RESTORING FACTS AND ANALYSIS to the public policy debate

CIVICS EDUCATION for the 21st century

HOW SCHOOL PRINCIPALS responded to COVID-19

WOUNDED WARRIORS

MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND THE ROAD TO RECOVERY PAGE 10
1. **Staffing Needs in the U.S. Secret Service**
   This user guide is part of a project designed to help the U.S. Secret Service determine staffing needs in a subset of administrative, professional, and technical work functions. RAND researchers from the Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center analyzed organizational structures, workflows, and available data and compared these factors with possible approaches to build tools for workforce planners to use in making staffing determinations.
   MORE AT www.rand.org/t/TL353

2. **Planning as Freedom**
   The pandemic has confined Americans to their homes, kept them from offices and schools, and separated them from the people they love and the activities they value. If the U.S. had planned better, Americans might be more free during the COVID-19 crisis. But there is a silver lining: This experience could provide lessons for how to address other sweeping problems that require planning, such as climate change.
   MORE AT www.rand.org/v200904

3. **Introducing the RAND Space Enterprise Initiative**
   Watch this video to learn more about the mission and goals of the Space Enterprise Initiative and the importance of making space research available to all.
   MORE AT www.rand.org/v200904

4. **Continuity and Change in China’s Foreign Policy**
   In September 2020, senior political scientist Andrew Scobell presented testimony before the U.S.–China Economic and Security Review Commission.
   MORE AT www.rand.org/t/CTA774-1

5. **Diversity in the U.S. Air Force**
   The Air Force experiences challenges in maintaining a demographically diverse civilian workforce. Researchers analyzed personnel data to better understand the challenges that civilian women, racial/ethnic minorities, and individuals with disabilities may face in advancing to higher pay grades as well as factors they consider when deciding whether to remain with the Air Force.
   MORE AT www.rand.org/t/RR2643
The Civic Mind
What students need to know about civic responsibility

Think Tanks in the era of truth decay

Help for Wounded Warriors
Treating mental health and substance use disorders

Teaching and Learning in the age of COVID-19

Research Briefly: Brain–computer interfaces and more

Commentary: The decline of American influence

At RANDom: RAND rolls the dice

Giving: Making a lasting difference

Závon Billups, shown here in a screen grab from a classroom video, teaches eighth-grade civics at a Boston charter school—not just how government works, but how to be active, engaged, and effective participants in it. He describes his students as "21st-century change agents."

The Q&A: Terri Tanielian, a voice for veterans
Investing in Disadvantaged Families

For nearly 60 years, a learning center in Pasadena, Calif., has worked to uplift some of the most disadvantaged families in its community, parents and children alike. A recent RAND study adds to a growing body of evidence that programs like it can make a real and lasting difference.

The Families Forward Learning Center provides free care and education to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers who are mostly living below the poverty line and learning English as a second language. It also provides parenting and English classes, among other supports, to their mothers.

Most of the mothers interviewed by RAND researchers said their English had improved; so had their self-confidence and their ability to advocate for their children in school. Almost all said they were now more involved in their children’s education, helping them with homework and reading to them.

The researchers also found that children who went through the program before kindergarten outperformed their peers on standardized tests in the third grade. The differences in their scores were “large and meaningful,” the researchers wrote—enough to make up some of the persistent school achievement gap between white and Latinx students.

The study was small, and it’s possible that the parents who enrolled in the program would have been more engaged in their children’s education anyway. But the findings are in line with other studies that have shown promising results from such two-generation programs. Done well, parents and children both seem to benefit when learning becomes a family affair.
Military Applications of Brain–Computer Interfaces

The U.S. military has started to put real research funding into the idea that future fighters may be able to engage machines with their minds. It may sound less like science than fiction, but a recent RAND study found the technological challenges might not be the biggest obstacles to making it happen.

Scientists have already developed electrodes that can read brain signals and translate them into commands for a drone in flight. People with quadriplegia have used brain–computer interfaces to control a mouse point with their minds.

In the not-so-near future, that kind of technology could enable soldiers to communicate directly with surveillance drones, or to control battlefield robots without using their hands. Computer implants could allow them to take in more information than their five senses provide, or to communicate with their team members without saying a word.

To test what that might look like, researchers at RAND invited experts—including neuroscientists and combat veterans—to play a tabletop wargame. The players were given a scenario—clearing a building, surviving an ambush—and asked to think through what human–computer capabilities they would want on the ground.

Their technological wish lists included computer-enhanced information processing, improved physical performance, and direct mind control of drones and other machines. But all of those came with some big asterisks.

Players questioned whether brain signals could be jammed or intercepted in the blur of war. They worried that decisions made at computer speed could outrun moral and ethical considerations. And they doubted that future enlistees would consent to link their brains to a computer unless the technology had been tried, tested, and adopted in the civilian world first.

Those concerns should guide the development of brain–computer technologies going forward, the researchers wrote. The risks are significant—just imagine what a hacker could do—but they have not received enough attention. The military and other funders should make sure the need is driving the demand for such new technology, and not the other way around.

