

**BRIEF**



# LEARNING RECOVERY AND A DIVERSE WORKFORCE

## A Win-Win for Students Hardest Hit by COVID-19

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# Learning Recovery and a Diverse Workforce: A Win-Win for Students Hardest Hit by COVID-19

## The National Comprehensive Center

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### Acknowledgments:

- » Seth Gershenson, Associate Professor of Public Policy in the School of Public Affairs (SPA), American University and Research Fellow at the Institute of Labor Economics (IZA)
- » Erin Lomax, Senior Research Associate, Westat
- » Karla Lewis, Project Manager for State Education Agency Services, Region 6 Comprehensive Center
- » Regina Seabrook, Director of Research, Curriculum, & Professional Development, Equity Alliance Minnesota

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Gershenson, S., and Lomax, E. (2021). *Learning Recovery and a Diverse Workforce: A Win-Win for Students Hardest Hit by COVID-19*. Rockville, MD: National Comprehensive Center at Westat.

The contents of this publication were developed under a grant from the Department of Education. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal government.

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## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced school leaders to make difficult decisions about how to balance students' educational needs with the health, safety, and social-emotional well-being of students and teachers. A little more than 1 year removed from the initial school closures and transition from face-to-face to distance learning models in March 2020, pre-K-12 education leaders continue to grapple with significant challenges. The good news is that there are resources that can be brought to bear for the bold and informed action necessary not only to help students recover but also to prosper. Specifically, the [American Rescue Plan Act of 2021](#) (Rescue Plan) recently enacted by Congress offers unprecedented amounts of potentially transformative funding to elementary and secondary schools. The Rescue Plan has the potential to simultaneously spur post-pandemic learning recovery efforts and address long-standing socio-demographic gaps in academic achievement and opportunity.

This brief is intended to help state and local education leaders consider how to approach this opportunity to meet a persistent problem: the need for more educators of color to serve our students. To do this, we encourage local education agencies (LEAs) to act strategically by leveraging the findings and evidence-based practices (EBP) of two distinct research bases:

1. High-dosage tutoring, extended-day programs, and summer learning programs are effective options for learning recovery (Augustine et al., 2016; ExcellnEd, 2020; McCombs et al., 2011; McCombs et al., 2019; McCombs et al., 2020; Nickow, Oreopoulos & Quan, 2020; Quinn & Polikoff, 2017; Robinson, Kraft, Loeb & Schueler, 2021; Schueler, 2020; Schueler, Goodman & Deming, 2017).
2. Students benefit from exposure to a diverse, representative educator workforce (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019; Gershenson & Papageorge, 2018; Gershenson et al., 2018; Gershenson, Hansen & Lindsay, 2021; Gist, Garcia & Amos, 2021; Redding, 2019).

## Seize the Opportunity

It is no secret that the COVID-19 pandemic has taken an especially heavy toll on Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous communities (Dorn et al., 2020). Learning recovery efforts, whether they occur in the form of in-school tutoring, extended-day (after-school) programs, or academically oriented summer camps, will necessitate strategic and innovative approaches to staffing. While the Rescue Plan brings significant fiscal resources to bear to support learning recovery efforts, these resources need to be spent strategically both to ensure maximum impact and to avoid a fiscal cliff. Strategies such as hiring temporary staff, giving stipends for existing staff, or contracting with organizations can all be part of the mix.

In planning for such strategies, LEAs should make every effort to ensure that that staff is racially and ethnically diverse and representative of the student body they will be serving for at least two reasons. First, diversity and representation are dimensions of workforce quality that schools should



strive for, as the immediate and long-run benefits to students of having a same-race teacher are well documented. Second, these temporary positions can serve as entry points into the teacher workforce, which is woefully unrepresentative of the increasingly diverse student population it serves. This will have long-lasting benefits for students, schools, and society at large. The remainder of the brief provides explicit suggestions and best practices for LEAs to jointly leverage the large evidence bases on both learning recovery and teacher diversity as they decide how and where to spend their Rescue Plan funds.

## The Rescue Plan Can Help

The rescue plan will provide \$122 billion in direct funding to states for elementary and secondary education.<sup>1</sup> States must distribute 90% of the funds to LEAs while the remainder may be reserved for state activities. LEAs must reserve 20% of their funds and states must reserve 5% of their funds for activities that “address learning loss through the implementation of evidence-based interventions, such as summer learning or summer enrichment, extended day, comprehensive afterschool programs, or extended school year programs...” (American Rescue Plan). States must also reserve 1% for summer enrichment and 1% for comprehensive afterschool programs. These reservations may appear inconsequential, but even a small percentage of state allocations from the Recovery Plan represents substantial funding for learning recovery efforts. The overall allocation for states ranges from approximately \$300 million for Wyoming to over \$15 billion for California,<sup>2</sup> which translates into substantial reservations for learning recovery activities.<sup>3</sup>

