

# Supporting Illinois Districts to Measure Changes in Student Learning After COVID-19-Related Suspension of In-Person Learning

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# The COVID-19 pandemic and student learning in Illinois

- Partnering with the Illinois State Board of Education
  - How has student learning changed following extended suspension of in-person learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
  - Do these changes vary by student characteristics and district characteristics?
- Recruited and gathered data from multiple public school districts in Illinois





## Supporting school districts and state leaders: Three approaches

- **District-specific reports** for districts to understand learning changes in their districts, along with coaching to interpret results, reflect on district experiences, and engage in collaborative planning.
  - Phase 1: Onset of COVID-19 to fall 2020 (17 districts).
  - Phase 2: Onset of COVID-19 to spring 2021 (4 districts).
- **Training on REL Midwest toolkit** to estimate student learning changes.
- **Statewide report** summarizing findings across the 17 districts that received district-specific reports in phase 1.

# Approach 1: Estimating Learning Changes for Illinois Districts

# Methods

- Simple comparison of average assessment scores before and after COVID-19 may not provide the best estimate of the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and student learning.
- Difference in average scale scores could be caused by differences in student and school characteristics before and after COVID-19 as well as pre-existing trends in student achievement.
- REL Midwest study method adjusts for student and school characteristics as well as time trends to provide better estimates of the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and student learning.

# Methods

- Study team estimated changes in assessment scores separately for each grade level and each subject (reading and math).
- Compared scores in fall 2020 to scores that would have been expected based on assessment score trends in multiple prior years.
- Adjusted for student and school characteristics and time trends.
- Converted changes in assessment scores to instructional days for ease of interpretation.





# Coaching sessions

- Spring 2021: Two virtual, 90-minute coaching sessions
  - The first session prepared districts to receive and interpret their findings.
  - The second session supported districts in reviewing their findings and demonstrate approaches they can use with others in the district to engage in collaborative, data-informed planning.



[Photo by Allison Shelley for EDU images]



Approach 2: Training for Illinois districts to use tools developed by Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest to do their own research to better understand student learning changes

# A Toolkit for Assessing Learning Changes After Spring 2020 COVID-19 School Closures



# Toolkit overview

*This toolkit was developed in fall of 2020 in collaboration with the Ohio Department of Education.*

This toolkit is a step-by-step guide for districts of any size that want to:

- learn where **learning changes** may have occurred;
- learn about the **needs and experiences** of students, families, and staff;
- understand how to use that knowledge to **inform decisionmaking**; and
- **identify next steps** for future analysis and planning.



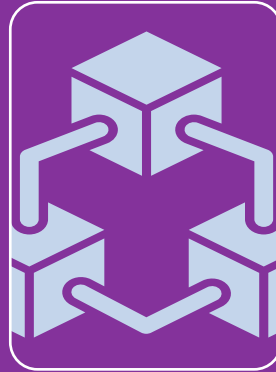
# Who should use this toolkit?

The toolkit offers guidance for **districts with varying levels of analytic capacity** to utilize two approaches for measuring learning changes:

- Quantitative analysis of existing student assessment data to assess where learning changes occur, and in what student groups they occurred.
- Qualitative data collection and analysis to understand student, family, and staff needs and experiences.



# How do I use the toolkit?



The toolkit contains **five modules**, each designed to walk users through a set of steps needed for analysis, data collection, and planning for next steps.

