

# SCREENING HANDBOOK

**"A BEAUTIFUL FILM—TREMENDOUSLY MOVING! ...EVERYONE WHO VALUES DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION NEEDS TO SEE THIS."**  
— JONATHAN KOZOL, ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN AND AUTHOR OF *SAVAGE INEQUALITIES*



A FILM EXPLORING THE REAL COST OF PRIVATIZING AMERICA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

# BACKPACK FULL OF CASH

**NARRATED BY MATT DAMON**

STONE LANTERN FILMS AND TURNSTONE PRODUCTIONS PRESENT  
"BACKPACK FULL OF CASH" NARRATED BY MATT DAMON PRODUCED BY SARAH MONDALE VERA ARONOW  
EDITED BY VERA ARONOW MARIAN SEARS HUNTER CINEMATOGRAPHY BY ROGER GRANGE ORIGINAL MUSIC BY TOM PHILLIPS  
CONSULTING EDITOR MARIAN SEARS HUNTER ANIMATION BY PATRICK SMITH DAVID GERLACH - QUOTED STUDIOS  
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Photo credit: Katrina Ohstrom

# Introduction

*Backpack Full of Cash* is a feature-length documentary that explores the growing privatization of public schools and the resulting impact on America's most vulnerable children. We hope that this documentary can help audiences understand charter schools, vouchers and high stakes testing; and put a human face on the consequences of these policies. By giving audiences a shared experience, you can stimulate a constructive conversation about what is happening in our public schools.

Your screening might take place at a school or a church, on a university campus, as part of a conference or professional development workshop, as a kickoff for ongoing community dialogue or in another setting, but whatever the occasion, this guide will serve as a roadmap for fruitful and comprehensive conversations about the film and the issues it raises.

Along with this step by step Screening Handbook, you will find everything you need to promote your screening on our website at [www.backpackfullofcash.com](http://www.backpackfullofcash.com) — editable e-posters, an e-postcard, a Press Kit template, a detailed Discussion Guide with FAQ's and more information about the issues. (You can contact your screening coordinator or email [screenings@backpackfullofcash.com](mailto:screenings@backpackfullofcash.com) if you have more questions.) Use this Handbook to customize your event, and let us know how it went!

— *Filmmakers Sarah Mondale and Vera Aronow*

Please share anecdotes, pictures, and/or videos from your event with us and we may showcase them on our website. Send your stories and pictures to [screenings@backpackfullofcash.com](mailto:screenings@backpackfullofcash.com)



# Event Planning

While choosing the basic format for your event, you should consider your objectives, your time frame and your audience. With larger groups, consider having a moderator and/or including local experts, such as educational thought leaders, policy makers, local professors, or other community stakeholders to supplement the video and address audience questions. Or, you could invite the filmmakers. Other activities might include: a separate follow-up session for participants to create policy action agendas; a workshop for a longer, more informal and participatory experience; piggy-backing on a larger community event, or for students, a formal classroom activity that spans multiple class periods. The following tips can help in the planning of a screening event.

## • Clarify Your Objectives

What do you envision for your event? A community forum at a local theater? A campus meet up, a get-together for your school faculty and staff, a session at your professional conference? Will you be selling tickets and/or using the screening as a fundraiser? Or do you want it to be free and open to the public? The screening can be a call to action for your community, or an educational 'salon' that can start a meaningful conversation.

## • Consider Timing and Agenda

Time is one of the most important considerations. The film itself is approximately 96 minutes, and for an effective event, you need to add 5 minutes before the film to set the tone, and 20-30 minutes after the film for a follow-up discussion and dialogue. As you begin to envision your event, you should set the agenda and format depending on your desired outcomes.

## • Choose a Date and Check out Possible Venues

Depending on the size of crowd you are expecting, you will want to scope out possible venues. Some independent movie theaters are happy to be involved in a community event. Schools, universities, libraries and churches often have public auditoriums or conference rooms that you might be able to book. Be sure to investigate the technical capabilities of your venue. Do they have a projector? Or can you show the film on a wide screen TV for a smaller crowd? Will you need a DVD or a Blu Ray disc from us? When picking the date and time for your screening, consider the academic calendar, holidays, and local events. If you are choosing between days, do not hesitate to ask an expert, such as a local campus or community organizer, about when they've had the most success with attendance.

## • Assemble Your Team

Based on your strategy and desired outcome, approach partners to secure their participation in planning and execution. Invite speakers, panelists, and/or co-facilitators.

## • Book It!

Fill out the Host a Screening form on our website and someone from our team will contact you to work out the details. After you've picked the date, and secured the venue, book your screening with our team. Once we receive payment, we'll list your event on our website and we'll help you to promote it using our online Community Resources.



