EDITOR’S NOTE
Online tutoring can be highly effective in providing personalized instruction, improving academic performance, and increasing student engagement. This Spotlight will help you examine research outlining the benefits of online tutoring; identify best practices for implementing online tutoring; analyze lessons learned from districts already experimenting with online tutoring; evaluate proposed requirements for tutoring materials; and more.

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Online Tutoring Can Be Effective, Research Shows

By Catherine Gewertz

School districts across the country are turning hopeful eyes to tutoring programs as a way to help children recover academically from the COVID pandemic. Research shows that well-designed face-to-face tutoring can be a powerful ally. But there was little evidence that it could be done effectively online.

That’s starting to change. Two new studies from Spain and Italy offer encouraging signs that tutoring online can work to help children complete unfinished learning.

The findings are particularly noteworthy now, as schools search for as many good learning-recovery options as they can find. COVID-19 has not disappeared, and though the likelihood of widespread school closures appears to be low right now, it might not stay that way.

A paper published last month by researchers in Spain documents the effects of an online math tutoring program provided for about 175 socioeconomically disadvantaged students 12 to 15 years old in Madrid and Catalonia in the spring of 2021, when schools had reopened after COVID-19 shutdowns.

The tutors were math teachers who’d undergone 15-20 hours of additional training in skills that included tutoring techniques. Each tutor worked with groups of two students for eight weeks. After school, when students were at home, they went online to connect with their tutors for three 50-minute sessions per week. They worked on math skills and concepts, but the tutors also helped students build good work routines and supported their emotional well-being.

The researchers found that compared to a control group, students in the tutoring program had higher standardized test scores and grades, and were less likely to repeat a grade. They also were more likely to report putting increased effort into their schoolwork.

Researchers estimated that the rise in the students’ grades was equivalent to the bump that six additional months of learning would produce.

Test scores, attendance, rise after tutoring program

A paper published in February 2021 focuses on an Italian tutoring program delivered by volunteer university students to middle school students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds in the spring of 2020, when schools were shut down.

The 523 tutors were from a Milan university; the 1,000 student recipients were from 76 schools all over Italy. The students completed online, self-paced training modules designed by pedagogy experts. Those same experts supported the tutors in their work during the program.

Each tutor was assigned to one student, and worked with that student for the entire program, connecting online three to six hours per week, for a total average of about 17 hours over the course of the program, which covered math and language arts.

Using pre- and post-tutoring tests and surveys, the researchers found the program improved students’ scores on standardized tests, their attendance, the amount of time they devoted to homework, and their sense of well-being.

Those effects didn’t vary by the type of device the students used; the impacts were the same for students who used smart phones as those who used laptops or other computers. But whichever device they used, effectiveness did drop for students who struggled to keep a good internet connection.

An American team of researchers, led by Matthew Kraft at Brown University, found only modest effects from an online tutoring program administered to Chicago middle school students in the spring of 2021. They theorized that impacts were small because students received only about three hours of tutoring over the 12 weeks of the program.

Interesting insights about online tutoring are emerging from a big research project based at Brown University’s Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Launched in 2020, the National School Support Accelerator Project is working with 12 pilot sites around the country as they scale up different models of tutoring. The project has also built a range of support tools to help districts launch good-quality tutoring programs.

Annenberg Institute director Susanna Loeb, who supervises the Accelerator project, said its pilot sites are developing online and in-person models, structured in a variety of ways. Those building virtual programs have noticed that they tend to work better if the student is at school during online sessions.

The dynamics behind that effect aren’t yet clear, but Loeb said it seems less important for the tutor to be on campus than for the student. If that model works, it could ease one of the biggest stumbling blocks in bringing tutoring programs to scale: hiring enough tutors.

