HOW EDUCATORS ARE FARING in the COVID era

Middle school lessons to counter TRUTH DECAY

Reducing firearm violence and MASS ATTACKS

MEET RAND’S NEW CEO
Personal Firearm Storage in the United States

Senior behavioral scientist Rajeev Ramchand describes what safe storage actually means; presents estimates of U.S. gun owners’ storage practices; presents research on select populations of interest, such as households with children; and summarizes research on the effectiveness of interventions that seek to change firearm storage practices.

MORE AT www.rand.org/t/RRA243-5

The RAND State Firearm Law Database

RAND developed a longitudinal data set of state firearm laws that is free to the public, including other researchers, to support improved analysis and understanding of the effects of various laws. The database is accompanied by a paper that documents the methods that RAND researchers used to construct the database and provides definitions and other information that will facilitate its use.

MORE AT www.rand.org/t/TLA243-2-v2

Abortion Misinformation in a Post-Roe Environment

Since the June 2022 Supreme Court decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization eliminated the constitutional right to abortion, patients and providers have found themselves in a chaotic information environment. Senior policy researcher Julia Rollison discusses how four potential sets of stakeholders—states, tech companies, large employers and health insurers, and data-driven reproductive health organizations—can lead the charge on preventing abortion misinformation.

MORE AT www.rand.org/t/CTA1458-1

Extremist Use of Online Spaces

In April 2022, senior international and defense policy researcher Heather Williams and policy researcher Alexandra Evans submitted testimony to the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol.

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Steps to Reduce the Risk That Climate Change Poses to U.S. Communities

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MORE AT www.rand.org/v220707
Educator Well-Being in the COVID Era
Teachers and principals report frequent job-related stress at twice the rate of other workers.

The Future Could Be Brilliant
RAND’s new president and CEO is an “apocaloptimist”

Mass Attacks Defense Toolkit
Researchers created a tool to advance efforts to prevent firearm violence and public mass attacks in the U.S.

Media Literacy Among Students
An educational tool, created as part of RAND’s Countering Truth Decay initiative

While students struggle and parents and politicians argue about mask mandates and curricula, the strain on teachers and principals to keep schoolkids safe, engaged, and healthy has been significant.
Anti-Bias Education in K–12 Schools

Nearly three-quarters of the teachers in a recent RAND survey said they provide some kind of anti-bias education in their classrooms. School districts need to provide better guidance and materials to help them navigate what has become a lightning-rod issue.

Researchers asked more than 7,000 public school teachers whether they address topics such as respect for diversity and awareness of injustice. Seventy-three percent said they do. Teachers who were Black, female, and had fewer years of experience were especially likely to say they address anti-bias topics.

More than half of the teachers described the instructional materials they have as inadequate for addressing such topics. More than a third said they were not well prepared—or prepared at all—to teach about diversity, bias, and injustice. Yet more than 80 percent said they consider it somewhat or extremely important to include culturally relevant content and approaches in their teaching.

If anything, the researchers noted, the proportion of teachers providing anti-bias education could be an undercount. The survey included general elementary teachers and math, science, and English language arts teachers—but not teachers whose main assignment is social studies. Those teachers might be more likely to address issues related to diversity and injustice.

Researchers fielded the survey to teachers in RAND’s American Teacher Panel in May and June 2021. At the time, several states were debating whether and how teachers should cover topics related to racism, sexism, and bias. As of July 2022, 17 states had taken action to limit the teaching of “critical race theory,” “divisive concepts,” or “race scapegoating.”

State and local policymakers, school leaders, and teachers should develop a shared definition of anti-bias education and clarify how teachers should implement it, researchers wrote. Teachers also need better training and instructional materials to help them address anti-bias topics without violating the law in their states.

MORE AT
www.rand.org/t/RRA134-12

This report is based on research funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, the Overdeck Family Foundation, and the Walton Family Foundation.
U.S. Business Community Support for U.S.–China Competition

The United States initiated a series of trade actions against China in 2018 that soon spiraled into an escalating exchange of tariffs on everything from soybeans to solar panels. Researchers at RAND wanted to know how that trade war has played in American boardrooms.

To find out, they reviewed the transcripts of quarterly earnings calls from major U.S. manufacturing, technology, and financial firms. They also interviewed dozens of corporate executives and business officials and conducted a nationwide public opinion survey of nearly 2,500 U.S. adults.

They found broad support for efforts to level the playing field and to take actions against China for intellectual property theft and human rights abuses. But the business community raised significant concerns about specific policy approaches, lack of consultation, and a go-it-alone approach to raising tariffs on Chinese goods.

The earnings calls bore that out. Manufacturing and technology firms, in particular, expressed growing concerns about their China-related operations, indicating that the trade war may have cut into their bottom lines.

Large financial firms, on the other hand, mostly described their China operations in a less-negative light, suggesting they believed specific policies would not affect their ability to operate in China’s financial markets.

The United States should work with its international partners to present a unified front on issues of economic competition with China, researchers wrote. That will give it more leverage than enacting its own unilateral tariffs and getting pulled into a tit-for-tat trade war.

