



# Transcript

for  
**The Way We See It:  
Youth Speak Out on Education**

Narrator:

“The Way We See It: Youth Speak Out on Education” is a project of Learning Matters, Inc. and the Listen Up! Youth Media Network, which connects young filmmakers and their allies to resources, support and projects.

John Merrow:

What makes a school worth going to?

Teacher:

Anything to the zero power is one...

Is it more than just reading, writing and arithmetic? A place that's safe?

Student #1:

Everything you say that's wrong with school is exactly why I didn't want to go back...

Teacher #1:

No drawing. Stop! (I'm sorry) It's all done (Spoken in French)

John Merrow:

Intellectually challenging? Where students are respected? No one around me even noticed what was going on.

What makes a teacher worth paying attention to? Is it passion? A sense of humor?

Student#2:

Literally, he always gives us a physical example of the lab we're supposed to do.

John Merrow:

Expertise in the fields they teach.

Teacher #2:

I show my passion for the language and for the ideas.

John Merrow:

Commitment to students?

Teacher #3:

A student comes in and you help them and what do you know there's a success there than you got a connection with that student.

John Merrow:

I'm John Merrow. Join me and an extraordinary group of high school filmmakers as they turn their cameras on themselves and their teachers . . . intimate portraits of today's classrooms. It's the way they see it: youth speak out on education.

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John Merrow:

The American public school is and always has been a force for change. Ever since the founding of our country's first public, or "common" schools in Massachusetts in the 1840's, the American public school has done much more than educate children.

At the turn of the century, when more than 13 million immigrants arrived through Ellis Island, schools that were asked to assimilate them and their children.

The United States became the first country to require 12 years of schooling for all children. By 1930, there were 29 million students.

(News Reel) 'Schools have been alerted. Pupils use methods of protection from atomic blasts'.

John Merrow:

In the 1950's, during the Cold War, schools were asked to fight communism and help win the space race.

(News Reel) 'Youth marched in the streets to help the nations' capital, petitioning for integrated schools'.

John Merrow:

In the 1960's, schools were a centerpiece in the war on poverty.

During the struggle for civil rights, schools were among the first public institutions to desegregate.

That was then, but what about now?

Today we have almost 100,000 public schools, 53 million students and 3 million teachers. The challenges are more complex than ever before.

Public schools continue to embrace large numbers of immigrants and refugees.

Schools are on the front lines in a war on drugs.

While coping with the war on terror, schools are under great public scrutiny concerning violence and bullying.

In a new worldwide economy, with new technologies, schools are under pressure to keep up with and meet the demands of a changing world.

Public education has evolved dramatically since the first schools were open more than 160 years ago. In fact, since the Brown vs. board of education decision a half-century ago, the pace of change has

accelerated. Now, a glimpse into the future... told by people with enormous potential to shape that future – high school students themselves.

Youth filmmakers from schools and video programs around the country, wrote, shot and edited the following short documentaries about teachers they think are worth paying attention to and schools that they think are worth going to. Like this one, produced by students at Oakland's Skyline High.

Vicki Chan:

Imagine a school where racial minorities are the majority and the district faces a hundred million dollar deficit. Skyline High and Oakland fits this troubled description but I choose to see the beautifully diverse people and the teachers that really do care. But what makes these teachers worth paying attention to? Meet Ms. James: She's cool, she's hip and she's as tough as the rest of us.

Dawn James:

Point the feet! Don't let 'em get lazy. Yes!

Student 1:

For me, when I first met her I thought she was very scary. I did. I was just like 'This lady is going to kill me.'

Dawn James:

Melissa, Faye, you're doing this. And you want...this hand has to go right to the floor. You've got to get there right there. Five, six, seven, and...

Student 2:

When music comes on that she's feeling she'll just come out of nowhere with some kind of dance movement that's just...and it's so funny.

Student 3:

But she makes you feel so comfortable cause she'll make fun of your mistakes to a point where everybody's laughing and it's a learning experience and you can internalize that and make it better.

Vicki Chan:

So what do you see in your students? Do you see them...Do you see these bonds forming between them and with yourself and the students definitely?

Dawn James:

Absolutely. Yea. You know dance, dance is very personal. And the students dance out their frustrations, their experiences, their relationships. In the process they learn a lot about not only about life but about themselves and how they are in the world and how the world sees them. So, it becomes a very personal experience.

Student:

One, two, three, four, five, six, uh, uh. Uh uh uh, bud ah bud ah. Stop! Bop bop bop!

Dawn James:

Yes! Now the last "ba ba ba." Where's the focus? So show me that. Everybody do that section. Five six seven and. Ba ba ba. More Sierra. Ready five six seven eight and one two three four and five six and seven eight. Yes! That was it. So it's on seven, it's on seven. Hot dog, that was good.

