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Strategies to Improve Student Achievement

United States Department of Education

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A once-in-a-generation pandemic has had a once-in-a-generation impact on our nation's children and youth. That is why, since day one, the Biden-Harris Administration has worked aggressively to safely reopen schools and keep them open, help students recover academically, support their mental health and well-being, and address teacher and staffing challenges many communities face.

While American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds have helped fuel important progress toward academic recovery, we have much work to do to get students back to – and beyond – pre-pandemic levels of achievement. This will require continued and additional actions, commitments, and investments by state, local, and education leaders and partners at all levels. It will also take a cross-sector approach and strong partnerships among education leaders, community organizations, healthcare teams, and others to provide the supports students and their families need. The Administration is calling on all States, districts, schools, and the many community organizations that support them to redouble efforts for the remainder of this year, including specific steps in three key areas:

1. Addressing Chronic Absenteeism
2. Providing High-Dosage Tutoring
3. Providing Summer, and Expanded/Afterschool Learning Programs

To further support these efforts, this resource provides information on key actions that stakeholders at all levels can take to increase academic success through proven, evidence-based strategies.

1. Addressing Chronic Absenteeism

Key to academic success is a student's regular school attendance. Chronic absenteeism, which reflects a high rate of both excused and unexcused absence across the school year, increased sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic. While these increases show up in every State, increases are higher for students from low-income backgrounds and students of color. According to the Council of Economic Advisers, absenteeism can account for up to 27 percent and 45 percent of the test score declines in math and reading, respectively.

Several evidence-based strategies can help schools address chronic absenteeism. Research shows that schools with greater family involvement pre-pandemic (as measured by survey results) are associated with better student attendance post-pandemic. The adoption of early warning intervention systems and effective use of data can help identify and address root causes of student absenteeism. Low-cost informational interventions, like sending supportive letters and texts to parents, can also help reduce absenteeism.

Quality Components

Research supports the following strategies to address chronic absenteeism:
1. **Developing and implementing a communication plan** that reinforces the importance of routine, in-person attendance at school every day, and increases the frequency and quality of

interactions between schools and families. This can include sending parents information about their children's attendance patterns through texts, letters, and calls, approaches that have been proven to affordably and substantially reduce absenteeism.

2. **Strengthening relationships with families, including through home visiting.** An evaluation of home visiting indicated that students whose families received at least one visit from a teacher were 21 percent less likely to be chronically absent. Schools can provide dedicated staff, including paid parent liaisons, to support and strengthen relationships.

3. **Using a multi-tiered system of support and intervention, including an early warning intervention system** to identify students for increased support based on attendance, grades, behavior, and assignment completion. A comprehensive system of support and intervention can help ensure students do not slip through the cracks, and this system can facilitate targeted efforts to improve engagement and reduce absenteeism.

4. **Creating a positive school climate.** Students who feel welcome, supported, and engaged at school are more likely to have better attendance. An essential part of the long-term solution to increasing attendance is sustaining a positive learning environment for all students.

5. **Adopting Continuity of Instruction Plans** to keep students on track when absent (e.g., due to unforeseen school closures or health). For example, Miami Dade Public Schools created a plan for regular outreach and wellness checks for students during distance learning, continuation of school-based health services, and a family engagement plan.

States, schools and districts should continually assess student attendance and performance to evaluate and improve on program quality.

Many States and districts are already implementing these strategies. For example, the School District of Philadelphia's parent mailing program reduced absenteeism by about 10 percent. The District of Columbia Public Schools report positive results from a mailing and texting program. And a study of Connecticut's home visiting program found that nine months after the first visit, attendance rates for visited students increased by nearly 15 percentage points compared to their pre-intervention rates.

Resources to Support Increasing Student Attendance and Engagement

- The U.S. Department of Education's (Department's) Student Engagement and Attendance Center provides direct supports to States and school districts in addressing chronic absenteeism, including access to resources on multi-tiered systems of support, home visiting, and understanding root causes and strategies to address absenteeism.
- The *Strategies to Address Chronic Absenteeism* resource from the Department's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) provides States and district with a menu of evidence-based practices to increase student attendance, including early warning systems, mentoring, and text-based "nudges" to families. More specifically, IES's *How to Text Message Parents to Reduce Chronic Absence Using an Evidence-Based Approach* provides tools for districts implementing text messaging to reduce chronic absenteeism.
- The *Equity Discussion Guide* provides tools for States and districts to examine their attendance policies and practices and better ensure support for historically underserved students.

