HELPING COMMUNITIES THRIVE

A lesson in CIVICS

Cracking the TOBACCO POWER WALL

A supermarket in a FOOD DESERT

HAPPY CITIES AND THE NEW SCIENCE OF WELLBEING PAGE 4
1. Taking the Temperature
Late last year, negotiators from 195 nations adopted a historic agreement to address climate change. Hear what RAND experts had to say after the most recent UN Climate Change Conference in Paris (COP21).
MORE AT www.rand.org/a151217

2. Interactive Database of the U.S. Army’s Local Economic Effects
This interactive, web-based tool provides estimates of the economic effects of Army spending for each state and congressional district for fiscal years 2012–2014.
MORE AT www.rand.org/t/TL180

3. Women at War
RAND researcher Kayla Williams, a former Army sergeant, reviews a new book about women at war, their return home from war, the psychological issues of active-duty women, and the experiences of female veterans.
MORE AT www.rand.org/b151221kw

4. Nobel Laureate Speaks at Pardee RAND
Robert Shiller, recipient of the 2013 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences, touched on the stock market, Federal Reserve decisions on interest rates, and markets trying to sell us stuff we don’t need.
MORE AT www.rand.org/v151013

5. Reforming the U.S. Military Officer Personnel System
Today’s system is essentially the same as that put into place after WWII. Senior fellow Bernard Rostker testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee on factors that should drive reform efforts.
MORE AT www.rand.org/t/CT446
A PHRESH Start How one supermarket delivered change to an underserved community

Pittsburgh residents review the results of a RAND study that found a new supermarket improved not just some dietary outcomes, but also neighborhood satisfaction. The study was the largest of its kind to examine the impact of a supermarket in a so-called “food desert.”

A Chance to Thrive Can cities do more to improve the wellbeing of their residents?

“Where There's Smokes...” Breaking through the tobacco power wall

Strengthening Our Democracy Starts in School The case for civics

Research Briefly

Giving Bringing RAND expertise to the classroom

at RANDom The science and fiction of Planets for Man
Till Debt Do You Part?

Marriage can wait. For thousands of young college grads in a recent study, paying off student loans came first.

Women, in particular, were less likely to get married when they were carrying higher levels of student debt. Every unpaid $1,000 knocked the odds of a wedding down by 2 percentage points, the study found.

Put another way, a woman with $15,000 in unpaid student loans was 20 percent less likely to get married in any given month than a woman carrying only $5,000 in student debt. The financial burden of that debt appears to make it harder for women to pencil out a marriage, the researchers wrote, at least in the lean years immediately following graduation.

The same pattern did not hold for men. That may be because men expect better financial returns from their first jobs and a quicker move up the corporate ladder to help them pay off their loans, the researchers wrote. It also may be that college-educated men are harder to find than college-educated women, and are therefore more in-demand as marriage partners despite their debts.

The study, coauthored by Robert Bozick, a senior sociologist at RAND, was based on an unusually rich trove of data from surveys of bachelor’s degree recipients who graduated in 1993. Those data points were admittedly old, the researchers wrote, but there’s no reason to think the underlying issues have changed. After all, they noted, the number of students graduating in debt—and the size of that debt—has only increased since then.

MORE AT
www.rand.org/t/EP50863

Making Money

Terrorists, insurgent groups, and other criminal enterprises may one day have the technological wherewithal to invent their own money—not with dollars and cents, but bits and bytes.

That day, however, is not likely to be anytime soon, RAND researchers concluded in a recent report.

An all-digital “virtual currency” could provide groups like the Islamic State with a new way to build their own economies and fund their activities across borders, the researchers wrote. The high-profile success of Bitcoin, in particular, has shown that such virtual currencies can sustain billions of dollars in trade, all of it potentially anonymous.

The researchers looked at what it would take for a terrorist group or other nonstate actor to create its own virtual currency for everyday transactions, not tap into an existing one like Bitcoin.

