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September 9, 2010

MOVIE REVIEW | 'RACE TO NOWHERE'

The Overscheduled Child

By JEANNETTE CATSOULIS

In “Race to Nowhere,” the first-time filmmaker Vicki Abeles tries to condense a Hydra-headed problem — America’s overstressed, overscheduled, overcompetitive school kids — into a single, clear narrative. The bad news is that she doesn’t entirely succeed; the good news is that she and her co-director, Jessica Congdon, admirably convey the complexity of the issue with considerably more compassion than prescription.

Spurred by the medical and emotional problems of her own three children, Ms. Abeles embarked on a deeply personal inquiry into the insanely hectic lives of too many of our offspring. Rushing from class to sports practice, from community work to homework, and relying increasingly on stimulants and sleep deprivation, these kids seem more pressured than the average C.E.O. Documenting consequences that range from depression to eating disorders to suicide, the film’s medical professionals share Ms. Abeles’s alarm and her awareness that blame, if it exists, is systemic and with little current incentive to change.

Packed with educators, parents, authors and articulate youngsters, “Race to Nowhere” reaches out to children hounded by a confluence of circumstances: parental fears of a disappearing middle class; an emphasis on unrealistic performance standards (the bell curve is not a fantasy); a teach-to-the-test curriculum that favors memorization over critical thinking; and the competitiveness of college entrance requirements. (Interestingly, the social pressures of adolescence are barely addressed.)

“We all have to get off this treadmill together,” says the author and adolescent-medicine specialist Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg, and the [film’s Web site \(racetonowhere.com\)](http://racetonowhere.com) is keen to assist. Like the makers of the excellent high-school-based [MTV](#) reality series, “If You Really Knew Me,” Ms. Abeles believes that benevolent intervention is an adult’s most powerful tool.

“Race to Nowhere” is rated PG-13 (Parents strongly cautioned). Pills, plagiarism and parental bereavement.

RACE TO NOWHERE

Opens on Friday in New York and Los Angeles.

Directed by Vicki Abeles and Jessica Congdon; written by Ms. Congdon and Maimone Attia; directors of photography, Mr. Attia and Sophie Constantinou; edited by Ms. Congdon; music by Mark Adler; produced by Ms. Abeles. At the IFC Center, 323 Avenue of the Americas, at Third Street, Greenwich Village. In English and Spanish, with English subtitles. Running time: 1 hour 25 minutes.