



# LEFT BEHIND

A FEATURE DOCUMENTARY FILM BY ANNA TOOMEY

The story of brilliant minds overlooked, devalued, and essentially tossed aside because they lack a fundamental skill, the ability to read and the unwavering conviction of a group of mothers to fight for them.

[WATCH THE SIZZLE](#)

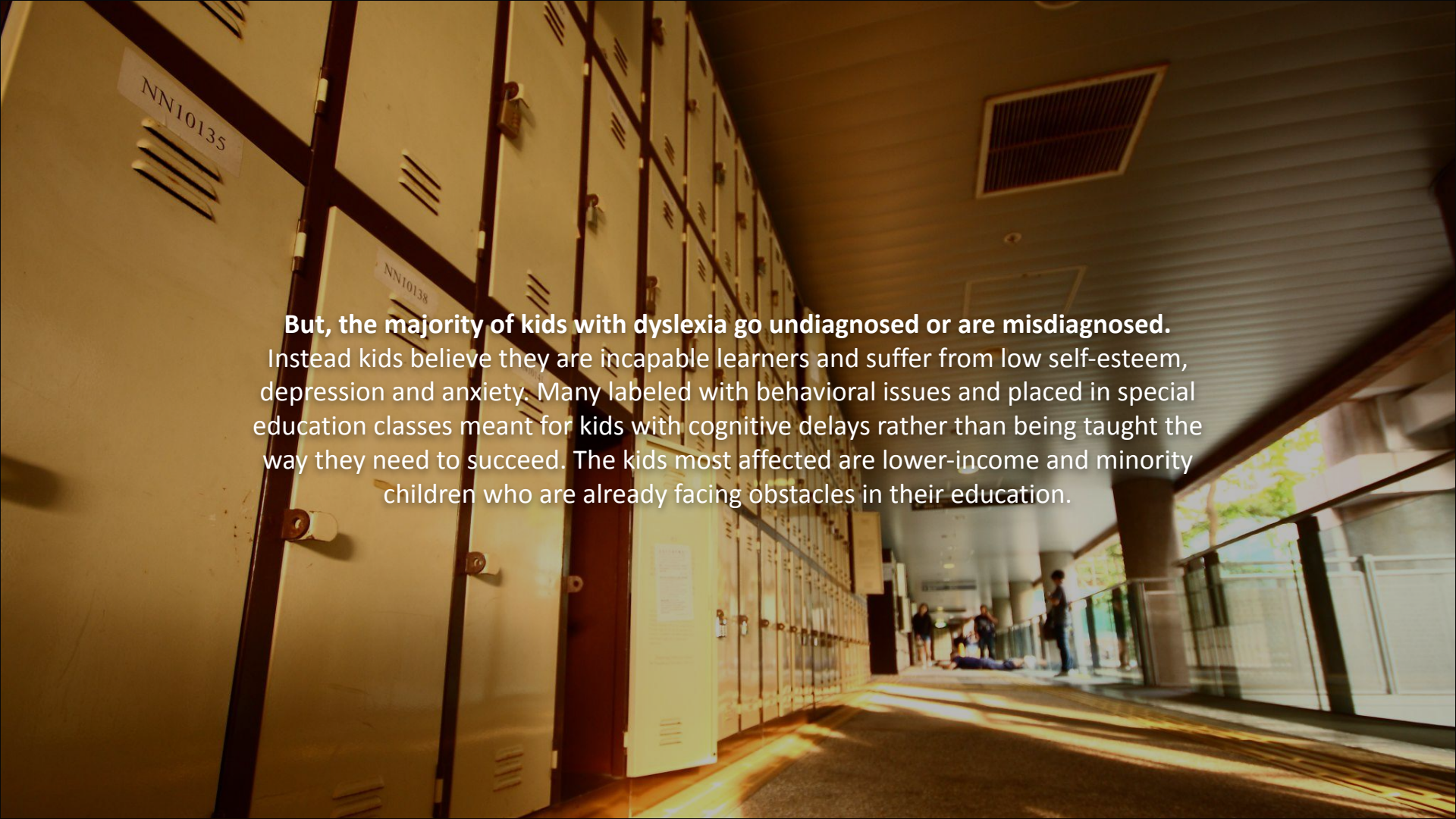


THE ISSUE

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# ONE IN FIVE AMERICANS 65 MILLION PEOPLE are dyslexic!

