RECOMMENDED USES FOR LEARNING LOSS FUNDS

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OVERVIEW

The recent passage of the [American Rescue Plan Act](#) is infusing America's K12 public schools with unprecedented, desperately needed relief funds to aid in the academic recovery of students in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The $122 billion allocated to K12 public schools represents over *seven times current annual Title I funding.* As a part of these relief dollars, Congress has required that states and districts designate 5% and 20%, respectively, to specifically addressing learning loss, totaling $28 billion. This funding gives education leaders across the country the opportunity to make significant investments in evidence-based programs.

What counts as a learning loss intervention under the ARP?

The bill currently defines learning loss interventions as: "evidence-based interventions, such as summer learning or summer enrichment, extended day, comprehensive afterschool programs, or extended school year programs [that] respond to students' academic, social, and emotional needs and address the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus" on student subgroups as defined in ESSA.

While the definition includes specific examples to consider, these are not exhaustive and the language allows for a pretty broad interpretation of interventions. Given that, state department guidance and outside advocacy could have an outsized role in the types of interventions SEAs and LEAs ultimately choose.

What does a good learning loss program look like?

Not all learning loss interventions are created equally. We encourage states to carefully consider implementing programs with a strong evidence base for improving students' academic, social, and emotional outcomes such as **high-impact tutoring** and **summer enrichment**, as well as more innovative models that have the promise to reshape education in student and equity focused ways, including **extended school days** and **community-based learning hubs**.

HIGH-IMPACT TUTORING

High-impact tutoring programs show clear, positive results, particularly for the lowest-achieving students. Students participating in these programs have gained an additional one to two years of math and an additional year of learning in English language arts—on top of what they learned in the classroom—compared to nonparticipants. In a recent meta-analysis of 14 types of educational interventions, high-impact tutoring was found to be the *most* effective at improving student achievement.

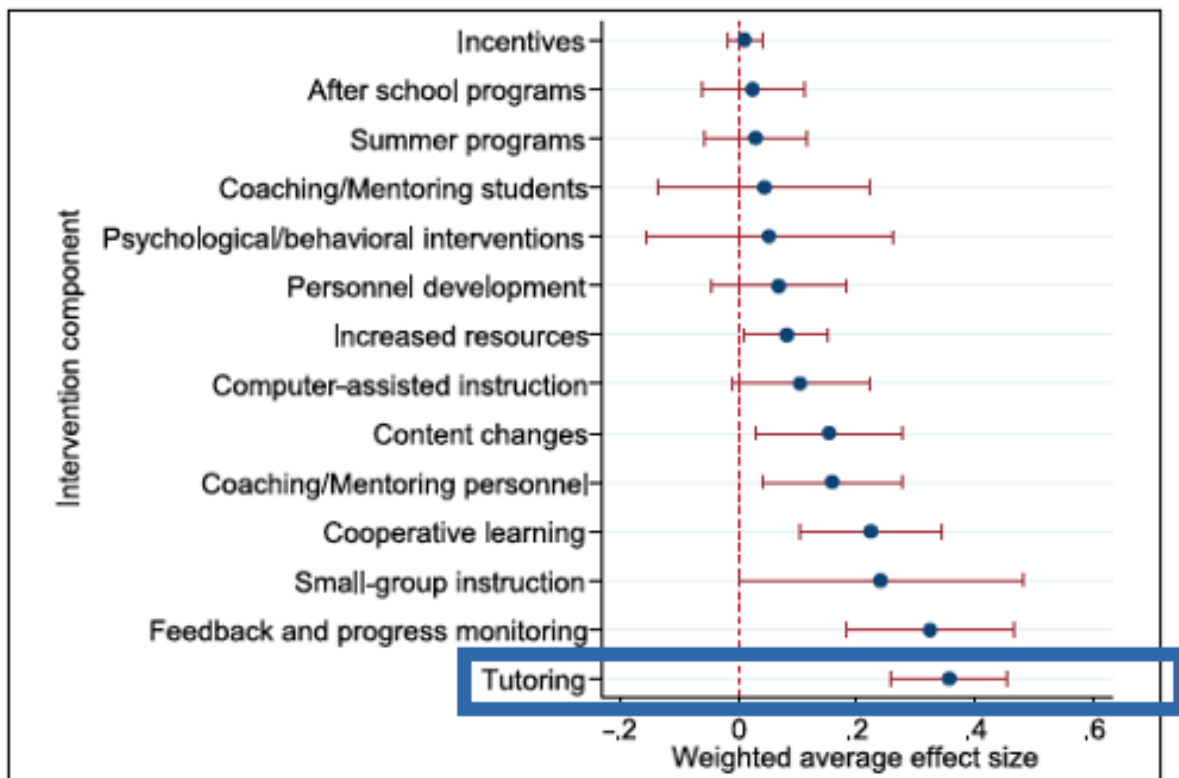## TUTORING OUT-PERFORMS ALL OTHER ACADEMIC INTERVENTIONS

