News Item, 21/04/2009, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung invests more in education

Thielen: Saving on education has high social follow-up costs

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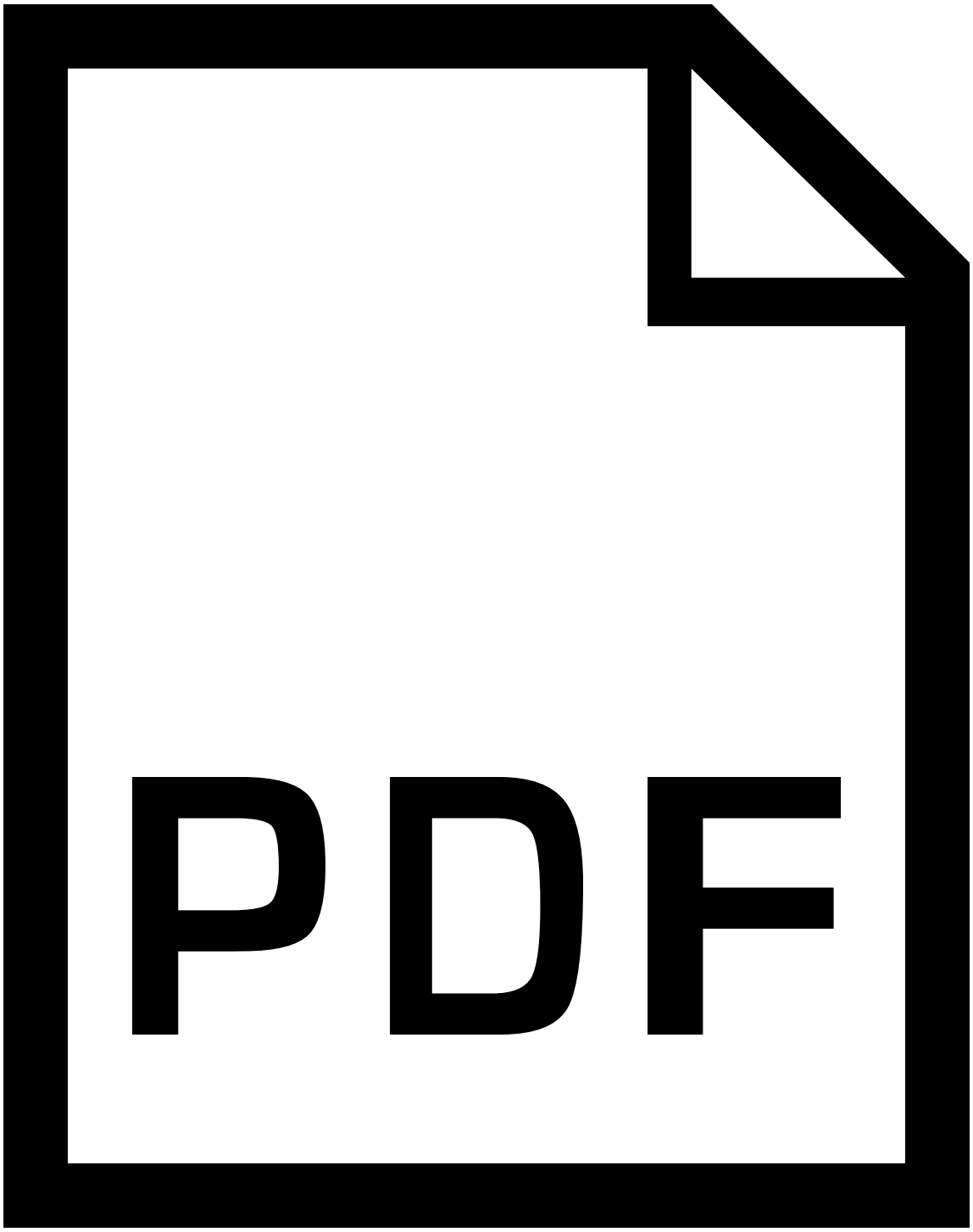

