

No Funds Left Behind

By Abby Rapoport

The American Prospect

March 2011

... It's a story being repeated across the country. With most states cutting school funding, Gates and other private foundation are wielding outsize influence over public education, using their much-sought-after millions to fund and shape a top-down reform agenda. Like the other major (but smaller) players, the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation, Gates uses its funds to encourage public schools to adopt a more corporate approach. The three foundations, which in 2009 gave around \$560 million in education-related grants, support creating charters to foster competition between local schools, rewarding or punishing teachers for their students' performance on standardized tests, and replacing local curricula with national standards.

"The danger is that philanthropic investments will drive education policy to a greater degree than might be healthy or democratic," says Aaron Dorfman of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, which recently commissioned a study on how philanthropies can be more effective in improving public schools.

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