



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**CONTACT**

Lisa Tawil, ITVS	415-356-8383	<a href="mailto:lisa_tawil@itvs.org">lisa_tawil@itvs.org</a>
Mary Lugo	770-623-8190	<a href="mailto:lugo@negia.net">lugo@negia.net</a>
Cara White	843-881-1480	<a href="mailto:cara.white@mac.com">cara.white@mac.com</a>

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

***The Bad Kids* Premieres on *Independent Lens*  
Monday, March 20, 2017 on PBS**

**Online Streaming Begins March 21**

**Film About Alternative High School Offering At-Risk Students One Last  
Chance for Diploma Is Part of the public media initiative,  
American Graduate**



*Jennifer with her niece.*  
Credit: Low Key Pictures

(San Francisco, CA) — Located in an isolated and impoverished Mojave Desert community, Black Rock Continuation High School is one of California's alternative schools for at-risk students. Every student there has fallen so far behind that they have no hope of earning a diploma at a traditional high school — Black Rock is their last chance. But Principal Vonda Viland and the teachers at Black Rock are on a mission to realize the potential of students who have been deemed lost causes by the system. Powerful and inspiring, ***The Bad Kids*** follows Viland and her staff over a year as they coach at-risk students with compassion, respect, and a seemingly endless supply of patience. The film focuses on three students — Lee, a new father who can't support his family; Jennifer, a young woman grappling with sexual

abuse; and Joey, an angry young man from an unstable home — as they work through the traumas and obstacles that rob them of their spirit and threaten their futures.

The film is part of [American Graduate: Let's Make it Happen](#), public media's initiative made possible by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to help communities solve the high school graduation challenge and prepare all students for college and careers. Winner of the 2016 Sundance Film Festival Special Jury Award for Vérité Filmmaking, *The Bad Kids* premieres on *Independent Lens* Monday, March 20, 2017, 10:00-11:30 PM ET ([check local listings](#)) on PBS.

When filmmakers Keith Fulton and Lou Pepe first stepped through the doors of Black Rock High on a scouting trip for another film, they were impressed. "What we saw there left an indelible mark," said Fulton and Pepe. "Here was a principal who had a kind word or nod of recognition for



1435 Folsom Street  
San Francisco CA 94103  
T. 415 356 8383  
F. 415 356 8391  
[pbs.org/independentlens](https://pbs.org/independentlens)

each and every kid; a secretary who spent all day on the phone with parents; teachers who didn't lecture but moved through their classrooms in quiet consultation with each student. And these supposed 'bad kids' lining the hallways with their guitars, their laughter, and their clear and familial support for one another. All of this at a *public school* — with rising graduation rates."

Black Rock High School demonstrates how education can combat the crippling effects of poverty on the lives of at-risk youth. For Viland and her staff, coping with the traumas her students suffer in their home lives takes precedence over force-feeding them facts and figures.

At Black Rock, educators know it might be necessary to focus an entire year just on keeping a student in school while trying to understand the challenges they face before expecting academic progress. Realistic preparations for the work force and life's responsibilities outweigh planning for higher education: these students can pursue a college education only if they first know how to support themselves.

*The Bad Kids* is not a story of triumph against all odds, because that isn't the reality of these students' lives or expectations. It is a story of taking achievable steps toward pride and a better future.

Visit [The Bad Kids](#) page on *Independent Lens*, which features more information about the film. *The Bad Kids* will be available for online viewing on the site beginning March 21, 2017. The film is also part of [Indie Lens Pop-Up](#), the national screening series that offers pre-broadcast sneak previews and discussions of *Independent Lens* documentaries in over 75 cities.

## Subjects

**Vonda Viland** is principal of Black Rock High School. A former Minnesota farm girl whose grandmother ran a one-room schoolhouse, Viland runs Black Rock similarly: she knows the lives, strengths, and challenges of each of her 120 students. Her philosophy embodies empathy and realism, and given Black Rock's rising graduation rate, it seems to be working. In 2015, Viland led the effort to get Black Rock recognized as a California Model Continuation High School, a status that makes it an exemplar for similar schools throughout the state. To Viland, the work is not just about her own students but an entire nation of children whose educations and futures are threatened by the effects of poverty.

