Learning Recovery 2023: 10 Educator Insights In 10 Charts

Results of a National Survey
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Executive Summary

Drawing upon the results of a nationally representative online survey conducted in July 2023, this report examines educators’ perceptions and insights about efforts to help students recover from the academic disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

The report’s 10 charts highlight key findings that illustrate the multifaceted approaches that educators are using to address pandemic-related unfinished learning or learning loss. These strategies include efforts to leverage federal and state COVID relief funding to purchase resources for accelerated learning interventions and tutoring, increase emphasis on small group work for students in class, and provide resources for more or different social-emotional learning.

Analyses featured in the report shed light on important questions about the degree to which strategies differ based on socioeconomic conditions or where districts are located. Findings also capture educator sentiments regarding the challenges that had a major impact on their districts’ and schools’ ability to address unfinished learning over the past two years, as well as the approaches they have found to be most effective to combat learning loss.

Despite the challenges that have been thrown their way in recent years, the survey results reveal that most educators are confident that students in their districts or schools will be able to make it to where they need to be by the end of the 2023-24 school year.

Key findings include:

- When asked about their expectations in a range of areas, educators’ concerns about student engagement stood out. Just 31 percent of teachers, school leaders, and district leaders thought student engagement would be higher in 2023-24 than prior to the pandemic and nearly half (46 percent) said it will be lower.
- Seven in 10 educators said they are confident that students in their districts or schools will be able to make it to where they need to be by the end of the 2023-24 school year.
- The survey asked teachers to specify the approach they planned to use during the 2023-24 school year to address pandemic-related unfinished learning or learning loss. Nearly two-thirds (66 percent) pointed to an approach that can be described as accelerated learning indicating that they planned to move directly to grade level content/skills and only address learning gaps if they impact a student’s ability to access grade level material.
- Strategies and uses of funding to address learning loss varied across school systems. More than half of school and district leaders (53 percent) reported that their schools or districts used one-time federal/state COVID relief funding to purchase tutoring. That share increases to 6 in 10 for respondents in higher-poverty school systems.
- Just 18 percent of school and district leaders said their schools or districts spent federal/state COVID relief dollars on accelerated learning. This approach was more than two times more common in urban districts (33 percent) than in their rural/town (15 percent) or suburban (14 percent) counterparts.
The pandemic had a profound impact on students, disrupting both their academic learning and their everyday lives. Recent test scores have demonstrated the degree to which the disruption stunted reading and math achievement.

To better understand potential strategies and solutions that can help students to recover lost ground, it’s important to hear from educators with firsthand experience in the field.

This report is based on findings from a nationally representative online survey conducted by the EdWeek Research Center from July 13th to 28th, 2023. In total, 727 educators participated—121 district leaders, 96 school principals, 64 assistant/vice principals or other school leaders, and 446 teachers.

The survey results provide a picture of where things stand with respect to learning recovery and also highlight some clues about educators’ expectations for the 2023-24 school year ahead.

The following pages feature 10 learning recovery findings from the survey in 10 accompanying charts.
Make an Impact on Learning Recovery

High-impact Tutoring Is Proven* to Increase Student Learning in Early Literacy and Algebra 1

Kids who meet grade-level expectations for early literacy are more likely to succeed in school.

Success in 9th grade algebra is imperative to high school completion.

The partnership between Saga Education and Success for All Foundation helps kids in both of these crucial subjects, increasing the odds of high school graduation four-fold.

Let’s Build Your High-impact Tutoring Program!

*The University of Chicago Urban Labs Education Labs conducted a randomized trial study that demonstrates individualized, intensive (or "high-impact") tutoring can double or triple the amount of math high school students learn each year, increase student grades, and reduce math and non-math course failures.
When asked to describe the approach they planned to use during the 2023-24 school year to address pandemic-related unfinished learning/learning loss, nearly two-thirds (66 percent) of teachers pointed to an approach that can be described as accelerated learning and said they would move directly to grade level content/skills and only address learning gaps if they impact a student’s ability to access grade level material.

Strong majorities regardless of locale (urban, suburban, and rural/town districts) planned to use that approach. Sixty-one percent of teachers in rural or town settings, 66 percent in suburban areas, and 73 percent in urban school districts indicated they would move directly to grade-level content and skills.

