

NCDPI Releases “COVID-19 Impact Analysis of Lost Instructional Time” Report

A new report analyzing the performance of North Carolina students during last year’s far-reaching COVID-19 disruptions finds that learning progress slowed across all grades and subjects. The report from the N.C. Department of Public Instruction’s Office of Learning Recovery and Acceleration (OLR) showed that students made less progress, on average, than students in the same grades and courses in previous years. Results presented today to the State Board of Education show also that students who experienced more face-to-face learning in the classroom, and where specific and targeted resources and supports were implemented immediately, made stronger gains than students who learned only virtually.

To understand the impact of the pandemic on student learning, the report compared students’ projected 2020-21 school year scores on state End-of-Grade and End-of-Course exams with their actual scores for the 2020-21 school year. As this analysis was based on student-level data instead of aggregate samples of students, this report is one of the most comprehensive done to date on the effects of the pandemic on students in the state and nation.

The findings of this report will help NCDPI better target resources and prioritize funding for students who were most affected and for areas of the state most in need.

During today’s presentation, DPI staff highlighted the following key findings:

- On average, students made less progress during the pandemic than they did in previous years.
- Results show that there was a negative impact for all students, for all grades, for almost every subject (except English II), and especially for Math (5th-9th); Science (8th).
- Students who returned to the classroom for face-to-face learning and where specific and targeted resources and supports were immediately put in place, did better than the students whose instruction was purely remote and who were physically disengaged from their school community.

Staff from the Office of Learning Recovery and Acceleration offered these key takeaways to the board with a focus on eliminating opportunity gaps:

- **Connectivity** - Students need access to reliable broadband internet at home, which directly impacts their ability to access robust, dynamic instructional materials and resources. Cross-sector partnerships should focus on solving the rural and economic broadband divide.
- **In-Person Instruction** - The majority of students need regular interaction and direct personal engagement with their principals, teachers, and peers.

- **Students Disproportionately Impacted by the Pandemic** – Education leaders and teachers should focus resources and targeted interventions on students who have been most negatively impacted by disrupted learning caused by the pandemic.
- **Focus on Content Areas of Highest Need** - Education leaders and teachers should focus resources and targeted interventions for early grades reading, middle grades math, and science in the transition years (5th and 8th grades).

As required in legislation passed by the NC General Assembly (S.L. 2021-3 HB 196), DPI contracted with SAS to collect, analyze and report data related to the overall impacts of COVID-19 on public school units, students and families.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Catherine Truitt said that while the report findings are not surprising given the challenges that students and teachers faced last year, they are invaluable to education leaders.

“These findings are critical to understanding how we continue to work towards recovery and acceleration statewide,” Truitt said. “This preliminary report will help us pinpoint which North Carolina students need additional supports and allows us to better target resources to specific grades and content areas. This data is a significant step forward in our work to identify the challenges so we can continue developing and supporting district run interventions that accelerate student learning.”

Dr. Maher, director of the Office of Learning Recover and Acceleration, said the findings provide actionable research that districts and schools can use to help students recover instructional time during the pandemic.

“Importantly, these findings also have the potential to show us which district- and charter-led learning recovery and acceleration programs and interventions are working well for students across the state. We look forward to connecting with these schools and districts to highlight those promising practices and elevating them to assist others. Our work in OLR has only just begun and in the coming months, we will work with district and state leaders to decide which next-level analyses are needed to best serve students.”

Using the findings, NCDPI will better understand learning recovery and acceleration programs that are most needed and highlight those that have best served students. Moving forward, this report will serve as a benchmark to monitor progress over time and ensure students continue to accelerate in their learning.

In mid-March, the OLR will present these preliminary findings to the NC General Assembly’s Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee (JLEOC). There is opportunity for input from

state and local leaders on the next levels of analysis. The technical, and final, report on the impact of lost instructional time is due in December.

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