A model in which tutors remain online, while students are at school, opens up the possibility of drawing on a national pool of tutors, Loeb noted. It could also help schools locate tutors with niche or harder-to-find skills.
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How to Make Online Tutoring Work For Your School: 5 Best Practices

By Libby Stanford

Many districts have invested in online tutoring as an academic recovery strategy, partly because staffing shortages make it difficult to find in-person tutors.

But research says it will take more than on-demand homework help for most students to make academic gains. That’s because online homework help doesn’t ensure a consistent relationship between student and tutor and often has low engagement.

There are ways for districts to optimize the impact of online tutoring, however. And, if done well, online tutoring can help schools reach more students through services with multiple languages, flexible schedules, and the ability to get help from home.

“Online tutoring doesn’t have to mean after-school tutoring; it doesn’t have to mean opt-in tutoring,” said Susanna Loeb, the director of the Annenberg Institute at Brown University, which has produced research on effective tutoring practices. “It really can be very similar to in-person tutoring.”

Here’s how districts can ensure they get the most out of online tutoring programs.

1. Be strategic about who receives tutoring

One problem with on-demand tutoring, in which students must opt in to receive support, is that it requires students to take the initiative to receive help.

That often leads to already high-achieving students utilizing tutoring instead of students who need it most. It also requires students to know where they need support, which can be difficult for young students especially, Loeb said. Instead, districts should select who receives tutoring based on students’ specific academic needs.

The Jefferson County school district in Louisville, Ky., uses this approach to identify students for its online tutoring program with FEV Tutor. Around 7,000 students receive high-dosage tutoring through the program, and those students are chosen on a school-by-school basis.

Often, teachers identify students in need of tutoring based on their scores on MAP, an assessment given three times a year, said Dena Dossett, the district’s chief of research.

“We rely on the schools,” Dossett said. “They know the students best in terms of which students need what types of support.”

2. Develop relationships with consistent tutors

Effective tutoring is relationship-based. That’s why in-person can be so much more effective than online tutoring, Loeb said.

But online tutoring can still provide students with those relationships by having them work with the same tutor every session. Some online tutoring companies, including Varsity Tutors and FEV Tutor, offer this approach, citing evidence that shows relationships improve tutoring outcomes.

“It’s very much a relationship-based activity; that’s what makes it impactful,” Loeb said. “So, you want to make sure they have that same tutor.”

Not only can this help students improve their academic outcomes, but it also gives them access to a mentor, who can help them with their social-emotional well-being.

3. Ensure tutoring is high-dosage and done during the school day

Low engagement is one of the most common issues with online tutoring. When tutoring is used as a resource for students when they’re at home, it’s nearly impossible for schools to ensure they are engaging with the program.

The best way to get around that is to build the tutoring into the school day, Loeb said. Often, teachers set students up for online tutoring during work time in class periods. This allows students to get the one-on-one help with the tutor without taking the teacher away from their duties.

“The benefit of offering online tutoring during the school day is that the students who may need it the most usually have a much easier time engaging if they’re at school,” Loeb said.

4. Involve teachers

To embed online tutoring into the classroom even further, districts can weave teachers into the virtual tutoring process.

Varsity Tutors recently launched a teacher-assigned tutoring program to help with this. The program allows teachers to get students targeted help as soon as the need arises.

For example, a teacher may notice during a lesson that a particular student is struggling with multiplication. Instead of waiting until that student’s test scores show they need improvement in math, the teacher can reach out to Varsity and have the student work one-on-one with a tutor right away.
“The teacher can go on their portal, upload the lesson, click a button, and say ‘I need three sessions with Billy,’ and the tutor is right there to reinforce, provide notes to the teacher, et cetera,” said Anthony Salcito, the chief institution business officer at Varsity Tutors. “So it’s giving tremendous power to teachers to help individualize instruction, not only reactively, but proactively.”

The teacher-assigned tutoring approach can also give teachers the opportunity to challenge students who are advanced with different materials, Salcito said.

5. Evaluate throughout the school year

It’s important for districts to know how impactful their online tutoring programs are.