MORE AT www.rand.org/t/RR2996

This research is part of Security 2040—a RAND initiative that tackles big, important questions about new technologies and trends that are shaping the future of global security. Funding was provided by gifts from RAND supporters and income from operations. Support for this project was also provided, in part, by the generous contributions of the RAND Center for Global Risk and Security Advisory Board.

Mobile Phone Surveillance During Pandemics

Tech companies have responded to the new realities of life under COVID-19 with mobile apps that can check symptoms, trace contacts, even monitor compliance with stay-at-home orders. But users need to know what they’re giving up when they click “download.”

The same app that can flag a fever might also feed sensitive health information to a private company. An app that can map an outbreak might also enable government surveillance of a user’s locations and movements.

Researchers at RAND developed a simple scorecard that can help users make more-informed decisions about which apps to trust, and which to keep off their phones. It takes into account how an app collects and uses personal information, whether it’s encrypted and anonymous, and whether law enforcement agencies can get access to it.

The researchers used the scorecard to rate 40 apps from 20 countries as test cases. Those included a digital health pass used in Russia to regulate travel, which met almost none of the criteria; and an app used in Poland to monitor people in quarantine by selfie, which did a little better.

The most common apps in the study were contact tracers. They use a phone’s Bluetooth signal to detect when someone with a confirmed case of COVID-19 gets too close. But even within that category, some apps far outperformed others when it came to privacy protections. A contact-tracing app from Australia, for example, fully met 16 of the 20 scorecard criteria. One from Israel fully met only two.

The study underscores the need for app developers to pay a little more attention to protecting user data, especially in the midst of a pandemic, the researchers wrote. It also highlights an opportunity for the U.S. government to set some standards for data protection, to make sure short-term health concerns don’t lead to long-term privacy headaches.

MORE AT www.rand.org/t/RRA365-1

Funding for this research was provided by gifts from RAND supporters and income from operations.
A Voice for Veterans on Capitol Hill

Terri Tanielian’s research has helped bring post-traumatic stress disorder and other “invisible wounds” of war out of the shadows. It has helped get military caregivers the support they so desperately need. And it has shown how the American health care system too often fails veterans, especially those in suicidal distress.

Tanielian is a senior behavioral scientist at RAND, an internationally recognized expert on military and veteran health, and a frequent witness at congressional hearings. Earlier this year, she completed an assignment that allowed her to more directly inform good policy. She embedded full-time with the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs as a six-month fellow.

She was there to provide nonpartisan support to the committee, to help it pursue policy ideas backed by evidence. She worked with staff to help inform the committee’s agenda for the current congressional session, including the chairman’s signature legislative proposal, the ACCESS Act. It would ensure all veterans get access to mental health care, regardless of their discharge status.

RAND funded the fellowship as a pilot project, with the help of philanthropic support, and is considering whether to expand the fellowship to more congressional committees, and more fields of research expertise, in the future.

Q How did this fellowship opportunity come about?

A I had testified in May 2019 about some of RAND’s research and analysis on suicide prevention for veterans and service members. I was in the audience for another hearing on suicide prevention, and a member of the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee approached me. She said, “I saw your testimony. Our chair has actually made suicide his No. 1 priority for this session of Congress, and we’re thinking of bringing in a fellow. Would you be interested?” So we teamed up with RAND’s Congressional Relations team and RAND leadership to figure out how we could make something like this work.

What were you hoping to accomplish?

The original intent was to produce a report for the committee, with a framework and some recommendations for how it could consider evidence-based policy solutions. But the committee members and staff wanted to move more quickly. So I became very much involved in crafting a strategy for the committee, producing real-time guidance and educating the members.

How did that impact the committee’s work?

I outlined what committee staff should be doing to gather more information,
what policy solutions they should be considering based on the evidence. When I drafted the framework, the staff said, “This is excellent. We need to brief the chairman”—who quickly said, “We’re going with it!” The committee sent out a press release about how the committee’s activities would be organized around this framework and its commitment to push forward with comprehensive suicide prevention legislation.

Do any moments really stand out to you?
I helped name the Veterans’ Acute Crisis Care for Emergent Suicide Symptoms—or ACCESS—Act, one of the main pieces of legislation the chairman introduced. I then went with staff to drop it in the “hopper” for new legislation in the U.S. Capitol. That was a memorable “pinch-me” moment. I also got to sit behind the members and write questions that hearing witnesses would have to answer. I was really humbled by the seriousness and the passion that the members of the committee and staff had for this topic, and their willingness to listen to what I could share about what would work, what the evidence says.

Has your fellowship experience inspired any of that work?
I’d say I’m emboldened by it, more greatly impassioned that we need to lean further in if we’re going to make strides in reducing the number of suicide deaths. I’ve been doing mental health research for 25-plus years, but now I’m thinking about how we could be working in more interdisciplinary ways—not just through the lens of “get more people into mental health care.” We need to think about it through the lens of ending discrimination, promoting economic opportunities and access to health care, enacting smart gun policies. All of those things are essential components of comprehensive suicide prevention. So I want to make sure I’m focusing on research that’s really going to propel those policy solutions.

