

# Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty: Spring 2020 School Closures May Result in \$7 Billion Lifetime Earnings Loss to Wisconsin Students

Posted on Thursday, Feb 11, 2021

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The News: A [new study](#) from the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty (WILL) estimates that spring 2020 school closures and incomplete curriculums could cost Wisconsin students more than \$7 billion in lifetime earnings losses. The study, that only examines curriculum completion during the spring 2020 school closures, provides a stark warning about the potential costs of learning loss due to school building closures in the 2020-21 school year.

The Quote: WILL Research Director, Will Flanders, said, “School closures and the loss of in-person learning have had real costs. Whether it is the cost to lifetime earnings as a result of curriculum loss, or the immense social costs that are impossible to measure, it is critical that policymakers follow the science and prioritize in-person learning to prevent students from falling behind.”

Diving Deeper: The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) recently released a [report](#) that detailed school district responses to the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020. The report includes key information on the extent to which school districts were able to complete their curriculum during the spring 2020 semester.

Using common methods from education research, WILL Research Director, Will Flanders, author of [Dreams Deferred: The Economic Cost of Learning Loss in Wisconsin](#), estimates the lifelong earnings cost of the incomplete curriculums in spring 2020.

- Schools failed to complete more than 10% of curriculum on average. Averaging across all districts, about 12.5% of curriculum went incomplete during the 2020 spring semester. Larger districts completed marginally less curriculum on average.
- The lifetime cost of spring 2020 school closures tops \$7 billion. From just the earliest portion of the pandemic, this report estimates that those in school will lose \$7 billion in lifetime earnings as a result of learning lost during the pandemic.
- Curriculum completion varies across districts. Some districts report completing 100% of curriculum, while others report completing as little as 61% of curriculum.
- Districts with more low-income students completed less curriculum. A district with 100% low-income students would be expected to complete 7% less curriculum than a district with no low-income students.

The Takeaway: Policymakers must work to get students back in school for in-person learning. The cost to lifetime earnings of the pandemic just in the spring of 2020 should open the eyes of those who do not see an urgent need to get children back into the classroom. This doesn't even count the numerous unmeasurable social costs accruing as a result of students staying home.

Read More:

- [Dreams Deferred: The Economic Cost of Learning Loss in Wisconsin](#), Will Flanders, February 11, 2021
- [“Wisconsin school closures to cost children \\$7B over lifetime: Study,”](#) The Center Square, February 11, 2021