

American Education is a truly Liberal education.

It's built with a conviction that we can use knowledge, wisdom, and virtue to promote human flourishing.

It's a *constrained* progressive vision — as is the American Republic's Constitution *itself*.

AMERICAN EDUCATION

a broadside from the oregon **education** project



How do we prepare our young people to *flourish* as citizens of The American Republic? By *rebuilding American Education*.

American Education trains students' *minds*, developing their intellectual and moral capacities to become *flourishing* citizens of the Republic. It centers the *individual*, preparing each for *self-rule* by internalizing knowledge, wisdom, and virtue.

American Education promotes merit, excellence, and success. It instills rational compassion on behalf of those in need. It advances liberty, justice, and *belonging*: out of the many, [we are] one; *e pluribus unum*.¹



American schools are failing. And they have been for decades.² It's a multi-causal problem³ that in the aggregate stems from *misunderstanding* what education is *for*.

Why did America's Founders give birth to **public education** — a revolutionary idea? To *sustain* the nation. Without it, the young Republic could not be "kept".⁴

"From the nation's earliest days, Americans understood education as a prerequisite for republican self-government. Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Rush, and others argued that **a free people could not remain free without an educated citizenry**. Although Americans seem increasingly inclined to view it as a means of personal advancement, public education was never merely about individual opportunity; it was about creating and sustaining **a people capable of self-rule**."⁵

This is why **public education** is so important. There's no Republic without it. Today's rage politics may best be explained as the *failure* of public education — and often its misuse to inculcate with a decidedly un-American point of view. The key to restoring deliberative democracy is rebuilding education, not politics.

American Education reinforces the republicanism of our nation's founding: **liberty**, *individual* rights and responsibilities, the Protestant work ethic, the rule of law, the right to private property, and resistance to concentrated power. It promotes *individual* merit, practical knowledge, accountability, intellectual vigor, honesty, and the subordination of feelings to evidence and reason.⁶

American Education instills the principles of **Liberal Democracy**: open inquiry, intellectual pluralism, civil discourse, and the idea that we should seek **truth** — challenging students with basic questions of human existence, developing their *thinking skills* to mine the rich deposit of knowledge available from *many* cultures.⁷

Acquiring knowledge, wisdom, and virtue is central — with a solid grounding in science. Its roots are an *effective* mix of Christian and Enlightenment culture which spread public education throughout the world, creating conditions for human *flourishing*.

Yet politically "progressive" states like Oregon have abandoned this vital perspective. It's both accurate and fair to say Oregon education is no longer *American* education.⁸ It prepares students to be "social justice" activists, pursuing the *political aspirations* of the far-Left, advocating for "a more just and sustainable democratic society." Students are trained to become "agents of change" — not *flourishing citizens*.⁹ This is the root cause of Oregon's failed schools. It's the latest example of how trendy, ill-considered educational *dogmas* have undermined student success.¹⁰ It's no accident that Oregon ranks at the bottom nationally: **we've lost focus**.

Oregon education needs to be *rebuilt* — not simply improved — in four ways:

- *Recentering* American Education;
- *Restoring* American Identity;
- *Recovering* American Character;
- *Redirecting* American Compassion.

¹ Oregon Education Project.

America is a Liberal Democratic Republic grounded on natural law and individual liberty.

It's not a democracy. In fact, our Constitution was designed to *constrain* democratic power. Neither is it a "pluralistic [social] democracy", as far-Left political progressives aspire to remake it. See **Rage and the Republic: The Unfinished Story of the American Revolution** by Jonathan Turley.

² See **The Lost Decade: Returning to the Fight for Better Schools in America** by Steven F. Wilson;

How to Educate a Citizen: The Power of Shared Knowledge to Unify a Nation by E.D. Hirsh.

³ See **The Knowledge Gap: The Hidden Cause of America's Broken Education System — and How to Fix It** by Natalie Wexler; **Mind the Children: How To Think About the Youth Mental Health Collapse** edited by Naomi Schaefer Riley and Sally Satel.

The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting up a Generation for Failure by Greg Lukianoff & Jonathan Haidt.

⁴ As Ben Franklin put it in 1787.

⁵ "Why Conservatives Should Defend Socialized Education" by Robert Pondiscio.

⁶ See **The Political Theory of the American Founding: Natural Rights, Public Policy, and the Moral Conditions of Freedom** by Thomas G. West.

⁷ See OEP **Liberal Democracy**. Also **Educational Pluralism and Democracy: How to Handle Indoctrination, Promote Exposure, and Rebuild America's Schools** by Ashley Rogers Berner.

⁸ See OEP **Woke Education**.

⁹ See the Oregon Department of Education's **2024 Revised Social Science Standards**.

