

"Race To Nowhere" Pre-Screening, Q&A With Director

Description



Update: I saw the film yesterday. It was totally eye-opening, and thought-provoking! extremely powerful stories and messages from students, parents and educators. I highly recommend seeing it if you get the opportunity!

The Race To Nowhere: The Dark Side Of America's Achievement Culture is a documentary film examining the pressures faced by youth, teachers and parents in our achievement obsessed education system and culture. Featuring the heartbreaking stories of young people who have been pushed to the brink, educators who are burned out and worried that students aren't developing the skills needed, and parents who are trying to do what's best for their kids, Race to Nowhere points to the silent epidemic running rampant in our schools.

Vicki Abeles directed *The Race To Nowhere* and she was gracious enough to answer a few of my questions about the film (see below). I plan to attend the film's pre-release screening on May 24th at 3:30 p.m. and I hope you'll join me! Vicki will be there to host a lively and thought-provoking discussion following the film. Details below.

Q. I watched the four-minute trailer of *The Race To Nowhere* and it's absolutely fascinating. As the director, what is the main message of the film you'd like viewers to take away from the movie?

A. My main message is that we have an epidemic of unprepared, disengaged, unhealthy kids trying to manage an extreme. We cannot wait for policies to change or for large institutions to make the changes our kids need today. My hope is that everyone leaves the film inspired and empowered to form alliances and become advocates for change. The film is a vehicle for bringing communities together to break the silence and to move forward, together in a way that better serves all children. We need to transform education, redefine success and safeguard the health and well being of our children.

Q. You write that *The Race To Nowhere* came about because your daughter became physically ill from the stress she was under. How do you think the film will help other parents learn from your family's experience as well as the intense challenges the kids in the film discuss?

A. The film is an eye opener for many, and at the most basic level reminds all of us to listen to our kids. As parents, it's easy to get caught up in the fear and competition driving today's education system and culture, and the film is a reminder that we need to see our kids as so much more than their last grade or homework assignment. Seeing the long-term toll on the adolescents in the film and the educational outcomes (kids arriving in college and the workplace unprepared and uninspired), parents are reminded to start trusting their instincts and becoming advocates in their schools and communities for real change.

Q. I'm the mom of two kids, ages 6 and 9. The film focuses on the pressures and stresses faced primarily by teenagers, but I already see pressure on elementary school kids to overachieve in every area of

their lives. Should parents with younger kids see the film?

A. Absolutely. My 3rd grade son is featured in the film and the issues impacting young children are addressed. I often hear from parents they would have done things differently had they seen the film when their children were younger. It's never too late to start the dialogue and to become advocates for change. And everyone can make the simple changes in their homes by valuing sleep and health over test grades and homework, making time for family dinners, and by listening to our kids.

Q. As the director, how did you find kids who are so willing to be brutally honest about their feelings and the intense pressures they face with school, sports, homework, extracurricular activities, physical appearance, and more?

A. At the time, I was surprised about how easy it was to find young people and families willing to be so courageous and trusting with their stories. Young people want to be seen and heard by the adults in their lives, and I believe in every case the young people who participated felt it was important to contribute to the film and be part of the solution. For several of the young people, they have younger siblings and they didn't want to see them have the same experience.

Q. The film's title *The Race To Nowhere* is fascinating. Do you think kids are truly unable to envision a life beyond the enormous pressure they face during the middle and high school years?

A. The title actually came from something one of the students said. Young people are usually focused on the present, and it's difficult to get them to see beyond that. Besides, when they look at the adults in their lives who often lead unbalanced, stressful lives, they may not see an end in sight to the pressures they feel. I hope everyone steps back and thinks about the fact that as adults we have a choice about whether to lead 24/7 lives, but we aren't giving our children a choice. And, we need to consider the impact of this kind of pressure on bodies and minds that are still growing and developing.

Thank you, Vicki, for taking the time to answer my questions and for making such a thought-provoking film. I can't wait to see it!

What: Screening of *The Race To Nowhere*

When: Monday, May 24th, 2010 at **3:30 p.m.** includes Q&A with director Vicki Abeles. Please note: the 7 p.m. show is **SOLD OUT**

Where: St. James Parish Church and Preschool in South Pasadena, 1325 Monterey Rd. S. Pasadena, 91030. Tickets are \$15 in advance (order on website under "screenings") or \$20 at the door.
www.racetonowhere.com

You can also see the film's four-minute trailer on the website.

A special thank you to Lauren Albrecht, Publisher Mom of Pasadena Macaroni Kids, for facilitating my interview with Vicki.
www.pasadena.macaronikid.com

Category

1. Beyond The Brochure

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