Dawn James:

I got into teaching because I wanted to make a difference and dance is something that I love to do. It's not so much that I'm, that my goal is to teach dance. My goal is to teach them respect and responsibility and discipline and commitment and dance is the vehicle that I use.

Vicki Chan:

If you think Dawn James has some mad skills, check out our physics teacher in action.

Student 4:

When I first saw him, I saw him wearing leathers. What he's wearing today, but with leather pants and um.

Student 5:

That's kind of restraint for him.

Student 4:

Yeah that's restraint.

Student 5:

I don't know, just casual right. It's casual Friday.

Student 4:

When I first saw him I knew that this year was going to be fun-packed.

Patrick Sears:

Everything I do is physics. Whether it's hanging lights up in the air or riding my motorcycle or sailing my sailboat, it's all directly connected to basic laws of the world.

If I'm laying down this packing blanket and I'm going that way, which direction is the force of friction going to be? It's going to be that way. Ok. There are two things that friction depends on. What are they? Ok. Mue. Mue and that force that force that's always perpendicular to the surface. What do you call that force? Normal force. Ok. Which clearly I am out of contact with. We're trying to see how hard it is. All right. Can they, can they do it? All right, let's go guys. Let's see. Oh. Not bad, all right. All right, how can we increase the normal force and therefore make more friction? Someone sit on my chest. Oh God! Oh! All right gentleman. Ok. Can they do it? All right let's try it. Oh! Oh! Ok.

It was clearly harder. You could see how much strain he put and how injured he is and how much I'm going to regret this tomorrow. Ok so what are we going to do? So, so clearly, clearly when we increase the force pushing down, Newton's first law says that the force pushing back up the balance it has to be more. The normal force is bigger.

Student 4

He's raw and uncut. He makes learning fun.

Student 6

Literally he always gives us a physical example of uh the lab we're supposed to do.

Patrick Sears:

Oh. Jam it on there. Oh yeah. All right, come on. There we go. Clear!

Vicki Chan:

What do you find most rewarding in teaching?

Patrick Sears:

When seniors come up to me at the end of the year and say, "I want be a physics major." Um last year, probably the smartest girl in the whole school turned into a physics major and this year one of the, one of the strongest student athletes here at school has said to me that she wants to be a physics major.

Vicki Chan:

Oh wow.

Vicki Chan:

Nowadays what many teachers are forced to teach out of their field, it is inspirational to see Mr. Sears and Ms. James employ their expertise in their classrooms. We pay attention to them because they're passionate and fun but we don't realize that these lessons will stay with us for the rest of our lives.

John Merrow:

Students are more likely to be inspired when teachers bring passion to the classroom. But knowledge matters too. And it's a sad fact that about 25 percent of all high school English, math, and science classes are taught by men and women who really have not studied what they're teaching.

In Baltimore, youth filmmakers found a teacher who knows his subject backwards and forwards...and isn't shy about bringing it to life.

Michael Tabegna:

She was flat like a pancake in the street. (Spoken in French)

Samantha Boyd:

Monsieur is a teacher worth listening to...(Tabegna sings in French) and I don't listen to a lot of my teachers.

Michael Tabegna:

It's my chance! (Spoken in French)

Dominic Angelella:

You look forward to going to his class but at the same time you sort of don't because you know that he's a really tough teacher.

Michael Tabegna:

I have three pit bulls: Assassin, Terrorist, and Sniper. (Spoken in French)

Johnathan Burke:

He cares about the students and he cares that you do well. And he makes sure that you do well. Even though he might give you a lot of work but that's necessary.

Michael Tabegna:

My real name is Michael Tabegna and I'm a French teacher at the School for the Arts in Baltimore, Maryland. I knew that I wanted to be a French teacher the first day that I walked into my French class in eighth grade. I had a really good teacher, Mr. Shalomburger and just the first day I knew I wanted to learn this I wanted to learn every detail of this absolutely perfectly because I'm going to teach this and this is what I'm going to be doing.

Samantha Boyd:

He enjoys teaching and he likes to make us learn. He goes out for us. He plays songs and he has his little characters.

(Tabegna sings: ...And the living is easy. Fish are frying...)

He claims to be the nephew of Jacques Chirac, the French president. And we all know it's a lie but it's cool. He also claims to be nineteen years old and we know that's a lie because he's been claiming to be nineteen years old for three years. But it's very cool.

Johnathan Burke:

Although he's a you know fun-loving guy, he can also be you know strict and serious about you know the work, which is the most important thing.

Michael Tabegna:

The feminine form of 'lequel' is... 'laquelle.' (Spoken in French)

I don't try to hide from students, because it can't be hidden the fact that it's a lot of work. It's a lot of memorization. Memorization is unpleasant at the time you're working on it for some people.

Dominic Angellela

He's taught everybody that you need to pay attention. You know like you know when anyone talks he just zeros right in on them and makes sure they're not talking.

Samantha Boyd:

Monsieur keeps the class under control and there's not usually much of a need for discipline that I see.

