BEST PRACTICES FOR LEARNING LOSS RECOVERY

December 2020
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................................... 3
KEY FINDINGS .............................................................................................................................. 3

SECTION I: ADDITIONAL LEARNING TIME ................................................................. 4
   Extended School Year .............................................................................................................. 4
   Extended School Periods and Days ....................................................................................... 4
   Instructional Solutions ........................................................................................................... 6

SECTION II: ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS ........................................ 12
   After-School Programs .......................................................................................................... 12
   Acceleration Academies ....................................................................................................... 13
   School-Based Summer Learning Programs ......................................................................... 14
   Long-Term Recovery Strategies ......................................................................................... 18
INTRODUCTION

Districts across the United States require exploration of research-based supports for student academic recovery from learning lost due to COVID-19 pandemic-related extended school closures. Early planning is essential in order to direct resources to effectively manage this crisis with cost-efficient strategies. As the research suggests, programs will need to go beyond typical remediation or enrichment opportunities accommodated by existing after-school or summer school programs. Hanover Research (Hanover) has prepared the following report to inform member districts’ learning recovery program development. In this report, Hanover shares best practices from secondary sources, publicly available research, academic literature, advice from educational experts, and guidance from state agencies. The report also includes information, strategies, and innovative ideas from notable districts’ learning recovery programs.

This report is divided into two sections: 
**Section I – Additional Learning Time** summarizes the research for adding learning time within the structure of existing programs (e.g., regular school year, existing summer school, school days and periods). 
**Section II – Additional Instructional Programs** describes research-based strategies for adapting district-wide programs (e.g., after-school, acceleration academies, summer school) for the anticipated increase in learning needs of students as the result of COVID-19 learning loss.

KEY FINDINGS

- **A district- or school-wide high-dosage, one-on-one tutoring program is one of the most cost-efficient ways to improve academic performance and learning recovery.** Of all educational interventions, one-on-one tutoring multiple times weekly for students struggling in reading and math shows the largest educational performance improvement effect sizes. Although one-on-one tutoring costs several thousand dollars per student annually, districts can defray costs through grants, community partnerships, and Title I funds for tutorial programs.  

- **Additional in-school strategies to remediate student learning loss include adding time to learning, looping, creating individualized learning plans, and cross-grade collaboration.** In particular, looping, or having a teacher instruct the same class of students for consecutive years, allows students and teachers to continue strengthening existing relationships, a crucial factor in supporting students’ learning recovery following traumas such as COVID-19. Looping also leads to test score gains, keeps more students in general education programs, improves school attendance, and provides teachers the ability to build continuity and hold students accountable for learning between school years with summer work. 

- **Integrating school-day classroom instruction into after-school curricula helps tailor such programs to better assist in learning loss recovery.** For example, a district that partnered with the YMCA and the Boys & Girls Club to add 100 minutes of after-school instruction at three schools found that students at two of the three participating schools saw test score improvement higher than the district average. 

- **Creating and expanding community partnerships helps districts create and implement cost-efficient programs such as one-on-one tutoring, after-school programs, and summer learning.** Community partnerships creates external sources of funding, shared resources (e.g., facilities), and utilizes trained volunteers from service programs (e.g., AmeriCorps).

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SECTION I: ADDITIONAL LEARNING TIME

In this section, Hanover reviews effective strategies, programs, and resources to develop and utilize in-school, out-of-school, and summer learning for learning recovery, including cost-efficient and cost-neutral elements. This section includes profiles of districts with exemplary programs as well as specific strategies that can be employed at the district or school level.

EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR

Recent studies recommend extending the school year to promote learning recovery. A study from early 2020 suggests districts start the school year earlier or extend it into the summer as one strategy to ensure students receive sufficient instruction time for adequate subsequent grade-level preparation. According to another 2020 study focusing on the effects of COVID-19 on student proficiency in Atlanta, increasing the school year by up to five percent for the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic years will recoup learning loss for all students in less than four years. This prediction is based on a model the authors developed after examining data from annual summer learning loss and the impacts of extended school closures as the result of previous natural disasters such as Hurricanes Katrina and Harvey.

Other studies on extending the school year found elementary school, low-income, and struggling students benefit from extended school years. However, the studies also suggest that unless all learning days are used efficiently, additional school days do not significantly help students improve their academic results.