Nearly one-quarter (24 percent) said their approach will entail teaching the content or skills that students did not learn previously before moving on to grade level content or skills. Results were similar across communities—22 percent of teachers in rural areas or towns, 27 percent from suburban settings, and 21 percent in urban districts.

Only 11 percent of teachers did not expect their students to have missed out on learning during the pandemic. This optimism drops in suburban and urban settings, with only 7 percent of educators in each group holding this view.

However, a larger share of teachers in rural areas or towns (17 percent) did not expect their students to have missed out on content or skills.
2. Views on instructional approaches differ based on whether educators faced school closures during the 2020-21 school year.

District leaders, school leaders, and teachers provided insights into their views on effective strategies for addressing learning loss.

The majority of educators (51 percent) who did not experience in-person learning closures during 2020-21 believed it’s more effective to move directly to current grade-level content and to only address learning gaps if they impact a student’s ability to access grade level content/skills.

Ten percent said it’s most effective to focus first on teaching the content that students did not learn previously before moving on to grade level skills.

The remaining 39 percent said both approaches are equally effective.

The picture is different for educators who faced at least some school closures in 2020-21.

They were less likely to say it’s more effective to move directly to grade level content and skills. Thirty-eight percent endorsed moving directly to grade-level content and addressing learning gaps if they affect a student’s capacity to learn grade level content or skills.

Twenty-six percent supported the effectiveness of addressing what students missed in the preceding years before progressing.

Another 37 percent said that both approaches are equally successful.

In your view, which of the approaches below is most effective when it comes to addressing pandemic-related unfinished learning/learning loss?

Results by time school closed for in-person learning in the 2020-21 school year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>No time at all</th>
<th>1-100% of the year</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moving directly to grade level content/skills and only addressing learning gaps if they impact a student’s ability to access grade level content/skills</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching the content/skills that students did not learn previously before moving on to grade level content/skills</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both approaches are equally effective</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Results show responses from teachers, school leaders, and district leaders.

Note: Percentages do not equal 100 percent due to rounding.
3. Urban school and district leaders are more likely to say their schools/school systems used COVID relief funding for accelerated learning.

The survey examined the ways in which schools and districts have used federal/state COVID relief funding to address pandemic-related unfinished learning.

School and district administrators most commonly reported that their schools or districts used this funding for specific academic interventions (55 percent) and more/different social-emotional learning resources (55 percent).

By contrast, just 18 percent of district and school leaders said their districts or schools used one-time federal or state COVID relief funding to purchase resources connected to accelerated learning initiatives.

One-third of leaders from urban districts/schools said they used such funding for accelerated learning compared to 15 percent of leaders working in rural areas or towns and 14 percent serving suburban schools/school systems.

**Learning acceleration** is an educational approach that focuses on giving students access to grade-level instruction by integrating essential knowledge and skills they might have missed in prior years while ensuring they progress with content for their current grades.

If students missed out on learning a concept from prior grades due to remote learning in the pandemic and that concept impacts their ability to master the current material, teachers would still concentrate on the content for their current grade level but also make sure they addressed the skill students should have learned in previous years.
4. Leaders in high-poverty districts were more likely to use COVID relief funding for tutoring.

More than half of school and district leaders (53 percent) said their schools or districts used COVID relief funding to purchase tutoring services.

In districts where more than half the students qualify for free or reduced-price meals—which serves as a proxy for student poverty levels—63 percent of education leaders said that funding was used for tutoring.

However, only 39 percent of leaders in lower-poverty districts indicated funding was used for that purpose.

In districts using money connected to the pandemic for tutoring programs, it may be unclear which, if any, alternative funding sources will be used to continue those services as COVID relief funding ends.
5. Nearly three-quarters of suburban administrators say their teachers have increased their focus on small group work to address learning loss.

School and district leaders were asked whether teachers in their schools or school systems have increased or decreased their focus on small group work in order to help their students master material they should have learned during the pandemic but didn’t.

Overall, 64 percent observed an increase while 34 percent observed no change and just 2 percent noted a decrease.

Seventy-four percent of administrators working in suburban communities saw an increase in teachers’ emphasis on this approach compared to 69 percent in urban school systems and 56 percent in rural areas or towns.