The first step to that process would be to look at engagement, Loeb said.

“I would start really simply by seeing, first, which students are receiving tutoring,” she said. “Are you getting tutoring to the students who need it the most? Are they attending? Those two ways of assessing are really important before you get into its effectiveness.”

Then districts can look at how tutoring is impacting students’ academic achievement and well-being. Assessments given periodically, such as MAP, can be helpful tools to see how tutoring is impacting student academics, Loeb said.

Tutoring can also positively impact indicators of student well-being, such as attendance and behavior. It’s important for districts to assess students who receive tutoring on those factors as well, Loeb said.

“You can just ask them some questions about how well they feel supported, how much they like school, some of those softer measures that importantly capture students’ engagement and general well-being,” she said.
Can Online Tutoring Help Schools Dig Out of a Pandemic Learning Hole?

By Stephen Sawchuk

Tutoring is the top-billed remedy to help students make up for disrupted learning. States and districts are spending millions in federal funds to pay for it. But can it work online when so many other efforts to move instruction online have fallen short?

A new study from a team of researchers is the very first to test the hypothesis using a randomized experiment. And the results, while far from a silver bullet, show some promise and suggest some lessons for other online tutoring efforts.

Probably because most students in the study received only around three hours of tutoring in a 12-week period—far short of the intensity prescribed in prior research—the findings weren’t strong enough to be statistically significant. But they pointed in a positive direction overall, and the study found suggestive evidence that more tutoring time would have yielded stronger results. The study also relied on volunteer college students to serve as the tutors, a model that can offer some cost savings.

“It’s not a huge amount of tutoring overall, and in some ways, despite the lack of statistical significance, I’m somewhat even surprised that we found positive and suggestive effects given the basically low dosage,” said Matthew Kraft, an associate professor of education and economics at Brown University and one of the team of researchers who conducted the study.

In my experience trying to implement, and talking to district leaders trying to scale tutoring, uniformly they’ll tell you there are substantial implementation challenges.”

MATTHEW KRAFT
Associate Professor of Education, Brown University

Previous studies bolster tutoring—but not in a pandemic

A wide body of prior research points to intensive tutoring, in one-on-one or very small groups, as an effective way to boost learning. In the early days of the pandemic, researchers, scholars, and media outlets highlighted it as a promising approach to support students who were struggling academically.

But that research had limitations, too. All of it predated the pandemic. Much of it was done in person, with qualified tutors, and embedded for lengthy periods in the school day.

Those conditions are far different from the reality district leaders have been forced to contend with the last two years—exhausted staff, a labor market in upheaval, virtual learning. They’ve had to turn their constraints around like a Rubik’s cube puzzle, trying to get the pieces to land the right way up.

What if schools use certified, trained teachers? Costs rise—if you can find and hire them in the first place. Use volunteers or college students? Cheaper, but they typically have less experience with teaching methods. Reduce the amount of tutoring? You may not get as big a bang for your buck. Try virtual tutoring? So far, the best evidence comes from a pilot program—in Italy, not the United States.

The new study comes much closer to the realities on the ground facing districts.

Kraft and his team worked with a nonprofit begun by college students, CovEd, which provided free tutoring services beginning in the 2020-21 school year.

Some 230 tutors worked with 6th through 8th graders at a Chicago middle school. Half the students were assigned to tutors who aimed to provide about an hour’s worth of tutoring each week. The other students went to their regular advisory period.

Even though the tutoring was provided virtually, CovEd and the team faced challenges sustaining the program for the duration of the study.

The study began in spring 2021, just as some college students were returning to their own in-person courses. In summer, volunteers’ schedules changed as they picked up jobs. By fall, the program struggled to find enough tutors to keep it going. Absenteeism was an issue too, though not due to any one factor, said Evelyn Wong, a manager of CovEd who helped found the nonprofit.