Notably, many other studies on extended school years were inconclusive. For example, a five-year study of Kindergarten-3rd grade students who started school significantly earlier than a control group for multiple summers found that after four years, students saw a 0.1 percent standard deviation improvement (SDI) in reading and math and 0.15 SDI in writing. However, "Only 18 percent of the students attended three of the four summers the program was conducted so the researchers had to estimate the program effectiveness." 2

Based on this and other inconclusive results, districts should ensure teaching and learning is consistently rigorous regardless of the length of the school year. Professional development to prepare teachers for additional school days and frequent communication with students and parents about expectations will ensure school communities are prepared to use additional time efficiently.

EXTENDED SCHOOL PERIODS AND DAYS

Districts that find extended school years too disruptive to family and/or community routines may choose to consider less disruptive strategies such as extending school days or content periods. Academic recovery strategies have historically relied on the use of additional instructional time to address learning loss. However, some districts apprehensive about extending summer school or extending the school year are looking into other, more localized options for adding instructional time. For example, Grade 9 students in Chicago Public Schools (IL), profiled in Figure 1.1, received double math time and as a result saw significant

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improvement in algebra test scores and better long-term outcomes, including increased educational attainment.⁹

**Figure 1.1: Chicago Public Schools (IL)**

**SPOTLIGHT: CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS (IL)**

CPS required all Grade 9 students with low math test scores to enroll in a full-year regular algebra course and a simultaneous algebra support class, usually taught by the same teacher. Teachers in the program received new curricula to use and additional professional development. Teachers received professional development in using extra instructional time to promote complex math thinking through student-centered instructional practices. The extra time enabled teachers to feel like they could take risks with new modes of instruction. Students who received the double dose treatment showed larger gains in algebra scores – equivalent to about an extra quarter of a year of growth – and their algebra GPAs were about a quarter of a point higher. The gains were greatest for students whose prior math scores were between the 20th and 50th percentiles.

Source: Annenberg Institute¹⁰

**Additional learning time is most effective with strong student attendance.** Research on extended learning time clearly highlights the importance of attendance in extended learning efficacy. Therefore, schools must ensure high levels of participation in any extended learning opportunities offered to students.¹¹

An extended school day has a statistically significant positive effect on students’ academic performance.¹² However, the academic effects of longer school days are mixed. A 2013 study found that a certain amount of extended school time improves student academic performance.¹³ Yet, some school districts studied by the Massachusetts Department of Education in 2006-2007 saw improvements while others did not. The study cited the differences in learning models and the communities they serve make results unreliable.¹⁴ The effectiveness of longer school days on increased student academic performance also depends on other factors such as instructional quality, class size, student ability, and the classroom environment.¹⁵

**The cost of longer school days varies by district.** A study by the National Center on Time Learning of the effects of extended school days at five districts showed costs were between $290 to $2,031 annually per student. When broken down into costs per hour per student, the added costs ranged from $2.20 to $5.23 per student.¹⁶ Another study indicated that extended day programs, on average, cost approximately $800 annually per student.¹⁷ Although extending school days is not inexpensive, learning recovery and

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performance improvement alternatives such as shrinking class sizes can cost between $2,000 and $4,000 annually, based on teacher bonuses for instructing additional students beyond regular classroom sizes. Figure 1.2 describes the State of Florida’s implementation and positive academic effects of longer school days across low-performing schools.

![Figure 1.2: Academic Impacts of Longer School Days in Florida](image)

In 2012, Florida lengthened the school day by an hour in its 100 lowest-performing elementary schools and increased the program to 300 schools beginning in fall 2014. During the program’s first year, students saw “effects of 0.05 standard deviations of improvement in reading test scores for program assignment.” According to Chalkbeat, this translates to “the equivalent of one to three months of extra learning. Another way to look at it: The most optimistic estimate is that the program closed about a third of the gap in the reading scores between the best schools in Florida and average schools.”

Sources: Multiple

Additionally, districts may consider hiring or asking teachers willing to conduct remote instruction at atypical times (e.g., nights and weekends) for students who cannot attend additional in-person learning time.

**INSTRUCTIONAL SOLUTIONS**

Beyond programmatic shifts to the school schedule, other school-level strategies exist that can maximize learning time and make learning recovery more attainable. Because these micro-level strategies can be adopted by principals or individual teachers, they are much easier to promote and implement. However, they also tend to be harder to manage, sustain, and evaluate.

**VERTICAL CURRICULAR REVIEW AND CROSS-GRADE COLLABORATION**

Districts can facilitate vertical curricular review and collaboration across grade levels and courses to account for anticipated learning loss. Vertical curricular review refers to ensuring “what students learn in one lesson, course, or grade level prepares them for the next lesson, course, or grade level.” This process requires teachers instructing different grade-levels to work together to understand individual students’ learning needs. Formalizing the vertical curricular review and cross-grade collaboration process into a school- or district-wide expectation would ensure teachers account for all students’ learning gaps. Districts, schools, and teachers can also institute this systemic approach among and between professional learning communities (PLCs).

