

Intelligence MEMOS



From: Philip Oreopoulos

To: Canada's Education Ministers

Date: May 26, 2021

Re: **HIGH-DOSAGE TUTORING STEMS PANDEMIC LEARNING LOSS. CANADA SHOULD GET GOING**

Over a year after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, student learning loss remains a pressing policy concern.

Inconsistent learning environments, low attendance rates, and inequitable access to educational technologies and resources have created an unprecedented educational crisis, particularly for low-income students and visible minorities.

Students are behind, and catching them up must be a priority. High-dosage tutoring presents a promising solution – one that other countries have begun to pursue through national or state-level policy initiatives. Canadian policymakers should follow suit and work towards initiatives that establish funding for – and expand access to – high-dosage tutoring to help get learners back on track.

The pandemic has made teaching more difficult. Achievement gaps have widened as some students struggle and others remain at or above grade level due to more independent learning styles, greater access to learning resources, or additional help at home.

Tutoring is the most effective tool we have to address this gap. It lets students learn at their own pace and get the personalized attention they need.

In a recent [meta-analysis](#) of 129 tutoring programs evaluated using random assignment, my co-authors and I found that 112 improved test scores, most by more than the equivalent of receiving an additional half-year of school.

All types of tutors were effective, on average, but professional tutors – paid, trained tutors such as school staff members, education students, and service fellows – were especially effective at improving student performance, as was offering tutoring multiple times per week and holding sessions during the school day.

The United States is gearing up to expand these kinds of programs with the Biden Administration allotting \$122 billion in support for K-12 public schools, of which roughly 20 percent must be used on programs that address learning loss, including tutoring.

US tutoring initiatives are moving forward at the state level as well. In May, the governor of California [proposed](#) a \$2.6-billion investment in high-dosage tutoring.

Last summer, a former Tennessee governor and his wife used their foundation to launch the [Tennessee Tutoring Corps](#) to provide high-dosage tutoring to low-income students across the state. In January, Tennessee lawmakers approved a [\\$160-million package](#) of education bills aimed at reducing learning loss, including the creation of the Tennessee Accelerated Literacy and Learning Corps to provide ongoing tutoring for students throughout the school year.

[Texas](#) and [Colorado](#) have legislation to establish state tutoring initiatives. These bills follow evidence-based guidelines by advocating for high-dosage tutoring from professional tutors that will occur during the school day. Lastly, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio's proposed [budget](#) earmarked \$500 million for testing and tutoring in the largest US public school district.

Meanwhile in the UK, a £1 billion package for schools, including £350 million towards the establishment of the [National Tutoring Programme](#) (NTP) was announced last year to give schools access to subsidized tutoring sessions, with a focus on students who are most behind. As of last month, more than 196,000 students had been enrolled from over 4,727 schools, though only 93,000 had commenced tutoring. NTP tutors will be paid for their work and will receive ongoing training.

This all raises the question as to why tutoring has been largely missing from Canadian policy debates. Quebec recently introduced a new volunteer program, doubling its tutoring budget from \$11 million to \$22 million – a start, but more needs to be done.

Provinces should seek to implement tutoring initiatives that follow evidence-based principles on a large scale. One model that works comes from [Saga Education](#), a US-based tutoring organization that teams up with high schools to offer daily, in-school tutoring for students behind in math. A program evaluation in Chicago Public Schools found that students in Saga learned an extra one to two years' worth of math beyond their peers in an academic year as it significantly raised average national percentile rank on math exams and reduced math failure rates.

Several resources exist to help build effective tutoring programs. The [National Student Support Accelerator](#) offers evidence-based tools for program implementers. And [SagaCoach](#) is a free, self-paced tutor training portal. Policymakers, education leaders, and tutoring program implementers can use these resources to build effective, high-impact tutoring programs, but not without government funding and political will.

The pandemic has created an educational crisis that must be addressed. The longer we wait to act, the more dire the situation. High-dosage tutoring is effective and Canada must take policy action now, before the window to help students recover begins to close.

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