This act provides LEAs with a great deal of flexibility. Funds can be spent on any educational expense allowed under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, and IDEA, plus a number of specific allowable uses. Included in the allowable uses of the funds are investments to stabilize and diversify the educator workforce and rebuild the educator pipeline (Griffith, M., 2021). Education funds in the Rescue Plan are available until September 30, 2023,<sup>4</sup> giving states and LEAs an opportunity for both quick action and sustained effort. Over the next three to four years, public elementary, middle, and high schools have a unique opportunity to invest in evidence-based approaches to learning recovery that may have been overlooked in the past due to tight budgets. Schools should nevertheless be thoughtful in

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<sup>1</sup> The Rescue Plan provides more than twice as much direct assistance to states than the [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009](#) and more than nine times as much as direct assistance to states than the [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act of 2020](#). The ARRA provided \$39.8 billion to states for the state fiscal stabilization fund (SFSF), an additional \$10 billion for Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and an additional \$11.7 billion for Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The CARES Act provided \$13.2 billion to states for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER).

<sup>2</sup> [Department of Education Announces American Rescue Plan Funds for All 50 States, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia to Help Schools Reopen | U.S. Department of Education.](#)

<sup>3</sup> States would reserve between \$2.1 million and \$105 million for state activities that address learning loss (depending on overall allocation). LEAs are also required to reserve funds, which further supplement state efforts. On the low end, LEAs in a small state must collectively reserve approximately \$54 million for activities that address learning loss, while LEAs in a large state must collectively reserve approximately \$2.7 billion.

<sup>4</sup> Section 422 of the General Education Provisions Act allows an additional fiscal year to use funds from the Recovery Plan.



how and where that money is spent, as the Recovery Plan funds will eventually run out; to avoid running in to a “funding cliff,” program staff should be hired on short-term or temporary contracts.

## Evidence-Based Practices for Learning Recovery

The Rescue Plan identifies several evidence-based practices for learning recovery, including summer learning and enrichment programs, comprehensive afterschool programs, and extended-day or -year programs. One common theme of these interventions is that they create additional learning opportunities for students, over and above those contained in a typical school day or calendar. Another commonality is that they provide students with repeated, personal interactions with educators, whether they be teachers, tutors, mentors, or counselors. The rich research base on these types of interventions can and should inform the selection and implementation of learning recovery efforts. However, so too should the equally compelling research base on the importance of teacher quality—and teacher diversity—for students’ cognitive and socio-emotional development. Whatever new learning recovery programs LEAs choose to implement must be staffed, and program success will be directly tied to the quality—and representativeness—of the staff.

*Tutoring*, for example, is an effective option for learning recovery that generates statistically and educationally significant improvement at all grade levels.<sup>5</sup> One key to a successful tutoring program is having frequent sessions (so called “high-dosage” tutoring). Another is that the tutoring is provided by a dedicated and consistent staff of tutors, be they teachers, paraprofessionals, or volunteers, who have received proper training and ongoing support (Robinson et al., 2021). Why? Trusting relationships, student buy-in, and personalized feedback are some of the reasons that tutoring works... but these are also some of the ways in which good teachers enhance student learning and that students of color experience better educational outcomes when paired with a teacher of the same background. It stands to reason that by hiring a representative set of tutors, we can accelerate learning recovery by reaping the usual benefits of a tutoring program in addition to those generated by exposure to tutors of the same race or ethnicity.

The expansion of extended-learning time programs, like summer programs and afterschool programs, also promotes learning recovery. *Summer programs* typically offer a combination of academic and enrichment activities (Augustine et al., 2013). These programs should be offered for at least five to six weeks during the summer and focus on academic content at least three to four hours per day. Summer programs are less individualized than high-dosage tutoring, but small groups are preferable. Like tutoring, a successful summer program trains and supports a motivated staff of educators who maintain high, grade-level standards. *Afterschool programs* can also accelerate learning recovery efforts. These programs provide an opportunity to incorporate deeper learning by connecting students with content aligned with their cultural backgrounds and lives

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<sup>5</sup> A [2020 meta-analysis](#) of 96 studies on tutoring reported an effect size of 0.37. For reference, an effect size of 0.4 translates into moving a student from the 50th percentile to the 66th percentile. For more information on tutoring and evidence of effectiveness, see [Learning Recovery: How to Develop and Implement Effective Tutoring Programs](#).



outside of school (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). They also provide additional opportunities for exposure to same-race teachers, counselors, and mentors.

Indeed, a wide body of evidence shows that students, particularly students of color, benefit from even a single exposure to a teacher, mentor, role model, or recitation leader of the same race or ethnicity (Gershenson et al. 2021). The benefits of learning from someone who looks like you are pervasive: they occur at every level of schooling, from kindergarten through law school—so they are likely present in after-school and summer programs as well. And exposure to same-race educators improves a variety of outcomes ranging from attendance and behavior, performance on standardized tests, and course grades. Importantly, these effects persist over time and ultimately increase students' likelihood of completing high school and enrolling in college.