What happened with the legislation you worked on?
COVID hit during my fellowship, and that really slowed things down. The intent had been to push forward quickly on these bills on a bipartisan basis. But then work stopped for a couple of weeks, and when it resumed, the focus was really on the VA’s role in response to the pandemic. The committee had a hearing in September 2020 to get formal feedback and discussion on the ACCESS Act, as well as 30 other pieces of legislation, all of them focused on suicide prevention and mental health.

What are you working on now that you’re back at RAND?
I’m trying to get some more work off the ground around helping military caregivers. I’ve also been looking at how we can deepen and expand our work on reducing veteran suicide risk.
The Lost Generation in American Foreign Policy

By James Dobbins and Gabrielle Tarini

Over the past two decades, the United States has experienced a dramatic drop-off in international achievement. This has become more pronounced under President Trump, but the decline began during the presidency of George W. Bush. A recent RAND paper found that, throughout the 55 years following World War II, successive U.S. administrations racked up major foreign policy successes—American actions that made enduring contributions to peace and prosperity—at an average rate of about once a year. Since 2001, the pace of foreign policy achievement has fallen to once every four years. The result has been a lost generation in American foreign policy.

Among foreign affairs experts and commentators, there is nearly universal agreement on the decline, but a variety of explanations of the cause. Some attribute it to a series of bad policy choices, others to the partisan deadlock and increasing insularity of domestic politics, and still others argue that America’s diminished influence simply reflects the shifting balance of global power, notably the rise of China.

There is something to all these explanations, but a shift in the global power balance seems the least likely. The growth in the Soviet Union’s power acted as a spur to American achievement, not an excuse for its absence. China has grown more powerful, but this is more a problem for the future rather than an explanation for the setbacks in American foreign policy over the past two decades. China was not responsible for 9/11, the global war on terror, the failure to stabilize Afghanistan and Iraq, the Iranian and North Korean nuclear programs, the Great Recession, the rise of the Islamic State, the Syrian and Libyan civil wars, or Russian aggression in Ukraine. Nor was China even a serious impediment to American efforts to address these challenges.

The decline in American influence seems best explained by the classic cycle of hubris followed by nemesis. An American sense of omnipotence was encouraged by victory in the Cold War and continued to mount throughout the following decade with success in the first Gulf War, pacification of the Balkans, and a generally buoyant economy.

Provoked by the attacks of 9/11 and further encouraged by the rapid fall of the Taliban, America’s leaders announced a global war on terror, embraced a policy of military preemption to deal with nuclear prolif-
erators, invaded Iraq, and declared their intention to turn that country into a democratic model for the rest of the Middle East.

These multiple missions strained the capacity of the United States. None was completed satisfactorily. Instead, the United States found itself bogged down in classic quagmires in Iraq and Afghanistan and entangled in a growing number of smaller conflicts throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Then, in 2008, came the Great Recession, which gave rise to a populist reaction on both the right and the left. The Tea Party and the Occupy Wall Street movements were eventually reabsorbed within the two major parties, driving these still further apart. In 2016, a nontraditional candidate running on a populist, anti-establishment, and anti-globalist platform won the American presidency.

This sequence—success, overconfidence, overstretch, failure, and retreat—illustrates how domestic politics, foreign policy, and external events interacted to diminish American influence. Yet these factors do not account adequately for the depth and duration of the American decline.

The Vietnam War cost more American lives than all of America’s 21st-century conflicts combined. It ended with a humiliating loss and was accompanied by an economic shock and oil embargo that slowed growth worldwide. Yet American diplomacy quickly recovered its momentum in the wake of that lost war and the attendant domestic turmoil. Elected in 1976, the year after the fall of Saigon, President Jimmy Carter briefly flirted with retrenchment, but, by the end of his term, he had brokered a lasting peace between Israel and Egypt, committed the United States to the defense of the Persian Gulf, begun covert support for the anti-Soviet insurgency in Afghanistan, secured European agreement to the deployment of nuclear-armed intermediate-range missiles, and reasserted the role of human rights in American diplomacy.

In 1980, Ronald Reagan was elected president, and it was “morning in America” again. Over the following decade, he and George H. W. Bush consolidated American leadership of the free world; expanded democracy; deterred aggression; negotiated nuclear-arms reductions; and helped liberate Eastern Europe, reunify Germany, and win the Cold War. While the loss in Vietnam proved only a brief drag on American global standing, this century’s setbacks have led many Americans to question the most basic tenets of modern American foreign policy. In the decades since, many Americans have come to feel that America’s global engagement is not working for them, that they are not sharing in whatever progress is being registered nationally and globally. And they have a valid point. Improvements in living standards for most Americans have slowed and for some have ceased altogether, dashing the expectations of ever-expanding prosperity set during the 30-year boom that followed World War II. Over the past 40 years, the personal income of 90 percent of Americans has grown more slowly than that of the country as a whole, the bottom half are hardly growing at all, while those in the top 1 percent have seen their income grow several times faster than the national rate.

