

February 17, 2021

Governor Philip Murphy
Office of the Governor
225 West State Street
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor Murphy,

As you know, New Jersey was one of the earliest states hit by COVID-19, forcing all schools in our State to be shuttered from mid-March through June 2020. Now, half-way through the 2020-21 school year, some schools in our largest and neediest school districts remain closed, with students receiving only virtual instruction. Initial research from early in the pandemic forecasts staggering learning loss, particularly for low-income students. An analysis by [CREDO](#) found that on average in New Jersey, there were at least 58 days of learning lost in reading and over 174 days lost in math. With long-standing persistent achievement gaps across our state and a lingering digital divide, COVID-19 has the potential to drastically exacerbate the educational inequities in New Jersey for an entire generation of students. We know from your comments in your State of the State Address that you share these concerns.

Given these initial projections of significant learning loss, our groups are highly concerned about widening achievement and opportunity gaps and the long-term impact of this pandemic on students' life outcomes. According to a recent report from [McKinsey](#), these academic, social and emotional gaps will have long-term economic impacts on students, estimating that the average US K-12 student will lose \$61,000 to \$82,000 in lifetime earnings -- an entire years' salary -- due to the learning gaps exacerbated by COVID-19. These estimates are worse for Black and Hispanic students.¹

While we know that our schools and communities are still very much dealing with the on-going crisis of the pandemic, we urge you to consider implementing both short-term and long-term solutions -- which could be funded through existing or anticipated federal stimulus dollars -- for addressing learning loss as soon as possible. ***To that end, we urge you to consider the following recommendations that would accelerate student learning and support the state's most vulnerable students:***

- 1. Robust, high-dosage tutoring for low-income students,**
- 2. Intensive summer programming,**
- 3. Extended school time, and**
- 4. Altering retention policies to increase choice for parents.**

¹ [COVID-19 and student learning in the United States: The hurt could last a lifetime, pg 7](#)

1. Robust, high-dosage tutoring for low-income students

Promising tutoring programs are emerging at the national and state levels that NJ could replicate. Specifically, the “Opportunity and Counseling Corps,” an AmeriCorps type tutoring effort; the [Tennessee Tutoring Corps](#), a stipended opportunity for 1000 college students to engage in tutoring hosted by the Boys and Girls Clubs; and Maryland’s publicly-funded tutoring program through \$100 million in CARES funding.

High-dosage tutoring is a one-on-one relationship between the same trained tutor and the same student or a very small group of students, at least three times a week, or for about 50 hours a semester. High-dosage tutoring has been shown to be successful, particularly for students of color.² On average, the effect sizes (i.e. impact) are among the largest of all interventions seen in education.³ For high-dosage tutoring, teachers quickly diagnose gaps in skills and knowledge and provide tutors with information so the content covered in a tutoring session is relevant and timely. This creates a more intentional tutoring experience and provides the students with an opportunity to develop a relationship with their tutor, which also helps to meet students’ nutrition, social, emotional and mental health needs.

It is our recommendation that the State invest in creating a tutoring corps. This state tutoring corps should focus on serving low-income students first. Funding should be used to support ongoing training and support for tutors, as well as stipends for tutors and public school teachers that participate.

2. Intensive summer programming

Research has shown that students who participate in some high-quality, voluntary, multi-week summer learning programs experience significant academic gains in reading and math that can diminish the effects of learning loss.⁴ While many districts provide summer school programming, additional funding could be used to increase the time used for summer programming (i.e. could expand to a 10-week intensive program from 8AM-4PM). In addition, new public funding could expand the number of students who can participate in summer programming; this could now include students who are showing some early signs of learning gaps.

As an example, in Tennessee, the Tennessee Learning Loss and Remediation and Student Acceleration Act recently passed to create an intensive six-week summer learning mini-camp, an after-school learning “mini camp” that will focus on STEAM, and a learning loss bridge camp that will be a four-week program that occurs annually

² Fryer, Roland G., Jr. and M. Howard-Noveck. (2018) *High-Dosage Tutoring and Reading Achievement: Evidence from New York City*. Journal of Labor Economics.

³ Nickow, A., Oreopoulos, P., & Quan, V. (2020) *The Impressive Effects of Tutoring on PreK-12 Learning: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the Experimental Evidence*. NBER.

⁴ Augustine, C., McCombs, J.S., Pane, J., Schwartz, H., Schweig, J., McEachin, A., & Siler-Evans, K. (2016). *Kids Who Attend More Benefit More: Voluntary Summer Learning Programs*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9924.html

prior to the start of a new school year.⁵ The state will fully fund the learning loss remediation and student acceleration programs for all priority students who enroll and offer additional seats to other students based on availability or additional local funding. Teachers will receive at least \$1,000 a week for staffing the learning loss bridge or summer learning camps, with stipends differentiated based on a variety of performance factors.⁶

It is our recommendation that the State create a grant program for a pilot program for districts, charters and renaissance schools to offer more robust publicly-funded summer school programming with an emphasis on serving low-income students first. Alternatively, if funding is not possible, the State should provide guidance to districts regarding how to use their federal stimulus funding to support more intensive summer programming.

3. Extended school time

In addition to more intensive and widely accessible summer school programs, the State should also consider providing districts, charters, and renaissance schools with the option of extending the school year. This could be done by starting the 2021-2022 earlier in August to make up for lost time for students this year. Clearly, there would be costs associated with starting earlier, as well as employee contract issues. However, if federal funding could be used to offset these costs, a pilot program could be offered to willing districts, charters, and renaissance schools who opt to start the school year earlier.

It is our recommendation that the State identify federal funds to create a pilot program for districts, charters, and renaissance schools that opt to extend or start the school year earlier.

4. Altered retention policies

Currently, according to state statute, N.J.S.A. 18A:35-4.9, decisions regarding pupil retention and promotion are made at the district level. The State should support districts and parents who want to have their students repeat a grade. The State could explore incentivizing this through a pilot program by providing additional funding to support this (again exploring the use of federal stimulus funding), and the State should provide guidance to districts and parents regarding how to assess a students' need to repeat a grade and space considerations.

Given the staggering estimations of learning loss, it is our recommendation that parents should be given the option to request that their child be retained in their current grade if the parent deems it in the best interest of the child for the child's social and emotional and/or academic well being.

⁵ See <http://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/BillInfo/Default.aspx?BillNumber=SB7002>

⁶ See <https://www.columbiadailyherald.com/story/news/2021/01/30/tennessee-legislature-bills-combat-student-learning-loss/4295865001/>

At the end of the day, we are all working towards the same goal—ensuring every student in this state has access to an excellent education that sets them up for success. **We ask for your leadership in enacting research-based, statewide programs geared towards ensuring that students are provided with the academic and social and emotional support needed to get them back on track.** Our students' long-term academic, social-emotional, and economic well-being are at risk. Thank you for your consideration, and we would be happy to discuss these recommendations in more detail with your staff.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kathy Assini, NJ Teacher Leader Policy Fellow & 2014 State Teacher of the Year
Tafshier Cosby, CEO, Parent Impact
Donna Custard, President, New Jersey Chamber of Commerce Foundation
Vivian Cox Frazier, CEO, Urban League of Essex County
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