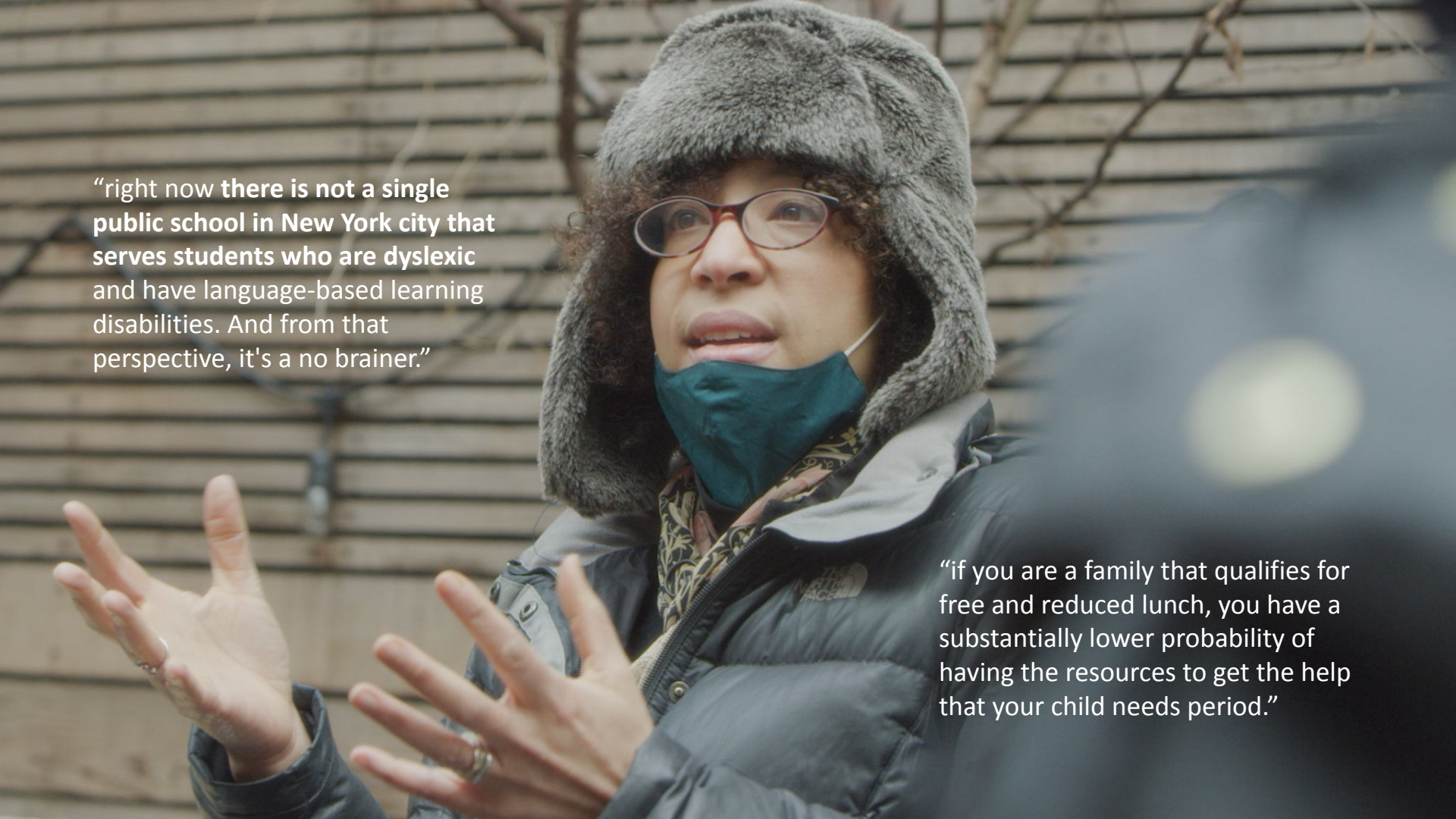
We have all heard the term, but what exactly does it mean to be dyslexic? Simply put, it's having trouble connecting letters on a page with their sounds. But the disorder has no effect on IQ. In fact experts believe that that inability can actually **lead to new brain pathways** like creativity, resilience, and out-of-the-box thinking because the brain is forced to create new novel connections.



**But, the majority of kids with dyslexia go undiagnosed or are misdiagnosed.** Instead kids believe they are incapable learners and suffer from low self-esteem, depression and anxiety. Many labeled with behavioral issues and placed in special education classes meant for kids with cognitive delays rather than being taught the way they need to succeed. The kids most affected are lower-income and minority children who are already facing obstacles in their education.

**LEFT BEHIND is the chronicle of determined mothers fighting to give all children access to reading intervention, revealing along the way the surprising nature and frightening scope of dyslexia in the United States.**

A diverse group of women fight to open the first ever public school in New York City specifically for dyslexic children which would serve the most impoverished and overlooked. Their goal is to open in the fall of 2022.