To sustain public support for constructive international engagement, America’s leaders will have to do a better job ensuring that the resultant material benefits are distributed more equitably. COVID-19—which has caused declines in employment and economic activity on a scale comparable to the Great Depression and a loss of American lives larger than any war since 1945—offers a logical starting place for such a turnaround.

To regain the willing collaboration of international partners, U.S. leaders will need to once again identify American interests with those of the rest of the world. They will need to practice competent statecraft, adopt prudent policies, and pursue realistically achievable objectives. They will need to demonstrate continuity of policy across successive administrations because enduring achievements can rarely be consolidated within a single presidency. ✨
Think Tanks in the Era of Truth Decay

By Michael Rich, President and CEO, RAND Corporation

We are living through a moment of crisis that will define who we are as a nation; yet we can’t even agree on what’s real and what’s rumor. Our political discourse too often amounts to opinions about opinions, shouted across a cable-television split screen. Asked to describe their feelings toward the federal government, a majority of Americans say either “frustrated” or “angry.”

All of this points to a civic disease that I’ve been calling “truth decay,” and that has enfeebled our response to everything from climate change to domestic terrorism to a global pandemic. It’s the diminishing role of facts and analysis in American public life, and it cuts much deeper than any political party or demographic.

It’s why nonpartisan think tanks like RAND are as important now as they have ever been.

I’ve always said that RAND is an idea as much as a research institute—a belief that the best way to solve the most complex and difficult problems is to begin with facts and objective analysis. In our early days, that meant figuring out how to put a satellite into
orbital, or how to manage the threat of global nuclear war. Today, it means saving lives and livelihoods from COVID-19, building a more just and equitable society, and responding to the ever-changing threats of an ever-accelerating world. Our goal throughout has been to make communities safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous.

At RAND, we have never shied away from a problem because it is too difficult or too complex. We've been countering truth decay one of our highest priorities because it is both, and because it threatens the very foundations of our democracy.

In recent and soon-to-be-published studies, there's a growing body of evidence showing that people don't just lack trust in American institutions like Congress or the media. They actively distrust them. They expect those institutions to display some basic competence, to provide accurate information, to perform their duties with integrity. And they just don't see it.

And so, often, they just walk away from the public square. Last year, we asked hundreds of Americans where they get their news. More than a quarter of them said they knew where they could go for reliable facts and information—sources like newspapers or television news shows. They just don't have the time or interest to bother.

That kind of disengagement has helped drive a wedge between what is true and what we think is true. Crime rates in American cities are far below the peaks we saw in the 1990s, but you would hardly be alone if you thought it has never been more dangerous to walk down the street. The scientific evidence for childhood vaccines has never been so strong, yet the World Health Organization recently listed vaccine hesitancy as one of the greatest threats to global health.

That's what I mean when I talk about truth decay. The proliferation of cable news shows and social media sites has resulted in an echo chamber of voices that agree with us—or a shouting gallery of those that don't. The switch from one-hour network news programs to 24-hour coverage did not come with a 24-fold increase in reported facts. We shouldn't be surprised when people use words like “frustrated” or “angry” to describe the national mood.

But here's why I'm optimistic.

A few years ago, RAND endeavored to review all of the evidence for and against some of the most common ideas for reducing gun violence—tougher background checks, for example, or weapon bans. We found that there was often a lack of reliable evidence either way. Federal constraints on gun research had created a factual vacuum around one of our most vociferous debates. Everyone was just shouting into the void.

That study, though, caught the attention of the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, now called Arnold Ventures. It brought together a research consortium to invest up to $50 million in gun violence research. And Congress, which had resisted funding research into gun violence for 20 years, passed a bipartisan spending bill to provide $25 million more.

We’ve seen periods before in American history when the truth struggled to be heard. Some of those eras ended with new forms of journalism, committed to chasing down facts and holding those in power to account. Others ended with government reforms aimed at earning back the trust of the governed. None of them ended without renewed faith in objective analysis to guide public policy.

As a research institute with two core values—quality and objectivity—that's our stock in trade. The problems we face, as a nation and a world, demand a workforce of people who can collect and analyze data, think through solutions, and provide insights and recommendations without spin or bias. The standards we set at RAND—research that is transparent and clear, based on the best information, and temperate in tone—are meant to ensure that the bluest of blue-state Democrats and the reddest of red-state Republicans can trust our findings equally.

When we launched a fundraising campaign for the future of RAND earlier this year, we named it “Tomorrow Demands Today.” That's a different way of saying what French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry once wrote, a line I've always thought spoke directly to RAND: “Your job is not to foresee the future, but to enable it.” At this moment in history, that means restoring facts and analysis to the core of American public policy.

