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**SCHOOL OFFERS AN UNPRECEDENTED LOOK AT  
A GREAT AMERICAN EXPERIMENT: PUBLIC EDUCATION**

***--New Four-Part PBS Series is Narrated by Oscar-Winning Actress Meryl Streep--***

*Preach a crusade against ignorance. General education will enable every man  
to judge for himself what will secure or endanger his freedom.*

--Thomas Jefferson

*Public education around this nation is selling something nobody wants!*

-- School Voucher Advocate Annette "Polly" Williams

*Public education is not dead! It is alive and functioning perfectly well today.*

-- Author and Journalist Nicholas Lemann

From Thomas Jefferson's passionate crusade for universal education to the wave of reforms aimed at "reinventing" today's embattled public schools, a new PBS series – ***SCHOOL: The Story of American Public Education*** – chronicles the dramatic history of America's struggle to educate *all* of its citizens and unite us as a nation. Narrated by Oscar-winning actress Meryl Streep, ***SCHOOL***'s four one-hour programs premiere on PBS stations nationwide this September 3-4, 2001 from 9-11 p.m. (check local listings). The series is directed by Sarah Mondale and produced by Sarah Patton and Sarah Mondale of Stone Lantern Films. It is presented in association with KCET/ Hollywood.

Ten years in the making, *SCHOOL* journeys through history and across the nation, weaving archival footage, on-site coverage, rare interviews and expert commentary into an unprecedented portrait of America's great education experiment.

Vivid images throughout the series bring history to life as they recall our collective experience – from drafty, one-room schoolhouses where the switch was applied as liberally as the golden rule, to classrooms flooded with turn-of-the century immigrants, eager to take part in the American dream; from a rural Texas high school where determined Mexican American teenagers revolutionized the curriculum, to an East Harlem neighborhood, where a bold experiment transformed a bottom-rung school district into a top-flight example...and much more.

According to Meryl Streep, “We have reached a very controversial moment in the history of public education. This series lets us take a look back, while keeping an eye on the present. It reminds us that public education for all Americans is relatively new, and something we cannot afford to take for granted.”

Designed to place today's issues into historical context, *SCHOOL* takes viewers on a 200-year journey, from colonial times to the present, in four chronological episodes:

- ▶ “The Common School” (1770-1890) traces America's struggle to create a tax-supported system that would educate every citizen, rich or poor. The goal was to establish a common ground that would bridge differences and preserve our infant democracy.
- ▶ “As American as Public School” (1900-1950) recalls the compelling story of how massive immigration, child labor laws and the explosive growth of cities transformed the nation's classrooms.
- ▶ “Equality” (1950-1980) covers the tempestuous era when public schools became a major battleground as minorities and women fought for equal rights, resources and opportunities.
- ▶ “The Bottom Line” (1980-the present) explores the wide range of “free-market” experiments – from vouchers to charter schools – that emerged in the wake of *A Nation at Risk*, the Reagan administration's shocking report on America's education crisis.

Featured throughout the series are interviews with witnesses, both famous and relatively unknown, who played key roles in public education's dramatic story. Among them are *Brown v. the Board of Education*'s Linda Brown Thompson; former Ambassador to Mexico Julian Nava, whose family fought to place him in college prep classes – despite his school's penchant for steering Mexican-Americans towards “shop”; Bel Kaufman, author of “Up the Down Staircase,” who recalls with humor her attempts as a young Russian immigrant to adjust to American schools; Dorothy Raffel, a gifted athlete who joined a class action lawsuit against gender bias in school sports; and John Golle, a businessman whose attempts to privatize Baltimore's public schools were seen as a crucial turning point in American education reform.

Leading experts in education history lend their insights to each episode of **SCHOOL**, illuminating the issues and their implications. They include some of the foremost authorities of the history of public schools, including: Stanford University Professor David Tyack; Larry Cuban, Professor of Education, Stanford University; Carl Kaestle, Professor of Education History and Public Policy, Brown University; Professor James Anderson, University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign, author of “The Education of Blacks in the South;” and Dr. Diane Ravitch, former Assistant Secretary, Department of Education, under President George H. W. Bush. Also featured are Jonathan Kozol, activist, best-selling author (“Savage Inequalities”) and National Book Award winner, and Nicholas Lemann, *New Yorker* staff writer and author (“The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy”).

According to Professor Tyack, “I do not see any way to achieve a good future for our children more effectively than debating together and working together on how we educate the next generation. Children may be about 20 percent of the population, but they are 100 percent of the future.” With this in mind, the PBS broadcast of **SCHOOL** is accompanied by a nationwide public engagement campaign whose goal is to spark a new dialogue about the role of public schools in American life. The campaign includes partnerships with national leaders in education reform, community groups and education organizations around the country. Their mission is to launch panel discussions, workshops, town hall meetings and other events to examine the issues addressed in the series and explore the challenges and opportunities for public schools now and in the future.

Sarah Mondale, director and co-producer of ***SCHOOL***, has directed and co-produced the award-winning PBS documentary films, *Marcel Proust: A Writer's Life*, and *Asylum* which earned her an Emmy nomination, as well as a dramatic short film, *Old Acquaintance* (HBO/Cinemax/PBS), and a verite documentary *Megamall* (in progress.) She is co-chair of Stone Lantern Films with her sister-in-law, Sarah Patton.

Sarah Patton is co-producer for ***SCHOOL***. She has developed and managed a number of award-winning PBS documentaries over the past 14 years including two other Stone Lantern projects, *Asylum* and *Marcel Proust: A Writer's Life*.

***SCHOOL*** is presented on PBS by KCET/Hollywood, the network's West Coast flagship station, which has an award-winning history of producing distinguished documentary series. KCET executive-in-charge is Mare Mazur, the station's senior vice president, programming and production. Joyce Campbell is KCET production executive.

The public engagement initiative is being produced by Roundtable, Inc., a media development, management and production company established by Robert Lavelle and Martha Fowlkes to reach into communities and create significant impact.

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