

Emma Willard, *Plan for Female Education* (1819)

Emma Willard (1787–1870) established one of the pre-Civil War's best known schools for women in Troy, New York. In her effort to obtain funding from the New York legislature, Willard linked women's education to the well-being of government. Willard's references to frivolity and idleness were addressed to privileged women. They would have little relevance to the harsh, work-filled lives of poor women. How does Willard relate "housewifery" to her educational objectives? What emphasis is placed on the maternal role?*

The inquiry to which these remarks have conducted us is this: what is offered by the plan of female education here proposed, which may teach or preserve, among females of wealthy families, that purity of manners which is allowed to be so essential to national prosperity, and so necessary to the existence of republican government.

1. Females, by having their understandings cultivated, their reasoning powers developed and strengthened, may be expected to act more from the dictates of reason and less from those of fashion or caprice.
2. With minds thus strengthened they would be taught systems of morality, enforced by the sanctions of religion; and they might be expected to acquire juster and more enlarged views of their duty, and stronger and higher motives to its performance.

* From *An Address to the Public; Particularly to the Members of the Legislature of New York, Proposing a Plan for Improving Female Education* (1819); in John Lord, *The Life of Emma Willard* (New York: Appletton, 1873), 76–84.

3. This plan of education offers all that can be done to preserve female youth from a contempt of useful labor. The pupils would become accustomed to it, in conjunction with the high objects of literature and the elegant pursuits of the fine arts; and it is so to be hoped that, both from habit and association, they might in future life regard it as respectable.
4. To this it may be added that, if housewifery could be raised to a regular art and taught upon philosophical principles, it would become a higher and more interesting occupation; and ladies of fortune, like wealthy agriculturists, might find that to regulate their business was an agreeable employment.
5. The pupils might be expected to acquire a taste for moral and intellectual pleasures, which would buoy them above a passion for show and parade, and which would make them seek to gratify the natural love of superiority, by endeavoring to excel others in intrinsic merit, rather than in the extrinsic frivolities of dress, furniture, and equipage.
6. By being enlightened in moral philosophy, and in that which teaches the operations of the mind, females would be enabled to perceive the nature and extent of that influence which they possess over their children, and the obligation which this lays them under, to watch the formation of their characters with unceasing violence, to become their instructors, to devise plans for their improvement, to weed out the vices from their minds, and to implant and foster the virtues. And surely there is that in the maternal bosom which, when its pleadings shall be aided by education, will overcome the seductions of wealth and fashion, and will lead the mother to seek her happiness in communing with her children and promoting their welfare, rather than in heartless intercourse with the votaries of pleasure: especially when, with an expanded mind, she extends her views to futurity, and sees her care to her offspring rewarded by peace of conscience, the blessings of her family, the prosperity of her country, and finally with everlasting pleasure to herself and them.