

SCHOOL PLAY

A Documentary Play

Created by

Arden Kass,
Seth Bauer & Edward Sobel

This script is available free of charge for any and all performances. For inquiries or to book for a performance, contact Public Citizens for Children & Youth.

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

"I'm not a teacher because I love English, you know. I love English, but I love people and so I felt needed in a different, like in a bigger way than just to impart knowledge and I think that that's what some of my students fight against and some of them learn to appreciate."

– Tracy King, English Teacher

"It's not a great time to be in public education. You definitely feel, more so than not, that you are a failure and not a success. Really- sometimes I move papers from one side of the desk to the other just to feel like I accomplished something at the end of the day— no really."

– Dan McGarry, Assistant School Superintendent

"So, am I going to be the villain in your play?"

– Charles Zogby, Former PA Secretary of Ed and Budget Secretary

School Play is based on over a hundred interviews conducted in 2014/15 with students, teachers, administrators, politicians and public figures in the education landscape of Pennsylvania.

It was conceived by Arden Kass and created by Kass, Seth Bauer and Edward Sobel. The project was commissioned by the advocacy organization Public Citizens for Children & Youth. It came about because we are all parents and we all agreed that public education was in danger in our state, and that we could help raise awareness of the problem and motivate more people to become involved in finding a solution by putting a human face on the situation through theatre.

School Play purposefully poses more questions than answers, yet a few facts are clear: yes, public education can excel, and in more ways than we understood going in; yes, our education system needs to evolve to reflect the world in which it now exists. And yes, we need a reliable, sustainable method for funding it.

Above all, we as a state and a society need to bring a huge dose of humanity and humility to any discussion of the decisions we make for students, teachers and education professionals, whose personal connections to education are more powerful and more amazing than anything we could have invented.

We thank everyone who contributed, whether their voice appears here on the page or in our heads, helping to shape this play.

PRODUCTION NOTES

School Play opened at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia on April 8, 2015, with five actors. They played a few main characters each, plus the supplementary characters. It is absolutely possible to use a larger cast and less role switching or to perform a shorter version than the 75-minute full-length play. Multiple versions are offered online.

Appropriately for the inherently diverse world of public education, there are no requirements for casting in regard to age, gender or race, and no required props. As a set, we used a projection of our logo and five chairs, each of which served as “home base” for a major character, making it easier for the audience to track and identify them. Again, these are just facts; interpret the script however you see it working best for your audience and venue.

We suggest a recorded or live announcement or a slide at the top of the play as follows: “All the language in **School Play** is taken from interviews conducted across the state of Pennsylvania in 2014 and 2015.”

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CAST OF CHARACTERS**I. My Favorite Teacher**

JAMIL ALLEN
DR. SHELDON PAVEL
GABBY KRAMER
ERICA SWIFT
CALEB SWARTZ
JOHN WILLIAM DAVIS
MELANA SIMS
MATT DE PROSPERO
DONNA WRIGHT (as a nun)
RALPH ROSIAN
DON TROTZ
JOE BRUNI

II. Inciting Incident

ARIEL SIVERNESS
DR. GERALD ZAHORCHAK, SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT

III. Inequality Olympics

YVONNE REYNOULDS
BRANDON LEONARD
LEO LEVY
GABBY KRAMER
DONNA WRIGHT
RENE COHEN
SHERI UTAIN
CHARLES ZOGBY
MARLENE GOEBICH
BEE REED
TEACHER (Marlene Goebich)
KYANNA HATTON
BRANDON'S MOM
JENN HOFF

IV. The Dividing Line

DAN DENVIR
PETER SCHMITZ

V. Is Caring Enough?

MIKE VUCOVICH
ARIEL SIVERNESS
SGT. MARK SPANKO
MELANA SIMS
DONNA WRIGHT
CHARLES ZOGBY
DON TROTZ
MARLENE GOEBBICH

1. ACTOR reads letter

VI. Reform for Children

CHARLES ZOGBY
DAN MCGARRY
SIMRAN SIDHU
GERRY ZAHORCHAK
JOE BRUNI

VII. Art vs. Money

DAN MCGARRY
DOUG HERMAN
YVONNE

VIII. Testing vs Teaching

GABBY KRAMER
MIKE VUCOVICH
SHERRI UTAI
DAN MCGARRY
GERRY ZAHORCHAK
JUSTIN ZAHORCHAK
CHARLES ZOGBY
JAMELLA MILLER
JAMIL ALLEN

1. Three ACTORS read kids' letters

IX. Me vs We

PETER SCHMITZ
ZOE RICHARDS
MATT BROUILLETTE
MIKE VUCKOVICH

X. Melana Sims

XI. These Kids Can Go Anywhere

GERRY ZAHORCHAK
ARIEL SIVERNESS
MIKE VUCOVICH
SGT. MARK SPANKO
DOUG HERMAN
DON TROTZ
JAMIL ALLEN
RENE COHEN
JOE BRUNI
KYANNA HATTON
DAN MCGARRY
YVONNE REYNOULDS

I. MY FAVORITE TEACHER

JAMIL ALLEN (elementary school parent)

Second grade teacher. Miss Brown.

Not only was she a great teacher, but she was a COOL teacher.

DR. SHELDON PAVEL (retired High School president)

Mrs. Liggett. She allowed me to explore. I was very interested in national parks. I would do the reading, and then she would let me teach the class. In sixth grade.

GABBY KRAMER (suburban high school junior)

There's this history teacher. He doesn't treat kids like they're sort of, lower than him? He's like just very like down to earth and understands like everything ... like when you're younger, like what you're going through? He's cool.

ERICA SWIFT

Mister...What's his name...?

CALEB SWARTZ (middle aged professional)

At the end of the season, my lineman coach said, "Swartz, where you going to college?" And I said, "Coach, I don't think I'm going to college." And he said, and I quote, "You're too damn smart not to go to college."

ERICA SWIFT

...begins with M, I can't remember right now.

CALEB SWARTZ

So, I put my applications in in January of my senior year. And I went to on become a history teacher just like my coach (*laughs*). And that's how I chose my college...So, ironically, I -- (*laughs*) am a college admissions representative.

JAMIL ALLEN

She drove, what is this, back in '82.

I think she had, like a Trans Am or something like that!

(*Laughs*)

She was cool!

JOHN WILLIAM DAVIS (middle-aged manual laborer)

She was cool, Miss Griffin.

I mean, if I was uhh, even if I was showing off or whatever, she'd give me some kind words, you know... like yeah...like a mother, you know?

MELANA SIMS (elementary school guidance counselor)

My basketball coach, Stacey Tussig -- whenever I'd have a good game and my dad wouldn't be there to see it, she always provided me with a little extra umm, encouragement.

ERICA SWIFT

He asked me one question and I remember raising my hand and answering it and that was it for me. He said,

DR. SHELDON PAVEL

'when do we start questioning is there a God?'

ERICA SWIFT (High School teacher)

And I said, "it's when ... when we're in pain", and I remember him saying 'yeah, I think you're right'. And that sparked my interest in reading. Now I'm an English teacher.

MATT De PROSPERO (middle-aged handyman/artist)

My 8th grade teacher. She was a nun. She was very young. Maybe 21. I didn't realize at the time. And she actually took me aside and said you know, who do you think the smartest kid in this class is and I pointed out someone. She said

DONNA WRIGHT (as a nun)

No, it's you.

RALPH ROSIAN (83 year old Korean War vet)

When I was in seventh grade, the teacher paid me 10 cents a day to go and build a fire and bank it all up so I got 50 cents a week. The movies was 10 cents and on Friday night a double feature, so I was a rich little guy, at least I thought so. That's back when money was worth something. It never dawned on me, as much as I disliked school uhh that when I went there to build a fire that I could burn that school down, and I wouldn't get punished for it. The teacher would.

