

**Bowdon Media
In Association With
Moving Picture Institute
Presents**

THE CARTEL



**A Documentary by
Bob Bowdon**

Hoboken International Film Festival, Audience Award
Philadelphia Independent Film Festival, Command Performance Screening
Jersey Shore Film Festival, Jury Award & Audience Choice Award for Best
Documentary
Downbeach Film Festival, Best Full-Length Documentary
Nevada Film Festival, Silver Screen Award

U.S. Theatrical Release begins April 16th, 2010

Running time: 90 minutes

Press Materials www.thecartelmovie.com

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THE CARTEL

SHORT SYNOPSIS: Teachers punished for speaking out. Principals fired for trying to do the right thing. Union leaders defending the indefensible. Bureaucrats blocking new charter schools. These are just some of the people we meet in *The Cartel*. The film also introduces us to teens who can't read, parents desperate for change, and teachers struggling to launch stable alternative schools for inner city kids who want to learn. *The Cartel* shows us our educational system like we've never seen it before. Behind every dropout factory, we discover, lurks a powerful, entrenched, and self-serving cartel. *The Cartel* draws an unequivocal bottom line: If we care about our children's futures, we must insist upon far-reaching and immediate reform. And we must do it now.

LONG SYNOPSIS: Teachers punished for speaking out. Principals fired for trying to do the right thing. Union leaders defending the indefensible. Bureaucrats blocking new charter schools. These are just some of the people we meet in *The Cartel*. The film also introduces us to teens who can't read, parents desperate for change, and teachers struggling to launch stable alternative schools for inner city kids who want to learn. We witness the tears of a little girl denied a coveted charter school spot, and we share the triumph of a Camden homeschool's first graduating class.

Together, these people and their stories offer an unforgettable look at how a widespread national crisis manifests itself in the educational failures and frustrations of individual communities. They also underscore what happens when our schools don't do their job. "These are real children whose lives are being destroyed," director Bob Bowdon explains.

The Cartel shows us our educational system like we've never seen it before. Behind every dropout factory, we discover, lurks a powerful, entrenched, and self-serving cartel. But *The Cartel* doesn't just describe the problem. Balancing local storylines against interviews with education experts such as Clint Bolick (former president of Alliance for School Choice), Gerard Robinson (former president of Black Alliance for Educational Options), and Chester Finn (president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute), *The Cartel* explores what dedicated parents, committed teachers, clear-eyed officials, and tireless reformers are doing to make our schools better for our kids.

This movie will force the scales to fall from the eyes of policymakers, education officials, reformers, intellectuals, teachers, and taxpayers. Putting a human face on the harm done by the educational cartel, *The Cartel* takes us beyond the statistics, generalizations, and abstractions that typically frame our debates about education—and draws an unequivocal bottom line: If we care about our children's futures, we must insist upon far-reaching and immediate reform. And we must do it *now*.



STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR, BOB BOWDON:

Only 35 percent of American high school seniors are proficient readers. Only 23 percent are proficient in math. Nationwide, only 74 percent of ninth graders graduate within four years—and that number drops to about 50 percent for black and Hispanic students. Twelve percent of American high schools are dropout factories—schools where less than 60 percent of freshmen even make it to their senior year. It comes as no surprise, then, that America lags far behind other developed countries when it comes to schooling: Among large industrialized countries, America ranks last in educational effectiveness—despite spending the most.

The conventional wisdom says that our schools could be dramatically improved with better funding. If we would only “invest in education,” the argument goes, our children would have a better future—particularly in urban areas, where leaky roofs, under-qualified teachers, and outdated textbooks are all too common.

And so the last few decades have brought an explosion of education spending, enthusiastically approved by local school boards and state legislatures and generally supported by taxpayers. That’s the moral cover under which our public school system wastes and steals billions of dollars every year.