As part of a cross-grade collaboration, teachers should identify 2019-20 school year competency, topic, and skill gaps due to COVID-19-related school closures in consultation with students’ prior-year teachers and

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develop plans to address these gaps beyond the 2020-2021 school year. Figure 1.3 lists five actions to help districts and schools create a foundation for further learning interventions.

**Figure 1.3: Five Actions for Creating Foundations for Future Interventions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action 1</td>
<td>Prioritize attendance and check-ins with families and students multiple times weekly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action 2</td>
<td>Teach grade-level for all core courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action 3</td>
<td>Use a core curriculum across the district and avoid using online supplements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action 4</td>
<td>Ensure teachers have uninterrupted teaching time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action 5</td>
<td>If health and logistics permit a hybrid schedule, prioritize in-person instruction for students needing extra help and those in transition grades (Grades 1, 6, and 9).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Education Week

**LOOPING**

Another structural innovation shown to improve student achievement and recover learning loss is looping. This strategy, defined as “the practice in which a teacher instructs the same group of students for at least two school years, following them from one grade level to the next,” helps students with academic performance and attendance (see Figure 1.4). In one study of “looping” in elementary school classrooms, students showed “small but significant test score gains for students assigned to the same teacher for a second time in a higher grade.”

**Figure 1.4: The “Looping” Cycle**

- **Year One:** A teacher instructs a particular grade level (e.g., 2nd Grade)
- **Year Two:** The teacher serves as the instructor for the same class (e.g., the teacher also serves as the 3rd Grade instructor)
- **Year Three:** The teacher returns to teaching the original grade level (e.g., 2nd Grade) and the cycle repeats

Source: American Association of School Administrators

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24 Figure contents adapted from: Sawchuk, S. “COVID-19’s Harm to Learning Is Inevitable. How Schools Can Start to Address It.” Education Week, August 19, 2020. https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/08/20/covid-19s-harm-to-learning-is-inevitable-how.html


27 Figure contents adapted from: “In the Loop.” AASA | American Association of School Administrators. https://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=14482
While looping has several potential benefits, such as keeping more students in general education programs and improved attendance, arguably the most important looping benefit is that students and teachers can deepen their connections with one another. Ensuring this continuity of existing relationships is even more critical as a result of COVID-19. Students who have experienced trauma (e.g., COVID-19) benefit from consistency in the classroom environment, classroom procedures, and instruction, as they can be triggered by sudden changes in routine, a lack of structure, or unclear boundaries. Consequently, looping would likely promote a stable and consistent learning environment to assist with long-term learning recovery.

Looping also allows teachers to give students summer work building on the exact content and style of previous academic material. As the same teacher assigns and grades student work with this model, students receive consistent feedback and have fewer ways of avoiding completing summer work. Therefore, when designing summer learning programs, districts should include “looped” teachers in the planning process or, if possible, assign them to teach their students during these sessions.

Additionally, looping serves as a practical, relatively low-cost strategy for districts to promote learning recovery by utilizing teachers’ existing training and skills. Indeed, teachers at some schools conduct instruction across two grades with other teachers for better-differentiated instruction. However, parents and administrators worry about the impacts of a student having an ineffective teacher across multiple years and the impacts of a poor, multi-year student-teacher relationship. Figure 1.5 lists the advantages and disadvantages of looping for and on student achievement.

**Figure 1.5: Advantages and Disadvantages of Looping**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADVANTAGES</th>
<th>DISADVANTAGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Stronger bonds between parents and teachers, teachers and students, and students;</td>
<td>▪ Personality conflicts between students or between teacher and student may be exacerbated;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Greater support for children who need stabilizing influences in their lives;</td>
<td>▪ Students may get an ineffective teacher for multiple years;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ A greater knowledge of students’ strengths and weaknesses, allowing for increased opportunities for teachers to tailor curriculum to individual needs;</td>
<td>▪ Teachers may move, retire, or change professions before the loop cycle is finished;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Increased opportunities for shy students as well as others to develop self-confidence I familiar environments;</td>
<td>▪ Student exposure to new teaching styles is limited;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Reduced anxiety about a new school year; and</td>
<td>▪ New students entering looped classes after the first year are at a disadvantage and may change the classroom dynamics;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ As typical transition periods at the beginning of the second school year are unnecessary, learning time can increase by weeks or months.</td>
<td>▪ After two years, mild separation anxiety may occur between the teacher and students or between students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Education World