DON TROTZ (School counselor)

Emmet Mark. I went through kind of a streak where I just didn't want to be around people. Um and I was just kind of hateful and just didn't like him, cause he always uh would say "hey how *are* ya?", and like you know, just very encouraging very optimistic and I *really* didn't like him, and I let him know I didn't like him, and he would always say, "you don't have to like me but you know what, I like you and your entire family!"

(laughter)

After a while it works on you.

JOE BRUNI (72 year-old school superintendent)
We couldn't wait to get to school.

DON TROTZ

Mrs. Barcameron, Mrs. Young, uh Mrs. Levintree, Mrs, Cobaldy. These were four ladies that constantly were always uh lovin us -- a family so to speak.

JOE BRUNI

The chocolate milk tastes best in school than in anywhere else in the world.

ERICA SWIFT

We got the best music teacher. Talk about budget cuts, his position was cut the very next year. Last name was 'Force' and the kids were holding up signs, and like 'keep the force with us', 'may the force be with us'. And he was the BEST and he did so many things with me with this program. He was cut.

II. INCITING INCIDENT

ARIEL (high school senior)

Dr. Gerald Zahorchak, Superintendent and former Pennsylvania Secretary of Education

GERRY ZAHORCHAK (folksy but articulate, 60s)

When I was in Harrisburg as Secretary of Education in 2007, Republicans and Democrats in Pennsylvania looked at how much would it take in every single school district so that all students could meet Pennsylvania's standards.

What does it take to get to adequacy? How do we distribute the funds we have so all students can get to their unique amount? Some schools, a few, were far beyond that amount. They did that through local property taxes. Many, many schools, who could not afford it at a local level, were depending on the state. And what we found was the state needed about 4 billion dollars more, annually.

Then, there was a shift in administration – the new governor took office, and it was – “stimulus money's gone, we don't have it. It's gone.”

Personally, I was on my way to become the superintendent of a large city in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Then February came. The announcement was made of the budget intentions and *Huuuh ...*

oh my gosh...It was devastating.

III. INEQUALITY OLYMPICS

YVONNE (high school junior)

I'm gonna get really emotional because I cannot stand - the bathroom! In our bathroom, first of all, God bless Miss Beaver for getting these new soap dispensers. They are so nice.

(KIDS agree, snapping their fingers as hip kids do...)

And like the soap is all foamy. Instead of like that gooey stuff. And like, like we have five stalls in our girls' bathroom only two have locks. Ok. There are two toilets that are stopped up every day. you cannot flush them. you cannot unplug them. Cuz that cleaning lady just walk in there and wipe the floors and come out. And we have three messed up toilet seats I don't know what happened. They're like burnt or something. It's like a tannish, just like - it's not good. But like it's like - I mean it's little things. Like Um. getting locks on the bathrooms. I don't know if I'm just the only person, but when I go to the bathroom I want some type of security that no one's gonna try to bust in there cuz they think nobody in there. And I can't stop the door cuz there's no lock, on the door. And um, like maybe like - it doesn't even necessarily have to be anything big like not like a big ole like bathroom makeover but like maybe clean, clean.

BRANDON LEONARD

The bathrooms? They, they're just really clean. I mean the urinals are like...

LEO LEVY

Out of the, let's say 15 urinals in the building, probably 2 are consistently functional. Most of them are missing the barriers between them.

BRANDON LEONARD

All the toilets are automatic flushing.

LEO LEVY

The one that does flush is always flushing.

YVONNE

What does it feel like? Dirty! With them bathrooms. Oh my god! And then it's like—you get excused, the 1st floor bathroom is flooded, man, I've got to go to the 2nd floor...3rd floor, Now I go back to class—

TEACHER (Marlene Goebich)

“Why were you out of class so long? I don't trust you to be excused ever again. “

BRANDON LEONARD

Lap pool. Diving pool. Boys and girls locker rooms for the pool...and then for the gym—

LEO LEVY

We don't have changing rooms. We have lockers.

GABBY KRAMER

We have six tennis courts.

LEO LEVY

I stand in the hallway and smear myself with Speedstick.

DONNA WRIGHT (High School English teacher)

You have to turn off so many distractions.

LEO LEVY

Ms. Wright. (*off Donna's "shush" glare*) High school English teacher.

DONNA WRIGHT

You have to be like SUCH a go-getter in order to "make it."

These kids do work hard, for the most part, and they do want it, hard, but they're so closed to the fact that -- there are people at -- there are people that have all of these resources, like--

(*She glares at the actors behind her*) Be Quiet. Thank you! She's recording me.

We'll talk about why you're late in a few minutes.

YVONNE

(*She begins to tear up*) You have these little bit of teachers that are still here taking on like 20 classes a day. Because they're - when you have - oh my goodness -- Miss Davis -our Spanish teacher - she'll say, "I teach over two hundred classes", and like - she'll really be like that. And she'll be like "I don't know anyone's name. I don't know where your tests are. I don't know anything!" I'm Yvonne*, by the way. High School Junior.

*correct pronunciation

RENE COHEN

My kids get to focus on what they're there to focus on.

And the staff is happy to be there, you know, it's just holistic. It's like, a safe, confident, happy, experience.

BRANDON LEONARD

...Pretty much every class has a smart board... There's a projector in every single room. White boards. No, no chalkboards. I don't think I've ever seen a chalkboard.

SHERI UTAIN

SHERI Utain, 43 years in Special Education.

I had one student who literally climbed walls. Or windows. So you had this poor child sitting there needing help with multiplication and the teacher's over here trying to get this student down... If you had an aide, the aide could walk either the student or the rest of the students out of the classroom, you know. So they can refocus-

RENE COHEN (Suburban H.S. parent)

I mean, we're in this little bubble, and I feel so grateful. But that's why we moved here. Hopefully, my children won't take it for granted.

YVONNE

We lost our nurse. Our nurse is only here like maybe Tuesdays and Thursdays, What happens on a Monday, Wednesday or a Friday?

DONNA WRIGHT

Our smartest students are the ones we're failing the hardest. We're preparing them for mediocre lives. It's not intentional, it's not malicious, it's just, when you have 30 kids in a classroom, when I have to tell the students to do research on their mobile phones, that's a problem. Like, it's usually freezing in my classroom. Frequently, I teach in my coat.

CHARLES ZOGBY (self-confident, 50-ish politician)

I don't think everything is in short supply. We spend a ton of money in this state in terms of basic education. People always argue for more.

YVONNE

Charles Zogby, former Pennsylvania Budget Secretary and former Secretary of Education.

CHARLES ZOGBY

Give me an example of a good school that's struggling to keep its doors open-

MARLENE GOEBICH

There's no paper! There's no money for paper.

SCHOOL PLAY --

Three years ago, when they cut the budget they said there's no money for paper. So bring your own. You can use the machine but there's no paper!

BEE REED

I remember doing my chapter reading for science class and it said, "maybe with the technological advances, we'll be able to land a man on the moon someday". "Land a man on the moon someday"? I read it three times to make sure it was correct. And I pointed it out to my teacher who basically asked us to excuse him for a second, and apparently marched down to the principal's office and was like—

TEACHER

WE NEED NEW BOOKS!

KYANNA

I'm Kyanna Hatton. Being a senior, I have to print out a lot of college things. There's one computer in the library. The screen is cracked. The printer is broke every other day. Mind you, you have a 167 seniors trying to print everything. And I'm just like – you know we need them -- can we get it fixed? But "we don't have money".

