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Carlos Jamieson, Tiffany McDole, Zeke Perez

cjamieson@ecs.org; tmcdole@ecs.org; zperez@ecs.org

Your Question:

You asked about supporting students' academic learning after interruptions to schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our Response:

While the disruptions to schooling caused by the COVID-19 pandemic are unique, policymakers can use lessons from previous educational research to consider how to best support students' academic growth following the crisis. States may be particularly interested in this research base as the [American Rescue Plan](#) (ARPA) sets aside dollars to address "learning loss" through "evidence-based interventions."

While the precise impact is unknown, it is likely that many students' [academic progress suffered](#) during the past year because of interrupted instruction and a lack of academic support. Variation in [students' experiences with schooling](#) during the pandemic, including unequal access to [devices and internet](#) and to [quality instruction](#), will likely result in wide variation in student academic progress. Furthermore, systemic inequities have caused a disproportionate impact on the [health outcomes](#), [economic well-being](#) and [educational opportunities](#) for communities of color and communities with low incomes throughout the pandemic. The added stress for children in these communities is likely to heighten the [need for ongoing academic support](#). Evidence also suggests the pandemic may have been particularly harmful in reducing learning opportunities for [English learners](#) and [students with disabilities](#).

While student experiences have varied, most families express concern about their children's academic progress: in a [survey](#) conducted by The Education Trust in four states, nearly 9 in 10 parents responded that they are "worried about their children falling behind academically due to coronavirus-related school closures."

However, supporting students with various levels of prior knowledge and learning experiences is not new in American education. Educators and policymakers can look to existing educational research to understand [how to best support students](#) after unfinished instruction and learning. This response explores four supports for academic acceleration, including state examples for each: intensive tutoring, increased instructional time, prioritizing learning acceleration and avoiding over-remediation, and understanding student needs.

Please note, this response focuses on academic interventions and supports, but research demonstrates that [student](#) and [family](#) engagement, including supports for student mental health and well-being, are also key ingredients for academic success. Supporting student mental health and wellness supports may be particularly pressing given evidence that students are experiencing [increased stress](#) during the pandemic.

A Note on Terminology

This response uses the terms "interrupted schooling" and "interrupted instruction" to refer to the gap in academic supports and opportunities many students experienced during the pandemic.

We opted to use these phrases rather than the term "learning loss" to highlight the systemic issues that caused gaps in learning opportunities for many students. The term learning loss is only used when quoting from legislation.

Intensive Tutoring

Research supports intensive tutoring, or [high-dosage tutoring \(HDT\)](#), as a cost-effective strategy for boosting student achievement. In HDT, tutors usually work with students in one-on-one or two-on-one settings in addition to students' regular instruction.

- **Arkansas:** [S.B. 564](#) (introduced, 2021) would establish a statewide tutoring program to address interrupted learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **California:** [S.B. 723](#) (introduced, 2021) would require the California Department of Education to administer a tutoring program to mitigate academic struggles because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This legislation would create an opt-in procedure and requirements for counties that choose to participate in the tutoring program.
- **Colorado:** [H.B. 21- 1234](#) (introduced, 2021) would establish the Colorado high-impact tutoring program to address unfinished learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The tutoring program would provide grants to local education providers for the purpose of establishing tutoring programs. Tutoring must occur at least three days a week and during the regular school day.
- **Tennessee:** [S.B. 704](#) (introduced, 2021) would establish a tutoring program for students enrolled in grades K-3 to address interrupted learning attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. Tutoring would occur on a rotating weekly basis with students attending tutoring sessions two or three times a week.
- **Texas:** [S.B. 2023](#) (introduced, 2021) would establish the Texas Tutor Corps program and create a COVID-19 "learning loss and student acceleration pilot program." This bill stipulates that students who are deemed likely not to be promoted must participate in an extended learning program, including extended year programs, tutoring, summer school or an accelerated reading program.

Increasing Instructional Time

Another approach to addressing interrupted learning is to increase the time students receive instruction, through an extended school day, extended school year or changes in how time is spent during the existing school calendar.

[Studies](#) demonstrate that a longer school year can have positive effects on student learning, particularly for English learners, students with disabilities and students identified as below grade-level. [High-quality summer programming](#) and other [out-of-school programs](#) can also support students' academic achievement. [Acceleration academies](#) have shown promising results, providing instruction during traditional school vacations to select students.

- **Arizona:** The [AZCares: Flexibility and Funding for Schools and Families](#) plan outlines \$20 million of funding for Acceleration Academy Grants. The grants "will be made available for high-need Arizona schools to bring in math and reading specialists, teams of paraprofessionals or other types of structure for learning and remediation, to help kids in need of extra support get back on track."
- **Massachusetts:** The state coordinates a program of [Acceleration Academies](#) through the Sontag Prize in Education that pre-dates the COVID-19 pandemic. In this program, teachers recognized for outstanding instruction are paired with small groups of students in select communities for additional instruction during traditional school breaks. A [study](#) of the program in Springfield, MA demonstrated positive results for student test scores, as well as lower suspension rates for program participants.
- **North Carolina:** [H.B. 82](#) (enacted, 2021) requires every school district in the state to offer a six-week school extension learning recovery and enrichment program because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Local education agencies are tasked with identifying "at-risk" students for participation in the program although students that are not deemed "at-risk" may also participate if there is sufficient space.
- **Tennessee:** [H.B. 7004](#) (enacted, 2021) establishes a learning loss remediation and student acceleration program. This program mandates that local education agencies implement summer learning camps in the summers following the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years. After school learning mini camps are also included as part of this legislation.