# We recommend that you book the screening and start planning well in advance!

## Five Weeks Prior

- **Finalize your invitation list and send your invitations.** You can download the editable flyer and other materials from our website. Make sure your invitation outlines all the event details: including the name of the film, and a description of the activities you have planned (panel discussion, moderated Q&A, open group dialogue, small group activities, etc.). If you are planning refreshments make sure you mention that in your invitation as well!

## Four Weeks Prior

- **Prepare an agenda for your event.** This can be as formal or as informal as you wish, but you should decide on the timing for arrivals, introductions, starting the film, and starting the post-film discussion or supplemental activities. This guide provides questions and discussion prompts for creating a unique, dynamic dialogue. If you are having an extended discussion or workshop after viewing the film, be sure to allow time for a bathroom and refreshment break after the film ends.
- **Plan the food and drinks you will serve.** Do you need to rent tables, chairs, plates, glasses, and utensils, or purchase disposable ones?

## Two Weeks Prior

- If you're selling tickets or using RSVP's, send out a reminder to those guests who have purchased tickets or RSVP'd yes, or not RSVP'd at all.
- Consider providing RSVP'd guests with links to the film's website, the film's official Facebook ([www.facebook.com/BACKPACK](http://www.facebook.com/BACKPACK)) or Twitter or Instagram (@BACKPACKthefilm) to set the tone, engage people on the issues and get your guests excited about your event. The *Backpack Full of Cash* team will help you push your event out using our social media.
- **Think through ways to best facilitate.** The best thing that can come out of your event is a productive dialogue around the film based on your objectives for the conversation. Look over the FAQs in our detailed *Backpack Full of Cash* Discussion Guide which is available with other Community Resources on our website.



## One Week Prior

- **Set up your technology. Do a tech check a few days before the event** — whether it is a projector and screen or a simple TV and DVD player, you want to ensure you have it up and running before the day of the screening. You should also play through the entire film at least one time before your event to make sure there are no jumps, snags or scratches.
- **Confirm with your invited guests one more time.** Consider re-sending links to the event to any late RSVPs.
- **Prepare and practice.** Prep an introduction to the film and a welcome to your event.
- **Establish a feedback channel.** Create a short, online evaluation form so you can collect feedback on your event. Sites such as Survey Monkey are great for simple, customized questionnaires.
- **Assemble your materials.** Purchase the necessary refreshments. Have copies of the *Backpack Full of Cash* Discussion Guide printed if you want your audience to take it home with them.

## The Day of the Event

- Test the tech one more time (picture and sound) at the venue before guests arrive to make sure everything will run smoothly.
- If you're playing the film on a computer, make sure that you check your settings and set Windows or other programs to avoid "time outs." Write down passwords in case the computer accidentally shuts down. *Backpack Full of Cash* is 96 minutes long and you need to check that your computer will play it all the way to the end.
- Arrange your venue to accommodate your guests, and to create a welcoming space for a meaningful event and discussion.
- Don't forget your agenda! Make the most out of your time by following the agenda you created. Introduce the film and explain why you are bringing it to the group. Before the film starts, let your guests know that there will be a short discussion, panel discussion, or activities in small breakout groups afterwards.

## The Day After

- Ship the DVD or Blu-Ray back to the *Backpack Full of Cash* team as pre-arranged in the license.
- Send a thank-you to all your guests and encourage them to continue the discussion and/or the action plan that was started at your event.
- Send a link to your online evaluation form to collect feedback from your guests.
- If you sold tickets fill out the Ticket Report that came with your license and email it back to us so we can calculate the fee.
- What went well? What can we do better? Fill out our online survey form for *Backpack Full of Cash* Screening Hosts that our team will provide.



# Guiding a Productive Discussion

**Before Your Event:** Note that *Backpack Full of Cash* has a strong point of view, which is common for independent films. You'll want to be clear about your personal responses while making plenty of room for other perspectives.

1 Create a list of the film's main points for post-screening discussion. These may include:

- The importance of equal access to quality public education
- The importance of building alliances in communities and between communities to support our nation's public schools
- The importance of financially supporting and valuing teachers, administrators, and other public school educators – and supporting the public school system
- The history of charter schools, voucher programs, and privatization, and how they impact and potentially undermine our public school system
- Whether access to a quality public education is a basic human right – and how historically, the fight for educational equality is inextricably linked to the civil rights movement and the struggle for equal rights for all citizens
- The history and consequences of standardized testing

2 Acknowledge that *Backpack Full of Cash* has a strong point of view, which is why you hope it can stimulate important discussion about a pressing issue. (This is especially important if some in the audience assume that all documentaries are "objective.")

