

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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For downloadable images, visit [pbs.org/pressroom](http://pbs.org/pressroom)

For the program companion website, visit [pbs.org/independentlens/whatever-it-takes](http://pbs.org/independentlens/whatever-it-takes)

**WHATEVER IT TAKES TO AIR NATIONALLY ON THE PBS SERIES  
INDEPENDENT LENS ON TUESDAY, MARCH 30, 2010 AT 10 PM**

***Film Offers Inside Look at the First Year of a South Bronx Public High School***

(San Francisco, CA)—Christopher Wong’s *Whatever It Takes* offers a fascinating inside look at the first year of the Bronx Center for Science and Mathematics (BCSM), a small public high school in the South Bronx headed by the idealistic Principal Edward Tom, an Asian American man who gave up a lucrative position as an executive with Saks Fifth Avenue for the underpaid, supremely challenging career as an educator in the inner city. The film airs nationally on the Emmy® award winning series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Maggie Gyllenhaal, on Tuesday, March 30, 2010 at 10 PM (check local listings).

The film begins on the school’s opening day as a sea of young African American and Latino students listen as Principal Tom sets the stakes high: “*People who look like you and me... they’re gonna expect excuses from us. And we can’t give the world excuses... I looked at every one of your parents and said ‘100% of your children will have the choice to attend college in four years.’*”

At the start of the year, students respond positively to the school’s potent mixture of tough love and high expectations. Banners in the hallway trumpet the school’s values – Honor, Excellence, Service — and students appear to wholeheartedly embrace BCSM’s smaller (and safer) learning environment, a welcome change from the gang violence and metal detectors so prevalent at many of the students’ former schools.



***Scenes from Whatever It Takes, coming to Independent Lens March 2010.***

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Change is what Principal Tom's life is all about. Since leaving the business world, he has totally committed himself to impacting the lives of low-income, minority children. At any given moment, you'll find him tutoring students in math, pleading with a gang member to come to school, or patrolling the streets to keep his kids safe.

Midway through the school year, however, Principal Tom's ideals run up against reality: over half his students are failing, detention hall is overflowing, and a near riot breaks out when the principal punishes the entire school following a graffiti incident. While traditional, inner-city high schools, burdened with thousands of troubled students, accept high dropout rates as an unavoidable occurrence; the staff at BCSM maintains their determination to protect "our kids" from falling through the cracks.

Desperately at risk is Sharifea, a 14-year-old girl whose recovering crack-addict mother is laid up in bed most days, sick and depressed. As a result, Sharifea acts as a surrogate mother to her two younger siblings. Cheerfully resilient, Sharifea latches onto dreams of becoming a pediatrician. However, lacking both the time and motivation to study, Sharifea soon receives Fs in all of her classes.

*Whatever It Takes* captures the efforts of Principal Tom and his staff to get Sharifea into a prestigious three-year summer college preparatory program at Dartmouth College. While Sharifea recognizes that this opportunity could change her life, tension builds as her poor grades threaten to disqualify her from participation. At the last hour, Sharifea's mother finally shows up for an emotional meeting with Principal Tom, in a last-ditch attempt to work out a solution.

Grittily realistic, yet ultimately triumphant, *Whatever It Takes* paints a compelling picture of cutting-edge ideas and dedicated individuals, united in their vision to restore hope to a broken community.

To learn more about the film and the issues involved, visit the companion website for *Whatever It Takes* at [www.pbs.org/independentlens/whatever-it-takes](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/whatever-it-takes). Get detailed information on the film, watch preview clips, read an interview with the filmmaker, and explore the subject in depth with links and resources. The site also features a Talkback section, where viewers can share their ideas and opinions.

## **About the Filmmakers**

### **Christopher Wong (Producer/Director)**

As a filmmaker, Christopher Wong seeks to highlight minority voices and stories, revealing ordinary people accomplishing extraordinary things. He 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 a feature-length documentary about television game show fans, and another short documentary on an Asian American pastor's quest to reconcile his conservative congregation with gay and lesbian Asian American Christians. *Whatever It Takes* represents his feature-length debut as both director and producer.

### **Renee Tajima-Peña (Executive Producer)**

Renee Tajima-Peña is an Academy Award®-nominated filmmaker (*Who Killed Vincent Chin?*) whose works have been broadcast around the world and premiered at the Cannes Film Festival, New Directors/New Films, Sundance Film Festival, and Toronto International Film Festival. Among other works, she directed the Sundance Film Festival award-winning *My America...or Honk if You Love Buddha*, and *Calavera Highway*, which aired on PBS's *P.O.V.* series in 2008.

Renee Tajima-Peña has twice been honored with Fellowships in Documentary Film from both the Rockefeller Foundation and the New York Foundation of the Arts. Born in Chicago and raised in Altadena, California, she graduated cum laude in East Asian studies and sociology from Harvard-Radcliffe College.

**About *Independent Lens***

*Independent Lens* is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 PM on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about a unique individual, community, or moment in history. Presented by the Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. Further information about the series is available at [www.pbs.org/independentlens](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens). *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS, and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen.

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