It also should do more to consult with business leaders before taking economic actions that could come back to hurt them. That would give U.S. businesses time to prepare for any impact, researchers wrote. But it would also give U.S. policy the benefit of knowledge and expertise from people who do business with China every day.

COUNTERING RUSSIA

Russia could pose a disruptive threat to Europe long after its war in Ukraine has ended or has ground into stalemate. Weakened and humiliated, it may be tempted to take swipes at U.S. allies in the “gray zone” of conflict short of war.

U.S. Army special operations forces could play an important role in countering such activities. They are uniquely well-suited for the low-simmer dynamics of such conflict, trained to operate in small teams, on the ground, with local partners, while drawing little attention to themselves.

Yet military planners have not fully established what role Army special operations forces should play in countering Russian activity. Researchers reviewed military doctrine and guidance documents, interviewed experts, and analyzed data on past operations to better understand how and when they could be most effective. U.S. Army Special Operations Command sponsored the study.

Special operations forces, which also include soldiers trained in psychological operations and civil affairs, could help strengthen allied forces on the ground and counter Russian propaganda. Their presence could reassure foreign partners of U.S. resolve, although the researchers cautioned that small teams of special forces are not likely to have a significant deterrent effect on Russia itself. If conditions worsen and competition intensifies, those same teams can work with local forces to disrupt Russian operations and, if needed, lay the groundwork for military action.

The invasion of Ukraine has shown that Russia is more willing to take costly risks than many observers had thought. The United States should engage with its partners and allies and continue to develop strategies and capabilities to respond to the evolving Russian threat. As part of that, it needs to provide more-concrete guidance for using special operations forces and embedding them in America’s long-term political and military strategy.

MORE AT www.rand.org/t/RRA1417-1

Funding for this research was made possible by the independent research and development provisions of the RAND Corporation’s contracts for the operation of its U.S. Department of Defense federally funded research and development centers.

MORE AT www.rand.org/t/RRA412-1
Meeting the Moment

Jason Matheny, RAND’s new president and CEO, understands the importance of policy solutions that promote safety, security, health, and prosperity

By Doug Irving, Staff Writer
Jason Matheny had a short list of priorities as he started work as RAND’s new president and CEO earlier this summer. Strengthen the competitiveness of democracies for the 21st century. Prevent technological disaster. And prevent the truth decay that’s damaging American politics.

Matheny has spent his career trying to see what’s coming around the next corner, from synthetic viruses to artificial intelligence. His work has taken him from the housing projects of Chicago and the remote villages of India to the Pentagon and the White House. A friend describes him as an apocaloptimist—“meaning,” he says, “that we’re on a really good trajectory, if we can just avoid any threats to our existence.”

“We should be aiming to improve the world as much as we can with whatever resources we have,” he said. “The future could be really brilliant if we dedicate ourselves to solving the world’s most important problems. There’s no better place to do that than RAND.”

The best ideas are going to come from a more diverse group of thinkers.

JASON MATHENY

Matheny is a technologist, a futurist, a huge fan of ’80s pop music, and a self-confessed nerd. He describes his ideal day as sitting at the beach with his wife and an iced coffee, reading research reports on his tablet. To calm his nerves before a big speech, he imagines the Big Bang, 13.8 billion years ago, and tells himself: “This will be over in 20 minutes, and in 13.8 billion years, it’s not going to matter that much.”

He grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, and learned the importance of public service from his mother, a city planner; his father, a professor of child development; and his sister, who went on to be a schoolteacher. He went to college in Chicago, hoping to become an architect and work in affordable housing. While there, he took a side job doing social work in Chicago’s Cabrini-Green Homes, which opened his eyes to the depths of structural poverty in America.

He was in the school library one day when he stumbled across a report from the World Bank. One number stopped him cold: Around 2.5 million people were dying every year from vaccine-preventable diseases, most of them children. “That was just so staggering for me, that we have this level of avoidable misery in the world,” he said. It helped convince him to change his focus to public health.

That was the first time his career turned on a moment. The second came several years later. He was working on an HIV prevention program in India when news broke that scientists had synthesized the polio virus in a test tube. Some of his colleagues had spent decades working to eradicate the virus responsible for smallpox. Now it seemed a matter of time before someone could rebuild it in their basement.

He began digging into any research he could find on biotechnology and risk, and kept coming across the same name: Andrew Marshall. A former RAND researcher, Marshall by then was the director of the Pentagon’s Office of Net Assessment, and an early voice of caution in the expanding field of biotechnology. Matheny sent him an email, not even knowing if he had the right address. Marshall wrote back—and invited Matheny to meet the next time he was in...
Washington. It was his introduction to the national security world.

Matheny joined IARPA—the Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity—a few years later to work on developing better ways to detect biological weapons. He later served as the director of a division known simply as the Office of Anticipating Surprise. He oversaw one of the largest crowdsourcing experiments in history, an effort to predict world events with the combined wisdom of tens of thousands of ordinary people. One clear takeaway that has shaped his leadership ever since: The more diverse the teams, the better their results. “The science on that was strong,” he said. “The best ideas are going to come from a more diverse group of thinkers.”