Some combination of three teacher behaviors likely explain these benefits of exposure to a representative teaching force: cultural competence that leads to trusting relationships with students and parents, holding and displaying high expectations for students, and serving as role models. These channels resemble many of the reasons that tutoring programs and the other learning recovery strategies targeted by the Rescue Plan are effective. Thus, the diversity and representativeness of the learning recovery workforce is an important dimension of quality to consider, as students will benefit from exposure to same-race tutors, as will students of all backgrounds students from seeing a diverse array of people in tutoring and teaching positions.

### Best Practices for Tutoring Programs

- » *Frequency.* Tutoring is most likely to be effective when delivered in high doses with three or more sessions per week or intensive individual or small-group programs.
- » *Personnel.* A wide variety of tutors (including volunteers and college students) can successfully improve student outcomes, if they receive adequate training and ongoing support.
- » *Measurement.* Tutoring programs that support data use and ongoing informal assessments allow tutors to more effectively target instruction for individual students.
- » *Curriculum.* Using high-quality instructional materials that are aligned with classroom content allows tutors to reinforce and support teachers' classroom instruction.
- » *Delivery Mode.* Most research has focused on in-person tutoring, but there is emerging evidence that tutoring can be effective when delivered at a distance.
- » *Group Size.* Tutors can effectively instruct up to three or four students at a time. One-to-one tutoring is likely most effective but also more costly.
- » *Focus.* Researchers have found tutoring to be effective at all grade levels—even for high school students who have fallen quite far behind.
- » *Relationships.* Ensuring students have a consistent tutor over time may facilitate positive tutor-student relationships and a stronger understanding of students' learning needs.
- » *Scheduling.* Tutoring interventions that are conducted during the school day tend to result in greater learning gains than those that are after-school or during the summer.
- » *Prioritization.* Programs that target lower-performing students can support those students who most need personalized instruction but can also create a negative stigma where tutoring is perceived as a punishment. Programs that target all students in a lower-performing grade level or school benefit from broader organizational commitment and the perception that tutoring is for everyone but are more costly.

SOURCE: EdResearch for Recovery: Accelerating student learning with high-dosage tutoring.

We would be remiss not to mention two additional benefits here as well, which make efforts to recruit a diverse and representative learning recovery workforce a “win-win” proposition: first, tutoring, after-school, and summer-program jobs can operate as entry points into teaching, which can help to diversify the teacher pipeline and ultimately lead to a truly representative teaching force. Second, because the employment effects of the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately harmed people of color, these efforts would boost employment among the demographics most harmed by the recession (Lee et al., 2021; Montenegro et al., 2020).

The bottom line is that schools are going to need more *people* who are willing to (1) undergo training to work in these learning recovery programs, (2) be available consistently, and (3) develop strong, trusting relationships with students to truly understand students’ social, emotional, and academic needs. The increased demand for quality tutors, educators, and counselors means that schools must be creative and strategic in identifying and recruiting talent. There are valuable lessons to be learned here from efforts to diversify the teacher labor force. Moreover, leveraging insights from decades of research on the benefits of a representative teaching force when hiring and training tutors will not only result in a larger and more effective tutor workforce, but potentially diversify the teacher pipeline and lead to a more diverse teaching force down the road, effectively operating as a “two for one” program.

## Best Practices for Hiring

To recruit a representative set of tutors, educators, and counselors schools should cast a wide net and look to recent graduates of the LEAs’ high schools and local colleges and universities. During the interview and hiring process, how an individual will contribute to the diversity and representativeness of the workforce should be considered as an observable measure of quality, alongside traditional measures such as experience and educational credentials. Finally, the interview process could be altered in ways that increase the diversity of the interview pool itself, which tends to lead to a more diverse set of new hires; for example, a simple change is to mandate that the pool includes some minimal threshold of people of color. Together, these actions will likely lead to a more representative, and higher quality, learning recovery workforce that will improve the educational achievement of all public school students, while providing the added bonus of potentially increasing the diversity of the teacher pipeline by lowering the “teacher career ladder” to the tutor and paraprofessional ranks.

