



—Getty

# Intervention

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Students are in desperate need of intervention. This Spotlight will help you dig into intervention from multiple angles; review information on tutors and the issues at hand with locating them; gain insights on how to approach SEL for the hard-to-reach age range, teenagers; begin understanding reading research and the changes with how to apply it; evaluate if your schools are implementing 504 plans according to newest guidelines and get ideas for how to design high-impact tutoring programs.

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Published October 12, 2021

# Schools Are in Desperate Need of Tutors. But Qualified Ones Are Hard to Find

By Elizabeth Heubeck

**T**he pandemic took an unprecedented toll on K-12 learning. From the onset of COVID-19 through the end of the 2020-21 academic year, students experienced up to nine months' worth of unfinished learning, with historically disadvantaged students hit hardest.

Tutoring is considered one of the most effective strategies to fill these learning gaps, especially when implemented using evidence-based practices. But many school districts are not prepared to ramp up their tutoring resources for students. And among those that are, there's a lot of variation in the approach.

"Some districts are still focused on students' physical safety," said Allison Socol, assistant director of P12 Policy at national nonprofit Education Trust. "How these things get implemented really matters. Tutoring in and of itself isn't some magical solution. It has to be done well."

Districts that do decide to ramp up tutoring programs can lean on federal funds made available by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP). The stimulus bill mandates that a minimum of 5 percent of the total amount received by K-12 districts be used to implement "evidence-based interventions to address unfinished learning."

## Increasing number of districts eye 'targeted intensive tutoring'

Targeted intensive tutoring (TIT) is one such intervention hailed by experts as highly effective. In the ideal version of this method, the same tutor works with one or two students over an extended period of time on building specific academic skills aligned with the school's curriculum and targeted to each student's academic needs.

"Just under half of superintendents say they're planning to implement targeted intensive tutoring with their recovery funds," said Socol, referring to results of a September 2021 nationwide survey conducted by AASA, the School Superintendents Association.

Making it work won't be easy. Research shows that this tutoring method is most effective



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Just under half of superintendents say they're planning to implement targeted intensive tutoring with their recovery funds.”

**ALLISON SOCOL**

Assistant director, P12 Policy, national nonprofit Education Trust

when the tutors are certified teachers who work with the same student in a one-on-one setting every day during the school day for an entire school year on curriculum-aligned skill building for which they receive training before and during their tenure. But the reality of meeting all those expectations is likely very difficult for most districts.

Consider the Dallas Independent School District. A new Texas law now requires supplemental instruction (tutoring) for any student in grades 3 through 12 who fails to pass the state's standardized test, STAAR, or STAAR high school end-of-course assessments. Because of that new law, the district's tutoring requirements have skyrocketed.

Before the pandemic, four local organizations served the tutoring needs of an estimated 1,000 students in the Texas district, said Derek Little, deputy chief of teaching and learning for the school system. "Now we're facing numbers in the 50,000 to 60,000 range," he said. "That's five times more than what we were planning even six months ago."

## Getting the word out about tutoring positions

To oversee the dramatic and sudden increase in demand for tutors, the district launched an Office of Tutoring Services, which

has six staff members. In 2021, Dallas ISD held a virtual job fair resulting in the hiring of an estimated 50 tutors, about one-third of the total number it hopes to hire this year.

The district is getting the word out about the part-time tutoring positions in various ways. In addition to hosting career fairs, it's advertising via the district website's career center, districtwide social media, and a local workforce job board. It's also relying on word of mouth and partnerships with area universities and high schools to find candidates. But Little says the majority of tutors will be hired by the district's contracted partners, thereby giving the district less control over who is hired and how they are trained.

Nevertheless, Susan Cordova, deputy superintendent of leading and learning for Dallas ISD, said the district is trying to adhere as tightly as possible to research around high dosage tutoring (another term for TIT). Tutors will be required to commit to the same time slot every week for at least a semester in an effort to build better student-tutor relationships, which Cordova acknowledged is important for success.

But there's one factor associated with TIT "best practices" that districts are likely to find particularly challenging: hiring certified teachers as tutors. Despite data showing that students have the best outcomes when tutored by certified teachers, many districts this



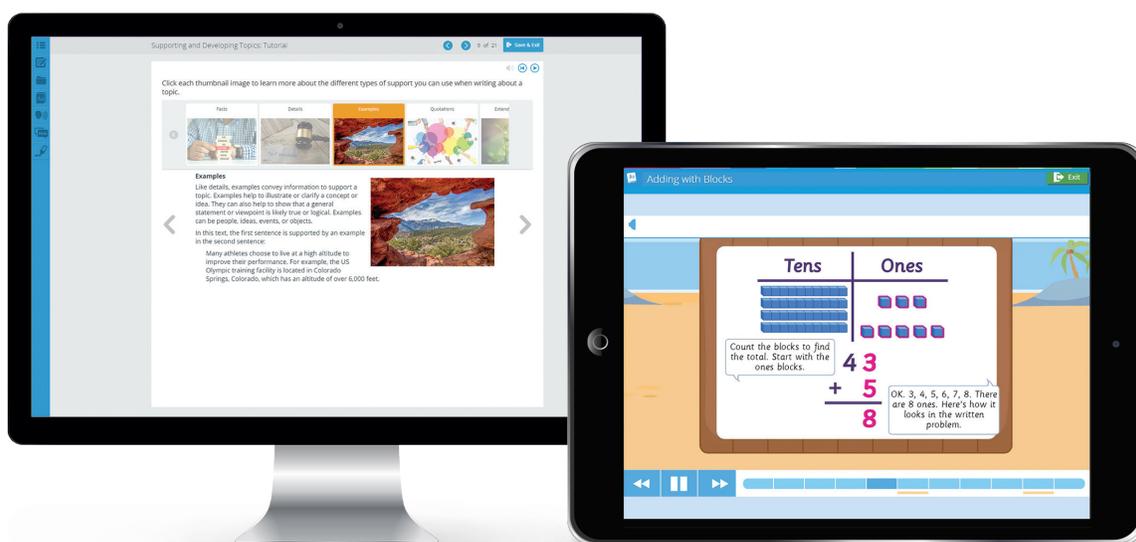
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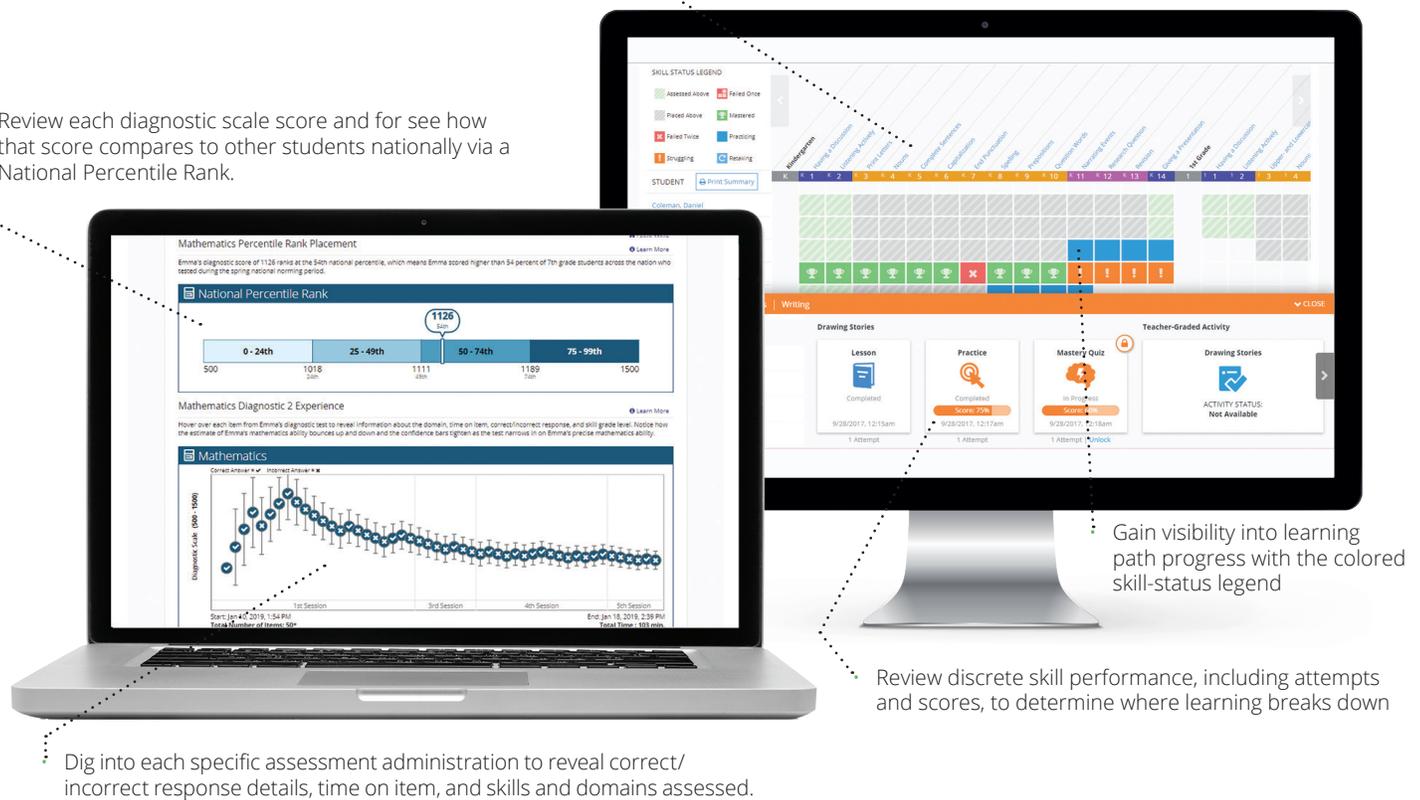
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[Exact Path is] almost like having a co-teacher with you that can remediate and accelerate while you make sure you're paying attention to the core content.