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Dr. Thomas Wittek

In the next few years, Bertelsmann Stiftung will concentrate still more than previously on the topic of education. The Chairman of the Board, Dr. Gunter Thielen, announced this during the presentation of the current annual report. Thielen regards the increasing heterogeneity of the population and changes due to the demographic transition as the greatest challenge for the educational system of the future. "Thus far, educational policy has reacted only insufficiently to the growing number of people from an immigrant background and the increasing differences in society. Ever more children and young people have no adequate access to education and are thus disconnected from social development," said Thielen.

In order to bring these problems to the fore and create transparency, in the coming months Bertelsmann Stiftung intends to publish various studies about the follow-up costs of insufficient education. "We want to prove with facts how expensive it is to save on education," said Thielen. A few months ago, Bertelsmann Stiftung demonstrated that with purposeful reforms of the expensive transitional system between school and profession, approximately 50 billion EUR could be saved by the year 2015. With an additional focal point "Heterogeneity and education," the foundation wants to show how with individual encouragement, children can exploit their potential regardless of their social and ethnic origins. Bertelsmann Stiftung will invest approximately 12.5 million EUR in its educational programs in 2009.

"For Bertelsmann Stiftung, achievement and fairness in the educational system is not a contradiction. Our educational system must secure both the competitive ability of our society as well as fair participation in good education," said Thielen. The foundations for successful learning are laid even before school. Therefore, society must invest more purposefully in early childhood education. In the future, additional money must be invested in the educational system where the challenges are the greatest. As an example, Thielen named social focal points and the purposeful encouragement of children from an

immigrant background.

