

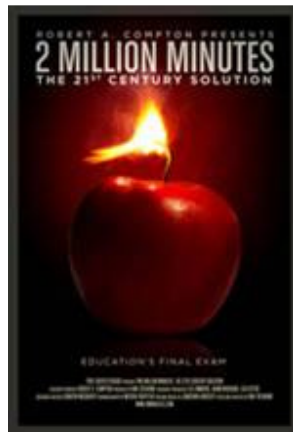
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Film holds Ariz. school as model for reform

Sequel to "Two Million Minutes" shines light on BASIS Charter School and its extraordinary record of student achievement

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Primary Topic Channel: [Global competitiveness](#) , [Instruction](#)



"Two Million Minutes: The 21st Century Solution" showcases the achievements of an Arizona charter school.

Leaders in education gathered Sept. 17 to discuss the future of American education and screen a documentary highlighting an exemplary charter school in Arizona, which filmmaker Bob Compton said holds the solution to the country's education problems.

"We're beyond education reform. We need an education revolution," Compton said.

The event also featured commentary from the Rev. Al Sharpton and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who are embarking on a tour around the country with Education Secretary Arne Duncan to highlight the Obama administration's efforts to reform public education, spur innovation, and discuss the challenges facing America's schools.

"I approach education reform from a civil rights point of view. I think the civil rights issue of the 21st century is education reform. I think the problem of ... inequality in education is an urgent matter," Sharpton said.

Gingrich agreed, adding that policy makers must convince people that education reform is important in light of new global challenges.

"We're going to try to convince people that there are solutions that will really work. And we're going to try to convince people that it is their duty as citizens, as parents, as members of the community, to get this to really work," he said. "We are not going to succeed in the world market with the current level of learning."

The film, "Two Million Minutes: The 21st Century Solution," showcased the accomplishments of BASIS Charter School, which has locations in Tucson and Scottsdale, Ariz. The film was a sequel to Compton's 2007 film, "Two Million Minutes -- A Global Examination."

The first film, which followed two students at schools in the United States, India, and China, found that American students were years behind Asian students academically. (See story [here](#).) Further research brought Compton to BASIS, where he said he found a school that teaches "ordinary" students at an extraordinarily high academic level.

"I was shocked to find what I consider to be the world's best high school in one of the poorest parts of America," Compton said. "The school is educating its students at a level that is globally competitive and preparing them to compete in the 21st-century economy."

The school was created by Michael and Olga Block in 1997 when they decided that the U.S. education system wasn't reaching its full potential.

"The average student gets a very poor education, even in suburban schools. There's only a few schools around the country that really have a superb education," Michael Block said in the film.

"The American K-12 system is very disorganized. It has a very good safety net for the kids [who] are somehow disadvantaged--language learning disability, anything like that. It actually has a very good system for the gifted kids, I thought at that time. But there's nothing for the normal kids in the middle. Those are destined to be mediocre, because nobody really cares about them, nobody challenges [them], and nobody teaches them responsibility," Olga Block said in the film. "That was [when] we decided that we would create our own school."

At BASIS, the curriculum is centered on the College Board's AP program in all core subjects. Students are not just offered random collections of AP courses, but an AP program that starts in fifth grade and culminates in 11th grade. Students meet state requirements to graduate after 11th grade, but many choose to stay on for one more year.

"Most of my students will not consider leaving at the end of 11th grade, they're ready [for] the 12th-grade program," said Carolyn McGarvey, schools director.

BASIS also focuses not only on teacher quality, but also on paying teachers a solid salary based on their performance--with a majority of the school's money going toward teachers' salaries, according to Olga Block.

"It's much more important to have the right teacher in the right place, and I'm perfectly willing to pay what it takes to have that right person there," she said, adding that teachers are paid on the quality of their work. Teachers "need to feel comfortable with the fact that you will be paid based on how well you are doing, and that is very unusual in education."

For example, BASIS has a system where teachers are paid a bonus depending on how well their students do on their AP exams, with teachers receiving \$100 for every score of 5 and \$50 for every score of 4 that their students get.

"They are not doing it for this money, but when their kids succeed and then they get this check, it really does verify that we really do value what they did," Olga Block said.

In 2003, the Blocks opened a second school in Scottsdale, which also has seen success.

"We have extremely similar results in both schools. But now, when it's established, I honestly believe that I can take this program into any framework," Olga Block said.

All of the education experts interviewed in Compton's film agreed that American children have the ability to improve their overall performance in school.

"I think that the children in the United States are capable of so much more than we ask of them. They are incredibly smart. They are so smart that they see exactly how high you set the bar, and that's about all they're willing to go normally," said former Intel Chairman Craig Barrett, adding that if the standards are increased, students will meet them:

"We've just been afraid as a society to raise the level of expectation. These kids could do it. Kids at BASIS [Charter] School are taking on high school [courses]. They're doing it in middle school. Those are not specially selected kids. It's the same demographics as the rest of the universe. Why don't we just accept that they can do it, and accept that as a society we need them to do it if we want to be competitive?"

Links:

[Two Million Minutes](#)

[BASIS Tucson](#)

[BASIS Scottsdale](#)

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