Large Class Sizes Are Unfair to Students

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The proposal by billionaire Bill Gates to increase class size in America’s schools in order to increase achievement levels flies in the face of research and common sense. It is also hypocritical given that Gates sends his own children to private schools that tout smaller class sizes as a selling point. Gates’ current position is even further at odds with his own foundation’s small school initiative in New York which promoted smaller high schools as a way of increasing graduation rates, and seems to have achieved this goal.

Once dominant, now America is just average when it comes to education. Its public solution, recently communicated by Microsoft mogul Bill Gates? Increased class sizes, decreased teacher counts, fewer advanced degrees, and probably more mediocrity.

It’s the type of technocratic cure-all one would expect Gates to champion, and it will doubtless perform as lamely as Microsoft, which currently hobbles at $30 a share while its more intuitive tech rivals like Apple and Google respectively hover around $200 to $600. But Gates’ short-changing of the

nation’s education system is just another strain of neoconservative austerity going viral in our global village. And it’s just as short-sighted as the disaster capitalism that destroyed America’s economic integrity: Increasing America’s class sizes and downsizing its teachers could cost us more than it could save us.

“Bringing the United States up to the average performance of Finland, the best-performing education system, could result in gains in the order of 103 trillion dollars,” claimed the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s [OECD] three-year Programme for International Student Assessment report released in December. Of course, those are just the numbers. The hypocrisy stings worse.

“The oligarchy making decisions for public-school kids—like Michael Bloomberg and Bill Gates—send their own children to private schools with comparatively tiny class sizes of 15 or less, while many of the kids in the schools they impose their policies on have classes of 25, 30 or more,” Leonie Haimson, executive director for the nonprofit educational watchdog Class Size Matters, told AlterNet. “New York City children are now suffering from the largest class sizes in early grades since 1999, despite billions more spent on education. And class sizes are expected to increase again next year.”

[I]f you follow the money, it leads to very rich people who have two sets of educational standards: One for their kids, and another for ours.

Larger Class Sizes Are Unfair

Let them, Gates has argued. According to the New York Times and the Associated Press, both Gates and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s CEO Jeff Raikes have floated the theory that teachers trump class size when it comes to educational excellence. The jackpot comes when you reward effective