

Education—Gates Scholarships

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Gates Is Pledging \$1 Billion AI For Minority Scholarships

By SAM HOWE VERHOVEK

SEATTLE, Sept. 15 — In by far his biggest philanthropic commitment to date, William H. Gates 3d, the co-founder and chairman of the Microsoft Corporation, is pledging at least \$1 billion to pay for full scholarships over the next 20 years for minority students in the fields of education, math, science and engineering.

The program, which Mr. Gates and officials at his philanthropic foundation plan to formally announce here on Thursday, will seek to help a minimum of 1,000 high school students a year, promising them enough money to cover tuition, room and board and other expenses through college and any graduate degrees that they pursue.

The \$1 billion program is one of the largest philanthropic donations in history to a specific cause, matching a commitment in 1997 by Ted Turner, the founder of CNN, to donate a similar amount to United Nations causes over the next decade, according to several experts on philanthropy. Funds for Mr. Gates's new program would come from existing money in the foundation.

The programs will also constitute the largest single scholarship fund

aimed at closing the gap between the rates at which whites and some racial minorities attain advanced degrees in math and science.

While the program, called the Gates Millennium Scholarships, will be open to all racial minorities, it will be especially aimed at black, Hispanic and American Indian students.

Aside from the impact of the program itself, the gift also offers one of the first major indications of the priorities that Mr. Gates, the wealthiest person in the world, will set in his charitable giving. For all the publicity surrounding his wealth, relatively little is known about Mr. Gates's

political leanings, other than that he generally regards himself somewhat as a libertarian on some social issues.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which he and his wife established this year through the merging of other foundations of theirs and have financed with two large donations of Microsoft stock, has about \$17 billion in assets. That makes it the largest philanthropic foundation in the United States, and it is soon expected to become the largest such organization in the world.

Mr. and Mrs. Gates have already announced commitments of about \$200 million for work in developing and distributing vaccines for malaria, AIDS and other diseases. And they have pledged a similar amount to a program that will bring computers and Internet hookups to schools and libraries in poorer areas in North America.

The scholarship program marks Mr. Gates's first major commitment to financing scholarships for minorities in education, although he has repeatedly spoken of the need to get more minorities into science, medicine and high technology. He has also said he believes it is crucial to narrow the "digital divide," or the lower rates at which some racial groups are said to use computers or be able to access the Internet.

A foundation official today confirmed that an announcement of the scholarships would be made on Thursday. But Trevor Neilson, the foundation's spokesman, declined to discuss any details before Thursday's announcement, and aides to Mr. Gates said he would make no comment today either.

While never a particularly vociferous proponent of affirmative action, Mr. Gates has generally indicated his support for strategies to give minorities greater entree to higher education. And his father, William H. Gates Jr., the co-chairman of the Gates charitable foundation, donated

\$25,000 last year to the campaign to defeat a Washington State ballot measure to ban any preferential treatment for racial minorities in the state's hiring, contracting or school admission programs.

Despite that opposition, voters decisively passed the measure. Because Mr. Gates's scholarship program involves money from a private foundation, it is not subject to any of the prohibitions covered by the ballot initiative, although it could conceivably come under legal attack by opponents who might argue that preferential scholarships should not be allowed under Federal laws covering nonprofit charitable groups like the Gates foundation.

Mr. Gates has come under heavy criticism from some quarters for not giving away more of his wealth sooner. His critics have also suggested that recent gifts were part of a public relations campaign by Microsoft, whose image has been battered in the massive antitrust court battle now under way in Washington, D.C.

Whatever the motivations, officials involved in minority education said that Thursday's announcement would be a landmark in their field.

"This is simply a huge amount of money for scholarships," said Stacy Palmer, editor of The Chronicle of Philanthropy, a biweekly publication that covers nonprofit organizations and ranks their assets by size.

In the coming year only, the Millennium Scholarship Program will focus on promising students who are already in college.

Beginning in the fall of 2000, it will be opened specifically to high school seniors, who must have a 3.3 grade average and be nominated by a teacher or their school's principal. The students must also write an essay outlining their life goals and make a commitment to some form of community service.

For those selected, the Gates foundation will pledge to make up any difference in the cost of college between any other scholarships the students are receiving and the total cost of their education.

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The New York Times

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1999

New York Board Now Says 8,600 Wrongly Put in Summer School

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By RANDAL C. ARCHIBOLD

School officials yesterday revised the number of students mistakenly assigned to summer school upward to more than 8,600, but Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani and Board of Education officials argued that parents of those children should be grateful for the mix-up because the faltering children were given a chance at more schooling.