The stakes could not be higher. As a longtime friend, a former chairman of the board at RAND, told me, RAND was established more than 70 years ago to address the existential threat of the time, the Soviet Union and its nuclear arsenal. Truth decay, he said, is the existential threat of our time.

That, unfortunately, is the truth.
Help for Wounded Warriors
Delivering Effective Treatment Options for Veterans with Co-Occurring Disorders

By Doug Irving, Staff Writer

Dan Smee was walking on a dirt road near his home in California, a backpack slung over his shoulders, when suddenly his eyes were darting, his heart was pounding, and he was back in Iraq, back on patrol.

He couldn’t sleep. He’d find himself in the smoking wreckage of an armored vehicle, groping around in the dark for his helmet, reaching to make sure his legs were still there. When the flashbacks got really bad—when he felt himself falling back into a flooded Iraqi canal, the water closing over his head—he chased them away with beer, whiskey, and sleeping pills.

It was a trap. As a recent RAND study showed, potentially tens of thousands of post-9/11 veterans like him have tried to numb the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or depression with drugs or alcohol. That can keep them from seeking the long-term care they need, and becomes just one more barrier to climb if they do. When Smee worked up the strength to ask for help, a social worker told him to go get sober first.

“I was so out of my mind at that point that I didn’t even know which way to go,” he says now. “The more symptoms I had, the more I drank, the more I used Ambien. Everything kind of crashed in on me.”
More than 10 percent of veterans who served in Iraq or Afghanistan developed PTSD from what they saw and experienced.
The prevalence of mental health and substance use disorders

More than 10 percent of veterans who served in Iraq or Afghanistan developed PTSD from what they saw and experienced. Some estimates put the number closer to 30 percent. As many as 15 percent show signs of depression. And one large survey of injured veterans found that half of those who had PTSD or depression also screened positive for hazardous alcohol use or a substance use disorder.

That survey was conducted by the Wounded Warrior Project, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to help veterans injured during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In response to those findings, and to stories of people like Dan Smee struggling to get help, it asked RAND to investigate the state of care for veterans with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders.

The lead researcher on the project, Eric Pedersen, spent the early years of his career working with those very veterans in clinics run by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Some of his patients thought they needed alcohol or cannabis to sleep. Others couldn’t leave the house without calming their anxiety with illicit drugs.

“Telling somebody to go get sober before you deal with their PTSD or depression, that’s just not going to work,” said Pedersen, now a behavioral scientist at RAND. “They’re just never going to come back in for treatment. The drinking is the one coping strategy they have, and now you’re going to remove it before you treat their underlying mental health disorder?”

That reality is not always reflected in the treatment options available to veterans and others struggling with co-occurring disorders. Pedersen’s team reviewed thousands of in-patient treatment centers and out-patient clinics, and found that more than a quarter of them have no way to treat co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders at the same time. And even among those that did, the researchers found no agreement on what good treatment looks like, no consistency—no standard plan of action to get someone like Dan Smee back on his feet.

Improving the delivery of promising and effective treatments

Smee had served as a medic in the Army after high school, and reenlisted with the National Guard after 9/11. He thought he would serve stateside, maybe guard an airport.

Instead, he soon found himself patrolling the dusty fields of eastern Iraq. He remembers the way the dirt fell like rain after the explosion that ripped a hole in the armored vehicle he was in, the moment of superhuman strength that allowed him to escape that flooded canal in full battle gear.

He was using Ambien to sleep by the time he came home. Within a few months, he had added six packs of beer and pints of Jack Daniels. He stayed inside his apartment, the lights turned low, unless he needed to venture out to re-supply. “The stuff that happened really started to wear on me,” he says now. “The friends lost, the near misses, being blown up and shot at and all the crazy stuff that comes with war. Things kind of unraveled for me.”

There are good, effective treatment protocols to help people break that cycle of mental health and substance use disorders, RAND’s study found. The VA, in particular,
has developed gold-standard treatments for veterans with co-occurring disorders, with the clinical evidence to prove they work. And yet, in interviews, the researchers found few providers who closely follow them.

Often, that was because of financial pressure. A treatment protocol might require 15 therapy sessions, for example; a patient might only have the insurance to cover five. Or a program designed for one-on-one sessions with a psychiatrist might be repurposed for group therapy. Did those modified programs still help? Often, the treatment centers themselves couldn’t say for sure, because they didn’t always follow up to make sure discharged patients hadn’t relapsed.

The researchers estimated that the average Wounded Warrior Project veteran lives within 15 minutes of a facility with some kind of program to treat co-occurring disorders. But there was no way to tell what kind of care it provides, what protocols it follows, or whether it could meet the specific needs of veterans.

That could make a big difference. At one facility that did serve veterans, for example, staffers knew not to schedule appointments around rush hour. They understood that, for a veteran with PTSD, getting stuck in a traffic jam could bring back memories of stopped convoys and roadside bombs.

“If you just want to go someplace, then sure, there’s someplace near you that says it can help with co-occurring disorders,” Pedersen said. “But in terms of quality? We’re not sure. We have these treatments that are out there, that we know work for veterans, but we need to do a better job to deliver them.”

