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## Good Tutoring Helps. But Can It Survive the Pandemic?



It's one of a select group of educational interventions consistently [backed](#) by high-quality research evidence.

So-called “high-impact” tutoring is the practice of providing students with additional assistance multiple times per week—for at least 45 minutes at a time.

During and after the coronavirus pandemic, targeted tutoring grew increasingly common as more than two out of three districts and schools used federal COVID-relief funds to introduce the practice, typically in response to learning challenges created by school closures implemented to limit the spread of the disease, according to a [new working paper](#) by [Alvin Makori](#) and NEPC Fellow [Patricia Burch](#), both of the University of Southern California, along with [Susanna Loeb](#) of Stanford.

In their paper, Makori, Burch, and Loeb address a thorny question that districts must grapple with if they are to maintain high-impact tutoring once relief funds expire, as will largely happen this fall: *How can we improve the implementation of this approach on a long-term basis, and at scale?*

Drawing upon the results of surveys of 349 teachers and 263 administrators, plus in-depth interviews with four teachers and 13 administrators, all conducted in 2022-23 with employees of an unnamed urban district and charter management organization that implemented high-impact tutoring, the researchers proposed the following five recommendations for ed-

ucators shifting the intervention from a pandemic-driven add-on to an ongoing fixture of the school day:

- **Invest in quality:** Educators gave past tutoring sessions mixed marks for quality. For example, one in five teachers in the charter schools that participated in the interventions said the tutors “almost never” focused on the critical skills students needed most. Three particular areas of concern were classroom management, zeroing in on the needs of individual students, and building family relationships. These results suggest the need to hire experienced tutors or better train those new to the practice, and to encourage coordination with classroom teachers and students’ family members. The researchers suggest nurturing partnerships with universities and other organizations that can help supply and train tutors.
- **Invest in quantity:** Due to a shortage of tutors, not all students deemed eligible for the additional assistance (based on assessment results) were able to receive it. Teachers found themselves making tough decisions that left no extra help for students who needed tutoring.
- **Invest in space and supplies:** Schools need a physical location where tutoring can take place. The temporary locations some tutors were forced to use (e.g., areas of hallways sectioned off by whiteboards) were not necessarily quiet or private learning environments. In some schools, it was also challenging to find necessary supplies, such as chairs for tutoring participants to sit in or computers and books to use for instruction.
- **Invest in time and logistics:** Tutoring requires time. In some instances, it takes place during the school day. But when that is not possible (some tutors reported challenges with being permitted to pull students out during instruction), students should be offered transportation so that getting to and from the sessions does not become a barrier to participation. The researchers suggest designating a tutoring coordinator to handle scheduling and logistics and considering placing tutors in classrooms rather than removing participants and causing them to miss content.
- **Invest in data:** A tutoring coordinator could also help identify students for tutoring and track data on participants’ progress. Long term, these data can help guide district and schoolwide decisions about resources and participants.

“High-impact tutoring has emerged as a promising strategy for addressing lost learning opportunities linked to the pandemic and structural inequalities,” the researchers conclude. But they caution that the lack of these necessary investments results in “workarounds” by tutors and administrators that “undercut the very principles (targeted high quality supplemental instruction provided as part of a shared curriculum) that makes tutoring effective.”

### NEPC Resources on School Leadership and Management

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