They concluded that such an effort would still face tremendous hurdles. It would take some sophisticated computer coding just to get such a currency off the ground, and even then it would face certain hacks and cyberattacks from opponents. The new currency also would be worth exactly nothing for day-to-day transactions to anyone without a working network connection.

But the quick-step march of technology will likely make virtual currencies an increasingly viable option for nonstate groups in the future, RAND found. That’s especially true if the currency can be decentralized across a network—think many bankers, but no bank—a precaution that would make it more resilient to attack and more reliable. At that point, the researchers noted, programming money could be easier and more valuable than printing it.

MORE AT
www.rand.org/t/RR1231
America’s Security Deficit

The United States needs significant and sustained increases in military spending to defend its interests and safeguard the credibility of its security commitments as it confronts a world of emerging dangers, RAND analysts warn.

The nation has instead imposed new constraints on defense spending after more than a decade of war in the Middle East. But that disregards some new realities that change the equation and demand more investment in military power, not less, the RAND experts wrote.

Russia has become a neighborhood bully. A restless China is building up its military while neighboring North Korea continues to present the world with a nuclear guessing game. And far from winding down, the instability of the Middle East has only worsened with the bloody rise of the Islamic State.

Those developments “have combined to turn what looked to some like an acceptable gamble into a slow-motion train wreck,” wrote David Ochmanek, a senior defense analyst at RAND and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Development. “The United States is underinvesting in defense and other instruments of national influence just when they are most needed.”

Rather than cut its military, the United States should increase military spending by at least $50 billion a year for the next nine years, according to RAND’s analysis. That would restore the basic readiness of the force after so many years of war, begin modernizing the nation’s near-obsolete fleet of nuclear-armed submarines, and strengthen U.S. posture in East Asia and the Baltics.

By 2024, such an increase would still leave defense spending lower as a percentage of the overall U.S. economy than it has been since at least the post–Cold War 1990s, RAND’s analysis concluded.

“To put it plainly,” the analysts wrote, “the United States’ credibility and influence internationally, the safety and security of its nuclear arsenal, and the viability of its all-volunteer force could all erode” without a change in course.

A Novel Approach to Climate Policy

World leaders have committed themselves to a global fight to rein in climate change. RAND researchers have some advice for them: Don’t pretend to know how policies enacted today will be implemented tomorrow.

Politicians leave office. Bureaucrats retire. And when they do, even the best-intentioned policies they leave behind become subject to reinterpretation or renegotiation by those who come next.

So how can today’s decisionmakers craft solutions that will last long enough to make a difference on something so monumental? RAND researchers turned to the mathematical models of decision science for an answer: Make friends in the private sector.

The researchers simulated the evolution of a hypothetical carbon tax over nearly a century. They found that a tax structure that returned some of the tax revenue to the private sector—as a reward for cleaner operations, for example—had the biggest impact on carbon emission rates.

The reason? Those companies then had a financial incentive to keep the tax high on their polluting competitors—and became a powerful lobby for the tax that endured even as generations of politicians came and went.

The decisions that world leaders are making today, in other words, can have significant bearing on how their climate-related policies play out in the future—if they’re careful. “The reality is that any policy is also always an experiment,” wrote Steven W. Popper, a senior economist at RAND who coauthored the carbon-tax study with researcher Steven C. Isley. “We never know for sure how it will truly unfold.”
A Chance to Thrive

What We Can Learn from One City’s Effort to Transform Community

Have cities missed the point?

What if, for all their focus on crime stats and traffic patterns, on zoning laws and building codes, they’ve missed the chance to thrive—and to help their residents thrive, too? What if there’s a better way to govern?

RAND researchers have been working on a project to redefine not just how cities measure success, but how they assess their very purpose for being. It’s called the Wellbeing Index, because its central philosophy is that cities can improve not just the safety and comfort of their residents, but also their happiness, their satisfaction with life—their wellbeing.
How they thrive
IN SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA

JOSE CARVAJAL
OWNS A SUCCESSFUL COFFEE BAR IN SANTA MONICA BUT CAN NO LONGER AFFORD TO LIVE IN THE CITY.