BRANDON'S MOM

There's an X-Box room, right? They count it as gym.

BRANDON LEONARD

Mom! It's A Wii room. It's a room with a bunch of flat screen TV's in there, all around. X-box Connect and, uhh, Wii everywhere.

RENE COHEN

The things my children are involved in from you know, jazz bands to technology clubs --it gets them to start thinking about who they are and where they want to go.

KYANNA

Boom! The real world. You have to figure out what job you're gonna do and actually like be something in life. And like you see in movies like the kids go to the counselor and he's like "yeah I'll help you do this that and the third." My counselor, he's somewhat helpful. But there've been countless times when he's like "I have so much to do, figure it out on your own." And going to a household where - like I live in single parent home with two other siblings. So I go home and it's basically like - you're on your own.

GABBY KRAMER

Compared to like Upper Darby or something, like I am so fortunate. To, you know be able to be where I am. Oh, I'm Gabby Kramer. And that's why certain kids come from you know other states or cities or whatever to go to our school district because it's just such a great one it's between, like, all around, everything about it.

JENN HOFF: (a high-intensity School Board President)

Jenn Hoff, School Board President. If you are on the poverty level you are likely to be in a failing school. That is the word.

RENE COHEN

I don't think life is fair, always, but I think it's how you handle it...?

IV. THE DIVIDING LINE**DAN DENVIR:** (Lefty Journalist)

Uh, Dan Denvir, journalist.

I like to look at this as if you were, kind of, approaching American public education from outer space... what's the first thing you notice? Why, why do Americans have a separate, inferior education system for low-income black people? It would be like going to South Africa before the fall of Apartheid like...not, not noticing that racial separation was kind of a salient feature of their social order.

PETER SCHMITZ (Comfortable Suburban Parent)

Uh, I'm Peter Schmitz.

Now we did notice of course, that, although there are, uh some kids of other races and ethnicities, there's not much mixing of social classes. Because of real estate prices, there's not many working-class kids left in the area and, um certainly not a lot of um - African Americans.

DAN DENVIR

It was sort of the racist underbelly of the New Deal. The construction of- of suburban America and, and of highways, um, basically...siphoning [chuckle] um, middle class people out ...out of the city –

PETER SCHMITZ

Certainly there are reasons for our history and the way things have developed here, but I don't think that will change in my lifetime.

DAN DENVIR

--those mortgages were typically explicitly "Whites Only."

(Beat)

So... instead of some sort of... system where we're all paying, you know, a fair amount of our own taxes into one...municipal pot, for all, you instead have the um, rise of a- separate and unequal system... where wealthy, wealthier --Uh, too wealthy [*chuckle*], uh, white communities, fund their own school districts.

PETER SCHMITZ

To change that basic structure of American life would require something on the size of what it took to change slavery.

V. IS CARING ENOUGH?

MIKE VUCOVICH (intense 40-ish High School principal)

I was totally dysfunctional up to my senior year of high school.

Missed maybe 50, 60 days of school, had awful grades.

ARIEL SIVERNESS: Mr. Mike Vucovich, High School principal.

MIKE V: My dad is borderline alcoholic and—he always felt sorry for himself like he should have things -- somebody should give him a job, he should have these things--

And I hated that. I resented that.

I didn't know what to do with it till I went to my aunt and uncle and they just made me understand that the expectation is, "Do well". Be smart.

So I had to quit feeling sorry for myself and learn how to work and since then, I haven't turned back.

(Beat, inviting her to speak)

Ariel—she's a senior now.

ARIEL SIVERNESS (High School senior)

Well... I'm pretty much an open book.

I grew up in a rough childhood. My mom left me when I was... 2, I want to say.

My dad raised me, like—he made sure I had everything I needed, but he worked all the time. So I live with my grandparents.

Middle school is what got me. I was bad. I had to go to counseling.

I was on medication, not prescribed medication.

And then I got here. All these teachers care about you so much.

I came here rough, like you could tell I needed some motivation.

I got about D's at the end of 9th grade and then they started talking SATs and college and I was like, "I have to do that?" like, what?

I'm, almost done with high school, and now I have to improve my life?

So, I forgot to say, my mom came back in 3rd grade.

I was still living with my grandparents at the time. But she tried to kidnap me and take me to Michigan... and my dad finally let me start seeing her again, and I started staying with her.

She was working at a hospital for a little bit, but then she got back into drinking...

She was not the parent of me. I was the parent of her.

Then she had a kid, that I had to take care of.

I love that little boy with all my heart though, I still take care of him to this day.

I think it was 10th grade that I decided to step up my game.

Mr. V, like he knew what I was going through,

he talked to me and he was just like,

MIKE VUCKOVICH: "Hey, you need to get your head on straight."

ARIEL: And I was like, "Yeah I know."

So I was like, I'm going to come to junior year with a new attitude and actually get good grades. I made straight A's all year last year and finally got into the National Honor Society. I got a letter and I was like, "Do they got the wrong Ariel?"

None of my parents went to college. So, I wanted to be like the first to.

I actually have a meeting in an hour and a half in Connemaugh Hospital.

Going over to talk about their nursing school.

Yeah, I'm pretty excited. I'm nervous though.

SGT. MARK SPANKO (*staccato*)

It takes a community to raise a child.

And that's what you have to live by.

MELANA: Sgt. Mark Spanko.

SPANKO: If one child is starting to lag—

MELANA: Green Beret.

SPANKO: The rest of the team picks it up.

MELANA: Active school volunteer.

SPANKO:

Care. By all means, care.

When a student struggles or a family struggles,
we pitch in as a community and we help them.

If a family doesn't have enough to eat, I'm going to take food out of my cabinet
and I'm going to make sure that that family eats tonight.

When the rubber hits the road, this community pulls together.

And you never forget where you came from.

DONNA WRIGHT

It wasn't really my plan ever to be a school teacher

When I was little I knew lots of people who wanted to be teachers

And I thought that was lame, I wanted to be a princess or a nun.

And neither of those professions worked out for me.

KID: That's Miss Wright, my English teacher. She's the best.

DONNA: So um.... My mother was always, like, well, you should do something
with literature. But --- be a teacher because you'll be guaranteed to get a job.

So I kind of did it as a default? Umm, and then when I got out of college, I didn't
get a job right away, but I did get engaged very quickly. And I needed to finance
the wedding. So I thought well, I'll teach in the school district, it'll just be the year,
and I'll just be one of thousands of teachers, nobody will miss me when I leave,
it'll just be like this token year of being able to make enough money to pay for this
wedding.

SCHOOL PLAY --

I, um, I got assigned to teach in one of the worst schools in the whole city - it was extremely violent, a horror story. A lot of tears, a lot of, "I can't do this", it was really a struggle. And then in the last two months, when I was ready to quit, somehow, I fell in love with it. And when I left, I thought it was just going to be, oh, I'm so happy, I'm getting married, and instead, it was like a little mini-tragedy in my life.

And so, when I moved to Hershey, my husband was in a PhD program there, the whole 5 years, I was always waiting for the day I could come back. The whole time, just waiting to come back. And that's how I ended up teaching um, at that school for 12 years. I really loved it. I still love it, I still see the students all the time, they're at my house, they're in my life, they're in my world, all the time. I go to their weddings, I go to their baby showers, I go to their funerals, I'm just there, all the time. I just feel like, you know, I was sent there for a reason.

CHARLES ZOGBY (self-confident, 50-ish)

I consider myself like a Robert Kennedy Republican, right.

DONNA WRIGHT Charles Zogby.

