

'Won't Back Down' Stands Up and Delivers

Won't Back Down gives a whole new meaning to “show and tell” regarding the red-hot-button issue of public school reform. In an inspiring “We’ve had enough!” manner, the drama takes a look at teachers, bureaucracy and parents in a raw and unflinching look at the current state of our country’s education system.

Billed as “inspired by true events,” *Won't Back Down* chronicles the journey of two women—a struggling, single mother named Jamie (Maggie Gyllenhaal) and veteran teacher Nona (Viola Davis)—who embark on a mission to turn around their kids’ failing school in Pittsburgh.

First off, disclosure. I grew up in a North Dakota farming community where public school was more private than otherwise. My wife and I currently send our children to private school. Yes it’s expensive, but we chose to forgo most other luxuries in life in order to give them what we believe is a better education.

How did this film affect me? My son is now a sixth grader and due to finances, we are actively discussing whether we will send him to the local middle school next year. This decision makes my heart weak with trepidation. I’m not going to lie: I don’t have a lot of faith in the system.

Won't Back Down is going to be an eye opener to many people—and liberals aren’t going to like it very , it’s emotionally moving. Yes, the cast is terrific. Yes, it’s great entertainment. But to me, its greatest strength is connecting to your heart as a parent.

If you don’t have kids of school age yet, it’s a warning. Our schools are broken. This film is putting the conversation

about the importance of education front and center in our classrooms, homes, around the water cooler, and in local and national government. Public school reform is a steaming cauldron that has been bubbling for years now, and *Won't Back Down* may be the catalyst that causes the debate to bubble over into the coming national elections.

When *The Tonight Show's* Jay Leno recently asked Viola Davis (Nona) about the controversial nature of the movie, she responded with a passionate defense of school choice: "I am a parent. And as a parent, I have a child and I know that the only way she's going to get a part of the American dream is through education. And so if that great education is a public school, I'm going to send my kid to the public school. If that great education is a charter school, I'm going to send my kid to a charter school. If it's a private school, I'll send her to a private school. I think that it's about wanting do what's best for your kid."

I agree. It's not about who's better among public, private or charter school options. It's about whom those institutions are for. Are they there for the teachers or the kids? If everyone in the equation isn't looking out primarily for the success of all the students, and I mean all, then we have a disconnect.

I believe this is a movie that all adults should see. At the screening I attended, the audience was demographically diverse. As the credits rolled, you could easily sense who was angered and who was motivated by the message. I asked one man how he liked the show and received an unintelligible "Harumpf!" True story. During the movie, some high school students sitting behind me were whispering (loudly) about teachers who aren't pulling their weight in their school. As they were getting up to leave they were seriously discussing how to get their parents involved in changing *their* school.

This is what *Won't Back Down* is all about! It's not about getting rid of public schools and forcing everyone into a

private school. Rather, it's about motivating honest conversation, promoting constructive and meaningful activism, and getting off our duffs to do our part as individuals to secure a better future for our kids. *Won't Back Down* is the type of film that inspires people to act.

Against all odds—and countless sometimes ridiculous obstacles—Jamie and Nona persevere and ultimately succeed—providing a better education and better life for their children, as well as other kids in their community.

There are also powerful moments in *Won't Back Down* showing unconditional love toward children and co-workers, as well as an inspiring story on parenthood, friendship, hope and courage. I truly fell in love with Jamie and Nona as mothers, providers and persons. It doesn't require a football to make an inspiring movie—just real, identifiable passion.

Rated PG for thematic elements and language, *Won't Back Down* features some expletives. Beer and alcohol is evident, as the character of Jamie has an evening job working as a bartender. There is kissing between Jamie and her boyfriend.

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