"If I were a parent of one of the children, I would say, 'Thank you for having the child in summer school' because the child got more education," the Mayor said at a City Hall news conference. "You got to understand, the alleged error is an error with the children at the lowest end of the score. In other words, they were children that had come very, very close to not making the, what was it, the 15th percentile. They are children who next year, when the standards are just a little bit higher, would not be promoted. So, these are children very much in need of additional educational help."

The Mayor, who had strongly pushed the summer school program

as a way of getting tough with failing students, spoke in response to questions about the revelations by Chancellor Rudy Crew that thousands of students in the third and sixth grades were erroneously required to attend summer school because of a scoring mistake by CTB/McGraw-Hill, the company based in Monterey, Calif., that designed the exam.

As a result of that error, hundreds of students were forced to change vacation plans or compelled to sit in often-sweltering classrooms. The board raised the figure of mistakenly assigned students yesterday to 8,668 — not the 2,000 to 3,000 first indicated by school officials.

And 3,492 of those mistakenly assigned students either never attended summer school or failed the second test. Citing a need for fairness, Dr. Crew said that all 3,492 would be promoted unless their parents requested that they not be.

The board tried to find a silver lining yesterday. Recalculating reading scores to compensate for the error showed that test scores last spring for the school system had sharply improved, not remained flat as was first reported.

The board said 48.5 percent, not 44.6 percent, scored at or above the national average. With the statistical adjustment that the board uses to allow for comparisons with previous years, the 1999 test improved 4.9 percentage points over 1998, the board said.

The initial test results, announced in June, were one of the grimmest chapters in the tenure of Chancellor Crew, who had put a high focus on literacy. Dr. Crew said at that time that he was determined "not to make excuses" and vowed to take strong action to overhaul the system.

Yesterday, many of those actions — from removing superintendents to

sending children to summer school — turned out to be based on erroneous figures. Dr. Crew said, however, that he would not reverse any of his personnel decisions, because they had been based on factors besides test scores, like leadership and management ability.

The news of the flawed scores, which testing company officials yesterday said affected eight other jurisdictions along with New York City, also showed the peril of relying on standardized tests to make high-stakes decisions.

"I see no reason even amidst the turbulence to abandon the standards," Dr. Crew said before a meeting of the Board of Education at its Brooklyn headquarters. "I don't think we made a mistake here at all."

David Taggart, the president of CTB/McGraw-Hill, his voice shaking, told Dr. Crew and the board that the company believed the new test results to be valid. "Maybe the word apology isn't enough," he said.

Dr. Crew, who agreed with the Mayor's assessment, said he would advance students who passed the spring exam, regardless of their summer school performance, though he would encourage the parents of borderline students to allow their children to be held back.

In an interview after the meeting, he said he wanted parents to think, "'I know my kid was wrongly placed

in summer school but, heck, I just know he or she is not doing well enough yet to handle the fourth grade.'"

Still, just one week into the new school year, he predicted confusion if many children are moved around.

None of the mistakenly assigned students have yet been notified.

The testing mistake elicited a range of emotion among school officials, parents and students who attended summer school. Some agreed with the Mayor, that any extra schooling could only be a benefit, while others complained about standardized tests and worried that the stress on children could only be unhealthy.

Indira Baptise, whose son, Colin Bunbury, was promoted to the fourth grade at P.S. 41 in Brooklyn after attending summer school there, said it so ignited an interest in reading that he goes to the library after school.

"I do not mind him doing the extra work, because he needed it," Ms. Baptise said.

But Maria Guzman, the mother of a third-grader who was left back, said she would be angry if it turns out he had improperly been sent to summer school. Not only did she cancel a trip to Puerto Rico, but she also decided not to let him go after summer school ended, as punishment for failing the reading exam.

Her son, Jose, repeating the third grade at P.S. 41, said being held back was "bad, terrible because we're repeating the same stuff over and

over."

There was confusion yesterday among administrators and parents about what the revised scores might mean. Yesterday, board officials said that of the 8,668 students who were assigned to summer school in error — 4,460 third graders and 4,208 sixth graders — 5,176 went to summer school and passed a second test. But 3,492, the board said, either never showed up for summer school or failed the second test by scoring below the 15th percentile on a national curve.

Those 3,492 — regardless of their absence from summer school or failing the test — will be promoted unless their parents request they not be, Dr. Crew said.

The mistake occurred through a miscalculation of the percentile score that showed how the students compared with a national sample.

Some teachers, who have pressed the board to use more than just a standardized test to decide which students are promoted, also felt that students were put through a needless exercise. Next year, under a board policy approved last week, administrators will rely heavily on standardized tests but will take into account a portfolio of students' classroom work as well as attendance. And the board for the first time is issuing guidelines for assessing classroom work.

Some principals said students should not be quick to celebrate if they in fact scored just above the threshold for summer school, because the bar was low to begin with.

The New York Times

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