

USING THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT FUNDING FOR HIGH-IMPACT TUTORING

As we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic and schools reopen their doors to in-person learning, we are faced with the **challenge of reengaging students** — many of whom have been chronically absent from school and have experienced severe social stresses. With students having faced an extraordinary range of experiences during the past year, a “business as usual” approach is unlikely to rebuild students’ well-being and accelerate their learning. Schools need new approaches, targeted to students’ needs. With funds from **the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)**, schools will have the resources they need to implement these approaches, including high-impact tutoring.

ARPA Funding Opens Opportunities

ARPA provides **massive and unprecedented funding** for K-12 education, including \$123 billion for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund III (ESSERF III). **Without careful planning and political resolve, however, this funding will be wasted.**

ARPA funds can be used to reengage students and accelerate learning for students who were most hurt by the pandemic. In fact, ARPA stipulates that states set aside 5% of funding to address learning loss and that local educational agencies set aside 20% of their allotment for this purpose. The table below shows that this amounts to \$6.1 billion nationwide at the state level and \$21.96 billion nationwide at the local level. This means that a total of \$28 billion in ESSERF III funding is dedicated to *learning loss alone*. To be clear, any of the remaining \$95 billion can also be used for this same purpose.

SEA Set-Aside	5% of Total State Grants	\$6.10 Billion
LEA Set-Aside	20% of LEA Subgrants	\$21.96 Billion
Total Learning Loss Funds	23% of ESSERF III	\$28.06 Billion

ARPA Learning Loss Funds for High-Impact Tutoring

The language that defines learning loss interventions in ARPA is relatively brief but does contain stipulations that are important for those shaping state and local policies around ARPA implementation to understand.

Though they are not explicitly mentioned in the law, high-impact tutoring interventions fully comply with these stipulations:

- Interventions have to be “**evidence-based**,” but this term is not defined here or elsewhere in the statute, which means that how state and school districts define this term is of critical importance. The evidence in favor of high-impact tutoring is some of the strongest for any intervention.
- Allowable interventions include “*summer learning or summer enrichment, extended day, comprehensive after school programs, or extended school year programs.*” A key point here is that this list is preceded by the term “**such as**,” meaning this is an *illustrative but not exhaustive* list. States and districts could decide to implement all, some, or none of

these interventions in their use of learning loss funds. High-impact tutoring is an evidence-based intervention, even though it is not included in the list of examples.

- Interventions, **singularly or collectively**, must meet students' academic, social, and emotional needs. High-impact tutoring has been shown to positively affect both academic learning and school engagement.¹
- Student **subgroups** under ESSA for whom **disproportionate impact** must be addressed include **students from low-income families, students of color, students with disabilities, and English learners**. High-impact tutoring has proven effective for a wide range of students, even those years behind grade-level standards.²

The Promise of High-Impact Tutoring

Research provides strong evidence that **tutoring**, not just any tutoring but rather initiatives with specific intentional characteristics, can produce large learning gains for a wide range of students, including those who have fallen behind academically. Tutoring also offers significant spillover effects including greater school engagement, higher grades, and benefits to the tutor, such as exposure to teaching as a career. A 2017 study examined interventions that aimed to improve educational achievement for elementary and middle school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Of all the interventions examined, including summer programs, feedback and progress monitoring, cooperative learning, computer-assisted instruction, and mentoring of students, tutoring was most effective.³

However, **not all tutoring is equitable or effective**. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, low-income parents could enroll their child in a state-approved tutoring program after school if their school was not making adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years. This tutoring showed little benefit for students, in no small part because what states required for approval varied widely and was often minimal. States also made little effort to reach the students who would benefit the most from tutoring. In the end, only 23% of eligible students even enrolled.⁴

Promising State Policies

Much of the ARPA funds will flow directly to districts, but states can play a key role by (a) setting guardrails for districts' approaches to defining high-impact tutoring, (b) providing technical assistance to districts so that districts choose and implement the high-impact tutoring program that best fits the needs of their students, and (c) developing the supply of tutors through centralized recruitment and initial training. To be clear, in the absence of state guidelines, districts should follow these policies as closely as possible in implementing tutoring if they truly want them to be "high-impact."

First, in keeping with research on high-impact tutoring, states can set guardrails on approaches to tutoring. While state education agencies cannot require districts to use funding in specific ways, states have a role in guiding local policies to ensure that high-impact tutoring programs are evidence-based so that they, in turn, effectively address unfinished learning for those

¹ Jonathan Guryan et al., "Not Too Late: Improving Academic Outcomes Among Adolescents," NBER working paper no. 28531, March 2021, https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w28531/w28531.pdf.

² Guryan et al., "Not Too Late: Improving Academic Outcomes Among Adolescents."

³ Jens Dietrichson, Martin Bøg, Trine Filges, and Anne-Marie Klint Jørgensen, "Academic Interventions for Elementary and Middle School Students With Low Socioeconomic Status: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Review of Educational Research* 87, no. 2 (2017): 243–282, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654316687036>.