Policymaker and Educator Actions

- ***If you are a governor or chief State school officer,*** launch statewide communications campaigns about the importance of regular school attendance; set goals and identify incentives for increasing school attendance rates; encourage your districts and schools to invest remaining available ARP funds in evidence-based programs that encourage regular school attendance; and launch home visiting programs and other evidence-based programs for students and families.
- ***If you are a superintendent,*** develop and implement a communications plan that reinforces the importance of attendance and increases family touch points through use of technology (e.g., texts, calls) dedicating staff to support data and root cause analysis of low attendance, and conducting home visits.

Selection of U.S. Department of Education Funds that May Be Used for Addressing Chronic Absenteeism

Formula Funding:
- **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Title I, Part A** funds, including school improvement funds, may be used on evidence-based strategies to increase attendance and instructional time. For example, a school that operates a Title I targeted assistance program may use Title I funds to implement strategies to increase attendance and instructional time for students who are failing or most at risk of failing.
- **ESEA Title II, Part A** funds may be used by districts and schools to implement evidence-based professional development programming focused on increased student engagement and training on the data and early warning intervention systems.
- **ESEA Title IV, Part A** funds may be used to improve school conditions and create positive and healthy learning environments that support consistent student attendance.
- **ESEA Title IV, Part B (Nita B. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers)** funds may be used to provide out-of-school time opportunities (such as enrichment programs before school, after school, and during school breaks) to enhance connections between students their school, family, and program partners which can increase attendance.
- **ESEA Title IV, Part E** funds may be used to strengthen family engagement practices, which can help foster daily student attendance.
- **Stronger Connections Grant** program, authorized under the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, can be used to drive funding to high-needs districts to create safe, welcoming school environments and fight against chronic absenteeism.

*Competitive Grants***:**
- **Full-Service Community Schools** provide wrap around supports including before and afterschool, behavioral health, on school grounds to support families. These funds may be used to address chronic absenteeism and support student engagement.
- **Promise Neighborhoods** provides comprehensive cradle-to-career supports to students in low-income neighborhoods.

2. **<u>Providing High-Dosage Tutoring</u>**

High-dosage tutoring programs can [accelerate](#) student learning and, when aligned with students' instructional program, complement other school-based activities to support student success (such as building educator capacity through the use of math and literacy coaches, which [research](#) shows can improve student achievement).

Quality Components

[Research](#) supports the following practices, which are associated with improved student outcomes:

1. **Use well-trained tutors,** which may include teachers, paraprofessionals, teaching candidates, retired teachers, AmeriCorps members, volunteers, and others. When possible, tutors should consistently support the same students.
2. **Provide tutoring in small groups.** 1:1 is best, but groups of 2-4, for example, can also drive improvements.
3. **Provide at least three sessions per week of at least 30 minutes per session.**
4. **Wherever possible, conduct tutoring during the school day**, so that the students are better able to consistently attend. Tutoring programs that take place during the school day have the largest effects.
5. **Align with an evidence-based, structured curriculum** that emphasizes strong core instruction. Take specific actions to support student learning, including using quizzing, asking deep explanatory questions, spacing learning over time, connecting and integrating abstract and concrete representations of concepts, and combining graphical representations — like figures and graphs — with verbal descriptions.

States, schools and districts should also continually assess student attendance and performance to evaluate and improve on program quality.

Many States and districts are implementing and scaling up tutoring programs aligned with research-based components. In [Tennessee](#), 50,000 elementary and middle school students were assigned high-dosage tutoring during the 2021-22 school year. [Illinois](#) incorporated the hiring, training, and overseeing of tutors into their public university educator preparation programs, expanding access to high-impact tutoring for students most in need, creating a sustainable pipeline of tutors for K-12 students, and improving college/district partnerships as well as practicum experiences for teacher candidates. [Baltimore City](#)'s high-impact tutoring program integrates tutoring within their existing multi-tier system of supports (MTSS) framework, easing operational and funding challenges. [Maryland](#) has also launched a statewide strategy to provide high-dosage tutoring to more than 60,000 students.

Resources to support high-dosage tutoring

- [The National Partnership for Student Success (NPSS)](#) is a collaboration between the Department, AmeriCorps, and the Johns Hopkins University Everyone Graduates Center. NPSS can help States, school districts, and community-based organizations improve, expand, and scale high quality programs. NPSS can also help States and communities recruit qualified

tutors, mentors, student success coaches, integrated student support coordinators, and postsecondary education transition coaches to help staff these initiatives.