Michael Tabegna::

If discipline is done correctly I think it should be invisible. I think if you, if you if you're waiting till a kid falls asleep before you tell him to wake up, you didn't do your job right in my opinion. When he starts to slouch...then you kind of walk towards him and he'll sit up straight or you tell him to sit up straight then he won't be in a position where he'll fall asleep.

Dominic Angellela

He would be doing something and I'd be zoning out really bad like I just I there were a lot of things on my mind and I was just not really feeling like paying attention in French class and he would come with like this really really extremely easy, like, problem and he would call on me because he knew I wasn't paying attention.

Michael Tabegna:

If you stop little things when they right at the beginning of the year and September is always a hard month with the incoming freshmen because you have to train them and you feel like a police officer and just any little thing they do you snap at them and you make 'em stop.

No drawing! Stop! (I'm sorry) It's all done. Do you have any other questions? (Spoken in French)

By the end of the school year really discipline is invisible. I try to at least show them that that learning a language can be exciting so that if they decide to continue they can. Or if they decide to choose a different language they're not, they don't have a bad experience behind them learning a language.

Samantha Boyd:

Monsieur has helped me get motivated to actually learn Japanese. Before I was just picking up random words from subtitled videos but, because of French class I've learned a lot about grammar.

Michael Tabegna:

The test will also include questions from your reading. (Spoken in French)

Dominic Angelella:

Like he's on like a, a weird teaching level you know like his just enthusiasm and like the weird things he talks about you know. You don't get that from any other teachers.

Johnathan Burke:

If they have a good relationship with the students and they make it lively it's something that you can relate to then it's easier to learn and do well.

Michael Tabegna:

As I said, I've been here for twenty one years...it's just a charmed career that I'm just so happy to be here that I would suggest if there's one important thing I could say to to all young people is find what you're passionate about and make it your work. Think something that you would do even if you, you know even if you weren't paid for it. Something that you just wanna spend your life doing and then when you go to work every day it's not a job. It's something that you do because it's your life.

John Merrow:

The theatrical Msr. Tabegna demands that his students do their very best, and not surprisingly--most do. Maybe that's what great teachers do--whatever it takes to hook their students. The trick is hooking them without lowering standards. Watch what these teachers in Salt Lake City do with a subject that many kids just dread.

Teacher:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun; Coral is far more red than her lips' red; If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun; If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head; I've seen roses damask'd, red and white; But no such roses see I in her cheeks; And in some perfumes is there more delight than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.

Student:

Poetry? Oh, I hate poetry.

Student:

When you dissect something it normally doesn't remain alive and I think it's the same way with poetry.

Student:

I mean I've never had a really good poetry class.

Student:

I like poetry units where you're exploring different kinds.

Student:

Um one of my teachers ruined Shakespeare for me.

Student:

I think most teachers have killed poetry, to the point where it's not enjoyable anymore.

Student:

How would I explore poetry? With a lighter.

Joel Long:

When you bring up poetry mostly you get groans.

Stephanie Bernritter:

No waaaay. We hate poetry.

Chris Arigo:

It looks like I am physically torturing them, you know as, as I'm teaching this. Like uhhhhh....

Joel Long:

You know I hope I can make some of them stop groaning by the end of the semester.

Chris Arigo:

Alot of the alienation between students and literature, in general, whether it be poetry or whatever, is this feeling that this has nothing to do with me.

Stephanie Bernritter:

I really work to eliminate the pressure because I want everyone to share.

Joel Long:

Every kid has his own particular approach to language.

Chris Arigo:

Poetry is such a concentrated form of language you know that it its almost like a nuclear reaction you know, where it's a chain reaction. Once one word hits the other and then it hits the other there's an explosion. You know, and that's the beauty of it.

Joel Long:

Part of teaching is a performance. I play in the classroom. I have fun in front of my students. I show my passion for the language and for the ideas.

But all drafts have to be burned. That's why we set them on fire. The neighbor's cat looks for birds pouring slow through dark ivy for the shade thinks of winter. How long your bones have grown.

Beth Ranschau:

Joel's definitely set apart from all of the other teachers I've ever had. He really does um diversify the learning experience for everyone.

Joel Long:

You want to be able to capture them. And I think part of the way that you do that is using your voice as an instrument, I guess, of performance uh to get them excited.

Holy donut holes Batman! Great...but could I put that? Let's see. Ho-ly do-nut hole...

Jake Lindsay:

I think he's a musician first and he's incorporated that in poetry.

Joel Long:

All those teeth shine in the mouths of dreams. They break china in headlights in the last night of jazz.

The rhythmic qualities, the melodic quality of the tone of voice that you use. Now I think I teach that way um because I know that that's the way I'm going to be able to get my meaning across.

Beth Ranschau:

He really turns us into poets. People who quote unquote see with their nerves.

Joel Long:

Poetry is a sacred act um. I don't pray but I write poems, you know and I try to show them what a crucial act that can be.