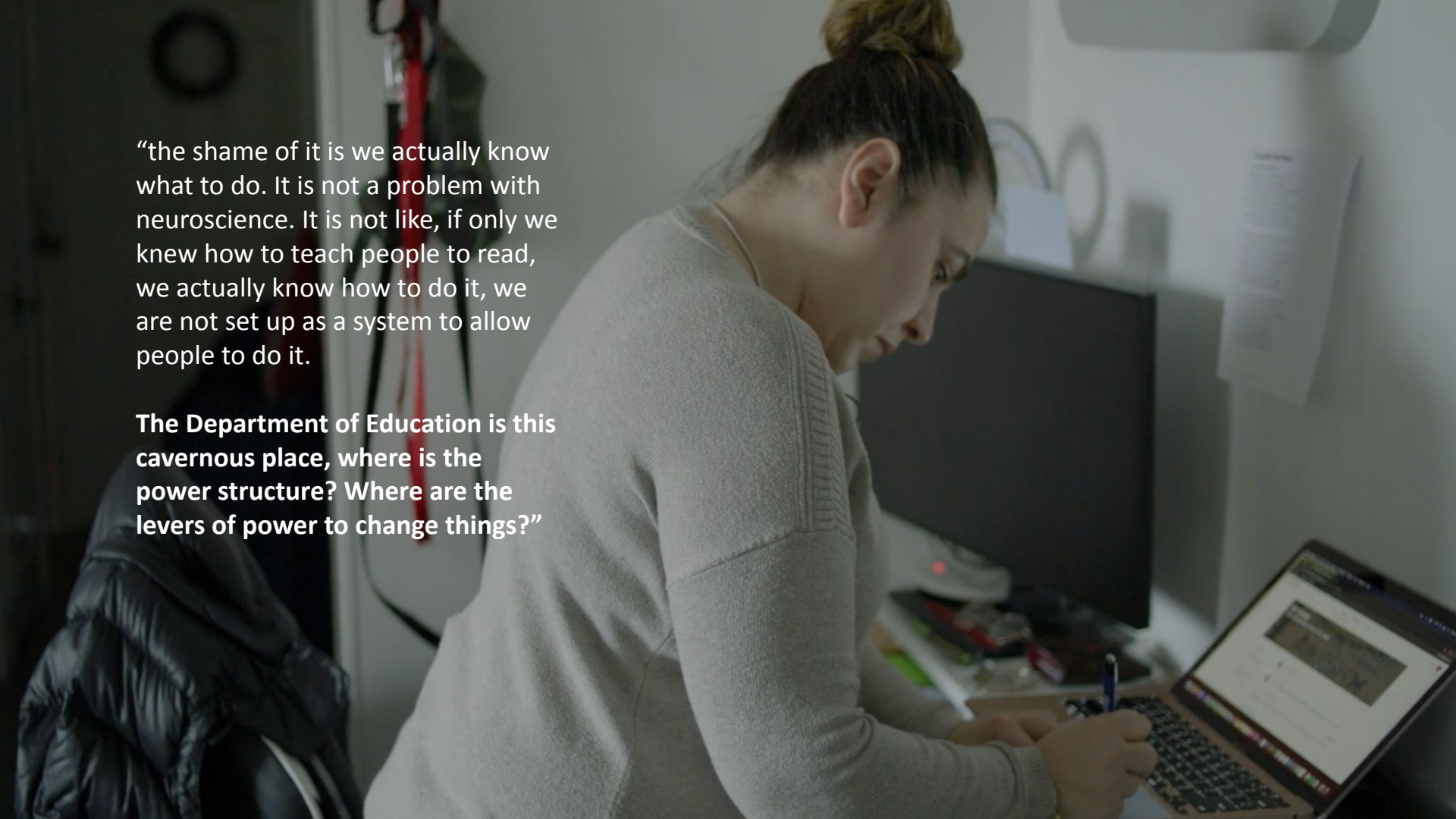


“right now there is not a single public school in New York city that serves students who are dyslexic and have language-based learning disabilities. And from that perspective, it's a no brainer.”

“if you are a family that qualifies for free and reduced lunch, you have a substantially lower probability of having the resources to get the help that your child needs period.”


“we estimate 10% of the Manhattan K through eight population, **need this school**, one school will not be sufficient **our ultimate goal is to come up with a model that's replicable**, so that it can be repeated throughout the city to serve more students because we know the need is there.”



A woman with her hair in a bun, wearing a light grey sweater, is seated at a desk in an office. She is looking down at a laptop, with her hands on the keyboard. A large monitor is visible behind her. The office environment includes a desk with various items, a jacket hanging on the left, and papers on the wall to the right. The lighting is soft and focused on the workspace.


“the shame of it is we actually know what to do. It is not a problem with neuroscience. It is not like, if only we knew how to teach people to read, we actually know how to do it, we are not set up as a system to allow people to do it.

**The Department of Education is this cavernous place, where is the power structure? Where are the levers of power to change things?”**

A woman with long brown hair and glasses, wearing a beige knit sweater, sits at a desk in a cluttered room. She is looking at a silver laptop with a frustrated expression, her hands clenched into fists. On the desk are a blue and white patterned mug, a smartphone, and some papers. The background shows a messy living area with a table and chairs.

**“there is no teacher training. If the child is struggling to read, whether they're dyslexic or just have some kind of language based learning disabilities, teachers don't have the skills to intervene.”**



A woman and a child are walking on a sidewalk. The woman is wearing a black jacket and a black face mask. The child is wearing a grey hoodie and a black face mask. They are walking past a colorful fence that is painted in various colors like blue, yellow, red, and green. In the background, there are trees and buildings.

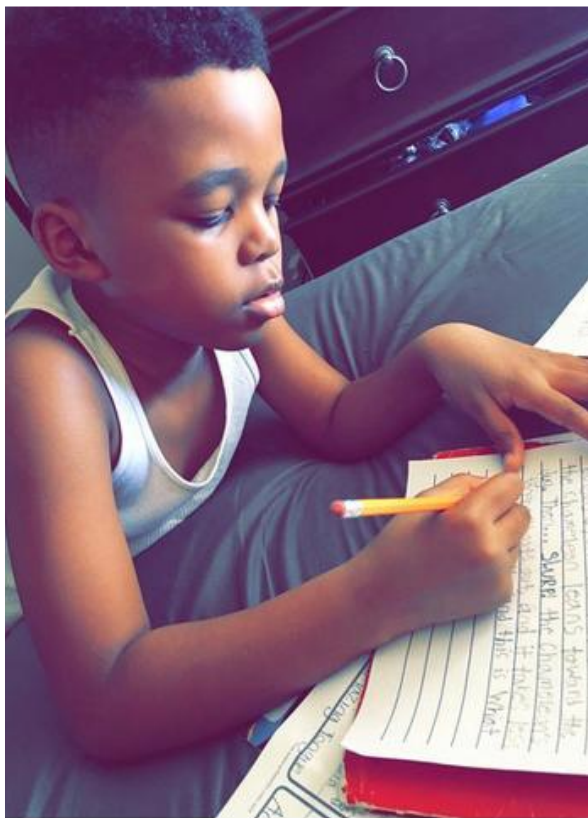
**“I could not let him be another statistic like my older son was. I'm doing right by him, because I have to, because...I can't lose him to this. If I leave him in the public school system, I will lose him.”**