New Jersey offers a dramatic instance of this corruption and improvidence. Every year, New Jersey and New York jockey for the top spot in education spending per student, but the Garden State has very little to show for its investment. Spending can exceed \$400,000 per classroom, and yet only 39 percent of the state’s eighth-graders are proficient or advanced readers, and only 40 percent of its eighth-graders are proficient or advanced in math. Of new high school graduates attending the state’s community colleges, nearly 80 percent require remediation. More than three quarters of New Jersey’s high schools have been warned that they may be placed on the state’s list of failing schools. So it’s not just the worst urban schools where we see a crisis—statewide measures show widespread dysfunction in public education despite lavish investments. All the while, some of the worst schools receive—and squander—the most money.

This costly, unconscionable failure forms the subject of *The Cartel*.



ABOUT BOB BOWDON:

Bob Bowdon, *The Cartel's* writer and director, has been a New Jersey-based television producer, reporter, news anchor, and commentator for the past fifteen years. His varied career has seen him producing television shows; hosting news programs; conducting in-depth on-camera interviews; appearing in satirical news sketches for the Onion News Network; anchoring regional news broadcasts covering New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut; and shaping Bloomberg Television's *World Financial Report*. He is president of Bowdon Media, an Internet marketing firm, and holds degrees in mechanical engineering, engineering management, and film production from Purdue University, Stanford University, and New York University. *The Cartel* is his first film.

EDUCATION REFORMERS IN THE CARTEL

Clint Bolick, former President, Alliance for School Choice

Robert Enlow, President & CEO, The Foundation for Educational Choice

Chester "Checker" Finn, President, Thomas B. Fordham Foundation
Senior Fellow, Stanford's Hoover Institution
Senior Editor, *Education Next*

Derrell Bradford, Executive Director, Excellent Education for Everyone

Dan Gaby, former Executive Director, Excellent Education for Everyone

Lance Izumi, Senior Director, Education Studies, Pacific Research Institute

Greg Richmond, President & CEO, National Association of Charter School Authorizers

Gerard Robinson, former President, Black Alliance for Educational Options
Secretary of Education, Virginia

Paul Peterson, Professor, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

Joe Nathan, Center for School Change, Hubert Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs

STATEMENTS ABOUT THE CARTEL:

“The message of the movie is that our kids are not getting a quality education because of the cartel which controls public education in this country. We’ve got to break it up... If people see it, I believe they will be angry, and I think nothing changes without pressure.”

-Reverend Reginald Jackson, Executive Director of the New Jersey Black Ministers Association

“I think [*The Cartel*] is phenomenal... The best, most specific look at a breakdown in America right now.”

- Derrell Bradford, Executive Director of Excellent Education for Everyone

“*The Cartel* is a terrific documentary which vividly illuminates what school reformers already know—the ‘system’ is in trouble and teacher unions are the major problem... This movie should be the catalyst of real change in every state across the country to show exactly how bad [education] is in our current system.”

- Robert Enlow, President and CEO of the Foundation for Educational Choice

“It’s just a great film. Everybody who pays taxes or votes in this state needs to take a look at this film and see how their education dollar is really being used. [*The Cartel*] is shocking.”

-Bob Ingle, Senior Political Columnist for Gannett New Jersey Newspapers
Author of the *New York Times* bestseller, *The Soprano State*

“Is your school sub-par? Are costs for education still high? Bob Bowdon can connect the dots.”

-Timothy J. Carroll, *Hudson Reporter*

"See *The Cartel*, and take your kids, too."

-Alex Adrianson, InsiderOnline

“[*The Cartel*] paints a disturbing picture of a culture in which money is thrown at failing schools—and overpaid administrators—while results in the classroom are dismal and reform efforts are quashed.”

-Karen Angle, *New York Daily News*

“*The Cartel* does what good reporters are supposed to do: follow the money.”

-Steven Rea, *Philadelphia Inquirer*

“One would anticipate disturbing anecdotes in a documentary about the public school system, but *The Cartel* surpasses all expectations. It is an important documentary and a valuable alarm bell that both parents and taxpayers need to heed.”

-Joe Bendel, *J.B. Spins*

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING: EMAILS FROM FANS OF THE CARTEL

“Ever since the night of the screening, I have wanted to see [*The Cartel*] again and again. Thank you for creating such a thorough exposé on how corrupt New Jersey politics and teachers unions can be. I only wish more teachers would open their eyes and stop drinking the union ‘kool aid’ as well.”

