



July 25, 2022

To: House Public Education Committee

Re: Interim Charge #2, Effects of COVID-19 on K-12 learning loss and best practices that exist to address learning loss

Chairman Dutton and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on one of the most important issues facing our students and the future of our state: Following more than two years of unprecedented disruptions during the pandemic, how will we support long-term learning recovery for all students while closing gaps for those furthest behind?

With the release of statewide results from the 2022 administration of STAAR, we can now begin to better understand what's working, what needs improvement, and how schools are serving students. Thanks to the dedication, hard work, and resiliency of educators, families and students across Texas, there is good news, especially in Reading where all student groups surpassed pre-pandemic levels of proficiency.

As you chart a path forward, please guard against complacency and refuse to accept pre-pandemic reality as the goal for our schools or the ceiling for our students. For Texas students from low-income backgrounds, 41% are on grade level in Reading and 30% in Math; only 25% of Black students are on grade level in Math, and gaps of at least 25% in all subjects persist across income and race/ethnicity.¹

Now is the time to focus resources – time, talent, and money – on developing mastery for students furthest behind in critical subject areas using research-backed strategies. During the last session, Ed Trust presented two strategies to give students the opportunities and supports they need to complete unfinished learning: targeted intensive tutoring and expanded learning time.

At its most effective, targeted intensive tutoring can double the amount of learning students typically gain during the school year. The research is clear that two students per tutor is the most efficient and effective way to accelerate learning, and that no more than four students should be placed with a tutor at a time.² In short, **ratios matter.**

Research also indicates programs providing 44 to 100 hours of additional instruction have an impact on student learning.³ The most effective tutoring interventions involve three or more sessions per week of

¹ 2022 STAAR Results Summary, July 2022: <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/2022-staar-results-summary.pdf>

² Strategies to Solve Unfinished Learning: Targeted Intensive Tutoring, The Education Trust and MDRC: <https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Targeted-Intensive-Tutoring-as-a-Strategy-to-Solve-Unfinished-Learning-March-2021.pdf>

³ Strategies to Solve Unfinished Learning: Expanded Learning Time, The Education Trust and MDRC: <https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Expanded-Learning-Time-as-a-Strategy-to-Solve-Unfinished-Learning-March-2021.pdf>



30-60 minutes each. Studies have found little evidence that once-a-week tutoring is sufficient to generate meaningful gains.⁴ In other words, **additional time matters.**

Even before the full scale and extent of students' unfinished learning was evident, the 87th Legislature followed this research and took bold action to incorporate these strategies into HB 4545. Faced with historical data showing that only 7% of students who are below grade level catch up within two years, it was clear that new policy solutions were needed. Remediation hasn't proven effective, nor has grade retention. Importantly, HB 4545 also sought to protect students' access to enrichment, recess, and physical activity.

While it is always necessary to balance what the evidence says is most effective with what is feasible, our schools are not without significant - albeit temporary - financial resources to implement evidence-based strategies. **Texas school systems were allocated more than \$11.1 billion in federal ESSER III funds, including \$2.2 billion dedicated to address unfinished learning; and TEA was allocated another \$1.2 billion, \$620 million of which was to be directed for the same purpose.**

It is also worth noting two other evidence-based strategies funded by the state as part of HB 3 that are aligned to HB 4545. While additional flexibilities may be needed to expand to more campuses, the **Additional Days School Year allotment has already incentivized extended learning time and has been adopted by nearly 100 school systems.** In Dallas ISD, 82% of participating students feel more prepared for school work and 84% report stronger relationships with adults in their school; teachers are also benefiting from more planning and collaboration time and opportunities for small group instruction.⁵

And the **Teacher Incentive Allotment, now with the participation of 241 school systems, is encouraging more experienced and highly-effective educators to work in schools most impacted by unfinished learning - an alternative strategy to accelerate learning written into HB 4545.** School systems should evaluate how teachers are assigned across campuses and to courses within schools to ensure students who are behind are accessing high-quality instruction in their grade-level and instructional support classes.

Of course, knowing what works is a long way from executing what works, especially under extremely challenging circumstances. Because our students' time is of the essence, we must maintain urgency while acknowledging that it takes continued time, focus, and resources to build the infrastructure and capacity required to implement with fidelity.

As Texas continues to address unfinished learning and close gaps, I ask you to please consider the following:

⁴ Accelerating Student Learning with High-Dosage Tutoring," Ed Research for Recovery:

https://annenberg.brown.edu/sites/default/files/EdResearch_for_Recovery_Design_Principles_1.pdf

⁵ Dallas ISD Superintendent's Report, February 3, 2022: <https://www.erstrategies.org/cms/files/5126-dallas-superintendent-report.pdf>



1. TEA has offered a variety of different implementation supports to school systems, including technical assistance to help design and launch tutoring programs of their own, access to high-quality instructional materials and training, vetted tutoring providers, and additional grant funding. **Robust feedback and data, including instructional schedules, student attendance and growth on interim assessment measures, are needed** to better understand what supports are working and to respond to what school systems need to continue quality implementation of HB 4545.
2. School systems cannot rely exclusively on their existing teacher workforce to serve as tutors. While the research tells us that a certified teacher is most effective, **others including paraprofessionals, those exploring or already enrolled in teacher preparation programs, and volunteers - can effectively deliver instructional support but only with high-quality support, training, materials, and the low ratios reflected in HB 4545.** As Texas seeks to bolster and diversify its teacher pipeline, structured and supportive tutoring experiences should serve as a key recruiting and apprenticeship strategy.
3. Every school system may look different, but each has assets in its local community - nonprofit and faith-based organizations, civic and business groups, alumni associations, as well as networks of families and parents. These **community-based assets possess a key yet often undervalued ingredient to accelerating learning: strong relationships with students.** School systems should not miss this opportunity to leverage these partners by investing in their capacity to support our students through high-impact tutoring.
4. Finally, in anticipation of federal ESSER funds expiring within the next two years, the legislature should **consider ways to help school systems sustain their implementation of evidence-based accelerated learning strategies beyond 2024.** The scale and the stakes are simply too high to risk a long-term generational decline in educational attainment or accept the unfinished learning and gaps that existed before the pandemic, especially for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

Sincerely,

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