

COVID-19 Learning Loss in L.A. Unified

How the Crisis Affects Students and
Implications for District Responses

Independent Analysis Unit
Los Angeles Unified School District

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Though L.A. Unified has made a considerable effort to provide remote learning opportunities for all, many students are likely to experience severe learning loss as a result of school facilities closures associated with COVID-19. As a result, the District can assume that when they return to school in the fall, approximately 500,000 students will be less prepared for their grade levels or courses than they would have been under normal circumstances. Moreover, for this cohort of students, the persistent effects of this learning loss will continue to threaten their academic progress. And because the crisis affects some students more than others, existing opportunity gaps will widen.¹

Until students return, and the District can assess each student's academic and social-emotional needs, it will be difficult to predict exactly what instruction students will need and how schools and teachers should respond. We cannot know exactly what they are not learning or precisely how much they are not learning. However, we can quantify how many students are likely to experience severe learning loss based on how the crisis is

As many as nine out of 10 L.A. Unified students will have unprecedented academic and social-emotional needs when they return to school in the fall. The District faces a serious challenge and will need to:

- Maintain connections to students at risk of dropping out over the summer
- Diagnose students' academic and social-emotional needs when they return to classrooms
- Plan to substantially increase differentiated supplemental instruction
- Plan for chances to review and recoup learning in coming years, including adding instructional time to the day or year.
- Plan for permanent changes to how it supports student achievement and access to opportunity to address widened opportunity gaps.

affecting communities and the circumstances of transitioning to distance learning. We can also predict the negative consequences of learning loss for different groups of students. By anticipating these consequences, the District can plan for system-level changes and interventions.

In this analysis, we outline the problem of learning loss associated with COVID-19 by explaining how the pandemic, school facilities closures, and remote learning may be interacting with existing risk factors to affect all students, our students with the highest needs, and students at different points in their education in different ways. Students with severe learning loss are likely to struggle to catch up for several years. This analysis will help the District plan for what it needs to do in the coming weeks, months and years to avoid the negative consequences of learning loss and to narrow opportunity gaps that will widen.

BACKGROUND

COVID-19 learning loss is defined in this report as any academic regression that occurs because of missed instruction or other impediments during the spring of the 2019-20 school year. Learning loss matters first because it could lead to many students being unprepared for the next grade-level at the start of the 2020-21 school year. Most research tells us that gaps in schooling of various kinds can cause learning loss. Over school breaks, students can lose proficiency with existing skills and knowledge. This well-documented phenomenon is sometimes referred to as *summer slide*.^{2,3} Students who miss substantial periods of instruction (e.g. students with interrupted formal education⁴ or students with chronic absenteeism⁵) also suffer learning loss due to missed new

instruction. One result of both phenomena is a lack of readiness—whether a student has the prerequisite knowledge and skills to meet or exceed expectations in each subject—at the beginning of the new school year. The District is aware of this threat and is planning “summer school for all” to address it.

But the problem goes beyond readiness at the start of the year. Learning loss also matters because its effects may persist beyond the 2020-21 school year. If a student starts out behind and cannot catch up, she is at risk of falling further and further behind, which has the potential to alter her long-term educational attainment and life chances.^{6,7}

Learning loss also matters because it will exacerbate existing opportunity gaps.⁸ Each student’s learning loss will depend on their pre-existing learning needs, prior academic attainment, stage in schooling, home environment and how their school and teachers adapt to the crisis. But before COVID-19, schools already faced the challenge of supporting students from disadvantaged groups who started school behind their peers. Now, with so much time away from school, and with the other effects of the pandemic, including exposure to factors that will worsen learning loss, many of these students will start school even further behind their more advantaged peers than they had before.

HOW THE CRISIS AFFECTS ALL STUDENTS

All students lost instructional time

Due to the COVID-19 school facilities closures, all L.A. Unified students have lost some time they otherwise would have devoted to school. Distance learning efforts have prevented the loss of even more time for most

Learning loss:
Any academic regression that resulted from missed instruction or other impediments during the spring of the 2019-20 school year.

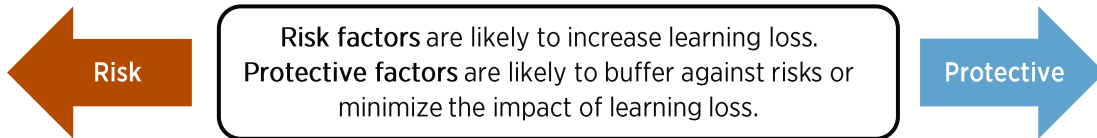
students, but do not fully replace the value of classroom instruction. Although less time does not necessarily equate to less learning, it is reasonable to assume that most students experienced a net loss of instructional content and quality from they would have experienced under normal circumstances.

All students will encounter factors that worsen or lessen learning loss

While all students lost some instructional time and probably content and quality, the crisis is affecting students in different ways, which will lead to variation in the severity of learning loss. As shown in the infographic, students are affected by conditions in their school and home. Each of these environments has risk and protective factors.

At home, many families provide a loving, nurturing environment for their children that support student learning. However, most students in L.A. Unified reside in low-income communities of color that are disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Some of the difficult conditions (e.g., increased financial stress) have the potential to exacerbate learning loss. Other conditions like ongoing exposure to abuse and neglect may be more consequential than they were because the home has been the sole environment for many school children since March 16. Regardless of the stressor and a child’s age, trauma has the potential to compound academic and social regression over time.