“Another challenge was students who didn’t have reliable internet access or whose parents were working, so the fact that the school had built the tutoring into their schedule was really
helpful,” she said. “Even then, a lot of students have things going on at home. The mentor would show up and students wouldn’t be able to [participate], because they were looking after a younger sibling, and the opposite was true, too; a mentor would have a job come up.”

It was sobering for the researchers, too. “In my experience trying to implement, and talking to district leaders trying to scale tutoring, uniformly they’ll tell you there are substantial implementation challenges,” Kraft said. “That shouldn’t be surprising given there’s a general labor shortage for people working in the education sector … But even beyond that, changing ossified school schedules and structures in dynamic and new ways [to make space for tutoring] takes pushing back against kind of the existing norms, and that isn’t always easy.”

The resulting test scores, while positive, weren’t large enough to rule them out as being a product of test error. But the study did show that those students who had more opportunities to attend tutoring sessions seemed, overall, to progress more than those who had fewer.

Logistical challenges are real—but not insurmountable

Some of these logistical challenges exist across the virtual tutoring field, said Shaan Akbar, the co-founder of Tutored by Teachers, a company that uses certified teachers to provide online tutoring services to schools and districts.

Akbar, who was not involved in the study, said such programs are harder to set up when harried administrators—and even the procurement officials who work out the tutoring contracts—are busy covering classes in schools thanks to staff shortages and teachers being ill with COVID.

“Yes, they want to work with you. Yes, they signed up with you. But man, they have to get you the student data and schedule you into their day—it’s school day design stuff,” he said. “And you have to have staff on the ground to monitor those kids or usher them to the computer lab and monitor them. And so what we’re finding is that we are more often than not deploying people of our own to the schools to support all of that.”

All that said, he said, his organization’s internal data shows progress among students when they receive at least an hour and a half of tutoring each week. (That’s far more than students in the study received.)

“The low cost, on-demand tutoring, the quick-solve stuff, isn’t going to yield the outcomes you want,” Akbar said. “You have to find deep partnerships and do it right to get the outcomes you need.”

And matching students to tutors is an art, not a science, Wong added.

“It’s about bringing a sense of normalcy,” she said. “Having a mentor they can connect with and look up to is more than 80-90 percent of the challenge here, rather than just looking for a match between mentors and subject areas.”

Thus the new study is really a beginning not an end—and begs for follow up.

“We have very few data points on the effectiveness of online tutoring. This is a new data point,” Kraft said. “It is far from the definitive answer, and we need lots of dots to try to see the whole picture. We’ve filled in one dot.”
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1 https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/22/10/new-research-provides-first-clear-picture-learning-loss-local-level
2 https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/
4 https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w27476/w27476.pdf

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Top 5 Keys to Success
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01 Focus on students who need support. Thoughtfully select students based on their specific academic needs. Decisions should be made based on multiple data sources, teacher and parent input.

02 Foster connection. Tutoring is most effective when it is built upon strong relationships. The student's classroom teacher can help to select a tutor that is best matched with the student's academic needs, and the teacher can also provide valuable information to the tutor to ensure alignment. The tutor's relationship with the student is equally important for establishing trust, providing academic and social-emotional support, and fostering engagement and encouragement.

03 Hire certified teachers. Tutors who are state-certified teachers have specialized training to deliver high-quality instruction. Work with tutors who are professionally-trained teachers adept at teaching the curriculum effectively with instructional materials aligned to those used in the classroom.

04 Allocate adequate time. To set your tutoring program up for success, it is important to allocate adequate time during the school day for students to receive consistent high-dosage tutoring without missing out and falling behind in other academic areas. Tutoring interventions that occur during the school day tend to result in greater learning gains than those offered before or after school or during the summer.

05 Monitor and evaluate. Each student should have learning goals attached to their tutoring program. Progress toward those goals should be measured, monitored and evaluated regularly. For example, attendance, engagement, and academic progress can all be measured and addressed to ensure that the student is getting what is needed out of the tutoring program.

