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# Labor Voices: Lawmakers should act quickly to implement Whitmer's tutoring plan

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The pandemic's impact on our children's learning is well documented – now state leaders must make academic recovery a top priority and focus resources on school-based tutoring to get students the help they need.

Between COVID, remote learning, mental health, school violence and more, Michigan students have struggled with unprecedented challenges these past few years. With all the stress and strife, it's no surprise that test scores have dropped, particularly among our most disadvantaged students.

An October report from researchers at Harvard and Stanford estimated that over the pandemic, the average Michigan student was academically delayed by the equivalent of about half a school year. This effect was much more pronounced in low-income school districts, with some students estimated to have fallen over one full school year behind.

While standardized test scores are a flawed measure of student achievement, there's little question some of our students need help to recover academically from the pandemic. Every child deserves an opportunity to succeed, and we need to take immediate action to get our kids back on track.

In her recent State of the State address, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer called on the state Legislature to support her "MI Kids Back on Track" plan, which would expand tutoring and other learning recovery programs in school districts across the state. The governor is calling on the Legislature to pass funding for this no later than spring break.

The governor's plan would provide funding for school districts to establish or expand existing school-based tutoring services, including hiring more academic recovery specialists and providing extra pay to school staff who volunteer to stay after school and tutor. In addition, districts could hire outside tutors to come into the schools and work collaboratively with school staff to help students.

Ensuring professional educators have the resources to identify and access the extra support students need is critical. Teachers and other education professionals know their students and can ensure they get the right high-quality support to help them recover and excel academically.

The stakes are high and time is of the essence: The further our students fall behind, the less chance they'll have at long-term academic achievement. This can mean a lifetime of personal and economic harm through fewer job opportunities and lower wages — even a shorter life expectancy.

Many states have already launched tutoring initiatives to help students catch up, but Michigan is not among them. Whitmer tried last spring, when she first announced her tutoring proposal, but the GOP Legislature never considered it – instead pushing a convoluted voucher system that would have used taxpayer dollars to benefit private, for-profit tutoring companies, and with little-to-no oversight.

According to research out of Harvard's Graduate School of Education, private tutoring centers tend to be located in higher-income areas, with their services used by well-off families looking to give their children a competitive edge. For low-income parents without job flexibility, reliable transportation or other means to transport their children long distances to private tutoring centers, such services are not a viable option — even with subsidies.

In effect, the GOP proposal would have helped students who need it least, while leaving the most disadvantaged students out in the cold.

Now that Democrats have taken over both the state Senate and House, the governor's school-based tutoring proposal is back on the table – and the time to act is now. We are urging lawmakers from both parties to act as soon as possible and provide students the help they desperately need to get caught up.

*Paula Herbart is president of the Michigan Education Association.*

## Labor Voices

Labor Voices columns are written on a rotating basis by United Auto Workers President Ray Curry, Michigan Education Association President Paula Herbart, Michigan Regional Council of Carpenters and