

THE ECONOMIC CLUB

O F W A S H I N G T O N, D. C.

**Excerpts from the Signature Event featuring Melinda Gates, Bill and Melinda Gates
Foundation**

May 12, 2005

“In the United States, the most intractable problem is education. The way our high schools worked 50 years ago, 40 years ago, 30 years ago does not work in our society today. High schools, designed for a different era, are failing to prepare the majority of students for college or for work. They are also perpetrating some of the worst divisions in America, deepening the divide between those students who have access to a high-quality education and the students who don’t. The failure of our high schools is also an economic disaster for us. Our economy increasingly depends on a skilled workforce that only a rigorous education can provide. Successful schools incorporate the new version of the ‘three Rs’, basic building blocks for redesigning new schools: Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships. Let me describe each of these to you. Rigor means making sure that all students are given a challenging curriculum that prepares them for college or work. Relevance means making sure that students have courses and projects that clearly relate to their lives and goals. Relationships means having real relationships with the adults in their school. There are two ways business leaders like you can help change the momentum for our schools. First, you need to demand that all students in and around the District of Columbia graduate from high school ready for college, work, and citizenship. You need employees who can think critically, have math skills, and can write well. Business leaders can become the top advocates for the belief that every child should be prepared for college. Second, you need to work with the D.C. school system to design a strategy for transforming your high schools.” ~ Melinda French Gates, Co-founder, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation