

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

BACKPACK FULL OF CASH

NARRATED BY MATT DAMON



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ACCLAIMED DOCUMENTARY FILM “BACKPACK FULL OF CASH” REVEALS DEVASTATING CONSEQUENCES OF PRIVATIZING AMERICA’S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*Narrated by Academy Award-winning Actor & Activist Matt Damon,
BACKPACK has been screened over 370 times in 39 states and nine countries
— including nine film festivals and 18 education conferences*

(New York, New York) – June 19, 2019 – Education is proving to be a [crucial topic](#) in the runup to the 2020 presidential nomination. In the era of #RedforED and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, the documentary film, **BACKPACK FULL OF CASH**, narrated by Academy award-winning actor and activist Matt Damon, is now serving as a primer for voters, especially those affected by education privatization.

Through the eyes of principals, teachers, activists, parents and most hearteningly, students, **BACKPACK** debunks myths about privately-run charter and voucher schools and explores the evolving fight over public education, a cornerstone of American democracy. This [highly acclaimed](#) feature-length documentary follows the tumultuous 2013-14 academic year in cities throughout the United States where public schools serving many low-income children of color, are starved of resources and undermined by market-based education reforms.

“I got involved in **BACKPACK FULL OF CASH** because I believe that every kid should have access to great public schools,” said the film’s narrator Matt Damon, whose mother is an educator. “For years now, I’ve been concerned that education reform is taking us in the wrong direction. Both Republicans and Democrats have been applying business strategies like competition and consumer choice -- to education. And that's chipping away at public education. “Backpack Full of Cash” does a really good job of raising awareness about these issues.”

Groups favoring school choice claim their movement is a success, pointing to data showing that charter enrollment has nearly [tripled](#) in the last 10 years and the number of students using vouchers has [increased more than two-fold](#). Critics [counter](#) that the movement has not lived up

to its promises and that the momentum is shifting. Regardless, charters, vouchers and related tax incentives along with DeVos' plan to expand "school choice" while cutting public school funding, all add up to education being a major, divisive issue in upcoming elections.

A poll by the [AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#) finds that 58 percent of all Americans have heard little or nothing about charter schools and 66 percent have heard little or nothing about school vouchers. "The public simply doesn't understand that their public schools are being taken away," says Diane Ravitch, former Assistant Secretary of Education and public education activist who appears in the film. "From Los Angeles to Detroit to Washington, DC, city after city is losing public education."

Interest from Latinx audiences - a prime target for charter advocates - prompted filmmakers to launch a [Spanish-language rollout](#) of the film with Spanish subtitles and screening resources, funded with a grant from The Schott Foundation for Public Education. "We've launched a [public information campaign](#) to help educate people on the real-life impact of charter schools, vouchers, testing, and privatization ahead of the 2020 elections," said **BACKPACK** filmmakers Sarah Mondale and Vera Aronow.

The film also showcases a model for improvement in Union City, New Jersey, where investment in public schools gives poor kids a high-quality education - *without* charters or vouchers. "What's going on in public schools like Union City is proof that if you provide enough resources to a school district and you help that district use those resources wisely, you get astonishing results. You get these improbable and fantastic scholars," said education writer David Kirp, who appears in the documentary.

Sarah Mondale, Director and Co-producer of **BACKPACK**, directed and co-produced the award-winning, four-part PBS series [SCHOOL: The Story of American Public Education](#) narrated by Meryl Streep. **BACKPACK** filmmakers Sarah Mondale and Vera Aronow are available to attend community screenings and talkbacks. Screener and interviews available now.

For more information, upcoming screenings, downloadable photos, trailer and other resources, please visit our website at www.BackpackFulofCash.com

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