

Pandemic recovery remains an unfinished project, and new challenges loom ahead.

Since 2020, the Evidence Project has tracked research documenting the pandemic's impact and school systems' recovery efforts. We have engaged researchers and organized working groups to identify gaps in existing knowledge and high priority research questions. During 2023, we consulted with 86 experts about the available evidence. Our conclusion: **the work of remediating pandemic-related harms is incomplete—and perhaps about to get more difficult.**

Pandemic recovery remains incomplete

- Nationwide, academic achievement is at [its lowest in three decades](#). Some states have already [made up ground lost](#), while others have made little progress.
- [Students of color](#), students with disabilities, and other marginalized youth were hit hardest by the pandemic. Their academic progress has yet to rebound to pre-pandemic trends.

Commitment to recovery has weakened

- Political and stakeholder support for addressing students' academic learning needs has continued to wane.
- Few states are transparently measuring progress towards remediating harms stemming from the pandemic.

Obstacles to learning acceleration are increasing

- [Learning acceleration strategies](#)—from tutoring and summer school to stronger in-class differentiation—have stalled in the face of staffing challenges, chronic absenteeism, and low uptake by both families and districts.

School disengagement is growing

- [Chronic absenteeism](#) has reached [crisis levels](#), all but locking in pandemic-related learning losses.

Financial resources to support recovery are dwindling

- [Enrollment declines](#) and the [end of ESSER funding](#) will put financial stress on districts and charter schools.

We will continue collecting evidence on:

- What strategies are most effective at addressing learning gaps
- Whether schools are providing meaningful access to learning acceleration
- The crisis in student engagement and attendance
- How enrollment declines and financial challenges impact student learning

We will need new evidence on:

- How to overcome obstacles that limit effective implementation of learning acceleration strategies
- Why participation in tutoring and summer school is so low
- How to adequately inform parents about student progress
- The causes of low engagement and possible solutions
- How investments in recovery can still continue with the expiration of federal relief dollars

To address these needs, the Evidence Project is convening **four working groups** and will commission research on priority topics.

<p>Working group #1: Humanize the harms and long-term implications of the pandemic for students</p> <p>Enrollment continues to decline, but so does action on pandemic recovery. At the same time, we continue to see the same decontextualized, overly-broad data and methods used to document pandemic-related harms—data unlikely to ignite significant commitments or action. This working group will identify research priorities around questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How has the pandemic shaped students’ struggles and successes in school and in life? • How do students and families view the long-term impacts of the pandemic on student well-being, labor market prospects, and enrollment in postsecondary education? • How do parents feel about long-term impacts, and how are they seeing them play out at home, at school, and after high school? What are effective strategies for communicating student needs to parents? 	<p>Working group #2: Identify bold, new learning solutions and conditions for their success</p> <p>Obstacles to learning acceleration are increasing—and current learning acceleration strategies are insufficient to address the harms caused by the pandemic. This working group will identify research priorities around questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the barriers to implementing known interventions (i.e., why have districts been unable to do what works)? • To what extent are districts implementing creative approaches to reconfiguring time, staff, and resources to accelerate student learning? • How can technology-based solutions (e.g., AI, remote instruction) help districts meet students’ learning needs with both scale and quality?
<p>Working group #3: Explore the causes of disengagement/absenteeism, identify solutions</p> <p>Student disengagement continues and may even be increasing. This and increasing absenteeism threatens to cement pandemic learning losses. This working group will identify research priorities around questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the root causes of decreased engagement and attendance (e.g., lack of relevance, conflicting family demands, lack of connection to adults in school, etc.)? • To what extent are districts implementing innovative solutions to increase engagement and attendance? • How are nontraditional schools (e.g., microschoools, charters) addressing the engagement crisis? 	<p>Working group #4: Protect student interests during budget cuts</p> <p>Districts are experiencing increased financial pressures and the resulting budget cuts may undermine schools’ investments in the very supports students most need. This working group will identify research priorities around questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can districts effectively respond to declining enrollment and revenues? • How can districts reduce the harm of budget cuts on students? • What are the most cost-effective strategies for accelerating learning in the face of financial challenges?