The VA and other treatment facilities should ensure they’re offering the full scope of evidence-based care that veterans with mental health and substance use disorders need. They should make a point of screening every incoming patient for signs of such co-occurring disorders. And they should provide more information about their approach to those disorders, what treatment protocols they follow, and what veterans can expect when they get there.

“We absolutely know that unhealthy substance use is prevalent in our warrior population, and that it’s a significant barrier to care,” said Michael Richardson, the vice president of independence services and mental health at Wounded Warrior Project. He added, “The same treatments don’t work for everyone, and integrated treatment approaches are one of the best ways we can address these challenges.”

Dan Smee hit bottom in a police holding cell. He says he felt the presence of the devil there, and heard the voices of lost friends: “Hey, Smee, this ain’t you, man.” He describes it as a moment of total clarity.

He went back to the VA, and this time got himself checked into a residential treatment facility for veterans with co-occurring disorders. He never looked back. Today, he’s a social worker at the VA, a guide for other veterans working through the same problems he did. “I struggled,” he says. “If I can help another veteran not struggle like I did, then it’s all worthwhile. That’s my whole new mission and purpose in life now.”

He’s been sober for 14 years.

Improving Substance Use Care: Addressing Barriers to Expanding Integrated Treatment Options for Post-9/11 Veterans is available for free download at www.rand.org/t/RR4354
Teachers, Students, and the Importance of Civic Responsibility in Present-Day America

By Doug Irving, Staff Writer

Závon Billups teaches eighth-grade civics at Boston Collegiate Charter School in Dorchester, Mass.
Závon Billups spends his days fighting for truth, struggling against apathy, and doing his best to counter the snarling partisanship that has consumed American politics. He is, in other words, a civics teacher. He describes his students as the change agents of the 21st century.

Civics was once the cornerstone of an American education. It’s not even a graduation requirement in some places now—but that is starting to change. A growing number of states and school districts are re-recognizing a need for teachers like Billups to prepare their students for the sometimes-messy realities of democracy.

Researchers at RAND have focused on civics in recent years as a crucial front in the fight against “truth decay,” the diminishing role of facts and analysis in American public life. In a recent survey, they asked hundreds of civics and social studies teachers what they teach, how they teach it, and what they think students need to know to become those 21st-century change agents.

“It’s about being able to get out into the thick of things and produce,” said Billups, who teaches eighth-grade civics at a Boston charter school. “I’m getting a bit lofty here, but you need these specific skills to succeed in our current climate. You need to see yourself as a stakeholder, as someone who’s participating, not just someone who learned about it from a book.”

Civics today covers much more than just how a bill becomes a law, RAND’s survey found. Most of the high school teachers who responded said their students “absolutely” need to learn to be tolerant of different people and groups. They wanted their students to see themselves as global citizens, to develop good work habits, and to embrace the responsibilities of government by the people.

They weren’t overly concerned that students memorize the 50 states, or learn about important periods in American history. Barely two-thirds thought it was “absolutely essential” that their students know the protections guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. Yet they were at least somewhat confident that their students would pick up those basics by the time they graduate anyway.

“It’s so easy now to look things up on the internet that teachers may think it’s less important to promote memorization,” study co-author Laura Hamilton said. “Some educators argue that it’s more important to give students the tools they need to find that information and apply it in the real world.”

But the survey also showed that students often struggle to separate good information from bad. Almost all of the high school teachers, and many of the grade-school teachers, said students routinely make false claims in class based on unreliable media sources. Most of the high school teachers said their students’ inability to evaluate information they find online is a moderate or major problem.

Those findings echo concerns RAND researchers have raised as they work to better understand and counter truth decay. Two of the biggest trends they’ve identified, in fact,
are a deepening sense of distrust among Americans, and a growing disagreement over what is even true to begin with. Both flourish when that line between fact and opinion blurs. “Teachers are clearly concerned that students are not able to make sense of the media they’re using to obtain information,” Hamilton said.

In Jayson Chang’s classes at Santa Teresa High School in San Jose, Calif., students start learning to detect bias—including their own—from the ring of the first bell. He opened his civics course this fall with a pop quiz. He’d call out a name or a phrase—“Donald Trump,” “Black Lives Matter”—and his students would answer with whatever words came to mind. His point became clear pretty quickly.

“A lot of us just skim through the news without realizing how one verb, one adjective, can completely change the narrative,” Chang said. “At the end of the day, how a bill becomes law, I cover it, but most of us are pretty disconnected from that process. If I can make my students think about how they consume the news, how they approach and have conversations with other people, that is how we get an active citizenry, an empowered and informed citizenry.”

RAND’s survey found one other reason for concern in America’s civics classrooms. Teachers need more support, and better materials, to really hold the line against truth decay. Many reported spending four or more hours every week digging up news clips,
historical documents, or other materials to use in class. A possible reason for that: More than 10 percent thought the materials their district provides are factually inaccurate or culturally inappropriate.