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28 Ibid.
29 "Trauma-Informed Teaching Tips for Educators & Traumatized Students." Concordia University. https://education.cu-portland.edu/blog/classroom-resources/trauma-informed-teaching-tips/
33 Figure contents quoted with modifications from: Bafle, C. “In the Loop: Students and Teachers Progressing Together." Education World, May 25, 2009. https://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin120.shtml
**Tutoring**

For students struggling in math and reading, one-on-one high-dosage tutoring (three times weekly, 50 hours per semester) can improve learning outcomes and make up for learning loss. Tutoring effect sizes are the largest of all educational interventions, with a 2016 Harvard study finding the following effects for high-dosage tutoring:

- **Math:** 20 times more effective than low-dosage tutoring
- **Reading:** 15 times more effective than low-dosage tutoring

Types of tutors vary across school districts. Many tutors are off-duty teachers who teach full-time and tutor over the weekend or in the evening. Others are independent retired teachers, college students, or career/industry professionals unaligned with tutoring programs. Still others are part of specific, organized programs such as Reading Recovery, or they can be recent college graduates in programs including AmeriCorps, the Boston MATCH Education program (Match), and the Chicago SAGA Education (SAGA). No matter where tutors come from, in order for tutoring to be most effective, the same individuals must conduct high-dosage tutoring to help students achieve accelerated learning recovery.

**Districts with the financial resources to implement an extensive, high-dosage tutoring program should do so.** While tutoring programs can cost several thousand dollars annually per student, districts can engage in measures to reduce costs through grants (e.g., ESSA funding) or business partnerships. Despite the high cost of tutoring programs, economists show that tutoring is a cost-effective strategy for rapid learning recovery. Governments have recognized the cost-effective impacts of tutoring for promoting learning recovery. For example, as a result of COVID-19, the United Kingdom created a £1 billion National Tutoring Programme fund providing money for tutoring students from low-income and disadvantaged households to close learning gaps and promote learning recovery. Additionally, districts are permitted use of Title I funds for tutorial programs such as Match and SAGA. These programs offer annual stipends to individuals, including recent college graduates, to serve as math tutors and serve as a potential low-cost tutoring alternative for districts.

Initial results from a summer 2020 online tutoring program created due to COVID-19-related school closures at a Milwaukee Public Schools (WI) elementary school found “testing showed participants made, on average, 2½ months’ worth of progress in one summer month” (see profile in Figure 1.6).

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Figure 1.6: Online Summer 2020 Tutorial Program

SPOTLIGHT: ONLINE SUMMER TUTORIAL PROGRAM
RALPH H. METCALFE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (WI)

Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) launched a program earlier this year where African American male mentors worked with Black children to improve their reading. In mid-May, Ralph H. Metcalfe Elementary School enlisted the support of two service organizations, MKE Fellows and Links, Incorporated, to tutor and mentor students to prevent a reading and math backslide over the summer. The program was called the Five Pillars, Metcalfe School Virtual Pilot program. 20 men served as tutors and mentors at Metcalfe, some participating up to five hours a day. The program served up to 34 students from April 23 through May 21 to complete the school year, and 25 students from May 26 through June 29. The use of collegiate tutors who culturally identified with the students allowed for deeper connections and provided them with an alternative perspective. Of the students participating, 87 percent reported to school daily and all completed their reading work at grade level or higher.

Source: Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

INDIVIDUALIZED LEARNING PLANS

Districts can use individualized learning plans to assess and address different learning levels caused by COVID-19 school closures. The Michigan Department of Education outlines several principles districts can use to create individualized learning plans, including developing weekly schedules and ensuring ongoing communication with families (see Figure 1.7). These strategies may help account for the wide range of learning individual students achieved at the end of the 2019-20 school year. Individualized learning plans also allow districts and schools to develop targeted supports for both academic and social-emotional needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students At The Center</td>
<td>▪ Build on the student’s strengths, interests, and needs; and use this knowledge to affect learning positively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Develop a weekly plan and schedule that offers routines and structures for consistency and balancing of think, work, and playtime for health and well-being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Contact families to support student learning through ongoing communication and collaboration. Communication will not look the same for every student and family—safety remains the priority. Provide translations as necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity and Access</td>
<td>▪ Set individual goals for each student using knowledge about them and content area standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Consider how to deliver content depending on tools and resources accessible to each student. Alternative modes of instruction may include the use of online learning, telephone communications, email, virtual instruction, videos, slideshows, project-based learning, use of instructional packets, or a combination to meet student needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Communicate with families about engagement strategies to support students as they access the learning as families are critical partners.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Assess Student Learning** | • Use a variety of strategies to monitor, assess, and provide feedback to students about their learning.  
• Use formative assessment results to guide educators’ reflection on instruction’s effectiveness and determine the next steps for student learning.  
• Communicate with families about assessment results to inform them about any needed next steps. |

Source: Michigan Department of Education⁴¹

SECTION II: ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

In this section, Hanover presents programmatic solutions for recovering learning lost as the result of extended school closures. Summer and after school sessions will be essential programs for districts to plan for and implement over the next several years. We conclude this section with a case study about one district taking a long-term approach.