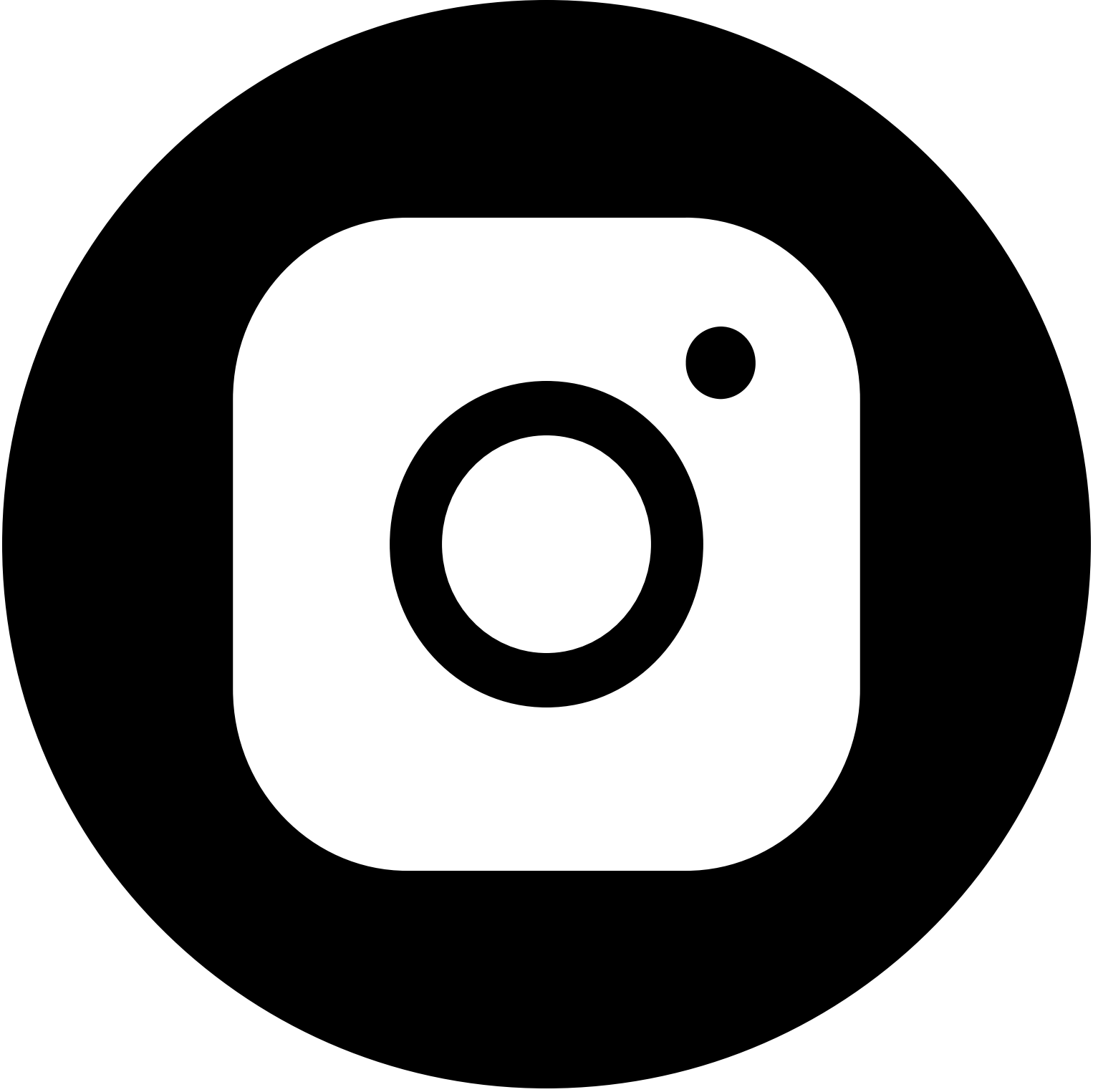
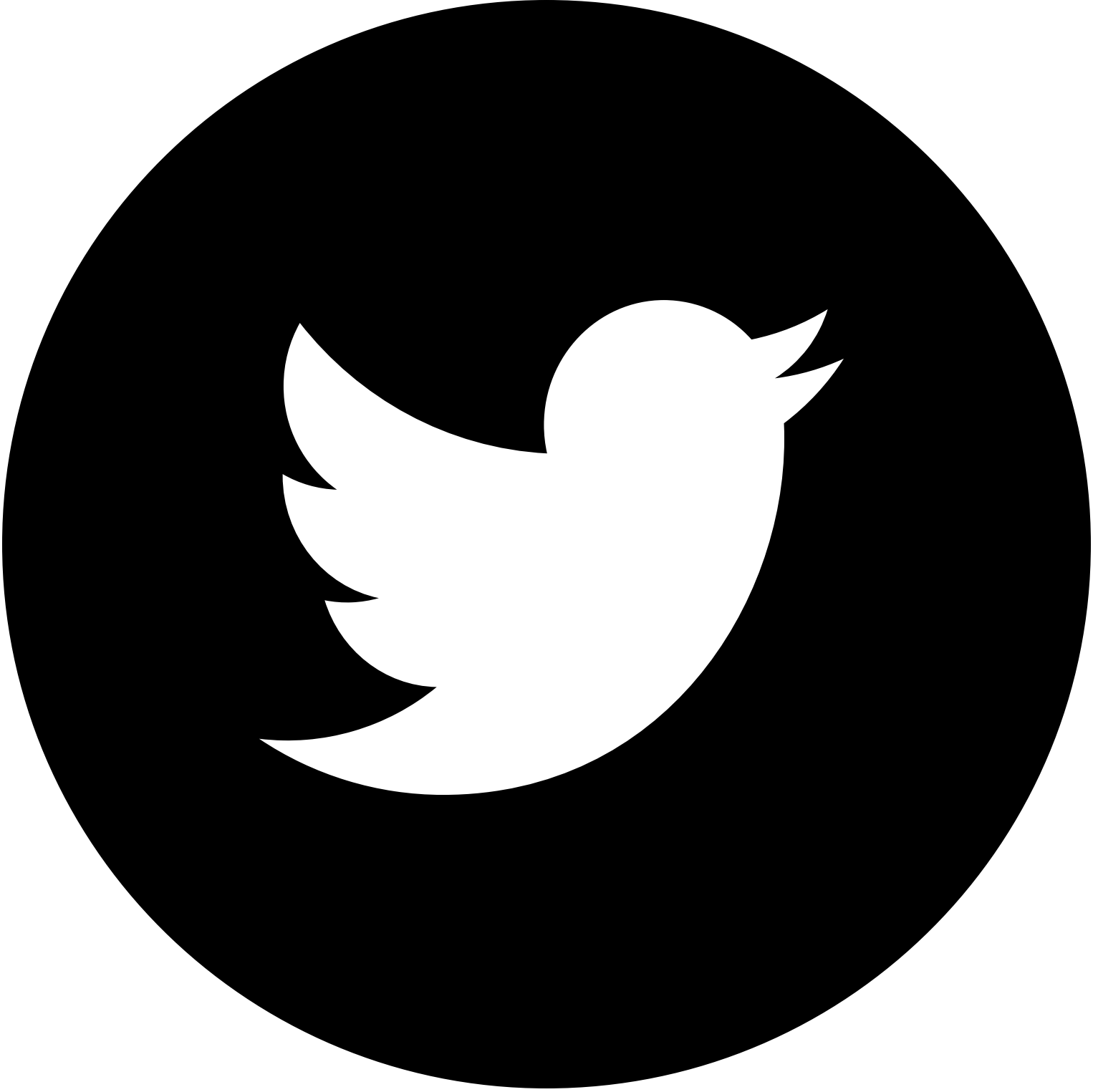
In order to reveal solution models in this area, Bertelsmann Stiftung is currently running two competitions. In cooperation with the German Federal Commissioner for Matters Relating to Disabled Persons, Karin Evers-Meyer, and the German UNESCO Commission, it has announced the Jakob-Muth Prize. Schools in which disabled and non-disabled children are taught together in exemplary fashion may apply. "Integration through education – Fairness for all," is the goal of the school competition "All Kids are VIPs." Pupils in grades 5 to 12 were invited to submit projects and ideas with which the integration of young people from an immigrant background into their own school might work better.

