



SchoolStatus



USING TECHNOLOGY TO IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS LEARNING LOSS IN K-12 SCHOOLS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every summer and fall, the news cycle is littered with stories about summer learning loss. This is because many students, especially those from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, begin each school year performing at achievement levels that are below what they were before the start of summer break. In education, we refer to this as summer learning loss or the summer slide.

School districts need to address the phenomenon of summer learning loss because it widens achievement gaps and wastes the academic progress students achieved during the school year. Also, it sharply increases the time that teachers spend teaching the previous school year's curriculum, just to get students ready to learn the current year's curriculum. Although we think of this phenomenon as a relatively recent event, the truth is that it has been a topic of interest for education researchers as far back as 1906 (Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, & Greathouse, 1996, p. 234).

To further exacerbate summer learning loss, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted traditional learning environments and left K-12 schools with a dilemma. How do we identify and address summer learning loss while simultaneously dealing with COVID-19 learning loss? In response to the unprecedented loss of learning time in 2020 and 2021, new technologies will need to be created and adopted to pinpoint and fill in student learning gaps.

In this whitepaper, we will discuss summer learning loss, COVID-19 learning loss, and how technology can be used as a cost-effective and strategic way to identify and address the learning gaps caused by it.

WHAT IS LEARNING LOSS?

Before we move on, let's define and discuss summer learning loss and COVID-19 learning loss. Summer learning loss is the loss of knowledge and skills during summer vacation. This happens mainly because students don't practice the skills they learned during the school year during the summer (Polikoff, 2017). It only takes 2-3 hours of academic instruction per week to prevent learning loss over the summer. Summer learning loss is just a case of "use it or lose it."

COVID-19 learning loss refers to the stagnation and reversal of academic progress stemming from school closures caused by the coronavirus disease. Many students have gone months without access to quality and/or structured instruction (Reilly, 2020). Even those with access to quality and/or structured instruction via remote or in-person learning struggle to succeed academically under the new normal. What makes COVID-19 learning loss so scary is the fear of how it can potentially work to exacerbate summer learning loss. With a surge in new cases of COVID-19 and a shortage of the vaccine, the pandemic will likely keep many students out of the classroom until well into 2022.

RESEARCH ON LEARNING LOSS

According to a summer learning loss study, on average, students' academic progress over summer vacation decreases by one month's worth of classroom learning. These declines were higher for math than for reading, and the magnitude of learning loss was more significant at higher grade levels. Most notably, they found that income-based reading gaps increased during the summer months, given that middle-class students usually made gains in reading skills, while lower-income students tended to experience learning loss (Cooper et al., 1996, p. 234).

Researchers on COVID-19 learning loss predict that the learning loss during the 2020-2021 school year could be substantial, especially in mathematics—with students projected to lose five to nine months of learning on average by the end of the 2020-2021 school year. Students of color and other disenfranchised groups could be six to twelve months behind, juxtaposed with four to eight months for white students. While all students have been disadvantaged by COVID-19, those who came into the pandemic with the worst academic opportunities are on track to have the most significant learning loss when its all said and done (Dorn, Hancock, Sarakatsannis, & Viruleg, 2020)

RESPONDING TO LEARNING LOSS

The overall response to summer learning loss has been the establishment of summer school programs. A meta-analysis by Kim & Quinn of 41 reading programs from 35 studies found that summer reading programs raised test scores. On average, they found that low-income, disadvantaged students reaped the most benefit from summer reading programs. Their conclusion was that low-income students showed more academic progress than higher-income students because they were more likely to suffer from summer learning loss when not exposed to high-quality learning activities in summer programs (Kim & Quinn, 2013, p. 387).

With many school districts unlikely to resume business as usual any time soon, the blended learning model seems to be the prevailing response to COVID-19 learning loss (Cavanaugh, 2020). This means that some students attend school face to face, and some attend remotely. When it comes to remote learning, many school districts are experimenting with what instructional practices make the remote experience conducive to learning. In addition to technology and live teaching, students need a daily schedule that builds opportunities for engagement, collaboration, and feedback. School district leaders should also empower teachers with opportunities to share best practices for teaching and learning.

When it comes to summer and COVID-19 learning loss, school districts should have a more holistic perspective on their role in students' academic progress. How can they accomplish this? By reimagining how they leverage technology, curricula, and support systems to go beyond the norm and then a million miles past that. They can accomplish this with a renewed investment in early childhood, which will give students the foundation needed to be successful for the duration of their academic careers. Here is another radical idea - integrating healthcare, social services, and education programs to help children be prepared for school socioemotionally and cognitively.

We can also ensure that every student has access to an outstanding teacher, instructional materials, technology, internet access, personalized and blended learning, etc. Let's make significant investments in teacher education programs, making them state of the art. When it comes to all educators, let's pay them on par with doctors and lawyers so that they don't have to work a second or third job to survive. Schools give students so much

more than just knowledge and skills. The pandemic has revealed that schools provide many students with nutrition, emotional support, a safe space, etc.