3 Try to give everyone an opportunity to be heard. Be clear about how people will take turns or indicate that they want to speak. Plan a strategy for preventing one or two people from dominating the discussion.

4 Talk about the difference between dialogue and debate. Remind people that they are engaged in a dialogue, not a political or dogmatic debate. In a dialogue, participants try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

5 Encourage active listening. Ask the group to think of the event as being about listening as well as discussing. Participants can be encouraged to listen for things that challenge as well as reinforce their own ideas.

6 Remind participants that everyone sees through the lens of his or her own experience, and expect that issues of race and class will be in the foreground. Everyone in the group may have a different view about the content and meaning of the film, and each of them may be accurate. It can help people understand one another's perspectives if in addition to sharing their views, speakers identify the evidence on which they base their opinions.



## Pre-screening Activities

1. Before the group views the film, provide a brief introduction based on your objectives. Refer to the inside cover of this Guide for a general description. Then, communicate some of the main questions that you hope the film will raise, such as:
  - Why do we need equal access to quality education, and what are the consequences of inequity?
  - What is the impact of privatization? What's our role in determining the future of public education?
  - What does democracy in action look like when it comes to education, how can we build this movement, and build alliances?
2. Conduct a short, whole-group discussion using one or two of the following questions as a guide:
  - What do you know about our public school system, and how it is organized, run, and funded?
  - What do you know about the public schools in your community?
  - What is YOUR definition of a quality education?
  - What do you know about charter schools? School vouchers?

### Digging Deeper

*Do you think that the right to a quality education is a basic human right?*

*Do you make your voice heard on education policy in your community? Would you ever consider getting involved at a local level?*

## Paving the Way for Multiple Perspectives

A productive post-viewing discussion will create a space that can help audiences process what they've just seen, as well as think ahead about whether and how they might want to stay involved in local activities. That said, be prepared for supporters of charter schools and other forms of privatization to have strong reactions to *Backpack Full of Cash* and be aware that the term "privatization" is itself controversial. Supporters of charters and vouchers usually prefer "school choice." (See *Backpack Full of Cash* Discussion Guide for more details.) Begin your discussion on a positive note so that those who sympathize with the characters don't feel shut down by detractors. Use one or more of the following questions as a guide.

- Can you share a moment in the film or a character who particularly stood out for you? Why did it/she/he resonate?
- In one or two words, describe how you felt after watching *Backpack Full of Cash*.
- What was the main message you took away from the film?
- What was something new you learned?
- What in the film made you hopeful?
- What in the film made you want to take action?



## Questions for Further Discussion

For a more detailed discussion, refer to our in-depth *Backpack Full of Cash Discussion Guide* (a separate PDF available at [www.BackpackFullOfCash.com](http://www.BackpackFullOfCash.com)).

### Our Schools – Who Controls Them, Who Decides?

At the beginning of the film, the question is posed, “Who should control our public schools?” What is your answer to this question, and why?

What are some of the implications of having publicly funded schools that operate outside of the public education system? How might this affect students, families, and the system at large?

What are your opinions on privately run charter schools? Vouchers for private and religious schools?

Imani is a cyber-charter student in 10th grade. How would you describe her educational experience?

#### Digging Deeper

*A student, Dlorah Ortiz, stated, “They took away all the help we need. They’re keeping us stuck at the same point without any help. They want to see us fail.” Why might she feel that way? Think about the vision expressed by Helen Gym: “One of the ways you exhibit – as a government and a society — your love for children is in the institutions you build around them.”*

*Some privately-managed schools can select or push out students who may be deemed “undesirable.” Is this fair? How might this affect the schools without such policies?*

### What Do We Need to Know About Education Today?

According to education historian and activist Diane Ravitch, the school system is not failing. Are you surprised by this statement? Do you agree? Why or why not?

After watching this film, what do you think are the main problems undermining the success of our public schools? How can we as citizens engage in fixing these problems?

How do you feel about public taxpayer dollars going to religious schools and other private schools not held accountable to public assessments and benchmarks?

What makes the New Orleans schools unique? What can we learn from their story?

#### Digging Deeper

*How does privatization of public schools affect our ability to weigh in about how public dollars are being spent?*

*In an era of test-based accountability, how do unions support public school teachers, and contribute to the success of the public school system?*

*What was the original concept for charter schools? How have they evolved? Why do you think this happened?*





## Education and Democracy

What is your own definition of a quality education? What is your vision of a functional public school system in a healthy democracy?

