

THE DOCUMENTARY  
**RACE TO NOWHERE**  
THE DARK SIDE OF AMERICA'S ACHIEVEMENT CULTURE

**Movement Behind Hard-Hitting Education Documentary  
Urges Action on Homework**

***Director Calls on Schools to Pledge for Homework-Free Weekends and Holiday Breaks  
Race to Nowhere Called "Juggernaut" Centerpiece of a National Movement***

**Updated: November 10, 2011** – The education documentary film, "**Race to Nowhere**", has become a national movement embraced by hundreds of thousands of parents, teachers and students. By the close of this year, the film will have been seen in more than 3,000 communities, reaching one million viewers in grassroots screenings hosted by those at the center of the film's storyline: students, teachers and parents.

Now, a year after its first community screening, the team behind "**Race to Nowhere**" calls on schools to take targeted action on homework. The **Homework Pledge**, launched on the film's online action platform **End the Race.org**, rallies schools nationwide to eliminate homework on weekends and school breaks. The pledge is the first in a series of calls-to-action the **End the Race.org movement** will promote in the coming year. Advocating for a "cultural shift", the pledge points to research revealing that most homework doesn't increase learning, raise test scores, or prepare students for academic success.

A recent *New York Times* report showcases the growing chorus of parents who are working with their children's principals and school boards to reevaluate homework policies. "Armed with neuroscience, self-analysis and common sense, some of New York City's most competitive high schools, famed for their Marine-like mentality when it comes to homework, have begun to lighten the load for fear of crushing their teenage charges," the article notes. "Teachers, parents and administrators are also beginning to look beyond the academic questions, studying research about the health effects of overscheduling and stress."

"Having toured thousands of schools over the last 12 months, I've seen that time—for family, for passion and service, for sleep and exercise, for rest—is what our students and families report needing the most," says Vicki Abeles, the first-time director of "**Race to Nowhere**". "An incredible consensus is building that we need to give our children opportunities for true learning and growth outside of structured schoolwork—and that means committing to homework-free weekends and holiday breaks."

The film has already ignited change in dozens of public schools and districts where "**Race to Nowhere**" has been screened, including:

- **Ridgewood High School** in New Jersey, which will ban homework during both its winter break and February break this year.
- **Walter Payton High School** in Chicago, IL, they have eliminated homework for Thanksgiving, winter and spring breaks this year with no tests or projects due immediately upon the return from break.
- **Wellesley Middle School** in Wellesley, Mass., which has committed to a no-homework policy on religious holidays and school vacations.
- **Galloway School District** in Galloway, New Jersey. Whose superintendent has proposed a ban on assignments on weekends, holidays and school vacations.

[www.RacetoNowhere.com](http://www.RacetoNowhere.com)

**Unique Distribution and Outreach:** An independently produced and distributed film—boasting no studio backing or commercial distribution and untethered to third-party corporate or advocacy interests—*Race to Nowhere* has been distributed uniquely through grassroots, community platforms. Director Vicki Abeles notes that this distinctive distribution approach reflects her priority to link the film to action and on-the-ground social impact. “When you step outside the conventional distribution approach and encourage audiences to engage with film not as consumers but as activists and stakeholders, you begin to see the incredible power of documentary to effect change in our communities,” Abeles says. The film will not be released on retail home DVD until 2012—part of a deliberate strategy to enhance brick-and-mortar community engagement with the film before it’s available for private, home use.

**Press Attention for Race to Nowhere:**

**The Washington Post:** “Riveted to this disturbing tableau were more than 300 parents and educators, including Elise Browne Hughes, 46, who wiped away tears one recent evening in Bethesda while watching the documentary "Race to Nowhere," which is becoming a growing grassroots phenomenon in the achievement-minded Washington area and beyond. "It's in the culture, and it kind of feeds on itself," said Hughes, a mother of two sons who paid \$10 for a ticket and braved the heavy rain to watch the film at Walt Whitman High School. For her and thousands of others nationwide, the film has raised difficult questions about how to raise well-adjusted children at a time when schools seem test-obsessed, advanced classes are the norm and parents worry that their children will not go as far in life as they have.” (10/7/2010)

**Katie Couric, former CBS News Anchor:** “I interviewed Vicki Abeles on my web show today and was struck by her message. 'Schools are not factories', she argues, 'and children aren't products to be fixed and tested.' Over-scheduled, stressed-out kids aren't just less competitive, they are miserable. One study found that 15% of U.S. high school students had seriously considered suicide. This film is a poignant reminder that straight A's and high SAT scores are not the Holy Grail. We all want our kids to excel, but I'd take a happy child over a 'depressed success' any day of the week.” (3/1/2011)

**The Washington Post:** “If Obama really wants to help promote education films, he could take a look at “Race to Nowhere,” a documentary that isn’t backed by a Gates grant but explores the strains of competing in a pressure-packed academic culture that is highly test-driven and pushes some students to the edge. His time would better be spent by talking to education experts who aren’t enamored with his policies and using his extraordinary intellect to come to understand how he is getting education so wrong.” (10/11/2010)

**The New York Times:** “Spurred by the medical and emotional problems of her own three children, Ms. Abeles embarked on a deeply personal inquiry into the insanely hectic lives of too many of our offspring. Rushing from class to sports practice, from community work to homework, and relying increasingly on stimulants and sleep deprivation, these kids seem more pressured than the average C.E.O. Documenting consequences that range from depression to eating disorders to suicide, the film’s medical professionals share Ms. Abeles’ alarm and her awareness that blame, if it exists, is systemic and with little current incentive to change.” (9/9/2010)

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