ZOGBY: I worked most of my life for kids. And I you know - I'm just as passionate as some of my friends on the other side of the aisle in seeing kids served, it's just that I would do it a different way. The superintendents have their association and the principals have theirs, and the business officials and the teachers union - like all the adults have their alphabet soup group that represents their interest. And they all say that they are in the service of kids, but at the end of the day - nobody really truly serves the interest of kids. Cuz when adult interests come in conflict with kids interest, I don't think the kids win. That's what I kind of feel very passionately about.

DON TROTZ (outgoing and energetic)

I try to I try to be visible. That's the key.

MELANA: Mr. Don Trotz, school guidance counselor.

DON: They know that they can come to me,

That I'm truly gonna care I'm truly gonna work to get some result.

Now, does it take away from my family time? It does.

I have to really balance that out especially now with my little boy uh and Jody.

Um I do a half decent job uh not a great job

but it's just part of life I, you know it's part of my calling, my passion.

MELANA SIMS (laughs)

I had a mom call me a month ago and she said,

"My daughter keeps getting picked on

because of the way that she dresses umm,

for school and I *don't* have the money to get her any other clothing,

can you please help me.”

And I said, sure, what size does she wear?

DON TROTZ: Ms. Melana Sims, school counselor

MELANA: Then she said she had a sister and a brother and there's a will, there is a way.

I found clothes that were in, gently used or new condition for all three of them

So, I brought in a bag for each of the kids and I told the little girl at the end of each day come see me, no one even needs to know.

So for a week she'd come and I'd fill her backpack

and send her on her way.

And she seemed a lot happier,

so if that's all it takes is for me to you know, make a phone call to somebody and say, hey, do you have size 7 clothes then that's what we do.

And whenever there's sales, like winter hats, scarves, gloves

90% off in the middle of the summer, I just buy them all

and as I see kids that are coming in and out without what they need,

you know I just call 'em over, here you go.

So, I'll find hats for 25 cents when it's 90 degrees out

and share them with whoever I see that needs them.

DON TROTZ

I'll show you the house I grew up in, down from the projects.

I lived here with um my first wife, uh we lived in that home. It looks good.

But she thought my life style was extremely busy um between school and church and she said

ACTRESS: Don, I really want to slow down my life pace and your life is way too fast for me. Way too hectic.

DON: ...and that ended.

We were married for 12 years and then, not that I wanted to do it, I don't think she really wanted to do it but she just said

ACTRESS: your life is way too busy.

DON: Some people say “well how can you be up” and it's like well if I'm discouraged, discouragement is gonna rub off on somebody else.

So, do I feel at times discouraged. Yeah.

Um usually when I'm feelin' like that I drive. I just drive.

I get a cup of coffee and I might just run in my car for 2 hours, come back, I usually do well.

But these kids here, like this is home, these kids need help.

So you do what you can to try to help 'em succeed.

I, you know do I wish everyone succeeded? Yeah. Is that gonna happen?

(beat)

I'm gonna go show you one more thing.

DONNA WRIGHT

Oh, my shut-down place? So. When my son was 2, the former president of our student government was sleeping in a bed with her boyfriend and their child and intruders came in and they ended up shooting up the whole bed. The boyfriend escaped out the window. She was killed. And her son is a paraplegic and he was like, 2 then. The same age as my son.

And I happened to be discussing this with my husband over dinner, and my son overheard, and every day for a week, he stood by the front door of our house in case that boy showed up, so that we could adopt him.

It was horrific - just so horrific, but if I internalized it, I wouldn't be able to move. Like, I absorb it, it goes in beyond my skin, but it stops before it gets to my heart. There's like, an off-switch somewhere inside me. There has to be. But, I laugh all the time.

MARLENE GOEBICH (High School drama teacher)

Do I feel appreciated, by the kids, yes. By the larger district, not at all, no. I'm a cog in the machine. If I fell over then some other cog would replace me. Like I can't imagine that the Superintendent wakes up at night and worries that I have paper or I have to run off a test. I'm sure he doesn't worry.

KID: Ms. Goebich, Drama teacher.

Or he doesn't worry like Like - we're in a costume room, I could walk around the costume room, and what I've paid for - most of what is in this room because that's where it comes from. And, did we make enough money to reimburse me, well if we do we do, and if we don't whatever, it's what it is.

(beat)

I have 3 jobs. My other job is I'm a waitress/bartender for private party service and -- I'm embarrassed. (laughs) And the other one is I do taxes in the off-season. And oh, and then my fourth job I guess like - in the summer it depends, some years I'm um a delivery driver for Primo's Hoagies. Sometimes I'm a waitress. Depends.

I have a doctorate In education. Education and with a specialty in creativity and theatre. And I have 4 jobs to support my job. So, I'm single. I spend five six thousand dollars a year, that's like cash for supplies. Yeah.

Can you imagine telling a lawyer bring your own paper?

CHARLES ZOGBY

I mean I'd be FOR paying teachers more but we also need a system where teachers are evaluated based on the performance they're delivering. Those who

SCHOOL PLAY --

are highly effective ought to be rewarded more highly than teachers who aren't as effective. So again, that runs headlong into what has historically been just full throated opposition by the unions to any change at all.

DONNA WRIGHT

I still frequently write to students who are in prison and will be in prison for a very long time. Ummm -- and -- when I first wrote the one, he's like, it hurt my feelings -- he wrote back, he said --

KID "No offense, but I don't know who you are! The only Mrs. Wright I know was my 9th grade English teacher and I'm sure she hated me because I did awful things in her class."

DH: And it was me! I was his teacher! And yeah, you did awful things in my class, but that doesn't mean that you weren't my student and that I didn't see potential in you and that that you know, I'm opposed to keeping in contact with you and, sending you some words of support.

It took us many months to be able to forge a relationship and then last mother's day, he sent me a mother's day card that he had bought from somebody in prison. It was drawn by hand on looseleaf paper and I mean, I put it up next to my own children's Mothers Day cards. He did hold other people's lives back in the classroom by his idiocy -- but um, , he always did have intellectual capabilities. He just- you know - couldn't see past the street life. He just couldn't do it.

ACTOR READS LETTER:

Dear Senator Stack,

I just have to ask “why?” Why is the state legislature deciding to impose these budget cuts on our school district, on the present students and on all future generations?

I look around me, and I see many of my peers. I see talented engineers, warmhearted teachers, passionate activists and politicians, aspiring musicians, shining stars, skillful businessmen, outstanding performers and so much more.

I have to ask you again, what are your loves? What did you love to do in high school? What made you into the person that you are today? Do you have children? What are their loves? What will they do, who will they be in the future? Most importantly, is all of this okay? I hope you truthfully answer these questions at least to yourself.

Sincerely,

Samantha Ho, High School Junior

VI. REFORM FOR CHILDREN

CHARLES ZOGBY

What you learn in Economics 101 right is that a monopoly delivers an inferior product at a higher price. And that's for the most part what we have in public education, we have a monopoly where everybody's forced to stay in the system. And we open these schools over and over again, year after year and we get the same results you know - what's the old definition of insanity right, doing the same thing over and over again expecting a different result. You know, um I'm a supporter of choice. Because I don't feel like at the end of the day parents and kids should be trapped in schools that don't work from them. Those families deserve another choice, like charter schools for instance.

DAN MCGARRY (feisty, 40-ish school administrator)

I'm Dan McGarry and I have a box back here I'll share with you. Two huge brown boxes of charter schools that I fought against coming into this community.

(He plops the box down)

Along with my other job I have to rate them and fight against them and say why they are not as educationally sound.

And to be honest with you, there are some cool ideas –

I'm not a total like, I hate charter school guy.

I think the competition is great – I don't have a problem with it. I have a problem with saying you're not going to follow the same rules as everybody else.