Where efforts to add learning time by extending the school year, day, or period and instructional strategies to increase learning opportunities during the school day are predicted to be effective, it is likely that many students will need additional time over the summer or after school if they hope to fully recover lost learning. Districts will need to begin planning early for summer and after school sessions that include more students than usual and expect to sustain these programs for years to come.

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

After-school programs are more effective when instruction from the regular school-day is integrated into after-school learning plans. For example, Meriden Public Schools (CT) partnered with the YMCA and the Boys & Girls Club to add 100 minutes of after-school instruction at three schools in the district (see Figure 2.1).46 Students at two of the three participating schools saw test score improvement higher than the district average, encouraging the district to expand the program to more elementary schools.47

Figure 2.1: Blending School-Day Classroom Instruction and After-School Curricula Through Community Partnerships

SPOTLIGHT: BLENDING SCHOOL-DAY CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION AND AFTER-SCHOOL CURRICULA THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

MERIDEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS (CT)

At the three schools, schedules were reengineered to include the Enrichment Block, a 100-minute time period for community partners to staff the classrooms as teachers and provide instruction in Meriden’s three key enrichment areas: STEM, literacy, and healthy living. During the Healthy Living Enrichment Block, for example, Meriden’s Department of Health and the YMCA provided nutritional classes to promote students’ health awareness and physical well-being. The University of Connecticut’s undergraduate students also offered early K-3 literacy programming. Since partners assumed the instructional role during the Enrichment Block, this strategy alleviated some of the pressure on teachers to improve students’ academic outcomes during the traditional school day. It also gave teachers greater freedom and flexibility in their schedules. Utilizing a “best-fit” approach, teachers could choose to instruct from either 7:30am-2:30pm or 8:30am-3:30pm. Depending on the teacher’s schedule, the Enrichment Block was placed at either the beginning or end of the school day.

Source: Meriden Public Schools48

48 Figure contents quoted verbatim with minor modifications from: Ibid.
As districts return to in-person instruction, partnerships with community organizations can assist in ensuring after-school instruction aligns with the regular curriculum. These integrated partnerships also allow teachers to take advantage of additional resources, as the example in Figure 2.2 demonstrates.

**Figure 2.2: Integrated Partnerships**

**SPOTLIGHT: INTEGRATED PARTNERSHIPS**

**OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT (CA)**

Schools in Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), use several strategies to increase collaboration, such as including partner staff in monthly faculty meetings and providing regular opportunities for Extended Learning Time (ELT) staff to meet with teachers. These meetings give ELT and teachers opportunities to learn about current curricular goals and instructional units. In some Oakland schools, ELT staff are further integrated into the regular school day; they provide extra assistance to teachers by mentoring students and conducting pullout sessions for small-group instruction. A study of the implementation of the community schools’ approach in Oakland highlighted one school in which ELT staff and regular teaching staff worked so closely together that the principal no longer referred to ELT as “after-school programming.” In this school, where nearly all of the 6th- and 7th-grade students stay after the traditional school day to participate in coding, dance, and STEM classes, the after-school program is designated as the 8th and 9th periods, indicating that it is incorporated into the regular school schedule. In this way, there exists a seamless integration of all student learning opportunities.

Source: Learning Policy Institute

**ACCELERATION ACADEMIES**

In addition to after-school learning, student participation in acceleration academies has resulted in math and reading improvements. Acceleration academies are “intensive, targeted instructional programs taught over vacation breaks by a carefully selected set of teachers,” In a study of Lawrence Public Schools (MA)’s use of Acceleration Academies, principals selected students based on low Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test scores, their perceived willingness to attend the academies, and their likely classroom behavior. The results were significant improvements in math achievement and more modest improvements in reading achievement. Figure 2.3 details the design of the acceleration academies.