That suggests there’s an opening for schools to do more to help their students put some context to current events; understand how institutions work, and how they should work; and guard against the creeping spread of truth decay.

“This hopefully will push states, school districts, and other advocates to think more about the need for better materials in civics and more training for teachers,” study coauthor and senior policy researcher Julia Kaufman said. “We’re entering this pivotal moment when heightened use of media is happening at the same time there’s growing distrust of government and other institutions. So there’s a growing need for schools to really focus on civic development.”

In Boston, Závon Billups has a not-so-simple test to see whether his students are ready to become 21st-century change agents. He spins a wheel to pick a topic, and then two students have to share their thoughts on it—not debate it, not try to win points, but educate each other about where they stand. “I’m not here to police what my students think, but to make sure they have the tools to express it,” he said.

On the other side of the country, the students taking Chang’s pop quizzes are mostly high school seniors who will graduate this spring. So he uses a different measure of success. “A lot of them,” he said, “are voters now.”

Funding for this research was provided by gifts from RAND supporters and income from operations.

The Civic Education in the Era of Truth Decay series is available for free download at www.rand.org/civic-ed

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—JAYSON CHANG
As parents, teachers, and students learned the hard way this year, not many schools had a plan in place to guide them through an extended school closure. When COVID-19 emptied classrooms from coast to coast, it was—as one school official in Maine said—“literally like building a new educational system overnight.”

That’s the main story, but not the whole story, from a RAND survey of school principals in the immediate aftermath of those COVID closures. Some districts, in fact, had thought through what an extended closure would look like, and how they would keep students engaged and learning at home. Principals in those districts were much more likely to say they expect no drop-off in student performance.

“Schools need to get serious about getting these plans and their technology infrastructure into place,” said Heather Schwartz, a senior policy researcher at RAND who focuses on pre-K to 12 educational systems. “During a disruption, what are you going to do? It could be a fire, it could be flooding, a hurricane, it could be influenza or some other type of pandemic. You can’t just go buy 1,000 iPads and think you’re done.”

She and other researchers at RAND had raised concerns in recent years about whether schools were prepared for the disruption of a long closure. When hurricanes swept through the Houston area in 2017, for example, they tracked more than 1,000 schools that had to close for ten or more days. Few offered any kind of distance learning.

Then came the total school lockouts of COVID spring. Within the span of a few weeks in March and April 2020, nearly every school in America had to figure out how to make distance learning work. Some handed out thick packets of homework for students to do on their own. Others handed out laptops and mobile hotspots.

To better understand how schools were adjusting to life under COVID, researchers turned to a unique panel of experts, the RAND American School Leader Panel. The panel provides a pool of school principals who participate in periodic surveys on school issues; a separate but similar panel covers teachers. Researchers were able to ask nearly 1,000 principals about what they were experiencing on the ground.

Nearly two-thirds of the principals said their schools had provided laptops or other computer devices prior to COVID-19, at least to students...
Nearly two-thirds of the principals said their schools had provided laptops or other computer devices prior to COVID-19, at least to students in need. Yet fewer than half said they had trained teachers to deliver online instruction or were offering fully online or blended courses.

Michelle Hansen, principal at Phoebe A. Hearst Elementary School, hands a laptop computer to the parent of a student that attends the school in Sacramento, Calif., Friday, April 10, 2020.

School Preparedness Levels Before the COVID-19 Pandemic

INDICATORS OF PREPAREDNESS

- **64%** Provided devices, at least to students in need
- **47%** Provided teacher training on delivering online instruction
- **45%** Used a learning management system
- **44%** Offered fully online or blended learning courses
- **20%** Had plans for delivering instruction during a prolonged school closure

Other important preparedness indicators—such as the percentage of students who have home internet access—exist in addition to the five preparedness indicators. In the survey, for example, only 55 percent of principals said that 90 percent or more of their students had access to the internet at home during the pandemic. Data on how many of these students had access to the internet at home before the pandemic began was not collected.

in need. Yet fewer than half said they had trained teachers to deliver online instruction or were offering fully online or blended courses. Only one in five said they had made plans before the pandemic to deliver instruction during a prolonged school closure.

“That’s the number that I find most concerning,” said Melissa Diliberti, an assistant policy researcher at RAND, a Ph.D. student at the Pardee RAND Graduate School, and the lead author of the report. “It really shows that few schools had this concept of a prolonged closure in mind as something that could realistically happen. I hope that number is going to be a lot higher now that schools have had to live through this.”

The more prepared a school was, the researchers found, the more likely it was to continue giving letter grades during the pandemic. The most prepared schools, in fact, were 20 percentage points more likely than the least prepared schools to stick with letter grades. And principals in schools that had a closure plan in place were less likely to say they expected a lower level of student achievement this fall than they saw last fall.

Large schools were more likely than small schools to have taken some preparedness steps pre-pandemic, such as training teachers to deliver online instruction. Middle and high schools were better prepared than elementary schools. And schools with high numbers of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch, a marker for poverty, were just as prepared, or unprepared, as schools with lower numbers.