-New Jersey fan

“It was such an amazing movie. [I had] too many emotions to describe. Through word of mouth, this movie can enlighten so many, so quickly. Maybe there will be people willing to stand up and change the system, or at least support those that are willing to do it. Let's start spreading the word now. Children are relying on us.”

-New Jersey fan

“I saw your film and left the theatre in tears. I am a retired teacher and was well aware of your message. To see it on the large screen just made it all too real again...”

-former New Jersey teacher

“I work in the schools and I see this everyday. I am not a teacher but an aide. I am so disgusted with what I see and get into arguments all the time, but they don't listen and don't care. We in special education see this so much. We just try to do what we know is right, without getting caught. The rules of operation come from up top and the teachers know it is wrong so they give up. It is all about the STATE TESTS. Please don't use my name for anything. I need my job and I can do more on the inside than the outside.”

-New Jersey school aide

“The state of education in New Jersey in particular has long been an interest of mine, and I am thrilled to see some good, loud light shed on the subject. I would be very interested in participating in some well-targeted program that could put into action common sense and fiscally responsible changes like the ones you suggest.”

-New Jersey fan

“My friend just went to your movie and said he had tears in his eyes. I have been working in XXXX, a [state-funded] tutoring program. People are pocketing millions. I reported it and now my life has been threatened, and this week I have been fired from my job. There apparently is an investigation going on, but I don't think they will do anything to the people they have found are stealing, even though it is over a million dollars.”

-New Jersey fan

“I have been a passionate art teacher in the city of XXXX for 24 years... I see everyday the waste, the inequality, the administration with tons of new supervisors.

... It's been making me crazy for years! I want to help, but I am almost ready to retire, then I can speak freely!”

-New Jersey teacher

“One of the reasons my wife and I decided to move to XXXX about 17 years ago was the good reviews we heard about the school system. A few years after we started our oldest child in the XXXX school system, we became very disappointed. Although the teachers she had were good, their hands were tied by the required curriculum (whole language, fuzzy math, etc...). All four of my daughters have since been attending a private school (whose tuition is two-thirds the state per-pupil average) and they are all doing very well academically. The oldest one graduated last spring and is attending Rutgers U to study psychology. With the outrageous taxes that I pay in this municipality, I think it is only fair that a voucher be given to parents who choose to send their children to other schools. I am saving the XXXX school system about \$16,000 per year. You would think they could give back a portion of that. The competition would be good for everyone.”

-New Jersey parent

STATEMENT FROM THE FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATIONAL CHOICE, ABOUT SCHOOL CHOICE:

The origins of public schools lie in the belief that they bring learning and opportunity to all and ensure a stable democracy.

If this were true, then there might not be a need for school choice.

But it's not. Public schools are as segregated as ever. Children, particularly children in urban areas, are dropping out in record numbers and are getting a quality of education that depends more on where they live than on what they can learn. Parents, unless they can move or pay private school tuition, have little choice about the kind of education their children receive.

Public schooling is simply a monopoly that doesn't fulfill the ideals of our founding fathers. The tragic irony is that the dream envisioned by the founders of our public education system is actually increasing the stratification of society and failing to provide equal educational opportunity.

In 1955, a forward-thinking Milton Friedman foresaw the result of this monopoly and encouraged a return to liberty through the introduction of school choice. He argued that it would be much better and more equitable if the government would "give each child, through his parents, a specified sum [voucher] to be used solely in paying for his general education."

The benefits of this idea, which has come to be known as school choice, are numerous. Studies show that school choice leads to better test scores for all students and higher graduation rates. They show that parents are more satisfied and involved with their child's school, and that school choice saves taxpayers millions of dollars. And they show that public schools respond positively to competition.

But beyond the theory, what lies at the heart of school choice is a family's freedom to choose. It is about the child in the back of the classroom who is not getting what he needs in his assigned public school. It is about the student who just doesn't feel comfortable at her current school. It is about the family that simply wants a different option.

In the end, the goal of education is to ensure learning and guarantee a free society and stable democracy. These goals are better met when all parents are free to choose the school that works best for their child.

So, why school choice? In a word, liberty.