SUE SCHUERMAN SERVES ON A NONPROFIT COALITION THAT PROMOTES THE IDEALS OF THE REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

MAYOR TONY VAZQUEZ MADE THE THEME OF THIS YEAR’S STATE OF THE CITY SPEECH: “GET THINGS DONE.”

ALIZANA HOBDY-CLAYTON HAS WON AWARDS FOR HER POETRY WHILE STUDYING AT SANTA MONICA COLLEGE.

BRUCE BAIR HAS OWNED A YOGA STUDIO FOR NEARLY 15 YEARS (AND THINKS THE CITY COULD USE MORE PARKING).

JOSE CARVAJAL
OWNS A SUCCESSFUL COFFEE BAR IN SANTA MONICA BUT CAN NO LONGER AFFORD TO LIVE IN THE CITY.
The city of Santa Monica, Calif., is the project’s sponsor and its case study—putting its official motto, “Happy People in a Happy Place,” to the test. Even here, in a city known for blue skies and golden sand, that shift in focus toward wellbeing has uncovered some surprising fault lines and started to change how government works.

“It’s allowing us to really look at what the purpose of local government is,” said Anita Chandra, a senior policy researcher and director of the Justice, Infrastructure, and Environment program at RAND, which is headquartered in Santa Monica. “Is it only to keep basic services going? Or is it to put into place those things that encourage community wellbeing?”

That word, wellbeing, is meant to go beyond just moment-to-moment happiness. Project leaders use it to describe the health of a community, its sense of connectedness and ability to reach full potential—happiness as a state of being, not just an emotion.

**Starting from scratch**

It might be tempting to brush aside the Santa Monica experiment as a feel-good exercise for a city of wealth, leisure, and natural beauty. One headline writer, for example, summed up the project this way: “Are You Happier than a Santa Monica Resident?”

But then you talk to Rick Cole.

He’s the city manager in Santa Monica, highly regarded in government circles as a sage of innovation. He talks about The Wellbeing Project as a chance to start from scratch and reconsider every function of city government. What is the best use of the fire department, for example, in a city with only a handful of serious structure fires every year? How does a library fit into a future gone digital?

He compares cities to railroads, newspapers, the postal service—giants of American industry brought low because they refused to consider doing anything other than what they had always done. “The question is, What business are cities in?” Cole says. “We should be in the business of community wellbeing.”

“What we’re talking about,” he adds, “is breathtaking.”

The index that RAND helped develop to guide that transformation was the most wide-ranging attempt to measure the wellbeing of an American city ever undertaken. It looked at the usual measures of city success, from library circulation to park acreage, but that was just the start.
The city also surveyed more than 2,000 residents, asking how well they know their neighbors, how often they spend time outside, how responsive they think the city is to their needs. It followed Twitter feeds to see what people in Santa Monica talk about on social media. It looked at where people checked in on the digital app Foursquare, a kind of crowd-sourced city guide. (And no surprise there: The beach was a top destination.)

Mitigating stress

Some of the findings confirmed the city’s reputation as an oceanfront playground, where people tend to be well-off, well-educated, and most of the time happy. Santa Monica residents vote more than average, volunteer more than average, and, despite the traffic and some of the highest housing prices in the nation, like living where they do.

But RAND’s Wellbeing Index also layered a little more nuance into that picture.

It revealed, for example, that despite the sun-and-surf reputation, fewer than half of Santa Monica’s residents get any kind of daily physical activity. Nearly a third said they feel stressed-out some or all of the time. Fewer than half talk to their neighbors on any regular basis, and 40 percent said they don’t feel they have any real voice in their community.