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51 Figure contents quoted verbatim with modifications from: Ibid.
53 Ibid., p. 3.
54 Ibid., p. 7.
55 Ibid., p. 1.
Principals typically used homogenous ability groupings to create classes of 10 to 12 students, with teachers assigned to a single group for the week. Teachers were given substantial flexibility to create their own lesson plans. Academies held over the February vacation focused on ELA. The April Academies focused primarily on math, but also included some classes dedicated to science. The district asked Academy teachers to focus on frequently assessed MCAS standards and provided a list of these standards, sample objectives, and interim assessment data for all of the students in the teacher’s class to identify the standards their students had and had not yet mastered. The daily schedule varied by school, but administrators were told to aim for a total of 25 hours of instruction over the week. Instruction in the core subject was broken up by two “specials” per day, which included theater, visual art, music, sports, technology, and cooking. Students received incentives for perfect attendance, such as $40 gift cards. LPS estimates that this program costs approximately $800 per student per week.

A study of this model found that “district students exposed to the first 2 years of the state’s takeover score about 0.3 standard deviations higher on math exams and about 0.1 standard deviations higher on ELA exams.” However, given the program’s cost and small groupings based on students’ specific academic level, districts should only use acceleration academies for struggling students needing intensive learning interventions.

SCHOOL-BASED SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAMS

Districts must plan summer learning programs to last several years. According to the Learning Policy Institute, "well-designed summer programs are most effective when students experience them for multiple summers.” Further, summer learning programs need to provide engaging and enriching learning experiences for students. Modern iterations of summer school offer programming for students with "wide-ranging interests and needs,” which the Wallace Foundation describes as "summer learning programs." Summer learning programs improve academic outcomes ranging from reading proficiency to GPA. Effective summer learning programs may include educational programming, youth development, and career development. Figure 2.4 describes the contrast between traditional summer school and enriching summer learning programming.

**Figure 2.4: Summer School Vs. Summer Learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUMMER SCHOOL</th>
<th>SUMMER LEARNING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solely include academic instruction</td>
<td>Engage students in recreational and enrichment activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused on remediation and review</td>
<td>Build positive relationships with peers and adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended by low-performing students</td>
<td>Attended by students of varied skill levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently mandatory</td>
<td>Voluntary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half-day</td>
<td>Full-day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Wallace Foundation

56 Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Ibid., p. 7, 21.
61 Figure contents taken verbatim from Ibid., p. 11.
Effective summer learning programs provide structured learning opportunities linked to standards. The district may use district curriculum standards and self-developed standards where appropriate. The National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) describes how organizers of summer programming should establish program standards that “[provide] structure and clear expectations” for program staff and participants. Further, the NSLA states that effective programs outline clear behavioral expectations for program participants and measuring learning outcomes following the program’s conclusion.

The Wallace Foundation adds districts should consider integrating curriculum standards into summer programming, particularly programs that teach academic content. Effective summer learning programs engage students in active learning, provide opportunities for out-of-classroom learning, and offer hands-on activities (see Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5: Features of Effective Summer Learning Activities

| MAKE LEARNING FUN | Successful summer learning programs supplement academic instruction with enrichment activities that are relevant and engaging to children and youth. Some examples include a debate on current events, use of technology, field trips, hip-hop dance, rap and spoken word, improvisational comedy, art, drama, and storytelling. They also include time for sports and recreational activities to offer students a chance to participate in the physical activities they enjoy. |
| GROUND LEARNING IN A REAL-WORLD CONTEXT | Consistent with an accelerated learning approach, academic concepts are best learned when applying them in a real-world context, for example, by teaching students about the difference between deciduous and coniferous trees by taking them on a hike through the forest. |
| INTEGRATE HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES | Didactic lectures may increase knowledge but are not very effective at changing behavior. Interactive forms of instruction such as immersion and experiential learning help to keep students engaged in the material. Engaging children in games, group projects, field trips to historic sites, nature expeditions, and science experiments are all ways in which to make learning more interesting and applied. |
| CONTENT SHOULD COMPLEMENT CURRICULAR STANDARDS | Successful educational programs integrate learning activities that complement what children are learning during the school year. Therefore, academic content is aligned with statewide, grade-level curricular standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics. |

Source: The Wallace Foundation

Summer learning program length will depend on factors including the length of the spring term, fall term preparations, and facility availability. While opinions on the length of effective summer learning programs differ, a 2018 RAND Corporation report recommends a minimum of five weeks. The report also recommends programs provide students with three to four hours of academics daily, including 90 minutes of mathematics and 120 minutes of English Language Arts (ELA) instruction.

PLANNING

Planning for a summer learning program must start early. The RAND Corporation, which has published several reviews of summer learning programs, recommends districts decide to hold a summer program in the fall and begin planning summer learning programs by January at the latest. RAND researchers recommend district leaders involve school site leaders in the planning process but centralize decision-making. Figure 2.6 presents the RAND Corporation’s recommendations for planning a summer learning program.

