

SPOTLIGHT



—Natasja Billiau via AP

Natasja Billiau's two children, Victor, 8, and Anna Laura, 5, study at the kitchen table in their Seattle area home during the coronavirus school building shutdowns. Billiau devised a learning schedule for her children that closely matches what they would have done at school.

BEATING THE 'COVID SLIDE'

EDITOR'S NOTE

Educators fear that learning loss from COVID-19 school closures will be even more threatening than learning loss from typical summer breaks. In this Spotlight, discover how schools are addressing academic erosion, how teachers are measuring English-learners' learning loss, and how teachers are staying connected to students amid school closures.

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AP Photo/Ross D. Franklin

Giselle Berastegui, 9, works on math problems at home in Laveen, Ariz., with her older brother during the coronavirus school closures.

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Instruction During COVID-19: Less Learning Time Drives Fears of Academic Erosion

By Catherine Gewertz

The picture of instruction that has emerged since the coronavirus forced students and teachers into remote learning is clear and troubling: There's less of it, and the children with the greatest need are getting the least. These dynamics carry serious implications as schools plan to reopen in the fall.

But even though the picture of diminished instruction is clear, it's not simple. Pandemic learning is complex and contradictory.

Some students are getting live video lessons for hours daily and staying in close contact with their teachers, while others get no real-time instruction and hear from their teachers perhaps once a week. Many teachers are pulling 12-hour days, while many others work less than they did a few months ago. Some parents push angrily for stronger academics during home-learning, while others demand relief, saying they can't handle home-schooling along with their other obligations.

These crosscurrents put teachers and education leaders in a bind: How do they maintain high-quality instruction while

providing the flexibility families—and they themselves—need to survive a national crisis? That is an especially important question if remote learning, or some version of it, continues in many districts next fall due to the coronavirus.

The defining question in K-12 education right now is “balancing the tension between high expectations and the need for flexibility” as everyone in the system tries to regain their footing, said Bree Dusseault, who's been leading an analysis of districts' coronavirus responses for the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington.

It's a tricky high wire: If districts and schools allow too much flexibility, they can be accused of letting children fall behind. If they refuse to soften their expectations, their communities might demand more compassion.

'The Picture Is Very Uneven'

The national picture shows a system providing less for children, whether it's by choice or by limited ability to shift suddenly to distance-teaching.

In surveys by the EdWeek Research Center, teachers report they're spending

less time on instruction overall, and they're spending more time on review and less on introducing new material. Nationally, on average, teachers say they're working two fewer hours per day than when they were in their classrooms. And they estimate that their students are spending half as much time on learning—three hours a day—as they were before the coronavirus.

Those dynamics are fueling worry about students' academic erosion. But EdWeek data suggest that risk is even greater for students in high-need neighborhoods. There, students are more likely to have teachers who communicate with them less frequently, and who report spending less time teaching new material. Teachers in those districts also say their students spend only two hours a day on learning now, an hour less than what teachers overall report their students are spending.

“The picture is very uneven. Not all of our kids are getting access to the same things,” said Michael Casserly, who leads an advocacy group for large districts, the Council of the Great City Schools. If these patterns persist, he said, they could create “a permanent underclass” of young people who lack the skills for work and civic responsibility, an inequity that “harms the national economy and offends one's sense of moral equity.”

Robin Lake, the executive director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education, warned the House education and labor committee in recent testimony that without a major improvement in schooling soon, students could descend into “academic death spirals.”

Instructed to Scale Back Expectations

So many teachers are working longer hours now than before their schools closed that they found the EdWeek survey data hard to believe. Rebecca Sorenson, a 3rd grade special education teacher in rural Michigan, said that in addition to lesson planning, she holds four or five Zoom sessions a day, each with one student, and spends hours weekly driving to her students' homes, which are spread over 116 square miles, to drop off books and study materials. “I'm working longer hours now than ever,” she said.

Interviews with teachers, however, surface a host of dynamics that have reduced

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teachers' work hours and led them to focus on review instead of new material. Some arose from state and district directives.

Laura Peden, a kindergarten teacher in rural Paxton, Ill., said her district, following a state directive, tried to stick to a five-hour day remotely and proceed with its usual curriculum. But it quickly heard that parents, many of whom are essential workers, were overwhelmed, she said.

Now she conducts one Zoom session with her class per week, sends paper packets home, and communicates with parents once or twice a week through Facebook and Class Dojo. District officials told schools not to teach new material, she said, because they worried that the "huge discrepancy" in parents' abilities to manage at-home teaching could exacerbate achievement gaps.

Many states have signaled the need for flexibility during coronavirus, waiving seat- and instructional-time requirements. Many districts offered flexibility by using pass/fail grading systems or deciding that students' remote-learning work wouldn't lower their grades.

But those policies might have affected student engagement. High school teacher Angie Black, who teaches accounting, business law, and personal finance in Leadwood, Mo., said she's working maybe two or three hours a day now, compared with six or more before, because so few of her students are signing on. She'd planned multiple sessions per day, to cover all 100 of her students, but she needs only one.

"They're like, 'I'm passing this, so I'm not doing any more work,'" Black said.

In some cities, teacher unions negotiated agreements capping work time. In Los Angeles, for instance, teachers are expected to work no more than four hours daily, including meetings, planning and professional development.

Gloria Martinez, the elementary vice president for United Teachers-Los Angeles, said the agreement was necessary to accommodate the time teachers needed for professional development on distance-learning, as well as juggling care for their own loved ones at home. It also sought to protect children from too much screen time, and parents from exhaustion managing work and family care, she said.

Some Duties Disappeared

Some duties teachers performed in their schools have dropped off their schedules.

Kelly Carver, a 2nd grade teacher in Ralston, Neb., said she no longer has the



—AP Photo/Craig Mitchell/lyer

25-minute daily lunch duty, or the 40 to 45 minutes she tacked onto each end of her workdays for tutoring. Susan Shelton, a high school English and journalism teacher in Pleasant Grove, Utah, no longer stays "after school" to help students produce the yearbook.

Jackie Wagner, a K-5 special education teacher in Broken Bow, Neb., said that the lessons she once conducted herself—filled with hands-on activities—she can't do remotely.

"Before, I'd plan lessons and then do them with the kids," Wagner said. "Now I plan lessons and hand them over to parents," she said. Given the responsibilities her students' parents are juggling, "I'm lucky if my kids get one hour a day" to practice her lessons at home, she said. She's worried that students like hers, with special needs, will be harmed "for three or four years down the road" from this year's learning losses.

Some teachers reported that even though they wanted to cover new material, distance learning made that tough.

"Without being in front of them, so I could walk around, look over their shoulders at their work, see the looks on their faces to see if they're getting it, it's really tough to introduce anything new," said Shelton.

Before schools closed, she conducted 80-minute class sessions every other day, each with 90 minutes of homework. Now she assigns 40 minutes' worth of work every other day.

Parents are concerned about the decline in their children's learning time. In a few cities—such as Arlington, Va., and

Katie Arnold, left, works in her home office in Portland, Ore., while her son Rowen Arnold, a 1ST grader at Mannahouse Christian Academy, plays educational games on her iPad.