“It’s just become a little bit claustrophobic,” said Aimee Flaherty, a film producer who has lived in Santa Monica for 12 years, as she walked her dog along the city’s oceanfront bluffs on a recent morning. “But at the same time, I love my home. I live nine blocks from the beach. I love my friends, I love my community. I do love my little life here.”

City leaders have labeled the next phase of the project with a single word: Act.

They’ve put a new focus on finding opportunities to get people out and engaged with their neighbors—through festivals, for example, or neighborhood councils. They’re working with the school district to open a health and wellness center at the high school, after the wellbeing survey revealed surprising levels of stress and loneliness among the city’s young people. The library recently updated its long-range plans to put more emphasis on community events and lifelong learning opportunities.

“It’s a mind-set shift,” said Julie Rusk, the city’s assistant director of community and cultural services. “I think we’re really at the beginning of a new way of thinking about the meaning of city services, how the services we deliver provide meaningful value.”
A global movement

That approach may still be novel for most American cities, but it has started to catch on elsewhere. The United Kingdom, for example, has pledged to include wellbeing as a guiding principle in policy decisions. The tiny South Asian nation of Bhutan replaced the strict economics of its Gross National Product with a people-centric measurement it calls Gross National Happiness.

The United Nations now tracks wellbeing around the world, from Switzerland, Iceland, and Denmark at the high end to Syria, Burundi, and Togo at the low. Its “World Happiness Report” shows that economic prosperity is a starting point, but true wellbeing also requires health, trust, social support, and the freedom to make life decisions.

“Just to focus on economic growth is to miss critical aspects of human life,” said John F. Helliwell, an economist at the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research who helps edit the World Happiness Report.

The Santa Monica project was meant to bring that kind of thinking to more American cities. Bloomberg Philanthropies funded the project with $1 million through its Mayors Challenge, a competition meant to turn bold and innovative ideas into real-world civic models.

Santa Monica is now putting together a guidebook to its survey and methods, to walk other cities through their
own wellbeing projects. It also is planning another round of community surveys later this year, to make the Wellbeing Index as active and integral a part of city planning as the annual budget.

Gloria Garvin sees it as a new kind of city report card, graded by the residents themselves. She’s 69 years old, a fourth-generation Santa Monica resident who was not at all surprised that the first round of findings showed some need for improvement. Now, she said, it’s up to the city to learn those lessons.

“It’s certainly not an A-plus,” she said. “There’s traffic congestion, a certain amount of resentment at overdevelopment. It’s frustrating at times dealing with the city council and staff.

“But,” she acknowledged, “I’m still here.”

For more on the City of Santa Monica’s Wellbeing Project, visit www.rand.org/b150429

For more on RAND Europe research on work and wellbeing, visit www.rand.org/workwell

“IT’S CERTAINLY NOT AN A-PLUS. THERE’S TRAFFIC CONGESTION, A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF RESENTMENT AT OVERDEVELOPMENT. IT’S FRUSTRATING AT TIMES DEALING WITH THE CITY COUNCIL AND STAFF. BUT ... I’M STILL HERE.”

GLORIA GARVIN, FOURTH-GENERATION SANTA MONICA RESIDENT
So, in a recent experiment, they did the next best thing to renting out a 7-Eleven. They built their own fake convenience store—stale coffee and all.

Tobacco companies spend hundreds of millions of dollars every year to promote their cigarettes in just such stores, with can’t-miss displays positioned right behind the cash register. Those “power walls” operate on the same marketing principle as the candy racks in supermarket checkout lines: Snag impulse buyers, especially young ones, just as they reach for their wallets.

A few local governments in the United States have tried to restrict power walls as a matter of public health, only to be beaten back by legal challenges from the tobacco industry. What was missing from the debate, the RAND researchers realized, was any real-world experiment strong enough to show whether power walls really do change young minds, and whether removing them would make a difference.

And that, they decided, would require a full-sized, fully functioning replica of a convenience store.

