

## INNOVATION, FUNDING MAKE BETTER TEACHERS

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The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has invested more than \$21 billion to fight hunger, disease and poverty around the world. In the United States, the foundation's major emphasis has been on education, and that commitment is entering a new phase with \$335 million in grants to explore better ways to evaluate, train and retain effective teachers.

This funding is important, but it isn't the only critical ingredient that the Gates Foundation brings to the table. At a time when our political process seems to be increasingly driven by conflict, the foundation provides a different model for working on policy issues: collaboration.

The Gates Foundation believes that effective teachers are the most important factor in a successful school, and many people agree. Because the foundation is not ideological, it is able to persuade interested parties to work together even though they might not see eye to eye on every issue. Using funding as leverage, the Gates initiative asked educators, administrators and school board officials to share ideas and find common ground about better ways to evaluate, train and compensate teachers.

Through this collaborative process, teams from 10 school districts created proposals for the Intensive Partnership for Effective Teaching grants. The winning proposals are more nuanced than the simple "yes or no" answers that usually dominate political debate about education.

For example, the idea of linking teacher pay to student achievement has been around for a while, and it appeals to many people. After all, why shouldn't teachers earn more when their students learn more? Underlying this idea, however, is an assumption that many teachers could do better work if only they wanted to, and that a little bit more money would motivate them to do so.

Educators and administrators in Hillsborough County knew that this assumption wasn't true. They also knew that simply paying bonuses based on test scores did nothing to improve student achievement, because such a program was already in place.

So Hillsborough County proposed a system that will look at many indicators of student achievement, not just test scores, and consider all of them in the evaluation of teachers. The opinions of teaching colleagues will be weighed, as well as principals. And rather than simply paying bonuses for performance, the county is creating a career ladder that allows teachers to move to different levels based on overall performance. The local teachers union was involved at every step in developing this process.

The Gates Foundation will invest \$100 million for Hillsborough County to put this system in place. Similar grants were awarded to schools in Memphis and Pittsburgh, and to groups that operate charter schools in Los

Angeles. Once these systems are implemented, educators and administrators will be able to see what does or does not affect the bottom line: student achievement.

The foundation is also investing \$45 million on research involving 3,700 teachers across the nation to determine how effective teaching can best be measured. All of this knowledge will be valuable, especially because it will be the result of a collaborative process.

The Gates Foundation has even awarded \$358,000 to the NEA Foundation to plan a new Institute for Local Innovation in Teaching and Learning. This is an acknowledgement that local education unions across the nation are leading the way in innovation to improve struggling schools.

Plain and simple, the status quo is not acceptable. The world has changed, and we need a different system. By building mutual respect and trust in the process, the Gates Foundation has ensured trust in the results. And by requiring collaboration, it has laid the groundwork for dramatically increasing teacher quality and student achievement, and transforming the lives of hundreds of thousands of students.

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