He became the director of IARPA in 2015, and the assistant director of national intelligence a few years later. When Foreign Policy magazine named him a top global thinker in 2015, it described his work as a “crucial link” between science and national security.

More recently, he launched a think tank at Georgetown University that focuses on averting risk from artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies (sample publication: “AI and the Future of Disinformation Campaigns”). He joined the White House in 2021 to lead policy on technology and national security.

RAND’s Board of Trustees selected him from a field of more than 200 candidates earlier this year to become RAND’s sixth president and CEO.

“What excites me about the future is that the United States is still, currently, the world’s primary engine for invention,” he said. “We continue to demonstrate the value of democracy and diversity by showing that they work. And we’re still the destination of choice for the world’s leading scientists and engineers.”

“What concerns me,” he added, “is that if you ask me 20 years from now, I’m not sure those three things will still be the case.”

He said he is intent on listening—to RAND’s researchers, alumni, fans, and critics—and working with them to identify how RAND can make the greatest impact. But he said a few broad topics were obvious priorities for those next 20 years and beyond:

**Keeping up with technological change:** “We’re at an especially fragile moment right now,” he said. “We still function in a much more complicated world than the one in which it was originally designed. During the Cold War, RAND built up a bench of economists, linguists, and political scientists who understood the Soviet Union better than anyone else in the country. We now need that same level of technical depth in order to understand China’s political, military, and economic plans and capabilities.”

**Domestic challenges:** “A large part of our population has been left behind—economically, in education, in measures of health and opportunity. How do we address these structural disadvantages that we see in this country and many others? At the same time, we face challenges from climate change, from aging, from the costs of chronic health problems, and we need to figure out solutions.”

**Truth decay:** “Truth decay—the diminishing role of facts and analysis in public life—is one of the true existential risks, not just to the United States, but to democracy globally. It cuts across what’s required for democracies to function, which is that we have some common way of agreeing on facts.”

“For nearly 75 years,” he said, “RAND has had an uncanny ability to identify the most important trend lines and play a significant role in helping the world navigate them. Our mission—to help improve policy and decisionmaking through research and analysis—requires us to make sure that the most consequential decisions are informed by the best possible evidence. We now have a moment where we need to think about what will define the next 75 years.

“If you could read a history book in the year 2098, what are going to be the key themes, the highlights? And what is the role that RAND will play in helping the world safely navigate those years ahead?”

He hopes to be remembered for one thing when those future histories are written: “reducing the risk of human extinction by .00000001 percent or greater,” he said. “Hopefully greater.”
Frederick Pardee Dies at 89
THE FORMER RAND RESEARCHER GAVE GENTEROUSLY
TO RAND AND THE GRADUATE SCHOOL THAT
BEARS HIS NAME

Frederick S. Pardee, a former RAND Corporation researcher and longtime RAND supporter, died in June 2022.

The Pardee RAND Graduate School has carried his name since 2003, when he made a generous donation to support its endowment. The gift allowed the graduate school to expand, and today it has more than 100 students who are pursuing a doctorate in policy analysis. The school was founded in 1970 as one of America’s original eight graduate programs in public policy and the only one based at a research organization.

“I don’t consider this a gift to RAND; I consider it a gift to the world because these graduates will work to change the world for the better.”

FREDERICK PARDEE

Pardoe worked as an economic analyst at RAND from 1957 to 1971. Shortly after leaving RAND, he founded a privately held investment firm that owns and operates apartment complexes in and around Los Angeles.

Pardoe continued to give generously to RAND and his namesake graduate school throughout his life. His additional donations helped create the RAND Frederick S. Pardee Center for Longer Range Global Policy and the Future Human Condition, which works to explore trends and the potential developments in the world 35 to 200 years in the future.

He also helped create the Pardee Initiative for Global Human Progress at the Pardee RAND Graduate School. The program tries to develop solutions to global or multinational challenges in Asia and Africa and partners with outside experts and organizations to bring about change. One collaboration sought to improve agricultural sustainability and food security in Africa by reintroducing traditional foods into African diets and agriculture.

His final gift, in 2021, included two Los Angeles apartment buildings designated specifically for Pardee RAND student housing. It was his desire to help relieve students and their families of the burden of finding affordable housing so that they could focus on making the world a better place.

From 2003 until his death, Pardoe served on the board of governors of the Pardee RAND Graduate School and helped position it as a first-rate policy Ph.D. program. He relentlessly pushed Pardee RAND to globalize and helped champion the development of a new model for public policy education.

“It’s such an honor to have the graduate school bear the name of Frederick S. Pardoe,” said Nancy Staudt, the dean of the school and vice president of innovation at RAND. “Our ongoing relationship with him reflected his deep-seated interest in innovative problem-solving, particularly in the application of new discoveries and insights aimed at improving the quality of human life on a global scale.”

Born in 1932 in Bolton, Massachusetts, Pardoe said he grew up during World War II dreaming of peace among nations and a better human condition. After earning both bachelor’s and master’s degrees in business and management in 1954 from Boston University, he served in the Air Force before joining RAND as a systems analyst.

