

If you're waiting for Super(wo)man, visit my classroom!

***Waiting for Superman* is an emotional film that could have been an inspiring call to improve the lives of America's children. However, that message was hijacked by ideological warriors with a narrow agenda.**

- You can't help but be moved by the stories of the children in the film. The lesson we should draw is that the opportunity for a great public education should come not by chance, not even by choice, but by right.
- The movie is selective, incomplete and misleading. It paints all teachers as bad and all charter schools as good. It places all the blame for failing schools on teachers' unions. It ignores the possibilities of collaboration by demonizing unions.
- In the entire two-hour film, not one good public school teacher is interviewed, not one non-charter public school is visited. Across the nation, amazing teachers are doing incredible work for children in terrific schools. They are achieving remarkable results that should have been included in the film.

The film portrays charter schools as a panacea, but that is a false hope.

- The charter school concept was borne of a desire to create "laboratories" where new ideas could be explored and, if successful, replicated in other schools. They were never intended as replacements for traditional public schools.
- You won't learn this in the movie, but the Harlem Children's Zone school in *Superman* receives two-thirds of its funding—as much as \$100 million—from private sources. Children at the school not only have good teachers, but extensive dental, medical and tutorial services. Without a dramatic change in our commitment to our schools and to children, funds will never be available to duplicate this holistic practice
- Geoffrey Canada, the hero of *Superman*, chairs a board stacked with wealthy philanthropists. His organization has assets of over \$200 million, and he's paid \$400,000 a year. The film carefully omits reports that Canada dismissed an entire class of poorly-performing students from his school.
- The SEED charter boarding school in the film spends \$35,000 per student to get its remarkable rates of graduation and college acceptance. Are we prepared to commit resources like that for tens of thousands of inner-city children?
- Charter schools, even those with open admissions policies, have greater control over admissions criteria and student behavior. Those who are disruptive or who don't meet academic standards can be sent back to traditional public schools.
- Reliable studies show that charter schools don't all outperform traditional schools. After surveying math tests in half of the nation's 5,000 charter schools, a Stanford University report found that:
 - 46% had academic gains no different than those of a similar public school
 - 37% were worse than a similar public school
 - Only 17% were superior to a similar public school

Is *Superman's* comparison to other countries fair? The movie points to Finland, a country whose teachers are fully unionized, as a country that the United States should emulate.

- In addition, nations like Korea, Singapore, Japan and Finland, succeed not by privatizing their schools or closing those with low scores, but by strengthening the education profession and respecting educators.
- Other countries have far fewer children living in poverty than we do. The child poverty rate in Finland is five percent; it is 20 percent in the United States.
- In Finland all teachers receive three years of high-quality graduate level preparation, paid for by the state. They are well compensated and much respected in their communities.
- Finland has national health care and strong social welfare programs for children and families.
- Finland seldom tests its students.
- Finland has a national curriculum that is not limited to reading and math, but includes the arts, science, history, foreign languages and other subjects.

Find out much more about *Waiting for Superman*, including the probable reason this dishonest attack on public education was not nominated for an Oscar, at <http://ift-aft.blogspot.com>!



**East Baton Rouge
Federation of Teachers**

Carnell Washington, President

11823 Marketplace Avenue • Baton Rouge, LA 70816 • (225) 292-2680