So if you read the Educator Effectiveness manual, Pennsylvania Department of Education -- it's a great read-- on how teachers and principals are evaluated, there is one line ... Page 3-

“Charter schools are not included in this rating system but may choose to participate.”

A loophole, meaning, as more and more mandates come down to us, they are exempt from being evaluated the same way as other public school teachers.

They don't have to be held accountable the same way. That, to me is not a competition. That's like saying because I am a short, 5 foot whatever white guy, because my mom and dad want me to, I could play center for the Lakers - but I can't! Do you get it?

SIMRAN SIDHU (elegant and articulate woman)

I'm Simran Sidhu. Executive Director of Youth Build Charter Schools.

I like to think of us as a life-transforming program—

CHARLES ZOGBY

SCHOOL PLAY --

These kids go to these charter schools, the same kids that the neighborhood school was failing right and they're knocking the the cover off the ball! I've seen it in alternative education schools, kids that are labeled trouble makers that go to alternative settings and are thriving, and yet they're doing it oftentimes with the same amount of money or less money.

DAN MCGARRY

We have a number of kids who've gone to specific cyber schools in this state, who for four years have accumulated ZERO academic credits. 17-year old, ZERO-CREDIT-ACCUMULATING ninth grader. And what do they do? Kick them out, and send them back where? To this public school. Do you know how much MONEY that costs this community?

SIMRAN SIDHU

I'm Simran Sidhu. Executive Director of Youth Build Charter Schools. I like to think of us as a life-transforming program—

GERRY ZAHORCHAK

Some people are just doing it because of their goodness. They really do want to care for kids.

JOE BRUNI: Gerry Zahorchak. School Superintendent-

GERRY: Some people are doing it because it's an opportunity - we can make a lot of money fast. And even share with stockholders, taxpayers' money! (laughs), sharing with stockholders! It just doesn't work, right?

JOE BRUNI

It's outrageous. Joe Bruni, School Superintendant. We send almost 1,000 kids from this school district to 72 other schools, and we bus them all. We pay tuition to send those kids back to the charters and pay fro their transportation. Four and a half million dollars a year!! And we get no reimbursement from the state for that. We used to, but we don't anymore.

GERRY ZAHORCHAK

Just follow the money. Who's making investments, who do they represent... On one side, you'll see the cyber/charter influence. On another side, you'll see the educational interest groups.

JOE BRUNI

It's an opportunity to make money! There's a lot of money to be made. Is there a moral or ethical issue? Yes!

CHARLES ZOGBY

It doesn't have anything to do with profit really.

JOE BRUNI

Charles Zogby. Again.

CHARLES ZOGBY

The vast majority is not for profit. So market driven would be systems where money travels with kids right to the school of their choice.

JOE BRUNI

There are people that have other ideas about public schooling. They don't want to see the government paying for it. Because it is expensive.

CHARLES ZOGBY

I'm trying not to be like flip here, but we allow people to buy any car they want for instance, but we don't allow them to buy a Ford Pinto. 'Cause these are kids after all right, so we wanna make sure that they're in um, safe environments but we also want to make sure that kids are going into schools that are gonna serve them. And for me at least, the school that produces bad outcomes year after year - right - there's something wrong with that school. Schools that consistently fail // kids should not be open.

SIMRAN SIDHU (*overlapping*)

I'm Simran—

JOE BRUNI (*// Overlapping with Zogby*)

We are not failing. We are not failing! // People from around the world want to be educated here. Most of our public schools are thriving and students are being well prepared, and they just want to call it one fell swoop that “public schooling is bad and here we've got evidence now to show you that these schools are failing. Kids in this zip code, in this school district, are being deprived of opportunities and services that would be otherwise provided for them -- *if* we had the funds to do that. We can't reduce teachers because we send kids to charters, we still need teachers here because we have students remaining.

CHARLES ZOGBY (*// Overlapping with Bruni*)

// Look it it's not a perfect country. But you know it's the freedom to let people maximize their potential in this country. And that it isn't the state dictating you know how we live, what we say, what we can do, where we can go to work. It's a country built on freedom that lets the full human potential bloom and that people

SCHOOL PLAY --

can do that without the interference of the state, and I think the other things is too is that we are a good nation at heart.

My grandfather came here in the early 1900's seeking a better life.

JOE BRUNI

For God's sake!

CHARLES ZOGBY (*// overlapping with Bruni*)

A guy who showed up with a suitcase and didn't know how to speak the language // and he raised a family. And to me, that's ultimately what makes this nation great, if you work hard you can still get ahead. I think a lot of people doubt that today in this day and age. I still believe it's true. And I believe it can be true again for successive generations just as it was for me.

JOE BRUNI (*// overlapping with Zogby*)

//The politicians need to improve their conversation about public schooling. I don't even know how many of these people have ever set foot in a public school. They seem to forget that it's brought us where we are as a nation AND they need to support and continue to provide so that all children are treated equally.

SIMRAN SIDHU

I'm Simran Sidhu. Executive Director of Youth Build Charter Schools. People are so dogmatic. "Either you're for innovation or you're against innovation. Either you're for unions or you are against unions." And it's like, that is not really the issue. It's 800 things that are happening. The biggest thing is that it's an education system that has to adapt to a whole new world and it's very hard to adapt massive systems.

It's such a complicated issue. No one is really evil... People need to stop digging in their heels, and saying, "this is how it's gonna be," from the unions to students to administrators, the sidelines—parents, everyone.

CHARLES ZOGBY

I don't know, I have this perception that, based on what I read, I'm fingered as somehow the evil force in education. Blame it on Zogby! And that's fine, if people wanna have that perception of me-

Everybody likes to be liked. But I don't have the ability to go and meet everybody who has an axe to grind. People don't like the fact that for-profit companies are involved in education. Or that I've pushed charter schools. I know in my heart

SCHOOL PLAY --

what I've done and why I've done it, and what I'm motivated by. If folks wanna turn their bile or invective on me because of that, well that's their choice, right? So I don't lose too much sleep over it. I really don't lose any sleep over it.

So, am I going to be the villain in your play?

VII. ART VS. MONEY

DAN MCGARRY

People don't connect to data,
they connect to personal things. I went through it four years ago.
Four years ago, ummm I was asked to come up here
as Assistant Superintendent, and six months into the position
all the stimulus money had run out.

Ummm--The year before I walked into this position, we had removed you know
close to nine million dollars in staffing.
25 to 30 elementary reading teachers were gone – overnight.
Six months into the job, we were 13 million dollars short.
There was nothing left to cut in this school district.
The only thing left to cut was elementary art, music, and physical education.
So I had to announce that we were cutting the elementary art, phys. Ed.,
and music program.

I tried to couch that with, okay, so this is not a good thing,
but we could turn it into a positive thing, because art -
and I am a proper example of trying to explain the data trends to people –
if we don't do something now because we lost all this reading support,
we are in 3 years going to be in major trouble academically.

DOUG HERMAN (hipster-ish high school teacher)

There was one student - He was in tenth grade at the time.

YVONNE: Doug Herman. History and Media Teacher.

DOUG: He really struggled, like, connecting with his peers. He didn't know how
to just be a kid, and it was because of the experiences he was having outside of
school. He was living a very rough life, there were some moments when he felt
like he was kinda homeless. Other times he just witnessed stuff - in his real day-
to-day life, where people that he cared about got killed and then he'd come to
school and it really wasn't a safe place. There were a couple of places it was
safe. He'd come to my classroom, we'd have lunch.

One day he came to talk to me on a Friday— we always had a staff meeting on
Friday afternoons— He came to me right at the end of the school day, and I was
like, “Hey man, I gotta go to the meeting.”

