

Action Line

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Bill Gates, have I got a deal for you!

By Danny Westneat, *Seattle Times* staff columnist (reprinted with permission)

At Lakeside, Seattle's premier school, they say the graduates know better than anyone what makes the place so special. "Ask any alumnus what the best thing about Lakeside is," the school's brochure urges, "and they will likely mention an environment that promotes relationships between teachers and students through small class sizes."

Any alumnus? Because one in particular is now going around saying the opposite.

Bill Gates lately has been arguing that smaller-sized classes are among the biggest wastes of money in all of education. "Perhaps the most expensive assumption embedded in school budgets – and one of the most unchallenged – is the view that reducing class size is the best way to improve student achievement," Gates said last week to a gathering of governors. Smaller classes just haven't worked, he said.

"U.S. schools have almost twice as many teachers per student as they did in 1960," he said. "Yet achievement is roughly the same." Gates called for an end to state caps on how many kids can be in each classroom.

Now let me clarify: Gates is suggesting larger classes in *public* schools. Not private schools such as Lakeside or the ones his own kids attend today. Public school classes already are growing, due to the recession. Add in someone as influential as Gates saying it can be the right thing to do under the circumstances, and look out.

So – is he right? Can we improve education by increasing class size? Well, as with everything in education, there's no easy answer. Gates' argument is hardly reassuring to those of us whose kids are the ones about to be experimented on.

For starters, that the U.S. has added teachers in the past 50 years and yet seen only moderate gains on tests doesn't prove smaller classes are a

waste. There are countless other variables at work, from more non-English speaking students to the rise of special ed to major family and societal changes.

Research has shown that small classes are most crucial when kids are young, but less so as kids grow up. That's why the focus in this state has been on driving classes down to about 17 kids for kindergarten through fourth grades. Most remain far more crowded than that. So one could just as easily argue it hasn't worked because it hasn't been tried yet.

Gates put up a slide in his speech showing that a third of all school employees today don't work in classrooms. In the search for savings, I'd start there. But Gates didn't. Instead, he proposed adding six students to the classes taught by the best teachers, then using the money saved to pay those teachers more. He said Gates Foundation research has found that teachers would be happy to have more students for more pay.

I looked up that study, done at the UW in 2008, and what it actually says is teachers prefer a \$5,000 pay boost to having two *fewer* students. They weren't ever asked about more students.

We're lucky to have Gates – he both means well and uses his means well – so I don't want to get too personal here. I bet he senses deep down as a parent that pushing more kids into classes isn't what's best for students. His kids' private-sector grade school has 17 kids in each room. His daughter's high school has 15. These intimate settings are *the* selling point, the chief reason tuition is \$25,000 a year – more than double what Seattle schools spend per student.

Bill, here's an experiment. You and I both have an 8-year-old. Let's take your school

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VEA office

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VEA elections

At the June rep council meeting, VEA reps will certify the election in which Courtney Hoover was elected VEA president. She will take office on August 1.

Serving on next year's executive board will be:

President: Courtney Hoover	Secretary: TBD
1 st VP: Lynn Maiorca	Primary Trustee: DeeLynn Durgan
2 nd VP: Carol Sandison	Intermediate Trustee: April Reyes
3 rd VP: Leslie Morrison	Middle School Trustee: Susan VanHouten
4 th VP: Katy Peppers	High School Trustee: David Tubb
Treasurer: Christine Munson	Specialist Trustee: Mona Rominger

Looking for a VEA secretary

Nominations for VEA secretary will close at the June 7 rep council meeting. The new secretary will fill Leslie Morrison's uncompleted term (she is now 3rd VP). The term will end in one year. Candidate forms are available from building reps or from the [VEA office](#).

Thank you, council reps

We would like to thank all the members who have served as council reps this year. These volunteers have provided a valuable network between the association and the members in their buildings and units. They deserve special thanks. Their contributions are vital.

Please join us in thanking them for taking the time to listen to you, to answer your questions, to represent you, and to attend meetings to report concerns and accomplishments. Their input adds strength to our association.



Bill Gates (continued)

and double its class sizes, from 16 to 32. We'll use the extra money generated by that – a whopping \$400,000 more per year per classroom – to halve the class sizes, from 32 to 16, at my public high school, Garfield.

In 2020, when our kids are graduating, we'll compare what effect it all had. On student achievement. On teaching quality. On morale. Or that best thing of all, the "environment that promotes relationships between teachers and students."

Deal? Probably not. Nobody would take that trade. This says more than all studies ever will.

Are you prepared?