**Jennifer** appears to be a model student: smart, focused, and on top of it all. She exhibits the ease of a "popular" kid and chats with fellow students about her plans to get a nursing degree. But at 13 she ran away to Las Vegas with her boyfriend, and was eventually tracked down and brought back by her grandmother. Now that she's at Black Rock, she wants to leave her troublesome past behind.

**Joey** is a teenage boy who wanders the halls of Black Rock with his guitar, playing the blues for anyone who will listen. Although he's smart and talented, Joey can't manage to get any work

done or even get to school on most days. His problems stem from his home life.

**Lee** is 18 years old and the father of a young son. Lee and his girlfriend have no car, no jobs, and no income for an apartment, so they shuttle back-and-forth between their parents' houses as they work toward their diplomas. With more than a year's worth of credits needed to graduate, Lee is naïve about the challenges fatherhood has in store for him.

### About the Filmmakers

**Keith Fulton (Producer/Director/Sound)** and **Lou Pepe (Director/Cinematographer)** are directors of both documentary and fiction films, among them *Lost in La Mancha*, shortlisted for the Academy Award for Best Documentary, 2002, and *Brothers of the Head*, winner of the Michael Powell Award for Best British Feature, 2006. Fulton and Pepe both hold MFAs in Radio-TV-Film from Temple University. They are alumni of the Sundance Institute's Writing and Directing Labs.

As Low Key Pictures, they have received documentary commissions from the Gates and Participant Foundations to create documentary programming about public education. They are the authors of numerous screenplays, and the creators of *Malkovich's Mail*, an original documentary special for AMC.

### CREDITS

Directed by	Keith Fulton & Lou Pepe
Produced by	Keith Fulton
Director of Photography	Lou Pepe
Edited by	Jacob Bricca Mary Lampson
Original Score by	Jacaszek
Executive Producers	Ted Dintersmith Donna Gruneich & Kevin Gruneich Ari Ioannides & Christine Ioannides
Co-Producer	Molly O'Brien
Associates Producers	Nancy Blachman Anne O'Shea & Brian Quattrini

A Low Key Pictures Production  
In association with The Filmmaker Fund

### About *Independent Lens*

*Independent Lens* is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 PM. The acclaimed series, with Lois Vossen as executive producer, features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by ITVS, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public



Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. For more visit [pbs.org/independentlens](http://pbs.org/independentlens). Join the conversation: [facebook.com/independentlens](https://facebook.com/independentlens) and on Twitter [@IndependentLens](https://twitter.com/IndependentLens).

#### **About American Graduate**

[American Graduate: Let's Make it Happen](#) was launched in 2011 with 25 public media stations in high need communities to spotlight the high school dropout crisis. Today, more than 125 public radio and television stations in over 48 states have partnered with over 1,700 community organizations and schools, as well as Alma and Colin Powell's America's Promise Alliance, Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University School of Education, Alliance for Excellent Education, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Newman's Own Foundation. With primetime and children's programming that educates, informs and inspires, public radio and television stations are important resources in helping to address critical issues facing today's communities. According to a report from the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University School of Education, American Graduate stations have told the story about the dropout crisis in a way that empowered citizens to get involved, and helped community organizations break down silos to work more effectively together.

#### **About CPB**

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private, nonprofit corporation created by Congress in 1967, is the steward of the federal government's investment in public broadcasting. It helps support the operations of nearly 1,500 locally owned and operated public television and radio stations nationwide. CPB is also the largest single source of funding for research, technology and program development for public radio, television and related online services. For more information, visit [cpb.org](http://cpb.org) and follow us on Twitter [@CPBmedia](https://twitter.com/CPBmedia), [Facebook](https://facebook.com/CPBmedia) and [LinkedIn](https://linkedin.com/company/cpb).

###



1435 Folsom Street  
San Francisco CA 94103  
T. 415 356 8383  
F. 415 356 8391  
[pbs.org/independentlens](http://pbs.org/independentlens)