Prioritizing Learning Acceleration and Avoiding Over-Remediation

Some educators have suggested a need to backfill content students may have missed while out of the classroom, but research suggests that [students benefit more from brief, “just-in-time” review](#), rather than extended coverage of previous grades’ content or remediation programs that supplant regular instruction. [Experts](#) also emphasize the importance of schools adopting a “growth over remediation” stance when reviewing assessment results, focusing on additional support to advance students toward grade-level expectations, rather than emphasizing missed skills (through grade retention or over-remediation). As alternatives to over-remediation, state leaders may consider changes to curriculum or strengthening instructional materials.

- **Louisiana:** State guidance regarding [Addressing Unfinished Learning Gaps](#) emphasizes the importance of grounding instruction in grade-appropriate, quality instructional materials, along with [specific guidance for learning acceleration for a range of instructional materials](#) in use in the state.
- **Missouri:** The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education established the Task Force for Learning Acceleration, which provided recommendations to both [the department](#) and to [school districts](#) regarding approaches to learning acceleration. Recommended approaches include accurately assessing learning, developing a viable curriculum and ensuring equitable approaches for all students.
- **Nebraska:** The School Renewal & Acceleration [Framework](#) is used by the state to shift the narrative about academic issues related to COVID-19 from “learning loss” to “renewal and acceleration.” This framework emphasizes the need to diagnose unfinished teaching and learning and planning for acceleration.

Assessing Student Strengths and Needs

Several [recent studies](#) demonstrate concerning results about the potential academic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as many students’ progress in reading and math may be months behind the progress expected in a typical school year. However, some experts recommend [caution](#) in overemphasizing these findings, as students may internalize this narrative as a negative reflection on their ability.

When planning instruction to best meet student needs, educators recommend integrating multiple sources of information and clarifying the [intended purpose for assessments](#). Many [experts suggest](#) assessing student needs holistically, including social and emotional well-being before attending to academic achievement. Furthermore, education researchers recommend using assessments [aligned with local curriculum](#), which may be more useful than standardized measures, such as traditional state assessments (for more on assessment types, see [here](#) and [here](#)).

- **California:** [Guidance](#) outlines a variety of tools available to districts to assess student progress. The guidance emphasizes that “teachers likely will want to use a variety of informal tools to assess student learning and performance—as well as their social-emotional well-being and home situation—in the first week or two of school and plan for a more formal diagnostic assessment after students have grown comfortable in the learning community.”
- **Connecticut:** [H.B. 5769](#) (introduced, 2021) would require the Connecticut Department of Education to develop a program to provide individualized support to students whose attendance and participation dropped during the 2020-21 school year.
- **Kentucky:** The Kentucky Department of Education has released [guidelines](#) about how districts can evaluate where students are academically and how to adjust the curriculum. Guidance encourages schools to consider administering diagnostic assessments and using classroom assessments, interim assessments and formative assessments as potential tools to understand learning needs.
- **Rhode Island:** [H.B. 5834](#) (introduced, 2021) would direct school districts in the state to develop a COVID Recovery Plan and Strategy. District plans should focus on the academic and social and emotional needs of students.

- **South Carolina:** [Guidance](#) for the 2020-21 school year emphasized the importance of evaluating student needs, particularly for students with disabilities and English learners. The guidance specifically mentions the use of “learning preparation days,” or LEAP days, to administer diagnostic assessments.

Additional Resources

The U.S. Department of Education released a handbook titled: “[Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students’ Needs](#),” including a section on “Addressing Lost Instructional Time.”

EdResearch for Recovery has released [several briefs](#) to support education leaders in making evidence-based decisions, including: [Broad-Based Academic Supports for All Students](#) and [School Practices to Address Student Learning Loss](#).

The Learning Policy Institute’s (LPI) [Restarting and Reinventing School](#) resource names ten priorities “that speak both to transforming learning and to closing opportunity and achievement gaps.” Priorities include assessing student needs and expanding learning time. LPI also released guides on [The Importance of Getting Tutoring Right](#) and [Accelerating Learning as We Build Back Better](#).

EdTrust released guides for [Strategies to Solve Unfinished Learning](#), including targeted intensive tutoring, expanded learning time and the importance of strong relationships.

EdWeek released a guide to [Overcoming COVID-19 Learning Loss](#). The guide draws from interviews with researchers and educators to identify interventions with a promising track record in accelerating student learning. The guide includes details around assessment, tutoring, extended learning time and other strategies.