

Return to School: Too Crucial to Postpone

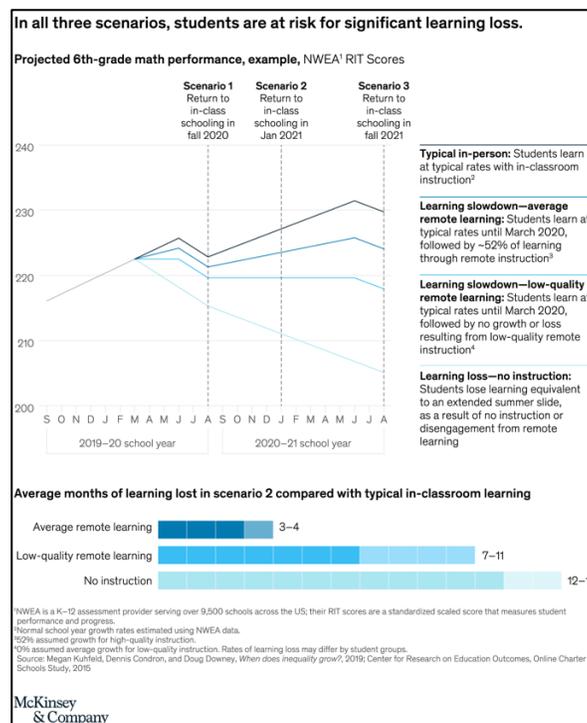
American families know that it's critical students safely return to in-person learning this fall – and conservative lawmakers are working to make it happen. The risks of leaving too many children behind academically, nutritionally, physically, and economically are far too severe to put off a full return to school.

American Academy of Pediatrics: “Schools are fundamental to child and adolescent development and well-being and provide our children and adolescents with academic instruction, social and emotional skills, safety, reliable nutrition, physical/ speech and mental health therapy, and opportunities for physical activity, among other benefits.”

Academic and Achievement Gap:

Our nation’s schools are fundamental to child and adolescent development. Research has shown that school closures disproportionately affect the most vulnerable students, widening disparities in achievement and harming economic potential.

In June 2020, McKinsey & Company considered the learning lost from the continued delay of in-person instruction. In their second scenario (in-class instruction does not resume until January 2021), they estimated that students who remained enrolled could lose three to four months of learning if they received average remote instruction, seven to 11 months with lower-quality remote instruction, and 12 to 14 months if they did not receive any instruction at all.



(Source: “COVID-19 and student learning in the United States: The hurt could last a lifetime,” [McKinsey & Company](#), June 1, 2020)

The impact of that learning gap would be grossly disproportionate: “Learning loss will probably be greatest among low-income, black, and Hispanic students.”

- “The average loss [of education] in our middle epidemiological scenario is seven months. But black students may fall behind by 10.3 months, Hispanic students by 9.2 months, and low-income students by more than a year. We estimate that this would exacerbate existing achievement gaps by 15 to 20 percent.” (Source: “COVID-19 and student learning in the United States: The hurt could last a lifetime,” [McKinsey & Company](#), June 1, 2020)

Studies predict that COVID-19 closures will probably increase high school drop-out rates by two to nine percent. Current drop-out rates are already higher for Hispanic and black students, at 6.5 percent and 5.5 percent, respectively.

- “COVID-19 closures will probably increase high-school drop-out rates (currently 6.5 percent for Hispanic, 5.5 percent for black, and 3.9 percent for white students, respectively). The virus is disrupting many of the supports that can help vulnerable kids stay in school: academic engagement and achievement, strong relationships with caring adults, and supportive home environments.” (Source: “COVID-19 and student learning in the United States: The hurt could last a lifetime,” [McKinsey & Company](#), June 1, 2020)

Between higher drop-out rates and increased loss of learning, continued COVID-19 school closures threaten to widen and exacerbate the current achievement gap by 15-20 percent.

- See this [study](#) for more information on the achievement gap in the United States and the role that schools can play in closing the gap.

Nutrition:

Millions of children in America rely on their schools for nutritious meals. Without structured access to those meals, many food insecure children will experience hunger on a daily basis, and in some dire circumstances, can experience stunted growth and decreased cognitive function.

- In 2019, 29.6 million children received lunches daily from the [National School Lunch Program](#).
 - **20.1 million of those children received free lunch**
 - 1.7 million children received reduced price lunch
- In 2019, 14.77 million children received breakfast daily from the [National School Breakfast Program](#).
 - 11.8 million received free breakfast
 - 740,000 received reduced price breakfast

Many states, cities, and school districts are taking innovative steps to bring the meals to the children who need them most; however, these actions only temporarily fill the gap and are not long-term solutions.

Physical/Mental Stresses and Decreased Activity:

While children are away from schools, educators are unable to effectively address important learning deficits, child and adolescent physical or sexual abuse, substance use, depression, and suicidal ideation.

When children cannot escape their homes for the safety of school, they will bear witness to, and be victims of, increased domestic violence and physical or sexual abuse.

- In a December 2020 issue of [Forensic Science International](#), an article stated that “...many countries are already indicating a dramatic increase in reported cases of domestic violence.”
 - [Forensic Science International: Reports:](#)
Many family violence (domestic violence, child abuse, and pet abuse) victims may currently be facing a “worst case” scenario – finding themselves trapped in the home with a violent perpetrator during a time of severely limited contact with the outside world. It’s not uncommon for domestic violence abusers to isolate their victims as an act of control or to reduce opportunity for disclosure of abuse, and the current societal conditions are likely furthering the impact of these actions. Perpetrator-imposed restrictions and continued surveillance of social media, internet, and cell phones may also limit the ability of victims to reach out for help electronically. **Further, schools, libraries, and churches are all critical staples in family routines around the globe. Families who are victimized by violence or abuse in the home indicate these institutions often offer critical emotional support and provide opportunity for a “reprieve” from their abusive home environment – a reprieve they are no longer getting at this time.**

Being confined at home further decreases physical activity in children, who instead are spending their time sitting in front of computers or other electronic devices all day. With many playgrounds, parks, and fitness facilities closed or operating under reduced occupancy, the opportunities for children to practice physical fitness are low. Being at school and attending physical education classes provides students with an outlet to cultivate healthy practices that will serve them for their entire lives.

Funding:

Many conservative states have partitioned out millions of dollars in their Education Stabilization Funds from the CARES Act to schools to help them effectively address getting back to school safely during the pandemic.

- The President has made more than \$13 billion available to support continued education for K-12 students enrolled in public, charter, and private schools affected by the coronavirus.
- Through the Treasury Department’s \$150 billion Coronavirus Relief Fund, State and local governments can access funding to help school districts affected by the coronavirus.