The Tutoring Solution
Survey Shows Parents Support Tutoring for Pandemic Learning Recovery but Show Limited Confidence in Schools

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
As schools emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, a pair of new, nationally representative surveys fielded this spring suggest that parents and educators agree that tutoring will be one of the most important ways that students catch up on content and skills they should have learned during the pandemic but didn’t. Ninety-seven percent of district leaders report that they plan to offer tutoring to aid in post-pandemic learning, according to the results of a survey of 1,000 teachers and administrators. A survey of more than 2,000 parents of K-12 students found that eighty-five percent of respondents say that tutoring can reverse the negative effects of the pandemic on learning. Parents and educators alike say that roughly half the nation’s children can benefit from such tutoring, according to the surveys, which Kelly Education commissioned from the EdWeek Research Center. However, when it comes to the size and scope of the task at hand, the two groups have two very different views. While most teachers, principals, and district
leaders say their students fell behind during the pandemic in math, English/language arts, science, social studies, and social emotional learning, the majority of parents believe their own children made as much or more progress in those areas during the pandemic as they did before COVID-19. Given this misalignment, it is not surprising that most parents believe pandemic learning recovery will take six months or less while the majority of educators say it will last a year or more. Parents appear to be unaware of just how concerned their children’s teachers and administrators are about learning recovery. This may help explain why they express much less confidence than educators that schools can and will do what it takes to make sure students will make up lost ground. And educators themselves are less than fully confident that schools are up to the task. While they may disagree on the duration and dosage needed for pandemic learning recovery, parents and educators alike do say that tutoring is a key solution, and that it should be embedded in the school day and offered on a permanent and ongoing basis. The paper concludes with research-based recommendations for implementing sound tutoring programs.

Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic disrupted education for students around the nation and the world. From one day to the next, buildings closed, teachers juggled online with in-person instruction, and the bedroom became the home room for millions of children. Not surprisingly, early indicators suggest that, for many students learning stalled as children struggled to study at home. The slowdown was not equitable: low-income students and students of color were more likely to experience lengthy stretches of remote learning, even as their white and more affluent peers returned to in-person classes. Students from low-income families also faced additional technological challenges and were more likely to be distracted from academics by the stress of parental job loss in industries hit hard by the pandemic.

As schools emerge from this unprecedented period, a consensus is developing among educators, thought leaders and researchers around a solution with the potential to simultaneously address overall learning recovery while also providing additional instructional opportunities to the students who fell farthest behind. That solution is tutoring.

Although research suggests that tutoring interventions are effective at improving educational outcomes, it was not clear how educators or parents viewed the idea of using tutoring to address pandemic learning recovery. Nor did we know whether educators actually planned to adopt tutoring post-pandemic, and, if they did, what it would look like.

In the spring of 2021, Kelly Education commissioned the EdWeek Research Center to gather information about these and other topics in an effort to gain a better understanding of educator and parent plans and perceptions for the upcoming school year.
Tutoring as a Solution: Widespread Agreement

Survey results clearly suggest that tutoring is poised to emerge as a permanent, large-scale solution to pandemic learning recovery.

Ninety-seven percent of district leaders say they are — or will be — offering tutoring for this purpose, with most reporting that all students will be eligible.

It is not clear how much districts spent on tutoring just prior to or during the pandemic. But in the next year, the typical district-level administrator expects his or her district to spend $750 per pupil on tutoring to address pandemic loss. Leaders expected about 1 in 3 students to receive tutoring to address pandemic learning recovery in the next year—or about 17 million of the nation’s 51 million public school students. If $750 is the median expected cost of tutoring those students, the nationwide total could amount to $12.75 billion. To put this into perspective, the nation’s only other recent, pre-pandemic, large-scale, tutoring intervention was the funding set aside for Supplemental Educational Services under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which amounted to about $2 billion annually.

Most report that federal COVID relief funding will pick up at least some of the tab, although federal Title I funding and state COVID relief monies are also common sources of revenue. Certified teachers are most likely to provide the tutoring, although children will not necessarily be tutored by their own teachers. Tutoring is typically expected to occur in person as opposed to online, and in groups of five or fewer students. Sixty-three percent of school and district leaders say tutoring will be delivered as an add-on for those who need it and not embedded into the school day or curriculum.

On average, teachers, principals, and district leaders say that 40 percent of their students could benefit, at some point, from tutoring to address pandemic learning recovery. They’re on the same page there as parents — 45 percent of whom say their children need tutoring to address content or skills they should have learned during the pandemic but didn’t.