Without being in front of them, so I could walk around, look over their shoulders at their work, see the looks on their faces to see if they're getting it, it's really tough to introduce anything new."

SUSAN SHELTON

HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH AND JOURNALISM TEACHER,
PLEASANT GROVE, UTAH



We were very sentimental about what kids are going through right now, but at the end of the day, this world will still expect these kids to perform. I have to have high expectations for children of color who already start behind the eight ball.”

HARRISON PETERS

PROVIDENCE SUPERINTENDENT, PROVIDENCE, R.I.

Newton, Mass.—they’ve started petitions to demand more instructional time for their children. Gallup polls showing rising concern among parents about a negative impact on their children’s learning. And a poll conducted by AP-NORC found that lower-income parents are particularly worried about their children falling behind in the sudden shift to home learning.

Dennisha Rivers, who has two sons in the Louisville, Ky., schools, said her children spend “maybe an hour” each day on schoolwork. She has little time to help them, and no doubt that they’re falling behind. She’s confident her 13-year-old can bounce back, but she wonders how her 7-year-old, who has a learning disability, will regain lost ground.

‘No Such Thing as a COVID-19 Pass’

Districts are taking very different approaches to instruction as they balance flexibility and expectations.

Providence, R.I., requires students to “attend” class from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., a schedule similar to their brick-and-mortar classes, except for a longer midday break to let their parents get to district-run meal sites.

Teachers take attendance, and use monitoring apps, to track student participation, said its chief equity officer, Barbara Mullen, and have consistent en-

gagement from about 80 percent of the district’s 24,000 students in this working-class, predominantly minority community. Bus monitors have been redeployed to work call centers, so fewer than 100 students still elude contact.

“There’s no such thing as a COVID-19 pass,” said Providence Superintendent Harrison Peters, who said he got some pushback from families wanting more leniency.

“We were very sentimental about what kids are going through right now, but at the end of the day, this world will still expect these kids to perform. I have to have high expectations for children of color who already start behind the eight ball.”

Miami-Dade County, a big, high-poverty district, stuck with its planned curriculum, making an unusually smooth transition to remote learning because of good planning and an aggressive push to distribute devices and WiFi hotspots. The district had already been incorporating digital learning into its system, but Superintendent Alberto Carvalho kicked that transition into high gear in January, when he saw the virus take hold in China.

When buildings closed, the district didn’t attempt to replicate its seven-hour, 20-minute school day, moving instead to an approach in which students cycle through live online instruction and independent work on assignments. Instead of starting and ending “school” at fixed times, Carvalho said, students and teachers are “playing a wider field” of time, interspersing work and breaks across a 12- or 14-hour period.

The district’s i-Ready learning platform for grades K-8 shows a consistently high level of engagement, with 90 percent or more of students in every income bracket and ZIP code using the platform every week since buildings closed, Carvalho said.

‘Abdication of Responsibility’

Martha Basulto, a 2nd grade teacher at Coral Reef Elementary in Miami, divides her 49 students into two 90-minute Zoom sessions daily, and with her co-teacher, moves through the district’s curriculum. She boasts 100 percent attendance, and she reports that formative assessments taken between September and May show that except for one student who needs extra support, all her students have gained academic ground and are ending the year on or above grade level.

“We followed that pacing guide to the

dot,” she said. “We didn’t drop the ball.”

Cleveland, another high-poverty district, opted for a long-range approach when it switched to distance learning. Christine Fowler-Mack, the district’s chief portfolio officer, said the district de-emphasized new material in favor of review because it knew that a large swath of students lacked computer access. It scrambled to distribute thousands of devices and Wi-Fi hotspots, but a large gap still persists.

“We knew we couldn’t, in an equitable way, ensure that students, if presented with instruction on new material, would be able to engage,” Fowler-Mack said. So the district prioritized learning continuity, distributing paper packets designed to review and strengthen core content areas, while it dove deep into planning for summer and fall instruction that will recapture missed material, and build in extra supports and interventions for students who are struggling academically or emotionally.



We knew we couldn’t, in an equitable way, ensure that students, if presented with instruction on new material, would be able to engage.”

CHRISTINE FOWLER-MACK

DISTRICT’S CHIEF PORTFOLIO OFFICER, CLEVELAND

Experts anticipate that most districts will face steep challenges in the fall when they must help students recover lost academic ground, especially since many aren’t tracking attendance or progress. That makes it tough to know what students need and how to be ready to support them, said Dusseault, of the Center on Reinventing Public Education.

But if districts aren’t better prepared in the fall, with “plans to address the different types of access gaps, instructional gaps, then it’s an abdication of responsibility to those students and their families,” she said. ■

Published on July 10, 2020, in Education Week's Inside School Research Blog

Lost Learning Time Compounds Over Summers. Students Are Taking an Extra Hit Right Now

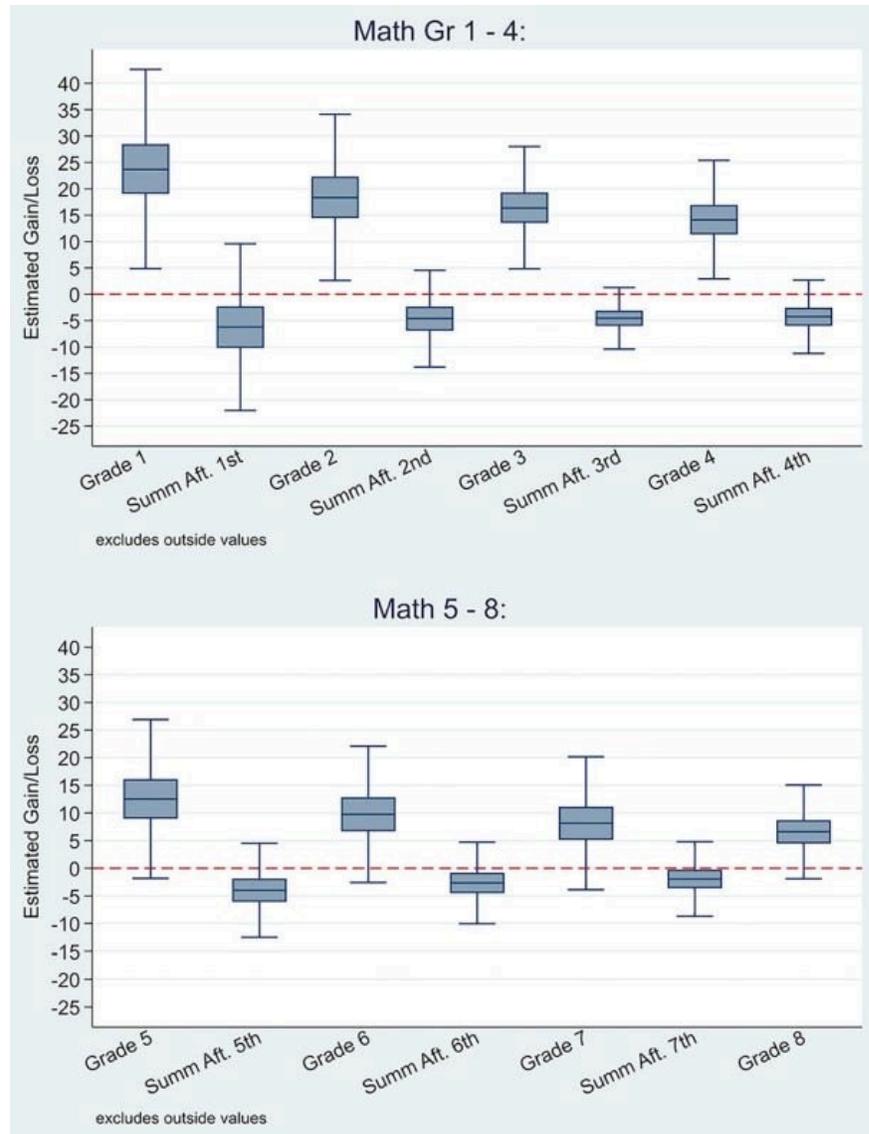
By Sarah D. Sparks

More than half of students consistently experience summer learning loss throughout their primary grades, finds a large new national longitudinal study, with compounding summer deficits leaching away on average nearly 40 percent of students' yearly progress.

