



Introduction

What is the purpose of education? Albert Einstein put it well when he said, “Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school.” In other words, education is not just a series of events with the goal of conveying a set of facts. Education should be a process of learning to think that will prepare students for lifelong learning, successful living, and for giving back to their world in some meaningful way. A Christian education raises that bar one step higher, because it seeks to prepare children not only academically, but also spiritually, for a life of service in God’s world.

The students at Ada Christian School are like children across the country and around the world. It is our mission that sets us apart. What makes this school different...what makes it worth the investment...is the passionate commitment of the teachers, the partnership with parents, and the faith foundation that is developed in real time and for the real world by everyone who walks these halls.

What Have We Accomplished?

Ada Christian School was built by a small group of farming families who sacrificed to fulfill their vision for Christian education back in 1952. They farmed the land, harvested the crops, and invested the profits into a tiny school with fifty-five students. Today, a fourth-generation descendent is one of the almost 600 students enrolled at this school! Throughout its more than 60-year history, Ada Christian School has formed strong and lasting partnerships with families, in which parents and teachers share the goal of doing what is best for each child individually.

Over the years, Ada Christian has invested resources to ensure that children receive exposure to a broad variety of disciplines, including not only traditional academics but also things that have been cut in many schools, such as art, music, and sports. Students also begin giving back to the community from pre-k onward, through service projects and volunteering. The students receive a strong academic foundation grounded in a biblical Reformed perspective, which views all disciplines as part of God’s creation, and therefore worthy of study. They also learn to become His citizens in this world, both to each other and in the broader community.

Ada Christian School is a great example of how higher standards drive higher performance. Ada Christian resides in the same area as two of the best public schools districts in all of Michigan. It’s not enough to say that the children will get a Christian education. They need a world-class Christian education that equips them to compete on a global stage with not only strong faith but a strong academic foundation. This difference is obvious. As one teacher at Grand Rapids

Christian High School says, “Give me two days in the classroom, and I can tell you which students came from Ada Christian. They’re just better prepared than other students.”

What is Changing?

It is no secret that the cost of a quality education is rising rapidly. In 1975, the average income in Ada was \$44,000 and Christian education was \$850 (less than 2% of income). In 2012, the average Ada income was \$83,000 and tuition was \$6,300 (almost 8% of income). That’s the charge for one student; but more than half of Ada Christian families have at least two children enrolled. That’s a substantial commitment in an affluent area like Ada, and it’s even more substantial for the 60% of families that live outside of Ada, where incomes are lower. For a typical family with two or more children, the commitment to Christian education can easily approach the cost of a second house payment.

One of the reasons costs continue to rise is that educational methods and standards are changing at a rapid rate. From the use of technology, to individualized assessment, right down to the furniture in the classroom, everything that used to be standard is in flux. None of these changes are made simply for change’s sake. They have been shown to enhance learning and deliver better results for students, and thus are imperative for any school that seeks to provide a high-quality education. However, they still require resources. A school of Ada Christian’s size spends a minimum of \$200,000 annually to keep up with changes in standards and technology.

Another significant and ongoing change in education is the national core standards for curriculum. Keeping up with and meeting those standards requires an ongoing investment in new resources as well as professional development. As an example, many skills that used to be taught in third grade are now being required of first graders. You can’t simply take third-grade materials and hand them off to a first grade teacher. It takes quality professional development to equip teachers with new tools, concepts and strategies.

The reality is that the days of the teacher in front of a blackboard teaching everyone the same thing from a used textbook are simply gone, and they’re not coming back. Education is now as fast-moving and evolving as high-tech.

What is our Solution?

The Ada Christian School Education Foundation was formed in 1988 as part of a strategic move to offset rising costs. The school board and foundation board members believe that a quality, faith-based education should be available to everyone, and so a certain portion of foundation endowment earnings each year are given to the general operating budget of the school, with the desire to keep the cost of education affordable for every family. “Affordable” has generally been defined as “less than 10% of a family’s adjusted gross income.” That’s still a sizable commitment. Thirty-three out of 277 Ada Christian families applied and qualified for additional tuition assistance from the Foundation in 2012.

Although the total need was \$240,000, the available budget for tuition assistance was only \$195,000. That left a \$45,000 gap. Some families were able to fill it by sacrificing other things; approaching their churches for support; or relying on family members. Some had to pull their children out of our school.

Tuition assistance is only one of the challenges for a world-class school. Another challenge is the ongoing and rising cost of curriculum resources. For example, the change to “My Math” for students in K-7 will require at least \$40,000 in software and resources, not to mention the time required for teachers to learn how to teach to the new standards. Or consider the cost of textbooks. Resources are rapidly being converted from hard cover to online so that they are more current and relevant. Contrary to intuition, however, the online resources are more - not less - expensive than traditional books, and they also require hardware such as laptops or tablets. These are just a couple of examples that illustrate why the cost of a world-class education is rising rapidly.

The Foundation therefore proposes to begin a \$6 million campaign that will provide the following critical resources to Ada Christian School in the pursuit of ongoing excellence:

- Technology and tools. Classroom and individual technology tools have proven very effective, but they require constant investment. Furniture, online resources, tablets, laptops and more are part of the wired world in which effective learning takes place. A commitment of \$700,000 will allow us to remain on the cutting edge of meaningful trends in technology and curriculum resources that support a high-quality Christian education.
- Assessments. Individualized assessments have been piloted and found to be extremely helpful in customizing a learning plan for each child. This new approach would test children in each grade up to four times each year. The test data will enable teachers to make informed decisions for instruction. Increased staff and training will be an important part of this process. We have allocated \$200,000 of our goal to the new assessment process.
- Professional development. The new curriculum standards, the new technology and the new assessment process all require training for teachers so that they can gain maximum return on investment for the students. Our campaign includes \$100,000 to bring in experts in the field, as well as give our teachers the time they need to collaborate on best practices.
- Tuition support. Ada Christian School never wants to lose a student because financial resources are not available. Approximately \$5 million of the total campaign goal would be invested in the endowment. The proceeds from the endowment will be used to keep tuition increases level with inflation, and also to provide funds for need-based tuition support.

Conclusion

Nelson Mandela once said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” Ada Christian School believes that great Christian education will produce great servants of God - not just great students. From the first day at Ada Christian until 8th-

grade graduation, each student builds a strong faith foundation upon which they can then create a life and learning framework that will stand the test of time.

Children spend almost as much time at school as they do awake at home. Parents have such a short time to ground their children in the faith, and to instill in them the character traits for lifelong success. What a blessing to have a place like Ada Christian School, where parents and teachers share the same values, and where children can develop a faith strong approach to lifelong learning and kingdom service. Will the community support this investment?