And then I heard all this chaos out in the hallway— like stuff like smashing and
breaking. And I found him like, just losing his mind. I tried to calm him down and
he turned on me. Like, he started to attack me. He was just in a blind rage, and I
calmed him down, I got him to relax.

SCHOOL PLAY --

But then I recognized that we were about to go into a long weekend. And he was now going to have like, 3 or 4 days of not having this safe place to go to, and not knowing where he was going to sleep, and if he was going to have food— And so he had this like, really crazy moment where he just lost his cool completely.

And there was something in me that was like, We Need To Put This Kid On The Stage. I saw - the emotions that I saw coming out of that child in this moment,

I was like, if we can channel that and show him how to use that –

We started a drama program. And by the end of the year, he went from that kid who everyone avoided, and he became, like the star of the school. He was AMAZING on stage.

He graduated, he went to college, he went into acting. He still looks back with kind eyes. He knew if he didn't have that after school program and that summer program, that he envisioned a very different future. He just thought he was going to jail.

DAN MCGARRY

Talking about data that nobody really wants to focus on if we can get first graders reading

“X” number of words per minute accurately we have just made their life infinitely better.

But we ended up cutting the very fiber of that...

So if I took away those -- art, music, I could bring back hourly reading tutors make sure that we didn't have any second grade, third grade students leaving our schools unable to read.

Long story short, that didn't go very well

the entire Performing Arts Center was filled with "save the arts" signs.

Signs all over. Ironically when we cut the 25 to 30 reading teachers, there wasn't a sign. Not a peep.

I tried to use the data we were talking about, but nobody heard a thing...

It became "all he cares about is data", "all he cares about are the tests"

My mom's an artist, so is my brother by the way.

My brother went to high school here and went to art school from here- changed his life- this school district so... (finger snap)

YVONNE

I'm glad you said that about the creativity thing because like – at times I like use it to my – advantage.

SCHOOL PLAY --

Like when I first started going here, people would ask me, oh well is it victorious like Hollywood Arts?
 Like is people singing and dancing in the hallway?
 Like this is *not* High School Musical!
 We have academic classes like everybody else.
 We have a 3 minute bell, you better get to your class.
 But like um, there's like times – ok –
 like at home I started using it to my advantage.
 I felt like - I don't know, it made me confident.
 Because I had gotten accepted as a theatre major,
 I was like walking around the house saying um "there's inside you"
 which is like a poem – I would say it in different tones and my mom would be like,
 "Excuse me miss, you need to shut it down."
 (*as self*) "I'm practicing mom, it's a role, it's a role!"
 Yavonne. High school junior.

DAN MCGARRY

My popularity? My popularity stinks.
 I've tried to get people to see who I am but I am partially to blame for that
 because when I delivered the message the first time
 in my heart I really thought "what are you upset about,
 it's much more upsetting to be an 18 or 19 year old not being able to read."

I would go home, and my wife would be at the top of the staircase crying
 "they are doing stuff to my house," you know, because
 I was living in the community – throwing stuff at my house
 putting stuff on my car -- it was awful.
 She would come to the top of the step and she was crying
 she would say, "When you are at the next board meeting, please
 tell them that you didn't mean it, you had to say it."
 And I would say, "No, I do mean it.
 If we don't get little kids to be able to read
 when they are little, it's going to hurt them."
 So it was a hell of a period of time.

We lost.

I lost I'll say.

We brought back all the art, all the music, all the phys. Ed.

And we brought back no reading support.

And now our highest performing schools are scoring the same exact way
 as our lowest performing schools.

It's heartbreaking because I didn't want to be right
People are now saying, "so the data that you presented was true."
Because the schools are now painted as failing,
horribly failing schools.

And if you drive through this community- I live here-
the number of "for sale" signs is unbelievable.
You have this flight from one of the best communities.
I was born and raised here, I went to the high school here
it was a phenomenal place, the diversity and the opportunities...
But when you take away from kids who need it,
the scores are going to drop.

The reality is we shouldn't be in a situation where we are taking away anything
from any kids. The only area we could take something away was around the arts.
Because they are not required by Chapter 4. They're not being measured.

VIII. TESTING VS. TEACHING

GABBY KRAMER

These things called Keystone testing... like every kid has to take and has to pass it to graduate and weird stuff like that. They're a way, I guess, to figure out intelligence levels and to see like what they're lacking in like, the core needs -- like science, English, and math -- but my learning difference teacher is telling me that, kids like me struggle with those, because we need like extra time? So if you have an issue, like some reason you don't score maybe as well as someone that's in like, a higher level class, like it's ... like, then you're just not as smart, I guess...

MIKE VUCOVICH (fierce high school principal)

I tell you right now, if they gave me that test when I was in 11th grade, I would have failed it miserably. But now I'm 8 credits shy for my dissertation, for my doctorate at Penn State.

That test doesn't define me, doesn't define any single kid in this school, nor should it.

SHERI UTAIN

You may do something for a student um and not see the results of it for 10 years.

MIKE VUCOVICH: SHERI Utain. Retired Special Education Teacher.

SHERI UTAIN

You know it's not there's not (*pause*)...It's another frustration that I found as a teacher that um you have a student that comes in in September and by the end of a certain period they're going to be tested in what you were supposed to teach them and you know you were given a certain amount of weeks to do this. Well kids don't learn on a schedule. So that's the other frustration with, you know, all the standardized testing.

DAN MCGARRY

I love the data; it's interesting to me. It's interesting to make better decisions. Not to hold teachers accountable, but, what are we doing, what are we not doing well.

But if I am in a classroom teaching and my data doesn't look the way it should, I am going to be held accountable for that; the school is going to be held accountable. That pressure is real. You can touch it, you can feel it. When you walk into a building where the scores are struggling, it is paralyzing to people. They are deathly afraid.

SHERI UTAIN

Now, I'm not opposed to standardized testing if its part of an overall evaluation. Okay. So, this is the teacher's evaluation, this is the standardized testing, this is something that projects, you know and you look at the whole picture --.

GERRY ZAHORCHAK

A tale of two children, same city. Time for kindergarten.

JUSTIN ZAHORCHAK: My uncle, Dr. Gerry Zahorchak -- School Superintendent.

GERRY ZAHORCHAK:

The Treated Child shows up registered, having been read to, well behaved...

The Untreated child: We get dozens every year.

Late, not registered, put on a bus by somebody who loves them. But frightened.

Often underdeveloped socially emotionally, probably has never seen a book.

So it's a lot of stimulation on that bus ride, scary,

and when they get into school, scary, so that causes that fight flight response,

and—you know, the child will run or fight back

or go into the neo-nate, fetal position...

That's the Untreated Child.

You find yourself asking, "tell us who you are". No understanding.

Do you have a brother or sister, often it's "yes", uh, older or younger?

Doesn't understand that.

We spend days sometimes, just looking for the identity of an impoverished child who comes to us just beyond the infancy state

That's the deep poverty. Different than low income.

But in our school, in Reading and Harrisburg— Harrisburg, one out of two children in that condition. In Johnstown, 4 out of 10.

My nephew, Justin Zahorchak, Elementary School Principal.

JUSTIN ZAHORCHAK

A kid in 3rd grade who might be on our kindergarten or 1st grade level, he's frustrated out of his mind, trying to take a test on a level where he's not even close.

We have kids, like, physically bawling because the test is so difficult.

CHARLES ZOGBY

In Philadelphia—

JUSTIN ZAHORCHAK: Charles Zogby, Former Secretary of-
CZ (interrupting): 70-80 percent of blacks and Latinos graduate you know, basic or below in math and reading. Where is the accountability for that? Where is the outrage for that?!?