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Schools Are Spending Big Bucks on Online Tutoring. Here’s What They’ve Learned

By Libby Stanford

Tutoring works.

That’s been the message for schools and educators since before the COVID-19 pandemic, with lots of research to back it up. But pervasive staffing problems have gotten in the way.

That is, until online tutoring came along. For decades, companies like Varsity Tutors and FEV Tutor have been offering online and virtual tutoring services to school districts. Startups like Paper, which began offering on-demand tutoring in the 2018-19 school year, seized the pandemic moment and ramped up services.

For many districts, the online tutoring services have been a logical investment, a way to reap its benefits while avoiding the logistical complications of finding in-person help, especially as federal ESSER funds rolled in.

But it hasn’t been that simple.

Researchers say tutoring works best if it’s high dosage (offered three or more days of the week), consistent, and personalized to the student. The on-demand chat box version of tutoring that many have come to associate with the online world doesn’t often meet those qualifications. It requires students to show up on their own accord and be self-aware of the areas in which they may need help. Often, students don’t get the same tutor at every session.

Such pitfalls have led districts in Columbus, Ohio, and Santa Ana, Calif., to cancel contracts with Paper, which offers exclusively on-demand tutoring, after not enough students utilized the service, according to Chalkbeat.

“High-impact tutoring is a relationship-based tutoring,” said Susanna Loeb, the director of the Annenberg Institute at Brown University, which produces research on effective education practices. “It relies on an adult to understand a student, understand their needs, be there to celebrate successes with them, be there to support them.”

Most districts initially went for on-demand tutoring and since haven’t seen the benefits, said Anthony Salcito, the chief institution business officer at Varsity Tutors.

“The thing that’s happened in this country is [on-demand tutoring has] been the bulk of what schools have opted for initially,” Salcito said. “[We all have] sort of put what I would consider the supplemental support as the foundation as opposed to actually putting tutoring front and center.”

Now, some companies and district leaders have found themselves altering their virtual tutoring strategy so that it is most effective for students.

The most popular strategy in town

Since the start of the pandemic through March 15 of this year, school districts across the country had spent $1.7 billion, or $199 per student, of their COVID-19 federal relief funding on tutoring, both online and in person, according to data from FutureEd, a Georgetown University research center that has been analyzing COVID-19 relief spending.

There’s a federal stamp of approval, too: The Biden administration has made it clear that tutoring should be one of the top priorities for the pandemic funds. It launched its National Partnership for Student Success, an initiative to bring 250,000 tutors and academic mentors to schools through partnerships with education nonprofits and AmeriCorps.

The support behind tutoring makes sense—it’s a strategy with significant evidence backing it. On average, tutoring can increase student achievement by around three to 15 months of learning across grade levels, according to a research review from the Annenberg Institute. It’s also one of the most effective strategies to increase achievement for lower-income students, the report says.

“When you look at the research, what’s interesting is that tutoring stands out above everything else,” Loeb said. “We know that things are important for schools: good teachers, good curriculum, all sorts of things like that. But if you’re thinking about a student and how to make sure that student really does better over time, tutoring is the only thing that we found with evidence—and it has substantial evidence.”

Online tutoring itself is also not new. Not long after use of the internet broadened, tutoring companies have popped up offering students and educators online services.

But the pandemic pushed online tutoring
into a new arena. More districts invested in devices and internet services so students could access schooling at home. That shift toward technology, coupled with increased funding from the federal government, made online tutoring a more alluring investment for district leaders.

“The pandemic didn’t really change the demand for academic support,” Paper CEO Philip Cutler said. “I think what really changed was the use of technology more broadly in schools.”

Not a simple fix

In December 2020, the Jefferson County school district in Louisville, Ky., entered into a contract with FEV Tutor to offer about five hours of tutoring per week to around 7,000 3rd through 12th graders.