“I was never really interested in just making money,” Pardoe said in 2003. “If I were, I would never have joined RAND in the first place. But I was fortunate, and my real estate investments grew in value. I want to give something back. I think about why I’m here. Why did I get placed on planet Earth? I’ve concluded that one is placed here to make a difference, and I want to make a difference by supporting institutions that will shape the future.”
Melissa Labriola is a senior behavioral and social scientist and associate director of the Economics, Sociology, and Statistics Department at RAND.

Research Efforts to Reduce Police Violence

Police in America fatally shoot around 1,000 people every year. For young men, in particular, that makes police shootings one of the leading causes of death in the United States—and for Black men, the risks are even higher. One in 1,000 can expect to be killed by police.

A succession of high-profile police killings—from Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014 to George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 2020—has prompted some departments and communities to seek change. But data is sparse, and research is thin. As a recent RAND study noted, “It is hard to intervene in a problem when our overall understanding of the problem is limited.”

Melissa Labriola helped lead that study. She and fellow researchers Meagan Cahill and Jirka Taylor assessed what we know and don’t know about police killings and developed a road map for future research that could move the field forward. They used the phrase “police killings” as the most neutral and accurate description, without the implications of guilt or innocence that other terms can convey.

Labriola has spent her career studying the criminal justice system—especially how alternative programs like drug courts or police diversion can reduce crime and improve outcomes for people involved.
What were you hoping your study would add to the national conversation?

A We’ve seen a lot of momentum on this issue in recent years, and both law enforcement and communities have started to focus on what reforms need to happen. But there is just a dearth of research that could guide them. There are policymakers out there who want to make changes, but they’re left to select strategies, tactics, training based on hearing from someone that it might work. We wanted to be on the front line of these changes and provide a systematic research agenda that could help guide them.

What do you think are the most important findings?

The lack of data in this area is severe. Police agencies hold their data tight, and they don’t always want to share it. But beyond that, we don’t even have a standard definition of police killings. Departments use their own definitions, so we can’t generalize across departments or get a good picture of what is happening across the country.

When we stepped back and started writing the report, it also became clear that there are three more foundational issues that we really need to understand better. Racial inequities—in policing in general and police killings in particular—are woefully understudied, despite the attention they have received in recent years. We also need a much better understanding of police culture, and of the role that police unions play in both preventing change and partnering on it.

Your report highlights a number of agencies that are trying new things that could make a difference; those efforts just haven’t been scaled up or well-studied. Did any particular efforts stand out to you?

The way police are trained right now is mostly focused on tactical situations. We’re starting to see positive results for de-escalation and implicit bias trainings, and the research on that is good.

There’s also good research that shows that strict use-of-force policies can make a difference when they’re clear and specific and direct officers to follow a progressive line of escalation before they hit lethal force.

With regard to body-worn cameras, the research goes both ways. We really don’t know the departmental or situational factors under which body-worn cameras reduce killings, but that is definitely a promising line of research.

What are two or three steps that policymakers could take that would help?

Start collecting data with some sort of systematic definition. That’s the big one.

Rethink and reevaluate how officers are trained.

And then look at departmental use-of-force policies, really embed them in the department, abide by them, make them something that is very important to every officer. And then go back and research what combinations of these policies are most effective.

What made you want to pursue this line of research?

It’s just so important, so needed in the field right now. Often, we’re asking a specific research question or evaluating a specific intervention. This was an opportunity to think more holistically about the problem and how to solve it, to provide a road map at the front end to help produce the biggest impact.

What brought you into criminal justice research in the first place?

I started out as a sociologist, wanting to affect system change, and that led me to the criminal justice system. I worked on innovations in the court system—drug courts, domestic violence courts. But there are so many different actors and agencies involved, so I’ve been able to focus on police, prosecutors, the courts, probation. They’re all touching so many people’s lives. And so we need to keep asking: Are there more effective ways to treat the underlying issues, to reduce collateral consequences, to get people out of the system, to decrease crime but also to improve public safety and community relationships? The time is ripe to not just discuss these issues, but to get to answers.

SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER 2022 | RAND.ORG 9
Put aside the politics for a moment, the pointing fingers, the thoughts and prayers and hopeless shrugs. What can people do right now to protect their communities from mass shootings?

Researchers at RAND have spent two years working to answer that question. They didn’t just look at the deadliest shootings and ask what went wrong. They looked at would-be shootings that never made the news and asked what went right. The result is a step-by-step guide to prevent shootings and other mass attacks before they happen, and to save lives when they do. It’s written for police, paramedics, local government officials—and for church leaders, concert promoters, grocery store owners, and school superintendents.

“I don’t like having to live in a world in which I know my daughter has a lot of fear over this,” said John Hollywood, who led the effort as a senior operations researcher at RAND. “We have the findings, we have the tools, we have the processes that we need to really do a better job of getting a handle on this. It’s a matter of going out and using them.”

In 2018, a woman in Everett, Washington, just north of Seattle, picked up a spiral notebook that had been lying on her grandson’s bed. She flipped it open and found the detailed outline of a school shooting. Zip ties for the doors. Bombs beneath the bleachers. A date in April that would coincide with the Columbine shooting.

