

United States Program: Education Initiative

Our Challenge

Improving our education system is the most important thing we can do to create equity and opportunity in America. All young people—regardless of income or background—deserve access to a high-quality education that will help them reach their full potential. As a nation, we have a responsibility to ensure that they are prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary to lead successful and rewarding lives. Our economic and civic future depends on it.

Yet, our students are not receiving the education that they need. Many children start kindergarten already behind. Thirty percent of students do not graduate from high school on time. Many more never earn a college degree. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is committed to working with partners in communities throughout the country to transform our education system and improve the outlook for these students. Our investments are catalysts designed to foster innovative educational opportunities for our young people, spark public engagement, and create a seamless web of support for high-quality learning from a child's first years through college and the workplace.



Increasing Opportunities through Education

High Expectations and Performance

Our goal is to significantly increase the number of students—particularly low-income, Hispanic and African-American students—who graduate from high school ready for success.

The path towards achieving this goal starts with high expectations for students and schools, coupled with strong support, and ends with high performance. Students across America are showing it can be done—from overcoming enormous obstacles to becoming the first in their families to attend and complete college. They are demonstrating what is possible when we set higher expectations for our students and schools and motivate them to succeed. But more work remains to be done.

Start Ahead, Stay Ahead

The seeds of life's success are sown early. Research indicates that a child's first years are the most formative, leaving an indelible mark on a child's lifelong learning capacity. When kids start behind, they usually stay behind. We can and are changing this.

Our partnerships in early learning—focused exclusively in Washington State—are aimed at helping to ensure that all children start learning before they begin school and arrive at kindergarten ready to succeed. Unfortunately, more than half of the children who enter kindergarten in Washington state each year lack the skills educators believe they need to succeed in school. We work with public and private partners, including Thrive by Five: The Washington Early Learning Fund, to invest in promising models and statewide efforts to give every child high-quality early learning opportunities and the greatest chance at success in school and life. We have invested over \$5 million to date, and have committed to \$90 million over the next ten years.

Transforming High Schools

As a nation, we are failing to ensure that all students have the opportunity for a high-quality education. Every day, nearly 3,000 of America's students drop out of high school. The economic, civic, and personal consequences are enormous. Over the course of their lives, dropouts from a single year's graduating class cost the nation more than \$325 billion in lost wages, taxes, and productivity.

More than half of the students who do complete high school are not prepared for the challenges of college and work. Graduating from college pays lifelong dividends; college graduates make over \$1 million more during their lifetimes than high school dropouts. Studies indicate that while more than 80 percent of students want to go to college, fewer than half do. It is clear that we simply cannot afford to let any student not have access to the education that enables them to fulfill their dreams.

That is why the foundation has invested more than \$1.5 billion in the creation of high-quality, high-performing schools and systems, supporting more than 1,800 schools. Educators and innovators in those schools are rethinking how and what we teach our students, striving to support and produce high-achieving graduates who excel in college and in the workplace. Innovative school models use a strategic approach for improving high school structure and instruction that emphasizes academic rigor; challenging, relevant coursework; and personalized support. These models have shown success in boosting student achievement, high school graduation and college-going rates

We know transformation is possible. There is growing momentum and optimism behind high school reform. And we are making real progress. For the first time in two decades, the graduation rate has begun to slowly increase. In addition, more than 34 governors have committed to an "all students college ready" agenda, and half of all large urban districts have plans in place to improve their high schools.

Making College Possible

When barriers to college are removed through increased academic preparation, availability of information and support, and financial aid and scholarships, the rate of college admission and graduation for low-income students improves dramatically.

The foundation seeks to increase access to higher education by providing more than \$1 billion in scholarships and programs for promising students who do not have the financial means to attend college. The Gates Millennium Scholars program has created opportunities to help academically talented, low-income, and minority students continue their education; the Gates Cambridge Scholars program supports promising international graduate students; and the Washington State Achievers initiative works with Washington-area high schools to combine high school reform with scholarship opportunities.

The students and schools we have been privileged to support serve as a continued source of inspiration. Their determination and their achievements are creating a new generation with aspirations and expectations to succeed in college and beyond.

