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OUR VIEW

Grad rates must go up

The bedrock of Oregon's 40-40-20 plan is that 100 percent of Oregon students will graduate high school on time in the year 2025.

That's not going to happen, obviously. Young people have all kinds of extenuating circumstances that can keep them from graduating on time, many of which cannot be avoided. Even state education officials admit that a perfect high school graduation rate is an aspirational goal, one that cannot be accomplished.

The psychological benefit of achievable goals aside, the state is not even close to approaching a perfect score.

Oregon's graduation's rate is among the nation's worst. More than 1-in-4 students are not graduating on time with a diploma. If that were translated into a letter grade, it wouldn't be one you'd be excited to show your parents.

Surely the failures cannot be leveled only on the schools. Neither can it be placed solely on a lack of dollars. It's a cultural problem as much as an educational one, and we all bear a certain responsibility.

One thing that schools should confront right away is the dismal truancy rate in Oregon. Just getting kids to class goes a long way toward getting them to graduate. Identifying reasons why students skip class more regularly in Oregon — whether it is open campuses, too many open periods during the day or a lack of personal investment in their showing up — needs to be addressed.

We've already started investing more dollars in new programs, starting from the ground up to get Oregon students on track right from preschool. That's smart and a good use of tax dollars. But it isn't going to help improve graduation rates for more than a decade, and adding a lost decade to numbers that have been too low for too long isn't good for the future of our state.

Pendleton Superintendent Jon Peterson channeled his inner Aaron Sorkin at last week's school board meeting, summing up the ways in which we have let down this current crop of students:

"They went through the recession where we eliminated 15 days of school in one year," he said. "They've experienced, all of the sudden, larger class sizes that no kid prior to them has experienced ... They're coming out at the end and we scratch our heads and wonder, 'Why are we graduating only 72 percent of our kids?' (It's) because we fund education at a 72 percent level is the truth. It makes me sick to think about the experiences of the kids that are coming through now compared to the experiences we all had when we went through."

More money will help. But more likely, it will take thousands of people — administrators and teachers and parents and students — to reinvigorate the Oregon education system from the ground up. We've started the process, but current high school students have been left out to dry.

The failures cannot be leveled only on the schools. Neither can it be placed on the lack of dollars. It's a cultural problem.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.



OTHER VIEWS

Conflict and ego

If you read the online versions of newspaper columns you can click over to the reader comments, which are often critical, vituperative and insulting. I've found that I can deal with these comments only by following the adage, "Love your enemy."

It's too psychologically damaging to read these comments as evaluations of my intelligence, morals or professional skill. But if I read them with the (possibly delusional) attitude that these are treasured friends bringing me lovely gifts of perspective, then my eye slides over the insults and I can usually learn something. The key is to get the question of my self-worth out of the way — which is actually possible unless the insulter is really creative.

It's not only newspaper columnists who face this kind of problem. Everybody who is on the Internet is subject to insult, trolling, hating and cruelty. Most of these online assaults are dominance plays. They are attempts by the insulter to assert his or her own superior status through displays of gratuitous cruelty toward a target.

The natural but worst way to respond is to enter into the logic of this status contest. If he puffs himself up, you puff yourself up. But if you do this you put yourself and your own status at center stage. You enter a cycle of keyboard vengeance. You end up with a painfully distended ego, forever in danger, needing to assert itself, and sensitive to slights.

Clearly, the best way to respond is to step out of the game. It's to get out of the status competition. Enmity is a nasty frame of mind. Pride is painful. The person who can quiet the self can see the world clearly, can learn the subject and master the situation.

Historically, we reserve special admiration for those who can quiet the self even in the heat of conflict. Abraham Lincoln was caught in the middle of a horrific civil war. It would have been natural for him to live with his instincts aflame — filled with indignation toward those who started the war, enmity toward those who killed his men and who would end up killing him. But his second inaugural is a masterpiece of rising above the natural urge toward animosity and instead adopting an elevated stance.

The terror theater that the Islamic State group is perpetrating these days is certainly in a different category than Internet nastiness. But the beheadings, this monstrous act of human incineration, are also insults designed

to generate a visceral response. They are a different kind of play of dominance. They are attempts by insignificant men to get the world to recognize their power and status.

These Islamic State guys burn hostages alive because it wins praise from their colleagues, because it earns attention and because it wins the sort of perverse respect that accompanies fear. We often say that terrorism is an act of war, but that's wrong. Terrorism is an act of taunting. These murderous

videos are attempts to make the rest of us feel powerless, at once undone by fear and addled by disgust.