Now, let's get back to the reality of now. Because of summer and COVID-19 learning loss, many of our students are woefully behind academically, and we must do everything within our power to make them whole. We know what needs to be done, and now, we must have the grit and endurance to do it. School districts should create acceleration plans based on evidence-based strategies, and they should leverage technology to identify and address learning loss. We must support our students, especially the disadvantaged ones, with more time and attention while still managing to expose them to grade-level learning. Our efforts can not be shots in the dark; they must be strategic and personalized for the students who need the most help.

HOW CAN TECHNOLOGY HELP SCHOOLS IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS LEARNING LOSS?

Tackling learning loss is a number one priority for district leaders. To address the individual needs of students who are experiencing learning loss, teachers must have real-time data on student progress, and parents must become engaged and involved to help students meet rigorous academic standards.

How can district leaders leverage technology to identify and address learning loss? With SchoolStatus, a unique solution that aggregates a district's student data, such as state assessments, benchmarks, attendance, behavioral infractions, and classroom grades, in a format that is easy to visualize. It then makes the data easily accessible to teachers and district leaders, and it pairs with communication tools to facilitate sharing actionable information with parents via call, text, and email (SchoolStatus, n.d.).

As a district leader, you know when learning loss has occurred. You also have ideas about the types of interventions, accommodations, and modifications that must be employed to address this issue. However, the greatest challenge to tackling learning loss is identifying who is at risk. SchoolStatus helps educators to identify students who are at risk for or are currently experiencing learning loss and partner with their families to address the learning loss immediately. Let's discuss some of the specific tools that SchoolStatus uses to help teachers and district leaders identify and address learning loss.

To make data-driven decisions in this day and age, you need all the data you can get. SchoolStatus understands this, and so it integrates all data points from multiple data silos, into one place to identify gaps in student progress and achievement. It goes a step further by giving district leaders access to real-time data like absences, infractions, low/failing grades, and socioeconomic factors. With this information, you can identify students who need intervention and tackle learning loss. If you can't find the data dashboard that you need, SchoolStatus will build a custom data dashboard just for your district.

If you would like to compare current and past data to measure the total amount of learning loss or academic progress, SchoolStatus can help you with this. You can also disaggregate the data so you can see how students from subgroups are performing. For instance, If you want to do a deep data dive to see how students in traditionally disadvantaged subgroups, such as African American males, or special education students, are faring academically, you can. Tracking these students' performance over time can help you implement interventions before learning loss or academic failure occurs. Another way to tackle learning loss would be tracking the performance of students in remote learning. You can identify students whose academic progress has been slipping since the onset of remote learning and partner with their parents to move them back to face-to-face learning.

I would be remiss if I did not discuss that tackling learning loss begins with giving parents consistent updates on their child's academic progress. Research confirms that when parents are engaged, students garner higher GPAs, have better behavior and social skills, and graduate on time. SchoolStatus streamlines your communication for productive relationships between school and home. This gives educators the ability to identify and address learning loss with their parent partners, leading to positive student outcomes and school climates. With SchoolStatus, you can build parent engagement through 1 to 1, data-informed conversations and begin to close the gap on learning loss immediately.

SchoolStatus allows district leaders to See the Whole Student. They believe that a holistic understanding of each student is essential for tackling learning loss. SchoolStatus makes kids who ordinarily would have flown under the radar visible. Trust me, if your district chooses SchoolStatus to manage data analytics and parent communication, you will be able to close the gap on learning loss in no time.

SCHOOLSTATUS IS ELIGIBLE FOR ESSER I AND II FUNDING

The CARES Act ESSER I and ESSER II Funding aims to help K-12 schools "rethink the way students access education." Federal funding via the Coronavirus Relief Fund is designed to make learning accessible to students with disabilities, at-risk populations, etc. (ESSER, n.d.).

As a result, school districts can use ESSER and ESSER II funds to pay for SchoolStatus, as it focuses on mitigating learning loss for disadvantaged populations. Technology, apps, tools, and even assistive technology were explicitly written into the funding guidance and are viewed as a means to provide better access to the curriculum for populations who have been disproportionately affected by school closures.

CONCLUSION

To identify and address learning loss, the apps and tools that school districts deploy must come with robust features and possess flexibility. SchoolStatus certainly fits this description, as it allows teachers to leverage data analytics to promote positive student outcomes and use communication tools to share actionable information with parents. School districts will love the fact that SchoolStatus comes with a small price tag and is scalable. Also, since it mitigates learning loss, school districts can use their ESSER and ESSER II funds to pay for it.

If you are searching for a data or communications platform to help you identify and address learning loss in these difficult times, SchoolStatus is the best choice. It checks all of the proverbial boxes, solves all of the issues associated with data analytics and parent communication, and all of your stakeholders will enjoy using it. By leveraging SchoolStatus to identify and address summer learning loss, you are well on your way to producing positive student outcomes.

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