## **WHO ARE THOSE LEFT BEHIND?**

**In NYC alone 250,000 children are dyslexic, and there is currently no public option for these kids.**

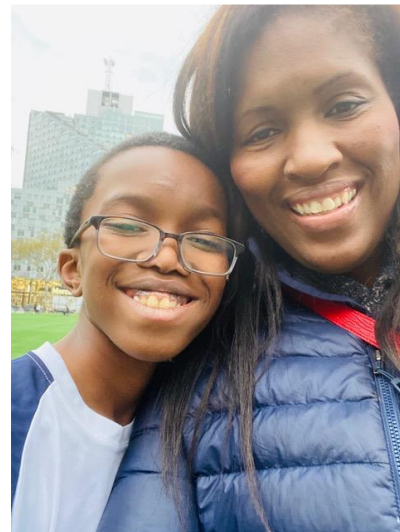
Lucas is a 4th grader at a NYC public school. He is dyslexic and reads at a 1st grade level. His mom, Naomi pleaded with the school to get him help, but the school does not have the resources to teach him, or any child with dyslexia.

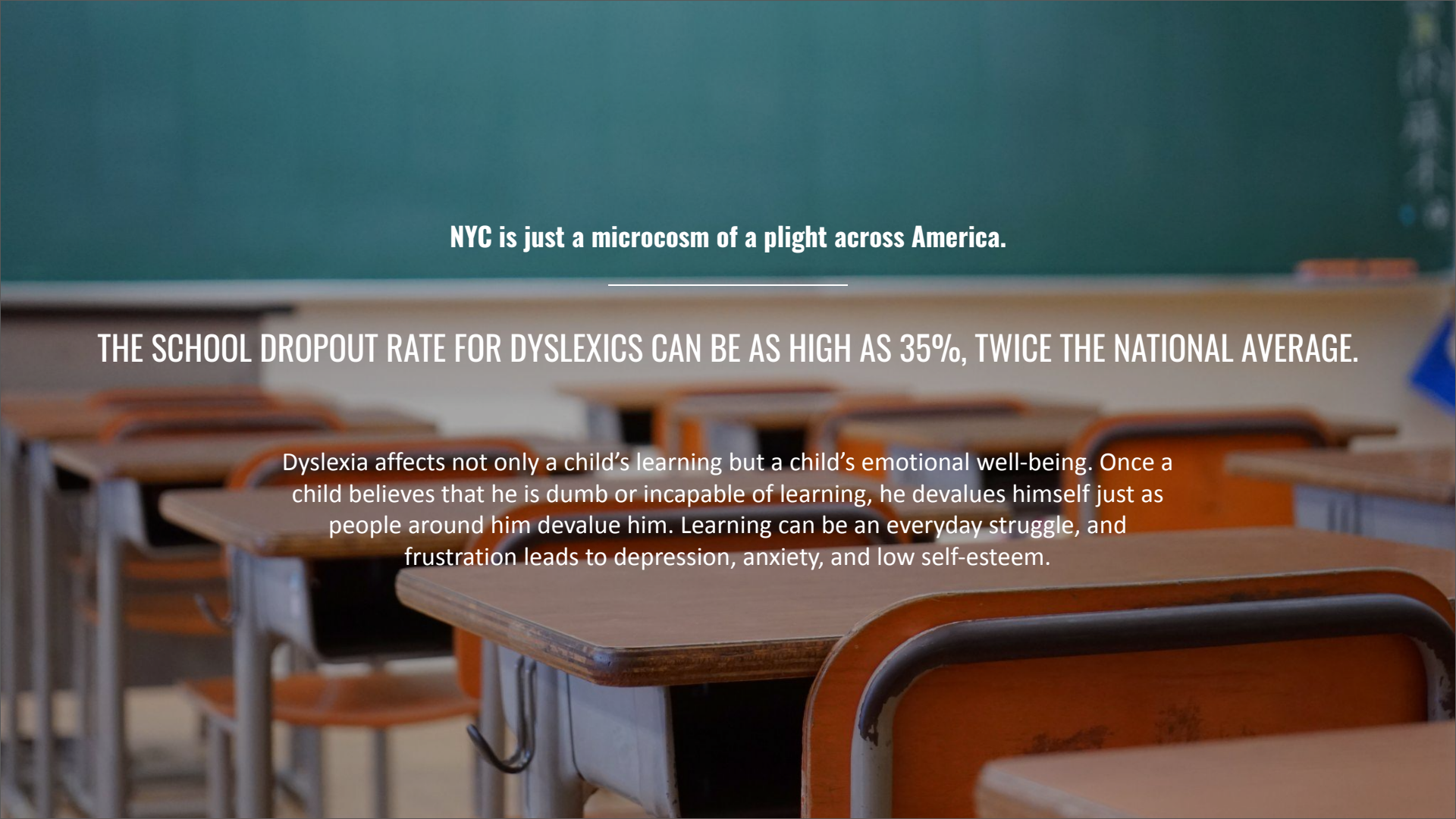
He feels angry, frustrated, discouraged by school, **telling his mom he has a small brain.**



