Saying Math is Racist Will Only Lead Todays Students to Financial Problems Later in Life

June 11, 2021 - In case you hadn't heard, some people are now saying that mathematics is racist. That claim may sound ludicrous to you... as it should... but it has gotten the attention of a number of pandering politicians and has started to gain some traction. The State of Oregon actually developed a micro course for educators focused on "math equity." As a part of that course, teachers are being told that focusing on getting the correct answer and forcing students to show their work is based on "white supremacy." Unfortunately, focusing on nonsense like this only decreases the likelihood that students will succeed in mathematics. And having a basic understanding of math is a primary key when it comes to avoiding unnecessary debt and leading a financially successful life.

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Our current understanding of mathematics has evolved from thousands of years of study. And it has come from multiple cultures that include the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Indians, the Orient, etc... You get the idea. Just about every culture in human history is represented when you sit down to solve a problem. Regardless of where mathematicians come from, they all have to solve problems using common number sets and procedures. Math is a universal language.

There is no doubt that there are some significant issues with regard to math education though. Most adults can remember the names of the good math teachers that they had. That's because there really aren't many of them. Over the years I had many more bad... or awful... math teachers than I did good ones. Those that are really bad can have a devastating impact on students; dissuading them from pursuing a STEM course of study.

But instead of addressing these issues, states like Oregon and California are now doing away with gifted programs and discouraging students from skipping ahead in their studies to take accelerated courses. In other words they are teaching to the lowest common denominator and, at the same time, discouraging truly talented students from pursing those talents. That's a real problem.

According to a paper published by the University of South Florida, only 16% of high school students are proficient in math and interested in pursing careers dependent upon it. And of those who do, only 50% of them go on to work in careers that actually use their degrees. In total, only 19% of American college students graduate with STEM degrees. Compare that to China where the number is more than 50%.

This creates issues. The United States isn't graduating enough people with these degrees to fill the open positions available in the private sector. This is true even though jobs requiring STEM degrees often pay better and provide long lasting job security.

Without even a basic understanding of math, people can't even balance a check book. And according to another study, 79% of Americans don't do that. It's no wonder that so many people are heavily in debt when they don't even have the ability to manage their personal finances.

When a study states that only 16% of high school graduates are proficient in math, there are some other conclusions that can pretty easily be drawn. This means that schools are giving students passing grades when they don't understand the subject matter. And that means that the schools and individual teachers are actually failing to do their jobs. Calling math "racist" is simply a way for the education system to deflect blame for its own failures. Unfortunately, it does nothing to solve the problem, and because of the polarizing nature of the word "racist", the problem will just become worse for future generations.
by Jim Malmberg
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