Catapult Learning

February 10, 2021

Committee of the Whole
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Committee of the Whole:

Thank you for your attention to the important crisis facing children in the District of Columbia during the pandemic. EmpowerK12's report, *COVID-19's Impact on Student Achievement and Academic Growth in DC,* provides important and sobering data on the negative academic impact that the pandemic is having on public school students in DC. Catapult Learning is particularly concerned by the following findings in EmpowerK12's report:

- At-risk students have lost 5 months of learning in math and 4 months of learning in reading
- Achievement gaps are growing in DC, and at-risk students are falling significantly behind.

The report also shows that students with disabilities have been negatively affected as well.

While the challenge made clear by the report is daunting, the good news is that effective intensive tutoring can combat learning loss. According to *The Impressive Effects of Tutoring on PreK-12 Learning: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the Experimental Evidence*, a report by the Annenberg Institute at Brown University, "We find that tutoring programs yield consistent and substantial positive impacts on learning outcomes."

For more than 40 years, Catapult Learning has delivered educational services, including reading and math intervention and tutoring, to students from low-income communities across the country, including in the DC area. In addition, Catapult Learning has for many years provided special education services to DC and Maryland public school students, and professional development and coaching to educators in DC and the DC area.

Due to our experience with providing research-based academic intervention and our expertise in virtual delivery since the beginning of the pandemic, Boston Public Schools (BPS) asked us to manage their 2020 Extended School Year (ESY) program for students with disabilities. Due to COVID, they needed ESY to be entirely virtual, but they had never delivered ESY virtually before. In a short period of time, in partnership with BPS, we recruited, hired, and trained more than 100 teachers to provide virtual instruction to more than 650 students with disabilities. After our successful management of ESY, BPS asked us to partner with them to launch BPS's virtual COVID-19 compensatory service program, which

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also involves teachers providing instruction to small-groups of students with disabilities. Currently the program is being offered to more than 200 students, and we expect that number to grow as BPS identifies more students with disabilities who have suffered learning loss. A program like this would greatly benefit students in DC as well.

We took the liberty to do some modeling regarding what an effort like this might entail. Several points on these models:

- All of them assume:
    - Utilization of our curricula, AchieveLiteracy, AchieveReading, and AchieveMath, which we designed, and we deliver across the country, to help students whose academic performance is below grade-level.
    - A total of 500 students, with student to teacher ratios of 4 to 1. We could deliver tutoring for more or fewer students, but that would obviously change the cost. We think the simplest way to think about cost is for a group of 500 students, with additional groups of 500 students costing proportionately more.
    - Recruitment, selection, training, supervision, and ongoing support of tutors; program setup; program management; attendance incentives; pre- and post-assessment and ongoing progress monitoring and reporting; program evaluation; and program quality controls.
    - A virtual summer program with students receiving 45 minutes of reading tutoring and 45 minutes of math tutoring per day, 4 days per week, for 8 weeks. Other iterations that could be contemplated, that might have implications for cost and student attendance, are:
        - In-person in students' physical schools
        - In-person in places other than students' schools, such as libraries or community centers (the Tennessee Tutoring Corps, discussed in more detail below, delivers tutoring at Boys and Girls Clubs)
        - During the school year, during the school day
        - During the school year, after school
        - During the school year, during school vacations (the COVID-19 compensatory services we are delivering for Boston Public Schools, discussed in more detail below, are taking place during the school year both after school and during school vacation weeks)
        - On weekends.
    - Students already have, or would be provided by their LEAs or other agencies, the technology and connectivity to engage in virtual tutoring. If technology and/or connectivity still needs to be delivered to students, that would increase the cost.

- We created three different models, each with different qualifications of tutors – certified teachers, college graduates who are not certified teachers, and college students. We have operated many intervention and tutoring programs across the country with certified teachers and college graduates who are not certified teachers. Admittedly, we have never operated a tutoring program with college students as teachers, but we have spent a significant amount of time over the past several months meeting with the folks behind the Tennessee Tutoring Corps (TTC), a program that launched last summer to help K-6 students across Tennessee combat learning loss and to help college students earn money over the summer given the negative impact the pandemic has had on job prospects. With what we have learned from TTC, we are confident a high-quality tutoring program could be run with college students as teachers.
- The more that entities like DCPS, DC public charter schools, and local IHEs work together to help recruit tutors, the more quickly the program can get up and running.
- The main driver in the price difference among certified teachers, college graduates who are not certified teachers, and college students is pay rate. The pay rates that we used to build our models are based on what our experience in the DC area and beyond tells us would be needed to attract and retain effective tutors. A particular pay structure different from these assumptions would impact the ultimate costs of the program.
- We built these models with at-risk students who do not have disabilities primarily in mind. That said, our experience tells us that the cost of tutoring the majority of students with disabilities would not significantly differ from these costs, with the following caveats:
  - We assume that IEP progress reporting would not be a part of the tutoring program. If it were, that would require additional time and thus compensation, which in turn would increase the cost.
  - The model that utilizes certified teachers is likely the only one that could be used for students whose IEPs stipulate that all instruction be delivered by teachers certified to teach special education, and it may take longer, and cost more, to hire and compensate teachers certified in special education as compared to teachers certified in other areas.
  - Students who require services, resources, and accommodations like one-on-one aides would likely need to receive those services, resources, and accommodations from, and at the expense of, their LEAs.
  - Some students with significant learning disabilities may need to receive tutoring in smaller groups, which would be more costly than the models presented here.

With all that in mind, we estimate that the tutoring model described above would cost approximately:

- $640,000 per 500 students if delivered by certified teachers
- $560,000 per 500 students if delivered by college graduates who are not certified teachers
- $520,000 per 500 students if delivered by college students.

Thank you again for your attention to this crucial need, and for allowing us to share our ideas and experience. We welcome the opportunity to answer questions and to serve as a resource in your work to ensure that all students are able to get back on track academically.

Sincerely,

Jason Botel
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