SHERI UTAIN

If you're using just one set of numbers and everything is based on that, that's not learning. That's not education. You're- you're talking about human beings.

CHARLES ZOGBY

When do you ever see a Superintendent fired because sixty percent of the kids can't read-When do you ever see a principal removed 'cuz 80% of the kids can't do math at a basic level –

Sorry I'm getting passionate about this. I just - it makes me mad.

DAN MCGARRY

It's laughable at times, the resources that they have, compared to what we have. 24- 25,000 dollars on a child and we can barely scrape together 8,000.

We can barely run a kindergarten!

How can you take a school that's 10 percent economically disadvantaged and compare it to a school that's 88 percent? How can you say they're on the same playing field? They are not.

CHARLES ZOGBY

If you do a play and nobody shows up - and you have to fold the production - that's accountability at the end of the day. That's measuring whether you've put on an effective performance or not. You might not want the feedback. But it is still a- a albeit imperfect - it is still a measure.

MIKE VUCOVICH

90 million dollars on testing each year.

90 million dollars would go a long way to help get counselors, get support services, get some mentors in schools.

That would do a lot of good.

JAMELLA MILLER (soft spoken parent)

I'm Jamella Miller. My daughter is an amazing kid, it's just really difficult for her to grasp certain concepts. So a simple thing like -- multiplication -- the teacher would teach maybe a hour a day, with 30 kids in the classroom. But it's okay because the teacher has "taught" quote unquote, whether or not the kid grasped the concept or not, while she's dealing with other students.

My daughter's confidence is crippled. Since third grade she has struggled tremendously and now she's in sixth grade. Before, *when I had a textbook*, I could say well, let's look it up to see how it was done in the textbook. It's painful

SCHOOL PLAY --

sittin' up at night until 11:00 Youtubin' stuff because the student didn't get it in the classroom. I feel helpless.

MIKE VUCOVICH

A 90 million dollar budget for testing. 90 million dollars.

JAMELLA MILLER

They keep children in the box.

JAMIL ALLEN

I'm Jamil Allen. My three year-old, when she was two and I had a smart phone, was able to pull up the TV on the smart phone. Their minds are working different. And, our education system needs to catch up. Our kids, because, they have been exposed to technology, they're more open. Their minds will work so much more rapidly than ours that they will be... geniuses!

I one time told my kids, I said, "I apologize,"
Because schools are teaching you the way they taught ME
And with me it was kind of borderline.
We're putting this harness on them...

CHARLES ZOGBY

The reality is that the kids are the only ones accountable. 'Cuz they're gonna go out into the marketplace whether it's seeking enrollment in college, whether it's eventually going for employment. And they're gonna find out whether they have the skills or not.

SHERI UTAH

Hot flash (*laughter*) I get so, I get so angry.

(She fans herself with her hand, as her emotions flare)

We want educated people not just so they can go out and get jobs, so they can develop as full human beings, to interact in our society. Do we value that or do we just want good workers, people who will you know, look both ways before they cross the street?

MIKE VUCOVICH

I only went to China twice, but the one thing I saw that was drastically different is the work ethic. An immense work ethic like I've never seen before.

They're not smarter, not more creative.

Our top kids and their top kids, we beat them.

In fact their biggest downfall is all they are is test-takers.

I don't find the creativity, problem solving. I just find test-takers.

What makes this country great is hope.
We all have a chance to do good, regardless of where we come from,
We are never defined by a box. In China I see them getting defined.

Look—see, I only went there for 3 weeks, so I'm not an expert please,
I know you're making a play and I'm being quoted as some international expert,
which I'm not. (*Laughs*)

JAMIL ALLEN

Like, It's time to change the system.
We have to be out the box. Think out the box. That's it.
(*Everybody on stage echoes*) Get out the box.
Yeah, get out the box. Break the box! (*Laughs*) Break the walls down!

ACTORS READ THREE LETTERS

ACTOR:

Dear State Leaders in Harrisburg,
We need to have nurse in our school every day because when we are playing we
might get injured or the students might have cuts. We never know.
Yours truly, Taro Iwakyra

ACTOR:

Dear State Leaders in Harrisburg,
Our school needs a counselor because when I need help when I am sad, who's
going to help when I cry because my grandmother died.
Sincerely, Destiny Slueue, Grade 3

ACTOR:

To whom it may concern,
Please don't put more kids in 1 room because then my teacher will not get to
teach and because she will have to scream at the other kids and that is going to
let her lose her voice. So don't let her lose her voice.
Unsigned.

IX. ME VS. WE**PETER SCHMITZ**

We moved here from Minnesota when the boys were uh I think they were about 6 and 7. Oh, I'm Peter Schmitz. I have two boys.

It was um immediately clear to me how huge the disparity was just 5 -6 miles away, what resources the kid would have at his command. You'd see in the paper, okay a kid here they spend \$30,000 per student and a kid in down the street, well they spend maybe \$12- \$13,000 dollars per student. Wow, that's a big difference.

You see the kids there and think immediately they're cutting libraries, or they're cutting music programs, they're cutting arts programs. They're um...they're merging schools. They're having class sizes of 20, 25, 35 in a class... I felt

(long pause)

awful...

for those kids.

They shouldn't, it shouldn't be like that.

Where my boys are now, Tom and some other kids, they get interested in Japanese culture through Manga and Anime. And there's enough kids like him that they hired a Japanese teacher and ... and it's been another area of mastery for him

(beat)

Um, once my boys are through the school system, I may no longer wish to pay this property tax, much as I love this community.

And, it will no longer be a question of protecting my kids.

It's just me, I can put up with it.

Now I know this isn't a political discussion and I won't get to that, but I'm...

Because I tend to read a lot, you know, take in a lot of news,

I know that there are countries where they set things up, that no matter where you live,

Your school will be the same.

It shouldn't matter where you live for what kind of education you get.

Do I have an answer? No, but I have awareness of it.

(pause)

You know only 15 to 25% of people really pay attention to larger social and political issues. So, I don't ... uh

(long pause)

Things could change. You don't know.

ZOE SISWICK

Oh my God. I – I have no idea what I'd do about school.

MIKE VUCOVICH: Zoe Siswick. High School counselor.

ZOE: Um, I think you know, it's it's this – It's this, live it politically or whatever it may be, you think you want to send your kids to public school. Um, to prove that public schools work and um, that they can be successful. But unless something major changes, my husband, I mean we couldn't send any kids we might have into a public school. To our school. And that's really sad to think about. To you know, kind of weigh that. Like do I wanna – Do – How much do I want to make a point versus --- at the expense of my child?

MATT BROUILLETTE

I have four kids. My oldest is in a cyber charter school and is thriving. He's a freshman. My three girls are all traditionally home schooled. I think my son would be bored in a traditional school setting. My oldest daughter, she would be lost. And she needs my wife to teach her. That is what works best for us and we're fortunate that we can afford to do that and that we can make that kind of choice. Who knows, we might make different choices as they get older. We keep options open.

I'm not going to tell any parent that they have to sacrifice their kids education for some greater good that somebody else has decided as a policy matter or otherwise. That, to me is, you know, gets to the core of this, of who should be responsible and who do we empower. I'm not about empowering, you know, bureaucrats and politicians to make these choices. I believe parents have to. I'm Matt Brouillette. President and CEO of the Commonwealth Foundation, Pennsylvania's free market think tank.

MIKE VUCOVICH

What the problem is ... it's become a society of me instead of we. I don't know when that changed, but it did and that scares me.

X. MELANA SIMS

A family came to me last year.

They were new to the area. From New York.

And when I met with them, as we meet with all the new students,

Something just told me to ask them what was bringing them here.

