



Success

Timely tips to improve student achievement

August 2024

2024 Olympics inspire engaging STEM lessons

The 2024 Paris Olympics offer an opportunity to engage students in STEM subjects through sports like swimming and skateboarding and the newest Olympic sport — breakdancing. Concepts such as kinetics, aerodynamics and physics can be integrated into lessons to make learning dynamic and relevant. For more, go to <https://osba.link/ss63b1>.

ACT overhaul means shorter tests, fewer questions

The ACT college admissions test will undergo significant changes starting next year, including a shorter duration, fewer questions, shorter reading passages and an optional science section for the in-person exam. For more, visit <https://osba.link/20a0b2>.

Activity stations promote literacy

According to elementary teacher **Sonja Cassella**, the key to creating literacy stations that foster productive and engaging learning environments for students is creating heterogeneous groups and flexibility in instruction into the process. Literacy stations can run smoothly in the classroom by incorporating clear behavior expectations, accessible materials and structured rotation schedules. For more, visit <https://osba.link/6b01b0>.

Attendance as a family affair

New research shows how schools can use family engagement as a strategy to reduce absenteeism. Harvard professors **Karen L. Mapp** and **Todd Rogers** discuss how educators can enlist parents in both strategic and tactical ways. For more, visit <https://osba.link/b77965>.

Less screen time may improve mental health among youths

A study published in JAMA Network Open found that reducing screen time among children and teens led to fewer behavioral difficulties, with noticeable decreases in peer-related and emotional issues and improvements in positive social interactions. For more, visit <https://osba.link/6a2b71>. (You do not need to log in or register to read this article — just scroll down from the title.)

U.S. schools urged to plan for digital accessibility

A recent U.S. Department of Justice rule requires that schools make digital content accessible to students with disabilities by April 2026 or 2027. Educational institutions are urged to ensure all digital materials meet specific accessibility standards. For more, visit <https://osba.link/84588a>.

Student achievement in-depth

Each month, **Success** brings you a research brief or in-depth article to discuss with board members and administrators.

Studies show what works, what doesn't with online tutoring

Until recently, there has been little evidence of the effectiveness of online tutoring, in which students and tutors interact via video, text chat and whiteboards. Virtual tutoring has boomed since the federal government handed schools nearly \$190 billion of pandemic recovery aid and specifically encouraged them to spend it on tutoring. Now, some new U.S. studies offer useful guidance to educators.

A recent Columbia University study shows that inconsistent attendance for online tutoring during the school day can result in less effective help in catching up from pandemic-era learning losses versus in-person tutoring, while regular attendance puts online tutoring on par with in-person help. The lesson here is that attendance can be rocky even during the school day, meaning students often end up with a low dose of tutoring instead of the high dose for which schools have paid. Conversely, some studies show significant benefits of online tutoring when students attend regularly.

While substantial evidence supports the efficacy of in-person small group tutoring, those results do not translate to online small group tutoring as shown in recent Stanford University and Brown University studies. Online tutors of the small groups were surveyed about their experiences and insights. They stated issues such as keeping each student in the group engaged and observed that students were easily distracted. Further, shy students were less likely to speak up to ask questions, perhaps because student work is public online and each child's mistakes are exposed.

School leaders have until March 2026 to spend the remainder of the \$190 billion in pandemic recovery funds, but contracts with tutoring vendors must be signed by September 2024. Both options — in person and virtual — involve tradeoffs. New evidence suggests that virtual tutoring can work well, especially when motivated students want the tutoring and log in regularly. But many of the students who are significantly behind grade level and in need of extra help may not be so motivated. Keeping online tutoring one-to-one improves the chances of it being effective, but means serving far fewer students. For more information and links to the studies, please visit <https://osba.link/500b45>.

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