Allison Atteberry of the University of Colorado-Boulder and Andrew McEachin of the RAND Corp., co-authors of the new study in the *American Educational Research Journal*, analyzed the progress of nearly 18 million students in 7,500 districts who participated in the math or English/language arts tests from NWEA's Measures of Academic Progress from 2008 to 2016.

As the charts to the right show, the researchers found students' math test scores improved during each school year—though by smaller amounts as they moved up from grade to grade. For example, in math, the average student improved by 24 points during 1st grade, but only by 6.5 points during 8th grade. The average learning losses each summer stayed more consistent from grade to grade, but still varied significantly. For example, the average student lost a quarter to a third of the progress he had made in math each grade during the following summer. But within that average, some students lost more than 16 test-score points in math during the summer, while other students gained nearly 7 test-score points.

"Mean summer learning loss patterns—those that most researchers, policymakers, and practitioners are familiar with—do not characterize most students' summer experiences very well," explained Atteberry and McEachin. "Some students maintain their school-year learning rate throughout the summer, while others can lose almost as much ground as they had gained in the preceding school year. We show that even if all the inequality in school-year learning rates could be entirely eliminated, students would still end up with very differ-



Source: American Educational Research Journal

ent achievement levels due to [summer learning loss] alone."

For some students, these compounding losses over summers explained more than 30 percent of the difference between them and their classmates by grade 5. Prior research has shown that while students in

poverty and those from disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups are more likely to experience summer learning loss than white or wealthy students are, these demographic factors only explain about 4 percent of the difference in students' summer learning loss over time. School



How Educators Kept Students on Track During Remote Learning

This spring, COVID-19 led administrators across the country to close school buildings and support students learning from home. We asked three educators about how they handled this disruption and found creative solutions to keep students motivated and engaged using the online literacy program, Reading Plus.



Susan Perrone
Director of School Leadership, Secondary Meriden Public Schools, Meriden, CT



Cathy Springs
6th grade ELA teacher and co-department chair Clark County Public Schools, Las Vegas, NV



Kip Plaisted
7th grade ELA teacher DC Public Schools, Washington, DC

How did you keep students on track with reading progress during remote learning?

Perrone: We looked at what we had at our disposal that would help with reading, the overall environment, and engagement. In the past, we used Reading Plus as an intervention. We considered how we could utilize it with more students during distance learning.

Springs: Our kids were pretty well trained because we were already doing blended learning. Once we were sent home and told to set our standards and expectations for the students, all the tools for Reading Plus made that easy.

Plaisted: We had a class competition with students to see who could level up the most during distance learning. Every week, I would post the students with the most level-ups and do a shout-out to the class.

What were your most difficult challenges?

Perrone: We hadn't exposed our regular education teachers to Reading Plus—we only thought about it as an intervention. Now we see the depth of the program and how we can provide value to all our students and teachers. Now every teacher knows how to use Reading

Plus and how to get their students up and running.

Springs: Completion. At home they can work at any time, and they were not always as fresh as when they would do [Reading Plus] in the morning at school.

Plaisted: There's always difficulty in accessibility for students. We have students who don't have tech at home or have to share with siblings. Some students only have a phone.

How was your experience using Reading Plus during distance learning?

Perrone: Teachers loved it. They felt it was easy to use and helped students. The teachers even requested to use Reading Plus again in the new year.

Springs: One good thing about Reading Plus is that because the program is so solid, it's easy for teachers to trust. Some of our kids told me that Reading Plus was their favorite program at home. They like to do better every time.

Plaisted: When students realized that Reading Plus was something they could continuously do and would count for them, they jumped on board. Students love to have competition. It showed a large number of returns for me.

How are you planning to incorporate Reading Plus into the upcoming school year?

Perrone: We created plans for all three possibilities this year: all in-school, hybrid, and all remote. Reading Plus is part of all of those plans. The first week of school, we are mandating that all teachers get set up with Reading Plus, in case we have to pivot to remote learning again.

Springs: We love the motivational tools that are available, including certificates of achievement. We plan to make leaderboards and share them with the class, so they still have a sense of community and competition.

Plaisted: The Reading Plus skills worksheets are a great feature I want to explore further to align the work to the standards students may be missing. This will help give students more ownership of their learning process by being able to set their own goals. ■

5 Key Considerations to Address COVID-19 Learning Loss

Educators are confronting multiple unknowns as they prepare for the new school year. When will they return to the classroom, if at all? What levels of learning loss have their students experienced during COVID-19 school closures?

Lacking months of in-school instruction, most students will face significantly greater learning loss than the typical “summer slide.” Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) projects that students will be 30% or more behind in reading from where they would typically be for fall due to COVID-19 closures.¹

School community members should consider five key factors when selecting the best curriculum solutions to meet this challenge:

1. Web-Based Access from a Variety of Devices

An instructional program should operate “the same” whether accessed in class or at home. With many districts considering hybrid models or cohort scheduling, it is crucial that students can easily transfer their work from the classroom to the kitchen table. Compatibility across a wide range of devices is critical. While some students may have access to school-provided technology, students at home may access instructional programs from tablets, iPads, laptops, and desktop computers.

2. Teacher-Student Communication

Without the benefit of seeing students daily, it can be difficult for teachers to keep track of who is having success and who may need additional support. The availability of built-in messaging tools helps enable teachers to easily congratulate students for good work in order to keep their motivation high—a critical part of any classroom. Real-time alerts and notifications should identify



students who may need the teacher’s specific attention and support.

3. Resources for Parent and Family Engagement

Parents and family members are an integral part of any educational community, especially when students must conduct their schoolwork at home. Effective online instructional programs have integrated portals explaining product features to family members so they can easily see and understand their children’s assignments and progress.

4. Strong Support for Teachers

Teachers should be able to conduct all the training and onboarding for a program from anywhere—not just a school auditorium. Easily digestible professional development modules make it simpler for teachers to learn how to implement a program. Look for

an offering that features a real-time dashboard with reports and snapshots that include everything a teacher needs to know at a glance.

5. Easily Accessible Customer Service

Students learning at home — and parents guiding them — can’t turn to a school technology aide to field immediate questions. Quickly responsive customer service is key to student success and should be available through multiple channels and an inclusive range of hours.