Respondents from rural communities or towns were more likely than their peers in suburban or urban areas to report that use of group work had not changed compared to pre-pandemic levels.

Forty-four percent of rural/town respondents but just 31 percent of urban and 22 percent of suburban leaders saw no changes in this practice.
6. Remediation is a common intervention when data suggest students have not mastered material they should have learned during the pandemic.

U.S. Department of Education guidance encouraged policies/practices to ensure “educators and grade-level teams have time to learn new instructional strategies for acceleration and to coordinate to ensure that students learn without relying on remediation or pull-out instructional practices.”

It also encouraged educators to use diagnostic and formative assessments “that provide timely information to help educators know where to focus for particular students” in order to address learning time lost to the pandemic.

Most survey respondents said that (during the 2022-23 school year) they or the teachers in their schools/districts used formative assessments (76 percent) and diagnostic assessments (65 percent) to evaluate whether students had mastered material they should have learned during the pandemic.

When data/evidence suggest that students had not mastered material that they should have learned during the pandemic, educators might assign students to a variety of interventions.

Nearly half (47 percent) of teachers, school leaders, and district leaders reported that students were assigned to remediation in academic subject areas where they were below grade level during the 2022-23 school year because data suggested such learning gaps.

Educators also assigned students to learning groups they remained in for a small part of the school day (18 percent) and to mandatory afterschool/summer learning or enrichment programs (15 percent).

Educators working in suburban (50 percent) and rural/town areas (50 percent) were more likely to refer students to remediation than their peers from urban communities (35 percent).

During the 2022-23 school year, what interventions, if any, were your students assigned to because the data/evidence collected suggested that they had not mastered material they should have learned during the pandemic?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Rural or town</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remediation in academic subject areas where they were below grade level</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning groups they remained in for a small part of the school day</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory afterschool/summer learning or enrichment programs</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Results show responses from teachers, school leaders, and district leaders.
Parents and Teachers Uniformly Disliked Teaching Remotely. Here’s Why Tutoring Remotely Is Different and Can Be Key to Supercharging Learning and Recovery.

By: Robert Runcie, CEO of Chiefs for Change and former Superintendent, Broward County Public Schools; and Alan Safran, CEO of Saga Education

This perspective will feel to some educators and families like it is ahead of its time—because parents, teachers, and most students disliked remote classroom teaching during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic and hardly want to think about it now. And yet, we are urging a new and crucial look at how live-online tutoring can and does provide high-quality instructional support for our students and is crucial to accelerating learning and recovery.

We need look no further than recent news reports to see the devastating results of the nation’s forced experiment on remote teaching: “Two Decades of Growth Wiped Out by Two Years of Pandemic,” The 74 declared.

Given all that, it would be easy for K–12 districts to insist on providing only in-person learning experiences for students. That would be a huge mistake for the students we serve.

Tutoring remotely—as part of the regular school day—may be the best pathway for districts to accelerate learning and recovery.

Despite the many challenges of teaching students in remote, online classrooms, it turns out that tutoring them remotely—as part of the regular school day—may be the best pathway for districts to boost academic achievement and for scaling tutoring to reach some of the most underserved students in our country. Two recent studies of live-online tutoring programs in Italy and Spain, for example, showed encouraging signs that tutoring remotely can help children succeed. Note that we are distinguishing remote tutoring, which is online with a live tutor, versus online instruction, which often means a student sitting in front of a computer-based practice platform without another human.

In the U.S., The New York Times recently called for more research into the effectiveness of live-online tutoring, calling it “potentially trans-
formative” because it “could greatly expand the pool of trained tutors available to schools.” It also could become a more cost-effective solution for districts where the cost of making in-person high-impact tutoring widely available would be too great. Trish Cook, a teacher at Uplift Gradus Preparatory, a charter public school in DeSoto, Texas, recounted her fourth-graders’ experiences with a fully remote math tutoring service: “These were trained tutors—it was clear they had some educational and leadership background, and morale went up.”

Here are three reasons district leaders should consider scalable, in-school-day live-online tutoring programs now and for the long term:

1. Live-online tutoring is the only equitable solution.

All students can benefit from working with a tutor throughout their K-12 careers—especially at the critical leverage points of grade 3 literacy and grade 9 math (students who are proficient in reading by grade 3, like students who pass algebra 1 by grade 9, have a four times greater graduation rate than students who do not reach these milestones). Finding in-person tutors (let alone in-person teachers) is a serious challenge for many urban and rural districts. But open up a national pool of remote tutors, and the labor shortage is resolved. Districts then can be very selective about which tutors they want—even adding tutors who speak the languages of their students when they can’t secure local tutors with this skill.

