# LEVERAGING TUTORS TO STEM LEARNING LOSS
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## INTRODUCTION

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 1.5 billion children around the world were displaced from their brick and mortar classrooms. In response, some school districts were able to seamlessly transition to remote learning, while others were hindered by a lack of digital devices and broadband Internet access for their students. Resulting in that some students were able to receive some form of instruction while others received little to none. A NWEA report suggests "students will return in fall 2020 with roughly 70% of the learning gains in reading relative to a typical year." Students are projected to return with only 50% of the learning gains in mathematics.

Learning loss during the Spring of 2020 could also have a long-term impact on the lifetime earnings of students. A recent McKinsey & Company analysis found that "the average K-12 student in the United States could lose $61,000 to $82,000 in lifetime earnings." Considering the academic and economic consequences of COVID-19, states should consider acting decisively to support student success. One potential method of doing so is providing tutors for students.

## TRADITIONAL TUTORING PROGRAMS AND DISTRICT COLLABORATION

Shortly after schools closed, many parents paid tutors to fill the void that schools left. Recent reports from several tutoring companies reflect this surge in demand. For example, bookings for Varsity Tutors, a private tutoring firm, were up by 40% in April 2020 compared to the previous year. Outschool, a virtual platform that connects K-12 students with live teachers, doubled its enrollment during the pandemic to over 160,000 students. Juni Learning, a STEM-based online tutoring platform was adding over 100 new students per week in February.

Although these programs are providing much needed support to students, they are expensive and out of reach for most families. For example, Varsity Tutors charges between $50-75 per hour for some of its programs. Recognizing that many families cannot afford those prices, some school districts are working to solve that issue. Los Angeles Unified, the nation's second largest school district, is partnering with Step Up Tutoring to provide free, one-on-one tutoring for 500 students throughout the district.

Districts that create such partnerships should keep quality top of mind. Although tutoring can produce significant results for students, all programs are not created equal. As states consider providing students with tutors, any program created should reflect some, if not all, of the key characteristics of a high-quality tutoring program. Research suggests that a high-quality tutoring program should:

- Complement the curriculum used to instruct students
- Be integrated within the existing school day
- Provide on-going assessment of and feedback to the tutors
- Utilize highly selective tutors and/or recent college graduates

## WHY TUTORS, WHY NOW?

Though a number of interventions aimed at boosting student performance exist, tutoring holds significant promise for students. According to a recent study, students who received daily, individualized tutoring saw improvements on an 10th grade English language arts exam that were equivalent to a full year's worth of instruction. Another study reported that students who received tutoring outperformed peers who did not receive tutoring by 200 percent on the same state assessment. The University of Chicago's Urban Education Lab study on intensive tutoring shows that "the program's benefits were equivalent to closing nearly two-thirds of the average gap in math test scores between white and black students—the equivalent of what the average American high school

students learns in math over three years." In short, tutoring works, and states have an opportunity to act boldly. States could stem the projected student learning loss due to COVID-19 school closures by providing individualized instruction, via tutoring, for the most affected students.

Tutoring also benefits the economy. Recent college graduates are facing a very difficult labor market, with unemployment rates in some states as high as 16.1 percent. States could train a cadre of college-educated, high impact tutors, who would give a year of service in exchange for a stipend or small salary to help meet living expenses.

The recently launched Tennessee Tutoring Corps provides an example how states can address learning loss by providing tutors while also creating an economic opportunity for recent college graduates facing a difficult job market. The Tennessee Tutoring Corps, founded by the Bill and Crissy Haslam Foundation, recruited 1,000 qualified recent college graduates and paid them a stipend of $1,000 to work with children throughout Tennessee during the Summer of 2020. States can learn from these philanthropists and the well-documented research on tutoring as they considering creating their own tutoring corps. With an infusion of federal funds, states could emulate the Tennessee tutor corps to help the students who need the most support, statewide.

## RECOMMENDATION FOR STATES

With the 2020-2021 school year underway, states and districts leaders should consider acting with urgency to establish a program that provides tutors for students who experienced the greatest learning loss during the school closures of Spring 2020.

### Leverage current and future stimulus funds

Following the Tennessee Tutoring Corps model, states could utilize any future federal stimulus package or unused GEER funds to finance their own tutor corps. For example, a state with $15 million of GEER funds could theoretically provide 15,000 tutors for its students statewide.

### Identify eligible students

During implementation, states can first prioritize students who are eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch as well as those who are performing below grade level on diagnostic assessments.

### Partner with existing online organizations

States can partner with Schoolhouse.world and Saga Education that already have the technical infrastructure and expertise to train tutors rapidly and monitor their progress.

### Develop and Compensate College Graduates

States should consider using research-based criteria to identify, train, and develop college graduates who want to become tutors and should require that contracted partners do the same. Baseline criteria can include passing a criminal background check or possessing a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution of higher learning. States can contract with tutors to provide a minimum number of hours per week in exchange for a pre-determined stipend or salary. States may also consider leveraging loan-forgiveness programs.