“I’m preparing myself,” her grandson had written. “I can’t wait. My aim has gotten much more accurate.”

The woman did the most important thing she could do. She called for help. RAND’s study looked at 640 mass attack plots that endangered, or would have endangered, four or more people in a public place between 1995 and 2020. More than half were thwarted before anyone got hurt—and in two-thirds of those cases, it was because of a tip from the public. Yet
previous research has shown that people are much more likely to try to talk to a potential shooter themselves or to do nothing than to call in a report.

“We have to get people to trust their instincts, to know that if they think about something for more than about five seconds, they really need to take action,” said Tara Richardson, a senior consultant with Lafayette Group, a public safety consulting firm that partnered with RAND.

For years now, RAND has been pulling together evidence to inform the debate over which policies could slow gun violence in America, such as child-access prevention laws. But the mass attacks project had a different purpose, and a different audience. Researchers wanted to provide tips and tools that communities could implement themselves, no Senate vote or governor’s signature required.

That starts with educating people about the specific warning signs they should watch for—words and actions that indicate not just motivation, but preparation for an attack. Those warning signs have not been well-publicized, but they should be. Public education campaigns could provide better guidance—beyond just “see something, say something”—about when people should reach for the phone.

Communities need to think of their response to such tips as a team effort. That means schools, mental health providers, social service agencies, major venue owners, and law enforcement all sharing information and establishing a single point person to follow up. That follow-up should be relentless and sustained. One of the biggest predictors of a plot reaching execution was information falling through the cracks.

In late November 2021, for example, rumors began to spread through the halls of Oxford High School in eastern Michigan that something terrible was about to happen. They were specific enough, and scary enough, that some students stayed home from school. “We got none of it,” the county sheriff said afterward.

During a break between classes, with the halls crowded with students, a 15-year-old boy walked out of a bath-
Researchers wanted to provide tips and tools that communities could implement themselves, no Senate vote or governor’s signature required.

room with a 9 mm handgun and opened fire. Four students died. Seven people were hurt. But the school had practiced active-shooter drills, and every classroom had a lock on the door. Students who fled the hallways knew to get into a classroom, lock and barricade the door, and grab anything they could to defend themselves—a hockey stick, a tape dispenser, scissors.

Run. Hide. Fight. When a shooting starts, those are, in order, the most effective ways to survive, and they should be as well-publicized as the warning signs. RAND’s study included 65 cases in which people fought back—and in 85 percent of those cases, they stopped the gunfire. In 12 cases, people rushed the shooter from different directions—and in all 12 cases, they stopped the shooting.

Communities need to know how they would respond, too. Police drills need to emphasize a lesson that has been clear since Columbine: Don’t wait, don’t assemble a response team, just stop the shooting. But schools, shopping malls, and other so-called “soft targets” also need to train—with police and other community partners—until their response is seamless. Washington, D.C., for example, recently offered active-shooter training for nightlife and religious workers, with instruction on what to do if a gunman is nearby and how to tie a tourniquet.

RAND’s study identified three additional steps that such potential targets can take to better protect people inside their buildings. They can ensure plenty of well-marked exits. They can provide longer walk-ups and controlled-entry areas, so people can see who’s coming. And, like the high school in Oxford, they can put locks on the doors. One study found that, as of 2017, no active shooter in the United States had successfully breached a locked door.

“We have examples where a shooter shows up, the doors are locked, and the shooter is left to basically run around until the police show up,” Hollywood said. “You haven’t heard about them because they weren’t mass-casualty events.”

RAND and its partners on the project—Lafayette Group, RTI International, and Karchmer Associates—chose not to present their findings in an inch-thick research report. Instead, they took what they learned from the data and from interviews with dozens of experts and first responders, and used it to build a free, online tool, available to anyone.

The tool walks users through every step of preparing for, preventing, and responding to a mass attack. It includes links to funding sources, case studies, model programs, assessment tools, databases, and training guides. The National Institute of Justice sponsored the project.

“We wanted to give communities clear, concrete steps they can take to protect themselves,” said Dick Donohue, who came to the project as the director of the RAND Center for Quality Policing. a former Boston-area transit police officer—and a shooting survivor. A bullet severed his femoral artery during a gun battle with the Boston Marathon bombers in 2013.

“Community stakeholders such as schools or law enforcement agencies need to assess: ‘Where are we missing things?’” he said. “It comes down to training and follow-up. Do they have relationships in the community? Can they get the word out? If something happens, God forbid, do they know how to reunite families?”

RAND’s project had its roots in many places—in Orlando’s Pulse nightclub, in the Route 91 Harvest country music festival in Las Vegas, in the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, Texas. But one shooting in particular motivated the research. In February 2018, a former student who had threatened to kill people and was known to have weapons walked into Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, and started shooting. Seventeen people died. It was the deadliest school shooting since Sandy Hook—until this spring, when 19 children and two teachers were killed in Uvalde, Texas.

