide their work together. A five-person committee was appointed to propose new statements by July 2019, based around five guiding values: Christ-centered, innovative collaboration, trustworthy relationship, culturally informed and responsiveness. These values were identified through a discernment process with the MEA board, MHEA Presidents, MSC Executive Committee, leaders of HEP and MC USA Executive Board representatives.

The preliminary draft of MEA’s strategic plan that emerged out of the March meeting identified overall priorities and goals. MEA staff, including the recently appointed interim executive director, will add specific initiatives, polish language and share with all stakeholders for feedback and counsel. The hope is to present a more finalized plan to the MEA board this summer.

This Strategic Direction Plan will guide the MEA as it walks with, empowers, and partners with schools, conferences and educational programs in and beyond Mennonite Church USA. The adoption of the Mennonite Higher Education Church/School Relations Agreement, outlining a new way for Mennonite Church USA to relate, partner and support each other, presents a unique opportunity to look and envision a new future for all. The adoption of the agreement which included a vision for Mennonite Higher Education, the creation of the Mennonite Higher Education Association (MHEA) in conjunction with the Mennonite Schools Council (MSC) going through a process to consider the initiatives that best serve its members schools and the growing Hispanic Educational Programs in Mennonite Church USA and other denominations calls us to re-look at our work. Mennonite Education Agency is looking forward to the development of a strategic plan to best serve and support the needs and missions of our educational partners and Mennonite Church USA.

**MEA Leadership transition**

The MEA Board announced that Thomas Stuckey of West Unity, Ohio, has been appointed interim executive director of Mennonite Education Agency (MEA). He will replace Carlos Romero who announced at the recent board meeting his intentions to transition out of MEA by the end of the summer. Romero has served as executive director since the formation of MEA in 2002, guiding the new agency's mission to strengthen the life, witness and identity of Mennonite Church USA through education. The appointment of the interim executive director will be followed by the appointment of a search committee to seek a new executive director.

Blessings in Christ,



MEA Executive Director