

I was disturbed to find out recently that a screening of my film *Knock Down the House* is being planned by GO Public Schools, a charter school organization operating in Oakland. While I have no doubt that some individual teachers, parents and administrators involved with GO Public Schools may share the progressive values that underlie the film, the larger trends of charter schools and public school privatization are completely antithetical to the film's mission of promoting a democratic process that is accessible and accountable to all people.

# A statement from Rachel Lears

*DIRECTOR OF KNOCK DOWN THE HOUSE*

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leads in a dangerous direction away from these ideals and goals. Instead of diverting resources away from public schools to charters, communities, governments and concerned individuals should double down on a shared commitment to providing excellent education to all students, regardless of their backgrounds, skills or needs, by supporting and improving our public schools. I would prefer that my film be used to promote this mission, rather than the privatization of public education.

Despite progressive rhetoric, charter schools are not a progressive force in America: nationally, 90% of charter schools are non-union, and overall they are more segregated than public schools. The National Labor Relations Board ruled in 2016 that charters are private corporations, not subject to the same laws as public schools. The largest private funder of charter schools (including GO Public Schools) is the anti-union Walton family; working with US Education Secretary Betsy DeVos they are currently engaged in a national push to privatize public education by promoting charter schools and voucher programs.

Publicly funded but privately run, charters do not perform better than public schools, but divert resources from them. Oakland is known nationally as among the worst districts in the nation for diverting public funds to charter schools, leaving students in the district in a precarious position. GO Public Schools advocates for this larger diversion project.

Charter schools are marketed as a quick fix for the inequities of public education, but with no accountability to the public and no obligation or duty to educate all students, privatization leads to greater inequality, not less. The only way to actually fix the system is renewed and expanded commitment from national, state and local governments to support and improve public schools for all students. This must include supporting teachers with resources, dignity and respect, including living wages, benefits, and the right to collectively bargain within unions.

*Knock Down the House* is about the capacity of ordinary working people to build power in themselves and in communities through solidarity and collective action, and in that process to demand a political system accountable to regular people, rather than big donors and corporate interests. Public education is the foundation of the democratic ideals and egalitarian aspirations portrayed in the film, and held dear by most Americans. The trend toward privatization of public schools in America