SCHOOL AND SOCIETY IN THE AGE OF TRUMP

With the presidential election still a few weeks away, it remains to be seen whether the age of Trump is a four-year anomaly or longer era that will extend through 2024. But already National Education Policy Center Fellow John Rogers of UCLA has taken stock of how schools have been impacted by broad social issues that have risen to prominence during this administration's reign.

In *School and Society in the Age of Trump*, Rogers and his co-authors Michael Ishimoto, Alexander Kwako, Anthony Berryman, and Claudia Diera draw upon the results of a nationally representative survey of 500 high school principals to explore how schools have been impacted by a set of five broad, societal issues that have become more prominent during the presidency of Donald Trump. Because the survey plus 40 follow-up interviews were conducted in 2018, those issues do not include the coronavirus pandemic. However, the issues that were examined remain relevant to this day. They include: political division and hostility; disputes over truth, facts, and the reliability of sources; opioid addiction; the threat of immigration enforcement; and threats of gun violence on school campuses. Combined, they present a major challenge to educators trying to shape the futures of the young people and our society. The following statistics and information are drawn from the study.

- **89 percent:** The share of principals who report that incivility and contentiousness in the broader political environment has considerably affected their school community. Impacts have included contentious behavior in classrooms, hostile exchanges outside of class, and disagreements among community and staff that negatively impact the school. The environment takes a toll. Principals report that they spend an average of 90 minutes a week addressing these issues. For example, a principal at a large, racially diverse high school in North Carolina described an incident in which a group of white male students chanted "Trump, Trump, Trump" as they descended a school staircase, getting louder and louder in response to a challenge from an African Ameri-

can classmate with an anti-Trump message handwritten on his t-shirt. The encounter was heading toward a disruptive confrontation that had to be headed off by multiple members of the school's staff.

- **92 percent:** The share of principals who say cyberbullying is occurring at their schools. "Social media is destroying school safety and climate," an Ohio principal said.

- **74 percent** of principals have talked with individual students regarding those students' concerns about their well-being or the well-being of their families due to opioid addiction of family members. In interviews, principals described keeping the overdose treatment drug Naloxone on hand, using their own money to pay the utility bill of a student with an opioid-addicted parent, hiring a support staff employee to treat addicted students, and responding to the weekend overdose death of a student. Many lacked the knowledge or resources for a comprehensive response—the most common approach described was a whole-school assembly with guest speakers and a motivational and scared-straight narrative.

- **68 percent** of principals say federal immigration enforcement policies and the political rhetoric around the issue have harmed student well being and learning and have undermined the work of their schools in general. Study authors note that the impact of this enforcement may be even more widespread, particularly in politically conservative communities, since students and families may hide the fact that they are undocumented. Principals who are aware of undocumented families in their communities report taking the following types of actions: finding temporary housing so a student whose parents were being deported could finish out the school year, connecting an undocumented parent with medical professionals who could help treat her cancer, knocking on doors to reassure parents that Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents are not permitted on campus, and writing letters to the court on behalf of parents facing deportation. "We have a very high population [of undocumented students]," a Nevada principal said. "We [always] understood they were here and they were our students. But . . . the country wasn't seeing them that way, and it was really affecting the way kids and families felt in our own community" until more recently.

- **72 percent** of principals report that students have experienced difficulty focusing on class lessons or missed school due to stress created by the threat of gun violence. Anxieties about gun violence increased throughout the nation after the February 2018 shootings at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. "My school did not experience any incidents of gun violence ... [but] we were all very much affected by gun violence," a Kentucky principal said. While focus has temporarily shifted away from the issue as the news is consumed with the pandemic and many students are learning at home, the anxieties are almost certain to return the next time a school shooting occurs.

The study's authors conclude with a set of four recommendations for states and others to consider, all designed to address the challenges related to the five issues they explore:

1. Establish and communicate school climate standards emphasizing care, connectedness, and civility, and then create practices that enable educational systems to docu-

ment and report on conditions associated with these standards.

2. Build professional capacity within educational systems to address the holistic needs of students and communities. Extend this capacity by supporting connections between school-based educators and other governmental agencies and community-based organizations serving young people and their families.

3. Develop integrated systems of health, mental health, and social welfare support for students and their families.

4. Create and support networks of educators committed to fostering care, connectedness, and strong civility in their public education systems.

NEPC Resources on Social Context of Education