### Digging Deeper

*Attorney Rhonda Brownstein states, “Public education is the civil rights issue of our day, because it’s a matter of justice.” How does she support this statement in the film, and what do you understand this statement to mean? How do you see this concept playing out in your own community? On a state and national level?*

*Wendy Fortunato, a school counselor, says “if you don’t educate properly all the people, then what is a democracy except a place where the people with the money and power determine the outcomes for everyone else?” What are your thoughts on this statement?*

## High Stakes Testing

What are some of the impacts that standardized tests have on students? What are some of the impacts that they have on teachers?

How do standardized tests disproportionately affect students of color, and students from a lower socio-economic background?

How can test-based reform mislead the general population about the overall health of our public schools?

## Positive Change and Problem Solving

Philadelphia guidance counselor Pierre LaRocco says that the dream of the public school is “bringing everyone together and giving them the same opportunity.” In your opinion, is this dream being realized?

Historian Diane Ravitch offers one definition of a quality education as “an interchange between a student and a teacher — a human being — looking into the eyes of the teacher, seeing approval or disapproval, interacting with other students, discussing problems, finding out that other people have better ideas.”

How does this align with your own personal definition?

List some of the elements of a successful education system that can be observed in Union City, New Jersey. Consider what you saw that speaks to teacher and student satisfaction and success. Compare these to what you observed in Nashville, Tennessee.

## Taking Action

What are some of the main takeaways from the film *Backpack Full of Cash*? Might these lessons inform your policy choices — and life choices — moving forward? How?

What are some of the social action ideas presented at the end of the film? How can you engage with these in your community, or on a national level?



# Resources

## School Privatization

**[ALEC Exposed](#)** A website dedicated to exposing the American Legislative Exchange Council. Check out their [page on school privatization](#).

**[Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools](#)** (AROS) An alliance of parent, youth, community, and labor organizations that represent more than 7 million people. Organizes nationwide days of action to reclaim the promise of public education as our nation's gateway to a strong democracy and racial and economic justice.

**[American Civil Liberties Union](#)** Works to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties guaranteed by the Constitution and laws of the United States.

**[American Federation of Teachers](#)** (AFT) At local and national levels this teachers union works to promote public schools and to stop privatization.

**[Alternet Education Page](#)** Numerous articles on school privatization from around the country.

**[Badass Teachers Association](#)** (BATs) A network of over 80,000 teachers and education activists throughout the United States who fight for communities to have strong, sustainable, and well-funded public schools.

**[Black Lives Matter's Statement](#)** on "An End to the Privatization of Education and Real Community Control."

**[Center for Popular Democracy](#)** Works with high-impact base-building organizations, organizing alliances, and progressive unions to envision and win an innovative pro-worker, pro-immigrant, racial and economic justice agenda. Check out these [education publications](#).

**[Economic Policy Institute](#)** A nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank created to include the needs of low- and middle-income workers in economic policy discussions. See their "[Exploring the Consequences of Charter School Expansion](#)."

**[Education Commission of the States](#)** ECS conducts research, delivers reports, and provides expert counsel on the full spectrum of education policy issues—from early learning through postsecondary and workforce readiness.

**[Education Law Center of NJ](#)** Education Law Center (ELC) serves as a leading voice for New Jersey's public school children and is one of the most effective advocates

for equal educational opportunity and equitable school funding in the United States. See [Is School Funding Fair?](#)

**[Education for Liberation](#)** National coalition of teachers, community activists, researchers, youth, and parents who believe a good education should teach people—particularly low-income youth and youth of color—how to understand and challenge the injustices their communities face. Organizes "Free Minds Free People" conference.

**[In the Public Interest](#)** A research and policy center on privatization and responsible contracting. It has issued several reports on dangers of school privatization.

**[Journey for Justice \(J4J\)](#)** An alliance of grassroots community, youth, and parent-led organizations in 21 cities across the country pushing back and demanding community-driven alternatives to the privatization of public schools systems. See [Death by a Thousand Cuts: Racism, School Closures and Public School Sabotage](#).

**[The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People](#)** NAACP, the oldest civil rights organization in the United States. The fundamental goal of the NAACP's education advocacy agenda is to provide all students access to quality education. [2016 NAACP Resolution and statement on charter schools](#).

**[National Center for Education Statistics](#)** Collects data from many sources covering all areas of education. See the National Assessment of Educational Progress reports.

**[National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education](#)** Provides nonpartisan documentation and analysis of privatization in education.

**[National Education Association](#)** (NEA) On local, state, and national levels, this teachers union works to improve and defend public schools.