— Dr. Cyndee Blount  
Principal at Acquinton Elementary School  
King William County Public Schools, Virginia

# Built to Strengthen Intervention



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### Teacher Challenges

Challenge Badges can be awarded based on mastery or time-on-task, with specific goals selected by the teacher.

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### High-Quality Curriculum

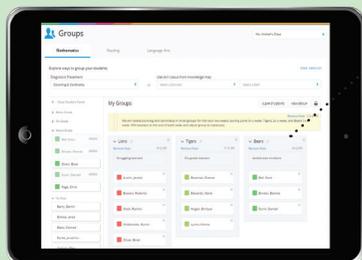
Students receive an individualized learning path with high-quality lessons delivered in bite-sized chunks

### Adaptive Learning Paths

Progress Checks assess skill mastery and adapt a student's learning path, providing struggling students with building blocks for remediation.

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Quickly create data-driven small groups to help plan for focused remediation.

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Mastery trophies are awarded as students demonstrate success on each skill in a Progress Check.



# Develop an action plan to target intervention needs

Collecting data that you can trust for critical intervention decisions can be overwhelming. Reports are explicitly designed to help you take action and make informed instructional decisions every step of your students' academic journeys.

## Access districtwide growth and performance reports

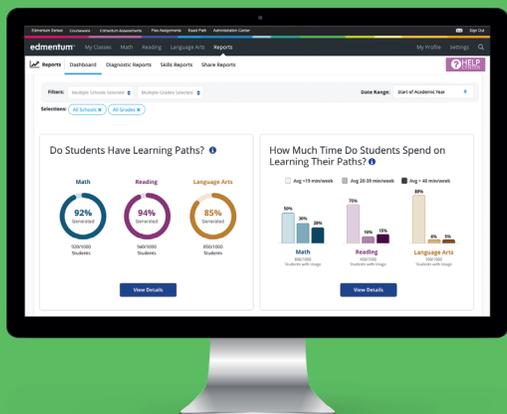
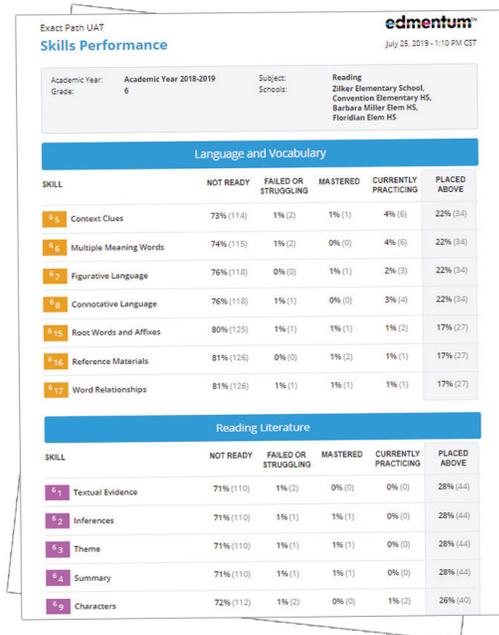


### National Percentile Rank Trends:

Inform key staffing and resource decisions by evaluating growth trends based on diagnostic assessment scores

### Skills Performance:

Guide focused intervention investment by evaluating how well students are performing on grade-level skills throughout the school year.



## Review interactive data views

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school year will consider hiring non-certified teachers because the supply of certified tutors is way behind the demand.

Stamford Public Schools is among several districts in Connecticut posting ads for tutors on [EdWeek Top School Jobs](#). Of the site's 318 total advertised tutor positions, Connecticut districts posted 52 of them. And although Stamford's posting says it prefers college graduates, who will earn \$30 an hour up to 20 hours per week, the district is open to hiring college graduates without a teaching certificate at a salary of \$20 an hour.

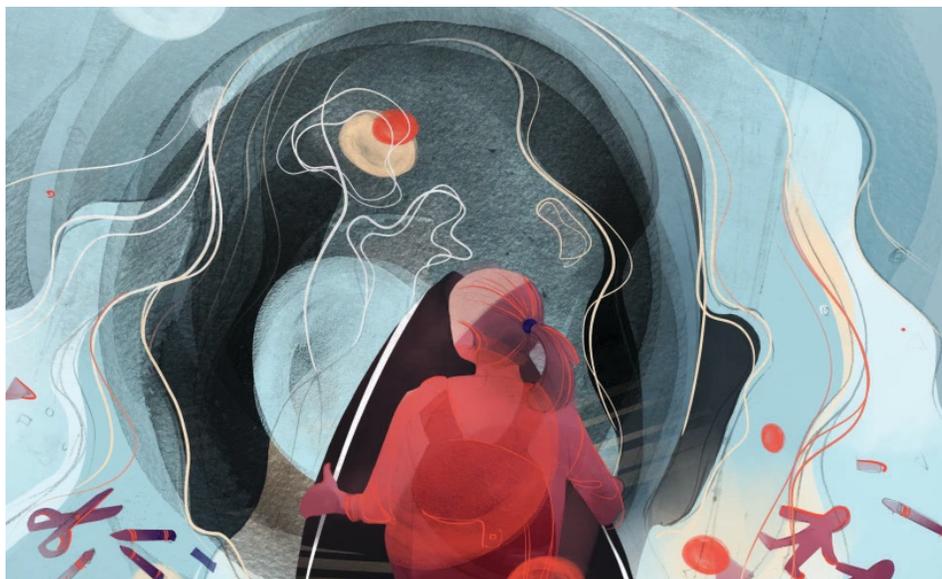
### 'Sometimes they just need that cheerleader'

Students in some districts will be working with tutors whose professional qualifications are far lower.

Los Angeles Unified School District, for instance, has partnered with the nonprofit Step Up Tutoring, which connects volunteer tutors as young as 16 to work one-on-one online with children from under-resourced communities, free of charge. To date, Step Up has paired over 800 students from the district with more than 2,500 tutors.

"The students' need is exponential," said Marcela Madden, spokesperson for Step Up, whose main focus on tutoring students is homework help. The nonprofit's tutors may not be certified, or meeting with students in-person, or reinforcing curriculum-aligned skills—all factors that research shows to result in the best outcomes. But, Madden emphasizes, they nonetheless are filling a void.

"These kids have been more adversely affected by COVID," she said. "Their parents continued to work, or were on the front lines. Sometimes they just need that cheerleader." ■



—Mary Haasdyk for Education Week

Published on October 12, 2021

## Why High School SEL Programs Feel 'Lame'—and How to Fix Them

By Stephen Sawchuk

**H**igh school-age students have a sixth sense for when things feel dopey, dumb, sus, cheesy, corny, basic, cringe, or "cheugy." (That last term is a courrant according to The New York Times, which may mean it's already out of date.)

Nowhere are the pitfalls greater than in well-intentioned social-emotional learning programs for secondary students. To put it bluntly, if you're doing mood meters, "scared straight" lectures, or feeling sticks with high

school students, there's probably a good chance that the students are tuning them out.

The big problem, researchers and practitioners say, is that too much of what constitutes SEL learning feels patronizing to teenagers and fails to address their core psychological needs and motivations: developing an identity and sense of agency, being recognized and respected by peers, finding ways to excel, and committing to specific goals and activities.

Programs that explicitly teach SEL skills generally have a good track record for younger children. But for older students, the paradigm looks different. It's less explicit and requires

creating leadership opportunities—formal and informal—where students will have to exercise their relationship and self-regulation muscles.

And it means adults have to do things differently, too, to create a school climate that supports rather than contravenes those efforts.

"When we think about working with younger students in general, often being a great teacher feels very theatrical. And as students get older, it's actually the opposite," said Jeffrey Imwold, the managing director of student support services for KIPP NYC, a chain of charter schools. "Students will know when you're being inauthentic. What matters is how you show up for them and deliver the material—and it can be really hard to show up authentically."

### What do we know from research about high school SEL?

There are fewer resources for teachers and school leaders who want to devise strong SEL programs at the high school level, according to several recent reports from the RAND Corporation, a research and analysis firm.

Using a nationally representative sample of teachers, it found that more than half of secondary teachers said they didn't often make connections to SEL through academic work, and just 19 percent used written lesson plans to promote SEL.

There is also less research on SEL at the upper secondary level. In a second report, RAND found just eight programs for high school-age students that had at least some positive research—and not a single one had been evaluated using a random-assignment design, the most rigorous way to assess effectiveness.

Researchers who study social-emotional learning say the focus on doing "programs" is perhaps part of the problem. Too many are retrofits of initiatives aimed at younger children

that feel phony to older students, said David Yeager, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Texas at Austin.

Yeager analyzed six dozen studies on anti-bullying programs and found that most of them were beneficial through about 7th grade, but had no overall benefits in high school. Like failed anti-smoking or anti-gang initiatives, too many SEL programs just don't align with what older students need, he concluded.

"Teenagers are really sensitive to social status. Anti-bullying programs don't deal with the teenage need to have status. They just tell you, don't do it," he noted. "That argument doesn't work for 14- or 15-year-olds. Anti-bullying efforts need to give kids alternative routes to status, rather than telling them to not care about status."

Thus, successful SEL approaches are often implicit, getting adolescents to exercise their SEL muscles without necessarily knowing that that's the intent—a little bit like sneaking kale into a fruit smoothie.

