

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

State must bring parity to schools

Every child in Oregon deserves an excellent education — regardless of where the student lives or attends school, regardless of whether the student comes from a well-to-do family or an impoverished one, regardless of academic ability, and regardless of ethnicity or race or background.

Last week's Department of Education report on graduation rates shows that is not the case in Oregon. But last week's report from the Legislature's Joint Committee on Student Success provides a path forward.

Across Oregon, high school graduation rates increased by 2 percentage points last year to almost 79 percent. The improvement is welcome news, but it remains deeply concerning that one-fifth of public high school students fail to graduate within four years.

There also are vast variations among demographic groups. The graduation rate was 82 percent for girls but 75.6 percent for boys.

Graduation rates generally were lower for students of color but higher for former English Language Learners.

Only 54 percent of homeless students graduated within four years of high school.

As members of the Student Success committee said last week, the public has had enough. Oregon has been grappling with these issues for decades, with too little progress.

Insufficient funding has been a major obstacle, especially since voters' passage of Measure 5 in 1990 put the onus on state government to fund public schools. But money



EO File Photo
A group of Echo fifth-graders hang out in their new classroom on Aug. 22, 2018, during an open house for the new addition of the Echo School.

is not the only issue. It's how the money is spent.

On the one hand, the collaborative approach espoused by the nonprofit, non-partisan Chalkboard Project has achieved profound academic gains and higher staff morale in participating school districts. On the other hand, the state's recent audit report on Portland Public Schools shows "how a school district should not operate," according to Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner.

The bipartisan Student Success commit-

tee has abundant ideas for reforms — excellent ideas — but with a combined price tag of well over \$3 billion. Not everything can be done.

The Legislature will significantly increase education spending. But PERS' unfunded actuarial liability will consume a huge chunk of any additional money earmarked for reducing class sizes, extending the school year or making other improvements. The majority Democrats and Gov. Kate Brown must face up to their responsi-

bility to rein in public pension costs, instead of wringing their hands over court decisions that overturned past reforms.

School districts must accept that additional funding will come with requirements for accountability in how that money is used.

Unlike previous political endeavors that chased the educational flavor of the day, the Student Success committee based its recommendations on reality. Lawmakers visited more than 50 schools — from the coast to Eastern and Southern Oregon — and talked with hundreds of students, staff members, parents, businesspeople, civic leaders and others.

This week, committee members are starting work on determining which proposals would achieve the greatest return on investment and how to pay for them. Their top priorities include the importance of early childhood education and the drastic need for more school counselors, mental health therapists and other behavioral health services — throughout the state.

In their letter submitting the Student Success report, the committee's Democratic and Republican leaders wrote: "A student's achievement should be a result of their own efforts, not their parents' income or their race, ethnicity, or ZIP Code. Unfortunately, factors entirely outside of a young person's control too often determine their access to a high-quality education. Oregon's students deserve a public education system that sets them up for success."

That is the challenge for the 2019 Legislature. That is the challenge for Oregon.

OTHER VIEWS

Kindness is a skill

I went into journalism to cover politics, but now I find myself in national marriage therapy. Covering American life is like covering one of those traumatizing Eugene O'Neill plays about a family where everyone screams at each other all night and then when dawn breaks you get to leave the theater.

But don't despair, I'm here to help. I've been searching for practical tips on how we can be less beastly to one another, especially when we're negotiating disagreements. I've found some excellent guides — like "Negotiating the Nonnegotiable" by Daniel Shapiro, "The Rough Patch" by Daphne de Marneffe and "The Art of Gathering" by Priya Parker — and I've compiled some, I hope, not entirely useless tips.

The rule of how many. When hosting a meeting, invite six people to your gathering if you want intimate conversation. Invite 12 if you want diversity of viewpoints. Invite 120 if you want to create a larger organism that can move as one.

Scramble the chairs. If you invite disagreeable people over for a conversation, clear the meeting room, except jumble the chairs in a big pile in the middle. This will force everybody to do a cooperative physical activity, untangling the chairs, before anything else. Plus, you'll scramble the power dynamics depending on where people choose to place their chairs.

The best icebreaker. To start such a gathering, have all participants go around the room and describe how they got their names. That gets them talking about their family, puts them in a long-term frame of mind and illustrates that most people share the same essential values.

Tough conversations are usually about tribal identity. Most disagreements are not about the subject purportedly at hand. They are over issues that make people feel their sense of self is disrespected and under threat. So when you're debating some random topic, you are mostly either inflaming or pacifying the other person's feeling of tribal identity.

You rigidify tribal identity every time you make a request that contains a hint of blame. You make that identity less inflamed every time you lead with weakness: "I know I'm a piece of work, but I'm trying to do better, and I hope you can help me out." When tribal differences are intractable, the best solution is to create a third tribe that encompasses both of the warring two.

The all-purpose question. "Tell me about the challenges you are facing?" Use it when there seems to be nothing else to say.

Never have a meeting around a problem. If you have a problem conversation you are look-



DAVID BROOKS
COMMENT

ing backward and assigning blame. If you are having a problem conversation you're saying that one episode — the moment the government shut down — was the key to this situation, rather than all of the causes that actually led up to the episode. Instead, have a possibility conversation. Discuss how you can use the assets you have together to create something good.

