A Reflection on and Clarification of the NBC 29 News Story on 4/23/15

I watched with great interest the report by Rob Manch on Community Christian Academy (CCA) this evening. First, I want to express my sincere gratitude for Mr. Manch’s taking his time to interview several members of our school community and taking footage of our classes. He spent a good part of his afternoon doing this great service for us, a school that has almost no marketing funds. Additionally, Mr. Manch effectively captured a number of the wonderful aspects of CCA, including the obvious devotion of the staff, students, and parents; the individualized attention that helps students to be successful, the commitment to provide educational opportunities to families from all socio-economic backgrounds, etc.

This was the first time we have had the pleasure of receiving this type of television reporting. While I have had the honor of being interviewed multiple times on WINA’s “The Schilling Show” and Newsplex’s “Jay James on Faith,” in these cases, what was released was a question and answer format where I did most of the talking, framing the points I wanted to convey. In today’s coverage by NBC 29, the reporter interviewed several people and edited the pieces and put them together to frame a story that he shared. I realized for the first time today how difficult it is to describe our mission and daily life in a way that enables the reporter to perceive clearly and accurately everything that is discussed. For this reason, I want to clarify a few things that were said in tonight’s story.

1. It was reported that I started CCA because I couldn’t afford to send my daughter to a Christian school.

   Correction – I never made any statements regarding my children. While I do have an adult daughter, she did attend a Christian school for several years because I was blessed to work in two Christian schools where I received significant discounts as a staff member. Mr. Manch interviewed multiple people, and I suspect that he may have confused me with our school parent, Teri Crawford, who mentioned that her mother could only afford to send one of her children to a Christian school. When I was asked why I started CCA, I stated that I had spent many years in Christian education and was concerned about the lack of affordable Christian schools in Charlottesville. The high tuitions are a barrier for many families who would like a private Christian school for their children but cannot afford the significant costs. CCA is the only Christian school in Charlottesville with an income-based tuition model that includes automatic scholarship awards to families earning less than $85,000/year.

2. It seemed to me that there was a suggestion that our school would not be able to continue if we did not raise $30,000 in 30 days.
Clarification – It is correct that we need to raise $30,000 by the end of May to fully fund the scholarship awards we made to students this year. If we do not raise those funds, we will not be able to pay all of our staff their full salaries. However, this does not mean that we will be closing down. Each full-time staff member of CCA (including myself) understands that we are choosing to serve the children and families of our community even if it requires a financial sacrifice on our part. The reality of partial paychecks for teachers and no paychecks for administration at times has not reduced our commitment to our school’s students and families over the last three years. We are enrolling for the 2015-16 school year, and I have never lost a team member or had an issue with complaining teachers because of the personal sacrifices we have made since our inception. Financially, each year is getting better, and donations are increasing. We are even looking to hire a Director of Donor and Community Relations to help us become effective in building support throughout our community, so we can continue to grow and add grades until we are a comprehensive K-12 school. (We are currently a kindergarten through fifth grade school.)

3. Some listeners might think from some statements that were made that they can get a free education if they cannot afford to pay tuition.

Clarification – CCA has a sliding scale tuition model, and each year 75-90% of our students qualify for scholarship awards that bring down the $6,000 tuition cost to a more affordable tuition for parents. However, all parents pay something for tuition to foster a sense of investment into the school. Our average scholarship award this year was about $3,500. The largest scholarship award we currently offer is $4,000, so parents have a minimum tuition due of $2,000 for the entire year, broken into monthly payments. We also have a “Work for Tuition” program that allows some parents to do work for the school to earn money to help pay for tuition. Parents who participate in the “Work for Tuition” program still pay at least $50/month to cover the average cost of the student’s books. Between 10-15% of our parents are paying just the average cost of books as their tuition.

4. While not stated, some viewers might assume that we are a school that is primarily for the poor or for those struggling in public school.

Correction – We are not a school that is primarily for the poor or the struggling students. We have a diverse student population, and our goal is that all families have an equal opportunity to have an excellent, affordable Christian education. Our school policy is that we reserve at least 25% of our seats for full-paying families and at least 50% of our seats for families with scholarship awards. Our scholarship recipients include families with household incomes varying from almost nothing to almost $85,000. Our policy helps us to achieve the economic diversity we strongly desire. Regarding struggling students, it is true that we have had numerous success stories where we have been able to help students who have struggled academically in the public school setting. Our small class sizes, effective teaching strategies, significant individualized attention, well-trained teachers, a culture that expects academic success, and strong partnerships with involved parents are factors that increase the success of all students including those with a history of struggling elsewhere and those who never seem to have
much difficulty. We have no specialized training for learning disabilities, so our strategies are not specifically geared for struggling students. We generally do not accept children with a history of documented discipline problems.

I am very grateful for the time and energy that Mr. Manch generously gave to create a positive report describing Community Christian Academy. I felt that it was complimentary of the work that we are doing to benefit the children and families in our area. Because of the unique complexity of our school, it is very difficult to give the kinds of details necessary to create a completely accurate perception of CCA in only a 2 ½ minute report. Therefore, it was important to me that I take this opportunity here to add some additional clarification so that viewers do not make inaccurate conclusions from the story that aired. Thank you, NBC 29 and Rob Manch for reporting on CCA today.

Sincerely,

Kimberly G. Moore, Ed.D.
Executive Director