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The price tag for COVID school closures that led to historic learning losses for kids could top \$28 trillion

Post Editorial Board

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COVID-era school closures could cost students as much as \$28 trillion in lost lifetime earnings. Shutterstock

Add one more grim figure to the toll [exacted by disastrous COVID-era school closures](#): a huge penalty to the lifetime earnings of students forced to suffer through remote schooling, totaling

possibly as much as *\$28 trillion* (more than the nation's entire GDP) over the remainder of the 21st century.

Those figures come from a new study by Eric Hanushek, a Stanford University economist and expert on education, following on his own 2020 study, as well as work published by professors at Harvard and Dartmouth in October.

The new study analyzes [the hideous nationwide decline in 8th-grade math](#) scores on the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress, aka the nation's report card. The *average* drop in math scores amounted to eight points — the largest ever recorded, erasing all gains since 2000, equal to as much as 0.8 missed *years* of school and a likely lifetime penalty of 5.6% to earnings.

But that's only for the average, eight-point decline. The worst states saw drops of more than *10 points*, [implying even bigger future penalties](#). The size of a state's economy also plays a role in the eventual catastrophe, so — per Hanushek's models — California, which saw a six-point score drop, will nonetheless see the biggest absolute state-level economic loss (amounting to \$1.3 trillion).

It's not only earnings that take a hit. Lower NAEP math scores are, per a Harvard study, correlated with higher likelihoods of incarceration, teen pregnancy and the use of food-stamp benefits and lower odds of owning a home, marriage and full-time employment. In other words, they are a good predictor of overall success or misery.

The tragedy is that the learning losses were avoidable. Schools were never vectors of COVID transmission. Yet [the United](#)

[Federation of Teachers](#), working hand in glove with the federal government and blue-state pols, conspired to close them during the pandemic anyway. That forced students and parents to accept less-effective remote education.

[UFT head Randi Weingarten's justification for the closures](#)? The cruel, heartless claim that “kids are resilient.” Yet the new study suggests they’ll pay a big price. But don’t expect Weingarten or any of her co-conspirators to [seriously apologize](#) — [let alone take responsibility](#).

Yes, learning losses can be recovered — *if* schools return to and surpass their pre-pandemic levels of achievement in the medium term. But given their current crusade to jettison *all* academic standards in favor of woke indoctrination (done in the name of equity, of course) remediation seems far-fetched.

It’s more ugly evidence that on education — as on every other social issue — kids come dead last for US progressives.