Factors likely to impact COVID-19 learning loss fall into two domains:








Many students are likely to experience **home risk factors** that worsen learning loss because they reside in communities disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

To minimize learning loss, the District can support capacities associated with **school protective factors**, which buffer against risks students encounter in their home environment.






Home risk factors

-  **Increased family financial stress caused by COVID-19-associated unemployment**
Undocumented families are at high risk because they have minimal access to social safety nets.
-  **Learning constraints at home** (including parent ability to support, distractions, and increased responsibilities)
Students with parents who leave home for work, speak a language other than English (or academic English) or have low education levels may face greater barriers to supporting their students.
-  **Stress or trauma related to COVID-19 exposure or death of loved one**
Students in low-income and black and Latino communities are at increased risk of community trauma caused by disparities in mortality rates associated with COVID-19.
-  **Increased exposure to abuse or neglect**
-  **Lack of internet access or technology**



School protective factors

-  **Teacher technological knowledge**
Teachers' able to use various technological tools and associated resources to support remote learning will minimize learning loss.
-  **School engagement with families**
Schools with high levels of family engagement prior to COVID-19 school facilities closures were well positioned to transition to remote schooling, and many others adapted quickly, developing systems and processes to maintain connections with students and their families.
-  **School leadership capacity to organize, motivate and support staff**
This is especially important to help teacher's coping with their own stress or trauma related to COVID-19 disease exposure or family changes in employment. This also may have impacted how quickly the school was able to distribute devices.

When schools and teachers engage students effectively, however, they create protective factors that offset risk factors and minimize learning loss for all students, regardless of home environment. These protective factors include teacher technological knowledge, school engagement with families, and school leadership capacity.

Regardless of conditions in the home and despite school protective factors, though, students with the highest needs before the crisis are at risk of suffering the most severe learning loss because remote learning in many cases is insufficient to support their needs.

HOW THE CRISIS AFFECTS STUDENTS WITH THE HIGHEST NEEDS

Students with high needs

Include students who are English and standard English learners, students with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, and students in foster care

Before the crisis, some students already had needs for extra support that, unless met, hindered their ability to learn. Now, with all learning opportunities online, these needs are less likely to be met, which means learning loss for these students is likely to be higher than it will be for some of

their peers. Moreover, some of these students with needs for extra support may also encounter risk factors in their home

environment that worsen learning loss. In this section, we focus on learning needs that are difficult to support remotely and how this lack of support will increase learning loss for each group of students.

Students who are English and standard English learners

What students who are English and standard English learners are missing

Since the District uses the home language survey to identify English learners (ELs) and standard English learners (SELs), we know that these students probably lack academic English supports at home. Thus, with remote learning, many of these students lose access to an English-language-rich academic environment.¹⁰ Many ELs and SELs are also low income and may lack internet access.

Without the appropriate language acquisition supports, ELs and SELs will lose opportunities to acquire knowledge or master skills in all subject areas. Their teachers may not be trained in using digital resources designed for ELs or SELs or they may have difficulty finding tools that work for their class.¹¹

In addition, many students who are English learners lost the opportunity to reclassify as English proficient by the end of this school year because the summative English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) test was suspended due to the crisis.¹² (Although, the California Department of Education (CDE) may authorize ELPAC testing windows in the summer or fall).¹³

Secondary students still absent online by the end of April are disproportionately English learners and students with disabilities.

By the end of April, between 2% and 5% of students grades 6-11 had not yet logged on to any of the systems the District tracks. This amounts to **nearly 6,000 secondary students**, and these students are **disproportionately English learners and students with disabilities**. English learners represent 30% of students absent online, compared to 13% of total enrollment, and students with disabilities represent 41% of students absent online, compared to 13% of total enrollment.⁹

How learning loss affects students who are English and standard English learners

Because of the challenges in meeting language acquisition needs remotely, ELs and SELs of all ages and grade levels may return to school this fall further behind in literacy, mathematics and critical thinking skills, compared to their English proficient peers.

For ELs, delays in reclassification will also affect their academic trajectory, which will impact students in later grades the most. Early elementary grade students can remain English learners without any negative consequences, even if they were ready to reclassify.¹⁴ At later elementary and early secondary grades, however, delays in reclassification puts students at increased risk of becoming or remaining a long-term English learner (LTEL). LTELs have lower academic outcomes than their English-proficient peers and cannot access the full A-G curriculum in high school until they gain English proficiency.¹⁵ Thus, for LTELs in high school, a delay in reclassification will have immediate and damaging effects on their academic careers and access to post-secondary opportunities

For long-term English learners in high school, a delay in reclassification will have immediate and damaging effects on their access to post-secondary opportunities.

Students with disabilities

What students with disabilities are missing

Students with disabilities have diverse needs, and many services the District provides to meet these needs as outlined in their Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are difficult to deliver remotely. Moreover, some students may have disabilities (e.g., hard of hearing) that make remote or online learning difficult

without the appropriate tools. By staying at home during the quarantine, these students also lose access to community and social settings that may be necessary to meet their IEP goals.

How learning loss affects students with disabilities

Many students with disabilities will experience severe learning loss because remote and digital services, supports, accommodations and modifications will be insufficient to support their needs. Many students will face substantial barriers that may lead to a regression in their social skill development as well as their academic progress. Academic and social regression will affect their readiness to meet grade-level standards in the next school year and may also affect their ability to achieve their goals as outlined in their IEPs. Therefore, the District should anticipate that these students will have even greater academic and social needs when they return in the fall, compared to the previous school year.