Lower-income communities were hit especially hard by COVID. As such, parents from lower-income families are significantly more likely to say their children need tutoring compared to their more affluent peers. Similarly, compared to those in lower-poverty districts, educators

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Percent of parents, educators who say their children/students need tutoring for pandemic learning recovery*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educators in districts with free-reduced-price meal rate of 75% or more</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents whose children have qualified for free-reduced-price meals</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents whose children have not qualified for free-reduced price meals</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators in districts with free-reduced price meal rates of 25% or less</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total: Parents</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total: Educators</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Educators include teachers, principals, and district leaders.
in higher-poverty districts are more likely to say their students need tutoring for pandemic learning recovery.

**Widespread Disagreement on the Scope of the Problem**

Although they might agree that tutoring is the solution, parents and educators do not see eye to eye when it comes to the size and scope of the corpus of content and skills that students should have learned during the pandemic but didn’t. Across seven subjects, parents are much less likely than educators to say that student progress lagged during the pandemic. In fact, most parents say that, compared to prior to the pandemic, their children made as much or more progress in each of the seven subjects during the past school year. By contrast, most educators say their students made less progress during the pandemic in five of the seven subjects, with the exception being the arts and physical education. The gap between parent and educator perceptions is biggest when it comes to English/language arts/reading. Just 24 percent of parents say their children made less progress in those subjects during the pandemic than prior to the pandemic. By contrast, 62 percent of teachers, principals, and district leaders say the same of their students.

Perceptions of progress did vary by socioeconomic status — as measured by parental education. For instance, 37 percent of parents without high school diplomas or GEDs said their children made less progress during the pandemic in English language arts/reading as compared to 19 percent of parents with bachelor’s degrees.

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**Leaders expected about 1 in 3 students to receive tutoring to address pandemic learning recovery in the next year—or about 17 million of the nation’s 51 million public school students.**

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**Compared to before the pandemic, how much progress has your child made/have your students made in the following areas during the pandemic?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Less</th>
<th>No Change</th>
<th>More</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Educators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social emotional skills</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/physical education</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social studies/history/civics</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts [e.g., art, music, theater, visual art]</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English/language arts/reading</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Educators include teachers, principals, and district leaders. Totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
Parent Perceptions of Pandemic Learning Recovery

Parents are much less likely than educators to perceive that their children fell behind during the pandemic. So it comes as no surprise that the two groups disagree on the size and scope of the effort required for learning recovery.

Three-quarters of parents believe their children missed out on learning at least some content and skills during the pandemic. Among those parents, more than half (60 percent) say learning recovery will take six months or less. More than two-thirds of parents who say their children need tutoring to address learning recovery believe that this intervention would be most effective if it took place, at most, once a week.

Educators Say Learning Recovery Will Take Longer Than Parents Seem to Expect

Unlike parents, educators are not expecting learning recovery to end anytime soon. In fact, educators are preparing for academic long-haulers, the educational equivalent of the COVID-19 long-haulers who have continued to experience physical symptoms and consequences long after the initial recovery has passed.

Ninety-seven percent of teachers, principals, and district leaders say their students fell behind during the pandemic. Just 23 percent agree with the majority of parents that learning recovery will take six months or less. Instead, most educators say learning recovery will take at least a year. And 1 in 5 say it will take three years or more.

Only 22 percent of educators agree with the majority of parents that tutoring would be most effective if offered weekly or less.
In fact, most school and district leaders say they plan to provide pandemic learning recovery tutoring three times a week or more. Sixty-six percent say this intervention will continue through the 2022-23 school year and beyond.

Parents Lack Awareness of Educator Concerns About Learning Recovery

Given their differing perceptions about the size and scope of the problem, it comes as no surprise that parents express much lower levels of concern about learning recovery than do educators. Educators are cognizant of this gap, guessing in the right ballpark when asked about parents’ level of concern about learning recovery. Parents, by contrast, appear unaware of just how worried their children’s teachers and administrators are about material that should have been learned during the pandemic but wasn’t. Just 20 percent believe teachers are very concerned about their children’s learning recovery. Yet more than 60 percent of teachers and administrators actually say that they are very concerned.
Percentage of parents and educators who say the following groups are "very concerned" about pandemic learning loss

Parents who are very concerned: 29% Parents whose children have qualified for free or reduced-price meals
24% Parents whose children have not qualified for free or reduced-price meals
19% Teachers who are very concerned
30%

Students who are very concerned: 16% Administrators who are very concerned
7% 61% 61%
7% 48%
7%

Educators in districts where 75% or more students qualify for free or reduced-price meals
63% 59% 62%

