

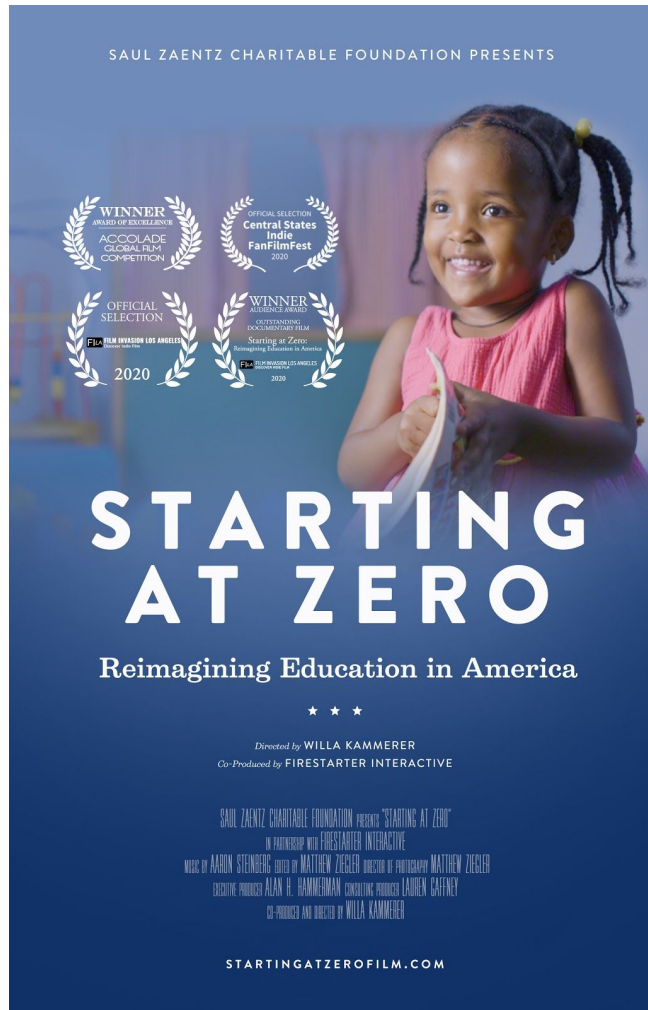


THE SAUL ZAENTZ
CHARITABLE FOUNDATION



Presents

STARTING AT ZERO



Special Event Virtual Premiere on August 12, 2020

*****Accolade Global Film Competition Award of Excellence***
*****Film Invasion Los Angeles Official Selection 2020***
*****Film Invasion Los Angeles Audience Choice Award for Outstanding Documentary Film***
*****Official Selection Central States Indie FanFilm Fest 2020***********

RT: 63 minutes

www.startingatzerofilm.com

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[Press Materials](#)

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LOGLINE

Starting at Zero explores the power of investing in high-quality early childhood education so that all children and families have the opportunity to attain the American Dream.

SYNOPSIS

Starting at Zero explores the power of investing in high-quality early childhood education so that all children and families have the opportunity to attain the American Dream.

The film brings together the voices of policymakers, educators, academics, business leaders, pediatricians, parents, and children. It features five current and past governors who are champions of early childhood education: Governors Steve Bullock of Montana, Kay Ivey of Alabama, and Ralph Northam of Virginia, as well as former Governors Jim Hunt of North Carolina, and Phil Bryant of Mississippi.

Starting at Zero examines the latest developmental brain science to demonstrate how essential the earliest years of learning are to maximize human potential. Key features of high-quality early childhood

learning environments and experiences are outlined and then brought to life as the film delves into the evolution of Alabama's #1 nationally ranked state Pre-K program.

Starting at Zero culminates with a call to governors across America for collective action: to set our nation on the path to future success through significant investments in high-quality early childhood education, both to support today's workforce, and to build the workforce of tomorrow. At the heart of the film is the affirmation that if children are given the opportunity to thrive in settings with caring, responsive adults, the returns to our society will be deep and long-lasting.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When I embarked on this project with the Saul Zaentz Charitable Foundation back in 2017, we did not set out to produce a feature-length documentary on early childhood education. We were interested in how the state of Alabama had consistently achieved the #1 nationally ranked state pre-K program, and wanted to create a playbook for how other states could establish similar programs in their own states. But once we started interviewing Secretary of Early Childhood Education Jeana Ross and other program leaders in Montgomery, we realized there was so much more to the story—that it had roots in North Carolina, Georgia, and Mississippi, and other threads in Oklahoma and Montana, Chicago and Omaha, and beyond.

Before we knew it, we'd traveled around the country pursuing this question of "what is high quality" in early childhood education? Also, how do you accomplish it, and why is it so critical to our nation's current and future success? Along our journey, we interviewed policymakers, educators, academics, business leaders, pediatricians, parents, and children—in rural and urban settings, red states and blue. The landscape of early childhood education in the United States is fragmented, but across this diversity of perspectives, we discovered so much commonality—a collective understanding of the importance of high-quality early learning, how to accomplish it, and sense of urgency to act. These conversations and shared themes became the backbone of *Starting at Zero*.