The crisis will likely heighten the needs of students with disabilities to unprecedented levels, widening opportunity gaps that already demanded action prior to the crisis. Students with disabilities in L.A. Unified have lower achievement levels on standardized tests than students with disabilities across the state. Students with disabilities in L.A. Unified also have lower achievement levels than their peers in the District without disabilities.¹⁶ And the disparities were already pronounced for students with certain disability categories. For example, only 6% of students with specific learning disabilities met or exceeded standards in English Language Arts in 2018-19. In contrast, 16% of students with disabilities in California and 49% of students without disabilities in the District met or exceeded these standards.¹⁷

The crisis will likely heighten the needs of students with disabilities to unprecedented levels, widening opportunity gaps that already demanded action prior to the crisis.

Students experiencing or at risk of homelessness or in foster care

What students experiencing homelessness or in foster care are missing

In mid-March, students in the District's homeless program or with an open foster care case immediately lost access to a stable environment and place to learn. For some of these students, the school campus may have been one of the few places where they felt safe. Exposed to new trauma or coping with previous trauma, these students are likely to have developmental, social, and emotional challenges that impede learning. Finally, students residing in shelters, where it is difficult to practice social distancing, are at greater risk of exposure to the disease.

How learning loss affects students experiencing homelessness or in foster care

Like English and standard English learners and students with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness or in foster care are likely to experience more severe learning loss than their peers, though for different reasons. Instability—housing or otherwise—paired with traumatic experiences (e.g., ruptures in family connections) may affect these students' cognitive, social, and emotional development. As a result, they will face even greater challenges than they experienced before facilities closures, which has the potential to affect their schooling for years.

The pandemic-induced recession also places students in the District's homeless program

at even greater risk of new or prolonged instances of homelessness, which, until their families find stable housing, will affect their ability to engage in school, compounding the effects of learning loss.

HOW THE CRISIS AFFECTS STUDENTS AT DIFFERENT POINTS IN THEIR EDUCATION

Stages of schooling include early childhood through early elementary, later elementary, and secondary cohorts

Learning loss may be severe for students who have needs for extra instructional support, but the crisis will affect all students, though its effects will vary according to student's age and grade level.

For each stage of schooling, we outline what students are missing as a result of school facilities closures and what factors influence learning loss uniquely at that stage. Some are home environment risk factors that can worsen learning loss and some are school-based protective factors that can reduce learning loss. We also explain how learning loss will affect each group of cohorts.

Early childhood through early elementary cohorts

What our youngest students are missing

By losing access to a physical academic environment where they interact with their peers, the District's youngest students lose in-person, physical opportunities for social, emotional and language and literacy development. Early childhood education (ECE) and primary education (kindergarten through

second grade) are critical in a child's development because early experiences influence children's brain architecture more than later experiences do.¹⁸

Research shows cognitive development in children is dependent upon social and emotional development,^{19,20} but the social and emotional components of educational curricula in early years is challenging to deliver without in-person interactions.

Factors that influence learning loss for our youngest students

Trauma, abuse/neglect, and stress. Trauma, neglect or other serious disruptions to a child's environment can harm all students, regardless of age. However, our youngest students are particularly vulnerable. Trauma during critical periods of a child's cognitive development affects the brain's architecture, weakening its foundation for future learning.^{21,22} Increased stress during these years has been shown to have prolonged impacts on a child's behavioral and cognitive development.²³

Learning constraints at home. Vocabulary-rich environments affect children's cognitive development, and families with lower income and educational levels are less likely to provide such an environment compared to wealthier families.^{24,25} In addition, remote learning in early years relies heavily on parents to provide structures and supports, which they may not be able to provide if they are working (remotely or otherwise) or have low education levels.

How learning loss affects our youngest students

For the District's youngest learners, loss of in-class learning can affect brain architecture, which weakens their foundation for future learning and health. Student's social,

emotional, and linguistic development are likely to regress, which will have immediate and long-term effects on a student's academic and life chances. Young students in low-income families who lack stable home environments are at risk of severe learning loss, in part because the effects of the pandemic are likely to exacerbate existing disparities in language and social-emotional development attributed to socioeconomic status. Developmental research shows interventions early in a child's life have a greater pay-off than later in life, so immediate interventions could prevent our youngest at-risk students from falling further behind their peers.^{26,27}

Later elementary cohorts

What our later elementary students are missing

Like the District's youngest students, later elementary students (third through fifth graders) also have lost access to a structured in-person academic environment with significant opportunities to interact with peers. This type of environment is important for their social-emotional development. Apart from being physically remote, distance learning is also independent learning, which may be a challenge for students at this age because it requires maturity and self-regulation.²⁸

