

# The Startling Evidence on Learning Loss Is In

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Illustration by Sam Whitney/The New York Times; photograph by WestLight/Getty Images

## By The Editorial Board

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In the thick of the Covid-19 pandemic, Congress sent [\\$190 billion in aid to schools](#), stipulating that 20 percent of the funds had to be used for reversing learning setbacks. At the time, educators knew that the impact on how children learn would be significant, but the extent was not yet known.

The evidence is now in, and it is startling. The school closures that took 50 million children out of classrooms at the start of the pandemic may prove to be the most damaging disruption in the history of American education. It also set [student progress in math and reading](#) back by two decades and widened the achievement gap that separates poor and wealthy children.

These learning losses will remain unaddressed when the federal money runs out in 2024. Economists are predicting that this generation, with such a significant educational gap, will experience diminished lifetime earnings and become [a significant drag on the economy](#). But education administrators and elected officials who should be mobilizing the country against this threat [are](#) not.

It will take a multidisciplinary approach, and at this point, all the solutions that will be needed long term can't be known; the work of getting kids back on solid ground is just beginning. But that doesn't mean there shouldn't be immediate action.

As a first step, elected officials at every level — federal, state and local — will need to devote substantial resources to replace the federal aid that is set to expire and must begin making up lost ground. This is a bipartisan issue, and parents, teachers and leaders in education have a role to play as well, in making sure that addressing learning loss and other persistent challenges facing children receives urgent attention.

The challenges have been compounded by an epidemic of absenteeism, as students who grew accustomed to missing school during the pandemic continue to do so after the resumption of in-person classes. Millions of young people have joined the ranks of the chronically absent — those who miss 10 percent or more of the days in the school year — and for whom absenteeism will translate into gaps in learning.

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