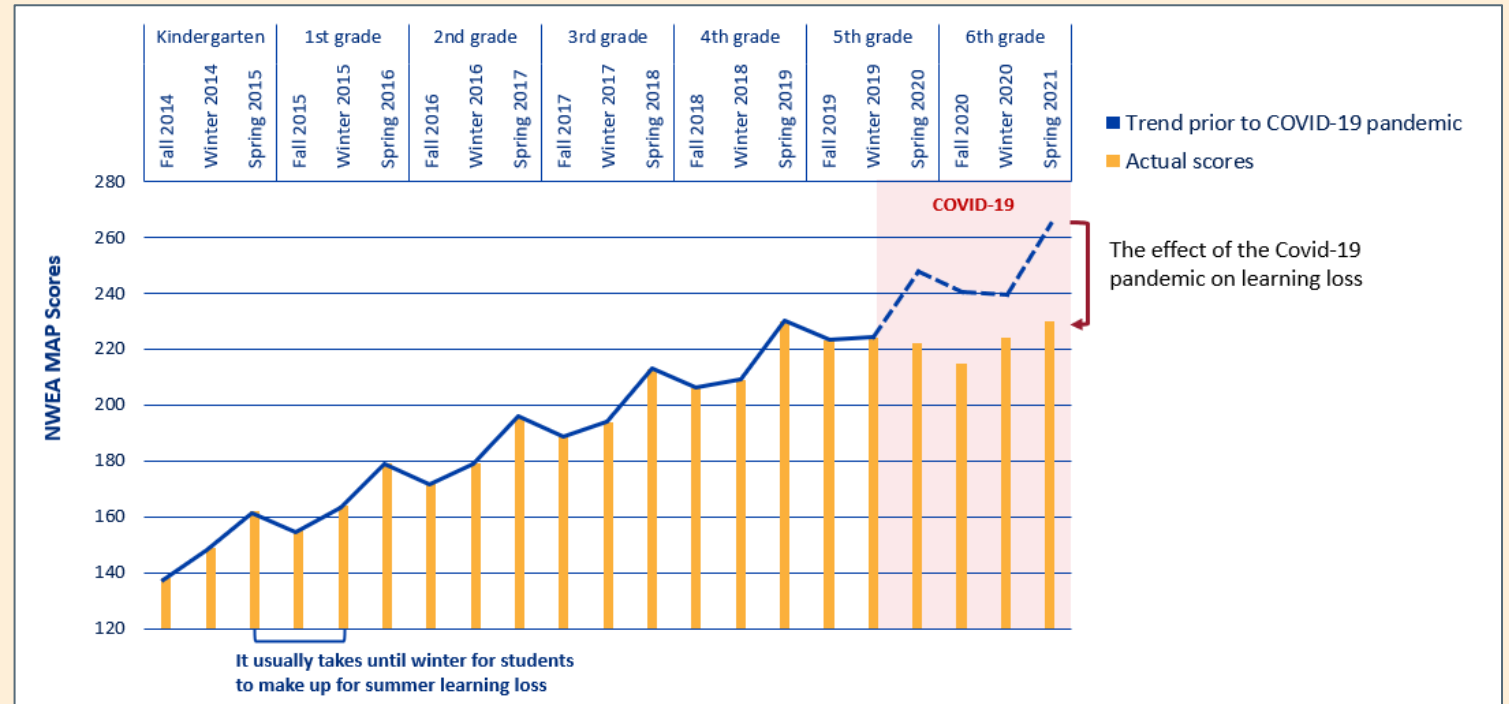


The toolkit includes **workbooks, conversation guides, and decision trees** to help users through the process of assessing learning changes using quantitative or qualitative approaches.



# Modules 1–3

- **Module 1:** Helps the user to identify and refine important questions about learning changes.
- **Module 2:** Helps the user to identify and assess the use of existing student data.
- **Module 3:** Walks the user through conducting different types of quantitative analyses (example at right).



# Module 4: Qualitative data collection

Add context to quantitative analyses of COVID-19-related learning changes.



**For example**, why do certain groups of students experience larger or smaller learning changes in reading than the average student?

Provide needed information to districts not available in administrative data.



**For example**, how did students experience remote instruction in reading in spring 2020?

Provide a fundamental understanding of the needs of district students, families, and staff going into the 2021/22 school year.



**For example**, how many families are experiencing housing or food insecurities?



# Module 5

- Disseminating findings.
- Identifying new or additional questions about learning changes.
- Seeking additional resources.
- Developing a plan for addressing student needs.



[Photo by Allison Shelley for EDU images]

# Approach 3: Statewide report

# Research questions

1. How has student learning **in Illinois** changed following the extended school closures due to COVID-19?
2. Do these changes vary by:
  - Student characteristics (such as gender, race/ethnicity, eligibility for the national school lunch program, English proficiency, disability status, or prior achievement)?
  - District characteristics (such as urbanicity and size)?



# Just In Time report



REL Midwest will develop a report that shares the findings from the statewide analysis.



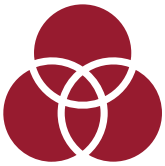
The report will be publicly available and shared on REL Midwest's website and through communication activities, such as blog posts.

# Concluding remarks

# Interpreting findings: Important considerations



These analyses **cannot isolate the impact of school closures** or the quality of remote learning after closures.



These analyses **cannot isolate other conflating circumstances**, such as trauma, poverty, racial bias, job loss from school closure, or remote learning experiences.



**Collecting data consistently** and continuing to conduct analyses will reveal the trajectory of loss and any mitigation across time.

# Next steps

- Districts need information about learning changes between fall 2020 and spring 2021.
  - REL Midwest is continuing to support Illinois districts to understand learning changes during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Districts need information about the actionable steps they can take to support students who are struggling, including strategies that have a strong evidence base.



[Photo by Allison Shelley for EDU images]



# Stay in touch

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