**[National Education Policy Center](#)** Sponsors research, produces policy briefs, and publishes expert third-party reviews of think tank reports. A great place to find responses to pro-privatization reports.

**[National School Board Association](#)** NSBA advocates for equity and excellence in public education through school board leadership. It believes "education is a civil right necessary to the dignity and freedom of the American people."



**[Network for Public Education](#)** (NPE) An advocacy group whose mission is to preserve, promote, improve, and strengthen public schools. Check out their “[NPE Toolkit: School Privatization Explained.](#)”

**[Opportunity to Learn Network](#)** A national network working to secure a high-quality public education for all students.

**[Parents Across America](#)** A grassroots organization that connects parents from around the United States to strengthen and support public schools.

**[Parents for Public Schools](#)** A non-profit organization of parent leaders who work to improve public schools by educating, engaging, and mobilizing parents across the country.

**[Progressive Magazine’s “Public School Shakedown”](#)**

**[Rethinking Schools](#)** Publisher of quarterly magazine and books that oppose school privatization and promote high-quality public schools and teaching for social justice.

**[Right to Education Project](#)** Tracks international developments in the fight against privatization and promotion of public schools.

**[TAG Teachers4SocialJustice](#)** A coalition of 10 social justice teacher groups that hold conferences and organize for educational justice in major cities. URLs of local groups listed.

**NOTE:** *The two following organizations promote privatization but have extensive information about voucher and charter programs.*

**[EdChoice](#)** Promotes school privatization. Their annual report *ABCs of School Choice* has comprehensive information on school privatization programs and legislation by state.

**[National Charter School Resource Center](#)** A pro-charter school clearinghouse that has information on charter school legislation. Their listing of charter schools does not distinguish between those chartered by local school districts (in which employees are public employees) and privately run charter schools.

## Community Schools

**[Coalition for Community Schools](#)** An alliance of national, state, and local organizations in education K-16, youth development, community planning and development, family support, health and human services, government, and philanthropy, as well as national, state, and local community school networks.

**[National Center for Community Schools](#)** The Children’s Aid National Center for Community Schools is a practice-based technical assistance organization that builds the capacity of schools, districts, and community partners to organize their human and financial resources around student success.

## Standardized Testing Issues

**[Defending the Early Years](#)** An organization of early childhood educators and advocates who rally educators to take action on policies that impact the education of young children, especially around testing and standards.

**[FairTest National Center for Fair and Open Testing](#)** Excellent materials in English and Spanish on alternative forms of assessment and problems with standardized testing.

**[Learning Policy Institute](#)** Works on a range of policy issues, particularly assessment.

**[NY Performance Standards Consortium](#)** A network of schools using high-quality assessment alternatives to standardized testing.

**[Rethinking Schools](#)** Articles in their quarterly magazine and on their website critique standardized testing and offer suggestions for authentic forms of assessment. See their book [Pencils Down: Rethinking High-Stakes Testing and Accountability in Public Schools.](#)

## Philadelphia-based Groups

**[Education Law Center of Pennsylvania](#)** The ELC-PA’s mission is to ensure access to a quality public education for all children in Pennsylvania.

**[Juntos](#)** A community-led, Latinx immigrant organization in South Philadelphia fighting for our human rights as workers, parents, youth, and immigrants.

**[Youth United for Change](#)** A youth-led, democratic organization made up of youth of color and working-class communities, with the “people” and political power to hold school officials and government accountable to meeting the educational needs of Philadelphia public school students.

**[Philadelphia Student Union](#)** Runs city-wide campaigns that bring together students from all of their chapters and additional schools to improve school district policies and practices.

**These resources were taken from the *Backpack Full of Cash Discussion Guide.***

# GET INVOLVED

## **THE ALLIANCE** TO RECLAIM OUR SCHOOLS

**Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS)** An alliance of parent, youth, community, and labor organizations that represent more than 7 million people. Organizes nationwide days of action to reclaim the promise of public education as our nation's gateway to a strong democracy and racial and economic justice.



**Journey for Justice (J4J)** An alliance of grassroots community, youth, and parent-led organizations in 21 cities across the country pushing back and demanding community-driven alternatives to the privatization of public schools systems. See [Death by a Thousand Cuts: Racism, School Closures and Public School Sabotage.](#)



**Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC)** A national coalition to build power among parents, youth, organizers, advocates and educators to transform their own communities, support alternatives to a culture of zero-tolerance, punishment, criminalization and the dismantling of public schools, and fight racism and all forms of oppression.

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[www.schottfoundation.org](http://www.schottfoundation.org)