Increased involvement in the area of education is also a logical consequence of the global economic crisis for Bertelsmann Stiftung. For a country such as the Federal Republic of Germany, which is export-oriented and lacks raw materials, additional investments in education and science are a matter of survival, said Thielen. In order to analyze the effects of the global economic crisis, Bertelsmann Stiftung established an interdisciplinary task force at the end of 2008. The task force concerns itself especially with the medium and long-term effects of social cohabitation. These effects include questions of social coherence and the search for common values. The foundation wants to reveal paths towards more sustainable economic development and put the focus increasingly on people.

"We assume that economic stimulus packages and additional lowering of interest rates will not bring about a quick recovery of the economic situation in Germany," said Thielen. In his view, the greatest danger is that distrust could increase again, meaning that protectionist tendencies would be exacerbated.

In order to draw citizens increasingly into the political discourse, Bertelsmann Stiftung has been testing new forms of participation for some time. With the cooperation of the German Federal Chancellor, Angela Merkel, the initial conference of the European Citizens' Forum was held in January 2009; it was organized jointly with the Heinz Nixdorf Foundation. In conferences and in an online forum 350 randomly-selected citizens from all over Germany formulated a program for the future of Europe. The final conference will take place in the former Federal Parliament Building in Bonn on April 25 and 26. Local citizens' forums will then be organized in various regions of North Rhine-Westphalia – one of these conferences will take place on May 26 in Gütersloh.

Downloads

- Ten theses for a modern educational system (59 KB)

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