Estate planning is preparing for the worst, whether for incapacity or death. Estate planning attempts to eliminate uncertainties in times of stress. It's something everyone should do, no matter their age or personal situation.

There are potentially five tools in the estate planning toolbox. Wills or revocable living trusts and community property agreements deal with death. Financial powers of attorney, health care powers of attorney, and health care directives deal with incapacity.



A will or a revocable living trust details how you want your property to be handled after your death. A community property agreement allows a surviving spouse to remove the deceased spouse's name from deeds/property titles and to avoid probate.

Powers of attorney give decision-making authority to an appointed individual when you are incapacitated. A health care directive outlines your wishes concerning end-of-life decisions.

Your plan should be tailor-made for your situation. It should not be a carbon copy of some existing plan. It should be realistic and meet the needs of your particular family. If you have no family, your plan should satisfy your desires about what you want done with your assets.

As a member of WEA, one of your benefits is the opportunity to meet with a WEA referral attorney to set up your estate plan. In Vancouver, Grant Broer is the WEA referral attorney (576-8277). By identifying yourself as a WEA member, you will be given a reduced rate for your plan.

Once your estate plan is complete, make a "document locator" list. This will tell your family where to find documents during what is always a painful and confusing time. Include on this list: will/revocable living trust; powers of attorney; health care directive; bank account; investments; property titles; insurance policies; and names and addresses of your financial planner, attorney, doctor, and insurance agents.

Estate planning is often one of those things that people put off "until another day." In reality, you should look at it as something that needs to be done yesterday because you could need it tomorrow.

This summer would be a good time to make your preparations.

Honoring retirees

VEA and Valic are hosting a retirement reception to honor retiring VEA members. The reception will be held from 5:00-7:00 p.m., on Thursday, June 6, on the patio of the Grant House on Officers Row.

Invitations have been sent to everyone that we know is retiring, inviting them and a guest to attend. However, if you are retiring and didn't get an invitation, [please let the VEA office know](#) so that we can include you. We don't want to leave anyone out!

Calendar items



May 30
Memorial Day

June 7
Rep Council

June 14
Executive Board

June 22
Last day of classes

June 30
NEA RA in Chicago

July 1
VEA office closed

August 1
VEA office open

Summer hours

9:00-4:00, Monday
thru Thursday

9:00-3:00, Fridays

VEA office closed
during July.

Bargaining — what's happening?

Bargaining is progressing, but we're not there yet. Our next bargaining session with the district will be on Memorial Day, Monday, May 30.



VEA will continue to e-mail our bargaining newsletter to those of you on our home e-mail list. Currently, the bargaining information we send is very general. But as we continue to work with the district, we will be sharing more specific information regarding the issues.

If you are not currently on our home e-mail list and would like to receive the bargaining newsletters, send your e-mail address to VEA's executive director, [Roy Maier](#). To receive text updates, send a text message to 41411 with VancouverEA in the message.

Special Ed Boot Camp coming to Vancouver

Registration is now open for the 2011 Special Education Boot Camps. These week-long trainings, presented by the Washington Education Association Special Education Cadre, will be held at three locations this summer.

For a registration fee of \$250, participants will receive five days of intense work on special education issues as well as 30 clock hour credits. The camp will provide hands-on training emphasizing the responsibilities of all educators working with students with disabilities. Certificated and classified personnel, general and special educators, parents, administrators, and community agency personnel are all encouraged to attend.



Vancouver's boot camp will take place August 15-19 at the Vancouver Hilton. Registration closes June 24 or once classes are filled.

[Read more about the boot camp](#) (and other dates and locations) or contact Shirley Jeffrey at WEA headquarters, 1-800-622-3393, ext. 7073.



WEA launches Summer University

Summer U is for you if you are interested in pursuing professional development geared toward becoming a better and stronger educator. It's for those of you who want to develop cutting edge skills needed in today's chaotic world, obtain college credit or clock hours, and network with educators who share a passion for public education across our state.

Summer U will be held August 1-4 at Edmonds-Woodway High School in Edmonds. Space is limited, so register today.

What are the college offerings?

- **College of Professional Practice:** For members who are beginning their candidacy for either National Board Certification or the ProTeach Portfolio. For members who are renewing certification as well as for people who are steeped in special education.
- **College of Advocacy and Strength:** For members who are learning about bargaining, contract writing, and other more traditional union issues as well as for those who are interested in learning more about the latest in education reform.

Want to attend? Space is limited. [Learn more about available courses and register online](#). After enrolling, if you are a VEA member, [apply to VEA](#) for sponsorship.