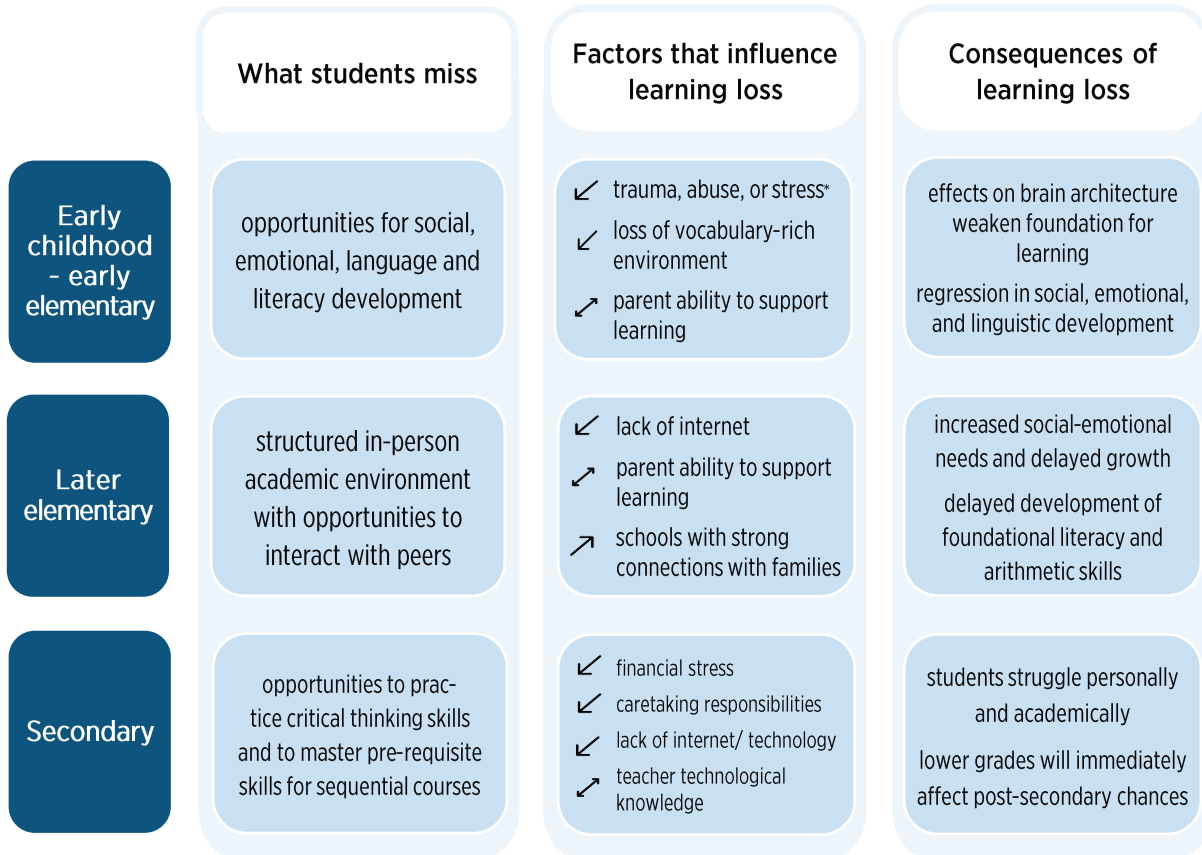
Factors that influence learning loss for our later elementary students

Learning constraints at home. Like the District's youngest students, students in later elementary grades benefit from vocabulary-rich environments with structure and supervision. Students in families with low socioeconomic status are at risk of increased learning because they families are likely to encounter barriers to providing these supports.

Lack of internet access or technology.

Though digital learning platforms are not the

How the crisis affects students at different points in their education



Note: This summary highlights factors that students are particularly susceptible to because of their age or grade level. For example, trauma, abuse or stress negatively affects all students, but its effects are particularly harmful during critical periods of brain development, which is why we emphasize this risk factor for our youngest students.

primary remote learning tool for most elementary classrooms, they help later elementary students maintain a connection to their peers and their school. Students who lack internet access or technology will miss out on this opportunity.

School engagement with families. Elementary school teachers and principals have relied on non-digital methods (such as paper homework packets) to provide remote learning opportunities for their students. Distributing this material and communicating with families is essential for this kind of remote learning to work. Schools with strong school-family connections can establish and maintain communications for this purpose with

their families. These schools can also marshal volunteer resources that help teachers provide learning continuity to their students.

How learning loss affects our later elementary students

For later elementary cohorts, school facilities closures will affect their social and emotional growth as well as their development of foundational literacy and arithmetic skills. In the short- to medium-term, students will demonstrate lower achievement levels on standardized tests, and they may fall further behind grade-level standards next year.²⁹ However, because the disruption occurred early in these children's academic careers, there may

be time during their formal schooling for them to recover. Alternatively, it may be years before we observe the full impact.

Without the appropriate interventions, there is a chance that some students in later elementary grades will never recoup their lost learning, and as they fall further behind, they will encounter substantial barriers to accessing post-secondary opportunities. Students may never access their full potential in secondary courses—for example, as they transition to middle school grades, students who were previously on track for accelerated math pathways may be placed into a slower math sequence, which will decrease the likelihood that these students are able to access upper-level coursework in science and math.

Secondary cohorts

What our middle and high school students are missing

In middle and high school grades, many courses are sequence-dependent and have prerequisite foundational standards. For example, standards in Algebra I prepare students for success in Algebra II. Because the loss of some learning opportunities was unavoidable, some students will have lost the opportunity to master pre-requisite skills. Students may have also lost the opportunity to practice critical thinking skills, which will impact their readiness for all courses.

Compared to elementary students, secondary students are more mature, better suited to learn independently, and more able to access social networks and other digital forms of communication. Still, students will miss out on extracurricular experiences that typically define their middle and high school experience – e.g., performing in the spring play.