Chris Arigo:

Bringing the visual element to the classroom is critical. It's not just important; it's absolutely a necessity. 'Cause they need to see it and hear it, you know, to fully wrap their head around you know whatever they material is, you know, um, particularly poetry. I do this poem by Joshua Clover called the Nevada Glassworks, which is all about atomic bomb testing and I couple that with a video of atomic bomb testing footage.

Jared Ruga

Kablam! They're blowing peacock tinted new world glass in Southern Nevada. The alchemists and architects of mom's duck and covered adolescence.

Lauren Wood:

And it really helped all of us understand more about the poem.

Chris Arigo:

You have such an interplay of, you know, sound and then the imagery, you know and to, that all needs to coalesce.

Jared Ruga:

He has also had us do things like the ransom note poetry, where the poetry itself is visual.

Chris Arigo:

Presented as an image, something that can be you know just easily assimilated into their, you know, into their intellectual realm.

Stephanie Bernitter:

Today they're going to be dancing the poem. And we're integrating 4 elements this time. Um emotion, images, symbols, and meanings.

Jessica Greenbaum:

I think what we're doing with the colors and the dancing is really effective with teaching poetry because the students actually feel the poetry and have to move with it instead of just reading it and hearing it.

Stephanie Bernitter:

Poetry is in the spoken word, as well as the living word, through movement and dance.

Andreas Peterson:

Even though it's just creative writing, it isn't just writing. She tries to incorporate movement and energy in the class. So, we all really like that.

Stephanie Bernritter:

We're creating new ways to communicate that don't necessarily always have to be just pencil to the paper.

Shantell Lopez:

Just want to be around her more makes us actually want to come to class.

Stephanie Bernritter:

Keep it fresh. Keep it alive. Keep it flowing.

Chaz Judd:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun; Coral is far more red than her lips' red; If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun; If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head; I've seen roses damask'd, red and white; But no such roses see I in her cheeks; And in some perfumes is there more delight than in the breath that from my mistress reeks. I love to hear her speak yet well I know that music hath a far more pleasing sound...

John Merrow:

Dynamic teachers stimulate the senses: what students see, hear, and feel. But youth filmmakers in Evanston, IL found that a supportive environment is just as important. Here's how a group of teachers worked together to help one young man succeed.

Renee Dewald:

Jamaal walked into my class, oh about a week after school started and um, and he had a slip of paper that he handed me, and it was a schedule. And on the schedule was AP chemistry, and AP calculus, and AP English and...that was Jamaal.

Malykke Bacon:

Jamaal never stopped aiming for the top, that's what amazed me. You know he wasn't settled, he wasn't content with the A-. "Well what do I need to do to get an A?" And I was just amazed not, not just because... you know he's African-American, or African-American male, but then I was thinking about that in, in respect to his extra curricular activities which include, (what) included diving and swimming and stuff, like how are you...juggling all of this?

Marion Kelley:

I saw in Jamaal something special. He desired knowledge, he enjoyed learning.

Malykke Bacon:

He proves that you really cannot judge a book by its cover. You know whatever you thought he was when you first saw him, in conversation with him you find out there is so much more beneath the surface.

Jamaal Applewhite:

When I lived in Rogers Park, I moved around a lot. And I probably didn't stay in a place for more than uh about a year.

Malykke Bacon:

Jamaal faced obstacles that...the average adult would not have been able to really deal with let alone a teenager.

Jamaal Applewhite:

My brother's name is Lavell Lee Applewhite, and um...His nickname was Bishop. I found out my brother was shot, where I grew up at. So, so I missed like a couple a weeks of school because of that also. And that was some of the reason that my mother wanted to move outside of the city in the first place, city of Chicago. Try to move to the suburbs. It's like the farther north you go the safer it is and the more opportunities.

Denise Martin:

We're the largest high school under one roof in the United States. We have a million square feet under one roof. It's dynamic, it's diverse, it is a school full of resources. We are a very good suburban school with all the problems of an urban school.

Jamaal Applewhite:

When I moved to Evanston Township from Chicago, um many of my classes were much different then those in Chicago. I knew that having the top classes would be important to get into one of the top colleges. Miss Kelley, kinda helped me uh, to figure out that that was important.

Marion Kelley:

I said to him, "look Jamaal...whatever you need, I want you to get to calculus before you're a senior. Rather than to do senior year Trig., I worked with him to go to Oakton Community College. And he went, and he completed it and he's in calculus.

Jamaal Applewhite:

Um, now I'm in AP chemistry, AP calculus, and AP English.

Marion Kelley:

There were a couple of times that I got on him and he got sort of, you know an attitude like "Who do you think you are?" But then after awhile he realized I was not going to back down, I was not going to go away, and that I had his best interests in heart.

Jamaal Applewhite:

This year, my senior year, uh things were pretty rough. My mother and I were growing further apart. And then uh, she kicked me out the house, so our relationship was really bad then.