Here, Education Week outlines five ideas for thinking about SEL programs in high schools—both what to do and what to avoid. They aren't a recipe and should be tailored to districts' local context and instructional goals. But they could help district and school leaders avoid SEL efforts that feel lame. (Or cheugy.)

### 1. Integrate high school SEL programs into academic learning.

Research indicates that it's difficult to teach noncognitive skills, including core SEL concepts such as self-management and responsible decision-making outside of content. That's partly because these skills look different depending on the task at hand. (Compare, for example, persistence in writing an essay to persistence at solving a multi-step mathematics problem.)

And when students engage in rich and robust classroom discourse—learning how to disagree constructively and how to persuade others—those are as much SEL opportunities as they are academic ones, noted Eugene Pinkard, the director of practice and leadership at the Aspen Institute's education and society program.

There are some major challenges with this type of high-quality integration. For one, noted Cami Anderson, the founder and CEO of ThirdWay Solutions, a consulting firm, even rich, well-regarded academic curricula often lack the scaffolds and supports that help teachers and students engage with the social-emotional implications of each lesson. (Anderson, a former Newark, N.J., superintendent and administrator in the New York

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In most SEL, we present it as something you should do with students to prepare them to be successful in academics. But the idea of Cornerstones is that when you acquire academics, it develops you as a person in a way nothing else does.”

#### KAREN COLE

The district's deputy chief of academic and creative empowerment

City district, worked on SEL and curriculum in both positions.)

"It needs to be rigorous and content-rich, but also provide opportunities for meaning-making around SEL skills," she said. Take, for example, a lesson that focuses on Ruby Bridges, who helped desegregate New Orleans schools in 1960. Great content will have students reading Bridges' reflections, as well as those of students and parents who opposed integration, and situate the historical moment within the larger civil rights struggle.

But teachers can also use the lesson to prompt dialogue about what kinds of social and emotional strengths Bridges drew on.

"As a facilitator, there's a lot to unpack there around moral decisionmaking. When do you decide to steer into conflict? What are the personal consequences of that decision? Where does that land you in terms of emotion? How do you take care of yourself personally? Where is the line around empathy?" Anderson suggested. "To me, that is the work. ... But it would require some really high-quality, adult-facing training" for teachers.

### 2. Aim for coherence across the system.

Many school systems now use regular climate surveys and check-ins to get a picture of overall student health. But coherence goes beyond that, the researchers and practitioners said, and it is harder to achieve in high schools if one teacher, for example, gives multiple

revision opportunities for work and another doesn't, or if departments use divergent grading approaches.

"Part of the problem with high school SEL is that it's so compartmentalized. It's not obvious how to use and transfer those insights," said Yeager. "If your health teacher says 'Here's how to succeed,' your health teacher isn't the one handing out your math grades."

To create common, coherent experiences for students, some districts are investing in specially designed academic lessons that also purposefully build SEL skills. Beginning in 2015-16, the District of Columbia Public Schools began to create an academically rich set of lessons, called Cornerstones, nested within its English/language arts and social studies curricula.

Each cornerstone is anchored in complex text, includes a field trip or partnership with community groups to make the work feel authentic, and generally ends with a performance or set of outcomes in which students share their work with each other and with the community. In 10th grade, for example, D.C. students experience "Life I Choose," a cornerstone lesson focused on narrative poetry and what it means to be successful in life.

Situated within a larger ELA unit about narrative, "Life I Choose" includes learning about poetry slams; as it progresses, also students will write their own poems and revise them using a framework. They're helped by a teaching artist who partners with the district and the cornerstone culminates in an opportunity for students to present their own slam poetry in a legit performance space.

Such lessons flip the paradigm of how SEL works, said Karen Cole, the district's deputy chief of academic and creative empowerment.

"In most SEL, we present it as something you should do with students to prepare them to be successful in academics," she said. "But the idea of Cornerstones is that when you acquire academics, it develops you as a person in a way nothing else does."

### 3. Focus on how adults can foster a good school climate.

It's tempting to think that SEL is something that teachers "do" to students. But much actually hinges on getting educators to make changes to the overarching school climate. Schools should be nurturing places where systems and structures support SEL work, teachers are trained on learning development, and thoughtful SEL experiences are devised for students, Pinkard said.

"Where I've landed is to give kids beneficial messages and interventions that aren't too long, and therefore not insulting about

telling kids what to think or how to think,” added Yeager. “Work on the adults in the school to change the climate to be more student-centric.”

Some aspects of creating school climate can be harder to tackle than others. Schools’ dress codes and conduct manuals, for instance, can convey a quiet authoritarianism that undercuts some of the values schools purport to care about, like fostering citizenship and independence.

Similarly, said Yeager, it’s all well and good to say that you support students to have a growth mindset to, for example, overcome shyness or loneliness.

“But if you’re in the kind of school where there are few opportunities for you to feel like a worthwhile person—there’s no leadership opportunities, no clubs, if there are no affordances for real contributions to community or peer group—it’s hard for you to believe that things can improve for the better,” he noted.

The good part, the SEL leaders say, is that teachers will get on board with these efforts if school leaders convince them it will support the outcomes they care about.

“When you have an SEL classroom, students want to be there and it’s less work for you; and more importantly, it creates the kind of student behavior you want, and turns the classroom into the kind of classroom you want it to be,” Imwold said.

One way to show high schoolers you’re serious about creating a positive climate? You don’t necessarily have to create your SEL initiative from scratch, Anderson said, but you do need to let the end users—students—weigh in on what they want and need from the efforts.

#### 4. Don’t neglect extracurriculars and other out-of-classroom opportunities to let students lead.

From devising cheerleading routines, building the sets for the school musical, athletic scrimmages, and the studio arts, there are tons of opportunities to build in SEL learning competencies beyond the classroom.

“We find [students] develop so many of these competencies through the extracurriculars and they frequently talk about their experiences in extracurricular opportunities,” said Imwold of KIPP NYC. “That’s where I developed social awareness or self awareness; I realized I was not a football player, and I found my people through theater, and that became the defining experience of my time in high school.”

Similarly, said Pinkard of Aspen, “don’t make the mistake of assuming all of this

“  
When you have an SEL classroom, students want to be there and it’s less work for you; and more importantly, it creates the kind of student behavior you want, and turns the classroom into the kind of classroom you want it to be.”

#### JEFFREY IMWOLD

the managing director of student support services, KIPP NYC

learning is in the classroom. The SEL experiences that we’re describing require students to be in places to engage each other outside the classroom, and with adults and community members outside the classroom.

“If you want your students to give a speech about something that’s important in their community, you can’t expect that to just come out of their head or simply be composed in the classroom,” he said

The District of Columbia’s “Our City” cornerstone looks at the city’s neighborhoods and how their residents can advocate for better services through their advisory neighborhood councils, Washington’s most local level of government. It concludes with students interacting with the commissioners at a municipal building.

And the Oakland, Calif., district uses capstone projects that require students to interview community members and researchers or conduct surveys to explore a social problem.

#### 5. Consider peer mentoring programs.

Saul Vargas, a 2020 graduate of KIPP NYC high school, has a unique insight on what works for high school-age students: As a peer leader, he and a partner regularly met with underclassmen in groups of about 12 students about how to make the big transition to high school.

“We talked a lot about organization, about

making friends and reaching out to teachers—just learning how to manage yourself and be independent, because you’re in transition from a place in middle school where your hand is being held,” he said in an interview. “In high school, you either do the work or you don’t.”

Peer mentoring of this sort is an approach that checks off a few SEL boxes at once: It gives one group of students an opportunity to lead, while helping younger students exercise their SEL skills in an authentic way.

The charter school’s program was sometimes more prescriptive than Vargas would have liked—he wasn’t a big fan of icebreakers and preferred sharing his own challenges and solutions with students. But he found the experience ultimately powerful—especially when he found success mentoring students who were struggling.

Vargas’ proudest moment was speaking with a student who was struggling with motivation and filing assignments. Vargas helped her see the work as an investment in herself, rather than something to please adults.

“One of the problems with her specifically was that she felt that teachers sort of undervalued her and didn’t think she was good enough to perform and talking to her about that and convincing her that you don’t need external validation to do well,” said Vargas, now entering his sophomore year at Princeton University. “In the next two to three quarters, her grades improved. She started getting 80s and 90s ... and it felt like a successful moment.”

Samara Fraser-Wellington, now a junior at the school, also sat on its restorative-justice team, where she helped resolve interpersonal issues among students.

“Sometimes you have to sit and listen to things you don’t necessarily agree with yourself but you have to still figure out how to help them,” she said. “So I think that was the hardest part when I first started. I think the most rewarding part is knowing what they get out of it, knowing I was able to help them, and hearing people say thank you. That makes me smile.”

The programs do take some work to set up. Students will need some training and guidelines: KIPP used an extra class period and a summer retreat to help its peer leaders learn how to model a lesson and host a dialogue. ■

#### Additional Resource

Adolescence is hard enough. They need to feel useful. This special report shows how schools can help. [Read Making Social-Emotional Learning Work for Teens.](#)



—Getty

Published on August 27, 2021

## How Can Schools Keep Quarantined Students Learning?

By Sarah Schwartz

Just weeks into the start of the academic year, schools in some areas have seen thousands of students placed into isolation or quarantine after contracting COVID-19 or having been exposed to someone with the coronavirus, as the Delta variant has caused case counts to spike in many parts of the country.

