



It's a tough subject.

## **SCHOOL PLAY**

A Documentary Play

Created by

Arden Kass,  
Seth Bauer & Edward Sobel

“The Courthouse Steps” version

*This script is available free of charge for any and all performances. Additional versions are available online. For inquiries or to book for a performance, contact Public Citizens for Children & Youth. [www.pccy.org/schoolplay](http://www.pccy.org/schoolplay)*

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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. The full-length play is 75 minutes long, but the script is now available online in multiple lengths to accommodate a variety of situations and venues.

**School Play** was conceived by Arden Kass and created by Kass, Seth Bauer and Edward Sobel. It was commissioned by the advocacy organization Public Citizens for Children & Youth. The project 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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**(75 minute version)**

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**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

**1. My Favorite Teacher**

JAMIL ALLEN  
GABBY KRAMER  
CALEB SWARTZ  
RALPH ROSIAN  
DON TROTZ  
ERICA SWIFT

**2. Inciting Incident**

ACTOR  
DR. GERALD ZAHORCHAK, SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT

**3. Inequality Olympics**

YVONNE REYNOULDS  
BRANDON LEONARD  
GABBY KRAMER  
RENE COHEN  
CHARLES ZOGBY  
MARLENE GOEBICH  
BEE REED  
TEACHER  
KYANNA HATTON  
BRANDON'S MOM  
JENN HOFF

ACTOR reads letter

**4. You're the Future**

JOE BRUNI  
KYANNA HATTON  
SGT. MARK SPANKO

## MY FAVORITE TEACHER

**W 1. JAMIL ALLEN** (elementary school parent)

Second grade teacher. Miss Brown.

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

**W 2. 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.

**M. CALEB SWARTZ** (middle aged professional)

At the end of the season, my lineman coach said,

**W 2. ACTOR:** "Swartzy, where you going to college?"

**M. CALEB:** And I said, "Coach, I don't think I'm going to college." And he said, and I quote,

**W2. ACTOR:** "You're too damn smart not to go to college."

**M. 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.

**W1. 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!

**M. 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 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.

**W 1. 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.

## INCITING INCIDENT

**M. GERRY ZAHORCHAK** (folksy but articulate, 60s)

When I was in Harrisburg 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.

### W2. ACTOR

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

**M. GERRY ZAHORCHAK**

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. But 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 the announcement was made of the budget intentions and *Huuuh ...*

oh my gosh...It was devastating.

## INEQUALITY OLYMPICS

**W 1. 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. 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 bust in there. And I can't stop the door cuz there's no lock. And um, like maybe, like - it doesn't even necessarily have to be anything big, not like a big ole like bathroom makeover, but like maybe clean, clean!

**M. BRANDON LEONARD**

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

**W 1. YVONNE**

What does it feel like? Dirty! With them bathrooms. Oh my god!

**M. BRANDON LEONARD**

Lap pool. Diving pool.

**W 2. GABBY KRAMER**

Six tennis courts.

**M. 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.

**W 1. YVONNE**

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

**M. 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.

**W 1. YVONNE**

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

**M. CHARLES ZOGBY**

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

**W 2. MARLENE GOEBICH**

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

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!

**W 1. 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 asked us to excuse him for a second, and apparently marched down to the principal's office and was like—

**M. TEACHER**

WE NEED NEW BOOKS!

**W 1. BRANDON'S MOM**

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

**M. 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.

**W 1. 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.

**W2. 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."

**W1. 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.

**W.2 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.

**M. KID:** Ms. Goebich, Drama teacher.

**W2.** Like - we're in a costume room, and what I've paid for - most of what is in this room -- that's where it comes from.

(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.

(beat)

I have a doctorate In education. Education,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?

### **W 1. ACTOR READS LETTER**

Dear Senator,

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

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## **YOU'RE THE FUTURE**

### **M. JOE BRUNI**

Joe Bruni, School Superintendent.

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.

### **W. 2. KYANNA HATTON**

I don't really get the help that I wish I could get. I feel like it's withholding me but it's making me a better person because now I look at it - I try to look at it, like if you want something you have to go out and get it. If you know ,you wanna be at

this university, this that and the third, do with all your power inside of you to like make it happen.

**M. 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."

**END OF PLAY**