

## University of Chicago Education Lab and Aspen Economic Strategy Group Publish New Paper on Solutions to U.S. Learning Loss

*Researchers to Congress: More time to spend ESSER funds, more resources, and more accountability to address learning loss*

**Monday, October 30, 2023** – The pandemic set students back dramatically in their learning, and with less than a year until the expiration of schools’ federal COVID-19 relief funding, the [Aspen Economic Strategy Group](#) (AESG) today released an urgent call for more federal resources, greater funding flexibility, and increased accountability to address U.S. learning loss. The paper – which is featured in the AESG’s forthcoming annual policy volume and authored by faculty co-directors of the [University of Chicago Education Lab](#), Dr. Jonathan Guryan and Dr. Jens Ludwig – details the urgent, once-in-a-century public education crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and proposes policy solutions to help schools scale proven strategies like high-dosage tutoring and close learning gaps.

“Addressing the pandemic-era learning loss is critical to the development of the next generation of American workers,” **said AESG director Dr. Melissa S. Kearney**. “If we fail to do this as a country, the learning loss these students experienced during the pandemic will hold them back for years, resulting in lower levels of human capital, earnings potential, and productivity. We owe it to this generation of students to make up for the educational setbacks they were saddled with, and it is in our nation’s economic interest to do so.”

In their paper titled *Overcoming Pandemic-Induced Learning Loss*, Ludwig and Guryan argue that the futures of American students are at risk due to massive learning losses incurred during the pandemic. Compounding the crisis is the looming September 2024 end date for Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding—even though the country has made almost no headway addressing learning loss.

“School districts have struggled to make progress remediating pandemic learning loss, and they haven’t received the support needed to make progress at scale,” **said Dr. Jonathan Guryan, co-director of the University of Chicago Education Lab**. “Pulling their federal funding at the end of the 2023-24 academic year would be like calling it quits before the real work even begins.”

To understand where to go next, Ludwig and Guryan first look backward to examine why so little progress was made over the past few years. Changing student learning outcomes requires changing what schools do; such changes have been hard for schools to make partly because of chaos in the wake of the pandemic and because change is generally difficult. Such challenges are explained in the context of one educational intervention known for centuries to help students of all ages: high-dosage tutoring.

High-dosage tutoring is one of the most effective learning technologies ever studied and can be delivered effectively at scale. US Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona encouraged districts to prioritize pandemic relief funding for high-dosage tutoring—but they need more time, more money, and more accountability to make it happen. In the paper, Ludwig and Guryan call on Congress to extend the deadline for ESSER funding allocation and increase the funding available for schools to invest in tutoring. They write about how districts may need a nudge — or even a push — to ensure they follow through on implementing one of the closest things we have (for better or worse) to a “COVID learning loss” vaccine.

“Changing student outcomes requires changing what schools do,” said **Dr. Jens Ludwig, Edwin A. and Betty L. Bergman Distinguished Service Professor and co-director of the University of Chicago Education Lab.** “But if America wants to avoid lifelong harm to the current generation of 50 million school-age children, we have no option but to change course. We know that there are a few promising strategies to overcome learning loss, like high-dosage tutoring. Now, we need to scale them.”

As a follow-up to their paper, the Aspen Economic Strategy Group will host an in-person and live-streamed discussion with researchers in early December in Washington, D.C. The event – titled *Overcoming Pandemic Learning Loss: Bringing High Dosage Tutoring to Students Nationwide* – will include a conversation with Dr. Melissa Kearney, director of the Aspen Economic Strategy Group, Dr. Jens Ludwig, co-director of the University of Chicago Education Lab, and Dr. Nakia Towns, Chief Operating Officer at Accelerate – The National Collaborative for Accelerated Learning.

Read the full paper [here](#).

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