

Meet the New Principal

by [W. Reid Cornwell](#)

The shiny new auditorium is filled to capacity. The audience is conspicuously silent. On the stage a glass and chrome podium awaits the speaker. In the background a state-of-the art, rear projection, theatre screen proclaims, "Welcome to The School of the Future."

A thin figure dressed in Khakis and blue oxford cloth shirt, sleeves rolled to the elbow, walks to the podium, taps and adjust his wireless microphone and say's, "May I have your attention."

The audience erupts in a cacophony of clapping, press shutters snapping, flashing of cameras and the mutterings of the attendees. The reflection of the camera flashes off his round glasses dance around the room as if a million fireflies have invaded.

The lone figure raises his arms to quiet the audience and after what seems to be an eternity there is silence. He says, "Students, parents, teachers, and guests welcome to the future." The roar of applauds is deafening and slowly returns to breathless silence. He continues, "I am your Principal and my name is Bill Gates!"

Far fetched you say. Consider this.

"Philadelphia on Thursday September 7, 2006 opened a public high school where students work on wireless laptops, teachers eschew traditional subjects for real-world topics and parents can track their child's work on the Internet."

"The school, which cost the school district \$63 million to build, is free and has no entrance exams. The 170 students in the inaugural ninth-grade class were selected by lottery from 1,500 applicants."

"Microsoft, motivated by a combination of altruism and self-interest, was closely involved in planning the school and providing its technology, said Mary Cullinane, group manager for the company's Partners in Learning program and the school's "technology architect." (Reuters)

Why would Bill Gates the richest man in the world take on a problem that has plagued the U.S for more than three decades? Why would he not go sit on a beach and enjoy his money instead of involving his company in a problem that is filled with political agendas, factional fighting, teachers Unions and angry parents.

Bill Gates has long been critical of the educational system. In a speech to his executives he said, " If the U.S. public education system was working at peak efficiency it could not supply the people to sustain a knowledge economy."

To many people's chagrin, he could not be more correct. This problem has been documented as far back as 1983 in "[A Nation at Risk](#) " and has been supported by commission after commission ever since. What is remarkable, is that every administration, regardless of party, has agreed? Despite this, Educational Testing Service reports that SAT scores hit a 31 year low. The U.S., for the first time in its history is no longer number one in the creation of new patents and discoveries.

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As a corporate executive [Bill Gates](#) understands that the people he needs to sustain Microsoft's dominance are not being produced in our schools.

There is perhaps a second reason. Colorado, where I live, is 39th in the nation for per pupil allocation of funds for education. This is reported to be \$7,200 dollars per year. The U.S. department of Education reports that approximately 45 million students are enrolled in public education. Do the math. If we take Colorado's expenditure per child and multiply it by the number

of students in the U.S. we get \$324,000,000,000, that's 324 billion dollars spent by the states, per year alone, and not counting Federal and private expenditures.

Is it possible that the numbers are sufficient to entice the world's most successful capitalist to be interested in education?

Microsoft already owns the lion's share of our workplace technologies. Their software is in our homes, telephones, refrigerators and personal computers. Do we want them to control how we educate our children? Unless we make a firm commitment to insure that our schools remain under public control.

The Principal of the school of the future will be Bill Gates.

[Information from *Encyclopædia Britannica* about Bill Gates](#)

[Information from *Encyclopædia Britannica* about Microsoft Corporation](#)