The *Reading Plus* solution meets each of these key considerations for remote and hybrid learning use. ■

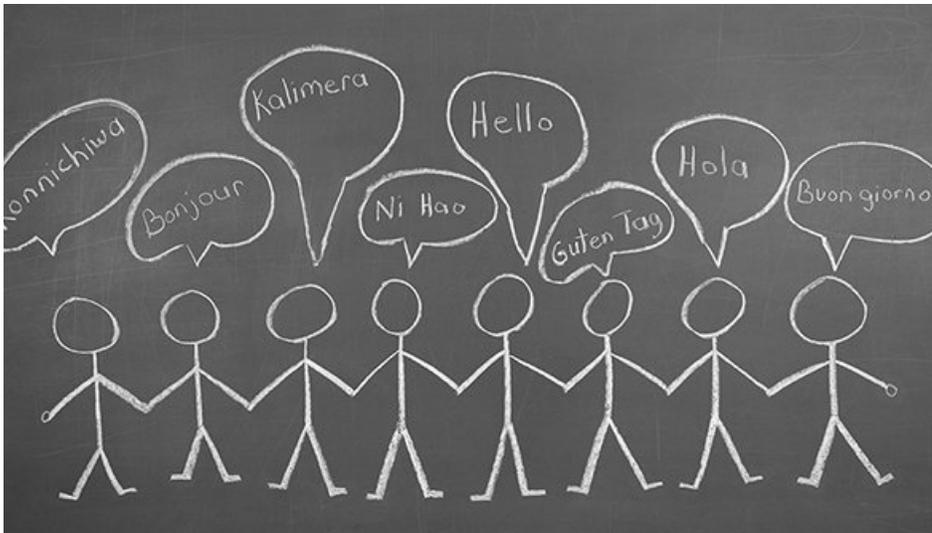
¹NWEA, “[The COVID-19 slide: What summer learning loss can tell us about the potential impact of school closures on student academic achievement](#)”

closures in the wake of the coronavirus have made it more urgent for schools to identify the students most vulnerable to summer learning loss. A separate study released earlier this spring and also based on NWEA data found that the so-called "COVID slide" could cause students to

lose as much as 30 percent of their annual progress in reading and half to all of their progress in math, without intervention.

Districts are still deciding how to measure and pinpoint how much ground they will have to make up with students when schools finally reopen this fall. But the re-

searchers suggested that education leaders should consider how new scheduling structures intended to reduce the number of students on campus, such as moving to year-round calendars, could affect which children remain out of the classroom, and for how long. ■



—E+/Getty

Published on June 17, 2020, in Education Week's Learning the Language Blog

How Will Schools Measure English-Learners' 'COVID-Slide' Learning Loss?

By Corey Mitchell

Educators are worried about students losing ground while school buildings are closed to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The so-called coronavirus- or "COVID-slide" may be especially troublesome for English-language learners, the 5 million students still learning English in the nation's K-12 schools. Many of them could fall farther behind because of a confluence of factors, including limited access to the internet and the language support services they often receive in school.

Along with their native English-speaking peers, English-learners likely will face a battery of tests when school resumes to gauge what they've learned and lost during the extended school clo-

sure—but those assessments may not fully reflect what they know and can do in academic subjects, especially if they cannot demonstrate their knowledge in English.

A new policy brief from the Migration Policy Institute explores the policy and practical questions for states considering implementing native-language assessments, tests that may be better suited to gauge what students know and what subjects they need support in apart from their English-language instruction.

"With high-stakes accountability likely to remain a fixture of the U.S. education system and increasing recognition of the value of multilingualism for students' future and the U.S. economy, it is more important than ever to ensure that education policymakers have the means to capture a full and accurate picture of EL academic

achievement," the brief's authors, Julie Sugarman and Leslie Villegas, wrote.

The authors argue that native-language assessments are tools to measure students' grasp of concepts, not just their English proficiency. However, not all schools and states offer assessments in languages other than English.

Under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, states must "make every effort" to develop statewide assessments in students' first languages if they constitute a significant portion of the student population. But the law stops short of requiring the assessments.

According to the Migration Policy brief, 31 states plus the District of Columbia offer native language assessments, most commonly in math or science but sometimes in reading-language arts and social studies, too.

Since some states and districts have no native-language assessments of their own, many use the Northwest Evaluation Association, the maker of the widely used MAP assessments, which are also available in Spanish, to gauge the academic growth of their English-learners. Nearly three-fourth of the nation's English-learners are native Spanish speakers.

English-learner students are "not in the environment they're used to where they're getting input to be able to practice, to be able to interact," said Teresa Krastel, who guides content development for the Spanish MAP Growth and Spanish MAP Reading Fluency assessments for NWEA.

"That, in combination with the limitations we've seen all over the place, the limitations in equity, access to tools, teachers in an online environment not directly targeting skills that English-language learners need to practice," are cause for concern, Krastel said.

Schools typically use the NWEA assessments three times per year, in the fall, winter, and spring. Roughly 160,000 students took the NWEA Spanish assessments in fall 2019; that number dropped down to 5,000 students for the spring 2020 testing period, said Adam Withy-

combe, manager of assessment products for NWEA.

"We anticipate that that kind of COVID slide is going to be pretty dramatic," Withycombe said. "I'm pretty sure

it's going to be even more so for English-learners."

It remains unclear if the coronavirus-related school closures will spur demand for native-language assessments, but

they are needed for a "fair and accurate accountability system," said Sugarman, a senior education policy analyst at the Migration Policy Center's National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy. ■

Published on June 23, 2020, in *Education Week's Inside School Research Blog*

Will the 2021 Nation's Report Card Be Another Coronavirus Casualty?

By Sarah D. Sparks

The congressionally mandated tests dubbed the "Nation's Report Card," have measured the progress of U.S. students in reading and math for five decades, come fire, flood, and budget cuts. But the combination of a global pandemic and nationwide economic instability could throw off the 2021 National Assessment of Educational Progress.

The National Assessment Governing Board, which supervises the NAEP, will hold a special session next week to gauge the prospects for administering the tests next spring, which are scheduled to cover reading and math in 4th and 8th grades.

In a May meeting, Peggy Carr, NCES' associate commissioner, warned that it could be a heavy lift to recruit schools, train testers, and set up the test in what may be a disparate and rapidly shifting educational landscape next spring. Yet without the NAEP, the country could miss a crucial nationwide picture of just how much learning have students' lost during the school closures and continuing disruption.

NCES would need to ask for an estimated additional \$50 million to pay to administer the NAEP under social distancing and varied school schedules. Traditionally, field staff work in teams to administer the tests to 25 to 40 students at a time, in sessions that run two hours or more, depending on the subject. In 2021, the main NAEP had been scheduled to move to a new format which would require groups of students to be given an additional 30-minute session of questions to answer, which would reduce the number of schools and students needed to participate but potentially increase the amount of time students would be together in a testing room.



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress

"It is NAEP's job to describe educational progress, and if we are in a situation next spring ... where 90 percent of schools are open with 90 percent of their students, then I think it would be a massive lost opportunity for NAEP not to do its job as laid out in law to measure educational progress in a way that states cannot," said Andrew Ho, NAGB board member and Harvard University education researcher.