Just one day before the shooting in Parkland, a woman in Everett, Washington, called the police to report the notebook she had found in her grandson’s room. Police arrived, searched the room, and found a rifle hidden in a guitar case. They pulled the grandson from his classroom at school and arrested him.

He had written in his notebook that he wanted to make his school attack “infamous.” It’s not, because nothing fell through the cracks. He pleaded guilty to charges that included attempted first degree murder and illegal possession of an explosive device. He’s now serving time in a Washington state prison.
The State of Teachers and Principals in the COVID Era

By Doug Irving, Staff Writer

Sheena Graham—"Mama Graham" to her students—knew it was time to go. She had always thought of her music classroom as a sanctuary. Now, in the third year of a pandemic, with students struggling and politicians arguing about mask mandates and critical race theory, it didn’t seem like much of a sanctuary anymore.

In big cities and small towns, teachers and principals are hurting. A recent RAND survey found they are twice as likely as other workers to experience frequent job-related stress. They report higher rates of depression and burnout, and much lower rates of resilience. Nearly a third are so disillusioned that they are considering leaving the profession—and the number is even higher among teachers of color, many of whom say they have faced discrimination from colleagues and parents.

There was no single moment that convinced Graham it was time to leave the profession she loves. There were many. But one that sticks in her mind is a boy railing against a school mask mandate and scoffing at the threat of COVID, just feet away from another student, sitting silently, who Graham knew had just lost several family members to it. She almost made it to 39 years of classroom service—almost.

“What was going on in the world—all the arguing, the politics—it was creeping into the school,” she says now. “Within the four walls of my classroom, it was hard to be able to nurture everyone and make each student feel valued and help each one find some place of comfort amidst so much anger.”

“I think what it came down to is this,” she says after a pause. “I felt like I was failing my students.”
More stress in an already stressful profession

RAND’s survey asked nearly 2,500 public school teachers and more than 1,500 principals about their working conditions and well-being midway through the 2021–2022 school year. Researchers also fielded similar questions to hundreds of working adults across the U.S., to see how their answers compare. The results depict an educational system operating in crisis mode, still reeling from the effects of the pandemic.

Teachers said their biggest source of stress was helping students make up lost ground after more than two years of school disruptions. More than half also said they had been asked to take on extra responsibilities—even filling in as nurses, bus drivers, or cafeteria workers—to cover staff shortages. Principals said they worried about the mental health of their teachers and staff.

More than 60 percent of educators said they had felt down, depressed, or hopeless at some point in the past two weeks. Nearly a quarter of the teachers said they were not coping well with their job-related stress—twice the rate of other workers. That could leave a lasting mark on a generation of students: Previous research has drawn a direct line between the health and well-being of teachers and the academic performance of their students.

“Teaching is stressful, and it may always be stressful,” said Elizabeth Steiner, a policy researcher at RAND who helped lead the survey. “But it’s important for teachers and principals to be in a position to manage that stress and not feel so burned out that they disengage.”

How to improve the well-being of educators

Sheena Graham made it through the pandemic but returned to a school that did not feel the same. She learned that she had lost her classroom—she’d be teaching music room-to-room instead—not from any official announcement, but from student texts. A district administrator refused to wear a mask near her, even though, as an older Black woman, she was at high risk of catching COVID. She had been named the teacher of the year in Connecticut just before the pandemic, in 2019, and thought she had a good four or five more years left in her career—until this year.

The pandemic “forced some things to come to the surface,” Graham said. “I felt less valued. Even in the public’s view, as we fought to get schools safe and get precautions into place, people would say, ‘Oh, teachers are just being selfish.’ But we’re fighting for your kids!”

Educators in RAND’s survey were two or three times more likely than workers in other professions to say political issues were sources of stress in their jobs. Many said managing student and family concerns about mask mandates and other COVID measures had been especially stressful. Some also cited local and national debates over the teaching of race, racism, and bias. More than a third of surveyed teachers, and nearly two-thirds of principals, said they had experienced harassment over their school’s policies for COVID safety or for teaching about race, racism, or bias, mostly from parents or other student family members. Those who did were twice as likely to say they sometimes fear for their physical safety at school.

On top of that, a significant minority of educators of color—36 percent of
teachers and 48 percent of principals—said they had experienced at least one incident of racial discrimination in the first few months of the school year. Black educators said parents and fellow staff members sometimes acted uncomfortable approaching them. Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander educators said people sometimes assumed they were foreigners.

That helps explain why 41 percent of teachers of color said they intend to leave the classroom by the end of the year, compared with 31 percent of White teachers. That’s not a reliable indicator of an impending wave of resignations: Previous research has shown that most teachers who say they’re leaving end up staying. But it is a good measure of how dissatisfied teachers are—and reason for concern in a profession that already struggles to retain teachers and principals of color.

“That’s a key indicator of well-being in and of itself,” said Sy Doan, an associate policy researcher who coauthored the study. “Districts need to ask: How can we make being in schools better for teachers? How can we make it more likely for them to stick around, particularly when teaching at this time has become so stressful?”