63 Ibid., pp. 12–17.
64 Figure contents quoted verbatim from: Terzian, Anderson Moore, and Hamilton, Op. cit., p. 17.
CONDUCT EARLY, ROBUST PLANNING

- Commit in the fall to having a summer program.
- Dedicate a director to manage summer program planning who has influence, authority, and committed time.
- Determine which students to target and plan accordingly.
- Consider a cross-departmental planning team.
- Create a calendar that stipulates task deadlines.
- Use meeting time wisely.
- Engage both community-level and site-level staff in the planning process. Planning worked best when a summer program director in the district central office ran the planning and involved site-level leads in some of the decision-making, such as creating site-specific master schedules or conducting site-specific professional development.

PLAN FOR BOTH ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES AND ACADEMICS

Enrichment and district partners should jointly plan staff hiring, training, and curriculum and behavior policies. During the planning phase, establish which organization has ultimate responsibility for overseeing the quality of instruction and managing the instructors.

ENGAGE IN A CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

Plan to administer pre- and post-tests, observe instructors, collect staff views about the summer program, and share evaluation data after the summer ends to improve the program over time and to reinforce community stakeholders’ commitment to retaining the summer program.

Source: RAND Corporation

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Through partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs), districts can provide students with unique out-of-school learning opportunities and potentially secure external funding for the summer program. Indeed, a 2011 RAND Corporation’s review of summer learning programs found that CBO partnerships contribute to program sustainability:

[The review] found benefits from partnerships between school districts and CBOs that included a wider variety of programming options, and more varied funding sources. However, a number of other partnerships may be beneficial, as several types of organizations have an interest in promoting summer learning experiences for youth—districts, CBOs, private summer learning providers, cities, and local funders. Each of these organizations has a set of resources and skills that can help build sustainable summer learning programs. [The RAND Corporation] encourage leaders to consider all local resources and build appropriate partnerships when developing these programs.

Reports on summer learning community partnerships often highlight specific examples of districts’ community partnerships for summer learning. For instance, a few years ago, the Ogden School District (UT) partnered with local community organizations to address student learning loss (see Figure 2.7).

67 Figure contents taken verbatim from: Ibid., p. ix.
In Ogden, Utah, parents and community organizations are central to Ogden United’s mission of creating additional summer learning opportunities. The community school’s initiative is led by a cross-boundary leadership team that includes the mayor, superintendent, school district Full-Service Community Schools leadership team, college and university presidents, the United Way, and prominent parent and community groups. The leadership team reached out to local youth-serving organizations (e.g., the YMCA, United Way of Northern Utah, Boys and Girls Club) to discuss effective summer programs for addressing summer learning loss in the city. Parents also participated in the decision-making process through focus groups and surveys. While the resulting programs have been run by community schools’ staff and partners, parents and community volunteers remain engaged by helping to organize, market, and teach at summer camps. Although the individual programs may have discrete themes and areas of emphasis, each program’s morning schedule typically centers on individualized learning and academic enrichment opportunities for students.

Source: Institute for Educational Leadership

**FUNDING**

Districts can think creatively to identify funding for summer learning programs. The NSLA’s pre-COVID Funding Resource Guide encourages districts to consider how they can use federal and state funding, grant awards, and community sponsors to fund their summer program. The guide lists dozens of potential funding sources available to districts to use for summer learning programs, including federal, state, local, and private funding. The RAND Corporation outlines additional recommendations for districts as they develop the budget for their summer learning program:

- **Design the summer program with costs in mind.**
  - To control fixed costs, avoid assigning small numbers of students to many sites.
  - Use enrichment providers to help leverage additional funds and provide a full-day program.
  - Hire staff to achieve desired student-to-adult ratios based on projected daily attendance, not the initial number of enrollees.

- **Put resources into tracking and boosting attendance.**

- **Use effective cost-accounting practices.**
  - To understand costs per student served, express costs on not just a per-enrollee basis, but also on a per-attendee, per-hour basis.
  - Set up data procedures to enable cost tracking on a per-attendee, per-hour basis.

**STAFFING**

**Effective summer learning programs hire well-trained staff.** Districts need to develop intensive selection processes and criteria for summer learning teachers and, when possible, including prioritizing teachers’ existing relationships with students (see Figure 2.8). Additionally, several studies show that low-student-
teacher ratios and class sizes of 20 or fewer students lead to the most significant improvements in student academic achievement in summer programs.  