The natural and worst way to respond is with the soul inflamed. If they execute one of our guys, we'll — as Jordan did — execute two of their guys. If they chest-thump, we'll chest-thump. If they kill, we'll kill.

This sort of strategy is just a recruiting tool for the Islamic State. It sucks us into their nihilistic status war: Their barbarism and our response.

The world is full of invisible young men yearning to feel significant, who'd love to shock the world and light folks on fire in an epic status contest with the reigning powers.

The best way to respond is to quiet our disgust and quiet our instincts. It is to step out of their game. It is to reassert the primacy of our game. The world's mission in the Middle East is not to defeat the Islamic State, which is just a barbaric roadblock. It's to reassert the primacy of pluralism, freedom and democracy. It's to tamp down zeal and cultivate self-doubt. The world has to destroy the Islamic State with hard power, but only as a means to that higher moral end.

Many people have lost faith in that democratic mission, but without that mission we're just one more army in a contest of barbarism. Our acts are nothing but volleys in a status war.

In this column, I've tried to describe the interplay of conflict and ego, in arenas that are trivial (the comments section) and in arenas that are monstrous (the war against the Islamic State). In all cases, conflict inflames the ego, distorts it and degrades it.

The people we admire break that chain. They quiet the self and step outside the status war. They focus on the larger mission. They reject the puerile logic of honor codes and status rivalries, and enter a more civilized logic that doesn't turn us into our enemies.

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in September 2003.



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

YOUR STATUE VIEWS

Requa downtown doesn't fit with rest of statues

I would like to bring to the attention of the city council the original purpose of the statues on Main Street here in Pendleton. The thought at the time was to recognize the early participants in the Round-Up. These names have been familiar with rodeo fans. The Hall of Fame refers to Pendleton as the Cowboy Capital of the World. Most people call Pendleton the Rodeo City. The statues are history, tradition and frame of mind.

While Don Requa is important to some people, I do not feel it is fitting to place his statue among the field of the early Round-Up participants. It destroys the purpose of both groups. To me a more fitting place would be the athletic field at the high school. He was an athlete, not a rodeo participant. I hope the city council can see fit to reverse itself and recognize the original purpose of the thought.

Robert Stangier
Pendleton

Not too late to listen and rethink location of statue

I have been mistaken for a member of the Arts Council of Pendleton several times now and gotten an earful about statues both standing and in progress. I would like to pass on my findings regarding statues:

1. Some people are still upset about the Stella Darby statue, seeing it as an inappropriate promotion of prostitution. Others are willing to accept it as local history.

2. Many people are very upset about the

proposed Don Requa statue being placed in Brownfield Park, for various reasons as size, cohesiveness with statues already in place and history.

3. The people upset about the placement of the Don Requa statue are connecting it to other city problems and saying if the city doesn't listen to them about this that they will vote against any city bond and urge others to do the same. So the Requa statue has become a focal point for political backlash.

4. People do not understand why the city won't change the placement of the statue after all but one of the other statues has been moved. "Why not save all the taxpayers money and just put the statue somewhere else?" they ask, as well as, "Why aren't they listening to us?" (I have no answers to these queries).

However, I do have a question of my own: If the statue placement causes such dissension among the people of Pendleton will it really honor Don Requa or become a focal point for more unhappiness? I hope the Arts Council, the Linebackers Club and the city council will rethink their decision. It's not too late.

Marge Normington-Jones
Pendleton

Requa belongs at high school, where it can be focal point

The Don Requa bronze should become a historical focal point on the campus of Pendleton High School.

In these times, students have few opportunities to develop and nurture the history and traditions of their school. One of



the service clubs or leadership groups at the school needs to capture this opportunity to keep Coach Requa's story alive.

Bring him home!

Shirlee McGreer
Pendleton

Keep Requa at Brownfield, and let's all move on

Can we please stop arguing about statues on Main Street?

Put the statue of Coach Don Requa on Main. He lived here, he worked here, and he

shopped here.

The cowboys? Why not just move them to the Round-Up Grounds and, while we are at it, move Til Taylor to the courthouse.

How silly and petty can we be? Can't we find things more important to spend our time on?

Don Requa did more than coach. He taught many of us to drive. He laughed with us when the city put in the Main Street "mall," that zig zag down the "gut" that turned into a game of touch-the-traffic-cone after we discovered it was nailed down.

Put his statue on Main Street where he can be seen by his students, their children and grandchildren.

A fine man, instructor and coach deserves a place to be seen and remembered for more than just football.

Susan Goodnow
Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

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