The educators RAND surveyed had some thoughts: better pay, smaller class sizes, and less time spent on non-teaching duties. They suggested more scholarships and student-loan forgiveness programs to bring more teachers—and especially teachers of color—into the profession. States and school districts could also provide more after-school counseling for educators, and better guidance on how they should handle high-tension issues like mask mandates. Educator-prep programs should consider adding conflict management to the curriculum.

The love of teaching

The survey results also suggest that something fundamental has changed in how schools and families relate to each other. The pandemic put physical barriers between them. Teachers became just one more face on a screen. School and district leaders now need to consider how they can reengage with parents and families, reestablish trust, and channel political conflict into more productive conversations about what students need. Despite all this, more than 70 percent of the teachers RAND surveyed, and more than 80 percent of the principals, still said they were glad they had chosen to go into education. “I love being in the classroom. I love being with my students,” one teacher told the researchers in an interview. “But it has been an exhausting experience.”

That’s how Sheena Graham feels, too—but she also knows that exhaustion, over time, becomes unsustainable. She doesn’t regret leaving when she did, even though she’s still trying to figure out what her next chapter will be, having retired years before she planned. She works with the choir in her church. She volunteers at a food pantry. She’s started working with a group of retired teachers, pushing for better conditions for those still in the classroom.

“I believe in educators; I believe we have the ability to change the world,” she said. “Everybody knows the value of an educator, but they don’t ever stop to think about it. Each and every person, if you ask them, they’re going to bring up an educator who had a great impact on their life.”

Students at her old school have started a group for anyone who needs a little extra support and encouragement, a place to go when they’re struggling—a sanctuary. They call it the Mama Graham club.
Alice Huguet knows a few things about middle school kids that people don’t always see. They’re listening. They’re engaged. They care about what’s happening in the world, and they can be savvy users of news and information—when they know where to look.

But they’re also just starting to take their first steps into the hall of mirrors that is the modern media landscape. They’re easy marks for misinformation, disinformation, trolls, bots, bias, and deceit—for the hollowing-out of public discourse that RAND describes as truth decay. Helping them find their way is important not just for their futures, but for the future of democracy.

Huguet, a former middle school teacher, now studies truth decay as a policy researcher at RAND. She teamed up with fellow researcher Andrea Prado Tuma to develop a set of lesson plans that teachers can use to help their students sort “facts” from facts. They had two goals, both lofty: to get 12- and 13-year-olds excited about public policy, and to do it in a way that would build their resistance to truth decay.

“Truth decay—the diminishing role of facts and analysis in public life—poses a very real threat to democracy, and every age group is susceptible in its own way,” Huguet said. “Middle school students are just starting to learn about how policy intersects with their own lives. We wanted to teach them how to be safe and be aware of the information they use, but also to show them how they can contribute creatively and responsibly to the information ecosystem.”
They had two goals, both lofty: to get 12- and 13-year-olds excited about public policy, and to do it in a way that would build their resistance to truth decay.
Kids are connected

American teenagers spend more than eight hours a day, on average, staring at a smartphone, television, or computer screen, according to a Common Sense Media survey released this year. And study after study has shown that they don’t always have a discerning eye for the blur of information coming at them.

One recent study, for example, asked more than 3,000 teens to watch a Facebook video of poll workers stuffing ballots into boxes, and judge whether it constituted solid evidence of U.S. election fraud. Exactly three of the teens thought to verify the source of the video using a basic internet search—and found it was from Russia.

Huguet and Prado Tuma saw an opportunity to attack truth decay at the roots.

Their project would eventually involve a small cast of RAND experts. But they took their early direction from a few dozen middle schoolers in Boston and Los Angeles. What they heard from the teens and pre-teens was not just passing curiosity about policy issues like immigration and climate change, but real interest. “What makes families immigrate to the United States?” “What can I, as a sixth-grader, do to help stop climate change?”

They developed a sequence of five lesson plans designed to turn ordinary middle schoolers into classroom experts on immigration, climate change, COVID precautions, or school start times. The students would work in teams to find credible information online, and then prepare a final video presentation or podcast for the class. Each team would have a designated fact-checker to verify any information it used.

That may seem like a pretty straightforward classroom assignment. But it opens up a conversation about what counts as a credible source, who qualifies as a credible expert, and how to find reliable information about high-wire policy issues like climate change. It teaches a life lesson for the internet age: Never accept information without asking who put it out there, and why.

“Even adults have a hard time navigating all of the media out there and determining what is true and not true,” said Prado Tuma, who specializes in educational equity as a behavioral and social scientist at RAND. “These students are experiencing a virtual world that is completely different from mine, and we need to give them the skills to navigate that—especially at this age, when they’re just developing a sense of self and identity.”

Kids are concerned

One other thing she and Huguet learned from the kids they worked with in Boston and Los Angeles: They wanted to see themselves as active participants in public policy, with a role to play in answering challenges like climate change. To make that personal connection real in their lesson plans, the researchers recorded student interviews with RAND experts on each of the four policy topics.

