

U.S. NEWS

Gates seeks plan for better teachers

By STEPHANIE BANCHERO

Bill Gates shook up the battle against AIDS in Africa by applying results-oriented business metrics to the effort. Now, he is trying to do the same in the tricky world of evaluating and compensating teachers.

The Microsoft Corp. co-founder has moved on from a \$2 billion bet on high school reform—much of it spent on breaking up big, failing high schools and replacing them with smaller ones.

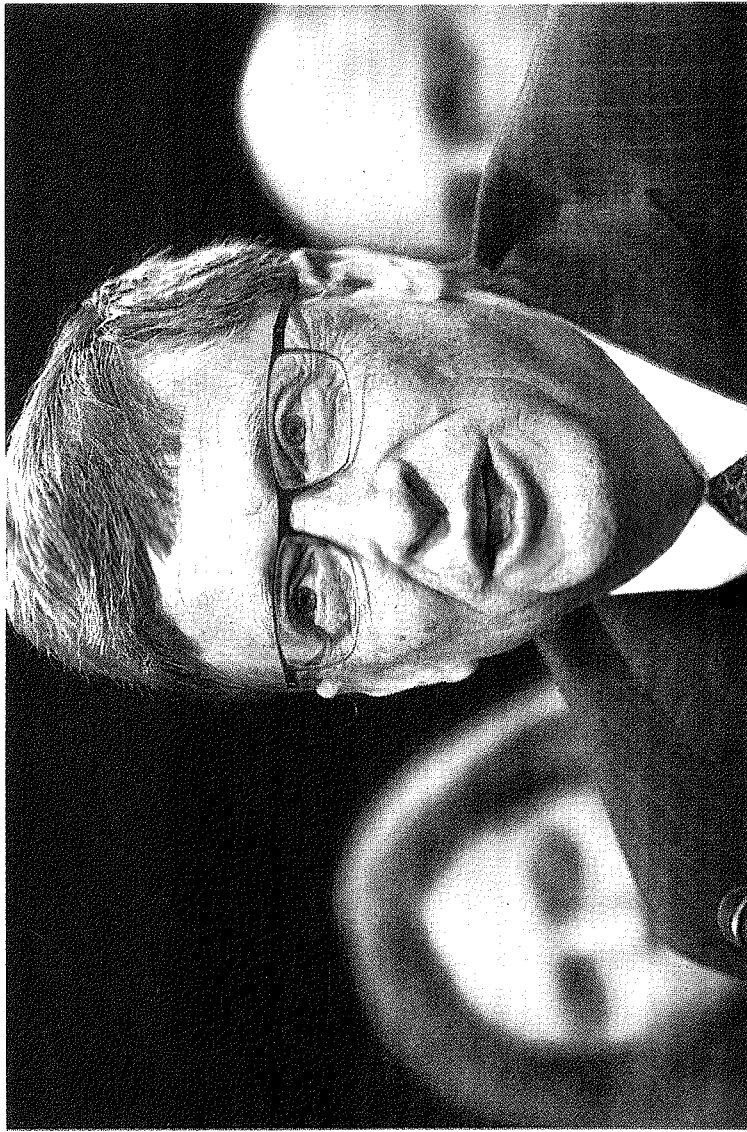
Now, he is venturing that improving teacher effectiveness is the key to fixing broken schools. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has awarded \$290 million to school districts in Memphis, Tenn., Hillsborough, Fla., and Pittsburgh, to build new personnel systems Mr. Gates hopes will be models for the country.

Mr. Gates has been touring the U.S., urging politicians and educators to eliminate teacher salary increases based on seniority and master's degrees and reward teachers for raising student achievement.

In a recent interview with The Wall Street Journal, Mr. Gates said the U.S. spent a "mind blowing" amount of money on education. Still, he said higher taxes and changes in budgets were needed to substantially improve U.S. graduation rates.

Q: What do you think state fights over collective bargaining mean for education reform?

A: I think the whole budget environment we're in is unfortunate be-



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cause it will both reduce funding for education and distract a lot from improved ways of spending. If you're putting in a new personnel system that rewards great teaching, rewards teachers who help other teachers be better, you're going to need good collaboration between the teachers and the principals, the superintendents, the administrative people.

Q: Some reformers think teacher unions are the obstacle and it's more expedient to work around them.

A: In some of these systems, there's a huge emphasis on the teachers who should be let go, and that's an element of a personnel system. But the bigger impact actually

comes in professions where a personnel system helps raise the average up of the people who stay.

Q: Do you think it is possible for school districts to build great teachers?

A: Absolutely. But the amount of research into what great teachers do has been so slow that you can't

make huge improvements in the average....Even professions like long-jump or tackling people on a [n] [American] football field or hitting a baseball, the average ability is so much higher today because there's this great feedback system, measurement system.

Q: You've said you do not think it is wise to cut K-12 budgets now.

A: I think that society has to be careful not to shift all of its resources to the elderly versus the young. I get very concerned when people talk about cutting education budgets.

Q: Do we need to increase taxes to spend more on education?

A: The only way to make the overall equation work involves some increased taxation and some cuts in spending in various categories, including the miracle of not having medical costs go up so much faster than GDP [gross domestic product] growth. There are a lot of challenges here to make the numbers work.

Q: What is the boldest effort that has come from the \$290 million you've awarded to restructure teacher personnel systems?

A: We video a great teacher and then she watches it and comments on her video, saying, "that kid's foot is jerking. I'm not making this interesting enough." Just the narrative of a great teacher talking through what she did right, what she could have done better, is so informative.