



## Putting Students First: Strategies to Mitigate the COVID Slide

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### Projected Learning Losses from COVID-19 School Closures Are Significant

Experts are projecting significant learning loss from the COVID-19 school closures and the move to online learning and are urging state officials and policymakers to start planning now to reduce the effects of the COVID Slide.

#### School Closures

With more than [124,000 public and private school buildings](#) in the country experiencing closures, **55 million of the nation's 57 million students are attempting to learn from home.**

#### Students Falling Behind

The Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) released a [report](#) predicting severe learning losses, particularly in math. The organization used past testing data and research on summer learning loss to model the effects of the COVID Slide. Their findings indicate that when students begin the school year in the fall, **they may only retain 70% of learning gains in reading** compared to a normal year and **less than 50% of learning gains in math.** In some grades, students might lose a full year of progress in math.



#### Students from Low Income Families will be Hit Hardest

The academic [impact will be unequal](#) and **outcomes are expected to be worse for students whose families are also experiencing unemployment**, food insecurity, homelessness or lack access to internet and technological devices.

#### Short Term Education Loss Long Term Lifelong Impacts

Our youngest students may face the biggest challenges as they lose critical momentum in developing foundational math and literacy skills as well as social skills. [Research](#) on the effects of teacher strikes in Argentina found that **elementary students who lost 80-90 days of instruction saw a long-term impact** on their educational attainment and career trajectory and had **lower labor market earnings as adults.**

Left unaddressed, the [lasting effects](#) of the COVID slide could impact students and their ability to be productive members of the economy for decades to come. State department officials and policymakers need to consider taking significant, intentional actions to ensure that all students can get back on track. The [NYT Editorial Board](#) called on states to start conversations with parent groups immediately on a “menu of solutions.”

## Potential Strategies to Combat the COVID Slide

Combatting the COVID Slide will require creative solutions to expand instructional time in a period of fiscal strain. States and schools will need to give serious thought to innovative, flexible models of education that are responsive to individual needs and permit students to remediate and accelerate at different paces. The alternative—*education as usual*—will surely leave a great number of students falling further behind.



### 1. Identify Learning Gaps

Diagnostic testing in the fall will be critical in helping educators identify the severity of student learning gaps, decide whether to retain students in their previous grade level, or to develop a targeted remediation plan to quickly catch students up to grade level. **If there are any savings from canceled spring assessments, those dollars could help support diagnostic testing in the fall.**



### 2. Increase Instructional Time

States and districts will need to grapple with how to fund [increased instructional time](#) during the 2020-21 school year, and possibly for school years to follow, even as [state budgets are taking large hits](#). **Adding instructional time could occur by shortening or skipping school breaks, extending the school year, lengthening school days or providing Saturday instruction.**

### 3. Ensure Access to Academic Support

Students and families will need access to supplemental educational services in and out of school.

- States must ensure **schools are well staffed** with educators and specialists to provide personalized or small-group instruction when needed.
- [Public-private partnerships](#) can support **academic enrichment** that occurs through after-school programs, community service, summer programs and more.
- Education experts have recommended an **expansion of a [tutoring corp model](#)** to help meet the demand that will come. Under that model, college students who have lost jobs could help fill some of the need for on-demand tutoring.
- Similar to the CARES Act stimulus checks, **providing educational stipends directly to families in need** would give them maximal flexibility to seek academic support for their students. States can apply for [grant funding from the U.S. Department of Education](#) to do just that.



### 4. Consider Competency-Based Education

**Policymakers and education officials should ensure there are flexible options for students** to master core competencies, stay on track for high school graduation and be college and career ready. This may require increased flexibility from seat-time regulations and a shift to competency-based education models (awarding credits based on demonstrated mastery of knowledge and skills rather than seat time). There are already [numerous examples of innovative competency-based models](#) that allow students to accelerate or remediate at their own pace and promote a focus on acquiring [relevant skills through personalized learning](#).