Tahirah Simmonds is a former special education teacher in NYC public schools. After her son, Jayden was diagnosed with dyslexia, she learned about teaching methods for dyslexic kids. “Teachers, even special education teachers, are not taught to recognize learning disabilities, like dyslexia; instead, the kids are classified as having emotional disabilities.” **“I feel so guilty that my son is receiving the help he needs and the students I taught did not.”**

April’s son, Seun, who is dyslexic, was **diagnosed by the school as having a behavioral disorder. The school recommended a special education classroom**, where the students had severe emotional and cognitive issues. **“The kids were out of control, police were there to maintain order, the teachers were untrained.”** She knew her son was smart and would be left to fail in that environment. She sued the NYC department of education and won. Her son is now in a specialized school just for kids with dyslexia and thriving.





**NYC is just a microcosm of a plight across America.**

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**THE SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE FOR DYSLEXICS CAN BE AS HIGH AS 35%, TWICE THE NATIONAL AVERAGE.**

Dyslexia affects not only a child's learning but a child's emotional well-being. Once a child believes that he is dumb or incapable of learning, he devalues himself just as people around him devalue him. Learning can be an everyday struggle, and frustration leads to depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem.



## SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE

48% OF INMATES IN PRISON  
ARE DYSLEXIC.

This is the cost of turning a blind eye. Our film profiles an inmate sharing his journey from a discouraged student to a life of crime. These are not boys and girls, men and women who aren't capable of learning and succeeding in life. They have just been told by society that they are not worth the time and money to teach them. **Think of all the minds and lives needlessly wasted.** And not only is their potential thrown away, but we as a society lose out.

# National Experts



Dr. Shawn Robinson, PHD

Senior Research associate, Author,  
"Promoting Academic readiness for  
African American Males with Dyslexia"

*"Growing up with dyslexia, I've experienced adversity even at the highest levels of education, for myself, and everyone like me. Now is the time to break the mold of leaving children behind because they struggle to read and learn. With the right kind of diagnosis early on in life, we can save young students from what I went through."*



Dr. Sally Shaywitz

Co-Director of the Yale Center for  
Dyslexia & Creativity

*"It is obvious that schools are failing to diagnose the great majority of dyslexic students, children who could be helped. This constitutes **one of the greatest tragedies in American education** in the twenty first century."*



Kareem Weaver

NAACP of Oakland,  
CA education committee

*"What the NAACP is calling for you to do is to be better, is to not wait until our kids get locked up in the federal penitentiary to give them what they need to put down your ideologies, to screen them, to learn how to support them and give them what they need in core classroom instructions. **This is the civil rights issue of our time.**"*

# The Brilliant Dyslexic Mind

A STAGGERING 35% OF U.S. **ENTREPRENEURS** SUFFER FROM **DYSLEXIA**.



Roger Ross Williams

*"The most creative people I know are dyslexic. Dyslexia has given me the gift of creativity, understanding and empathy."*



Richard Branson

*"Personally, I actually think dyslexia in the real world can be a big advantage. We have a slightly different wiring to our brains, which enables us to think creatively and differently."*



Octavia Spencer

*"I could solve puzzles quicker than the average child. I would start with the mazes at the end and go to the front and be done in, like, 30 seconds. My deductive reasoning was very important."*



Steven Spielberg

*"You are not alone, and while you will have dyslexia for the rest of your life, you can dart between the raindrops to get where you want to go. It will not hold you back."*



## **LEFT BEHIND** is really about social justice.

Our film is a **call to action**. It unmaskes an education system biased against low-income and minority children, looks at ingrained education inequality, racial bias in schools, and the long-term emotional and social consequences of letting a population of kids fall through the cracks.