The researchers rented the hollowed-out shell of an old telemarketing call center in an office park in Pittsburgh. They moved in display racks and freezer cases, chips, and sandwiches. They scuffed the floors and left sticky soda spills on the shelves, to give it the right look. They even kept a pot of old coffee simmering on a burner, to give it the right smell.

They called it the RAND StoreLab, and the only thing that changed from day to day was the location and visibility of the tobacco power wall. Sometimes, the researchers left it behind the cash register; other times, they moved it to a side wall, or hid it completely behind a metal screen.
Then, they invited in the teens and tweens—nearly 250 in all, each given $10 and a few minutes to shop in the store. Afterward, the researchers asked participants whether they thought they would try a cigarette sometime in the near future.

Around 30 percent of the young shoppers who saw the power wall—either behind the cashier or on a side wall—said they probably would. The number dropped by nearly half when the power wall was hidden, the researchers reported late last year in an article published in the journal Tobacco Control.

Put simply: “Hiding the power wall decreases kids’ intention to smoke in the future,” said William G. Shadel, a senior behavioral scientist at RAND who led the study.

Tobacco companies have redeployed their billions of advertising dollars in recent years as laws and legal settlements banned them from radio and television, t-shirts and billboards. “The next, and probably final, battleground for the tobacco industry was point-of-sale retail locations,” Shadel said. “This study allows us to fill a gap in the regulatory literature. It actually helps bolster the argument [for further restrictions targeting the power wall].”

The researchers next plan to explore whether graphic posters warning about the dangers of smoking can scare consumers away from cigarettes. They’re also planning another experiment to test whether gruesome warning labels on cigarette packs can convince adult smokers to quit.

At the StoreLab, in other words, the coffee is still on.
The opening of a supermarket in one battered Pittsburgh neighborhood gave RAND researchers an unprecedented opportunity to test—and, it turns out, upend—some core assumptions about food access and health in some of America’s neediest communities.

More than 23 million Americans live in low-income neighborhoods more than a mile from any supermarket, so-called “food deserts” where chips and soda are easier to find than apples or oranges. A generation of public policy has linked such limited access to healthy food to a host of health problems, such as obesity and diabetes.

The federal government has spent half a billion dollars in recent years to entice markets and grocery stores into those food deserts. But the evidence that they improve diets or health outcomes was thin before RAND’s years-long study of the impact one new supermarket had on one urban food-desert neighborhood.

The supermarket changed that neighborhood for the better, RAND found. But not quite the way anyone expected.
Food desert is a good way to put it. You almost had to saddle up your camel to go the mile to get something.
The neighborhood, known to residents as the Hill, had gone more than three decades without a supermarket of its own. Years of civic neglect and disastrous attempts at urban renewal had reduced thousands of its homes to vacant lots or parking lots. It was a place apart, a mostly poor, mostly black island severed from the rest of the city by a busy highway and the hill that gave the neighborhood its name.

It hadn’t always been that way. The Hill once hummed with so much jazz and culture that a visiting Harlem Renaissance poet declared it the “crossroads of the world.” Its music halls drew the likes of Miles Davis and Duke Ellington; its Negro League baseball team starred a young Satchel Paige. Playwright August Wilson, eulogized in the New York Times as theater’s “poet of black America,” introduced Broadway audiences to the characters he met growing up in the Hill.

“It’s been beat up so much,” said Cheryl Hall-Russell, the president of the Hill House Association, a nonprofit community-service provider that partnered with RAND for the supermarket study. “It’s a mix of pain and promise. If you’re here, you can really feel that pain and promise, often in the same person.”

The Shop ‘n Save supermarket that opened in late 2013 was unremarkable except for its address, on Centre Avenue in the commercial heart of the Hill District. It was a victory for the community, which had spent years fighting to bring back a grocery as a matter of public health and social justice. “This is our little garden of Eden,” one resident told the news crews who came for the grand opening. “Our paradise.”

