



A documentary by Christopher Wong

Third World Newsreel
545 8th Ave., 10th Fl, New York, NY 10018
(212) 947-9277 ext. 17, distribution@twm.org, www.twm.org

WHATEVER IT TAKES

A documentary by Christopher Wong
2011, 92 min, United States, English
Shooting Format: SD 24p (uprezzed to HD in post-production)
Screening Formats: DVD, HDCam, Digibeta
Aspect Ratio: 16:9
Sound: Stereo



SHORT SYNOPSIS

Whatever It Takes chronicles the struggles and triumphs of the very first year of the Bronx Center for Science & Mathematics, an innovative public high school in New York City.

LONG SYNOPSIS

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At the Bronx Center for Science and Mathematics (BCSM), principal Edward Tom stands outside on the school's very first day, greeting each arriving student with a handshake and hug. A rookie principal who traded his financially lucrative career as a Saks Fifth Avenue executive for the less glamorous job as a public high school math teacher, Tom is committed to improving the lives of low-income kids of color.

Fourteen-year-old Sharifea is a talented ninth-grade girl with big dreams, but even bigger obstacles. She dreams of attending medical school and becoming a pediatrician, but with her formerly crack-addicted mother now sick with hepatitis, Sharifea is forced to care for her two younger siblings, leaving little time or energy to focus on her schoolwork.

Whatever it Takes is a deeply emotional story of dedicated teachers and cutting-edge ideas, united in their vision to restore hope to a community.



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REVIEWS

"A modern-day classic... If you ever needed proof that real life can seem larger than life, and documentary can be as thrilling and moving as fiction, here's your film..." – Montreal Gazette

"Wonderful, transformative storytelling.." – Sundance Institute for Documentary Film

"Fast-moving, hugely enjoyable..." – LA Weekly

"An emotional journey..." – NY Daily News

"Amazing, provocative..." – angryasianman.com

AWARDS

Grand Jury Prize, Best Documentary Feature, LA Asian Pacific Film Festival

Audience Award, Best Documentary Feature, LA Asian Pacific Film Festival

Grand Jury Prize, Best Documentary Feature, San Diego Asian Film Festival

Grand Jury Prize, Best Documentary Feature, DC Asian Pacific Film Festival

Grand Jury Prize, Best Documentary Feature, Sandhills Film Festival

Audience Award, Best Feature, Asian American International Film Festival

Special Jury Award, Documentary, Ojai International Film Festival



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BIO

As a filmmaker, Christopher Wong seeks to highlight minority voices and stories, revealing ordinary people accomplishing extraordinary things. *WHATEVER IT TAKES* represents his feature-length debut as both director and producer.

Christopher Wong was a grant recipient of The Sundance Documentary Film Program in 2007, and a Fellow of Sundance's Story/Composer Lab in 2008. Recently, he was named as one of The Independent's "10 Filmmakers to Watch in 2009".

Currently, Christopher Wong is working on two other documentaries – one about television game show fans, and the second on a revolutionary Asian American pastor.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When I decided to start this film project, I wanted to show what could happen when a dedicated group of educators and students band together to create an environment of learning and achievement. Could change truly occur in a community ravaged by decades of poverty, neglect, and despair? By chronicling the entire first year of the Bronx Center for Science & Mathematics, I was fortunate to capture a rarely seen but genuine representation of the South Bronx, a place full of talented individuals born into hardship, but rising to excellence.

A secondary goal of this documentary was to examine the effectiveness of the newest trend in public school education: the "small schools movement". In theory, small schools pose an advantage over larger schools by offering greater personal attention, increased local control, higher expectations, and more parental involvement. By documenting the day-to-day experiences of the school's principal, teachers, and students, we observe on a larger scale both the inherent strengths and weaknesses of small schools.

Another important objective was to break certain racial and ethnic stereotypes that have long persisted in this country's media and culture. While low-income African American and Hispanic youth are often seen as incapable of succeeding in technical disciplines, this documentary provides strong evidence of these same youth thriving in both science and mathematics. Also, Asian American males have rarely, if ever, been shown as powerful and passionate individuals capable of promoting social change; in the main character, Principal Edward Tom, we see a charismatic, visionary Asian American man willing to sacrifice all in order to get his students on the road to college.



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CREDITS

Director/Producer – Christopher Wong
Executive Producer – Renee Tajima-Peña
DP/Co-Producer – Jillian Elizabeth
Editor/Co-Producer – Zebediah Smith
Co-Producer – W. Scott Lyon
Animation – Robin Steele
Original Score – iZLER
Production Company – Whatever It Takes Doc, LLC



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