

WHAT'S WORKING?

Research providing real-time insights into districts' recovery efforts

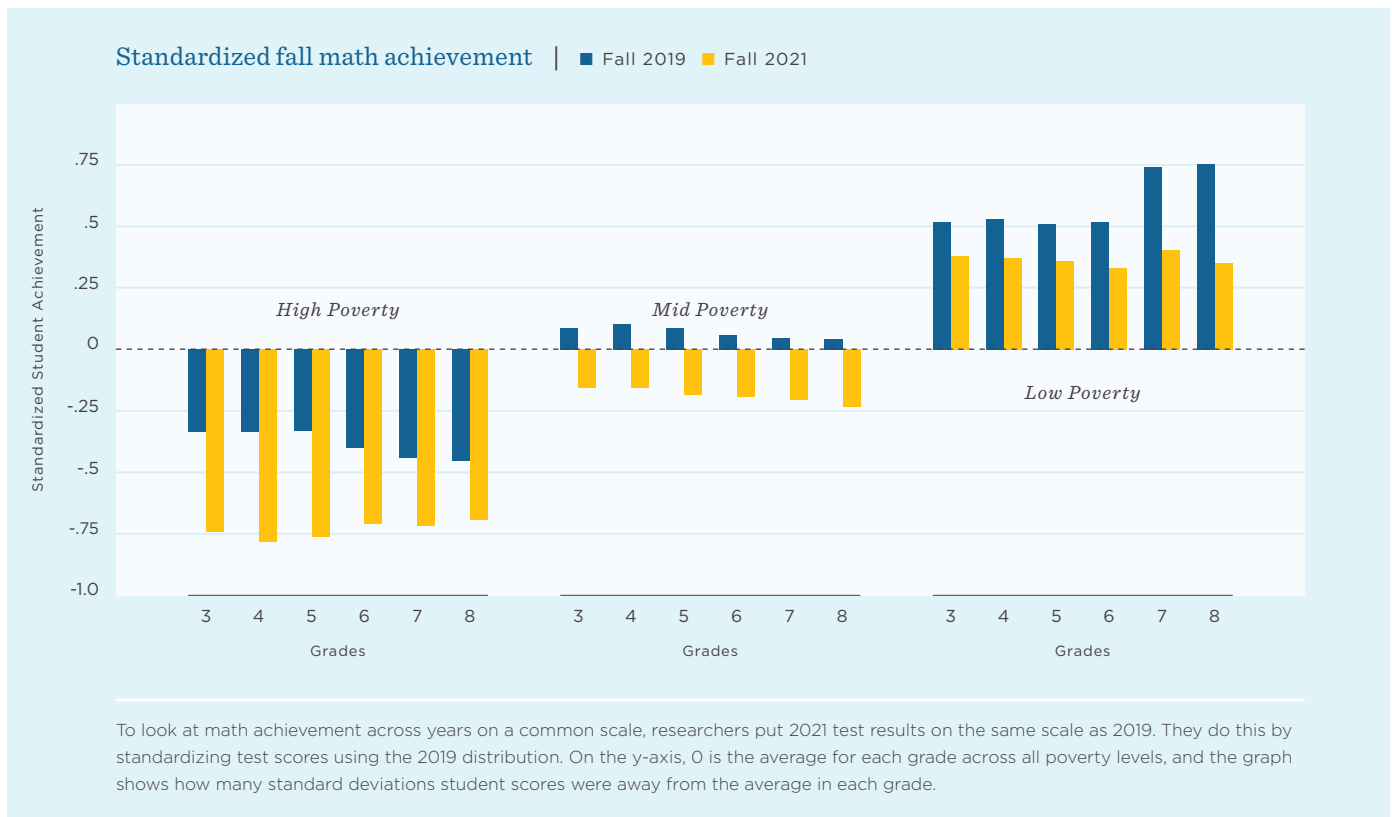
Early insights from a powerhouse research partnership

In response to disrupted learning opportunities associated with the pandemic, [NWEA Research](#) is partnering with [CALDER](#) at the American Institutes for Research, the [Center for Education Policy Research](#) at Harvard, and a coalition of districts to research which academic COVID recovery interventions are improving student outcomes.

The [Road to Recovery \(R2R\)](#) research team plans to report on findings regularly during the project so districts can adjust their strategies as needed. A lot is at stake. The federal government has provided nearly \$200 billion to schools to spend over three years to address challenges associated with the pandemic, with

\$22 billion specifically dedicated to learning recovery using evidence-based interventions. The [U.S. Department of Education](#) has indicated that these funds are to focus on the “disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on underrepresented student subgroups,” as it is now well-established that the pandemic had an overwhelmingly negative effect on student achievement and [exacerbated pre-pandemic inequities](#).

