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Your Question:

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

Our Response:

Since the abrupt school closures because of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, school systems and the students they serve continue to face challenges. Even after schools returned to in-person learning in the fall of 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to [interrupt learning](#), challenging state policymakers. 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. 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 impacts of the pandemic on student education are still unknown, early reports suggest negative impacts on [academic progress](#) for all students. Differences in [students' experiences with schooling](#) during the pandemic, including unequal access to [devices and internet](#) and [quality instruction](#), caused a wide [variation](#) in student academic progress. Furthermore, systemic inequities that existed before the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated learning gaps for students and caused a disproportionate impact on the [health outcomes](#), [economic well-being](#), and [educational opportunities](#) in communities of color and communities with low incomes. The added stress for children in these communities is likely to heighten the [need for ongoing academic support](#). Evidence suggests the pandemic may have been particularly harmful by reducing learning opportunities for [English learners](#) and [students living with disabilities](#).

Supporting students with a variety 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. Providing student mental health and well-being supports may be particularly pressing given evidence that students may continue to experience [increased stress](#) as we move through 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](#), as a cost-effective strategy for boosting student achievement. In high-dosage tutoring, tutors usually work with students in one-on-one or two-on-one settings in addition to students' regular instruction.

- **Arkansas:** [Act 912](#) (enacted, 2021) establishes the Arkansas Tutoring Corps, a [statewide tutoring program](#) that recruits and trains tutors to be connected with schools and organizations to address students' academic needs.
- **California:** [A.B. 86](#) (enacted, 2021) provides funding for learning support including tutoring or other one-on-one or small group support to address learning gaps.
- **Colorado:** [H.B. 21-1234](#) (enacted, 2021) establishes the Colorado high-impact tutoring program to address unfinished learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The tutoring program [provides grants](#) to local education providers for the purpose of establishing tutoring programs that prioritize underserved student groups for whom entrenched inequalities may be exacerbated by interruptions in learning due to COVID-19.
- **Tennessee:** The [state recently announced](#) \$50 million in additional funding to support grant opportunities for community partners expanding the state's TN Accelerated Literacy and Learning Corps high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring program.
- **Texas:** [H.B. 4545](#) (enacted, 2021) requires [accelerated instruction practices](#), which includes 30 hours of one-on-one or small group instruction, for students who do not pass the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness in grades three to eight.

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 structure.

[Studies](#) demonstrate that a longer school year can have positive effects on student learning, particularly for English learners, students living with disabilities, and students who need additional academic support. [High-quality summer programming](#) and other [out-of-school programs](#) can also support students' academic achievement. [Acceleration academies](#) have also shown promising results, providing instruction during traditional school vacations to select students. States have also looked to bridge or [13th year high school programs](#) to address interrupted instruction as students prepare for postsecondary instruction and careers.

- **California:** [A.B. 130](#) (enacted, 2022) establishes the Expanded Learning Opportunity Program and appropriates state funds for allocation to school districts and certain charter schools. The program will include classroom-based instructional programs with expanded learning opportunity programs that provide access to no less than nine hours of combined in-person instructional time and expanded learning opportunities.
- **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.

- **Minnesota:** [H.F. 4-1](#) (pending, 2022) would appropriate funds for expanded extended time programs, after-school community learning programs and summer school grants. The funding for these programs is intended to “combat the educational effects of the pandemic.”
- **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 due to 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. [A report](#) to the General Assembly outlines lessons learned along with implementation challenges.
- **Tennessee:** [H.B. 7004 / S.B. 7002](#) (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 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years. After school learning mini-camps are also included as part of this legislation. The [2021 annual report](#) reviews information on the effectiveness of the summer acceleration programs.

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, a practice known as remediation. 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 with a focus 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.

- **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.”
- **Michigan:** The Michigan Department of Education released a report, [Accelerated Learning: Acceleration vs. Remediation](#), that discusses the difference between these two approaches and the reasons for focusing on acceleration. Specifically, the report highlights the potential for increasing opportunity gaps when we focus on remediation and filling in learning gaps over accelerated learning that is focused on growth. As an extension of this report, the Michigan Department of Education has released guides for educators on tutoring, Tier 1 grade level instruction and student engagement, among others, on their [Accelerated Learning](#) webpage.
- **Missouri:** The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education established the [Task Force for Learning Acceleration](#), which provided recommendations regarding approaches to learning loss and 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.

Understanding 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 pre-COVID-19 pandemic school years. 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 Education Commission of the States' [Assessments 101: Policymaker's Guide to K-12 Assessments and Education Week's Head-to-Head Comparison](#).

- **California:** [Guidance](#) outlines a variety of tools available to districts to assess student progress. The guidance emphasizes that each assessment is designed for a specific purpose and each is important to address student needs after interrupted learning. The assessments include summative assessment, used to evaluate what has been learned, and diagnostic assessment, intended to help teachers identify what they can do to support continued learning.
- **Texas S.B. 15** (2021) [permits](#) schools or districts with a performance rating of C or higher to operate a full-time remote learning program and provide virtual coursework outside of the state network. A school district or open-enrollment charter school that operates a local remote learning program is required to periodically assess the performance of students enrolled in virtual courses under the program. Requires an assessment instrument administered for accountability purposes be administered to students enrolled in a virtual course in the same manner in which the assessment instrument is administered to other school district or open-enrollment charter school students.

Other State Actions

In addition to the academic supports outlined above, states have introduced bills to study the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools, teachers, and student learning.

- **New Jersey:** [S.B. 2268/ A.B. 3311](#) (pending, 2022) would require the commissioner of education to prepare a report on learning loss. School districts would be required to submit data on student academic outcomes. The data would be used by the commissioner to identify and quantify the impact of the COVID-19 public health emergency on overall student academic outcomes and student achievement disparities.
- **North Carolina:** [H.B. 196](#) (enacted, 2021) allocated funds for the state board of education to contract with a third party to collect, analyze, and report on the impacts of COVID-19 on schools and students. [Initial findings](#) were shared with the General Assembly in early March 2022.
- **Rhode Island:** [H.B. 7168](#) (pending, 2022) would direct every school district to develop a "COVID Recovery Plan and Strategy." The plans must identify priorities and needs of local students and identify strategies to reach priority targets.
- **Virginia:** [S.J. 308](#) (enacted, 2021) directs the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission to study the impacts on the state's public schools, students and employees. In addition to examining barriers to student success in virtual and hybrid models, the Commission is charged with examining programs that can address learning loss and identify barriers to implementing the programs.

Additional Resources

The U.S. Department of Education released a guidebook, [Strategies for Using](#) American Rescue Plan Funding to Address the Impact of Lost Instructional Time, which includes evidence-based strategies and resources for reengaging students, supporting parents and caregivers and using high quality assessments.

The Office of Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education published [Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America's Students](#), which highlights certain student groups, the challenges they faced before the pandemic and some of the additional challenges they face due to the pandemic.

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

The Learning Policy Institute's [Restarting and Reinventing School](#) resource names 10 priorities "that speak both to transforming learning and to closing opportunity and achievement gaps." Priorities include assessing student needs and expanding learning time.

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.

FutureEd released an [analysis](#) of local school district's spending plans for federal ESSER funds, estimating that more than \$1.7 billion is designated for tutoring and academic coaches.