

Can 'Waiting for Superman' be a teachable moment?

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Daisy is a child who wants to be a doctor so that she can “help someone in need.”

Today she's in [fifth grade](#). Will she receive the kind of education that is necessary to succeed in high school, college, and then medical school? The odds don't look good. Right now she's destined to attend a high school where 40 percent of the students fail to graduate, and only a handful of graduates move on to college.

Daisy, who live in Los Angeles, is one of five children who are profiled in the movie, “Waiting for Superman,” a gripping story of children whose future depends on getting a good education.

What can Daisy's parents do? They're dissatisfied with their local school, and would like to enroll her in another public school, KIPP LA Prep. It's a [charter school](#), which means it gives principals and teachers more freedom to operate than the traditional school—and then holds them accountable for helping children learn. It also has high expectations for parents.

You'll have to watch the movie to find out what happens to Daisy, but the truth is that while Daisy is one child, she represents the 50 million children who have a right to a school that prepares them for life.

Unfortunately, few politicians have been very good at delivering on the promises of public education for 50 million kids in America. Our [students](#) lag their international peers in key tests, and only about a third of them are adequately prepared for life after high school, a tragedy for them and for us.

What can we do for Daisy and, indeed, all of America's schoolchildren? They all deserve a high-quality school as a birthright of being an American. But too often, we run schools as if they're for the benefit of adults rather than children. We've tried bigger school budgets and reform after reform.

We need some of what the best charter schools represent and have to offer: Spend more money where it challenges kids to succeed and provides each student with an effective [education](#). Give principals the power to select the teachers in their school, and then hold them accountable for student learning.

Let parents have more options in the number and kinds of schools their children can attend, and then expect them to be active participants in their children's education. In short, there is no single "Superman" who will make American schools great. It will take changes from many of us—perhaps including you as well.

Well-educated children are essential for economic and civic vitality. Are we willing to continue accepting schools that don't succeed? The quality of our future is at stake.

John R. LaPlante is [an education](#) policy fellow with the Wichita-based Kansas Policy Institute.

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