Yet, schools are planning to start the next school year with an array of schedules, from digital learning to students taking turns by class or grade in attending school live on campus, and such social distancing is expected to still be in use next spring, at least in some "hot spots," Carr noted.

NCES may have to hire additional test workers to cover all of the students, but it may also have a harder time recruiting, as workers would have to come into contact with children in many different sites to proctor the tests live.

"In a scenario where there's a patchwork of instruction within and between states ... it would be very difficult to make any sorts of adjustments," Ho said. The College Board this summer gave up on attempts to administer its college admissions test SAT at home, and even though the NAEP has moved to digitally based tests, NAGB could not provide the NAEP via distanced learning at schools. "There'd be no control over the administration conditions. You would have to rely on parents to administer at

home, with video proctoring. The challenges of a conversion like that would be insurmountable.”

But pushing back the NAEP to 2022 would start the tests on a new timeline, making it harder for researchers to track what happens in the next year.

Sean Reardon, professor of poverty and inequality in education at Stanford University, uses NAEP data to track patterns of opportunity and achievement gaps across states. Reardon said he would be concerned about differences in test administrations and different response rates of students in different states, but said without NAEP, even states that are able to administer their own tests next year will not be able to compare their policies and outcomes to those in other states.

“Suppose this is not the only pandemic, or that this pandemic leads to changes in schooling that persist, on and off in different places, for more than a year,” Reardon said. “We’d like to learn from the many different responses of schools and districts what strategies are most effective for ensuring continuity of learning during school closings, online learning, etc. ... Basically, if we want to learn from the educational experiment that has been thrust upon us, then we need the best data we can [get], as soon as we can. NAEP is better positioned than any other data source to provide the highest quality data under the circumstances.”

In fact, if the tests are administered next spring, NAGB is considering adding pandemic-specific questions to the background surveys given with each test. The questions would cover aspects of the school closures; students’ access to technology and other supplies for remote learning; teacher and school preparation for distance-learning and parent involvement in students’ education at home.

NAEP’s older, long-term-trend assessment in reading and math still will provide information about students from just before the pandemic; NCES completed its administration just before nationwide school closures this spring. Results from that test are scheduled to be released next spring, while the main NAEP’s 12th grade results in those subjects are set to be released this fall. ■



— Pavel Abramov/Getty

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How Schools Will Overcome the ‘Coronavirus Slide:’ Ideas From 5 Superintendents

By Denisa R. Superville

More governors are canceling in-school instruction for the rest of the academic year, leaving superintendents and their academic teams to figure out how they will make up for what could be profound learning losses for millions of students.

Will they run summer school? Would they even have the money to do that? Should they start the 2020-21 year earlier? Can they require longer school days in the upcoming year?

Those options—some more feasible than others—are what superintendents are weighing right now as it becomes increasingly likely that few, if any, schools will resume in-person instruction this academic year. Already, at least 15 states have either ordered or are recommending that schools not re-open this spring.

“I do think there will be gaps when kids come back,” said Jason Kamras, the superintendent of the Richmond Public Schools in Virginia. “I think there is going to be the ‘coronavirus slide.’”

While many districts are providing remote learning, the quality and quantity of

those efforts are highly variable. Analysts at the Center on Reinventing Public Education in Washington state have been collecting and reviewing dozens of districts’ remote education plans.

Mostly, CRPE has found “good assignments,” but not robust instructional plans, said Sean Gill, a research analyst.

“For the most part, we are not seeing a lot of instruction, however you may want to define it: whether it’s a teacher on Zoom or a teacher doing check-ins. That’s not something we have seen as much,” Gill said.

“What we’ve seen is more districts are providing general resources or they are providing directed curriculum, where the curriculum has kids at a certain place or time. ... Those interactive programs do help kids learn and do give them feedback. But whether teachers are looking at that data as they normally would and then supplementing that with targeted instruction doesn’t seem to be happening yet.”

How districts decide to make up for that slide depends on a host of factors—many beyond their control.

The biggest wildcard is when the coronavirus will be under control and when public health officials will deem it safe enough for social distancing to end.

Another is what state governments do.

Already, in most states, governors have mandated how long schools must stay shuttered. Some governors or state education officials could also order the steps that schools must follow to make up for the lost learning time.

Then there's the looming recession, caused by the near total shutdown of the economy. Most districts, which are heavily reliant on state funds, may have no choice but to go along with state recommendations, said Noelle Ellerson Ng, who leads policy and advocacy for the AASA, the School Superintendents Association.

But there are also local factors that may constrain what districts can do to make up for lost time. Do they have enough in their contingency funds to pay for summer school for all or nearly all students? Is there enough staff available to teach during the summer and will labor contracts need to be negotiated to make that possible? What about bus drivers to transport students?

Education Week interviewed five superintendents, who talked about the ideas and solutions they are considering for making up for lost time.

Jason Kamras

Superintendent, Richmond Public Schools, Richmond, Va.

The district created a daily instructional schedule for every subject at every grade level. Those lessons are pre-packaged and available on a weekly basis on the district's website. Teachers recorded video lessons addressing each standard and the district built in independent practice for students. It's also set up on-demand tutoring.

But the district is not requiring teachers to teach every day. They are encouraged, but not mandated, to check-in with students.

"We are working around the clock, seriously, to provide as much as we can now," Kamras said. "But we know that even with the best resources—and the best of intentions—that does not replace the time a child has with a teacher. We are thinking about, do we start school earlier, do we extend the day, do we make the next year longer? We are thinking about all kinds of things to help provide supports to fill in those gaps."

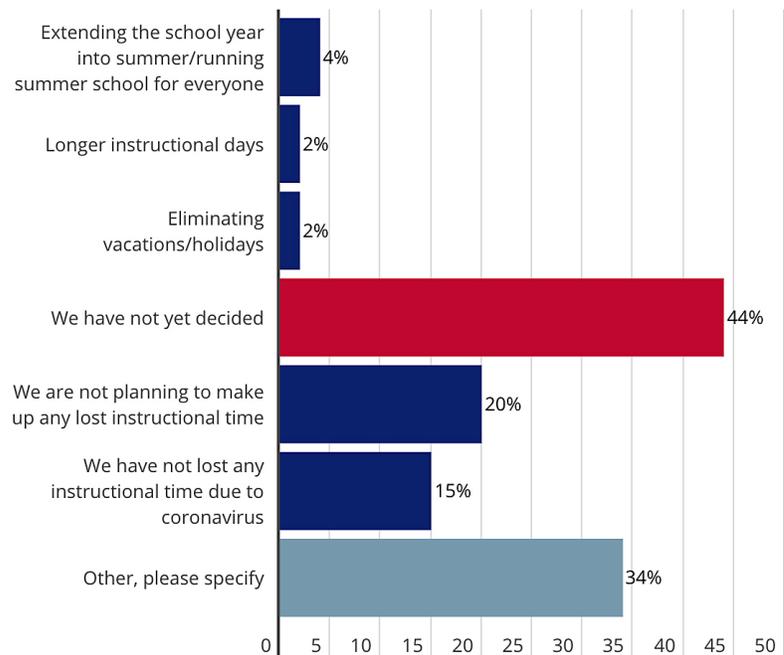
Summer school for all kids may be off the table for Richmond. Virginia has a stay-at-home order through June 10. Even if that order is lifted by then, school buildings will have to be cleaned and prepared for students. Additionally,

Making Up for Lost Time Will Challenge Schools

District leaders have deep uncertainty on how their schools can make up for potentially profound learning losses brought on by the mass closures of school buildings and uneven shift to online learning.

