

APRIL 2024

Overcoming Pandemic Learning Loss

The Personalized Learning Initiative (PLI) in the Bay Area

THE CHALLENGE

The once-a-century public health crisis of the pandemic created a once-a-century public education crisis. Around the country, the closing of schools and shift to remote learning cost the average student at least half a school year's worth of learning. In the Bay Area, test scores—which had been improving prior to the pandemic—dropped significantly between 2019 and 2023 and have yet to recover, with disadvantaged students hit hardest.

The problem is far more serious than a short-term 'blip' in test scores. The data show that children who fail to meet key developmental milestones face significant long-term risk. Children who can't read by the end of 3rd grade are four times more likely to drop out. Students who haven't completed algebra by the end of 9th grade are five times more likely to drop out. The pandemic has dramatically increased the number of children – in San Jose and beyond – who are at risk of missing those key milestones. If we want to get them back on track, we need to act now.



Photo courtesy of Bay Area Tutoring Association.

THE SOLUTION: HIGH-DOSAGE TUTORING

The good news is that we've known how to overcome learning loss since the 15th century at Oxford: high-dosage tutoring. Research from the University of Chicago Education Lab found that students who completed 30 minutes of in-school tutoring at least three times a week doubled their math learning in a single academic year.

But while we know tutoring works, cost, and staffing barriers have made it difficult for schools to implement. Rocketship Public Schools California, like most public school systems, cannot afford to deliver this type of tutoring to all the students who would benefit – even with a massive one-time infusion of federal pandemic relief. Overcoming pandemic learning losses and remediating pre-pandemic disparities in San Jose will require figuring out how to deliver high-quality tutoring at public school prices. And that, in turn, will require an ambitious R&D initiative to scale up this promising strategy.

CONTACT US

To learn more about the Personalized Learning Initiative, contact Education Lab Executive Director Sadie Stockdale Jefferson, PhD (ssjefferson@uchicago.edu).

THE PLAN

We have launched a new [Personalized Learning Initiative](#) to support the expansion of high-dosage tutoring across the country. In San Jose, in partnership with the Bay Area Tutoring Association, we're bringing PLI to our district partner Rocketship Public Schools, with a focus on high-dosage tutoring to support literacy and numeracy for K-5 students. To that end, we are providing:

- **Direct service funding:** This enables Rocketship to extend high-dosage tutoring to a larger number of eligible students. These funds will be utilized to finance tutoring slots, procure technology licenses, appoint project directors, and more, ensuring that students receive the necessary support.
- **Program design and feedback:** Our research team is collaborating with Rocketship to guide them in adopting essential tutor program design features that have proven to be most effective in promoting student learning.
- **Technical assistance:** To ensure high-fidelity, on-the-ground implementation, we have partnered with the Bay Area Tutoring Association (BATA) to oversee personnel management. BATA hires and manages tutors, provides ongoing feedback and coaching to tutors, and oversees the logistics of tutor placement in addition to providing input into program design and implementation.

We will rigorously measure impacts on student learning and share back analysis of what kind of tutoring works best for which students at the lowest cost. These findings will help develop proven, cost-effective, repeatable best practices for Bay Area school districts and will be disseminated nationwide as a part of the PLI's "blueprint" for scaling high-dosage tutoring.



Photo courtesy of Bay Area Tutoring Association.