As a result, a significant number of children are once again learning from home—even as some states and districts have limited access to remote instruction in their attempts to encourage students to return to five-day-a-week in-person instruction. Keeping students engaged and on-track during quarantines has quickly become a thorny challenge.

In many school systems last year, students who had to quarantine shifted temporarily to their district's 2020-21 remote learning option, sometimes videoconferencing into in-person classrooms. That's not always an option this year, as some districts have pivoted away from this kind of concurrent teaching—a model that many teachers found overwhelming.

Other districts don't have a remote option any longer. In Texas, for example, the state legislature hasn't funded virtual learning,

meaning districts that want to offer it have to find the money elsewhere.

What that leaves, in many places, is a patchwork of solutions for quarantined students that varies school by school and even classroom by classroom. Some teachers say that they've shifted to a fully asynchronous model for students at home, posting assignments online or sending paper packets.

This kind of instruction is “really going back to the old days” of the pandemic, said Dan Domenech, the executive director of AASA, the School Superintendents Association.

And teachers say it's taxing, for them and their students. “We kind of went into this year thinking it would be OK. But it's twice as bad as it was last year, if not worse,” said Kathryn Vaughn, an elementary art teacher in a rural district in Tennessee.

Almost as soon as students came back this year, in early August 2021, children at her school started getting sick or exposed to others who were sick, rotating in and out of the classroom. (Vaughn's district started the school year without a mask mandate, and then put one in place. Under an executive order from Gov. Bill Lee, though, parents can opt their children out of the mandate.) The uncertainty has made it hard to plan instruction, Vaughn said.

“It's kind of a constant state of disequilibrium,” said Jim Bentley, a 5th grade teacher in Elk Grove, Calif., who said he's had up to a quarter of his class out at any one time this school year, which started mid-2021. He's worried about the continued interrupted learning. “The inconsistency in what students are going to experience is probably going to be much greater,” he said, than if they were full-time remote or full-time in person. (Students are required to wear masks in the district, with exemptions for medical conditions.)

Improving quarantine instruction is an urgent priority, said Bree Dusseault, the practitioner-in-residence at the Center on Reinventing Public Education. Even in districts with low community spread and strong COVID-mitigation measures, it's possible that students might get exposed and spend some time at home.

“Right now, we do not know if we're going to be experiencing these outbreaks for weeks or months or the whole year,” Dusseault said. “We cannot have another year with students getting limited to no access to instruction.”

### Quarantine instruction policies are all over the map

Heading into the 2021-22 school year, eight states banned schools from issuing mask mandates. The move has spurred fierce debate among parents and community members, and has been met with condemnation from public health officials who have said that it could lead to increased spread of the virus. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics both recommend that all adults and children wear masks in schools, regardless of vaccination status.

Some high-profile cases of large student quarantines are in districts where masks are optional, or where parents could opt their children out of mask requirements—like in Hillsborough County, Fla., where more than 10,000 students and staff were in quarantine or isolation just a week into the school year, in a district of about 224,000 students and 24,000 employees total. But even in some schools with universal mask mandates, community spread of the virus has forced students out of the building.

Mae Pagett, a 6th grade science teacher at Drew Charter School in Atlanta, said her school took precautions as the school year began: requiring masks, testing teachers weekly, and installing portable air filters. “They were really thinking about a lot of stuff, but just the number of students that came into the building, and the Delta variant hitting Atlan-

ta right before school opened, it threw everybody a curve ball,” she said.

Which students have to quarantine, and when, differs from district to district. The CDC recommends that unvaccinated students quarantine if they have been within 6 feet of an infected student unmasked for 15 minutes or more, or within 3 feet while masked. Unvaccinated students who have been within 6 feet of an infected adult for 15 minutes or more should quarantine, regardless of masking. Vaccinated students do not need to quarantine. Still, CRPE, which is tracking districts’ COVID responses, found a lot of variation in its review of 100 large, urban school systems.

Most districts, but not all, exempt students who have been vaccinated—though this distinction is irrelevant for students under 12, [who aren’t eligible to receive the vaccine yet](#). And some exempt other student groups, including those who have recently recovered from COVID, students who are masked, or students who receive a negative COVID test result after exposure. Quarantines are generally between 10 and 14 days.

Districts’ plans to keep students learning during those quarantine periods are just as varied.

“First of all, there’s not a lot of information being put out yet about what is happening,” said Dusseault, of CRPE. In an analysis this week of the same 100 districts’ quarantine plans, only 38 share any information on their websites about how students will keep learning if they’re sent home.

Among those that offer specifics, the details are all over the map: Some say they’ll send home packets; others will deliver assignments electronically. Six districts mention that they’ll have someone check in with students, and only four promise synchronous instruction.

### ‘There’s been a lot less direction’

After 18 months of distance learning and a summer to build back-up plans for quarantined students, how did some schools end up back where they started in March 2020: relying on a patchwork of paper packets and asynchronous online activities to provide instruction at home?

In some places, teachers say, new state laws placed constraints on what districts were able to provide. Vaughn, the Tennessee art teacher, said that the governor’s ban on schools pivoting to virtual learning sent her school back to paper packets for quarantined students.

The governor’s rule doesn’t prevent schools from offering remote instruction temporarily, to individual students in quarantine. But because her elementary school doesn’t offer a

regular online option anymore, Vaughn said, there’s no infrastructure or plan to provide assignments virtually.

“Teachers are having to prepare paper packets of work, kind of guesstimating how long students will be out,” Vaughn said.

Other districts are asking teachers to make work available virtually, but not requiring any live instruction. “There’s no real, official back-up [for quarantined students],” said Stephanie, a high school teacher in Atlanta Public Schools who asked that her last name not be used.

Stephanie uploads assignments to Google Classroom, and students who are out are supposed to complete the work by the end of the week. She says that most haven’t so far. It’s hard to know if her students have made much progress in these few weeks, she said.

“

It’s a really icky feeling being in the classroom watching all of this happen like a slow-moving train wreck.”

### KATHRYN VAUGHN

Elementary school art teacher,  
Tennessee

“There’s been a lot less direction,” said Bentley, the California teacher. He’s tried to maintain connection online, recording videos of himself and trying to engage students in reading and writing. He’s been considering setting up a livestream of his class via Zoom, but it’s not a requirement, he said.

Even in schools where teachers are able to provide some synchronous instruction for students in quarantine, having new students in and out of the building every day has been “hectic,” said Pagett, in Atlanta. She teaches in person, with a livestream option for students who are quarantined at home.

“It’s hard to keep track of who is out, why they’re out. So most of us just turn on our Zoom everyday and we’re not sure who’s going to be at school,” she said.

She’s been trying to stick to activities that students can do at home or at school—like comparing the melting speeds of ice on different surfaces—and she’s recorded herself giving voice instructions for students to listen

to. But only about 65 percent or 70 percent of her students who are out are signing on regularly. They had the option to pick up laptops at the school, but not everyone did. “It’s kind of a mess,” she said.

The situation has left some teachers overwhelmed and exhausted, only a few weeks into the school year.

“It’s a really icky feeling being in the classroom watching all of this happen like a slow-moving train wreck,” said Vaughn, referring to climbing numbers of quarantined students.

### Models exist for continuous instruction

At the same time, some districts have found ways to provide continuous instruction for students at home.

Arlington Heights School District 25, in Illinois, has set up a “quarantine academy” for students who test positive for COVID or who have been in close contact with someone who tested positive. (The Illinois State Board of Education requires that students in quarantine must have access to a remote option.)

Academies are organized by grade band, with one dedicated teacher each for early childhood, grades K-2, grades 3-5, and grades 6-8. A fifth, special education teacher supports students across the different virtual classrooms. All core content is delivered through synchronous instruction, while classes such as music, art, and physical education, as well as lunch and recess are asynchronous. Students rotate in and out of the quarantine academy as needed throughout the year.

Tracy Recklaus, the grades 6-8 quarantine academy teacher, said the set-up is “way better” than concurrent teaching, in which one teacher works with both students in the classroom and students on a live video call. “I have the full attention of the kids in one place, and I can attend to that,” she said.

Recklaus and her quarantine academy colleagues worked with the district’s learning coaches and content area leads for a few weeks before the start of the 2021-22 school year, designing lessons that could be easily differentiated to meet the needs of multiple grade levels in one group.

For example, studying a poem of the day in English/language arts: “You can unpack a poem at every level, and the brilliant thing about poetry is you can interpret it in a billion different ways,” she said. Recklaus also plans to focus on skills that are relevant across grades and that students often need reinforce-

ment with from year to year—like scale factors in math and science, or differentiating between mean, median, and mode.

Even if districts don't have the staff to set up quarantine academies, there are still ways to improve the instructional experience for students at home, said Dusseault, of CRPE.

Clear communication should be a priority, she said—explaining exactly what will happen once students go into quarantine, and what

options students will have to stay connected with the classroom. Houston Independent School District does this on its website, she said, with a separate landing page to answer students' and parents' questions.

Providing some kind of live instruction is also important, said Domenech, of AASA: "The best model would be where the district can revert back to providing remote learning with a teacher."

Students should at least have access to staff during the week, Dusseault said, to review assignments or check in on progress. Districts could use tutors for this purpose, she said—a strategy that Fulton County schools in Georgia plans to put in place by the end of August 2021.

"I think what we did learn in the last 18 months is that relationships absolutely drive student engagement and well-being," Dusseault said. ■



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## Popular Literacy Materials Get 'Science of Reading' Overhaul. But Will Teaching Change?

Lucy Calkins and Jennifer Serravallo Are Among Those Making Shifts

By Sarah Schwartz

**A** slow but significant change has been taking place in the early reading world, loosening the grip that some long-used, but unproven, instructional techniques have held over the field for decades.