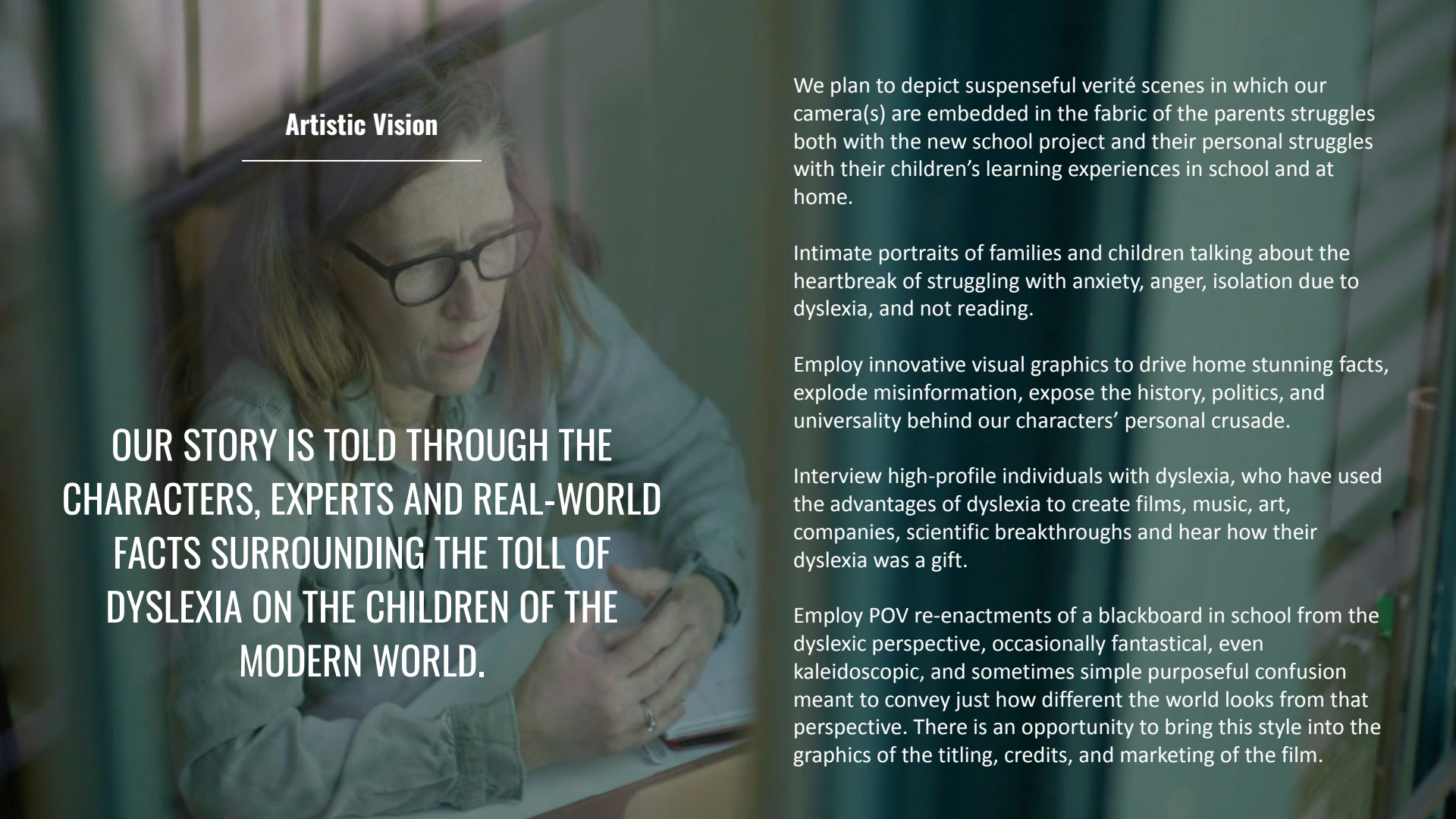


**RESHA CONROY**, FOUNDER OF THE DYSLEXIC ALLIANCE FOR BLACK CHILDREN

**“We can’t have a conversation about literacy without a conversation about equity”**

It is a travesty that this large number of children are not being taught to read, hundreds of thousands are ending up in jail, and as a society we are living with the consequences. Left Behind has implications beyond just education. Our film is about the loss of potential. We as a society are losing out on millions of gifted brains. It is about race, education, prison reform and changing the trajectory of kids’ lives for the better. There is a clear solution, and there is a huge population that needs this solution. **Are we as a society willing to allow 20 percent to fail?** What does that say about us? What are the implications for these children and the long-term costs to us from a moral and fiscal standpoint?



A woman with long brown hair and glasses is sitting at a desk, looking down at a book or document. She is wearing a light blue button-down shirt. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a classroom or office setting with a whiteboard or chalkboard.

## Artistic Vision

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**OUR STORY IS TOLD THROUGH THE CHARACTERS, EXPERTS AND REAL-WORLD FACTS SURROUNDING THE TOLL OF DYSLEXIA ON THE CHILDREN OF THE MODERN WORLD.**

We plan to depict suspenseful verité scenes in which our camera(s) are embedded in the fabric of the parents struggles both with the new school project and their personal struggles with their children's learning experiences in school and at home.

Intimate portraits of families and children talking about the heartbreak of struggling with anxiety, anger, isolation due to dyslexia, and not reading.

Employ innovative visual graphics to drive home stunning facts, explode misinformation, expose the history, politics, and universality behind our characters' personal crusade.

Interview high-profile individuals with dyslexia, who have used the advantages of dyslexia to create films, music, art, companies, scientific breakthroughs and hear how their dyslexia was a gift.

Employ POV re-enactments of a blackboard in school from the dyslexic perspective, occasionally fantastical, even kaleidoscopic, and sometimes simple purposeful confusion meant to convey just how different the world looks from that perspective. There is an opportunity to bring this style into the graphics of the titling, credits, and marketing of the film.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

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**My son was diagnosed with dyslexia in first grade.** He went from a happy, curious kid who asked a thousand questions to a frustrated, angry boy when he tried to read and write, and none of it made sense. He started hitting kids in class and came home one day and told me I guess I'm just the dumb, angry kid. The school told us he was progressing enough, and even after he was diagnosed with dyslexia, they told us it was an attention issue. We took him out of the public school and got him into a specialized school. Every year his confidence has grown, and he now sees himself as smart and is proud of his work. Chris Farrell, our Producer, also has a child with dyslexia and was able to get her help. We know that we were lucky, and we can't sit idly by while millions of kids still believe they are the dumb, angry kid.