Your narrative will never win. In many intractable conflicts, like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, each side wants the other to adopt its narrative and admit it was wrong the whole time. This will never happen. Get over it. Find a new narrative.

Never threaten autonomy. People like to feel that their options are open. If you give them an order — "Calm down" or "Be reasonable" — all that they will hear is that you're threatening their freedom of maneuver, and they will shut down. Nobody ever grew up because an angry spouse screamed, "Grow up!"

Attune to the process. When you're in the middle of an emotional disagreement, shift attention to the process of how you are having the conversation. In a neutral voice name the emotions people are feeling and the dynamic that is in play. Treat the hot emotions as cool, objective facts we all have to deal with. People can't trust you if you don't show them you're aware of how you are contributing to the problem.

Agree on something. If you're in the middle of an intractable disagreement, find some preliminary thing you can agree on so you can at least take a step into a world of shared reality.

Gratitude. People who are good at relationships are always scanning the scene for things they can thank somebody for.

Never sulk or withdraw. If somebody doesn't understand you, not communicating with her won't help her understand you better.

Reject either/or. The human mind has a tendency to reduce problems to either we do this or we do that. This is narrowcasting. There are usually many more options neither side has imagined yet.

Presume the good. Any disagreement will go better if you assume the other person has good intentions and if you demonstrate how much you overall admire him or her. Fake this, in all but extreme cases.

As you were reading this list, you might have thought the real problem was other people's obnoxiousness, not your own. But take an honest look at yourself. You just read all the way to the end of a piece of emotional advice written by a newspaper columnist.

Sad.

David Brooks is a columnist for the *New York Times*.

YOUR VIEWS

A nation divided

One hundred and fifty years ago, President Abraham Lincoln warned a nation on the edge of civil war, "A nation divided against itself can not stand." Lincoln referenced Jesus in Matthew, who also warned every kingdom divided against itself will be brought to desolation.

The very foundation of America is under a full fledged frontal assault, including our Founding Fathers, our Constitution, our separation of powers, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and now our border sovereignty. Our duly elected president is attacked and maligned mercilessly by the national press, the media, Hollywood, and the global left both Democrat and establishment Republicans. Our nation, the great bastion of freedom for the whole world, is virtually impotent because our Congress can not function or pass legislation, our president and any who assist his administration are hounded mercilessly by the press, and the power of our government (DOJ, FBI, Special Counsel Mueller, IRS) has been fraudulently weaponized to destroy a president and a nation that elected him.

It matters not whether you love or hate President Trump because this assault will inevitably lead to the desolation of our liberty, our freedom and our way of life. Despite this incessant attack against our president, the left has failed miserably to win the soul of those that support his pro-God, pro-America agenda. In the process the national liberal press has lost all credibility.

Our borders are being infiltrated with terrorists, gang members, drugs, and illegal immigrants with the full support of the Democrat-controlled press and media. Our currency boldly declares "In God We Trust" yet the mere mention of the God of our fathers has been erased from our schools, our universities, our government, and our courts.

As a frequent critic of the *East Oregonian* editors, I applaud their recent effort to report news forthrightly. I exhort my American brethren to trust in our lord Jesus Christ and stand without compromise for our God and our country.

Stuart Dick
Irrigon

A wall too far

Not too long ago The Donald, on national television, assured democratic leaders Chuck Schumer and Nancy

Pelosi, and the country, that he will take responsibility for a government shutdown, if it occurs.

And despite claiming that he has an amazing memory, The Donald quickly and conveniently forgot, stating later that he blames the Democrats for his shutdown.

It was laughable when The Donald stated, again on national media, that he can "relate" to the financial hardship of the laid-off and furloughed federal employees who must go without paychecks because of his shutdown.

The Donald manufactured the so-called "crisis" on our southern border to "justify" his demand for \$5.7 billion of taxpayer funds for his "beautiful," and racist, wall. Actually, the "crisis" exists only in his imagination. Throughout his presidential campaign rallies, The Donald's call to arms for the faithful was that Mexico will pay for his wall. What happened to this insistent claim?

It is a moral crime that 800,000 federal employees, and many more federal contractors, must endure serious financial hardship just because of Trump's bigotry. It is outrageous that many must turn to food banks, use up their life savings, etc., just to try to make ends meet for their families. Many are on the verge of losing their family homes that they worked hard for.

To add insult to injury, Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross questions why these employees must turn to food banks, and Trump's daughter-in-law tut-tuts and downplays the financial ordeal of these employees. This clearly demonstrates that Trump's inner circle is out of touch, and cannot empathize with average Americans. Worst of all are the phony acts of "compassion" displayed by these super-rich one-percenters.

Genuine terrorists are now working on electronic systems that will bring down airliners. So, how will Trump's wall prevent this? Building walls to keep people out lost its practicality with The Great Wall of China.

The Donald put himself in a boxed-in corner of his own making because of his insistence that his wall be built. A current national poll found that 71 percent of Americans do not believe the wall is a valid and legitimate reason for the government shutdown.

The Donald's disapproval rating went up just since December 2018. It is this rising disapproval rating that will get The Donald's attention, and he will be forced to re-open the government, without his wall.

Bob Shippentower
Pendleton