¹⁰ See **The Lost Decade**.

Recentering American Education

“Contrary to popular belief, the brain is not designed for thinking.”¹¹

Learning isn’t fun. It’s hard work for almost all of us, especially at the beginning. Education is a novel, human-created *accelerator* of our brains.¹² The goal is to ensure that every child is literate, numerate, widely read, and **knowledgeable** — none of which comes naturally to us or can be obtained without significant *effort*.

American Education *centers* the science-based acquisition of **core knowledge**. As education scholar E.D. Hirsh has argued for several decades now,

“The core problem with American Education is that [“progressive”] educational theorists, especially in the early grades, have for the past sixty years rejected *academic content* in favor of ‘child-centered’ and ‘how-to’ learning *theories* that are at odds with how children really learn. The result is failing schools ...”¹³

Content-rich, high-quality curriculum driven by The Science of Learning is essential.¹⁴

Teaching needs to align with the underlying *cognitive* mechanisms of learning:

“The primary goal of instruction is to facilitate students’ long-term *learning* — that is, to create relatively permanent changes in comprehension, understanding, and skills of the types that will support long-term [memory] retention and transfer.”¹⁵

Oregon students are failing because they don’t know very much. Why not?

Because our politically-appointed education leaders don’t *center* knowledge.

They’re busy promoting “equity” and activism in support of *political* causes.¹⁶

We must *recenter* our schools to *train students’ minds* so they will succeed — developing their *intellectual capacities* to become flourishing citizens.

Restoring American Identity

“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their **character**.”¹⁷

Oregon education has replaced Liberal individualism¹⁸ and **colorblind realism**¹⁹ with a racialized framework [**intersectionality**²⁰] dividing students into “identity” groups.

The Oregon Department of Education’s stated goal is to expand students’ perspectives and change how they understand the human experience by

“**empathizing with a range of identities and lived experiences.**”²¹

Teachers are to *essentialize* a students’ race or ethnicity and employ “culturally responsive” classroom practices to develop *critical consciousness* [**“wokeness”**].²²

The unstated goal is to *divide* students into “white” oppressors vs. everyone else.

This is exactly wrong. And demonstrably un-American. It reverses the *end goal* of the Civil Rights Movement: equality and inclusivity creating *oneness*.

This was articulated by Martin King in a definitive 1956 speech:

“The end is reconciliation, the end is redemption, the end is the creation of the **beloved community**. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opposers into friends.”²³

American Education *centers* the *individual* — regardless of race and ethnicity. It resists the divisiveness of **intersectionality** and embraces King’s vision of the *beloved community*, **united** across race, for the sake of our children’s success.

We must *restore* the fact that we’re **united** as **Americans** — *e pluribus unum*: while originating in differing ancestral populations, we’re now *one people*.

As Frederick Douglass championed it, on behalf of liberated African slaves:

“We are born *on* American soil, and are *of* American soil ... Every muscle and fiber of our bodies have been taken *from* it ... What right then has any man to call us Africans?”²⁴



¹¹ Why Don’t Students Like School? A Cognitive Scientist Answers Questions About How the Mind Works and What It Means for the Classroom by Daniel Willingham.

¹² How We Learn: Why Brains Learn Better Than Any Machine ... For Now by Stanislas Dehaene. Education is not natural. For example, reading borrows from brain centers devoted to facial recognition to create something foreign and “unnatural.” Effective teachers make it more engaging, yet it still involves hard work.

¹³ The Making of Americans: Democracy and Our Schools by E.D. Hirsh, Jr.

¹⁴ The Science of Learning uses evidence from cognitive and educational psychology (along with related disciplines) to understand how we learn — that is, how the brain acquires, processes, stores, retrieves, and applies new information and skills. This includes The Science of Reading. See OEP Teaching Our Kids and The Science of Learning.

¹⁵ Instructional Illusions by Paul A. Kirschner, Carl Hendrick, and Jim Heal.

¹⁶ To see how Oregon education was corrupted with ideology see OEP Ethnic Studies.

¹⁷ Martin King.

¹⁸ See OEP Liberal Democracy and Weird People.

¹⁹ See OEP Colorblind Realism. Bayard Rustin, Pauli Murray, and Martin King were proponents of this view, acknowledging the *reality* of race without grounding personal identity in it.

²⁰ See OEP Victim Culture.

²¹ ODE 2024 Revised Social Science Standards.

²² See OEP Woke Education and Culturally Responsive Teaching.

²³ The First Annual Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change on August 11, 1956.

²⁴ Henry Highland Garnet.

