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POLICY BRIEF

Student Achievement Growth During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Fall 2021 Update

Two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, little information has been available about how students in the metro-Atlanta area are performing academically. Metro districts have adopted different strategies to help students navigate and recover from the pandemic, including small-group tutoring, expanded summer school programs, and additional supports for technology use and student health and wellness. This report continues MAPLE's research agenda analyzing how the pandemic has affected student achievement in math and reading in metro-Atlanta districts.

What did we learn?

In three metro-Atlanta districts, the impact of the pandemic on student achievement growth has been greater in math than in reading. Reading achievement has rebounded more than math.

Students who were in elementary school when the pandemic hit have fared worse than students who were in middle school.

Average performance in metro-Atlanta districts was similar to many other districts around the country.

Many students have started to recover academically, but improvement is uneven. We find differences in achievement trends by geography and by economic status within at least one district and by race and ethnicity within multiple districts.

What are the policy implications?

Recovery efforts ought to target students who experienced the greatest declines in national rankings and have been the slowest to recover.

Research-supported recovery strategies include high-intensity, small-group tutoring; extended learning time; and extensive summer academic learning programs.

Acceleration efforts are more effective if offered during the regular school day. Frequent participation (possibly mandated or incentivized) is key.

Researchers

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What questions did we answer?

1. What has been the effect of the pandemic on students' achievement growth in math and reading through fall 2021?
2. How have changes to student achievement growth varied by grade level?
3. How have changes to student achievement growth varied by geography, race and ethnicity, and economic disadvantage?

What data did we use?

We used administrative data from three metro Atlanta districts: Clayton County Public Schools, Fulton County Schools, and a third district that has chosen to remain anonymous. Our outcomes of interest were math and reading scores on the iReady and MAP Growth formative assessments. We used national percentile rankings to measure student progress, comparing student achievement during the pandemic to that of students throughout the U.S. from before the pandemic.

Why is this issue important?

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented a monumental challenge to districts, students, and parents. Only by understanding how students have performed academically can recovery efforts be targeted to meet those with the greatest needs.

Acceleration efforts may not always work as well as intended. Therefore, it is essential that districts plan for rapid evaluation of current recovery efforts. We recommend that districts consider evaluation and ongoing program refinement as part of the initial design process rather than after the program has started or finished.

What will we study next?

First, we will continue to provide our district partners with rapid-response research about their students' academic performance during the pandemic. Second, MAPLE researchers are conducting analyses of the pandemic's impact by student gender, for English learners, and on the supply of teachers in metro-Atlanta districts. Third, we are working on evaluating the efficacy of acceleration efforts to help districts fine-tune their strategies to have the greatest possible benefit for students.

Want to learn more?

A report is available at **gpl.gsu.edu/gpl-publications**

The **Metro Atlanta Policy Lab for Education (MAPLE)** is a component of the **Georgia Policy Labs (GPL)**, a research collaboration between Georgia State University and a variety of government agencies committed to leveraging the power of data to drive policy and programmatic decisions that lift children, students, and families—especially those experiencing vulnerabilities.

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