

Strategies to Solve Unfinished Learning

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What is “Unfinished Learning?”

The Education Trust uses the term “unfinished learning,” as opposed to “learning loss” or “learning gaps,” to describe material that should have presented to students, but has not yet been mastered. The idea that learning is not complete better reflects the reality that all students can learn and “gaps” can be closed with equitable opportunities, materials, assessments, and high-quality instruction. With this phrasing, our goal is to redirect any focus on “fixing students” toward a focus on systemic changes to meet the needs of students.

Take a minute to imagine 8 year-old Maya:

- Maya lives with her mom (a nurse), her grandmother, her 12-year-old brother, and 3-year-old sister
- She shared a computer with her brother for the first 4 months of the pandemic
- Her school opted for 3 hours of zoom class a day
 - Her neighborhood has suffered from unstable internet so some days she couldn't log on for class
- Maya is a natural caregiver; she always wants to help her mom and siblings in any way that she can.
- Maya hasn't had contact with any school staff outside of her zoom class.



Maya, like many other students, is experiencing unfinished learning. Let's talk about what schools can do to support students like Maya.

Targeted Intensive Tutoring

- Sometimes known as “high-dosage tutoring”
- Same tutor to work over an extended period of time (e.g., all-year, every school day) on academic skills
- **KEY EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS:**
 - A **well-trained** single tutor working with less than 4 students at a time
 - A skill-building curriculum closely aligned with the math or reading curriculum used throughout the school
 - Targeted to the student’s academic needs.



HOW EFFECTIVE IS INTENSIVE TUTORING?

We looked at the research to help leaders navigate complicated decisions.² The chart below shows how implementing various features of intensive tutoring impact its effectiveness.

Features	More Effective		Less Effective	
Tutors	Certified teachers	Paraprofessionals	Trained volunteers	Peers
Student: Tutor Ratio	1-2: 1		3-4:1	
Curriculum	Skill building curriculum		Homework help	
Training and Supervision	Pre-service & ongoing training & supervision	Pre-service training & a single additional supplemental training	Pre-service training only	No training
Location	During the school day complementing the regular class	During the school day substituting for the regular class	After school/ Out of school	
How often & How Long	All year, every school day for an hour		Partial year	
Target Population	Younger students		Older students	

Expanded Learning Time (ELT)

- Encompasses programs or strategies implemented to increase the amount of instruction and learning students experience
- Can be after-school, summer, and in-school programs.
- **KEY EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS:**
 - Aligned to in-school curriculum, targeted to student needs, **well-trained educators**, small class sizes



★ *Additional time in school cannot be effective unless traditional school time is also used well including high quality curriculum and instruction.*

HOW EFFECTIVE IS EXPANDED LEARNING TIME?

We looked at the research to help leaders navigate these complicated decisions. The chart below shows how implementing different features of expanded learning impacts its effectiveness.

Features	More Effective	Less Effective
Curriculum	Aligned, individualized, & high-quality curriculum	Clear program goals but not aligned to curriculum No clear program goals
Training and Coaching	Pre-service & ongoing training, & coaching	Pre-service training only No training
When and Where	During the regular school year	Mandatory summer programs After school or weekends
Attendance	Mandatory during the school day	Mandatory other times Voluntary with incentives Voluntary with no incentives
Total Annual Hours	Significant Time (45-100 hours)	Too little Time (less than 44 hours) Too Much Time (More than 100 hours of reading)
Class Sizes	10-15 students	15-20 students 20+ students
Teachers	Certified Teachers	Non-Certified Instructors

A Cautionary Tale:

Not all programs during the school day have shown large increases in student outcomes. Implementation decisions matter, and it is imperative that programs center equity and high-quality instruction in those decisions.

In 2012, Florida passes legislation requiring double blocks of reading. A study of the extra hour of reading found relatively small increase in outcomes in some places because many schools were unable to place students with their certified teachers or with small groups.



Strong Relationship Building Strategies

Strong relationships and connections to schools and the caring educators who teach and work within buildings will be key to the successful implementation of any evidence-based academic intervention to address unfinished learning.

BUILDING DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

Elements	Sample Actions (and Explanations)
Express Care	Be dependable (Be someone I can trust) Listen (Really pay attention) Encourage (Praise my efforts and achievements) Believe in me (Make me feel known and valued)
Challenge Growth	Expect my best (Expect me to live up to my potential) Hold me accountable (Insist I take responsibility for my actions) Help me reflect on failures (Help me learn from my mistakes) Stretch me (Push me to go further)
Provide Support	Navigate (Guide me through hard situations) Empower me (Build my confidence to take charge of my life) Advocate (Defend me when I need it) Set boundaries (Establish limits to keep me on track)
Share Power	Respect me (Take me seriously and treat me fairly) Include me (Involve me in decisions that affect me) Collaborate (Work with me to solve problems and reach goals) Let me lead (Create opportunities for me to take action)
Expand Possibilities	Inspire (Inspire me to see possibilities for my future) Broaden Horizons (Expose me to new experiences, ideas, and places) Connect (Introduce me to more people who can help me)

HOW EFFECTIVE IS RELATIONSHIP BUILDING?

We looked at the research to help leaders navigate these complicated decisions. The chart below shows the most effective elements of relationship building strategies in schools.

Elements	More Effective				Less Effective			
Adults	Certified teachers and other staff		Other in-school adults		Trained volunteers		Outside mentors	
Group size	Individual or small groups			More than 8 students				
Activity	Social activity around a student's goal		Academic activity around a student's goals		Activity not structured around student's goals		No structured activity	
Training and Supervision	Pre-service & ongoing training, & feedback			Pre-service training only		No Training		

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA)

- Education Stabilization Fund: ~\$165B
 - ESSER III: \$122.8B
 - Minimum set-asides for SEAs: 5% to address interrupted learning for underserved students, 1% (\$1.25B) for evidence-based summer programs, 1% (\$1.25B) for after-school.
 - LEAs must also set aside at least 20% of their funds to address interrupted learning for underserved students.
 - Within 30 days of receiving funds, districts must release a plan that includes information about returning to in-person learning.
 - HEER III: \$39.5B
 - The vast majority (91%) of the funds will flow to public and private nonprofit institutions.
- Maintenance of Effort and Equity Provisions