## Conclusion

Congress responded to the challenges faced by schools during the COVID-19 pandemic by enacting the American Rescue Plan, which provides unprecedented, potentially transformative funding to public schools. How that money is spent is crucial to ensuring that students whose education was disrupted by the pandemic are able to recover and reach their full potential. This resource makes the case for using those funds to ramp up high-dosage tutoring programs, after-school programs, and academically-oriented summer programs and discusses best practices for doing so. Besides



being evidence-based, effective learning-recovery interventions, they can also be leveraged as entry points into the teaching profession, which can help to diversify the teacher pipeline, relieve teacher shortages, and create jobs more generally. In this sense, states and LEAs that use Rescue Plan funds to deliver various learning recovery programs have the potential to fulfill two objectives in one fell swoop: facilitate learning recovery and diversify and replenish the teacher pipeline. This presents a rare “win-win” situation in education policy, as many states and LEA’s are currently struggling to diversify their educator workforces. We should seize this opportunity to address two policy objectives—learning recovery and teacher diversity—with a single, uncontroversial, and funded intervention.

This opportunity arises because whatever type of programming Rescue Plan funds are spent on will likely involve some amount of either recruiting and training new staff or increasing the workload of existing school staff to cover after-school or summer hours. Whether schools are hiring tutors, summer-school teachers, or after-school program mentors, they should be strategic in doing so. Specifically, districts and schools should be intentional about recruiting a racially and ethnically diverse learning recovery workforce that is representative of the student body they will serve. In so doing, they can bolster support for many students hardest hit by the pandemic.



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## Appendix A. Additional Information

Here we provide links to resources that can provide more information to help answer questions you may have about workforce diversity and student success, summer and extended learning, and tutoring programs.

Need	Resources
I need access to research on impact of <b>teacher diversity on student success</b>	<a href="#">Teacher Diversity and Student Success: Why Racial Composition in the Classroom Matters</a> <a href="#">The Importance of a Diverse Teaching Force</a> <a href="#">The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers</a>
I need best practices for <b>extended learning time</b> .	<a href="#">Structuring Out-of-School Time to Improve Academic Achievement</a>
I need best practices for expanding <b>afterschool</b> programs.	<a href="#">Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond</a>
I need evidence of effectiveness of <b>summer learning</b> programs.	<a href="#">Learning from Summer: Effects of Voluntary Summer Learning Programs on Low-Income Urban Youth</a> <a href="#">Every Summer Counts: A Longitudinal Analysis of Outcomes from the National Summer Learning Project</a> <a href="#">Investing in Successful Summer Programs: A Review of Evidence Under the Every Student Succeeds Act</a> <a href="#">Making Summer Count</a> <a href="#">Summer Learning Loss</a>
I need best practices for developing <b>summer learning</b> programs.	<a href="#">Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond</a> <a href="#">A Summer Like No Other: Lessons from the Field During COVID 19</a> <a href="#">Summer Learning Planning Resources and Toolkit</a> <a href="#">Summer Learning Toolkit Resources</a> <a href="#">Getting to Work on Summer Learning: Recommended Practices for Success, 2nd Ed.</a> <a href="#">Getting Support for Summer Learning: How Federal, State, City, and District Policies Affect Summer Learning Programs</a> <a href="#">Making Summer Count: How Summer Programs Can Boost Children's Learning</a> <a href="#">Preventing Summer Learning Loss</a>
I need information on how to bring <b>summer learning</b> programs to scale.	<a href="#">Getting Support for Summer Learning: How Federal, State, City, and District Policies Affect Summer Learning Programs</a> <a href="#">Supporting Summer Programs: Navigating Federal, State, and Local Program Support Opportunities</a>



Need	Resources
I need to understand the costs of <b>summer learning</b> programs.	<a href="#">Making Summer Count</a>
I need to understand what federal funding is available for <b>summer learning</b> programs.	<a href="#">Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond</a>
I need general information on <b>vacation academies</b> .	<a href="#">Summer “Vacation Academies” Can Narrow Coronavirus Learning Gaps</a>
I need to know evidence of effectiveness of <b>vacation academies</b> .	<a href="#">Can States Take Over and Turn Around School Districts?</a> <a href="#">Making the Most of School Vacation: A Field Experiment of Small Group Math Instruction</a>
I need best practices to <b>develop a tutoring program</b> .	<a href="#">Accelerating Student Learning with High-Dosage Tutoring</a> <a href="#">Leveraging Tutors to Stem Learning Loss</a>
I need <b>examples of tutoring programs</b> currently in use.	<a href="#">Accelerating Student Learning with High-Dosage Tutoring</a> <a href="#">Five Ways Schools Hope to Fight COVID Learning Loss</a>
I need <b>evidence of the effectiveness</b> of tutoring programs.	<a href="#">Accelerating Student Learning with High-Dosage Tutoring</a> <a href="#">Leveraging Tutors to Stem Learning Loss</a>
I need to <b>take a tutoring program</b> to scale in my district or state.	<a href="#">A Blueprint for Scaling Tutoring Across Public Schools</a>
I need to understand the <b>costs of tutoring programs</b> .	<a href="#">COVID 19 and Learning Loss</a> <a href="#">A Blueprint for Scaling Tutoring Across Public Schools</a>