The results point to a striking need for better planning at schools—and to the difference that could make in the lives of millions of students.

“COVID is going to leave a lasting impression on everyone who’s alive right now,” Diliberti said. “We’re all going to have a sense that this might not be the last time that something like this could happen. Schools and districts are going to have to respond with plans to address long closures—not if but when they happen again in the future.”

Most principals in RAND’s survey didn’t seem to argue with that. Fully 85 percent of them said one of their top priorities when schools reopen will be planning for the next big closure.
Frank Clark doesn’t have to look far to see where RAND research can make a difference. He’s a guiding force in the leadership circles of Chicago, a self-made man who’s built a second career out of giving back. His commitment to RAND—and especially to its work on social and economic justice and effective gun policy—grew from there.

“If you know Chicago, you know it’s a wonderful city—beautiful, really—but there are aspects of it, parts of the city, that need help,” he said. “It’s associated with poverty, with poor education, with people who didn’t get a fair shake in life. I got involved with RAND in the simple belief that we will make a difference. It really is as simple as that. This is a place where you think that you’re getting something done.”

Clark got his start in the mailroom of the local electric company, Commonwealth Edison, in 1966. Over the next 40 years, he worked his way up the ranks while also attending night school to earn his college and law degrees. By the time he became the company’s first Black president in 2001, ComEd was one of the largest utilities in the country. He retired in 2012 as the chairman and CEO.

He has devoted his time and energy since then to some of the most important civic institutions in the city: the Chicago Symphony, the Adler Planetarium, the Museum of Science and Industry, the Chicago Community Trust. The son of a public school teacher, married to a school psychologist, he served until recently as the president of the Chicago Board of Education.

He jokes that people always assume he can’t say no. In reality, he said, he asks himself one question before he commits to a cause or an organization: Will it have an impact that outlasts me?

That’s what brought him to RAND. He was at another board meeting when a friend, tech titan Ellen Hancock, told him about the research she was seeing as a member of one of RAND’s advisory boards. Intrigued, he started digging into RAND’s work on social and economic policy. In its research on the criminal justice system, in particular, he found objective, fact-based ideas to address the unequal treatment he saw all too often in Chicago and across the country.

He was sold. “It was this idea of being a part of something that will make a real change in the lives of people, that will affect our policy, that will hopefully make the lives of people better and more affordable,” he said.

He now serves as the chairman of the RAND Social and Economic Policy Advisory Board. The board provides strategic guidance and philanthropic support to research programs covering everything from climate change to economic disparities to criminal justice reform.

He also chairs the National Collaborative on Gun Violence Research, a philanthropic fund established after RAND researchers highlighted a profound need for high-quality research on effective gun policies. The fund, administered by RAND, has awarded millions of dollars for scientific research on gun policy. It is, Clark said, “an extraordinary effort to develop real, impactful policy guidance.”

“These are issues that mean a lot to me, whether they’re environmental issues, social and economic issues, or looking for ways to respect people’s rights but also quell some of the gun violence that takes place in this country,” he said.

“It boils down to trying to make a difference in life and leaving this world a better place than you found when you entered it,” he added. “The research I see at RAND will not just benefit Chicago, or Illinois, but people throughout the United States and, I think, throughout the world.”

For more information about giving, visit campaign.rand.org.
Take Me out to the Wargame

By Melissa Bauman

RAND is famous for its Pentagon wargames. Now the public can play defense analyst, too, if they have $250 to spare.

RAND’s latest game is Hedgemony. Unlike Risk, which pits one army against another, Hedgemony players create a defense strategy to allocate troops and resources and “hedge” against the unknown. In other words, Hedgemony players make the defense policies that Risk’s troops would carry out. The game’s creators say it’s aimed at policymakers, war colleges, and researchers—but they didn’t rule out family game night. “It depends on the family!” said Michael Linick, a RAND researcher involved in the creation of the game.

A more layperson-friendly RAND-related game is ControVersus, created in 2019. It has sets of “concept” cards with topics like “anti-vaxxers” or “the 24-hour news cycle,” and “value” cards with phrases like “a dangerous precedent” or “everyone’s favorite scapegoat.” Players flip over a value card from a stack, each person plays one of the concept cards they were dealt, and a (hopefully) friendly debate begins as players defend their cards. The goal is to talk politics with less heat—and without having to reveal your actual views to cranky Uncle Hank.

Still, RAND is no Hasbro, and most of its games aren’t for public consumption. The 1954 game MonopoLOGs is about military procurement, but most people aren’t in the market for an aircraft carrier. RAND’s Game of Science was created in 1965, but good luck deciphering the rules. There’s also the 1957 game of SWAP—Strategic War Planning—that takes about 10 days to finish.

And those are just a few of the games people play—at least at RAND.

Sources: RAND.org; RAND Blog; RAND archives
Get the Games: Hedgemony: www.rand.org/t/TL301
ControVersus: controversus.games
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