**Every child deserves a chance.**

*We are passionate about this film and know this is an issue the country needs to discuss, and we are the ones to bring it to light*

# POTENTIAL INTERVIEWS

## Successful people who have dyslexia:

- Steven Spielberg
- Roger Ross Williams, first African American director to win an Academy award.
- Octavia Spencer
- Danny Glover
- Richard Branson
- Anderson Cooper

## School to Prison Pipeline:

- Bryan Stevenson, criminal justice activist.
- Van Jones, news commentator, Author and lawyer, focus on criminal justice reform.
- Shawn Robinson, PHD, expert on African American males and dyslexia.

## Education/ Literacy Experts:

- Maryanne Wolf, literacy expert, Director of Center for Dyslexia diverse learners and Social Justice, UCLA
- Resha Conroy, Founder Dyslexia Alliance for Black Children
- Geoffrey Canada, Education expert, President of Harlem Children's Zone
- Miguel Cardona, Secretary of Education
- Arnie Duncan, Secretary of Education under Obama
- Kelly Butler

## Policy Makers:

- Senator Bill Cassidy of Louisiana

## Other notables:

- Nicholas Kristoff, Author of best selling book, Tightrope, on disparity in this country.

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a yellow pencil, poised to write on a spiral-bound notebook. The notebook is open to a page with horizontal lines. In the center of the page, the words "CREATIVE TEAM" are written in a clean, white, sans-serif font. To the right of the text, there is a pile of brown and yellow pencil shavings, suggesting recent use or preparation. The background is dark and out of focus, emphasizing the hand, pencil, and notebook.

CREATIVE TEAM

**Director, ANNA TOOMEY**, is an Emmy Award-winning Producer with 20 years of experience. She has worked for ABC News, Good Morning America, ABC News long-form unit, and Peter Jennings Reporting. She is dedicated to bringing to life compelling, character-driven stories with passion and integrity.

She began her career at ABC News working with Peter Jennings on his documentaries including the Emmy award winning, *The Gun Fight*, an inside look at the National Rifle Association, and *The American Game*, a glimpse at American families through the lenses of a little league team as well as *The Century* with Peter Jennings and the Beatles Anthology.

As a Producer on the six-part series, *In the Jury Room*, she spent months in the field covering murder trials and profiling attorneys and defendants during trial, including going into prisons to interview defendants. She combed through hours of footage to develop an intriguing storyline, culminating in a primetime 6-hour series airing on ABC News.

As a Producer at Good Morning America, she received two daytime Emmy awards. She pitched, developed, scripted, and edited segments from start to finish, working with anchors and correspondents, producing heartfelt character-driven pieces. She has directed multiple camera shoots, including the roundtable discussion with Robin Roberts and Sheryl Sandberg for her book "Lean In." Anna also produced a series of breast cancer awareness segments, including Amy Robach's emotional journey after her diagnosis. As a series producer for "GMA Investigates," she exposed the dangers of everyday household and commercial products. She has vast experience booking and interviewing celebrities, high-profile experts, politicians, and authors, as well as everyday people. Anna grew up in New York City, receiving her BA at Hamilton College.

She lives in New York with her husband and two children and owns her own production company, Sandy Dog Productions.

**Producer, CHRIS FARRELL**, developed and Produced the recent documentary, *Jimmy Carter Rock & Roll President*, which showcased the life of former President Jimmy Carter and how music and musicians played an integral part in his personal and political life. The film received critical acclaim for telling a surprising and previously unknown story. The film centered around the key themes of hope, faith, compassion, redemption, moral courage and the power of music to bring people together. The film was also noteworthy for the eclectic all-star cast.

Farrell led all aspects of the project including developing the original concept, hiring the team, negotiating with the Carter Center and President Carter, raising the external financing, overseeing logistical and creative matters and ultimately leading the negotiations around distribution. The film, which prior to COVID was slated to open the 2020 Tribeca Film Festival, was distributed via Greenwich Entertainment, CNN Films, HBO Max and internationally in Germany, France, Austria, Switzerland, Canada, Japan and the UK.

Farrell was a partner in the launch of the 24 Hour Plays on Broadway in the wake of 9/11. He also was instrumental in bringing the event to the Old Vic Theater in London. The 24 Hour Plays would go on to be an annual event on Broadway, in London and Los Angeles, raising over \$10 million for charity.

In addition to producing various entertainment projects, Farrell has been an advisor for over 30 years on the issues of strategy, communications and mergers and acquisitions. During his career he has worked on transactions with approximately \$100 billion in value, including the \$31 billion merger of equals between Ahold and Delhaize. In his role as Global Head of M&A for AholdDelhaize, he recently led the acquisition of Fresh Direct and also put together the partnership agreement between Fresh Direct and the 2021 Tribeca Film Festival.

He currently serves on the Board of Directors of Kernel Group Holdings (NASDAQ listed SPAC) and Health Designs, a privately-held health and wellness company. Previously, he served on the Board of Directors of the Surfrider Foundation and held various roles with the Joyful Heart Foundation's Board of Directors. He graduated with a BA in Economics from Stetson University and an MBA in Finance from Fordham University's Graduate School of Business, with the distinction of Beta Gamma Sigma.