⁴ Carolyn J. Heinrich et al., "Improving the Implementation and Effectiveness of Out-of-School-Time Tutoring," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 33, no. 2 (2014): 471–494.

students most in need of additional support. States should set rigorous standards for high-impact tutoring programs that are in line with research evidence, utilize state set-asides to support the adoption and implementation of such programs, target programs to students most impacted by the pandemic, and devise metrics that gauge learning gains for participating students.

These guardrails could include requiring the tutoring programs chosen to have either independent, experimental evidence of effectiveness at improving student learning OR these five features:

1. **Tutoring should be embedded in existing schools either during the school day or immediately before or after the school day.** Embedded programs have a significantly higher likelihood of student attendance and reaching the students who need it most.
2. **Tutoring sessions should include a minimum of three sessions per week, of approximately 30 to 60 minutes per session, and one to four students per tutor.** For tutoring approaches to be effective, students have to spend a substantial amount of time working with their tutor.
3. **Students should work with a consistent tutor who is supported by ongoing oversight and coaching.** The basis of effective tutoring is strong tutor-student relationships. Tutors need initial training, oversight, ongoing coaching, and clear lines of accountability in order for the program to be effective.
4. **Data should inform tutoring sessions.** Tutors should use data to understand students' strengths and needs, and should build their sessions to focus on those needs.
5. **Materials should be aligned with research and state standards** and should be engaging for students and easy for tutors to use, given their training and experience.

Second, states can fund technical assistance to help districts implement high-impact tutoring, support implementation, and ensure continuous improvement. Funding for technical assistance for development can improve the probability of success. Clear guidance on the characteristics of high-impact tutoring and local programs that show evidence of high quality can help districts design and implement programs effectively. Design workshops that walk districts through the critical steps in developing a tutoring program, as well as a vetted list of tutoring providers, can further support this implementation.

Third, states can create critical infrastructure to support districts in implementing high-impact tutoring smoothly and with quality. For example, they can help develop and manage the supply of tutors with centralized recruitment and initial training. This approach can be particularly helpful for tutors with skills that are rarer, such as dual language speakers or those with strong advanced math skills, and it can be particularly helpful for places that have difficulty recruiting tutors overall, such as rural districts. The approach also reduces the burden on potential tutors by easing access to a tutoring position. Tutors would no longer need to apply separately to each of many relatively small tutoring operations.

States can also create tutor training programs that can guarantee a minimal level of training for tutors, particularly in the areas of student safety and engaging in culturally responsive tutoring strategies. If states are creative in finding new sources for tutors such as partnering with universities and educator preparation programs, they may reap the dual benefits of recruiting energetic and diverse tutors for students today, while increasing and diversifying the pipeline of teachers for the future.

In the second volume of the “COVID-19 Handbook: Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students’ Needs,”⁵ the U.S. Department of Education (ED) makes evidence-based recommendations for high-impact tutoring programs that are generally aligned with the above guidelines. Similarly, ED asks states to explain the evidence-based interventions, including high-impact tutoring, that they plan to implement in its template for ESSERF applications, which are to be submitted by June 7.⁶

States are already acting. The Texas Education Agency is providing research-based training to local education agencies and their area affiliates and providing a vetted tutor provider list to enable them to design and implement programs quickly and with quality.⁷ In Colorado, a bipartisan bill to establish a statewide high-impact tutoring grant program is currently making its way through the state legislature, clearly reflecting best practices in high-impact tutoring. Given the challenges of implementation and differences in local conditions — particularly in Colorado’s many rural districts — the bill also specifies some flexibilities for districts, allowing them to modify some of the above requirements by providing a rationale for and outlining their alternate plans.⁸

With great need, substantial new funds, and a clear knowledge base for identifying the most promising tutoring approaches, we are in an unusually good position to provide students with the resources that they need to successfully reengage in school and thrive. States have a role to play through guidance, policy, and direct support so that districts can choose to effectively meet the needs of their students. Once districts start implementing high-impact tutoring they are likely to find that this proven approach should be part of core instruction, not only in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic, but for the long run.

For more information, contact the brief authors:

Susanna Loeb
Annenberg Institute, Brown University
loeb@brown.edu

Charles Barone
Education Reform Now
charles@edreformnow.org

⁵ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, *ED COVID-19 Handbook, Volume 2: Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students’ Needs* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, 2021),

<https://www2.ed.gov/documents/coronavirus/reopening-2.pdf>.

⁶ *State Plan for the American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 2021),

https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/04/ARP-ESSER-State-Plan-Template-04-20-2021_130PM.pdf.

⁷ *Senate Committee Report*, S.B. 2023, Texas Senate, Education Committee, 87th legislative sess., 2021, <https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=87R&Bill=SB2023>.

⁸ *Supplemental Education High-Impact Tutoring Programs*, H.B. 21-1234, Colorado General Assembly, 1st reg. sess., 2021, <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb21-1234>.