Big names—like Lucy Calkins, of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Proj-

ect, and author and literacy specialist Jennifer Serravallo—have recently released updates to their published materials or announced impending rewrites that change how they instruct students to decipher words.

Reading researchers say they find these industry moves encouraging. "The fact that there's an awareness ... that's a step in the right direction," said Claude Goldenberg, a professor emeritus at Stanford University who stud-

ies early literacy development in English-language learners.

But they also cautioned that this narrow change in materials won't necessarily lead to large shifts in instructional practice, and that more needs to be done to support teachers of the youngest learners in developing kids' early reading skills—especially after several years of disrupted, pandemic-era schooling.

The shifts curriculum providers are making mainly have to do with how teachers instruct students in word-level reading—that is, decoding the words on the page into spoken language.

Much of teacher training and many classroom materials adhere to the theory that children should use multiple sources of information, or cues—the letters in a word, but also the pictures on the page or the flow of the sentence—to make a prediction about what the word is.

But evidence from cognitive psychology and neuroscience research has long shown that good readers attend to the letters in the words to identify what words say. Research has demonstrated that instructing students on how to crack the code of written language is one of the most effective ways to get them reading words.

And while it's important to teach young kids about story structure and syntax, and to have rich conversations about illustrations in picture books, children shouldn't rely on those sources of information to guess at what the words on the page say, said Goldenberg.

"There's a very subtle, nuanced, delicate dance in sequencing," he said. "It's that kind of delicate balance that I see completely missing from programs that try to do everything all at once."

Now, some publishers are trying to make a shift in how they integrate, sequence, and attend to foundational skills instruction. But there are open questions about how these changes in materials will change practice in classrooms.

"We see ourselves at a hinge moment," said Maryanne Wolf, the director of the Center for Dyslexia, Diverse Learners, and Social

Justice at the UCLA School of Education and Information Studies, and the author of several seminal books about how the brain learns to read. “The separation of two doors on reading has been not just unfortunate, but even tragic, leaving behind children who have needed desperately a different form of instruction.”

### A public conversation about reading science led to materials changes

The research motivating these changes isn’t new.

In 2000, a panel of experts was convened by the federal government to evaluate the evidence on reading instruction. One of the takeaways from the National Reading Panel’s report was that explicitly teaching about the sounds in words, and how those sounds matched up to written letters, would help children learn to read. This finding drove policy changes in the early 2000s, most notably the introduction of Reading First, a federally funded program that emphasized phonemic awareness and phonics instruction.

The program had mixed results, leading to some improvements in children’s word-reading ability, but not in their reading comprehension. In its wake, many schools and teacher education programs adopted a model called balanced literacy—aiming to balance foundational skills instruction with more focus on stories, comprehension, and developing a love of reading.

But in 2018, reporter Emily Hanford of APM Reports brought to light that in many balanced literacy classrooms, students were not receiving systematic, explicit instruction in phonics—how written letters match up to spoken sounds—and were being encouraged to use other strategies to guess at words. Without this foundational instruction, many students never figure out how to decode the printed words on the page.

Hanford’s documentaries—as well as a slew of coverage from Education Week and other outlets—ignited a firestorm of controversy, with some teachers outraged that they had never learned how to teach phonics in their teacher preparation programs, and others pushing back with a defense of their teaching methods. In the several years that followed, more states started to mandate teacher training in, and classroom attention to, foundational skills instruction in an effort to adhere to what came to be referred to as the “science of reading.”

But these word-guessing strategies are also deeply embedded in much of early reading curricula, as Education Week reporting has shown. Many programs and teacher guides encourage prompting students to rely on a story’s mean-

ing and structure, as well as the letters on the page, to predict what words will say—a strategy known as three-cueing or MSV (for meaning, structure, and visual). And while most curricula incorporate phonics instruction, it’s often “competing for teachers’ and children’s attention and time,” said Goldenberg.

Now, some influential publishers are starting to make changes.

Serravallo released an update to part of her popular *The Reading Strategies Book*, revising strategies for word-level reading to emphasize decoding and abandoning techniques that encourage students to guess at words. Early 2021, literacy consultants Jan Burkins and Kari Yates released a new book, *Shifting the Balance*, that offers “ways to bring the science of reading into the balanced literacy classroom.”

And Calkins, of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, has announced upcoming revisions to her popular *Units of Study for Teaching Reading* program. The changes, Calkins said, will incorporate more explicit instruction in phonics and remove some prompts that ask students to look to pictures or context for word identification.

At the same time, several more states have passed laws mandating that schools teach the “science of reading”—laws that would affect curricula and materials.

Mark Seidenberg, a cognitive scientist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison who studies reading, said the publishers’ changes are a response to these new policy priorities. But he worries that the revisions will be surface level, only shifting instruction enough to “satisfy the stipulations in those laws,” he said.

“They can’t change their materials too much, because they’ll lose their followers,” Seidenberg said. “What’s going to come out of this? Minimal changes that are enough to satisfy [these] states.”

Wiley Blevins, an educational consultant and author of several books on phonics teaching, understands the critiques, and the skepticism, that some experts are expressing about these changes: “I get the anger, because we’re talking about kids’ lives. We’re talking about their futures.” But he sees more reason for optimism, in teachers who may now have more guidance to “do better for their students.”

### Lucy Calkins outlines upcoming changes to Units of Study

In some cases, this guidance for teachers is still forthcoming. Calkins’ Reading and Writing Project, a workshop-based program that publishes a reading curriculum used by about

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We see ourselves at a hinge moment. The separation of two doors on reading has been not just unfortunate, but even tragic, leaving behind children who have needed desperately a different form of instruction.”

#### MARYANNE WOLF

Director of the Center for Dyslexia, Diverse Learners, and Social Justice at the UCLA School of Education and Information Studies

16 percent of early elementary and special education teachers, according to data gathered by Education Week, is planning to release updated materials in summer 2022. (The timeline has been pushed back due to COVID-related production delays, Calkins said.)

The planned update reflects a shift in approach for the group. In November 2019, Calkins released a statement pushing back on those whom she described as “the phonics-centric people who are calling themselves ‘the science of reading.’” About a year later, in fall 2020, TCRWP put out a new position statement, calling for attention to phonemic awareness and phonics instruction, and emphasizing that sounding out words is the best strategy for kids to use to figure out what those words say.

“[P]oring over the work of contemporary reading researchers has led us to believe that aspects of balanced literacy need some ‘rebalancing,’” the document read.

The revised units will offer different guidance on reading “superpowers,” or reading strategies, Calkins said. Instead of being taught “picture power”—to look at the pictures to figure out words—students will be taught “slider power,” that they should “slide” over the word to blend the letter sounds together. Early units will also teach a progression of letter sounds and explicitly address how to decode short, phonetically regular words, Calkins said.

Students will still learn “picture power” later, she added, but as a comprehension strategy for understanding the meaning of the story, rather than as a strategy to identify words.

TCRWP will also release new decodable books that include sound-spelling patterns that children learn, so that students can practice applying their phonics knowledge to texts. (Studies have shown that using decodable books can encourage students to try to sound out words while they’re reading.) The group will recommend that teachers integrate these alongside their predictable books, which have repetitive sentence structures and pictures that give clues as to the words on the page. The earliest kindergarten units, which Calkins calls “pre-reading units,” still use predictable books to teach concepts of print and high-frequency words.

Though Calkins says that these changes are “not small,” she also maintains that much of reading workshop will remain the same. “There’s a trademark to our schools that are working with us. There’s a trademark tone to the classrooms. Kids collaborating deeply, passionate about books, talking all the time about their ideas about books, writing up a storm,” she said.

“I don’t think the teachers will find [these changes] jarring,” she continued. “I think

“  
I can model that it’s OK to say, ‘There were a few things I think I got wrong, and I’m learning about them.’”

#### LUCY CALKINS

Director of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project Tennessee

teachers want to learn, and ... I can model that it’s OK to say, ‘There were a few things I think I got wrong, and I’m learning about them.’”

Goldenberg, who was one of the researchers who participated in an external review of the Units of Study in Reading published in early 2020, said that many of the lessons in the current curriculum are well done, but that they’re “sitting on a flimsy foundation.”

Layering on more attention to the foundations of reading could strengthen the program, but only if this focus is deeply and purposefully embedded, he said.

#### New teacher guides rethink old practices

Other authors have already released updates into the marketplace, like Burkins and Yates, who have written teacher guides on reading coaching, balanced literacy, and guided reading.

When Hanford’s work first came out, Burkins said, her colleagues in the field were on the defensive—and she and Yates, were, too.

“I’m going to own that I had defensiveness, dismissiveness, uncertainty about why some of these claims seemed outlandish or wrong,” Yates said.

While Burkins had read the work of a few cognitive psychologists in her training, much of the body of research that Hanford drew from was unfamiliar to her. “If you’re an educator, your information inputs have not been from the cognitive [research] side,” she said. Even in her doctoral program, where she completed a dissertation on phonemic awareness research, research courses were limited and she felt that she received mixed messages about evidence-based practice.

Burkins approached Yates about exploring

the research together. “Jan really said, ‘Kari, we’ve got to take a deep dive into this because, look—we’ve built careers around supporting early literacy. And we have coached teachers on many of the practices that are being criticized,’” Yates said. “And so I think part of it, for us, was: We know we owe it to the people we’re trying to serve—who are not just children, they’re teachers—to figure out what’s amiss here.”

