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Brad Mitchell Ms. Campbell ENG 101 01 October 2012 Waiting for ' Superman' The film " Waiting for Superman" follows five children as they have to struggle through a system of conflicting education regulations and avoid the academic pitfalls that are public schools in order to receive a proper education that may guarantee them a career. The film, directed by Davis Guggenheim, asserts the claim that Teachers' Unions are a main problem to public education, and that charter schools are the safest and most definite method to ensure that a student acquires a proper education. While the film was created with good intentions to improve the education of American students, it has been dismissed by most due to the film seeming to demonize Teachers' Unions and overly-praising charter school systems. Although public schools have indeed faltered since the 1970's, it does not mean that private schools and charter schools are the go-to solution. The truth is, public school systems have been proven to perform just as well as, if not better than, the charter schools that the film seemingly praises as a definitive solution. An article from The Washington Post by Rick Ayers talks about a survey run by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes, or CREDO, saying that it " concludes that only 17% of charter schools have better test scores than traditional public schools, 46% had gains that were no different than their public counterparts, and 37% were significantly worse." (Ayers.) Another popular argument that the film expresses is that the Teachers' Unions should be reformed because the regulations that the unions created make it nearly impossible to fire a bad teacher. Although Teachers' Unions do have room for improvement, throughout history and across the globe the unions have done more good than harm. The American

Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association were created to abolish the discriminatory pay rates between male and female teachers, and to establish a firm group to ensure that changes to school systems would not be made without representation and that teachers as a whole would not get the short end of the stick. "Waiting for Superman" highlights Finland as having one of the best school systems in the world, while in fact ninety-percent of the Finnish labor force is operated by unions. Dana Goldstein wrote in an article for The Nation: You also don't learn that in the Finnish education system, much cited in the film as the best in the world, teachers are—gasp!—unionized and granted tenure, and families benefit from a cradle-to-grave social welfare system that includes universal daycare, preschool and healthcare, all of which are proven to help children achieve better results at school. (Goldstein.) The film also continuously bashes tenure as 'good idea turned horribly wrong', saying that it allows bad teachers to sit in class and do nothing to teach their students without risk of being fired. Tenure was created to ensure that university professors would not be fired for political reasons or when there was a change in administration. When it branched out to public schools, tenure protected every teacher from being replaced due to absurd reasons like race, religion, or sexual preference. Several surveys have shown that most principals say they would indeed have the authority to fire a terrible teacher if the need arises. The other main point that "Waiting for Superman" argues about is the funding of public schools versus the funding of charter schools. Public schools are federally funded, meaning that decisions made concerning the school and its administration are made by the state, which fall under a set of federal

regulations. Charter schools, however, are privately funded, originally by parents and teachers who were committed enough to start a school under their brand of administration and regulations, as time went on, though, more people created their own charter schools mainly for the purpose of gaining more money from applicants and showing little care for the education of students, if only to keep their charter school operating. "Waiting for Superman" has received both positive and negative reviews since its debut in September 2010. Many critics say that the film is little more than charter school propaganda. While it may seem that way, especially with all the accusations of statistical inaccuracy, the film should not be completely ignored. Davis Guggenheim has fulfilled the purpose of the movie by raising awareness about the quality of public education, and alerting the public to the mess that is the work of Teachers' Unions and theirs' and the governments' conflicting regulations. The United States government and the people of the public must work together and reform and improve the nation's education system for the benefit of their children in the short run, and for the benefit of their nation in the long run. Works Cited Dana Goldstein. "Grading 'Waiting for Superman'." The Nation. 23 September 2010. The Nation. 20 September 2012. . Rick Ayers. "The Answer Sheet." The Washington Post. 27 September 2010. The Washington Post. 20 September 2012. . fairest. "The Real Facts About 'Waiting for Superman'." FairTest. 29 September 2010. n. p. 20 September 2012. .