

QuickPoint! – Oregon’s Century-Old Lesson in Public Education

By Eric Fruits, Ph.D.

Earlier this week, the Michigan Democratic Party’s Facebook account landed in some hot water. A [post](#) published to the page mocked parents who say they should have a voice in what public schools teach.

The post went on to say that public schools teach kids what society “needs them to know.” This was the same argument made 100 years ago when Oregon voters banned all private schools in the state.

The measure, sponsored by the Masonic Grand Lodge of Oregon and the state chapter of the Ku Klux Klan, required all school-age children to attend Oregon public school, and only public school. They argued that an influx of Catholic immigrants had beliefs that were incompatible with American values. They argued that only a public school could teach these kids what society needed them to know.

While the measure was passed by voters, it went down in flames before the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1925, the Court unanimously [struck down](#) the measure, legalized private schools throughout the country, and famously declared, “the child is not the mere creature of the state.”

Perhaps this should be the first lesson they teach in public schools: The government serves us, not the other way around.

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