In a nationally representative survey conducted March 23, the largest share of respondents said they don't know what will happen to address that issue.

How, if at all, do you plan to make up instructional time lost to coronavirus closures? Select all that apply.



NOTE: Most people who selected "other please specify" said they were doing online instruction. Totals do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

SOURCE: EdWeek Research Center survey, March 2020

EducationWeek

the district planned to have three new schools ready for occupancy by mid-to-late August. If those buildings are not ready, the district's enrollment zones will be affected, Kamras said.

"We already know there are massive opportunity gaps in our schools here in Richmond, Virginia, and around the entire country, and that, as we all know, has negative consequences largely for kids of

color and low-income kids," Kamras said. "And this closure—while necessary, and I support it—is only going to exacerbate those opportunity gaps. I think as we look towards next year, and frankly as we look toward the next several years, it's going to mean that we need to invest even more in closing those opportunity gaps than we already were. Because I fear this closure is only going to make them worse."

Deborah Gist

Superintendent, Tulsa Public Schools, Tulsa, Okla.

Oklahoma has closed its school buildings for the rest of the academic year, so keeping students engaged in remote schooling for such a prolonged period is a major concern for Gist. That's why teachers there are focused on students' social-emotional needs, as well as academics, she said. Students' home life and emotional state will dramatically impact their ongoing connection and engagement with distance learning.

"We are definitely planning to do what we can to support our students to overcome that," Gist said.

Planning for summer school is under way, Gist said, but whether the district can provide a full program to every student is unclear. Finances are also a big source of uncertainty and may limit what the district can do to make up for lost time. With Oklahoma's heavy reliance on oil, and oil prices plunging, Gist is bracing for additional budget cuts on top of what the district experienced from the Great Recession.

"We know that we are going to have to pay attention to [learning loss], because we know that we are going to see challenges with our students being out of school," Gist said. "Even though we are confident that our teachers are going to do everything they can and our whole team is focused on this, we know that it's not going to be the same for every family...We anticipate that it will be some combination of additional supports for children—whether that's summer or something during the school year. But we are also watching the finances very closely."

Randy Poe

Superintendent, Boone County Schools, Florence, Ky.

When Poe shut down his district's schools in March, he thought it would be for just a few weeks. He started using non-traditional instruction days that were built into the calendar, like snow days. Now with the closure expected to last the rest of the school year, Poe is keeping instruction going online.

About 92 percent of the district's 20,000 students are keeping up using the remote learning option, while the rest have printed course packets delivered to their homes.

When students return, teachers will first assess them to see where they are

and then decide how to proceed. Still, Poe thinks a combination of extended learning days, possibly in the summer, will be part of the district's plan.

If the pandemic hasn't eased and social distancing guidelines are not relaxed by July or August, then whatever the district does to help students—whether it's extended school days, targeted enrichment for students after school, or an extended school year—will be incorporated into the new school year, he said.

"We are not going to be able to catch up in one to two weeks," Poe said. "This is going to be a situation where you are going to have to apply extended school services over the entire school year next year."

While some students may need help reviewing a few concepts, others may need targeted support.

"We are going to have to look at personalizing this over the next year for all the different students that we have," he said.

Joseph Meloche

Superintendent, Cherry Hill Public Schools, Cherry Hill, N.J.

Teachers are regularly checking in with students—and the district distributed nearly 2,000 Chromebooks to students who needed them. But replicating the in-school experience with distance learning will be a huge challenge, said Meloche.

Teachers spent their first week reviewing content with students and strengthening their skills, with very little new material, except in Advanced Placement classes.

The district has not yet decided whether it will do end-of-year assessments online. Meloche is still hoping to have students back in the buildings before the school year ends in mid-June.

But he and his team are also beginning to think about what the beginning of 2020-21 ought to look like.

"What should we do differently? What types of questions do we need to ask that are different? And what can we provide for kids during the months of July and August beyond the traditional summer reads and recommendations for families and children to rehearse and prepare for those school-type skills?" Meloche said.

When the district reopens depends on many factors, such as whether students progressed as far as the district expected them to while learning online and feedback from local stakeholders, including students.

"I think listening to those student voices

about what their current experience is, is going to be incredibly vital," he said. "It's vital right now."

While a focus on student learning is paramount, Meloche is also concerned about students' emotional well-being.

"Their social and emotional wellness is our first priority," Meloche said. "Safety and security are at the top of any list and then their social and emotional wellness. ... Those things have to be met and connected with before we can venture into the pool of academics and starting discussions about content and development of skills and that kind of stuff, which we do a pretty decent job with."

Raquel Reedy

Superintendent, Albuquerque Public Schools, Albuquerque, N.M.

Reedy said district leaders, despite the unprecedented disruption to the last weeks and months of this school year, should take a longer view of students' educational careers. Most students will miss what may amount to one-quarter of in-school instruction this academic year. That's out of the more than 13 years of schooling they get from kindergarten through the end of high school, she said.

Albuquerque is running a virtual learning program and purchased 18,000 Chromebooks to deliver to students who did not have devices at home. About 8,000 have been distributed so far. The district has a partnership with the local PBS station to provide four hours of programming for students daily, including a bilingual hour in Spanish and English. And it's working with the city to expand the number of hot spots available to students who don't have access to the internet.

She anticipates that teachers will need to start planning for the new school year earlier to develop programs to help students catch up. They'll likely have to adjust where they normally pick up in the curriculum.

"We need to say, 'OK, you've always been able to start X unit in your language arts class or in your chemistry class...You may need to spend some time reviewing with the students the different concepts and the foundational information they need to have before you can start unit X,'" Reedy said. "Reviewing is never a bad thing. But again, bringing kids up to snuff as far as what's required, what skills they need, what knowledge they need to have before you can enter a unit—which is good teaching practices

From “Mirrors” to “Doors”: Why Students Deserve Diverse Content Worth Reading

Black Lives Matter protests this year sparked a wave of reflection and change across our nation’s institutions, from criminal justice to sports. In education, the social justice movement revealed the need to intensify efforts to provide students with rich multicultural diversity in books and reading programs. It’s imperative to integrate a range of cultures, characters, and experiences within instruction materials to ensure all students are represented.

The scholar Rudine Sims Bishop, widely considered the “mother of multicultural literature,” published an influential essay in 1990 in which she advocated for children’s texts that are “mirrors,” “windows”, and “sliding glass doors.”¹ When reading “mirrors,” students see themselves and their lives reflected in the texts they read. “Windows,” on the other hand, enable readers to gain an understanding and appreciation of experiences different from their own. “Sliding glass doors” allow children to enter those worlds they read about.