A note on high school dropouts

For students at risk of dropping out, increased family financial stress may increase the likelihood that these students continue working and drop out in the fall. Constraints in a students' home environment as well as deficiencies in the school's capacity to provide support to these students may also increase the likelihood that students at risk of dropping out become dropouts.

A note on high school seniors

High school seniors are hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 school facilities closures, not least because the pandemic has denied them their senior year festivities and their physical graduation ceremony. Knowing these students would not have another chance, the District has focused on helping them succeed, graduate and move on. Though today's seniors may find themselves less ready to succeed in college or other endeavors, this problem will move from the District's sphere of influence next year.

Factors that influence learning loss for middle and high school students

Increased family financial stress. Unlike younger students, older students may seek work to help support their families, reducing their time and energy for learning at home.

Learning constraints at home. Students in families with younger siblings may struggle to balance increased caretaking responsibilities with schoolwork, especially for students in families whose parents are still leaving the home for work.

Lack of internet access or technology. Secondary teachers are primarily using digital learning platforms to provide remote learning opportunities, so students who lack sufficient internet access are at risk of greater learning loss than their peers with adequate connectivity.

Teacher technological knowledge. With different teachers for each subject, secondary students are likely to encounter teachers with a range of technological skills, which may lead to a range of learning loss.

How learning loss affects middle and high school students

For secondary students, learning loss during the COVID-19 school facilities closures can immediately and permanently impede access to post-secondary opportunities. Because these students are far along in their academic careers, the District has little time to intervene to reverse the effects of long-term effects of learning loss.

When secondary students return in the fall at least partially unready for their coursework, they may struggle to keep up with new content and earn lower grades. Low achievement will affect middle schoolers differently from high schoolers. Middle school students who were on track to access and succeed in advanced pathways but struggle upon re-entry may instead choose less rigorous courses in the coming years. High school students who receive lower grades than they would have otherwise will decrease their grade point average and college eligibility. Over time, there may be a decrease in graduation rates paired with a decrease in college enrollment.

High school students from disadvantaged backgrounds are especially vulnerable to the effects of learning loss on college access. Students in low-income communities of color already face substantial barriers to post-secondary access and success. These students are more likely than students in other communities to experience difficult and potentially traumatic conditions during this crisis that will impede learning.

For secondary students, learning loss during the COVID-19 school facilities closures can immediately and permanently impede access to post-secondary opportunities.

Compared to earlier years, lost opportunities for social-emotional skill development may have less impact on secondary students' academic success because their maturity enables them to maintain connections with their peers remotely (e.g., through social media). Nonetheless, the disruption in physical schooling and other events associated with the pandemic will lead to greater social-emotional needs when students return. And, if extracurricular activities are cancelled for safety measures, some students may lose a primary motivation to do well in school.

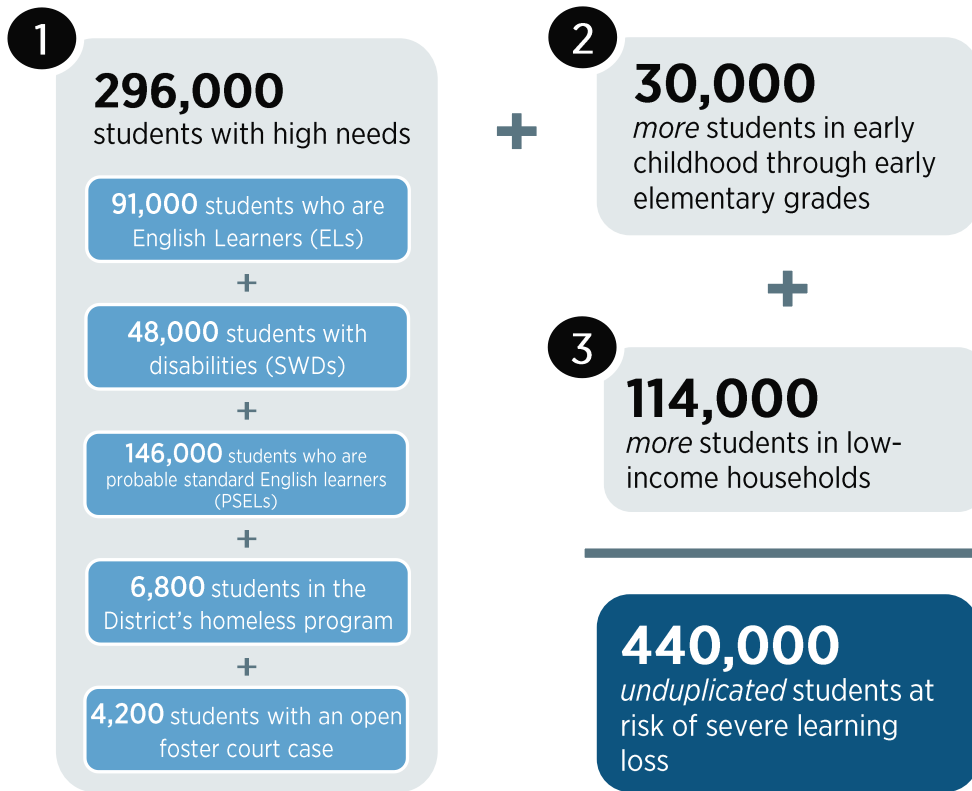
Finally, there is a risk that some students will drop out and never return to school, and the effects of dropping out on a student's life outcomes and society are well known (e.g., increased poverty and crime). In the medium-to long-term, an increase in dropouts may also affect future demand for alternative and adult education programs.