2. Students really can form relationships with their tutor.

During the first year of COVID-19, teachers struggled to build personal connections with students because they were delivering remote
lessons to virtual classrooms of 25 or more. Saga sites around the US have shown that students can and will form strong relationships with their remote tutors. The key is that the platform for remote tutoring must recreate in the virtual world of the computer screen what was created in the traditional world of in-person tutoring across a table. Cameras, audio, and chat need to be on, and the students in the room at school need to be supervised by an onsite adult to ensure this. And importantly, tutors can work remotely with two to four students at a time and continue working with the same students each day, which allows individualized instruction and peer-to-peer interactions.

3. Live-online tutoring offers instructional advantages over in-person tutoring.

Some of this revolves around the confidentiality uniquely provided by live-online tutoring. Students tutored in person are often embarrassed to truthfully tell their tutor if they’re ready to move on from a lesson, but in the remote environment, the tutor asks the students privately to chat a number on a 1-10 scale, and the tutor can then adapt their next lesson to accommodate the student who was too shy to admit they didn’t feel ready to proceed. Likewise, it is crucial for tutors to be observed and given on-the-job coaching; but if an observer sits at an in-person tutorial table, the dynamics will change. Remote observations, done surreptitiously and frequently by the supervisor on the tutoring platform, can provide reality for the observer and actionable feedback for the tutor to improve (not to mention a quality audio/visual recording to roll for the tutor, like a coach would do to improve an athlete’s techniques).

Consistently high-quality live-online tutoring can be delivered at scale, by districts, to the students who need it most. It offers an immediate pathway to accelerate learning and recovery and the possibility of a long-term solution to redesign schools and close persistent and unacceptable opportunity gaps. We now have the means to do so. Do we have the will?

Learn more about how high-impact tutoring is helping with learning recovery.
7. Most educators say their schools or districts provide academic and social-emotional resources for learning recovery.

Schools and districts don’t have direct control of all the variables that can influence student achievement or of the complex forces that shaped student learning during the pandemic. But they can choose to provide additional resources to help students master material they should have learned during the pandemic but didn’t.

The majority of teachers, school leaders, and district leaders reported that their schools or districts provided additional resources for more/different social-emotional learning (58 percent) and for specific academic interventions (58 percent). Nearly half (49 percent) cited additional resources for tutoring.

However, 11 percent reported that even though some students haven’t mastered material they should have learned, their schools or school systems aren’t providing additional resources to help them catch up.

Nine percent reported that students haven’t mastered material but their schools or districts aren’t doing anything anymore to address learning recovery.

Only 1 percent of respondents said they do not have any students who have not learned content they should have mastered during the pandemic.

What, if any, additional resources is your district or school providing to help students master material they should have learned during the pandemic but did not? Select all that apply.

- More/different social-emotional learning: 58%
- Specific academic interventions: 58%
- Tutoring: 49%
- More teacher PD: 33%
- Remedial programs that students can pursue at their own pace: 25%
- More/different curricula: 22%
- More in-class paraeducator support: 19%
- Extended learning time: 19%
- Smaller class sizes: 16%
- Accelerated learning: 14%
- We have students who have not mastered material but we are not providing any additional resources to them: 11%
- Although we have students who have not mastered material, our district/school isn’t doing anything anymore to address it: 9%
- Other: 5%
- We do not have any students who have not mastered material: 1%

*Results show responses from teachers, school leaders, and district leaders.*
8. Just 3 in 10 educators expect student engagement to be better in the 2023-24 school year than before the pandemic.

The coronavirus pandemic undoubtedly impacted many aspects of teaching and learning in the years since its onset in 2020. But what are educators expecting for the 2023-24 school year?

When asked about their expectations in a range of areas, educators’ concerns about student engagement stood out. Just 31 percent of teachers, school leaders, and district leaders thought student engagement would be higher in 2023-24 than prior to the pandemic and nearly half (46 percent) said it will be lower.