The opening of the supermarket—with its chips and candy aisles, of course, but also fresh produce and a full dairy section—provided a unique opportunity for RAND researchers to track its impact on the neighborhood. They called their study PHRESH, for Pittsburgh Hill/Home-wood Research on Eating, Shopping & Health. It followed more than 800 residents before and after the grand opening to see whether the arrival of the supermarket changed their health or habits.

The researchers found that people in the Hill District were not nearly so captive to neighborhood convenience stores before the supermarket opened as years of public policy had assumed. Most already shopped at a full-service grocery: They just had to drive or catch a bus to get there.

“You couldn’t even get apples” close to home, said Phyllis D. Ghafoor, 61, a Hill District native and community leader. “Trying to build a meal out of a dollar store is torturous. Food desert is a good way to put it. You almost had to saddle up your camel to go the mile to get something.”

The arrival of the Shop ‘n Save did deliver some obvious health benefits, the RAND study found. Neighborhood residents ate around 200 fewer calories a day, on average, after the supermarket opened. They also took in less added sugar and fewer empty or ‘non-nutritious’ calories from solid fats.
or alcohol. The overall quality of their diets stayed about the same, but that counted as a small success, since the diets in a nearly identical comparison neighborhood got worse.

But not everything worked as expected. Residents actually ate fewer fruits, vegetables, and whole grains after the supermarket opened. That may be because neither the new store nor any other market in the area paid any special attention to marketing healthier food, the researchers wrote.

And there was an even bigger twist. The health benefits of the new store had nothing to do with whether people shopped there. The researchers found the same dietary changes in people who never set foot in the new store compared with those who used it every day.

“There was something that this grocery store did [to change] this neighborhood,” said Tamara Dubowitz, a senior policy researcher at RAND who led the study. “The mechanics may be difficult to explain and understand. But we saw that investing in this neighborhood caused positive change, and that’s significant.”

What changed? The researchers found a likely answer in a survey question they had asked residents before and after the store opened: How satisfied are you with your neighborhood? About two-thirds of Hill District residents said they were happy with their neighborhood before the store opened. Afterward, the number shot to 80 percent.

The store, in other words—so long fought for—improved not just the community’s physical health, but its psychological health as well. The fight itself also may have played a role, raising awareness of health and diet through the years of community meetings and rallies that brought the Shop ’n Save to the Hill. The end result was fundamental, a shift not just in diet but also in the community’s perception of itself—“health in a much broader sense,” Dubowitz said.

The RAND study was by far the largest of its kind ever undertaken, and provided the first real evidence that the public-policy bet on supermarkets can pay off in food deserts like the Hill District. The return on those investments just isn’t as simple or direct as once thought.

For residents of the Hill District, the opening of their first neighborhood supermarket in more than 30 years has come to represent a turning point. It coincided with a burst of new activity—a new community center just down the street, hundreds of new homes planned for construction. But it’s the new supermarket that first greets people coming up the hill from downtown, a landmark symbol of progress in a community still fighting to reclaim some of its old jazz.

“It upgrades the community. You have the security of knowing that you have a store to go to,” said Bobbie Street, 68, a longtime Hill resident who, nonetheless, remains loyal to a Giant Eagle store across town. Still, she said, the new Shop ’n Save “is good for the neighborhood, it really is.”

The PHRESH project is funded by the National Cancer Institute of the National Institutes of Health. For more on PHRESH, visit www.rand.org/PHRESH

Top: Neighborhood dignitaries gathered in 2013 for a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the grand opening of the Shop ’n Save supermarket. (Photo courtesy of the Hill House Association)

Bottom: A community member reviews a summary of RAND’s PHRESH study and its findings.

A New Supermarket in a Food Desert: Is Better Health in Store? is available for free download at www.rand.org/t/RB9874
Civics classes have long been a mainstay of American education. In fact, the original purpose of U.S. education was to shape citizens who share a common ideal and have the knowledge, skills, and inclination to uphold the tenets of democracy. But in more recent decades, the teaching of civics and other social studies courses has hit hard times in most states, driven in part by accountability systems that reward schools for math and reading scores, leading many schools to shift time away from other subjects in response.