**Director of Photography, JAMES FIDELER**, is an award-winning cinematographer and filmmaker who calls Brooklyn home. Alumni of The Johns Hopkins University, where his focus was International Studies and Film, James developed a cinematography career that takes him around the world. He has shot projects in France, England, Mongolia, Czech Republic, Mexico, Canada, Panama, Jamaica, Dominican Republic, India, Argentina, Haiti, Denmark, and Dubai, to name a few.

Currently, in post-production, James filmed Lady Gaga's new project of Cole Porter songs recorded at Electric Lady Studios in New York. His recent work includes Jimmy Carter Rock N Roll President, which received praise for the beautiful way he shot it.

Other notable credits include the Emmy award-winning HBO documentary Assault in the Ring, Toronto Film Festival premiered and PBS staple American Masters Joan Baez: How Sweet the Sound, Tribeca Film Festival premiered The Zen of Bennett (additional cinematographer), as well as ESPN 30 for 30 documentary Renee, the story of the first transgender person to play tennis in the US Open, and No Mas, a boxing story about Sugar Ray Leonard and Roberto Duran's fascinating rivalry. Recently, James shot a PBS Great Performances Love is Here to Stay: Tony Bennett and Diana Krall Sing Gershwin. In 2018 he began production on a feature documentary about Indian classical musicians living in Brooklyn, a project that represents his directorial debut.

**Executive Producer, ELLEN LOVEJOY** is a senior global content licensing executive with over 20+ years of experience. Over the past 10 years as Senior Vice President, Americas + Formats, Ellen has built a successful global distribution team at A+E Networks, helping to transform the business into a global IP company. She has a proven track record of developing business and creative partnerships across the world and building strategies to monetize content in the rapidly changing media environment. Ellen provides strong cross-platform sales and business development skills. She is a powerful communicator and strategic, entrepreneurial thinker skilled at building and executing a plan to consistently deliver results.

Recent deal highlights include selling Miss Scarlet + the Duke to PBS's Masterpiece Theater, launching A+E's first AVOD partnership in the Spanish speaking US market with Univision, negotiating multi-platform movie deals with ViacomCBS and NBCU and creating an opportunity with US multicast leader, KATZ to launch two new dignets.

Ellen's significant experience will be invaluable to the project specifically around distribution and monetization.

Previously, Ellen was SVP, Sales for UK based Target Entertainment (based in NYC) and Head of Sales for Sydney based Beyond Productions (based in London). Ellen nurtures and leverages global relationships with a broad and diverse network of media companies worldwide.

**Consulting Producer, DR. SALLY SHAYWITZ**, the definitive expert on dyslexia, a Professor in Learning Development at Yale University and Co-Founder and Co-Director of the Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity. She is a world-renowned scientist and dedicated, compassionate physician devoted to bringing ground-breaking scientific advances to benefit dyslexic children and adults. In addition to over 250 scientific articles and chapters, Dr. Shaywitz is the author of the award-winning, best-selling book *Overcoming dyslexia*, which has just been released as a completely revised and updated second edition.

**Consulting Producer, HILDERBRAND PELZER III**, is a distinguished educator, recognized for his expertise and credibility in the areas of juvenile justice and correctional education for incarcerated youth.

Leveraging the unique lessons Pelzer learned from inside correctional facilities, he helps educators grasp the intricate connection between early literacy and feelings of self-worth and between illiteracy and juvenile delinquency, showing how education can improve and transform lives.

Pelzer is a leading and distinctive voice on the relationship between education and incarceration.

His captivating TEDx Talk, “What Incarcerated Youth Can Teach Teachers,” illuminates issues related to inadequate reading instruction, educational inequity, and illiteracy in the juvenile justice system. The talk also considers what imprisoned youths can do to bring attention to these problems and attract aspiring teachers.



## TIMELINE

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We have commenced filming and over the course of 2021 we will follow the women's progress as they seek to open Manhattan Literacy Academy. I see their story as a natural arc. They will either succeed in opening the school or fail. Throughout the year, we will follow other characters such as a family struggling, experts, successful dyslexics, and other stories. The current timeline envisions bringing on an editor in the summer of 2022, and will begin post-production by the fall of 2022 with the aim of submitting to the major film festivals in late 2022 for a 2023 premiere.

## THE OPPORTUNITY

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We are seeking to raise \$1.1 million either in the form of donations, via a 501(c) (3), or investment in a LLC with commensurate profit interest. For those who decide to donate they will receive an immediate tax deduction, for those who elect to invest they will be subject to a waterfall whereby investors will recoup their money plus a preferred return prior to any backend for the creative team. The backend will be split 50/50 between the investors and the creative team.

## DISTRIBUTION STRATEGY

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Our goal is to have the film premiere at one of the major festivals (e.g. Sundance, SXSW or Tribeca) in 2023. Based on our experience we strongly believe this can be a commercial success with wide distribution through a network and SVOD. There is currently a high demand for character driven social justice films, especially having to do with equity, education and race.

## BUDGET

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The budget for the film is \$1.1 million. This will allow us to hire an experienced and high-quality production team, including an award-winning director of photography and award-winning editor, to tell the story in a creative, impactful way. The money will also allow us to widely distribute and publicize the film to garner a larger audience and engage viewers to create change on this issue.



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