But why do children (and adults) need diverse books? “It’s not just children who have been underrepresented and marginalized who need these books,” said Bishop. “It’s also the children who always find their mirrors in the books and therefore get an exaggerated sense of their own self-worth and a false sense of what the world is like.”²

According to the Cooperative Children’s Book Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, half of all children’s books published in 2018

depicted white characters.³ But the real kicker? More books were published that featured *animal characters* than featured any people of color.

Randi Bender is among the many content leaders determined to change this. “Students deserve texts worth reading,” says Bender, Chief Content Officer at Reading Plus, where she leads a team of editors who write and comb through thousands of texts to find the perfect fit for the online reading program. “We look for content that respects and reflects the experiences and cultures of all children, especially

those who have been historically underrepresented.”

At the beginning of 2020, Bender and her team began a project to double the number of texts in the program by the end of the year, adding more content at all reading levels with a particular focus on diversity of content for students of color. Bender believes the impact will be significant. “Our high-quality texts help students build their knowledge about themselves, their classmates, and the world around them—and discover the value and power of reading.” ■



¹Rudine Sims Bishop, “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors,” *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 1990.

²Reading Rockets. “Mirrors, windows and sliding doors.” *YouTube*, 30 Jan. 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAu58SNSyc>.

³Huyck, David and Sarah Park Dahlen. (2019 June 19). Diversity in Children’s Books 2018. *sarahpark.com* blog. Created in consultation with Edith Campbell, Molly Beth Griffin, K. T. Horning, Debbie Reese, Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, and Madeline Tyner, with statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children’s Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison: <http://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp>. Retrieved from <https://readingspark.wordpress.com/2019/06/19/picture-this-diversity-in-childrens-books-2018-infographic/>

anyway—we'll want to reinforce that.”

The district has already extended online instruction through June, with additional extensions possible, for seniors to get the credits they need to graduate.

Still, Reedy and other superintendents think that with teachers and students forced to adapt to online learning almost overnight, the in-class experience

will be very different when they return.

While schools have always talked about flipped classrooms and other ways to incorporate technology into the classroom, actual practice has largely remained the province of a few dedicated teachers. Now, with the coronavirus closures, everyone had to make the leap.

“I think the comfort level that teach-

ers are going to have as a result of being pushed into this is going to reap some real benefits as far as instruction and the use of different modalities,” Reedy said. “It will [look different] because students and teachers have put themselves in a different [level] so to speak, and stretched themselves in ways that they have never truly been asked to do.” ■



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OPINION

Published on June 19, 2020, in Education Week

English-Language Learners Need More Support During Remote Learning

Here are four ways to help offset learning loss

By Leslie M. Babinski, Steven J. Amendum, Steven E. Knotek, and Marta Sánchez

Young children who are learning English require special consideration during virtual instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Approximately 1 in 6 children in kindergarten and 1st grade in the United States are learning English as a second (or third)

language. As teachers grapple with the monumental task of providing remote instruction to English-language learners, it's important that state and district leaders provide extensive support and clear guidelines for engaging their ELLs.

Virtual learning for elementary school students, particularly those in the early grades, has been provided in a wide range of formats, including live online sessions with teachers, videos, internet links, and printed packets. The responsibility of connecting young children to

these resources often falls to parents. In many ELL communities, internet access may be limited to a cellphone, making it difficult for parents and children to navigate learning activities, especially if multiple children are in the home.

This spring, 48 states suspended school for the remainder of the school year, resulting in millions of students who will miss over 20 weeks of in-person learning. Given what we know about learning loss during the traditional summer months, it is critical to support families and teachers to ensure that children are able to engage in learning activities during this unprecedented time.

Under federal Title VI requirements, school districts are required to ensure that English-language learners can meaningfully participate in instruction. Although the types of in-person instructional services vary both across and within states, ELLs typically spend most of their school day in the general classroom with English-only peers and receive specialized instruction from English-as-a-second-language (ESL) teachers for a specified number of hours a week. In the current climate, it is critical that ELLs continue to make academic progress and receive social-emotional support from their teachers along with their English-only peers.

As state and district leaders consider outreach through email, phone calls, and physical copies of instructional resources for providing equitable access to possible remote instruction when schools reopen, we offer the following evidence-informed suggestions for consideration.

1. Support students' emotional and mental health by maintaining relationships with schools and teachers. During the abrupt end to in-person schooling because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to virtual instruction, it was important for school leaders to pay special attention to their districts' outreach efforts to families who do not speak English as their

first language. Many families with English-language learners may also face significant challenges during this time from loss of work, separation from extended families, and concerns about their health. Information to help parents support their children allows for continuity of the central place of the school in the lives of many families. Additional resources from schools and districts for interpretation and translation with clear two-way communication may be necessary to support both teachers and families during remote instruction for ELLs.

2. Encourage and support families to use their best language.

As parents have moved into a home schooling role, it is important to provide a clear message to families that by using their home language, they can continue to support their children's progress in literacy. In fact, recent research shows that young ELLs with strong early-literacy skills in their native Spanish at kindergarten entry made greater growth in English reading from kindergarten through 4th grade. In this study, the effect of early Spanish reading ability was more influential than students' ability to understand and speak English. Given the results of this study, the message for virtual learning is clear: Support and encourage families to use their best language. Skills learned from reading in native languages support learning in that language and can also transfer to learning to read in English.

3. Build on the considerable strengths of bilingual families.

Families of English-language learners have considerable strengths that can be leveraged by schools and teachers to help them through this difficult time. By building on families' cultural wealth when planning virtual learning activities, ESL and classroom teachers can collaborate to tap into their students' cultural and family backgrounds through instructional activities that originate from a strengths-based viewpoint and can engage and sustain connections with families. Such a model can be used to recognize and build on family strengths and cultural knowledge. For example, teachers can offer learning activities that include the entire family, such as taking turns in storytelling or having older siblings read to younger ones. In the Latino community, for instance, parents may engage their children by using "cuentos" (sto-

ries) or giving "consejos" (advice in the form of a proverb).

4. Provide opportunities for enhanced teacher collaboration.

Imagine kindergarten and 1st grade students and their parents trying to navigate virtual instruction from multiple teachers with different content, web portals, and instructional strategies. From our research in elementary schools, there are clear benefits for students when ESL and classroom teachers collaborate to provide aligned instruction with coordinated scaffolding for their ELLs. For example, after briefly planning together, ESL teachers can provide direct instruction to preteach specific academic vocabulary to support ELLs' comprehension during literacy lessons provided by their classroom teachers. Or ESL and classroom teachers can align instruction by using the same instructional strategies to teach phonics or reading-comprehension strategies across settings. Meaningful access to remote instruction for ELLs requires intentional collaboration between classroom and ESL teachers. As this type of collaboration is all the more difficult as the teachers themselves work remotely, it will require support for teachers from education agencies at the school, district, state, and national levels.

Focusing on supporting English-language learners and their families during virtual instruction will help teachers provide access to the curriculum and keep lines of communication open. While this is critical as families, teachers, schools, and communities adjust to life during various phases of stay-at-home orders in many states, these principles can also support families in the transition back to in-person schooling. ■

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OPINION

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in Education Week*

How to Contend with Pandemic Learning Loss

Teachers will need to work together to uncover missed learning

By Heather C. Hill & Susanna Loeb

Just about everybody agrees that the school closures resulting from COVID-19 will lead to some student "learning loss" and that the loss will affect students differently depending on their social advantages, the effectiveness of their schools, and their degree of trauma.