NINE OUT OF 10 STUDENTS LIKELY TO HAVE SEVERE LEARNING LOSS

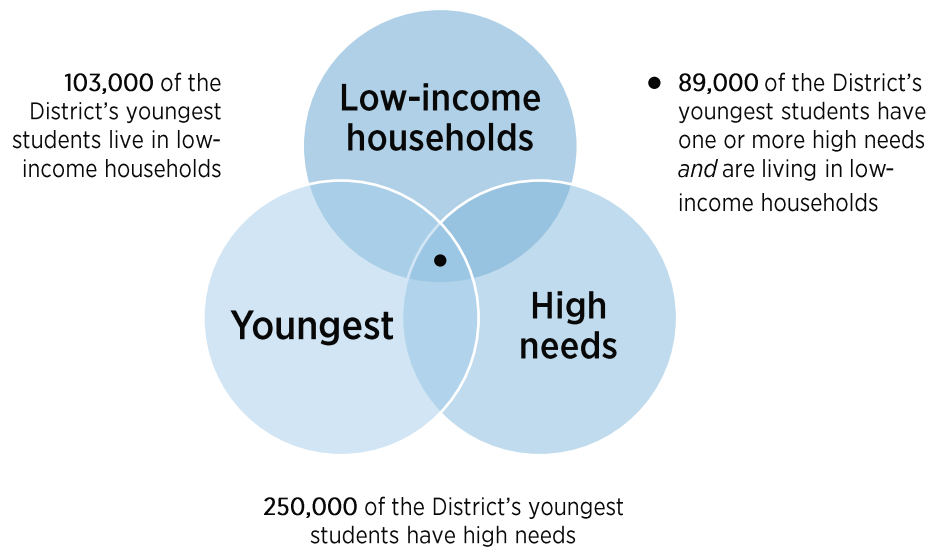
We estimate 440,000 students will return to school in the fall with unprecedented academic and social-emotional needs, representing 93% of the students likely to return in the fall (all current early childhood education through 11th grade students). With nine out of 10 of these students likely to have severe learning loss, the District will face a serious challenge that they will need to meet with aggressive plans for learning review and recoupment and wrap-around services.

As shown on page 11, the 440,000 students likely to experience severe learning loss represent an unduplicated count of students who fall into three categories.³⁰

Students likely to experience severe learning loss fall into three categories:



But, many of these students face multiple challenges that compound the effects of the crisis on their learning loss



First, we count **296,000 students with high needs** (64% of the students likely to return in the fall) **who will likely experience severe learning loss** because their needs are difficult to meet with remote schooling. The high needs category includes students who are English learners, students with disabilities, probable standard English learners, students in the homeless program, and students with active foster court cases. If students belong to any of these groups, we count them once, beginning with English learners. Thus, no count of students in a group includes students from the group above.³¹

Next, we count **30,000 more of the District's youngest students**. Early childhood through early elementary grades are not well-suited to online instruction and are critical to a child's cognitive and social-emotional development, which affects future learning.

Then, after accounting for students with high needs and the District's youngest students, we add **114,000 students living in low-income households** (23%). Low-income communities are disproportionately affected by the crisis, which means many students will face barriers to learning that exacerbate learning loss. Though some students living in poverty had high academic attainment before the crisis, exposure to risk factors will likely impede their learning in the short-term and heighten their social-emotional needs, which may affect their schooling when they return.

Importantly, many students face multiple challenges that compound the effects of the crisis on their learning loss. For example, of the 296,000 students in the combined high needs categories, close to 250,000 of them (85%) *also* live in low-income households.

Thus, the figure also illustrates that—in addition to many students who have multiple high needs (e.g., students with disabilities

who are English learners)—nearly 90,000 of the District's youngest students have one or more high needs *and* are living in low-income households. These students represent 20% of all students and are likely return to school with unprecedented levels of academic and social-emotional needs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DISTRICT RESPONSES TO LEARNING LOSS

The problem of learning loss associated with the COVID-19 pandemic is doubtless large, pervasive, and varied, as this analysis has shown. However, much remains unknown. The recession could have unanticipated effects, recovery could be slower than hoped, the pandemic could have a second wave, and schools may not open in the fall. Given this uncertainty, and knowing what we do know, how should the District respond to the problem of lost learning? Assuming classrooms can open for the 2020-21 school year, we have identified several areas on which the District should focus its response.

The District is already acting in the short-term to expand summer school, but because the problem will persist, it must also plan to provide ongoing and long-range support and consider fundamental changes to business as usual. If done well, the response to this year's unprecedented crisis can also address existing opportunity gaps.

Immediate to short-term responses

The District should make the greatest feasible use of the time between the end of this school year and the beginning of the next, whether through summer school, drop-out prevention programs or other school-to-student contact.

Nearly 90,000 of the District's youngest students have one or more high needs and are living in low-income households. These students represent 20% of all students and are likely return to school with unprecedented levels of academic and social-emotional needs.

Summer school

For the short-term, the District is developing a distance learning “summer school for all” program. Depending on how it is implemented, this program can help some students recoup missing instruction and others refresh skills and knowledge they once learned. However, summer school is not the whole solution to the problem of learning loss. It is unlikely that a few weeks of remote learning can replace approximately 60 days of limited, remote, or missed instruction. Moreover, summer school will be a distance learning option, which some students will find inaccessible. And since summer school will be voluntary, some students will choose not to participate. Therefore, more is needed during and beyond next school year to support the many students who have lost learning.