Malykke Bacon:

I thought oh my gosh, here's a kid who has busted his butt, you know to, you know, reach the top. And here we are the pinnacle year, the senior year, and he's not going to be able to enroll in Evanston.

Jamaal Applewhite:

It got so bad that I thought I wasn't going to be able to make it, at school. That's when uh, the teachers really stepped in and help me and helped encourage me.

Malykke Bacon:

I called Mrs. Madden who is the um, director of pupil personnel services and said you know, here you got a situation where there's a homeless student. Don't we have some policy?

Marilyn Madden:

And he called and said, you know Mrs. Madden can you please take a look at this student as see if there is anything that we can do. So um I tried to find out what was going on with the residency issues. And then I realized that he was homeless.

Jamaal Applewhite:

I tried my best to work hard and do things uh myself. I wouldn't been able to make it without help from um other people.

Marilyn Madden:

Mr. Logan and myself decided that we would look at how we can keep him here in the high school. And so we were able to do, so and he was able to stay here.

Malykke Bacon:

Jamaal is the type of person, if you get to know him, if you...and you have anything that you can do to help him, you will help him. You know what I mean; he's just that likeable.

Denise Martin:

Students respond if you care. If they think that you recognize them as an individual not as just an ID number in that seat.

Marilyn Madden:

I knew about a program called the "Posse." Jamaal was selected for the \$100,000 scholarship.

Jamaal Applewhite:

They were on the speakerphone at like 2 in the morning. "Well you got the Posse thing" and then uh...I was pretty much speechless.

Marilyn Madden:

It was just so rewarding to me. I was so touched by it that um, here's a student that has, beat the odds.

Malykke Bacon:

If a student comes in and you help them and then what do you know, there's some success there, then you've got a connection with that student.

Denise Martin:

You don't have to be a black teacher, you don't have to be a Hispanic teacher, you know you can be any teacher, but you have to act like you care.

Marion Kelley:

So it's really a personalization of the school system. And I found particularly for minority student, they need to know that they are more than just a number. They need to know that they are part of a system that they're not going to be allowed to disappear.

Denise Martin:

You don't have to go to 99 workshops to learn that how you um communicate your commitment to their success makes all the difference in the world.

Malykke Bacon:

He was like, "hey I want to do something for all the people that helped me uh, make it through you know high school you know. What should I do?" And I was like you know honestly I don't want anything and I think that most of those people don't want anything material. What we would probably want you to do is just do the best you can with your life and when you have the opportunity throw back a hand and help somebody else.

Jamaal Applewhite:

But in spite of all the things I had to overcome, I overcame them with the help of many teachers and administrators at the school. And um... they're people that are worth listening to.

John Merrow:

Jamaal's story has been repeated in lots of classrooms – dedicated teachers making a difference. And like excellent teachers, schools can also go the extra mile to help their students achieve. Española Valley High School in northern New Mexico is a good example.

Thomas Vigil:

I've been doing art my whole life. I love doing art. Since I got into kindergarten as soon as somebody handed me a box of crayons. Not really anybody in my family is artistic. I just, I don't know for some reason, I am.

Thomas Vigil:

I see a lot of kids that have, that are very gifted especially in our community in Española. We have a lot of kids that are real good at working on their cars, on doing artwork, but they'll just throw it all away they won't go to school, they'll drop out.

Thomas Vigil:

Yea school can be rough on a lot of kids, especially if you don't want to be here. It's rough on me. I've constantly thought about dropping out.

Thomas Vigil:

Out of the freshman class of about 400, only about 120 graduate. We have a lot of kids that come from broken homes and kids with bad backgrounds.

Monica Smith:

How do you cope with mom and dad being divorced? How do you cope with mom drinking alcohol and doing drugs? When you, and you have to take care of 3 siblings, and do homework and work and... it, it's a lot to deal with, and many of these kids are are facing these challenges alone.

Thomas Vigil:

As you can see there's not too many kids here, but that's just because it's 7 o'clock in the morning. Most kids don't come to school til 8. I only come to school at 7 because I have early bird class. Algebra 2.

Math Teacher:

Anything to the zero power is 1. If we put zero in for x. Two to the zero power is one.

Thomas Vigil:

Basically what I think about when I'm in Algebra 2 class is...that I don't really want to be there. And it like, blocks me from wanting to learn. If I'm...getting all kinds of equations and...different things shoved in my head. I just get all confused and I rather be doing something else. So I tend to get bored and distracted really easily.

English Teacher:

This is the Rubaiyat by Omar Khayyam, you only have two pages of it.

Thomas Vigil:

When it comes to English I get frustrated very easily. When I look at words on a page, it's...its like more confusing than math. Like some people think that all these equations make, like a different language. That's how I feel with English; it's just a different language for me. I see one word, I see the last word, I

get them mixed up and...I get confused real easily and I can't comprehend things right. Sometimes I don't know what the teachers saying and...