Researchers have tried to predict the magnitude of pandemic-related learning loss by making comparisons with what happens when students are out of school in the summer. Recent work by researchers at NWEA, a nonprofit provider of student assessments, estimated that students would end this school year with only about 40 percent to 60 percent of the learning gains they'd see in a typical year.

Data from the federally funded Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, however, suggest a much smaller loss. And estimates that use summer comparisons aren't taking into account the learning that schools have worked hard to provide virtually this spring.

Yet even if the loss is on the larger side—say, the equivalent of three months—this change is small compared with typical existing learning differences among students as they enter a new grade. Most schools are already set up to contend with such variability, and that can work in students' favor as schools return to something closer to normal.

Teachers have always faced students who return in the fall with unfinished learning. Research from teachers' time-

use logs show that many spend the first months of mathematics instruction, for instance, reviewing prior-year content. This fall, that review period would give students a chance to achieve mastery of material missed in the spring.

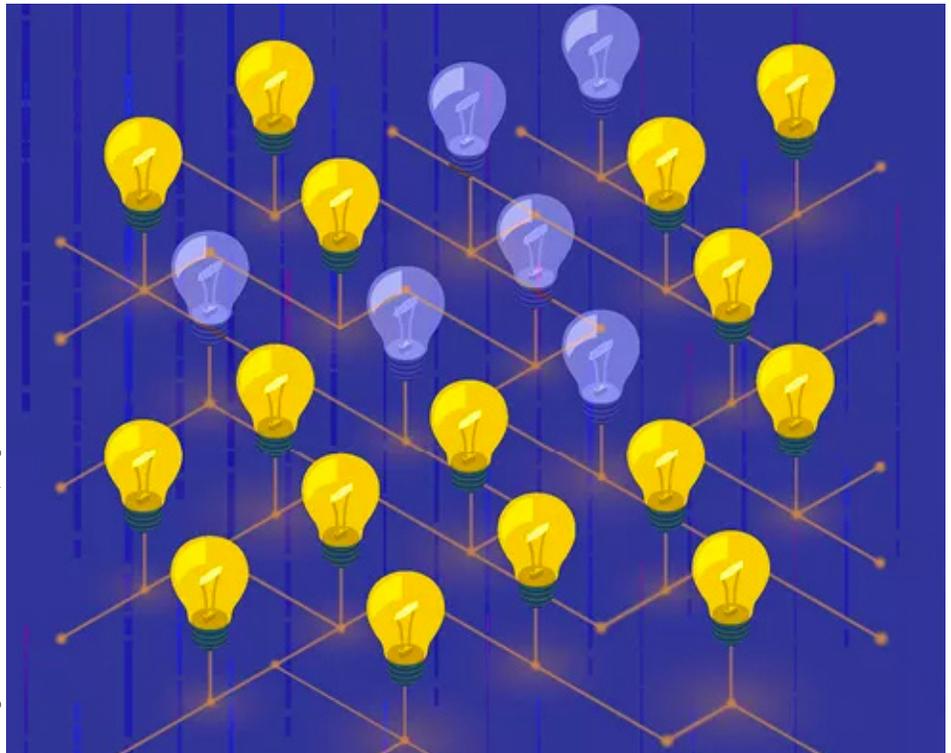
Teachers also already report spending more instructional time with students who are struggling academically, another compensatory mechanism. And key topics—the American Revolution, identifying themes in a text, fractions—recur repeatedly in the curriculum. Although reformers often object to the repetitiveness of the U.S. curriculum, in this case, it will aid students who have missed material this spring.

The fact that schools are used to responding to students with unfinished learning doesn't mean we have nothing to worry about. Children who suffered trauma from other natural disasters typically lost ground academically and experienced more behavioral problems in the short term as compared with children who did not. And we know that some communities—mostly low-income communities or those of color—are being hit harder than others by COVID-19 and its economic consequences. Schools must try to marshal resources to address those additional needs.

To learn more about how missed learning may play out in the fall, we contacted several experts in English/language arts and mathematics, including Joanne Carlisle at the University of Michigan, Bill McCallum of Illustrative Mathematics, Jon Star and Catherine Snow at Harvard University, and Denise Walston of the Council for the Great City Schools. We asked each to report their level of alarm about learning loss and what strategies they would suggest schools look to in the summer and the fall.

All experts reported feeling more concern than alarm with regard to general pandemic learning loss. In ELA, said Carlisle and Snow, students are introduced to most content by March, though they observed that with fewer opportunities to practice new skills after the closures, levels of mastery might be lower. The ELA experts were most concerned about beginning readers, who tend to need more continual reinforcement of skills.

Math experts made similar observations—with the caveat that some math content that is primarily taught in the spring, like geometry, may be missed. All experts noted the challenge of supporting the children whose learning has been strongly affected by school closures and the effects of the pandemic.



Design: Vanessa Solis/Education Week. Images: iStock

As of this writing, there is little sense of what school will look like in the fall. However, both experts and research suggest several strategies that districts can profitably work on this summer and as school begins. These include:

- **Providing opportunities for teachers to learn about material never taught to or practiced by their incoming students and to adjust new school year lessons appropriately.** Teachers will need opportunities to communicate across grade-level teams about very specific missing content.
- **Making sure teachers have information about what students know and can do at the beginning of the new school year.** Formal assessments are unlikely to provide this information in an efficient manner, both because of the time lag in reporting results and because those results are often not granular. Instead, the experts recommend quick, informal assessments done by classroom teachers.
- **Moving students immediately into grade-level-appropriate content in the new school year, rather than repeating material from the end of the prior grade.** Where new lessons draw on concepts affected by the shutdown, schools can add extra review but in a “just in time” fashion. Curriculum materials may also be helpful in this effort, at least in math, because many already identify key skills and knowledge at the beginning of each lesson.
- **Finding time and resources for additional high-impact supports for students most in need, such as tutoring or extra time working with a teacher or paraprofessional.** Most experts cautioned, however, against a heavily remediation-focused approach to addressing unfinished student learning, for instance, by pulling students out of the classroom for compensatory instruction, because it interferes with learning new material.
- **Tracking down students who have disengaged from instruction this spring.** Students are more likely to disengage from instruction when it occurs in digital settings, and there is a worry that more students than in past years will drop out entirely. To the extent possible, identify students at risk (perhaps using administrative data from online learning platforms) and have teachers or other adults in the school reach out.
- **Identifying opportunities to recover instructional time.** Studies of U.S. classrooms show missed or wasted instructional time due to

either interruptions (e.g., field trips, announcements) or to teacher and student absences. Schools can help minimize the impact of student absences by keeping kids connected while at home and of teacher absences through the use of “understudies”—staff who can cover classes and ensure instruction continues when teachers fall ill. Leaders should plan for minimizing such disruptions in the fall to the extent

that returns to school buildings could make them possible.

Finally, schools will need to take steps to address students’ emotional needs and to strengthen the bonds between teachers and students, especially in districts that may see intermittent school closures. In our next essay, we’ll take up effective responses to trauma in school settings. ■

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