**Figure 2.8: Staffing Summer Learning Programs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruit and Hire the District’s Most Highly Effective Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Advertise attractive program features and encourage promising teachers to apply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hire teachers with relevant content knowledge and grade-level experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If possible, hire based on staff motivation and performance rather than seniority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hire experts to support to students with special needs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provide Teachers with Sufficient Professional Development Prior to the Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Familiarize teachers with the summer curriculum and how to teach it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Train teachers to avoid common culprits for classroom instruction time loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emphasize that engaging academic work is a part of summer fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Train teachers to effectively check for student understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Engage all instructional support staff in academic training sessions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: RAND Corporation

**LONG-TERM RECOVERY STRATEGIES**

Experience from prior school closures suggest districts need to develop a long-term strategy to address lost learning beyond the current school year. A 2019 study of the 2009 Australian bushfire found that a disaster may erode learning across multiple academic years. The study analyzed students’ test scores from Grade 1 (the year of the bushfire), Grade 3, and Grade 5. When comparing Grades 3 and 5 results, the authors determined that students attending the most affected schools recorded significantly less reading and math improvement. Similarly, research on learning loss after Hurricane Katrina found it took two years for students to recover academic achievement. This research indicates districts will need long-term strategies beyond the 2020-2021 academic year in order to help students recover from learning lost during COVID-19 school closures.

Some districts have already developed long-term learning recovery plans. In May, the Superintendent of Chesterfield County Public Schools (VA) presented a two-year Recovery of Learning Plan through the end of the 2021-2022 academic year to the school board. The plan includes multiple phases and timelines, beginning with summer 2020. Figure 2.9 details the current and upcoming phases of the district’s learning recovery plan and steps to prepare for a future disruptor event.

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### Figure 2.9: Chesterfield County Public Schools (VA) Recovery of Learning Plan, Fall 2020-Spring 2022 and Future Preparations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME PHASE</th>
<th>PHASE COMPONENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **School Year 2020-2021** | Use multiple diagnostics to assess each student’s learning gaps:  
  ▪ Diagnostic, formative assessments, student work, conferences, parent feedback, etc.  
  ▪ Utilize intentional instructional planning by teachers to create individualized learning plans as needed that maximize our district interventions and services available.  
  ▪ Provide multiple opportunities for learning support without adding stress or pressure (before / after school for example). |
| **Summer 2021** | **Option A:**  
  ▪ Implement our traditional CCPS summer school plan on select school sites  
  ▪ Average enrollment capacity - 8,000 - 10,000  
  ▪ Increase enrollment capacity by adding school sites as learners have needs and interest in participating  
  **Option B:**  
  ▪ Use CCPSOnline for acceleration and remediation course offerings  
  ▪ Continue student access to Chromebooks and online backpack to continue self-paced learning  
  **Option C:**  
  ▪ Based on student / parent demand, offer a newly-designed combination of onsite and online learning for learning recovery, acceleration, or remediation |
| **School Year 2021-2022** | Continuing the CCPS 2020-21 Recovery of Learning Instructional Plan components:  
  ▪ Teachers will be able to access multiple years of previous content via Canvas to review essential knowledge and skills still needed by individual students.  
  ▪ District interventions and services will continue to be adjusted or increased to meet continued surfacing needs.  
  ▪ Before / After-School-Optional recovery learning opportunities will continue. |
| **Pivot Factors to Further Future-Proof Learning** | **Option A:**  
  ▪ Assure all groups, and especially our most vulnerable groups, have basic needs met.  
  ▪ Plan for 100% Technology Access that supports distance learning.  
  ▪ Prepare teachers to navigate confidently from face-to-face instruction to distance learning instruction — ensuring engagement, progression through a high-quality curriculum, and progress monitoring. |

Source: Chesterfield County Public Schools

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OUR SOLUTIONS

ACADEMIC SOLUTIONS

• College & Career Readiness:
  Support on-time student graduation and prepare all students for post-secondary education and careers.

• Program Evaluation:
  Measure program impact to support informed, evidence-based investments in resources that maximize student outcomes and manage costs.

• Safe & Supportive Environments:
  Create an environment that supports the academic, cultural, and social-emotional needs of students, parents, and staff through a comprehensive annual assessment of climate and culture.

ADMINISTRATIVE SOLUTIONS

• Family and Community Engagement:
  Expand and strengthen family and community relationships and identify community partnerships that support student success.

• Talent Recruitment, Retention & Development:
  Attract and retain the best staff through an enhanced understanding of the teacher experience and staff professional development needs.

• Operations Improvement:
  Proactively address changes in demographics, enrollment levels, and community expectations in your budgeting decisions.

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