Percent of parents and educators who are very concerned about learning recovery

Parents whose children have qualified for free or reduced-price meals: 34%
Parents whose children have not qualified for free or reduced-price meals: 25%
Educators in districts where 75% or more students qualify for free or reduced-price meals: 72%
Educators in districts where the free or reduced-price meal rate is 25% or less: 37%
Educators express even higher levels of concern about learning recovery in the highest poverty districts where three-quarters or more students qualify for free or reduced-price meals. Seventy-two percent of teachers and administrators in these districts are very concerned about pandemic learning recovery as compared to 37 percent in the lowest poverty districts where the free or reduced-price meal rate is 25 percent or less. Compared to their more affluent counterparts, parents whose children have qualified for free or reduced-price meals are also more likely to be very concerned about learning recovery. But the gap is smaller than it is for educators from higher- and lower-poverty districts.

**Will Learning Recovery Succeed?**

Parents, teachers, and administrators are split when it comes to the question of whether or not schools have what it takes to help students recover from the educational impact of the pandemic. Parents and teachers are relatively skeptical, with less than half expressing a great deal or quite a lot of confidence that districts or schools will do what needs to be done to make sure students learn material or skills missed due to the pandemic. By contrast, more than 70 percent of school and district leaders express that level of confidence in their district or school’s ability to promote learning recovery.

**Amount of confidence that district or school will do what needs to be done to make sure students learn material or skills missed due to the pandemic**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>District leaders</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If Covid-19 continues to disrupt school schedules, the need for training may become even more urgent as instruction may well move online once again.
Parents may doubt that schools can succeed because they are unaware of just how concerned their children’s educators are about learning recovery. Teachers’ lack of confidence that learning recovery can succeed, however, is deeply troubling and may signal the need for additional support.

**Conclusion: Widespread Agreement on the Tutoring Solution**

Despite their differences, parents and educators clearly share a united front with their advocacy of tutoring as a path forward.

Eighty-five percent of parents believe that tutoring can reverse the effect of pandemic learning loss. But they do not see it as a temporary or ad hoc add-on. Rather, the majority of parents and educators say tutoring should be embedded in the school day rather than offered here and there as needed.
During the pandemic, many families who had the means to do so paid for their children to receive tutoring to head off learning loss while lower-income families did not necessarily have this option. This almost certainly widened the opportunity-to-learn gap between lower- and higher-poverty communities. Tutoring for pandemic recovery is widely viewed as a way to shrink that gap. Most parents and educators say that tutoring should become a permanent aspect of education that is offered at no cost to families. Most also say that free tutoring will make education fairer and more equal.

A recent meta-analysis of dozens of tutoring studies that employed rigorous experimental designs identified several characteristics that appear to associated with effective tutoring interventions. As school and district leaders implement such interventions on their own in the high stakes environment of taking back the time the pandemic stole, they may want to consider some of these “best practices”:

- **Consider hiring paraprofessionals to tutor students**: Seventy-six percent of school and district leaders say that certified teachers who work in their districts will tutor their students to address learning recovery while just 37 percent say their district’s paraprofessionals will do the same. However, once federal COVID recovery money run out, this may not remain an affordable solution since teachers are paid more than paraprofessionals. Because “the skills required for effective tutoring are distinct from the skills required for effective classroom teaching,” the metanalysis found multiple examples of effective interventions in which paraprofessionals helped students make substantial gains.
Incorporate tutoring into the school day: Just 37 percent of school and district leaders plan to embed pandemic recovery tutoring into the curriculum and/or school day. But the metanalysis found that the positive effect of during-school tutoring was roughly twice as large as the effect of after-school interventions. Administrators should consider how they might incorporate tutoring into the school day. Parents and educators alike prefer tutoring to be incorporated into the school day, the survey found.

Dosage matters. Weekly tutoring appears to have a much smaller impact than programs delivered multiple times per week. While 91 percent of school and district leaders say pandemic learning recovering tutoring sessions will take place at least twice a week, more than two out of three parents who say their children need tutoring believe that the sessions need only occur once a week, at most.

A final recommendation based on the survey results is that educators should communicate to parents exactly where their children are academically and what will be done to help them catch up if they have fallen behind. Survey results clearly suggest that parents may be less aware than educators of the degree to which the pandemic has impacted their children’s learning. Parents also appear to under-estimate educators’ level of concern about pandemic learning recovery. As the pandemic recedes into the rearview mirror, parents and educators need to work hand in hand with tutors to ensure that a health tragedy does not become an academic tragedy.