The book outlines six “shifts” in thinking for the balanced literacy classroom: rethinking how comprehension begins, committing to phonemic awareness instruction, reimagining phonics teaching, revising instruction on high-frequency words, rethinking MSV, and reconsidering which texts beginning readers should read.

The focus, Burkins and Yates said, was on making the research that has appeared in journals accessible and actionable for teachers. They also tried to highlight where practices that many teachers already use align with evidence-based best practice—like engaging students in rich read-alouds, or using text sets of books that approach one topic from different angles to build knowledge.

“When you come in with the approach of, shut all this down and start fresh, you’re going to lose teachers. Energy is our most precious resource,” said Yates. “This work is as much about the reading science as it is about the science of understanding how to support human and organizational change.”

Like Burkins and Yates, Serravallo, the author of *The Reading Strategies Book*, also noted the inaccessibility of paywalled journals. More recently published books, like Seidenberg’s *Language at the Speed of Sight*, Daniel Willingham’s *The Reading Mind*, and Wolf’s *Reader, Come Home* “make it easier for people to find the information,” she said.

Serravallo worked with several reading researchers, including Wolf, on the updates to her book. Wolf, who met Serravallo while they were recording a podcast together for Serravallo’s publisher Heinemann, said that they were able to find common ground in a shared vision of what reading instruction should ultimately do.

“She knew that my particular goal, my ultimate goal ... is deep reading,” Wolf said. “Deep reading is when the brain has gone well beyond that first decoding brain, and into a place where all the parts are working automatically enough and connected to each other so that time can be allocated to critical thinking, inference, empathy, reflection. All of these are the real goals for a society.”

Strong instruction in foundational skills is just one piece, but a fundamental piece, of achieving that vision, Wolf said.

Serravallo’s revision is an overhaul of chapter 3 of *The Reading Strategies Book* (the book is designed to help teachers work with students, but it’s not a curriculum). The chapter focuses on strategies for deciphering words. The old version starts, “In order to construct accurate meaning from a text, children need to read words correctly, integrating three sources of information: meaning, syntax, and visual.”

The new version takes an entirely different approach, explaining the different ways a child can decode a word, and noting that the goal of orthographic mapping—“gluing” the spelling and the sound together in memory, so the word can be retrieved automatically.

Gone are the recommendations that children guess at the word based on the pictures or the rest of the sentence; in their place are suggestions for helping students apply their phonics knowledge to word reading. The new version also cites different sources, from a body of research in developmental psychology and cognitive science that wasn’t referenced in the original.

“The common practice that I used, and that my colleagues used, back when I wrote that [original] chapter relied on a certain type of text that scaffolds kids’ early reading by providing a lot of exposure to high-frequency words, some decoding, and some use of meaning to decipher the words on the page,” said Serravallo.

For some children, she said, the combination was enough to get them started on a path to fluent reading. “For other kids, it is a problem,” she said.

### Reading community calls for more work translating research to practice

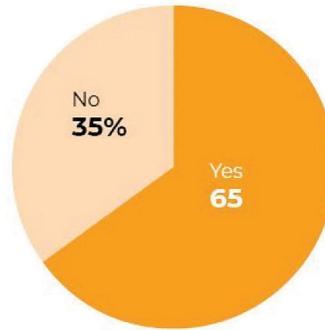
Seidenberg said the changes in Serravallo’s book, in particular, could prove a useful resource for classroom teachers. But he worries about a framework for reading instruction that is still oriented around “strategies,” focusing on how to respond to struggle.

For example, he said: “If the kid understands that there are digraphs, and has had enough relevant practice with them, you shouldn’t have to have a backup strategy [for recognizing digraphs].”

But Sandra Maddox, a literacy specialist with the South Carolina Department of Education, who consulted Serravallo on the revisions to her book, said that the classroom context isn’t always so predictable. Some students might be able to apply the new phonics skills they learn right away; others need more repetition and targeted reminders. “It’s not enough to just say, ‘sound it out,’” said Maddox, who specializes in working with children with dyslexia.

## WE ASKED ED. PROFESSORS WHO TEACH READING:

Do you teach the three-cueing system (i.e., meaning/structure/visual or semantic/syntactic/graphophonic)?

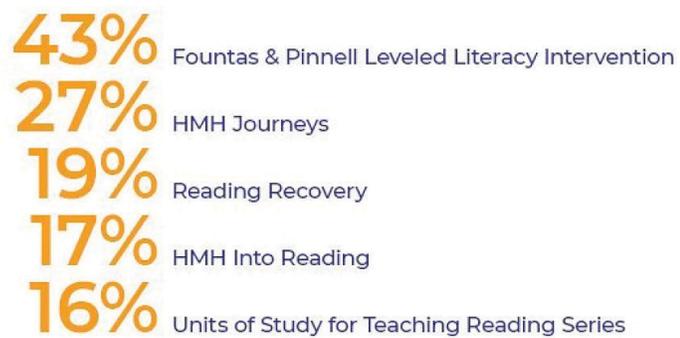


SOURCE: Education Week Research Center

In fall 2019, the EdWeek Research Center asked a nationally representative sample of 533 postsecondary instructors who taught courses in reading instruction about their practices and the materials that they used. Sixty-five percent said that they taught the three-cueing system, an approach that does not align with the cognitive research on reading.

## TOP5 READING MATERIALS

By Percentage of Teaching Using



SOURCE: Education Week Research Center

In fall 2019, the EdWeek Research Center asked a nationally representative sample of 674 K-2 and elementary special education teachers about their practices and the materials that they used.

Reading researchers, publishers, and educators alike all voiced a need for more translational work—collaborations between cognitive psychologists and educators to implement reading science in ways that are effective and practical.

Understanding reading research is one thing; applying it is another, said Yates. “Knowing how the brain learns to read does not answer the question that a kindergarten teacher [asks], in those 4,000-plus decisions they make every day, about exactly how to proceed with this group of kids in front of them,” she said.

Wolf said that her team at UCLA is “busily building bridges.” They’re working within the school of education, teaching teachers about dyslexia, while also collaborating with neurologists at the University of California San Francisco. “We are really determined to pull neuroscience and education together, for the benefit of all,” she said.

Other researchers, too, are working on local efforts: In Madison, for example, Seidenberg sat on an early literacy task force with leaders from the Madison Metropolitan school district and the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Education, with the goal of improving student reading outcomes and closing opportunity gaps.

This kind of work is happening slowly, Wolf said.

### **It’s hard to know, yet, what effect these publishing changes will have**

Maddox has already seen some uptake of Serravallo’s new pages among the teachers she works with. “They’re downloading them, printing them out, and adding them to their book,” she said. “What I hope it does is make teachers more aware of the strategies for decoding, and make them more aware of phonemic awareness and phonics in general.”

This knowledge is more necessary this year than ever, said Blevins, who consults with school districts. Because of educational disruptions during the pandemic, he said, teachers in older elementary grades are seeing large numbers of students with foundational skills gaps—in some cases, for the first time.

“They don’t even know where to start. [The teachers have] never heard of blending,” he said. He’s started doing sessions with 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade teachers in addition to the earlier elementary teachers he normally works with, teaching them a handful of key routines they can use and introducing them to a comprehensive phonics survey they can give kids to figure out what skills they need to focus on.

“I think that there’s a recognition that upper grade teachers need more knowledge of

phonics,” said Calkins. “Third graders, the last time they had an uninterrupted year in school was kindergarten.”

But researchers say there are still barriers in schools to identifying student needs. “I do think the measurement groups have been slower to respond than some of the instructional ones,” Matthew Burns, a professor of special education in the University of Missouri’s College of Education and Human Development, said of common classroom tools used to take reading inventories, evaluating what students know and don’t know.

In a study on publisher Fountas and Pinnell’s reading inventory, Burns and his colleagues found that the results weren’t reliable: Students would receive different scores with different books that were supposedly both at their reading level. “We put too much stock in the score we get from these measures,” he said.

Fountas and Pinnell materials, which include reading curricula as well as assessment tools, use many of the word-guessing strategies that other publishers are starting to move away from. The group’s founders, Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, declined to comment for this story through their publisher, Heinemann.

However, in a Sept. 8 opinion piece for Education Week, Fountas and Pinnell distanced themselves from the term “balanced literacy,” and characterized the ongoing conversation about reading practice as the “latest chapter in the reading wars.”

“We believe this round of conflict, like the previous ones, is harmful to our profession and has real potential for confusing children as well as teachers and administrators,” they wrote.

Fountas and Pinnell’s intervention materials, *Leveled Literacy Intervention*, hold a large share of the market—43 percent of early elementary and special education teachers said they used LLI in a 2019 EdWeek Research Center survey.

Changes to materials would better support teachers, Blevins said. But he stressed that stamping a “science of reading” approved seal on a resource and putting it in teachers’ hands doesn’t necessarily give teachers the knowledge and understanding they need to change their instruction.

“Whenever you see these shifts happening, it’s always surface knowledge,” Blevins said. “What that has boiled down to is ... on social media, teachers will name a program and say, ‘Is this science of reading?’”

The overwhelming interest in reading research presents an opportunity, and a caution, Blevins said. “It is a moment that if we did it right, we could take advantage of it and help millions of kids. But we need to go deeper.” ■

“

Knowing how the brain learns to read does not answer the question that a kindergarten teacher [asks], in those 4,000-plus decisions they make every day, about exactly how to proceed with this group of kids in front of them.”