Given the growth in achievement disparities, the historic funding opportunity, and the multi-year timeline of recovery efforts, it's crucial to have timely evidence on what's working, what's not working, and why.



The Road to Recovery (R2R) research

The research team is currently collaborating with a dozen large districts—both urban and suburban—to compare reading and math achievement trends during the pandemic period to pre-pandemic trends. The researchers are studying the impact of academic-related interventions on MAP® Growth™ tests and non-tested measures like attendance and behavior to evaluate program effectiveness.

MAP Growth assessments are typically administered in the fall, winter, and spring, providing researchers and educators with multiple data points throughout the school year. The tests are designed to measure and compare growth over time and across grades.

While districts have rolled out a wide range of initiatives to address the challenges associated with the pandemic, this research project is studying interventions that: (1) add instructional time for students in grades K-8; (2) are new or expanded since the pandemic; (3) are deemed important for students' academic recovery in math, literacy, or both; and (4) are supported by Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds.

The programs the researchers are studying include summer learning initiatives, tutoring, push-in and pull-out interventions, extending the school year, out-of-school time programming, school vacation initiatives, additional instructional blocks, and virtual learning opportunities.

The researchers are also examining how districts are implementing programs. They are looking at eligibility considerations, how students are assigned to and enrolled in programs, who the providers are, student-teacher ratios, when and where students access interventions, the frequency and duration, and the processes for tracking student attendance.

Key goals

Researchers have several big goals for the project. They include:

- + Understanding which recovery strategies and implementation features work best to improve academic outcomes for students.
- + Providing districts with practical, timely feedback, so they can adjust strategies as needed.
- + Informing the field more broadly on the efficacy of recovery efforts, so other districts and policymakers can learn from the findings.

What we know so far

While it's too early to know which interventions are having the biggest impact on student learning, preliminary findings on the impacts of the pandemic, the programs being implemented, and the students targeted for them are detailed in the project's most recent reports. We summarize some of the key findings here.

Pandemic impacts on student learning:

- + Students in the great majority of districts—nearly 90%—experienced losses in math and reading achievement, but some districts fared much better than others.
- + Math achievement was generally more negatively impacted than reading achievement (although that was not true for all districts).
- + There were disproportionate impacts on students in urban centers, high-poverty schools, and Black and Hispanic students.

Recovery efforts generally:

- + Districts are more likely to offer tutoring to students performing below district benchmarks.
- + Leaders are more likely to make extended-year options, intersessions, and additional block time available in low-performing schools.
- + Summer learning opportunities are broadly available, with priority given to historically underserved and academically struggling students.
- + Most states have few requirements regarding the types of interventions districts are implementing and/or which students are targeted.
- + Data collection regarding students' participation in interventions is required by only a few states for specific types of interventions.
- + Districts have varying capacities to collect data on students' eligibility, enrollment, and attendance in their intervention programs.

EARLY RECOMMENDATIONS

FOCUS SPENDING

While districts are only required to spend 20% of ESSER funding on academic recovery, they will likely need to spend much more than that on programs related to core subjects to recover the unfinished learning caused by the pandemic.

EXPAND INSTRUCTIONAL TIME

Additional instructional time should be a central focus of recovery interventions. Quality is key, but can come in different forms and delivery models.

TRACK INTERVENTIONS

To ensure students are getting the services they need, and to assess what's working, districts need to track who is receiving specific interventions at the individual student level.

TRACK ATTENDANCE & ENROLLMENT

Districts also need to track attendance, as well as enrollment, in intervention programs. A RAND Corporation study examining summer learning opportunities found students with high attendance were most likely to benefit from programs offered.

ADOPT TECHNOLOGY TOOLS

Some districts, like Guilford County Schools in North Carolina, have developed or adopted tools, like apps that teachers can download on their phones or laptops, to make it easier to track enrollment and attendance. States should make these tools widely available as resources for districts that have the capacity to implement them.

Stay informed

The research team plans to regularly share updates and findings on the research effort. Keep an eye on the [project website](#), hosted by the CALDER Center, for news. For more information please contact the project leads Dan Goldhaber (dgoldhab@uw.edu), Tom Kane (tom_kane@gse.harvard.edu), Andrew McEachin (andrew.mceachin@nwea.org), and Emily Morton (emily.morton@nwea.org).



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