



Mission Statement: MEA will strengthen Mennonite education for restorative leadership, work, and service throughout the church and the world.

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COVID-19

The global health crisis has dominated all of our lives this Spring. Although our educational systems, both public and private, have been disrupted, our Anabaptist-Mennonite institutions have risen with grace to provide compassionate leadership. MEA's role during this crisis has been to provide support to the leaders of our schools, who are feeling the heavy burden of making tough decisions to close campuses and pivot to online learning. Although most schools are on summer break now, none are idle. Leaders and administrators are working hard to form plans, and contingency plans on top of contingency plans, seeking to balance safety with a sense of normalcy and community. We realize many leaders can feel isolated and high levels of stress, and the need for physical distancing only compounds this burden. **MEA stands with our schools' leaders** as they make difficult decisions and are challenged to discern new ways of being community together. Our prayers are with them. And as the pandemic persists and resurges in some locations, we all look to our Creator for help.

Mutual aid

One opportunity this crisis offers is the chance to **increase our mutual aid** to care for one another. Please encourage your congregations to support their students financially. There are congregational student aid plans and church-school matching programs, and congregations can give to schools using either a designated or unified giving plan. MEA can help congregations understand all of these options and develop plans of assistance for students, families and schools. If congregations already have student aid plans in place, please encourage them to consider an increased level of giving for each student.

New student loan options being explored with Everence

MEA is leading an exploratory conversation with Everence and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) about new student loan options to ease financial strain for students and families. The idea is based on leveraging several unique players: congregations, individuals, AMBS, MEA and Everence. All would work together to develop a low-interest loan program for students. With AMBS as a

test plot, the goals would be to increase enrollment and provide additional leaders/pastors for Mennonite congregations. If successful, the program could be replicated at other schools. MEA is committed to advancing this conversation to help make Anabaptist-Mennonite education more affordable.

Legal resources

MEA provided three consultations by Zoom for our schools with an attorney to help understand the CARES Act and its provisions for unemployment claims and extended sick leave. Representatives across all levels of Mennonite education had the opportunity to ask questions and receive legal counsel specific to their contexts. This service was provided by MEA at no charge to the schools, utilizing the savings realized from canceled travel.

MEA Investment Fund focuses on climate change

The [MEA Investment Fund](#) Committee recently unveiled 5 new stewardship commitments that are focused on climate change. These commitments echo the Fund's intent to invest in companies that practice environment stewardship and work toward environment sustainability. Nine Mennonite education institutions from all levels of Mennonite education plus ten other MCUSA institutions with education-related funds participate in MEA's Investment Fund. More information about the five new climate change commitments can be found [here](#).

New interim director for K-12 schools

Dawn Graber has been hard at work since beginning her role on a part-time basis four weeks ago. She enjoys tapping into her executive coaching skills set to connect with the principals and heads of schools, and she hopes to reach out to every school leader in the Mennonite Schools Council network in the coming weeks to offer support, encouragement and opportunities to collaborate. Already she has heard a call to provide a point of connection for affinity groups, such as music teachers and guidance counselors. These groups sometimes do not have others in similar roles at their own schools with whom they can share best practices, questions and ideas. Dawn was able to respond quickly to offer these affinity group meetings, and is also working to get up to speed on accreditation processes.

Hispanic Ministries Education

MEA's Hispanic Ministries Education programs are responding to the increasing demand for online training in theology and Biblical studies. MEA's **SeBAH** program, Seminario Bíblico Anabautista Hispano (Hispanic Anabaptist Biblical Seminary), offers 100% of its courses online and in Spanish, and students from many regions of the United States, Colombia and Mexico are enrolling. In the "Theology of Preaching" class that begins in July, 16 people from four Anabaptist organizations have enrolled. And in partnership with AMBS, SeBAH is offering a continuing education course this summer entitled, "Let's be church, from a radical Anabaptist perspective." To date, 20 people from the United States and other Latin American countries have registered. SeBAH and its sister program **IBA**, Instituto Bíblico Anabautista, (Anabaptist Biblical Institute) continue to lead the way on an international level to provide Spanish-language Biblical and theological education from an Anabaptist perspective. To learn more about Hispanic Ministries Education, follow this [link](#).

For Your Prayers

MEA's monthly *Prayers for Faith and Learning* publication offers an opportunity for congregations to join us in praying for our schools in specific ways. Contact Jolene VonGunten to join the subscription list: JoleneV@MennoniteEducation.org.

As the pandemic extends into its fifth month here in North America, and as racial injustices affect God's people of color across the nation on a daily basis, our very souls are troubled and worn. We pray for the peace and justice that can only come from our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Hear our prayer, oh God.

On behalf of the MEA board and staff, thank you for the many ways you support Mennonite education.

*Submitted by Tom Stuckey, Interim Executive Director and CEO
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TS/jvg