Connecting to absent students

For various reasons, some students have not yet engaged with distant learning opportunities at all and it is uncertain if they will return when face-to-face school resumes. Students who are falling behind academically and students experiencing pandemic-related stress might fail to return to school.

This risk of increased dropouts creates a need to expand existing drop-out prevention and recovery programs. What is needed first is to maintain connections with all students

possible, and then to design interventions for students who do not remain connected. The District already offers schools and programs oriented toward students either at high risk of or returning from dropping out. Expanding the capacity of these programs may be needed this summer and in coming months and years.

Ongoing and long-term responses

Simply resuming instruction—even after a robust summer school program—as if nothing had happened would leave many students behind expectations, some permanently. Something different is needed for the next school year, and because expecting everyone to catch up in a single year is impractical, the District should implement some changes for multiple years.

Differentiation and diagnosis

More time and additional supports are needed to help students recover any content they did not learn adequately or missed altogether, and because student experiences will have varied widely, each classroom and school may see a wider spread of student proficiencies and needs than usual. Therefore, the importance of differentiation will be greater than ever.

To prepare for differentiated instruction during the next school year, it will be valuable for schools and teachers to understand the extent of learning loss for individual students. Aside from classroom assessments, the primary way the District has kept track of standards-based student proficiency has been the annual spring administration of the Smarter Balanced Assessment tests (SBAC), which was canceled for spring 2020. Going into fall 2020, the District will not have these scores to help target instruction and supports. What is needed is a set of assessments

that can be administered at the beginning of fall 2020 and again later in the year as well as year-end. One possibility worth further exploration is the Smarter Balanced Interim Assessments.³² These tests cannot be used for high-stakes decisions such as school staff evaluations, student retention or placement into special programs, or reclassification of English learners, but, with some modifications, may be useful as diagnostic tools to help teachers assess what content their students need to review.³³

Flexibility with curriculum

After assessing students at the beginning of the year to determine learning loss, schools and classroom teachers will need to individualize instruction to fill in gaps in each student's knowledge. Flexibility will be required of teachers, schools and the District. Beginning the year with April 2020 concepts is one possibility. Teachers should be prepared to provide opportunities for do-over activities starting in August. Any period of review and recoupment, however—especially if it is extensive—will affect the curriculum, even pushing some standards-based content off the 2020-21 calendar for some students. Therefore, the District and state need to consider moving in the direction of a more flexible design. One element of such a transformation could be competency-based learning. Changes in the yearly calendar might also be an integral element.

Calendar options

In a separate report, due soon, the IAU is exploring options for altering the school calendar and daily schedule to add instructional time to the next and subsequent school years. These options include adding instructional days to the school year, extending the school day, adding intersessions to the winter and spring breaks, and re-introducing year-round schooling to the District. To change the

calendar, of course, the District would need to address labor partners' concerns over how educators will be paid.

Social-emotional supports

Beyond academics, the District will need to assess and address students' social-emotional needs and their general wellbeing in terms of food and housing security, safety at school, physical and mental health, and other factors. Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), a Stanford-based thinktank, the CORE Districts consortium, and Education Analytics, an assessments consulting firm, are joining forces to develop open-source tools to assess student needs. To address their needs, the District may need to expand the mental health services and other social-emotional programs it offers. The community schools model, which provides wraparound services to students may be especially useful during the post-crisis period.

Educational technology

The District's sudden plunge into universal distance learning, while undertaken under less-than-ideal circumstances, has greatly increased the District's educational technology capacity. These new capabilities mean that ongoing distance learning could be used as a supplement to in-person schooling all year round. Online options could be offered that help students review content, recover credits, or take courses outside of their schedules.

Responses to widening achievement gaps

It will take multiple years for some students to win back what they have lost during two months of classroom closures. L.A. Unified has already struggled for decades to overcome gaps in learning and opportunities between advantaged and disadvantaged students. Diagnosis of learning gaps,

differentiation, extensive opportunities for review, flexibility when it comes to curricular expectations, adding instructional time, augmenting social-emotional supports, and making more use of educational technology will all be necessary in the short-term to address COVID-19 learning loss, but could also be added to the long-term toolset for serving students. If the District can make some of these changes permanent, the current efforts could lead to greater equity, progress on disparities in academic outcomes, and higher overall achievement in the long run.

CONCLUSION

The preceding analysis sheds light on the magnitude of the learning loss problem the District faces in the wake of the COVID-19 school facilities closures. Although the District's efforts to support at-home continuity of

learning prevented many students from losing all 57 days of instruction between March 16 and the end of the school year, the combination of at least some lost learning time, the challenges of remote and online learning, the impediments to learning in the home environments of many students, and the already-existing achievements gaps this crisis has exacerbated all amount to an educational problem of substantial proportions.

One-time and temporary changes to District operation and instruction are necessary to deal with the immediate impact of learning loss due to the pandemic. But the long-term impacts described in this report will persist for years—from now until graduation and beyond—and in many cases for the lifetime of the student. The District cannot treat this as an 18-month problem and resume business as usual in 2021.

