

local icon

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higher standards

Intel's chairman takes personal interest in state of education

by **Charles Goyette**

PHOTO: INTEL



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(Opening page) Educational ventures, such as the BASIS School in Scottsdale, that set high standards and deliver great results win strong support from Craig and Barbara Barrett (above).

AS CHAIRMAN OF THE board of Intel Corp., one of the world's leading high-tech companies, there are a lot of things on Craig Barrett's mind.

Right at the top is the state of American public education. His wife, Barbara Barrett, on the board of the Thunderbird School of Global Management (formerly Thunderbird — The Garvin School of International Management), past president of the Maricopa Colleges Foundation, and a former candidate for governor of Arizona, shares the concern.

Their commitment to excellence in education is evident in their generous support for The Craig and Barbara Barrett Honors College at Arizona State University. Additionally, the couple recently made a \$450,000 contribution earmarked for teacher salaries to the BASIS school. BASIS has operated a top-ranked middle school in Scottsdale since 2003. The Barretts' support will help the school add

a Scottsdale charter high school in the fall, offering the accelerated curriculum, small class sizes, and dedicated, talented teachers that led Newsweek magazine to call BASIS TUCSON Upper School (opened in 1999) one of the finest high schools in the United States.

The Barretts' overview of American educational performance is informed by their world travel. Just before they jetted off to Bhutan, a small country tucked between China and India along the Himalayas, we visited the couple at their Paradise Valley home and talked about the BASIS schools and education with Craig Barrett.

Q: HOW DID THE BASIS SCHOOL COME TO YOUR ATTENTION?

A: A year or so ago Barbara and I were invited to the middle school here in Scottsdale. They were inaugurating a new chemistry laboratory. While we were there we spent a few hours sitting in the classrooms observing and talking with (BASIS school co-founders) Michael and Olga Block and some of the teachers about the school's philosophy. That was the first point. The second was a few months ago when Newsweek magazine did their assessment of U.S. high schools and rated the Tucson BASIS high school third best

in the U.S. on a specific metric, the number of advanced placement courses taken per student at the school. So it was those two things as well as the general academic accomplishments of the school.

Q: DO YOU THINK THE BASIS SCHOOL IS A MODEL THAT CAN BE REPLICATED?

A: I think it's a wonderful example of what young people can accomplish. I have a general feeling we set our expectation levels way too low in most of our public school systems. The result we get is exactly where we set the expectation level. The BASIS school effectively set the expectation level much higher and accomplishes much more. ... If the system requirements are too low, that's what you get. If you raise the system requirements and you get teachers involved who really have the opportunity to push kids and to lead kids in academic achievement, then you get great results. BASIS gets great results.

Q: IT LOOKS AS THOUGH YOUR ATTENTION IS ON THOSE WITH GREATER POTENTIAL.

A: The Honors College obviously focuses on students who have done extremely well in high school and are motivated. Our focus on BASIS is driven to some degree by our awareness of the

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K-through-12 system in the U.S. and its deficiencies. ...

No Child Left Behind is an attempt to quantitatively measure what is going on in education. I'm an engineer. I'm pretty sure you can't solve a problem unless you measure something. But you saw what the attempt to measure schools, teachers, kids was met with. It gets politicized. And by the way, if you get into the bowels of No Child Left Behind, there are so many exceptions in it that it is hard to say it is a very accurate measure of what is actually going on.

But at a school like the BASIS Middle School in Scottsdale today, it's no nonsense. By the time the kids get through middle school, they have taken three or four years of high school math, physics, chemistry and biology. It's what young people are capable of. ...

I do think there is another way you might look at BASIS. If the kids who go there are really superb in their academic achievements, it is then going to force parents of others to ask why their kids aren't getting the same opportunity. So you can get the question raised, not in a hypothetical sense, but in terms of an absolute result, of real performance, real accomplishment. That is behind our decision to help finance the Blocks and to get this high school going. Let's get the demonstration. It's a milepost; it's a signpost against which others can be measured.

Q: ARE WE RIGHT TO BE NERVOUS ABOUT OUR EDUCATION HERE IN THE UNITED STATES WHEN COMPARED WITH OTHER COUNTRIES?

A: If you look at any of the international tests, NAEP, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or TIMMS (the Third International Mathematics and Science Study), or PISA (the Program for

International Student Assessment), in every one of the tests of U.S. kids versus their international counterparts, especially in the areas of math and science, U.S. kids do dismally. There is a great observation that through the fourth grade they do OK, but by the 12th grade they do really terribly. So the longer they stay in the system, the worse they perform. It's the greatest indictment in the world of any system. Why in the world leave your children in that system? But leave that aside. The kids do very poorly. So you've got a problem.

You look at the competitiveness of the United States. Our future work force doesn't understand the basic concepts which drive knowledge-based societies, drive jobs which have high value added, which drive competitiveness. We're faced with this great dichotomy. We have the greatest economy in the world, but the work force that is coming up in it is not adequately prepared. It's not that everyone is behind the power curve, but on average we do very poorly.

Q: WHY DID THIS HAPPEN?

A: I think any society that has great success gets way too comfortable. ... We're coasting on our past success, and we're not pushing.

Q: THE CLAIM IS MADE IN RESPONSE THAT AMERICANS STILL HAVE AN INVENTIVENESS AND ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT THAT IS NOT FOUND IN THE REST OF THE WORLD.

A: Economies are driven by new ideas, new products, new companies, new start-ups and new services. The company I work for is the largest high-tech venture capital company in the world. We have

Opened in 2003, the BASIS Middle School in Scottsdale insists on a rigorous curriculum.

worldwide operations. We used to do about 90 percent of our venture capital funding in the United States. We now do about 50 percent in the United States. Most of the other 50 percent is done in Asia. The dollars we fund are for the best people, the best ideas, with the highest probability of success. The Chinese, the Indians and other Asians are entrepreneurial as all get-out. They're creating new business plans, ... new high-tech, start-up companies. So I hear that argument, but on the street it's totally different. People have to recognize that our economy is great but that it is increasingly competitive, especially with these 3 billion new capitalists that have come into the world's economic system in India, China, Russia and Eastern Europe. ■

To learn more about the Scottsdale BASIS school, visit www.basisscottsdale.org. Charles Goyette is a morning talk show host in Phoenix on 1100 AM-KFNX. He can be reached at www.charlesgoyette.com.



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"IF YOU RAISE THE SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS AND YOU GET TEACHERS INVOLVED WHO REALLY HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO PUSH KIDS AND TO LEAD KIDS IN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, THEN YOU GET GREAT RESULTS.
BASIS GETS GREAT RESULTS."