

WHAT'S NEW WITH KIDS?

For May 2011

Waiting for Superman

Luck of the draw could have been the name of the 2010 documentary film titled *Waiting for 'Superman,'* which provides insight into the problems of public education in the United States.*

The film was recommended to me by Louise Helton, a member of the Nevada KIDS COUNT Executive Committee. For several months, I tried to rent it from a Blockbuster near my home, but was unsuccessful because the store carries only one copy of the film, as I found out all the Blockbusters in the valley do. Finally, after driving to a store further from my home, I was able to obtain a copy.

In an ideal world, all schools would be equal. All schools would have high-quality teachers, low teacher-to-student ratios, attentive students, and abundant resources, so that parents would not have to worry about sending their child to a poorly performing school. Unfortunately, this ideal situation does not exist. The film documents the efforts of five parents/grandparents in obtaining the best education possible for the future success of their children, taking measures such as entering their children into a lottery for a slot at a charter school. It is gut-wrenching watching the process and the outcome of the families that did so, knowing that the odds are against all of the children winning the lottery.

In the film, it is implied that it would take a superhero, namely Superman, to fix the problems with public education in the United States. We cannot wait for a superhero. That responsibility lies with all of us who benefit from an educated society. Some high-profile and controversial people have used their voice and wealth to spotlight the problems with public education. Examples are Bill Gates and Michelle Rhee, who are featured in the film. In his film interview, Bill Gates said that we need well-educated citizens in mathematics, science, and engineering, if we fail at this, we will not be able to compete in the global economy. As former chancellor of Washington, D.C. public schools, Michelle Rhee implemented changes to improve the poorly performing schools, but met many obstacles along the way. In her interview, she stated that "there is a complete and utter lack of accountability for the job that we're suppose to be doing, which is producing results for kids."

Obviously, not all public schools require fixing. The film, however, helps bring attention to the need for improving public education in the schools that are failing their students.

**Waiting for 'Superman'* was directed by Davis Guggenheim and producer Lesley Chilcott.

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