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## The key role of tutoring in learning recovery—and much more

Tutoring—an old education practice that historically was only available to affluent kids—raced to the forefront of public consciousness in the last two years as a way to catch all kids up after the pandemic’s learning disruptions.

There’s strong evidence behind an intervention now called “high-impact tutoring,” defined as individualized or small-group instruction during the school day, in alignment with core curriculum, for a substantial amount of time, several days a week, with a built-in mechanism for monitoring student progress. This kind of tutoring is delivering real results for students, especially when led by teachers or paraprofessionals, for students in the earliest grades, and for programs conducted in school (see sidebar on page 43).

The challenge is that high-impact tutoring is difficult to deliver at the scale and the pace that we need. Generous estimates suggest only about 1 in 10 of all U.S. students [are getting effective tutoring support](#), while the real number is likely even lower. It is also especially difficult to reach high school students, who arguably should be our top priority given how little time they have to recover pandemic learning losses before graduation.

But there’s reason for optimism: a growing number of tutoring providers are innovating new models, conducting research, and delivering results.

### OVERCOMING IMPLEMENTATION HURDLES

For districts committed to developing their own programs, it is difficult to find and train qualified tutors; ensure the curricula are aligned; coordinate the communications between tutors and classroom teachers; and manage the program overall, especially in systems that already are stretched thin. Meanwhile, districts seeking to partner with providers have trouble finding those with both a strong evidence base and the capacity to reach all the kids in the district who could benefit—often thousands or tens of thousands. Historically, providers that offer tutoring at scale are essentially providing 24/7 homework help, which is not the same as high-impact tutoring.

Indeed, scaling quality programs is the biggest challenge, and the millions of students who are behind today can’t wait decades for us to get it right. In order to solve it, we need to

figure out how to get more tutors into schools, how to align tutoring curricula with core curricula, how to help districts solve school-day scheduling challenges, and how to ensure costs are sustainable.

That's why we started Accelerate, a nonprofit determined to make high-impact tutoring a standard feature of American schools by:

- *Identifying and funding innovative, scalable tutoring models, including those that use technology and AI to reach more students.*
- *Funding rigorous evaluations of these models to gauge effectiveness of the programs.*
- *Supporting state departments of education in creating regulatory frameworks to encourage effective in-school tutoring. This could include creating preferred provider lists, statewide procurement for strong tutoring providers, and mandatory statewide data collection and analysis of tutoring in schools.*

Our ultimate goal is to embed tutoring into the regular school day, which is the most effective way to ensure all students from every background get the individualized support they need.

## SUCCESSFUL INNOVATIONS AT ALL LEVELS, INCLUDING HIGH SCHOOL

Saga Education's longstanding math tutoring partnership with Chicago Public Schools provides a great example of what is possible. Saga offers tutoring as part of a credit-bearing class, and the school system recognizes that tutoring offers as much or more value than the classes it replaces. The research supports this choice: A randomized control trial of 2,633 ninth and tenth graders, published by the National Bureau of Economic Research in 2021, found the program improved students' math test scores and grades in math and non-math courses.

Early literacy is a priority, too, and scaling tutoring in early literacy has great potential. On Your Mark, an Accelerate grantee, offers synchronous tutoring via computer using high-quality instruction materials based on the science of reading. Using noise-canceling headphones, students get extra doses of phonics and other instruction without leaving their desks. In California, Accelerate is supporting Amira, a company that equips high school and college students with a AI-powered platform to tutor younger students in foundational literacy.

## IMPACT OF AI

Tutoring models that use artificial intelligence are already here, and within a year or two we expect AI to become a useful tool to support—not replace—skilled educators in giving tutors feedback and helping to pinpoint individual students' learning gaps. Before now, it was difficult and costly to have

## ENCOURAGING RESEARCH

### A meta-analysis of 96 studies by J-PAL found that:

- Tutoring programs consistently lead to large improvements in learning outcomes for students, with an overall pooled effect size of 0.37 standard deviations (effect sizes greater than 0.3 standard deviations are considered to be large impacts). This translates to a student advancing from the 50th percentile to nearly the 66th percentile.
- Tutoring programs led by teacher or paraprofessional tutors are generally more effective than those using nonprofessional (volunteer) or parent tutors.
- The effects tend to be strongest among students in earlier grades, though a smaller set of programs at the secondary level were also found to be effective.
- Reading tutoring tends to be relatively more effective for students in preschool through first grade, while math tutoring tends to be more effective for students in second through fifth grade. Tutoring programs conducted during school tend to have more widespread benefits than those conducted after school or on demand. Many programs shown to have weaker effects used parents as tutors or took place in an after-school program. In these circumstances, it is difficult to ensure that tutoring actually occurs.

supervisors watch tutoring sessions and provide feedback to tutors. But video and transcript crawls via AI could mean a significant improvement in the quality of feedback to tutors. Groups like Schoolhouse, Carnegie Mellon, and Saga are already working on AI models for giving tutors feedback.

To address learning gaps, AI-enabled technologies can help tutors triangulate what students are learning in core classroom instruction, where an individual student has learning gaps, and what an appropriate tutoring intervention looks like. AI could dramatically reduce tutors' prep time for individual tutoring sessions, and lower the cost for school districts.

The high cost of tutoring is a key barrier for many school districts, and it's why Accelerate is also funding five states (Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Louisiana, and Ohio) that have embraced tutoring as a statewide priority, in the hopes that they will become models for other states to follow. Over the 2023-2024 school year, Accelerate will support each of these states in implementing evidence-based tutoring programs statewide, measuring their impacts on student outcomes, and develop plans for long-term sustainability.

States across the country are making strides toward ensuring all students have access to high-impact tutoring during the school day. There are so many reasons to be hopeful that this intervention can permanently change the American school system.

If anything keeps me up at night, it is the concern that the education field, in our eagerness to move on to the next big thing—especially when federal Covid-19 relief funding runs out—will give up on tutoring before it has a chance to scale up and deliver the kinds of results we all want. The key is to respond quickly to what works, and treat tutoring as an evidence-based, long-term solution. Tutoring is not a post-pandemic extra, but an evergreen must-have that should be a central part of today's American school day.



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