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² Kuhfeld, M. & Tarasaw, B. (2020). *The COVID-19 slide: What summer learning loss can tell us about the potential impact of school closures on student academic achievement*. NWEA Collaborative for Student Growth. <https://www.nwea.org/content/uploads/2020/04/Collaborative-Brief-Covid19-Slide-APR20.pdf>

³ McEachin, A., & Atteberry, A. (2016). The impact of summer learning loss on measures of school performance. *Education Finance and Policy*, 12(4), 468–491. https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp_a_00213

⁴ DeCapua, A., & Marshall, H. W. (2010). Students with limited or interrupted formal education in US classrooms. *The Urban Review*, 42(2), 159–173. See also: DeCapua, A., Smathers, W., & Tang, L. F. (2007). Schooling, Interrupted. *Educational Leadership*, 64(6), 40–46.

⁵ Gottfried, M. A. (2019). Chronic absenteeism in the classroom context: Effects on achievement. *Urban Education*, 54(1), 3–34.

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⁷ Loeb, S., & Bassok, D. (2007). Early childhood and the achievement gap. In H.F. Ladd & E.B. Fiske (Eds.), *Handbook of Research in Education Finance and Policy* (pp. 517-534). Routledge Press.

⁸ Kuhfeld et al. (2020). *Projecting*.

⁹ Author's calculations from data downloaded from FOCUS on April 3, 2020 (student details for all students enrolled) and April 20, 2020 (IT tools usage monitoring as of 4/28/20). For probable standard English learners, there was no disparity between students who logged in and students absent online. We focused on secondary students, where digital learning platforms are used more frequently than in elementary school. We also excluded students in grade 12 because only students in grades 6-11 will be returning next year.

¹⁰ Le, Q. T., Wise, B., & Ganon, S. (2018). *Reclassification patterns for English learners in L.A. Unified*. Independent Analysis Unit (IAU), Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education.

<http://laschoolboard.org/sites/default/files/IAUReport20180610-ReclassificationTrendsforEnglishLearnersinL.A.Unified.pdf>

¹¹ U.S. Department of Education. (2019). *Supporting English Learners through technology: What districts and teachers say about digital learning resources for English learners*. <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/title-iii/180414.pdf>

¹² California Department of Education (CDE). (2020). English learner updates newsletter: Covid-19 edition. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/documents/elnewsltrapr32020.pdf>

¹³ Edsource. (2020, April 26). *Quick Guide: How has the pandemic altered California's school accountability reforms?* <https://edsources.org/2020/quick-guide-changing-school-accountability-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/630200>

¹⁴ If the CDE authorizes an ELPAC testing window in the summer or fall, even students who may still be ready to reclassify might be better served by keeping the English learner classification so that they have access to language supports throughout the next academic year. See: Le, Q. T. et al. (2018). *Reclassification patterns*.

¹⁵ Le, Q. T. et al. (2018). *Reclassification patterns*.

¹⁶ Forthcoming IAU paper on outcomes for students with disabilities disaggregated by disability type

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Though cognitive, emotional and social capacities are interrelated throughout a person's life, peer interactions are essential in early years because the cognitive-linguistic capacities of young students depend upon the development of socioemotional capacities. See: Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (2007). *Brain architecture*. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/>

¹⁹ Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (2007). *A science-based framework for early childhood policy: Using evidence to improve outcomes in learning, behavior, and health for vulnerable children*. <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>

²⁰ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2007). *The science of early childhood development*. <http://developingchild.net>

²¹ Terrasi, S., & de Galarce, P. C. (2017). Trauma and learning.

²² Barr, D. A. (2018). When trauma hinders learning. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 99(6), 39–44.

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²³ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2005/2014). *Excessive stress disrupts the architecture of the developing brain: Working paper 3*. Updated edition. <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>

²⁴ For example, by age 5, disparities in home environments linked to socioeconomic status lead to disparities in language and social-emotional development that widen over time. See: Center on the Developing Child. (2007). *A science-based framework*.

²⁵ Gilkerson, J., Richards, J., Warren, S., Montgomery, J., Greenwood, C., et al. (2017). Mapping the early language environment using all-day recordings and automated analysis. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 26(2), p. 248-265.

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²⁶ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2007). *The timing and quality of early experiences combine to shape brain architecture: Working paper no. 5*. www.developingchild.harvard.edu

²⁷ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2007). *The science of early childhood development*. <http://developingchild.net>

²⁸ Fitzpatrick, B. R., Berends, M., Ferrare, J. J., & Waddington, R. J. (2020). Virtual illusion: Comparing student achievement and teacher and classroom characteristics in online and brick-and-mortar charter schools. *Educational Researcher*, 49(3), 161–175.

<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X20909814>

²⁹ Kuhfeld et al. (2020). *Projecting*.

³⁰ Authors' calculations from data downloaded from FOCUS on April 3, 2020 (student details for all students enrolled).

³¹ Many students with high needs are dually identified or receive multiple services: 19,000 ELs are dually identified as SWDs; 23,000 SWDs are dually identified as PSELs; and 500 students who are homeless are in foster care. All counts are rounded.

³² Smarter Balanced Interim Assessments—Smarter Balanced Assessment System (CA Dept of Education). (n.d.). Retrieved May 7, 2020, from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/sbacinterimassess.asp>

³³ Several ideas concerning diagnostic assessments for learning loss and socioemotional needs are discussed in Hough, H. (2020, May 5). *Understanding, measuring, and addressing student learning needs during COVID-19 recovery*. Policy Analysis for California Education. <https://edpolicyinca.org/newsroom/understanding-measuring-and-addressing-student-learning-needs-during-covid-19-recovery>