



COVID SLIDE

Educators have come to expect a “summer slide,” or loss in academic growth anywhere between two weeks to two months in students returning to the classroom from summer break, but new research suggests the “COVID slide” is going to be significantly worse. Already, learning loss from the summer months disproportionately affects economically disadvantaged students, and projections suggest that learning loss related to school closures will be especially devastating for the most vulnerable populations.

Using data to project growth trajectories of students, researchers project two scenarios: a “melt,” in which students stagnate — no ground loss or gained; and a “slide,” in which students will lose ground academically during the school closures at rates similar to those seen over the long summer break. However, when factoring in the traumas associated with school closures due to COVID-19, students facing homelessness and food insecurity will fare much worse.

Projections expect the upper elementary grades to be hardest hit, in part because 3rd, 4th and 5th grades are usually a time of rapid academic growth. In particular, 3rd graders are facing particularly large losses in reading, up to 30%. And math looks worse: depending on the grade, students are projected to lose anywhere from half to all of their academic growth from the 2019-2020 school year.

Districts and policymakers need to think not just about the reality of what students and teachers are facing now in this unprecedented time, but what teachers will be facing at the restart of instruction. Despite educators’ remarkable efforts to continue instruction through virtual learning, at best students will not have gained or lost learning. “We are not going to be able to catch up in two or three weeks,” said one superintendent. “This is going to be a situation where you are going to have to apply extended school services over the entire next school year.”

Sadly, the high-stakes testing and draconian school accountability measures that schools and teachers and students will face won’t account for any of this. TSTA will continue to advocate for the instructional time students and teachers need more than ever.