They recruited Mahshid Abir, an emergency room doctor and senior physician policy researcher, to discuss the science and policy of overcoming COVID-19. They had Wendy Troxel, an international sleep expert, describe why teens need more sleep. Shelly Culbertson, who has studied immigration and refugees around the world, talked about the challenges faced by immigrants who are children. And Robert Lempert, whose contributions to climate research earned him a share of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize, answered that sixth-grader’s question about what she could do to fight climate change (drive less, consume less, and get involved).

The lesson plans and recorded interviews are available for free on RAND’s website.

“Students in this middle school age group know more than they might think they do about policy,” Huguet said. “It can be hard to talk to them about navigating information online, being careful with what they find, but it’s so important. What they bring to the table is really valuable.”

A recent RAND survey found that nearly two-thirds of middle and high school social studies teachers consider that kind of media literacy and civic development to be an “absolutely essential priority.” But many said they don’t have clear guidance on how to teach it and often feel pressure to focus on other subjects instead, like math and reading. Nearly 80 percent said their students’ limited ability to evaluate information they find online had become a moderate or major problem.

RAND’s lesson plans were meant to help answer that need. But the researchers also had one other statistic in mind that underscores the importance of reaching kids at this age. By the time they turn 13, around 80 percent of young people will have opened their first social media account.
Chair to Advance Truth Decay Research Established in Honor of Former RAND President

The new chair will help further develop and expand the impact of RAND’s research on truth decay, including efforts to deepen understanding of it, raise public awareness of its consequences, and design and test solutions to counter the phenomenon.

diminishing role of facts and analysis in public life—while paying tribute to former RAND president and CEO Michael D. Rich, who stepped down in July 2022 after more than a decade at the institution’s helm.

Rich is coauthor of Truth Decay, a 2018 report that launched an ongoing stream of research into how the phenomenon has enfeebled America’s response to everything from climate change to domestic terrorism to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The distortion of facts—the misinformation and disinformation at the center of many of our problems today—is the research area to which Michael Rich has personally devoted the last few years,” said RAND trustee Joel Hyatt, chair of the Tomorrow Demands Today fundraising campaign. “To celebrate Michael and to thank him for his lifetime of devotion to RAND, I am honored on behalf of the RAND Board of Trustees to announce the establishment of the Michael D. Rich Chair in Countering Truth Decay.”

The new chair will help further develop and expand the impact of RAND’s research agenda on the problem, including efforts to deepen understanding of it, raise public awareness of its consequences, and design and test solutions to counter the phenomenon. More than $4 million has been raised to establish the chair. Additional fundraising efforts will continue to augment the work of the chairholder and support related research, events, convenings, and outreach opportunities.

“For more than 45 years, Michael Rich has helped RAND become a leading source of expertise, analysis, and evidence-based ideas,” said Michael E. Leiter, chair of the RAND Board of Trustees. “He epitomizes the integrity, the nonpartisanship, and the focus on impact that define RAND. On the occasion of Michael’s retirement, it is fitting that we pay tribute to him by ensuring that RAND can make significant progress in the fight against truth decay for years to come.”

Rich became president and CEO of RAND in 2011. He began his RAND career as a summer intern in 1975 and went on to hold a number of senior leadership positions. As president and CEO, he focused on extending the impact of RAND’s work, broadening its legacy of innovation, and helping decisionmakers stay ahead of the curve on critical concerns.

For more information about giving, visit campaign.rand.org.
Most domestic violence (DV) survivors enter the family court system in a crisis state. DV-focused programs embedded within the court can offer supportive services, reduce the stress of engaging with the court, and empower survivors to navigate their cases.

Seven Steps to Creating a Program to Empower DV Survivors

1. Lay the Groundwork
   - Secure funding from multiple sources
   - Build rapport and partnerships with stakeholders
   - Set up a safe, restricted-access office space colocated within the court

2. Identify the Target Population
   - Be prepared to serve a wide variety of DV survivors with cultural sensitivity

3. Develop a Case Flow Process
   - Warmly welcome DV survivors with a client-centered approach
   - Match clients with a case manager
   - Follow up with high-risk clients

4. Determine the Staffing Required
   - Likely roles include
     - Leadership: advocate
     - Director: supervisor
     - Front desk staff: first responder
     - Case manager: client coordinator
   - Reflect community diversity

5. Develop a Training and Supervision Plan
   - Use progressive training (course work, shadowing, observation)
   - Set supervision expectations (include reflective supervision as needed)

6. Conduct Continuous Quality Improvement
   - Compile and analyze metrics of program effectiveness and design fidelity

7. Examine Potential Barriers and Facilitators
   - Barriers to address
     - Community stigma
     - Fear of deportation, language barriers
     - Financial, housing dependence on harming party
     - Hesitance to engage with courts
     - Misperceptions of program offerings
   - Facilitators to leverage
     - Collaboration with partner agencies
     - Professional development and self-care
     - Community outreach about program benefits

Adapted from Empowerment-Based Domestic Violence Programming Within a Family Court Setting: An Implementation Guide, by Dionne Barnes-Proby, Mallika Bhandarkar, Melissa M. Labriola, Sierra Smucker, Emily Hoch, and Yael Katz, 2022 (www.rand.org/t/TLA1669-1).
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