



Testimony of Jax Chaudhry, Regional Director  
On Behalf of The Literacy Lab  
Before the  
Committee of the Whole, DC Council  
February 10, 2021

Good afternoon Chairman Mendelson and members and staff of the Committee of the Whole. I'm Jax Chaudhry, the Regional Director for The Literacy Lab, a non-profit organization dedicated to closing the literacy gap. We provide high-dosage tutoring (HDT) to students at 27 school sites in the District. I am grateful to be with you today to provide testimony on behalf of The Literacy Lab on *Student Learning Loss: Widening the Achievement Gap During the COVID-19 Pandemic*.

I would like to start by thanking Chairman Mendelson and the members of this Committee for their attention to this critical concern. As the report from EmpowerK12 makes plain, students have fallen behind in reading during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, although all students and families are confronting challenges presented by the pandemic, its consequences are not shouldered equally. One of the most sobering of EmpowerK12's findings is that at-risk students have suffered learning loss in reading at **four times the rate of their peers**.

In short, consequences of the pandemic have been disparate. Individualized solutions are required. High-dosage tutoring should be one of them. Education experts at leading institutions like Johns Hopkins, Brown, and University of Michigan recommend high-dosage tutoring as a needed tool to overcome learning loss.<sup>1</sup> As a long-time provider of high-dosage tutoring to District students, we—unsurprisingly—think that an expansion of HDT services would help to combat learning loss and improve academic outcomes for students in general.

We also believe that an expansion of HDT services creates an opportunity for the District. First, it can establish a set of guidelines to ensure that high-dosage tutoring meets a similar set of standards

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<sup>1</sup> <https://hechingerreport.org/takeaways-from-research-on-tutoring-to-address-coronavirus-learning-loss/>

that will serve students well. And second, the District can use the expansion to further promote equity, particularly for some of its most at-risk students.

### **Hallmarks of an Effective HDT Program**

As the District explores where and how high-dosage tutoring can be a part of its overall plan to combat learning loss, we encourage the Council and District Government to ensure that any HDT models used in the District include the following traits: an evidence base, high frequency of sessions, regular progress monitoring, and ongoing observation and coaching. In the interest of time, I will omit more in depth discussion of these items and leave them for your further review in the written testimony.

*Evidence based.* High-dosage tutoring relies upon tutors to guide students through a specific task designed to develop a discrete skill - such as asking a student to blend letter sounds together to help the student learn to construct a word. The effectiveness of high-dosage tutoring hinges on the quality of the underlying model.<sup>2</sup>

*High frequency of sessions.* Research shows that dosage, specifically *high*-dosage tutoring makes the greatest impact when the frequency of sessions is at least three times per week. A Harvard study synthesizing 196 previous experiments concluded that high-dosage tutoring produced fifteen times as much growth in reading for participating students as compared to those receiving lower-dosage tutoring.<sup>3</sup> Higher dosage models are worth the investment.

*Regular progress monitoring.* HDT works, in part, because it can be tailored to each individual student. Each student's need can be determined through a combination of an initial assessment and collaboration with school-based personnel. A student's needs may change over the course of the year, though. Rather than wait for formal assessments that may be given only a few times per year, tutors should conduct short, informal assessments regularly to ensure that the utilized HDT strategy is working and remains appropriate.

*Ongoing observation and coaching for tutors.* Rigorous upfront training and a strong framework can prepare tutors for most situations, but work with individual students will always present some

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<sup>2</sup> <https://hechingerreport.org/takeaways-from-research-on-tutoring-to-address-coronavirus-learning-loss/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.nber.org/system/files/working\\_papers/w22130/w22130.pdf](https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w22130/w22130.pdf)

unexpected challenges. Regular observations and support from experienced education professionals can help tutors improve their application of the model with each student.<sup>4</sup>

### **Time for Capacity Building**

One point I want to share on the record is that time and resources will be required to build school capacity or to ramp up third-party support for HDT. PAVE has shared, families want our schools and communities to promote holistic student services to make equitable gains - specifically families valued 1:1 student interactions with educators. However, many schools are exhausted from pivoting to provide virtual classroom education and benefit greatly from 1:1 capacity building. HDT providers expand school capacity intentionally to best support students. With already-stretched school personnel and growing demand, the District will likely need to identify third-party partners to help provide the increase in services. That will, however, take significant time and resources. Purely speaking from our experience, recruitment alone takes several months to identify and onboard quality tutors. Then, we ensure that each tutor receives 40 hours of training before beginning work with students and providing consistent coaching.

### **Additional Recommendations**

We also recommend that the District use any expansion of HDT programs as an opportunity to advance equity. To do so, we urge the District to include prekindergarten students in high-dosage tutoring programs and promote equitable representation in its tutoring corps.

A large portion of the research evaluating the educational effects of the pandemic has focused on K-12, but Pre-K can be just as critical. Even before the pandemic, the need for high-dosage tutoring in prekindergarten classrooms was significant. Students did not begin school—even at the prekindergarten level—with the same level of preparation. By age 3, there was a several million word gap between children from the wealthiest and under resourced families—and that was pre-pandemic.<sup>5</sup> As I noted earlier, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented hardships for everyone, but its consequences have been more severe for socioeconomically disadvantaged residents,

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<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2020/05/21/getting-tutoring-right-to-reduce-covid-19-learning-loss/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/feb2014/the-word-gap>

including a disproportionate number of residents and families of color. The pandemic has meaningfully exacerbated the inequities experienced by students of color.<sup>6</sup>

A considerable body of research also shows that students of color perform better throughout their academic careers when they have even one same-race teacher during elementary school.<sup>7</sup> Despite that, the educator workforce in the District does not reflect the diversity of *all* its students. For example, the Office of the State Superintendent's Teacher Workforce report shows that males of color account for just 16% of the overall teacher workforce while boys of color comprise 45% of the student body.<sup>8</sup> HDT is an ideal place to begin to address equitable representation in the educator workforce. The District should prioritize recruiting candidates of color to staff HDT programs or seek providers who do.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the challenges that our schools, educators, and students will face in the coming years will be immense - these challenges are also opportunities. We encourage the Council and District to use them to combat dual priorities, learning loss and inequities in educational opportunities.

We want to, once again, thank the Council for convening this roundtable focused on learning loss. We would also like to acknowledge that the District Government has been a leader in funding early literacy since well before the pandemic began. We are supporting students at our 27 partner school sites, in part, because of the District's investments in the Early Literacy Intervention Initiative grants, which the Council enlarged during last year's budget process.

I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have at this time.

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<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-student-learning-in-the-united-states-the-hurt-could-last-a-lifetime>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nber.org/papers/w25254>

<sup>8</sup> <https://osse.dc.gov/publication/dc-teacher-workforce-report>