However, with polls showing record-low job approval ratings for Congress, a political landscape littered with extreme positions, and recent tragic events that call into question assumptions about shared allegiance to American ideals, a return to civics education seems warranted now more than ever.
U.S. democracy depends on citizens’ investment in the constitutional foundation on which the country stands. Beyond a simple belief, the laws, rights, and responsibilities of U.S. democracy provide ways for citizens to improve our government and society—through voting, free speech, petitions, proposing new policy, peaceful protest, judicial system involvement, and many other civic actions.

Yet we are not born knowing how to engage in these civic activities. We learn through family and friends, colleagues, classmates, and public service campaigns. In addition, schools have historically been and continue to be an equally important way to educate young citizens about their country’s civic ideals and legal rights. However, some of us—perhaps even many—are not taught about our civic rights and duties. Take, for example, voting, which seems like it should be one of the most straightforward ways to engage democratically. Yet placing an educated vote is far from a simple activity, since it requires the ability to analyze current events, evaluate policy arguments, and understand the political process, as well as know how to register and actually place a vote. Learning to engage civically can take many forms, including striving for social justice, proposing policy, participating in political campaigns, serving on a jury, and expressing opinions in a public forum. If not through high-quality, school-based civic education, how will young people gain the skills, knowledge, and motivation necessary to effectively participate in civic life?

Disparities in educational outcomes can come into play in civic engagement. Civic equality is not a birthright. The United States is a nation where wealthier and white youth have a much greater probability of enrolling in and graduating from college and being employed than poorer and minority youth. Unfortunately, the probability of voting and other civic engagement is highly correlated to socioeconomic background. To develop a widely engaged populace, public schools must attempt to correct this civic inequity.

Such a shift, however modest, may be on the horizon. The 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act that President Obama signed into law December 10 includes several new social studies, history, and civics federal-funding sources—the presidential and congressional academies for American history and civics, which offer teacher workshops and education programs aimed at students; grants for local education agencies to develop, implement, and strengthen programs that teach traditional American history, civics, economics, geography, or government education; and grants that support innovation and research in teaching. Even though the new funding is relatively modest, the renewed federal support for civics education is a small but significant step forward. To optimize this opportunity, teachers should be prepared to teach civics in a new way. Continuing with the status quo civics education that consists of dry textbooks, lectures, worksheets, and multiple-choice tests would be an enormous mistake. Instead, high-quality, school-based civic education can teach
democracy through a dynamic “action civics” curriculum that teaches students how and why to engage civically rather than simply teaching them about citizenship. For instance, the Campaign for the Civic Mission for Schools—a coalition of more than 70 groups committed to improving civic learning—recommends students engage in formal classroom instruction in civics and other social studies courses that includes discussion of controversial current issues and simulations of democratic processes such as voting or legislative deliberation as well as participation in extracurricular activities including “service learning” and involvement in school governance.

Teaching action civics can build on project-based learning, an approach that is rapidly growing in popularity as teachers learn new ways to effectively teach to Common Core State Standards and other state standards that demand development of students’ sophisticated thinking and communication skills. Research has shown that teachers also need to receive more training in how to facilitate conversations about controversial topics and current events, and in how to personalize instruction so that students may be moved to actively engage with issues they are passionate about.

Many competing factors divert attention from civic education. Policymakers and educators are overwhelmed with demands to improve students’ math and reading performance; to increase student engagement in science, technology, engineering, and math topics; to increase focus on physical education, arts, and foreign languages; and to combat the high rate of high school dropouts—all of which are important causes.

Yet civic education is critical to the stability of our democracy. It behooves us as a nation to create the conditions necessary for teachers to teach about how and why we can and should engage as citizens.

Anna Saavedra is a policy researcher at the RAND Corporation.