Recovering American Character

“The aim of education is not simply the imparting of facts or an appreciation of great books, but *wisdom* — uniting theory with practice, knowledge with *character* ...”²⁵

Oregon education gives primary place to a student’s *felt-sense* of well-being, preferring *affective ideation* [emotion] over *deliberative reasoning* [cognition].²⁶ How a child *feels* about school is most important, not whether they’re succeeding.²⁷ Students are often *coddled* and not held accountable to standards of excellence. They become overly engaged with their “inner selves” — preoccupied with *feelings*.

This may be causing a recent collapse²⁸ in the mental health of young people today: good intentions and bad ideas have set up a generation for failure.²⁹ Give smart phones with social media to emotionally-catalyzed kids and that’s the likely outcome.³⁰ Gone is the *resilience-building* embodied in America’s traditional Scouts Oath:

[I swear] To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.³¹

American Education promotes **good character**: kindness, honesty, diligence, delayed gratification, the value of doing great work, and becoming *trustworthy*.³² It aims to instill *wisdom*: real-world understanding, open vigilance, prudence, and the subordination of feelings to arguments and evidence — *deliberative reasoning*.

We must *recover* American Character by developing students’ moral capacities. It’s an essential ingredient in the preparation of young people for **self-rule**: *internalizing knowledge, virtue, and wisdom to become flourishing citizens*.

Redirecting American Compassion

Oregon education is designed to transform students into “agents of change” for “equity” and “social justice” — political aspirations on behalf of the “oppressed”. **This has always led to disaster**.³³ Doing good on behalf of those in need is effective when motivated by **rational compassion**, not divisive, moralizing, activist *ideology*.³⁴

That’s also embodied in America’s traditional Scouts Oath:

[I swear] To help other people at all times.

Sometimes helping doesn’t help — especially when feelings replace reasons. “**Empathizing with a range of identities and lived experiences**” is a reliably wrong way to help people *in reality*. We must *redirect* those efforts toward effective *thinking*. American Education instills **rational compassion** on behalf of those in need: we use the tools of science to make *effective contributions* to human flourishing.

American Education is a truly Liberal education.³⁵ It’s built with a conviction that we can use knowledge, wisdom, and virtue to promote human flourishing. It’s a *constrained* progressive vision — as is the American Republic’s Constitution *itself*.



²⁵ **Crisis of the Two Constitutions: The Rise, Decline, and Recovery of American Greatness** by Charles Kessler.

²⁶ See OEP Against Empathy, TSEL, and Rational Compassion.

²⁷ The Oregon Board of Education denies that low test scores are a sign of students’ lack of success. ODE self-evaluations prioritize students’ feelings over success.

²⁸ **Mind the Children: How to Think About the Youth Mental Health Collapse** edited by Naomi Schaefer Riley and Sally Satel.

²⁹ **The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure** by Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt.

³⁰ **The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness** by Jonathan Haidt.

³¹ Oregon’s education leaders view the oath as an example of “White Supremacy” that needs to be *removed* from our schools — “decentering whiteness”. See OEP White Supremacy.

³² See OEP Basic Morality and American Character. This is what Martin King was referring to in his “I Have a Dream” speech.

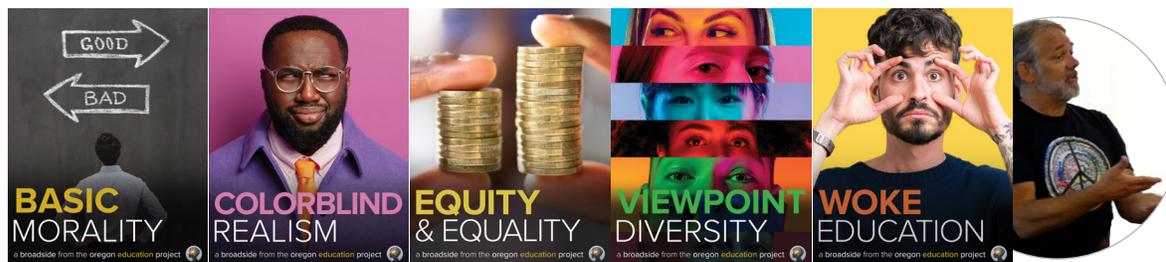
³³ See OEP Victim Culture.

³⁴ See OEP Rational Compassion.

³⁵ See OEP Liberal Democracy.

Broadsides Clear Thinking. Critical Thinking. Effective Thinking.

Approximately 2,000 words, these succinct essays can be read in 15–20 minutes. They include links to online references, resources, and a basic bibliography.



Rob Schläpfer is a retired social science educator who’s spent over a decade conducting classes and community conversations to bridge Oregon’s deep political divide.

A former pastor, professor, and publisher, he’s taught critical thinking, civics, and cultural studies for over four decades.

He created the Oregon Education Project to promote high-quality American Education centered on merit, excellence, and success.

References cited in American Education