FIGURE 5. *Weighted average effect sizes by component.*

Source: 2017 Meta-Analysis Comparting Interventions

Successful tutoring programs share some key commonalities, which likely lead to their strong results. As a part of any guidance around high-impact tutoring, we encourage the Department to highlight these design elements as critical to implementing a successful tutoring program.

Based on research, effective high-impact tutoring programs:

- **Occur during the school day.** Embedded programs have a significantly higher likelihood of student attendance and reaching the students who need it most.

- **Include a minimum of three sessions per week.** For tutoring approaches to be effective, students have to spend a substantial amount of time working with their tutor.

- **Provide students with a consistent tutor who is supported by ongoing oversight and coaching.** The basis of effective tutoring is strong tutor-student relationships. Students should have a consistent tutor who is skilled at relationship-building, which helps develop both academic and non-academic outcomes;

- **Use data to inform tutoring sessions**. Tutors should use data to understand students' strengths and needs and should build their sessions to focus on these needs. Tutoring programs should use also data to assess their effectiveness at improving student learning and should make adjustments based on these data.

- **Use materials that are aligned with research and state standards.** The materials that tutors use with their students should be aligned with both state standards and research on teaching and learning and should be engaging for students and easy for tutors to use.

National experts such as the [National Student Support Accelerator](#) have developed specific guidance and toolkits to help states and LEAs navigate potential implementation challenges. For instance, LEAs will need to make specific choices about whom they plan to use as tutors—certified teachers, paraprofessionals, college students, or others—each of which will have separate ramifications for recruitment and training, as well as the cost of programs. Similarly, states or districts planning to partner with existing high-impact tutoring providers may need tools to assist in evaluating these providers for quality and compatibility with local conditions.

EXTENDED SCHOOL DAY

Extending the length of the school day could be a critical way to increase instructional time for students in an effort to make up for lost instruction as a result of COVID-related school closures. Because it's hard to isolate the effects of extending the school day from other policies and practices, little high-quality empirical research on its effectiveness exists.

However, a 2018 study examining a program extending the school day for additional literacy instruction in a subset of Florida schools was found to provide students with an additional 2-4 months of gains in reading achievement. Effects were particularly strong for students from low-income families, one of the groups disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

While there aren't any studies examining how long the school day should be extended, a [2006 meta-analysis](#) of out-of-school programs found that the most effective programs provided at least 43 additional hours of instruction in each reading and math. This translates to about a minimum of 30 minutes per day of additional instructional time over the course of a 180-day school year.

As evidenced by the Florida study, **extending the school day should be paired with a specific academic intervention**, such as the additional literacy instruction implemented in the schools cited in the above extended day study.

Given the challenges of integrating high-impact tutoring into existing school schedules, extended school day could be a natural pairing for tutoring by:

- providing a highly effective program for additional learning time;
- easing the burden on administrators attempting to limit the impacts of tutoring sessions on regular instructional time;
- preventing added burdens to teachers' workdays already stretched thin by the challenges of remote and hybrid teaching; and
- avoiding extensive renegotiations of collective bargaining agreements.

