

Economists want to stop teachers' degree bonuses

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SEATTLE | Every year, American schools pay more than \$8.6 billion in bonuses to teachers with master's degrees, even though the idea that a higher degree makes a teacher more effective has been mostly debunked.

Despite more than a decade of research showing the money has little impact on student achievement, state lawmakers and other officials have been reluctant to tackle this popular way for teachers to earn more money.

That could soon change, as local school districts around the country grapple with shrinking budgets.

Last week, U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan said the economy had given the nation an opportunity to make dramatic improvements in the productivity of its education system and to do more of what works and less of what doesn't.

Duncan told the American Enterprise Institute that master's degree bonuses are an example of spending money on something that doesn't work.

On Friday, billionaire Bill Gates took aim at school budgets and the master's degree bonus.

"My own state of Wash-

ington has an average salary bump of nearly \$11,000 for a master's degree – and more than half of our teachers get it. That's more than \$300 million every year that doesn't help kids," he said.

"And that's one state," said Gates, the co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, at a speech Friday in Louisville to the Council of Chief State School Officers. Gates also took aim at pensions and seniority.

"Of course, restructuring pay systems is like kicking a beehive," he acknowledged.

Ninety percent of teachers' master's degrees are in education, not subjects such as English or math, according to a study by Marguerite Roza and Raegen Miller for the Center on Reinventing Education at the University of Washington.

Their colleague, professor Dan Goldhaber, explained that that research dating back to a study he did in 1997 has shown that students of teachers with master's degrees show no better progress in achievement than their peers taught by teachers without advanced degrees.

Goldhaber said his findings were criticized vehemently in the 1990s, but repeated studies since then have confirmed the results.