Thomas Vigil:

My mom thought I had A.D.D., but I've never been tested for it. And I don't want to get tested because I don't want to take all those drugs that just make you a boring kid and are supposed to cure you. I think they just make you dull and tune into stupid things that nobody wants to hear about.

Monica Smith:

Thomas is a target also, because he's noisy, you know he's daring. I think Thomas is one of those kids who has had it rough at home and he's learning to work through those problems.

Thomas Vigil:

This is in school suspension. I got a note in school suspension for going off of campus. I'm still not admitting to it, but it's all right. What sucks about being here? Um, the fact that I have to be everything that I'm not. I can't draw, I can't stand up, I can't talk...And that's everything that I'm not.

Thomas Vigil:

Ok, here's the best part about school seeing my friends, and most importantly my girlfriend.

Thomas Vigil:

Here's my favorite class in school, Art. I love art; I just love seeing other people do it.

Robbie Garcia:

Thomas is doing pretty good in my class. He's a really talented artist; his strengths are mostly in drawing. Anything hands on for him that keeps him in school, that's the best thing for him.

Wayne Sanchez:

He really does love art, he's fierce at it, and he just doesn't do it just to do it because he's bored, he does it all the time. He's always drawing...on people's arms, on his arm, or on a piece of paper, and everybody always wants something of his because he's so fierce at it.

Thomas Vigil:

TV production is a real fun class, I get to get up and out of class and...spend time doing what I want to do. And I get to learn new things about camera equipment and editing systems.

Ellen Kaiper:

Thomas, has gone and learned all the ah...computer editing system and his fellow students call him a genius, because he knows a lot more than a lot of the other students --certainly a lot more than I do. It's my strength I can right grants, I can bring the equipment in...and luckily I have these wonderful students who can deal with all the equipment.

Thomas Vigil:

What makes this school worth going to? If I didn't have a school that allowed me to express myself through TV and, through media and art, I probably would go crazy. 'Cause that's the only thing that keeps me sane at school besides my friends. Being able to express myself through art I'd...that's what I do.

John Merrow:

Because of state and federal cutbacks, Española Valley High School has to raise its own money for arts programming, that means that only a handful of students get to experience what Thomas did. For a lot of

other students, Española may not be worth going to, and so the dropout rate remains high. But what if Thomas, and students like him, had the opportunity to go to a school that specializes in video? A school like Communications Arts High School in San Antonio.

Nicole Bernal:

I'm just uh, putting up my posters for student council. I'm running for vice president.

Narrator:

This is Nicole; She's a junior at Communications Arts High school in suburban San Antonio, Texas. Comm Arts is a magnet high school with an emphasis on skills in all areas of communication. With only 450 students in ninth through twelfth grades, Comm. Arts is small, especially in this part of Texas where it is not unusual for schools to have three to 4,000 students. We know this first hand...because Comm Arts is a school within a school. We're located on the campus of a high school that has 3,500 students. So let's follow Nicole, as she and her classmates have a unique perspective on the difference between large and small schools.

Nicole Bernal:

Because there's so many students at a large high school, and the class size is just humungous, and the teachers are responsible for so many kids. I didn't really feel like the teachers cared about me. I felt like they were just going through the motions, and they were just, you know giving us the assignments, and they didn't really care about what I was learning.

Richard Tobin:

One experience I had at the big school was a communication graphics class I took that touched on the basics of photography. I felt um, that a lot of the experience was taken away due to the size of the class. The teacher spent a lot of time trying to manage the students. In a smaller environment teachers are allowed to concentrate on you as a person. You're participating in an intelligent conversation, in an intelligent environment.

Nicole Bernal:

Next year I really hope to bring my knowledge...

Nicole Bernal:

The small school environment allows students to be heard and...form and voice their own opinions. And it's really cool because a lot of the teachers really support that and they want to hear what you have to say.

Bret Wilkinson:

Ok...We're able to do a little bit more in classes you know, as opposed to someone who has 30-35 kids on a regular basis. You know their a little bit more limited because they have to focus more so on management of their students as opposed to being able to devote more time towards educational pursuits.

Kari Minter:

One of the schools I student taught, I never even met the principle. And at another one I had met him briefly, but we never had a conversation, and it was you had to set-up an appointment to even go into his office because he was very busy because he had a larger school. At Comm. Arts it's been, it's kind of a unique relationship because at anytime I can walk into Miss. Rican or Miss Barkers office and talk to them or show them different projects I'm doing. So I think that's a unique, unique thing our principles knows what's going on in our classroom and they know what our curriculum is.

Nicole Bernal:

Also one of the benefits at a smaller school is that...parents are a lot more involved. For instance, my mom is in the parents support group here at Communications Arts. And it's really cool because I enjoy having her come with us on the field trips, and she gets to you know hang out with me and my friends.

Nicole Bernal:

Some of the best aspects about having a small, you know, community environment is that um, the students feel closer and so when we have activities, when we have special events; it helps to bring them together because you know everybody knows everybody.

Teacher:

Highlight your name before voting please...

James Ruiz:

Recently one of my fellow classmates, she's been going through chemotherapy and different health problems, so she's been losing most of her hair. So on her first day back, to make her feel as comfortable as possible, it was arranged for the students and faculty of our school to wear hats and bring hats to really show that we care about her. And to further that I decided to shave my head to show support that she really is a big part of all our lives.

Student:

Congratulations to the winners of the student council election. President: Sarah Sodderset. Vice President: Nicole Bernal. Secretary: Victory Saunders.

Richard Tobin:

It's definitely the sense of belonging that makes this school special. You know it's that experience that you get an actual learning instead of just trying to get through the system.

Nicole Bernal:

I think that a lot of the self-confidence that I have now goes back to just the experience of coming to this small school. And having all these friends and having all these people say hey you know we're in this together we all support each other.

John Merrow:

The trend toward small schools has made its way to the nation's largest public education system. In New York City, with more than one million students, it's easy to fall through the cracks. But not at Satellite Academy, an alternative high school, where students and teachers treat each other like family.

Geraldo "Promise" Vargas:

In the schools I was in it was horrible. There were feces in the stairwells, fights, and stabbings daily. In an environment like my former school, you either had to adapt to the animalistic ways of the other students or become their prey. And me? I could never be any man's victim. I fed into the violence and started not to care about my environment, my school, myself, or others. Traditional schools trained me to be numb to my emotions.

Promise:

I'm Geraldo Vargas, also known as Promise, and I go to Satellite Academy in the Bronx. Before Satellite, I went to Evander Childs High School. It was a terrible experience. I didn't go to school or quote unquote drop out because, all honesty, I was involved in a lot of gang activity and things like that. I was kind of scared for myself and my well-being. I mean in that school I felt like everybody was against me and I felt I wasn't learning anything important. If I'm not learning, what's the point of being in

school? I mean everything we say that's wrong with schools is exactly why I didn't want to go back. I left Evander and I went to Satellite. I had heard about Satellite through one of my counselors and he told me about this wonderful place where everybody is family and, you know, all that good stuff in an alternative school so I decided to go to Satellite, give it a shot and I'm graduating in June from there.

Gillian Smith:

The foundation to truly be an alternative school is the same. You know, that is that is to be student centered. It should be if not advisory group, but some form of student-teacher contact because we've found that students that are at risk need that.

Norman Fruchter:

So these alternative high schools developed to second chance schools to take on kids and to try to help them finish their high school education when they had not been successful in regular high schools. Given that these were students who had dropped out of regular high schools, their graduation rate was quite good. These were, these were students who would never have graduated if there hadn't been alternative high schools.

Promise:

At Satellite, you know, the most kids I have in a class is maybe fifteen and, once again, the teachers are able to walk around, you know, help the students. Yea but isn't twenty-one with the files...the students who do know what they're doing and don't need the extra help the teachers do, they go around to help the other fellow students. You know it's just a the whole situation is just a family atmosphere and the smaller class sizes just it kind of shows that even more. They're not teachers, they're friends. I look at them more as like peer role models like they are my authority figures to a certain degree but they don't act like it. They don't play on that.

Teacher:

I hear you and that's exactly.... it was funny because...

Promise:

The teachers in my school they you know we know them by a first name basis I mean, I can, they tell us things about their personal life. Like I said it's more like they want to be your big brothers and sisters. It got to the point now at vacation time when I'm not in school I miss school, I want to go to school. I don't like being home now. I like being in my uh Satellite. They actually care about me, they put me in internships, they listen to what I want to learn, what I want to do. Satellite has been such an amazing help in my life. It just, it changes my whole outlook on a lot of things. I actually enjoy coming here every day.

Promise:

The future of Promise? I mean, I thought being a rapper was my only way out of the ghetto, that I was going to spit my way to the top, you know but Satellite showed me there's other alternatives that I could still do and still have a chance into getting into the hip hop field, you know, which was like you know starting your own label, doing maybe doing production for music video editing among other things. So I mean honestly I can't tell you exactly what my career will be but rest assured I'm going to be successful whatever I do.

John Merrow:

Schools like Satellite Academy create an environment where students feel safe taking intellectual risks. But what about physical safety? In Minnesota, student filmmakers found that appearances can be misleading.

Ron Kaplan Everson:

It was...in seventh, I was in seventh grade when it happened...and I was surrounded by a group of boys, um probably about 10 of them. No one tried to stop it. No one...around me even made a remote attempt to notice, even recognize what was going on as something unusual.

Ron:

It was at a homecoming football game, um at Lakeville High school. Something uh that's pretty big in the town. Football is really, sort of a focus for the town, when I was beat up by these 10 guys probably about 4 or 5 of them were beating me with coke bottles that were half or full.