In a time when our social issues run deep, and our stakes high, film is a powerful medium for bringing together the voices of individuals who may never otherwise have the opportunity to connect—and discover common ground. When approached with a mindset of listening, learning, and curiosity, it's clear that there's a lot more that unites us than divides us. We hope that *Starting at Zero* will indeed encourage "*Reimagining Education in America*," spark "aha" moments for our viewers, and drive collective action on early childhood education in states across the country. And that if we can rally around investing together in a hopeful future for children, families—and our nation—that we may begin to find common ground in other critical areas, as well.

It has been an honor and joy to partner with the Saul Zaentz Charitable Foundation on *Starting at Zero*. Of course, this film would not have been possible without the talent and great collaborative effort of our team, to whom I am deeply grateful: Executive Producer Alan H. Hammerman, Firestarter Interactive's

Consulting Producer Lauren Gaffney, Director of Photography and Editor Matthew Ziegler, Associate Producer Annie Glidden, Assistant Cameramen Jake DeNicola and Alexander Sutula, Designer David Miller, and Music Composer Aaron Steinberg, as well as the organizations and individuals who believed in this work and helped guide its evolution. It's taken a village, and we could not have brought this vision to life without everyone's contributions. We view the film's launch not punctuation mark, but only the beginning of a shared conversation. Deep in my DNA I believe in the power of storytelling to help bridge the gap between the world as it is, and as we want and dream it can be, and hope to continue to tell stories and produce films to nurture that transformation.

— Willa Kammerer

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Saul Zaentz Charitable Foundation, Producer

Saul Zaentz was a media entrepreneur in the music and film industry. He built the largest independent jazz record label in the world, Fantasy Records and, through the Saul Zaentz Company, became a prominent independent film producer. His creative activities in film resulted in 34 Academy Award nominations, the award of 22 Hollywood Oscars for those involved in the filmmaking process, including three for Best Picture. Zaentz's renowned works include the films *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Amadeus*, *The English Patient* and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Mr. Zaentz died in 2014.

Founded in 1997, the [Saul Zaentz Charitable Foundation](#) works to improve outcomes for poor and vulnerable minority citizens in the United States. The Foundation is deeply committed to creating standards of fairness and a level playing field for those living in poverty and adversity by supporting equal treatment through high-quality early childhood learning and improving K-12 and college graduation rates. In this regard, the Foundation supports innovations in scientific teaching methods and best practices. *Starting at Zero* is Foundation's second documentary film focused on early learning. Learn more about the first film, [Tomorrow's Hope: The Promise of Early Childhood Education](#).

Willa Kammerer, Director

Willa Kammerer is a documentary director and producer based in Providence, RI, and runs the creative agency [Firestarter Interactive](#). Willa is committed to using film and storytelling to improve the wellbeing of people and the planet, and has deep experience working with education institutions, nonprofits, and foundations to bring this vision to life. Willa began her career as an intern in public radio, studied radio storytelling at the Salt Institute for Documentary Studies, and holds a B.A. in Italian from Middlebury College, as well as professional certificates from Georgetown University in Social Impact Storytelling and Social Impact Partnership Design. She is also a graduate of Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses. *Starting at Zero* is her first feature-length documentary.

Firestarter Interactive, Co-Producer

Starting at Zero was directed by Willa Kammerer and co-produced with the support of her team, Firestarter Interactive. Firestarter is committed to using film and storytelling to improve the wellbeing of people and the planet, and has deep experience working with education institutions, nonprofits, and foundations to bring this vision to life. *Starting at Zero* is the team's first feature-length documentary.

Alan "Mickey" Hammerman, Executive Producer

Mickey Hammerman has always been a strong proponent of early education and is committed to improving and expanding early childhood education. Through his work as President of the Saul Zaentz Charitable Foundation, he hopes to make a transformative impact on how children learn, and create future opportunities for all children to learn and thrive.

As an attorney, now retired, Mickey and Saul Zaentz met in the 1970's, and Mickey became Saul's personal attorney, and in turn, his life-long friend. Mickey was honored when he was chosen by Saul to represent the Saul Zaentz Charitable Foundation, and he is devoted to recognizing Saul's generosity and commitment to helping others, through the support provided by the Saul Zaentz Charitable Foundation.

Mickey is a longtime member and contributor to the Harvard Community, and is the recipient of many awards and recognitions for his community service.

END CREDITS

**Produced by Saul Zaentz Charitable Foundation
in Partnership with Firestarter Interactive**

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Falco Ink

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Former Governor of North Carolina

KAY IVEY
Governor of Alabama

RALPH and PAMELA NORTHAM
Governor and First Lady of Virginia

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Secretary, Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education

GREG CANFIELD
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Executive Director, Alabama School Readiness Alliance

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Regional Director, Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education

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Parent, Alabama First Class Pre-K & Community Liaison, Help Me Grow Alabama

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