J-PAL
ABDUL LATIF JAMEEL POVERTY ACTION LAB
NORTH AMERICA

**NORTH AMERICA
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BACK TO SCHOOL

Illustration: J-PAL

Good afternoon,

Last week, my kids went back to school. As for most families, things looked different this year. There were no back to school pictures or lists of classroom supplies to buy. Most strikingly, there wasnÕt even a ceremonial drop-off. Like many kids this fall, mine will be resuming virtual learning from home.

Whether returning to reopened school buildings or continuing remote learning, ÒBack to SchoolÓ this year will feel very different for parents, teachers, and students. But while families, educators, and policymakers adapt, it is paramount that addressing learning loss stays at the forefront of the conversation. As online learning continues, policy and education officials must be proactive to combat the growth of pre-existing inequities and gaps in educational access and achievement.

Existing research can provide decision-makers with useful guidance on how to navigate this transition. J-PALÕs Education Technology Evidence Review summarizes over 120 studies on education technology programs, and identifies which types and uses of technology have the most potential to improve student learning. However, as education leaders face unprecedented questions, new evidence is needed. This is why J-PAL North America launched the COVID-19 Recovery and Resilience Initiative. A new blog series is outlining the initiativeÕs goals and

research agenda across three key policy areas, with the most recent installment detailing the initiativeÕs approach to work and research in education.

Lastly, IÕd like to share an interview with J-PAL affiliated researcher Sarah Cohodes. Her research focuses on ensuring that all students can access quality education. In the interview, she discusses remote learning, school reopenings, and how these realities are impacting students and families. We hope that youÕll find her insights helpful as we think about the path forward and the work that must be done so that next yearÕs ÒBack to SchoolÓ looks different from todayÕs.

Stay well,
Mary Ann Bates
Executive Director, J-PAL North America

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Building an Effective COVID-19 Response: Addressing the Education Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic has entirely shifted the education landscape in the United States. While education leaders should turn to existing evidence where possible, new evidence will be necessary as the field faces unprecedented challenges. J-PAL North AmericaÕs COVID-19 Recovery and Resilience Initiative aims to create a playbook of evidence-based policies to help communities effectively respond to COVID-19. To guide the initiativeÕs work in education, a new blog outlines how COVID-19 has exacerbated inequities in the American education system and where research should go from here to help us effectively address this enormous learning crisis. Research questions were developed in collaboration with J-PALÕs academic leadership, including top education researchers from across the country. Prioritized areas for future research include identifying strategies to minimize the widening of pre-existing achievement gaps, methods to address student trauma, and innovations to help parents support their children.

Photo: Shutterstock.com

Photo: Vincent A. Jones II | Sarah Cohodes

What Does the Evidence Say About Education Technology

As students return to school amid the COVID-19 pandemic, education technology will play a key role in how schools provide instruction. Education technologies can be a powerful tool to boost studentsÕ learning outcomes. Our evidence reviewÐÐWill Technology Transform Education For The Better? ÐÐsummarizes over 126 rigorous evaluations of different types and uses of education technology. The review offers helpful insights to inform educatorsÕ decision-making as they continue to incorporate technology to support remote or blended learning necessitated by COVID-19. While access to technology alone generally does not improve learning outcomes, students often need basic technology in order to utilize effective online resources. Evidence points to Computer-Assisted Learning (CAL) programs as highly effective education technology tools, particularly for math. CAL programs target instruction to meet studentsÕ learning levels and help students develop skills at their own rate of progress. The review also notes that low-cost, tech-enabled nudges for student tasks or parental engagement activities show

An Education ResearcherÕs Perspective on Schools and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Sarah Cohodes is a J-PAL affiliated researcher with a focus on maximizing access to quality education. In a recent conversation between Professor Cohodes and J-PAL staff , she stressed that the best thing to support student learning will be to safely get them back into normal school as soon as possible. In order for this to be possible, she notes, a massive virus suppression effort will be necessary. Until then, open schools will put teachers, students, and their families at risk of COVID-19. At the same time, continued remote learning will continue to exacerbate learning disparities and place undue burdens on parents, particularly mothers. In the interview , Dr. Cohodes also touches on the roles schools play in society, how education leaders should be thinking about allocating resources, and how being a mother has influenced her research and perspective on the COVID-19 crisis. Additionally, she touches on the actions that schools and teachers will need to take to provide additional supports to the students who need them most, including those who were already falling behind

promise as well. For all education technologies, however, effective program design and widespread access to the tools necessary for use will be key to ensuring that these technologies work to alleviate, rather than aggravate, existing educational disparities.

before COVID-19 closures.

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J-PAL North America is a regional office of the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J–PAL), a global research center based at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Anchored by a network of more than 190 affiliated professors at universities around the world, J-PAL draws on results from randomized impact evaluations to rigorously study what strategies meaningfully reduce poverty and translate research into action.

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