Ron:

After the incident, there wasn't really any steps to reprimand the individuals beyond suspending them. My mother talked to a police officer who told her that it would be best just to let it drop.

Peggy Everson:

Ron came up to me after the incident at homecoming. Ah...I remembered it the day he told me. He knew he was safe telling me. There was no question in his mind.

Ron:

I officially came out when I was 14. I started coming out to friends of mine when I was 12. After that happened I started, um, noticing a quick up rise in people verbally abusing me, physically pushing me in the hallways. Really people, a lot of people starting to um...really harass me daily.

Peggy Everson:

We'd get obscene telephone calls at home. He was harassed in the gym. He ended up, Ron has asthma, and he ended up having asthma attacks so severe that the paramedics would be called to the school...to help him breathe.

Ron:

It got to the point where uh my mother and I decided that it was dangerous for me to be living in this town and that I should probably be better off living with my aunt who lived in South Minneapolis.

John Colburn:

I'm John Colburn and I teach seniors in literary arts at, here at the arts high school and Ron is one of my students right now. Some of the writing has been very direct. He's talked about difficulties that he's faced, hard times with his family, death of a friend, difficulties at school and been very explicit about them. Ron is so honest, there's an honesty in his writing. To be able to be open and honest is very important in the writing program.

Ron:

I used to write a lot about um, the experiences that I went through at Lakeville. I don't write about it a lot anymore just because it's not something that I like to remember and because I really don't think about it being in the, such a liberal environment that I'm in now.

Susan Stemme:

I think one of the things that was really important in creating a safe environment when Perpich started was that school started with only two main rules. And those rules were respect yourself and respect others. One of the things that we actually do it explain to the kids why we have those policies, try to talk about what the policies are there for, who they're really there to protect, but the main thing is to get the students to see how it is that their behavior is affecting somebody else.

John Colburn:

Ron is a blast in the classroom. He's a really, fun guy to have in class. And coming in as a new senior is difficult because the juniors have already been together for a year and built that trust and then some new people come in...and ah, and Ron has navigated that extremely well and become kind of a...class favorite.

Peggy Everson:

Arts High School has probably given opportunities to children to feel safe where they haven't perhaps in their home schools. Ron's experience has been incredible. Ah...the teachers are extremely nurturing. Whenever there's been a problem...everybody hops to take care of it.

Ron:

I think the one point that I began to realize that I shouldn't be afraid anymore, is probably when I moved to uh South Minneapolis, and started seeing so many support groups out there for me. Where other people saw me as a real person rather than, just you know, who I loved. It took a long time for me to be able to open up to anyone, just because I was so afraid that that would happen again.

John Merrow:

The American public school has changed a lot in 160 years and it will continue to change – it has to. In these demanding and rapidly changing times, young people seem to have strong ideas about what they want from their schools and teachers. Most students want to be held to a high standard. They want teachers who are creative who know their subject matter and who are passionate about what they teach. They want teachers who have a vested interest in their success.

Students are also asking a lot from their schools. They want non-traditional electives like art and video classes. They want smaller classrooms where they feel respected. They want schools that accept them and support them for who they are and what they can become.

But as much as anything else, students want to be involved in decisions that affect them. Like the youth filmmakers who made these documentaries, students can often identify ways to make school a better place to be. When given the opportunity, youth will tell it they way they see it and speak out on education.

Alexander Johnstone:

I'm Alexander Johnstone in Salt Lake City. What makes a teacher worth paying attention to? A teacher that uses all of their students' senses: what they hear, see, and feel.

Lauren Barron:

I'm Lauren Barron from San Antonio, Texas. A school worth going to is a small school because it provides personalized attention and helps build a strong community.

Thomas Vigil:

I'm Thomas Vigil in Española, New Mexico. A school worth going to includes art classes as an integral part of its curriculum.

Vicki Chan:

I'm Vicki Chan in Oakland. Teachers worth paying attention to bring their passion and expertise into their classrooms.

Alex Cheng:

Hi. I'm Alex Cheng for Youth for Social Action in Evanston, IL. A teacher worth listening to is one that encourages their students succeed in real life and not just in the classroom.

Cady Vishniac:

I'm Cady Vishniac in Baltimore. A teacher worth paying attention to holds their students to a high standard and expects them to succeed.

Gerardo Vargas:

I'm Gerardo Vargas, A.K.A. Promise, and we're in the Bronx, New York. What makes a school worth going to? Small class sizes, good teachers, good curriculum – actually caring about your student's future, not just pushing them away before graduation.

Narrator:

If you would like to screen “The Way We See It: Youth Speak Out on Education” in your school or community, visit Listen Up! online at [listenup.org](http://listenup.org). At our web site you'll find a guide to help you organize a screening. You can also purchase copies, download a transcript of the show and even watch videos. Or just write us at [info@listenup.org](mailto:info@listenup.org).

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