Seventy percent expected the amount of small group tutoring their students receive to increase. Nearly half predicted an increase in the amount of formative assessment conducted (49 percent) and the rigor of instruction (45 percent). Only 7 percent pointed to an increase in the amount of homework assigned.

Compared to prior to the pandemic, how, if at all, do you expect the following to change during the 2023-24 school year?

- The amount of small group tutoring our students receive
  - Increased compared to prior to the pandemic: 70%
  - No change: 26%
  - Decreased compared to prior to the pandemic: 24%

- The amount of formative assessment conducted
  - Increased compared to prior to the pandemic: 49%
  - No change: 47%
  - Decreased compared to prior to the pandemic: 4%

- The rigor of instruction
  - Increased compared to prior to the pandemic: 45%
  - No change: 39%
  - Decreased compared to prior to the pandemic: 17%

- The engagement levels of our students
  - Increased compared to prior to the pandemic: 31%
  - No change: 24%
  - Decreased compared to prior to the pandemic: 46%

- The amount of summative testing conducted
  - Increased compared to prior to the pandemic: 28%
  - No change: 66%
  - Decreased compared to prior to the pandemic: 10%

- The strictness of grading policies
  - Increased compared to prior to the pandemic: 13%
  - No change: 57%
  - Decreased compared to prior to the pandemic: 30%

- The amount of homework assigned
  - Increased compared to prior to the pandemic: 7%
  - No change: 59%
  - Decreased compared to prior to the pandemic: 34%

*Results show responses from teachers, school leaders, and district leaders.

Note: Percentages do not equal 100 percent due to rounding.
9. Most educators are confident that students will be able to reach where they need to be by the end of the 2023-24 school year.

Seven in 10 teachers, school leaders, and district leaders are confident that students in their schools or school systems will get where they need to be by the time the 2023-24 school year is finished.

Although most educators in both higher- and lower-poverty districts expressed that belief, there’s a confidence gap.

Seventy-nine percent of respondents working in lower-poverty districts—where 50 percent of students or less qualify for free or reduced-price meals—said they were confident students would reach the grade level where they need to be.

That was true for 65 percent of respondents from higher-poverty systems where most students qualify for school meal programs.

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How confident are you that students in your district or school will be able to reach the grade level/where they need to be by the end of the 2023-24 school year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>50 percent or less qualify for free or reduced-priced meals</th>
<th>79%</th>
<th>21%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 50 percent qualify for free or reduced-price meals</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Results show responses from teachers, school leaders, and district leaders.*
10. Challenges impacting the ability of schools or districts to address learning recovery are more severe in high-poverty systems.

Overall, 54 percent of educators cited teacher vacancies as a major challenge limiting the effectiveness of their learning recovery efforts. Forty-four percent pointed to student absences from COVID as a significant barrier affecting their ability to combat pandemic-related learning gaps.

Only 1 in 5 respondents said that too many teachers have insufficient knowledge/skills to address unfinished learning.

In wealthier school systems where most students don’t qualify for free or reduced priced meals, 47 percent of educators expressed concerns about teacher vacancies due to staffing problems. However, in more economically challenged settings where the majority of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, 57 percent reported that teacher vacancies are impacting learning recovery.

In schools with fewer students eligible for meal assistance, 29 percent cited COVID-related teacher absences as a barrier to learning recovery. This percentage rises to 38 percent for those in schools with more students qualifying for assistance from meal programs.

Thirty-seven percent of educators in more affluent schools highlighted student absences due to COVID as a problem. This challenge becomes more pronounced in less affluent schools where 48 percent of educators reported that it had a major impact on their capacity to address unfinished learning.

Fourteen percent of respondents from more affluent school systems felt that too many teachers weren’t fully equipped to address the learning gaps. By contrast, 24 percent of respondents from less affluent districts shared those concerns.

What, if any, challenges have had a MAJOR impact on the ability of your district or school to address pandemic-related unfinished learning over the past two years? Select all that apply.

- Too many teachers have insufficient knowledge/skills to address unfinished learning
- Teacher vacancies due to staffing challenges
- Teacher absences due to quarantines/being sick with COVID
- Student absences due to quarantines/being sick with COVID
- Focus on acceleration rather than remediation

*Results show responses from teachers, school leaders, and district leaders.