This commentary originally appeared in U.S. News & World Report in December 2015.
East Rockingham High School seniors (clockwise from left) Sarah Hopkins, 17, Brooklyn Trimble, 17, Cortland Morris, 18, and Charlie Morris, 17, cast their vote for president during a mock election held by Rockingham County Registrar Lisa Gooden during their government class Tuesday, September 15, 2015, in Elkton, Virginia.
The establishment of the Harold and Colene Brown Faculty Chair at the Pardee RAND Graduate School

Harold Brown, the former U.S. Secretary of Defense, president of the California Institute of Technology, director of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, and RAND trustee, and his wife, Colene, have made a gift to establish the Harold and Colene Brown Faculty Chair at the Pardee RAND Graduate School.

The chair will enable exceptional RAND researchers and faculty to be in residence at the school each year, allowing them to work on independent research and provide mentorship and guidance to students.

RAND president and CEO Michael Rich announced the gift last Veterans Day at One Night with RAND, a fundraising event with leaders in business, philanthropy, government, academia, and media discussing America’s role in the world.

The event featured a salute to Brown and his career, which includes a 60-year affiliation with RAND first as a client, and then as a trustee and a philanthropist. Many of Brown’s friends and colleagues contributed gifts to RAND in his honor. The lead donor for the tribute was Warburg Pincus, where Brown served as a managing director and senior advisor. Committee members included President Jimmy Carter, former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, former Secretary of the Navy Richard Danzig, former Undersecretary of Defense Paul Kaminski, former Secretary of Defense William Perry, former Secretary of the Air Force and former president of RAND Donald Rice, and former president of RAND James Thomson.

In announcing the gift, Rich said, “Harold has been critical to the growth of our graduate school. This chair will rotate between RAND researchers to allow them to be in residence at Pardee RAND, providing student mentorship while infusing innovative thinking that will inspire students to take on the most complex policy problems.”

Brown and his wife have already established a faculty fellowship, allowing RAND researchers to work with students on critical policy issues.

“With this additional gift,” said Susan Marquis, dean of the graduate school, “we will be able to provide substantial and transformative support to Pardee RAND faculty, significantly bringing together the intellectual and academic freedom offered by the school with the vast talent and critical mission of RAND.”

Elaborating on why he has invested in Pardee RAND, Brown said, “RAND has for nearly seven decades been the gold standard in public policy research and analysis. The Pardee RAND Graduate School has rapidly achieved a similar status among graduate schools that educate the next generation of policy analysts and produce academic research. Colene and I are delighted to enable the school to use the skills and experience of RAND researchers more flexibly in the school’s educational process.”
Imagine it’s the 1960s and you’ve written a dense scientific book that you want people to actually read. What do you do? Persuade famous science-fiction author Isaac Asimov to rewrite it with you, of course.

Talk about a fantastic voyage. Asimov worked with RAND researcher Stephen Dole to produce Planets for Man, published in 1964 at the height of the space race and five years before the first moon landing. The book—intended to be a layman-friendly version of Dole’s more technical Habitable Planets for Man—projected where in the universe human life might survive or might already be flourishing based on what they knew then about biology and cosmology. (They ruled out every planet in our solar system by page 9.) Planets for Man was reissued in paperback and digital editions in 2008 to celebrate RAND’s 60th anniversary.

The book wasn’t Asimov’s only link to RAND. He (and fellow sci-fi author Arthur C. Clarke) participated in a 1963 exercise that asked noted experts in various fields to forecast future scientific and technological trends. Among Asimov’s predictions was that world population would peak at around 6.5 billion.

“My low estimate is a case of deliberate optimism,” he wrote. “I am assuming that the human race in an attack of sanity will take reasonable measures to put the brake on the population explosion.” While When Sanity Attacks might make a great cable TV show, the concept hasn’t taken hold when it comes to reproduction. The population is at 7 billion—and growing.
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