- The *Establishing and Implementing Tutoring Programs Package* from the National Comprehensive Center provides steps States and districts can take that can be applied immediately to classroom practice to stand up high-quality tutoring programs. It also provides best practices for planning the expansion of tutoring programs to the State or district level.
- *Strategies for Using American Rescue Plan Funding to Address the Impact of Lost Instructional Time* provides guidance to districts in effectively using funds, including remaining ARP funds, to accelerate learning. Strategies include: (1) providing students with tailored learning supports; (2) implementing evidence-based tutoring practices; and (3) using diagnostic and formative assessment to inform and personalize instruction.
- Secretary Cardona has called on colleges and universities to partner with districts to increase the number of college students serving as tutors and in other high-impact roles supporting students. This includes through using federal work-study funds to pay tutors, providing sustainable source of funding for these programs. The Secretary's letter also identifies additional Department resources that districts can use to support these efforts.
- Schools can utilize AmeriCorps funding to place members as tutors across grade and subject areas and to advance a variety of high-dosage tutoring models. An AmeriCorps partnership can not only provide schools with access to well-trained tutors to deliver evidence-based support to students but can also support school districts and institutions of higher education to build pathways to careers in education for those serving. Department grantees and subgrantees may use Department program funds as matching for AmeriCorps programs.

Policymaker and Educator Actions

- ***If you are a governor or a chief State school officer,*** launch a statewide effort to increase high-dosage tutoring (using remaining ARP funds, if available) in communities and schools that need it the most. Evaluate State achievement and other data to expand existing programming. Commit to providing a targeted number of tutors delivering evidence-based tutoring to a set number of students. You can also commit to establishing and/or expanding partnerships with colleges, universities, and school districts to recruit and train tutors and other support staff. To support these efforts, consider partnering with colleges and universities or AmeriCorps members to increase the supply of tutors in your area. State support is crucial in helping schools provide effective high-dosage tutoring programs. States can support schools implementing tutoring by providing technical assistance, funding, lists of vetted tutoring providers, and convening stakeholders that can work together to scale and improve these efforts.
- ***If you are a superintendent,*** launch a robust districtwide effort to increase high-dosage tutoring and integrate high-dosage tutoring into your district's MTSS or response to intervention frameworks, which may already be scheduled into the school day.
- ***If you are a college or university president,*** support local districts by helping more postsecondary education students to serve as tutors and mentors in K-12 schools as part of a work-study or other program. Partner with districts to place teacher candidates in schools as tutors, providing literacy and math coaching or data analysis through faculty or graduate students, as appropriate. Join the NPSS Higher Education Coalition.

Selection of U.S. Department of Education Funds that May Be Used for Implementing High-Dosage Tutoring

Formula Funding:
- **ESEA Title I, Part A funds,** including school improvement funds under section 1003, may support high-dosage tutoring programming in schools receiving Title I funds.
- **ESEA Title II, Part A** funds may be used to train educators on delivering instruction via high-dosage tutoring.
- **ESEA Title III** funds may be used for high-dosage tutoring for English learners to help them attain English proficiency and develop high levels of academic achievement in English.
- **ESEA Title IV, Part A** Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant funds may be used to support tutoring to expand student access to well-rounded educational opportunities.
- **ESEA Title IV, Part B (Nita B. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers)** funds may be used to support tutoring during non-school hours, particularly for students who attend schools with high concentrations of students from low-income backgrounds and students in schools that are identified by the State for support and improvement.
- **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** funds may be used to provide special education and related services, as well as supplementary aids and services, such as high-dosage tutoring if appropriate and included in the IEP to a child with a disability in accordance with the child's IEP.

Competitive Grants:

- **Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL):** The Department's IAL grant program provides funding for districts that serve high concentrations of students from low-income families to improve literacy skills for children and students from birth through 12th grade, which may include high-dosage tutoring.
- **Education, Innovation, & Research (EIR):** The EIR program provides funding to create, develop, implement, replicate, or scale innovations to improve student achievement. Districts can apply for funding to continue the innovative programs they created with ESSER funding, including high-dosage tutoring.
- **Full-Service Community Schools:** Full-Service Community Schools grant funds may be used to hire for tutoring roles and support high-dosage tutoring programming.
- **Promise Neighborhoods:** Promise Neighborhood grant funds may be used to hire for high-dosage tutoring.

3. Providing Summer and Expanded/Afterschool Learning Programs

Consistent attendance in summer programs with academic instruction can increase student outcomes in math and reading. High-quality afterschool programs can likewise have demonstrated positive effects on student math and reading achievement, and support students' sense of

belonging. The use of data on student participation and program quality can help these programs succeed, and their success supports teachers in providing instruction more effectively during the school day.

Quality Components

The following practices can strengthen summer and expanded/afterschool learning programs:

1. **Align with school day (and grade level) academic content** and standards;
2. **Maximize student attendance and participation** by being adaptive to individual and small-group needs and by **including an enrichment component** to support student interest and engagement;
3. **Use trained educators** and staff, and provide ongoing development and support;
4. **Provide free transportation and meals**; and
5. **Design instruction to accelerate learning** (e.g., through inquiry- and project-based forms of instruction) to increase student engagement.

