

Dear Tien Shan Community,

It's been nearly a year since we left Kazakhstan – a year which has simultaneously been both the longest and the shortest of our lives. I've gone back and forth trying to decide if it's even worth sending a letter like this, but if for no other reason than my own ability to move forward, I believe it's necessary. My hope, though, is that this letter can be enlightening for you as well.

Our exit from the school (Joe's and mine) was abrupt, and likely confusing for many of you. To be honest, it was confusing for us as well. But it's hard to explain without going back to the beginning of the school year, August 2024.

The year started off with Joe and I feeling more confident than ever in our roles in the school, and excited about the direction it seemed the school was going. We were part of a newly formed child safety team, and we had lots of ideas about how to incorporate what we were learning from TCKTraining.com into the fabric of the school. It seemed like the administration was on board with creating better awareness for families, teachers, and students themselves about the kinds of difficulties that TCKs face, and about preventing the kind of harm that can quietly follow them into adulthood.

That confidence fell apart in the very first child safety meeting, when Cecily Bader admitted, in front of school leadership, to engaging in what she described as “a lot of” grooming behavior. Nothing came from that admission, despite both the Middle School principal/Child Safety Team lead and the High School principal being in the same room. And I don't think anyone ever would have followed up, except that within a few weeks there began a string of disclosures—from four teachers and seven students—who came forward to express discomfort with the way Cecily was interacting with students.

I'll add an aside here: no one on the child safety team was surprised by these reports. We had all seen concerning behavior at different moments, but none of us realized how deep the problem had become, or how many students were experiencing it.

I personally received reports from two of those students and was part of the response team that sifted through all the reports to categorize the violations of our child safety

policy. We compiled everything into an eleven-page document and submitted our findings to the administration, as required by the school's own safeguarding procedures.

I shouldn't have to say this, but I want it clearly stated: this was an extremely difficult and painful process for everyone involved on the child safety team. None of us were "out to get" Cecily. None of us approached this with personal motives or grievances. It was heartbreaking to see the full picture come together and to realize that, whether intentional or not, students were being harmed. But our responsibility was to the students, first and foremost, and so we did what we believed was required of us.

At that point, I truly believed our role as a response team was complete. I believed—naively, as it turns out—that once the concerns were clearly presented, there would be a process of accountability, reflection, and change. I thought there would be a shared understanding that the well-being of students had to come first.

That is not what happened.

I don't place all of the blame on Cecily. The administration failed her as well. Instead of clearly outlining the violations and providing a structured path for accountability and behavioral change, their (heavily altered) findings letter began by affirming her contributions to the school. When the concerns were addressed, they were presented in vague and incomplete terms, without clarity, without specificity, and without a defined path forward. This failure was not only passive; in our experience, it was also shaped by board-level influence, where Jonathan McDonald, acting in his role as a board member, manipulated aspects of the child safety process and discredited the persons and work of the child safety team.

Given that, it is perhaps not surprising that Cecily's response was one of denial, suggesting that others were simply "jealous of her relationships with students."

What followed only made things worse. Additional students came forward, sharing something that had not previously been known: that Cecily had discussed her ongoing personal struggles with pornography in classroom settings. This occurred in at least two

co-ed classes—the Class of 2025 in their 11th grade health class, and the Class of 2027 in their 8th grade health class.

These disclosures were deeply concerning, not only because of the explicit nature of the content itself, but because they occurred without administrative or parental knowledge or consent. Parents were never informed. When the child safety team learned about this, our immediate instinct was to communicate transparently with families so they could support and process this with their children. That communication was never sent, because the administration did not support it.

At every point where there was an opportunity to respond clearly, responsibly, and transparently—to students, to parents, and to staff—those opportunities were missed. And those missed opportunities have had real and lasting consequences.

They have affected the students directly involved in these situations.

They have affected students who sensed something was wrong but were left in confusion.

They have affected families who were not given the information they needed to support their children.

They have affected teachers who tried to respond appropriately and were instead pushed out of the community.

By January 2025, it became clear to us that nothing we said or did was making a meaningful difference. The very systems that were supposed to protect students were no longer functioning in that way. In some cases, those systems seemed to be working against the very people trying to uphold them.

We were called “woke” for listening to students and taking their concerns seriously, as if caring about the safety and dignity of children is a purely secular sentiment. As if advocating for the vulnerable is optional.

And as the concerns themselves could not be easily dismissed, the focus shifted to discrediting the people raising them. Our character, our motives, and our integrity were questioned in ways that are difficult to fully describe.

There is a particular kind of damage that happens when your own community turns against you, not because you have done something wrong, but because you refused to stay silent.

Joe was told that he was “trying to destroy the school” because he continued to bring forward concerns about leadership decisions and safeguarding failures. That was never our intention. But if the choice is between protecting an institution’s reputation and protecting the well-being of students, that is not a difficult choice for me.

And I would ask you, sincerely:

Is it a difficult choice for you?

Because that is the question that sits underneath everything that has happened.

This letter is not written out of anger. It is written out of grief, and out of a deep concern for the students and families who are still part of the community. It is also written with the hope that greater awareness can lead to greater accountability—because without accountability, there is no real safety.

We loved this community. We invested in it. We believed in what it could be. And that is precisely why this has been so difficult to process, and why it has taken so long to say anything publicly.

But silence—in situations like this—does not protect anyone.

My hope is not to tear anything down. My hope is that by telling the truth, there is still a chance for something better to be built—something safer, more transparent, and more aligned with the values that the school claims to hold.

---

In February 2026, both Campus Crusade for Christ (CRU) and the International Mission Board were placed on formal legal notice regarding the safeguarding concerns and the way they have been handled.

Those notices laid out what had been reported, the patterns that had emerged, and the ways those concerns were responded to. The responses of the organizations were vague at best; they neglected to take responsibility and didn't engage with what had been shared.

If you would like a fuller understanding of what took place, Joe and I have documented it carefully and shared it publicly. You can find that information here:

[TSIS Accountability Project - Start Here](#)

Sincerely,  
Sharon

Tien Shan Alumnus (1999-2008)

Tien Shan Teacher (2013-2016, 2023-2025)