So, I started to ask questions and they started telling me that basically they came here with nothing. And when some people say we have nothing it's interpreted like they might not have everything they need and sometimes it literally means nothing.

So, I asked where they were staying and they were staying in one of our housing projects and I told them I said, well, I'll gather some stuff up

and I can drop it off, I live 5 minutes away

And when I got there that night they were sitting on the linoleum floor in the projects.

you know, there are a lot of times people think they have it rough

or they think that they're poor, but that in fact is poor

when you're sitting on a bare floor waiting for your counselor to come with a pot so you can cook the food that you just got off your food stamps.

So, I went into panic mode and gathered up a bunch of stuff from people-

At least got them some bedding and pillows and things like that.

It's, it's discouraging sometimes whenever people will criticize or critique how we do on standardized testing versus some of the other districts, but our demographics are very different.

but we're making gains, we're always making gains

and sometimes it's just not portrayed in such a way

where we're at the level that we need to be, but we are getting there,

we're making positive....

We're taking steps to, to improve upon that and we do, you know make gains.

XI. THESE KIDS CAN GO ANYWHERE**GERRY ZAHORCHAK**

Ariel, let me ask you a question. Would you ever think you would go to Sunnehanna Country Club, up on the hill, and speak to a group of adults at their meeting, where you are in charge?

ARIEL

Okay. *(Laughter)* Put me on the spot. We get to go to these lunches at Sunnehanna Country Club—Well everyone gets a chance, not just me. The InterACT club. They have really good food. Umm, that's why I agreed to go at first. *(Laughter)*

GERRY ZAVORCHEK

The truth. It's all about the food.

ARIEL

'Cause I said, "What's this for?" And they said, "You're gonna talk in front a bunch of professional people." I said, "Uhh, I don't know". I just wanted the food. I didn't care about the talkin'. But basically what you do is listen to the upcoming projects they have, like the different community service projects. And you listen to their ideas and I don't know, you get to interact with a lot of professional people. Like the owner of McDonald's or a nurse. He's strange, but he's a good nurse. You know who I'm talking about right?
(Laughter) Don't tell him I said that.

GERRY ZAHORCHAK (greatly amused)

He's a dentist. She called him a nurse. And he's a really radical conservative. But she's sitting up there next to him.

ARIEL

And they can help you. Say you want to get into a college that other people want to get in to, that will help you. Like, they are really good references. And their influence is, they are like role models.

GERRY ZAHORCHAK

I don't have to stay at this. I'm at retirement age you know. But this is bigger than me. Just like you heard from Mike Vukovich, I thought it was great --

MIKE VUCKOVICH

SCHOOL PLAY --

"I don't want to hang around and admire the problems of poverty while we could be working at systems that would overcome it."

The one thing that defines this school, this country, is hope and care. You want to be successful in life, two things, work hard, be nice. And persistence: that's what used to define us. I don't know if it does anymore. Right? Like-- that's my diatribe on the subject.

SERGEANT SPANKO

I was in Fallujah, I was in Iraq and I was in Afghanistan. I says, "One of the greatest things that those children wanted was an education. They wanted a book, they wanted to read. And they couldn't. They weren't allowed." And I says, "You can't put a price on education, you can't put a price on a child's future. I'm the past, you guys are the future. You're the leaders. You're going to be the politicians, the police officers, the paramedics, you're going to be everything this town needs, so take the education that these teachers are giving you and use it. Because there's kids in other worlds and countries that can't do that. They can't even wear what they want to wear." And I says, "you're the future."

DAN MCGARRY

You know Kipling's poem, If? – "If you can walk amongst kings, nor lose the common touch" Life is about being able to overcome all different types of circumstances and communicate with all types of people on an equal playing field. That is what the public schools provide; we don't measure that. We don't tell that story at all.

DOUG HERMAN

I love getting kids to understand that they ARE history, and how they pay attention to what's going on in the world is really important. Making them educated, engaged, involved, citizens is - It's unbelievable that we don't have Civics as a mandated class anymore, and then we wonder why we have this under-engaged electorate...it's not shocking why it happens.

GERRY ZAHORCHAK

We're almost telling students from birth, from the zip code they live in, "You're going to fail in life, not just your *education*, you're gonna fail in life." And you can see it on the streets in many of these cities. You see the decay in human beings, in their face, in their teeth. And just their posture, uh, as they're, you know, up against a building or sitting on the curb, um, they've been kicked to the curb because of the funding systems for education.

DON TROTZ

SCHOOL PLAY --

I always say just keep showing them kindness, they can't come against kindness. They can come against it, if you get defensive, if you get mad or frustrated, they'll come against it but if you keep showing them kindness there's absolutely no way somebody can come against you for kindness.

JAMIL ALLEN

When the season was over and the playground was built, I was going to school for a parent meeting, this little boy hugs me from behind, I'm like, "What in the world is going on??" I'm thinkin, "Is it one of mine?" And here he was like, "Do you remember me?" And I'm thinkin, "I remember you! You played football! What are you doin over here?"

Then one kid said, "Wait! You helped build the playground!"

I'm like, "Oh, look at that!"

And kids remember. And kids SEE that. And kids WANT that.

RENE COHEN

I have to tell you, I'm not the most, politically, abreast person, like, you know, but the one thing that *would* motivate me to be more involved is education.

JOE BRUNI

I wanna show the world that they are capable. That's my big thing!

When our kids won the mock trial contest at the Delaware County courthouse two years ago, the whole courthouse went nuts. They blew every private school away. These kids were just phenomenal, and I said "YAY" to that! These kids can go anywhere. Compete anywhere. That's what it's all about.

KYANNA

Pride? Pride builds character and allows you to find the new love for something. Like you can find love like if I might not have as much pride in myself but to see Yavonne every day, I feed off of it. I wanna be like that! Like it inspires me. The thing I learned about school is that uh - um, I don't know how to sum it up -- I learned that like - you have to find things out on your own and like don't belittle yourself. Because they teach you like - I don't know - like history class. They teach you a nationalistic point of view of like the world. But like you start to like uncover different truths that are like, not lies - but the truths and your perception of new things. And then like, that to me, that is what inspires me to like build myself to be a better individual. And it teaches me like in the future - when I have children, if I have children - (laughter) like - I wanna tell other people, like I wanna express that to people who don't know. I wanna tell YOU.

DONNA WRIGHT

SCHOOL PLAY --

You know, I do take joy -- in lots and lots and lots and lots of little things. I just take joy in their personalities. Seeing them accomplish things. I love the kids. They make me giggle, they say outrageous things to me, and um, like I laugh every single day.

KID: Miss Wright, can I go to the bathroom?

DONNA: Yes, Kathleen. Hi Raven, how are you? Miss Parker, where are you on your outline. This is my favorite brat. She thinks she's my child, so the other day she took a video of herself on my phone, eating my food.

I was so mad. My strategy for keeping the kids away from my food? I lick it! Go Jimmy, go!

KID: I love your class

DONNA: I can't get rid of them. He doesn't belong in my class until after lunch.

YVONNE

The way, I am - I don't know --- I was born an optimist!
So like when people are like - what will you plan on doing in college I'm like I'm gonna major in theatre. Well theatre won't make you any money, well I'll major in theatre, and minor in entrepreneurship, because even if I don't um - become this famous actress or choreographer, I'll just probably open up my own business, that has something to do with the arts. So - how I kinda look at it - people like to refer to things as plan a, plan b. And the way my mindset is "If plan a doesn't work, there are 25 other letters in the alphabet!"

JOE BRUNI

Their lives become your life. You open up all kinds of little boxes that you didn't expect to find.

END OF PLAY