States, schools and districts should continually assess student attendance and performance to evaluate and improve on program quality.

ARP has helped fuel [record expansion](#) of these programs. For example, the Autauga County Schools in Alabama, in partnership with a local YMCA, leveraged $2.5 million in ARP funds for afterschool and summer program and saw more than two-thirds of the students enrolled in the summer 2023 reading camps increase their literacy levels and/or avoid summer learning loss. The Hillsboro School District and Hillsboro City Government in Oregon leveraged $4.8 million in ARP funds to increase afterschool programs slots from 320 to more than 1,000 for students in grades K-6. The South Carolina Department of Education, in collaboration with the South Carolina Afterschool Alliance, made a $1.5 million investment of ARP funds to Wings for Kids, creating five afterschool and summer programs for 500 students in Title I elementary schools.

Resources to Support High-quality Summer, and Expanded/Afterschool Learning Programs

- [The Engage Every Student Initiative](#) is a partnership between the Department, the National Summer Learning Association, Afterschool Alliance, National League of Cities, the School Superintendents Association (AASA), and the Department's National Comprehensive Center to help communities utilize ARP funds alongside other state and local resources to ensure that every child who wants a spot in a high-quality, out-of-school time program has one. State and districts leaders and community-based organizations can also refer to these [tip sheets](#) to support high quality programming. Leaders can contact the [Initiative](#) for support and explore technical assistance to support expansion and program sustainability on [the Initiative's website](#).
- States can join the [Strategic Use of Summer and Afterschool Set Asides Community of Practice,](#) comprised of cross-agency State teams that are committed to demonstrating the lasting benefits of summer and afterschool funding for youth, families, and out-of-school time systems.
- The [*Making Summer a Successful and Sustainable Strategy for Student Growth*](#) resource from the National Comprehensive Center provides best practices for implementing summer

programming and offers examples of how a district implemented and is sustaining a successful summer program.

- The *Guide to Accelerated Learning* offers descriptions, resources, and examples of State educational agencies implementing accelerated learning in their out-of-school time programs.

Policymaker and Educator Actions

- ***If you are a governor or a chief State school officer,*** commit to allocating funds or launching new initiatives across your State that are focused on creating or expanding afterschool or summer offerings in 2024, prioritizing underserved districts. Publicly set a goal for and report on the number of evidence-based summer learning and enrichment programs provided, and for how many students. Encourage your districts and schools to invest remaining ARP funds in expanded learning time programming and commit to investments to help sustain these efforts.
- ***If you are a superintendent,*** expand summer programming in 2024, and offer after-school programming through your schools, or community-based partners, to more students in the current school year and the next. You can also make a pledge to support expansion of out of school time in your community, including reaching out to the Engage Every Student initiative for technical assistance and to secure sufficient staffing.

Selection of U.S. Department of Education Funds that May Be Used for Summer and Expanded/Afterschool Learning Time

Formula Funding:
- **ESEA Title I, Part A** funds may be used to continue expanded learning time programming in schools receiving Title I funds. For example, a school that operates a Title I targeted assistance program may use Title I funds to provide extended learning time for students who are failing or most at risk of failing.
- **ESEA Title II, Part A** funds may be used to implement evidence-based professional development programming focused on effectively using expanded learning time to support student acceleration.
- **ESEA Title III** funds may be used for extended learning time that is specifically designed to help English learners attain English proficiency and develop high levels of academic achievement in English.
- **ESEA Title IV, Part A** funds may be used to provide student access to a well-rounded education, including during enriching expanded learning programs.
- **ESEA Title IV, Part B (Nita B. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers)** support the creation of community learning centers that provide academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours for children, particularly students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools.
- **IDEA** funds may be used to provide special education and related services, as well as supplementary aids and services, such as enrichment during expanded or summer learning if appropriate and included in the IEP to a child with a disability in accordance with the child's IEP.

Competitive Grants:

- **Full Service Community Schools** funds may be used to support summer and expanded/afterschool learning programs.
- **Promise Neighborhoods** provides comprehensive cradle-to-careers supports, including through expanded learning time programming, to students in low-income neighborhoods.

Leaders at all levels can access technical assistance in taking these actions through the National Partnership for Student Success, here.

Disclaimer: Outside resources included and cited in this document, such as links, articles, and other information, provide insights on education practices from the perspective of schools, parents, students, grantees, community members and other education stakeholders to promote the continuing discussion of educational improvement efforts, innovation, and supports. The Department has not independently verified the information contained in these outside resources, which are provided for the reader's convenience. The inclusion of outside resources is not intended to reflect their importance, nor is it intended to be an endorsement by the Department or the Federal government of any views expressed, products or services offered, or curriculum or pedagogy.