#### **KARI YATES**

Speaker, consultant, and co-author of book, *Shifting the Balance*

Published on October 13, 2021

## Students With Depression, Anxiety May Qualify For Accommodations, Feds Tell Schools

By Evie Blad

**A**s the pandemic continues to fuel concerns about children's mental health, schools should be aware that students with conditions like depression and anxiety may qualify for accommodations under federal law, the Biden administration said in October 2021.

"Students with mental health disabilities are protected by Federal civil rights laws, including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990," said a new fact sheet from the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice. "These laws require K-12 schools and postsecondary institutions to provide students with an equal opportunity to learn, free from discrimination, including during public health crises."

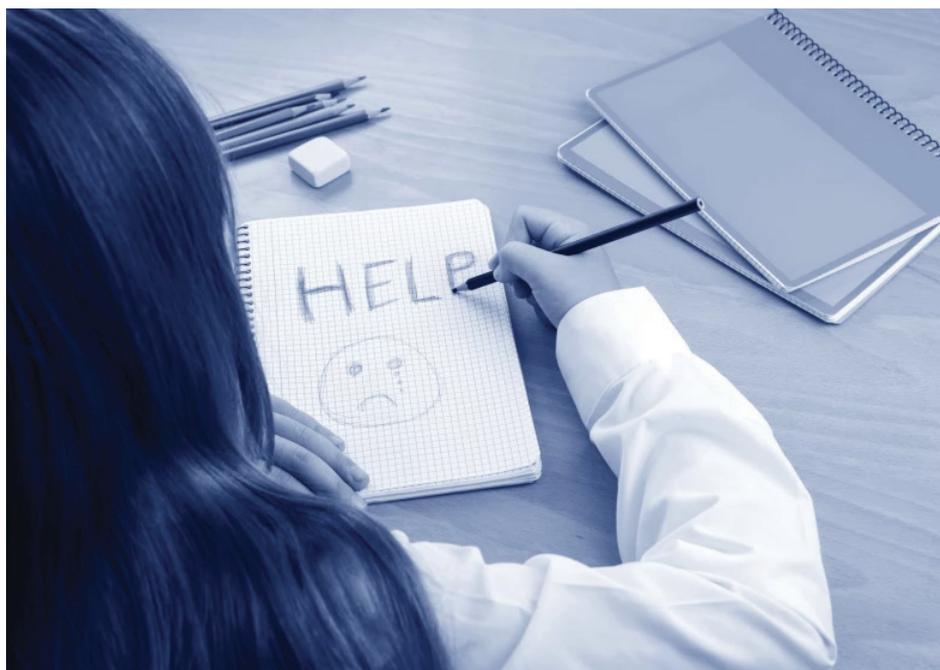
Ongoing disruption and social isolation sparked by COVID-19 precautions have led to concern about mental health in general. And federal officials have encouraged schools to target federal relief aid to students' mental health and emotional well-being in addition to the academic recovery.

The new guidance, released in honor of World Mental Health Day on Oct. 10, specifically says schools must provide "reasonable modifications to school policies, practices, and procedures, as appropriate for an individual student." Failure to do so could amount to "discrimination based on disability," which could lead to a federal civil rights investigation, the fact sheet says.

### Schools face challenges with mental health efforts

The instruction comes as schools struggle to meet students' mental health needs. Groups like the National Association of School Psychologists said schools already had inadequate numbers of support staff like psychologists, social workers, and school counselors before the pandemic.

Even with new funding, school administrators must confront a staffing crunch that has affected all sectors of the economy and has made it difficult to recruit staff in all areas of the school, including teachers and bus driv-



—iStock/Getty

ers. In a survey by the EdWeek Research Center, 19 percent of responding district leaders and principals said they had difficulty hiring new mental health counselors.

School psychologists who help address student mental health concerns must also tackle a backlog of special education evaluations to determine which students are dealing with expected academic challenges posed by interrupted learning time and which may have unaddressed disabilities.

But mental health disabilities may also call for individual plans to accommodate students' needs, the new fact sheet says. Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, schools are required to provide a free and adequate public education to students with disabilities. In the case of conditions like diagnosed depression, schools might consider "reasonable modifications" to policies related to things like attendance for individual students, the agencies said.

Schools should also train staff to recognize and respond to signs of suicidal ideation and "develop trauma-informed crisis management procedures that include an individualized assessment of the student's circumstances," they urged.

The document details several hypothetical situations that might prompt a federal investigation from the Education Department's office for civil rights. They include an example of a parent who reports that their student has developed severe depression for the first time during the pandemic.

"Despite the school's Section 504 [free and adequate public education] obligation to evaluate any student who needs or is believed to need special education or related services because of a disability, the principal does not refer the student for evaluation," the fact sheet says. "Instead, the principal says that all students are struggling because of the pandemic and suggests that the parent should hire a private tutor and find a psychologist for the student."

Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Suzanne Goldberg wrote in a letter to educators accompanying the guidance, "Importantly, these Federal disability-rights laws require that when students with mental health disabilities need help or are in crisis, schools and postsecondary institutions make decisions about how to respond based on each student's individual circumstances, rather than on myths, fears, or stereotypes about people with mental illness." ■



— Julian Studio/Stock/Getty Images

## OPINION

Published on April 28, 2021

# Learning Recovery: The Research on Tutoring, Extended School Year, and Other Strategies

The evidence points most strongly to the value of high-dosage tutoring, but other approaches also have merit

By Heather C. Hill

*Editor's Note: This is part of a continuing series on the practical takeaways from research.*

**D**istricts have started to receive about \$123 billion set aside for schools in the American Rescue Plan. This legislation provides money to help districts bring back students during (what I hope is) the tail end of the COVID-19 pandemic. The funds can also purchase programs that meet the needs of the hardest-hit students, hire additional educators to address learning loss, and underwrite summer, after-school, and extended-day and -year learning programs. With so many choices, how should schools spend this money in ways that most boost student outcomes?

To answer this question, I reviewed syntheses of research that look at ways to catch students up academically. Overall, high-dos-

age tutoring programs had the best track record. Other promising possibilities include extended learning time and highly structured home summer-reading programs for elementary students. Where possible, I compare program outcomes by using the average impact of high-dosage-tutoring programs as a benchmark. While such comparisons are imperfect, they give educators a rough sense for how to prioritize programs with the same aims.

If districts are particularly targeting struggling students and can find the means to do high-dosage tutoring well, the research suggests that is the top choice. To qualify as high dosage, the program must provide each student roughly 75 minutes per week of small-group or individual instruction over a 36-week period. Low-dosage tutoring programs, on the other hand, do not on average show positive impacts.

The success of tutoring makes sense—tutors can tailor material specifically to student needs and pace material to match student progress. Many tutoring programs operate

during the school day, with certified teachers pulling students out of their regular classroom for 1-to-1 or small-group instruction. Reviews of the literature show that after-school programs that feature tutoring can likewise improve outcomes in English/language arts.

Another approach to regaining lost learning is an **extended school year**. While tutoring may be directed just to some students, an extended school year is intended to move all students closer to where they would have been without the pandemic.

Several sources of evidence point to a longer school year as promising. First, economists have shown a relationship between the number of instructional days and student performance: When schools gain instructional days as a result of fewer snow days or changes in state testing windows, standardized-test scores improve. Second, policies and programs that add days to the school calendar are often (though not always) positively associated with improved student outcomes. In some cases, these programs can also accelerate the learning of students with lower levels of prior knowledge or who come from low-income or other historically marginalized communities.

Still, the extension has to be significant. A back-of-the-envelope estimate based on a study by Benjamin Hansen suggests that adding between two to six weeks of instruction would be needed to achieve the same effects as 36 weeks of high-dosage tutoring per year per student. In line with this estimate, successful programs extending the school year added between two and six weeks of instruction to the calendar.

Districts might also think about an **extended school day**. However, the evidence as a whole provides only weak support for extended days as a means of academic catch-up. It may be that how the time is used accounts for most of the difference. For instance, researcher Matt Kraft described how the Match Charter Public High School in Boston used a two-hour extension of the school day to incorporate individual tutoring; ELA test scores rose similarly to the effects seen in the average high-dosage-tutoring program, and math scores rose among the lowest-performing students.

The recovery plan specifically sets aside funds for **summer school** or other summer experiences for children. Several scholars have examined the body of literature on summer school and find that summer school programs that include reading and math work boost those skills, though the effects are roughly just a half to a third the size of those produced by the average high-dosage tutoring program.

Critics point out that academically focused summer schools may have a downside, depriving students of other kinds of summer benefits, like those gained in summer camp, informal care, or neighborhood settings. There, students may develop self-regulation and self-efficacy, enhance their creativity, or explore interests like art or engineering. Summer school may also be a relatively inefficient way of recovering lost learning because the material and pedagogical methods used in summer settings may not align well with students' school year classroom experiences.