SUMMER ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS

After many students have been out of school buildings for over a year, this summer will be crucial to provide an opportunity to allow students, as Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT) noted, "an opportunity to reset and reconnect through summer enrichment programs" and by "…giving kids—of all socioeconomic backgrounds—a chance to just be kids."

Given that students of color, students from low-income families, students with disabilities, and English learners were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and school closures, summer programming will also be critical to getting these students prepared to access grade-level content next school year.

The most recent meta-analysis of summer programs found that participants, on average, show improved reading achievement compared to non-participants, with gains concentrated amongst students from low-income families. Importantly, as shown in a RAND evaluation of summer programs, high attendance—80% or higher—is key for producing strong academic and behavioral outcomes.

Based on research, the strongest summer learning programs ensure consistent student attendance and—

- Are voluntary, full-day with combined academic and enrichment activities, including offerings in art, music and/or athletics;

- Use a strong research-based curricula delivered for at least three hours a day through traditional teaching as well as hands-on learning experiences;

- Are available at least five days a week for no less than five weeks per summer;

- Make use of highly-effective educators in classes of no more than 15 students per adult; and

- Charge no fee for participation while providing free transportation and meals.

Similarly, National Summer Learning Association research of summer programming in 2020 found that the most successful programs operating during the pandemic:

- **built off existing programs and partnerships** rather that starting from scratch during a time of major disruption,

- made **clear, early decisions about programming** rather than making last minute adjustments based on the latest pandemic related guidance,

- **focused on social-emotional development** in addition to academics, and

- **included anti-racist and culturally relevant content.**

Unlike the other interventions included here, the American Rescue Plan Act designates state funds specifically for evidence-based summer learning and enrichment programs. Therefore, we encourage states to allocate these funds to districts and CBOs efficiently to prevent districts from using more general learning loss funds on summer programming unless needed.

COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING HUBS

Over the course of the pandemic as students and their families were struggling with the realities of remote learning, community- and faith-based organizations around the country stepped up to fill in the gaps. These organizations created learning hubs that provide access to basic needs, academic support, and enrichment activities. While some are mainly focused on supporting students and families while school buildings remain closed, others are engaged in a more long-term strategy to radically rethink the ways in which families and students experience education, particularly for students poorly served by schools prior to the pandemic.

These more disruptive models, such as The [Oakland REACH](#), have the potential to drastically improve student academic, social, and emotional outcomes by increasing student access to high-quality instruction and enrichment activities routinely enjoyed by more affluent peers and provide parents with the tools to better advocate for these opportunities.

Given that students of color have been systematically denied access to high-quality academic and non-academic opportunities, the REACH's philosophy is to make sure families get the best, so they start expecting the best. Lakisha Young, Co-founder and CEO of The Oakland REACH, identifies five key elements of their work that drive their success:

- **High-quality academic enrichment**. The REACH provides students with access to literacy tutors and partners with both local & national organizations to provide culturally relevant curriculum, including programs that teach math and reading with specific references to Black and Latinx culture.

- **Community**. Family liaisons assist in accessing remote instruction, support increased student attendance, and help families advocate for higher quality district services. Families participate in the Family Sustainability Center which provides virtual workshops to support both the academic and socio-economic needs of families.

- **Social/Emotional**. The Hub focuses on the whole child and the whole family. Students have access to a wide variety of non-academic activities offered through local partnerships, including fine arts, martial arts, cooking, and creative writing. Families have a safe Zoom space for socialization and access to mental health supports.

- **Tech Support**. Staff help families become power agents around technology by not just troubleshooting remote learning problems but providing tech trainings and workshops for families.

- **Socio-economic supports.** Relief funds and Christmas gifts have helped support families struggling during the pandemic. Additionally, financial literacy and management classes—along with employment opportunities as family liaisons and literacy tutors—help support more long-term financial wellbeing.

The Oakland REACH is starting to partner directly with the school district, potentially giving them access to federal relief funds. Districts and states could consider seeking out existing community-based organizations that have existing relationships with students and families to help facilitate similar partnerships.