

# How to Revitalize America's Education System

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By Adam Ellwanger

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*Commentary*

*Imagine these words as the first speech delivered by the incoming Secretary of Education.*

Today, I am here to deliver bitter medicine: American education has failed. Teachers and parents, administrators and government—and even students—all bear some responsibility.

The most common explanations for our educational crisis are inadequate funding, overuse of standardized testing, and systemic prejudice. They are false.



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- **Our schools do not lack funding**—no country spends more on public education.



- **The poor results of standardized tests** indicate our failures; they are not the cause.



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- **Our schools are not prejudiced**—the most aggressive education reforms since 1955 directly aimed to eliminate systemic discrimination.

For decades, we ignored signs of trouble, but the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the depth of our challenges. The problems are so pervasive and complex that there is no quick fix. We cannot merely repair; we must rebuild.

Since 2020, American families have struggled mightily. The declining quality of education prompted affluent families to opt out of public schools, leaving middle- and working-class families with diminished resources and influence to push for reform. States' refusal to enact school choice reforms widened the wealth gap and limited generational mobility.

But lower- and middle-class families bear some responsibility, too. The rise of single-parent households, less common among affluent families, has been catastrophic. When the only adult in the home works up to 60 hours a week to make ends meet, there is little time for homework help, PTA meetings, or engaging with school officials. Even in households with two working parents, time and energy are often in short supply.

Teachers, for their part, have good reason to despair. Despite the monumental importance of their work, many are underpaid. They face administrators who value standardized test scores above all else. Meanwhile, declining standards for decorum and discipline, often justified in the name of “social justice,” have made schools unsafe for both teachers and students. Violence and insubordination create an environment unfit for serious learning. Some parents treat schools as daycare centers or demand good grades for minimal effort. Worse, parents of disruptive students often refuse to ensure their children do not rob others of the opportunity to learn.

Yet teachers, too, have failed. They inflate grades to keep their jobs but do no favors for students unprepared for future challenges. This, in turn, lowers the quality of education for students ready for more advanced work, driving gifted students out of public schools.

Another harsh truth is that many teachers are unprepared for the job. The education system has failed for so long that many teachers have never mastered the material they are supposed to teach. Colleges steer future educators toward “education” majors, where coursework focuses more on leftist “social justice” ideology than on subject mastery. Some graduates believe their mission is to “dismantle” an “unjust” society by creating anti-American activists.

When these activist-teachers enter classrooms, they often abandon their duty to transmit America’s culture, knowledge, and values. Instead, they teach students to disdain their nation, its people, its past, and its way of life. This undermines social cohesion and deprives disadvantaged students of the tools they need to succeed.

Outdated curricula exacerbate these issues. Most schools still use models from the late 20th century, failing to address how computing, the internet, and artificial intelligence have transformed how we read, write, and learn. Even in innovative schools, teachers often struggle to balance the needs of non-native English speakers with those of native speakers, diluting the educational experience for the latter.

Our colleges and universities are also broken. Admitting underprepared students has lowered academic standards nationwide. General education curricula often assume a need for remediation, leaving motivated students without the challenge or preparation they deserve.

Government-run financial aid has inflated tuition costs while diminishing the value of college degrees. Proposals to cancel student debt signal to universities that they can continue raising prices without consequence, encouraging predatory admission policies that saddle students with unmanageable debt.

## **How Do We Revitalize American Education?**

Nothing short of an academic Sputnik will suffice. Just as Sputnik spurred the urgency that sent Americans to the moon, we need a bold initiative to revolutionize education:

- We will create K-12 curricula prioritizing history, civics, and an understanding of our government.
- We will eliminate curricula that divide Americans by race, class, religion, sex, or sexual identity.
- We will implement school choice nationwide.
- We will end federal student loan programs, allowing private lenders to evaluate borrowers' ability to repay. Conditional lending will force colleges to lower tuition and revise admissions and program offerings.
- We will expand vocational training and enhance opportunities for gifted students.

- We will raise teacher credentialing standards to ensure advanced subject knowledge.
- We will enforce decorum and discipline in schools. Uniforms will unify student bodies, and measures like suspension and expulsion will ensure classrooms are conducive to learning.
- We will revise college accreditation standards to reflect post-graduation success and employment metrics.
- We will penalize public colleges and universities that engage in discriminatory admissions practices.

And that is just the beginning.

The destiny of our nation depends on education. The effort to revitalize our schools must be as bold as our aspirations. Together, we will bring American education into the 21st century. Together, we will make American education great again.

*From [RealClearWire](#)*

*Views expressed in this article are opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of [The Epoch Times](#).*

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**Adam Ellwanger**

Author

Adam Ellwanger is a professor at the University of Houston–Downtown, where he teaches rhetoric and writing. He is also a higher education fellow at The Leadership Institute’s Campus Reform.

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