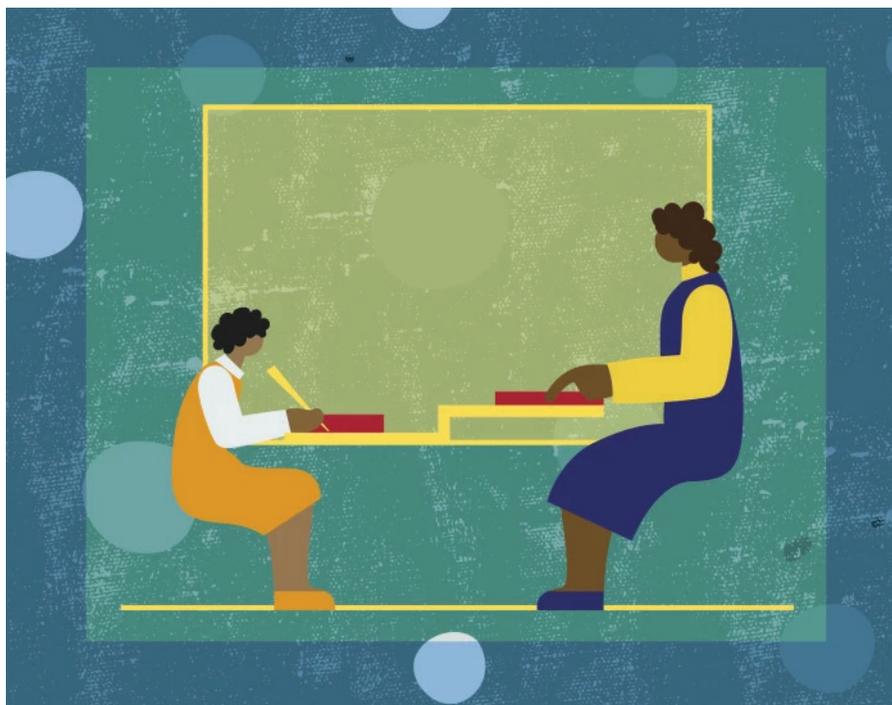
Perhaps surprisingly, **highly structured home-based reading programs** over the summer appear as effective on average as summer school in improving elementary-grade reading outcomes. One review of the literature also suggests that these home-based programs may be particularly effective for low-income children. Such programs provide students books or other texts to read, and many programs encourage reading the materials with family members. Particularly effective programs, like READS, also match texts with student interests and reading levels as well as involve classroom teachers in the program's rollout and conclusion.

After-school programs are also popular for improving achievement. Unfortunately, after-school programs without tutoring have shown on average either small or no effects on student academic outcomes. That said, after-school programs with strong youth-staff relationships and an explicit focus on building social-emotional skills may help students build those skills and develop a more positive attitude toward school. Like many summertime activities, they can be valuable, but they don't seem very good at helping students acquire academic skills they are missing.

With the exception of extended-day and after-school programs without tutoring, all the options above provide a pathway to recovering at least some of the academic learning lost to the pandemic. Districts choosing among them will want to compare costs and prospective benefits in order to spend their federal recovery money wisely.

Districts will also want to pay close attention to the implementation of the program(s) they choose. Effect sizes produced in academic studies are often not reproduced in the real world. I'll write more about that in a forthcoming essay. ■

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## OPINION

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# 8 Considerations for Designing High-Impact Tutoring

The most important rule is start small

By Kevin Newman

**W**ith the return to in-person learning, K-12 leaders are urgently setting priorities for the school year. Each spring, educators are eager to find that “just right” approach to their biggest challenges. As a former middle and high school principal, I know that’s especially true after a tough year—and no year has been tougher than this one.

For many leaders, accelerating student learning is top-of-mind, and one method that has garnered a lot of recent attention is high-impact tutoring. The National Student Support Accelerator, founded this year at the Annenberg Institute at Brown University to promote and support high-impact tutoring, defines it as one-to-one or small-

group support that supplements classroom learning and complements existing curriculum by focusing on specific goals in response to individual students’ needs. This kind of tutoring is also known as “high-intensity tutoring” or “high-dosage tutoring.”

Research has shown that frequent in-school tutoring is one of the best ways to support students’ academic progress. In fact, tutoring has had greater impacts on student learning than various forms of teacher training, curriculum, extending the school day, teacher evaluation, and more.

This kind of tutoring is not meant to solely focus on remediating previous learning, although some reteaching may be involved. It might be helpful to think of high-impact tutoring as “accelerated learning” rather than “remediated learning.”

As with any education intervention schools undertake, it is important to first

consider a variety of factors and then formulate a program that's calibrated to address them. In my current role helping leaders of the KIPP network of charter schools shape their academic strategies, I advise that any school looking to design a high-impact tutoring program address these eight key components:

1. **Format:** It can be either online or in person.
2. **Frequency and length of time:** It is recommended that tutoring take place at least three times per week for at least 30 minutes at a time for the full school year.
3. **Ratio:** Ideally, a student-to-tutor ratio should be 1-1 or 2-1 and no greater than 4-1. Any ratio greater than 2-1 runs the risk of “teaching to the middle” and thus being less effective. Larger groups also require the tutor to have greater pedagogical skills and/or classroom-management skills.
4. **Scheduling:** It is recommended that tutoring occur during the school day as a formal part of the schedule, such as a dedicated class period.
5. **Staffing:** If possible, students should have the same tutor(s) for the full year. Research indicates that less-experienced tutors can be effective with consistent training, strong supervision, and structured curricula. Schools might consider staffing with paraprofessionals and/or novice teachers.
6. **Students:** Given that all students benefit from individual attention, tutoring is recommended for all students, not just for those who may be struggling. Tutoring exclusively for struggling students tends to create stigma and may be perceived as punishment.
7. **Support:** For tutors, determine who will provide ongoing training and supervision, including observation and feedback. For content, determine differentiated scope and sequence for each student and determine whether teachers or tutors will be providing it. For outcomes, determine the process for individual goal setting, progress monitoring, and data collection and analysis.

8. **Tutoring content:** Content should be curriculum-based, on grade level, with just-in-time scaffolds to help students over rough spots, and it should be focused on the most critical standards for the grade level. It is most important to tailor content to students' progress, whether that be pre-teaching, reviewing for an exam, or aiding with homework.

These are all important considerations, but the list comes with a caution, too. In stressful times like these, a recipe feels like a godsend. Yet a recipe can also be dangerous because it does not take local context into consideration. So rather than run with predetermined recommendations, school leaders should first start with defining the student outcomes they are seeking to meet through high-impact tutoring. If schools are looking for one “rule” to follow without exception, it is this: Start small, work with the program until you find success, and then assess whether that success can be maintained at a larger scale.

For example, the KIPP schools in Nashville, Tenn., are currently building their program with these components in mind but in a way that meets their context and constraints. They will be targeting students in specific grades, with primary students focusing on reading and secondary students focusing on math. Their tutoring will be offered for an hour after school, three days a week, and they have partnered with a local tutoring service to provide instruction and oversight.

While KIPP Nashville is not incorporating every single recommendation, they are considering all components in their design, and—most importantly—they are starting small. “We decided to start small and observe results so we could make the appropriate revisions if we decided to scale up,” said Nancy Livingston, the KIPP Nashville chief of schools.

To be as successful as possible, take these eight components into account and thoughtfully design a program that is realistic, sustainable, and rooted in your specific context. Our students don't need another education initiative to fizzle out partway through the year. They deserve a well-considered plan that places their learning at the center. High-impact tutoring, if done right, can be instrumental in achieving that goal. ■

*Kevin Newman is the senior director of academic health for the KIPP Foundation. He was formerly the principal of KIPP Austin Academy of Arts & Letters and KIPP Austin Collegiate in Austin, Texas.*

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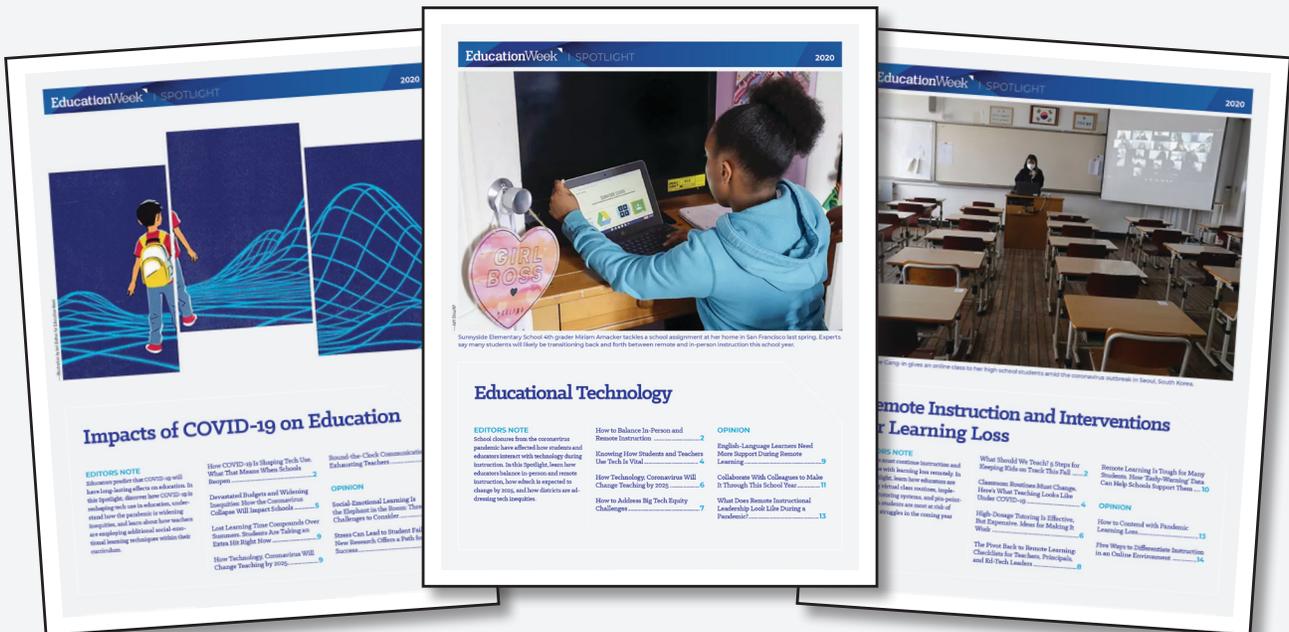
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