“We, like every other district in the nation, are experiencing staffing shortages,” said Dena Dossett, the district’s chief of research. “What this online tutoring allows us to do is provide that additional support that would be very challenging to do in person.”

The Jefferson County district made a point to ensure that its tutoring would follow the Annenberg research, Dossett said. That’s why the district went with FEV Tutor for the bulk of its program. The tutoring service helps schools in the district to identify students struggling with core subjects based on their MAP scores, which come from tests administered at several points throughout the year. Those students then participate in live video tutoring with the same tutor five hours a week during class time.

“We anticipated seeing growth because [FEV Tutor is] using the MAP scores to pinpoint what instructional needs the students have,” Dossett said. “It’s individualized one-on-one. So they’re able to dig a little bit deeper and have more time to provide differentiated support.”

The company has offered personalized tutoring to districts since its inception in 2009, said Ryan Patenaude, the executive vice president and co-founder of FEV Tutor. Its goal is to improve learning by strategically working with the district, Patenaude said. The company uses the Annenberg research to guide its tutoring model.

“Everyone thinks tutoring has to be after school, it has to be homework help, it has to be what the status quo tutoring is,” Patenaude said. “There’s so much more that can be done with tutoring.”

So far, it has worked for Jefferson County. Students who used FEV Tutor saw their math scores increase 4.3 points and their reading scores increase 4.2 points in a winter-to-spring 2021-22 analysis of NWEA MAP scores. Students who didn’t use FEV Tutor grew, too, but not as much.

Other tutoring companies are starting to shift their tutoring models to more closely follow the research. Varsity Tutors has expanded its high-dosage tutoring to include on-demand and teacher-assigned tutoring.

The high-dosage tutoring allows districts and schools to provide targeted tutoring to a population of students who might be struggling more in one subject area than another, while the teacher-assigned tutoring allows schools to provide intensive support as needs arise, said Salcito, the Varsity executive. Both options give students access to the same tutor every time they log on.

“It’s giving tremendous power to teachers to help individualize instruction, not only reactively but proactively,” Salcito said. “We think this is going to be not only great for identifying kids at risk of failing but also empowering teachers to help relieve the stress and burden that they have to do this work on their own.”

Anthony Salcito
Chief Institution Business Officer, Varsity Tutors

Where on-demand tutoring fits in

So why does on-demand online tutoring seem to fall so short? For one thing, it requires students themselves to take initiative. Only students who log in three days a week for at least 30 minutes of live tutoring help are going to have significant academic gains, and those students are often already high achievers, Loeb said.

“When you start to get computers involved with online tutoring, it’s easy to move to that opt-in, and you’re really going to miss a lot of kids,” she said. “In general, it’s really hard for students to understand what they need support with. So that’s why a program that uses data to understand students’ needs, has material there to support their development, is really much more beneficial.”

That doesn’t mean on-demand tutoring has no place in schools. Jefferson County uses Paper as an on-demand service for middle and high school students in addition to its tutoring with FEV Tutor. Cutler, the CEO of Paper, sees such services as one piece of the overall academic-recovery puzzle, when used as a tool alongside other academic-recovery strategies—such as after-school programs, mental health supports for students, and extended learning time.

“I don’t think that it’s a one-size-fits-all solution,” Cutler said. “Districts need to know their community; they need to know what works best.”

The Omaha school district in Nebraska recently applied this approach when developing a three-pronged tutoring program for its students. In addition to on-demand online tutoring offered by Paper, the program includes in-person, high-dosage tutoring by teachers, who will be paid extra for working with students after school. Other students in the district’s separate after-school programs will also receive in-person tutoring.

Susanne Cramer, Omaha’s executive director of school improvement, noted that the district has also placed academic-recovery liaisons at each school to oversee both the district’s tutoring and summer learning programs.

“That consistent relationship, alignment to [core classroom] instruction, and that dosing component of 30 hours or 36 weeks, that’s the golden triangle of what we’re trying to achieve,” she said.

Cramer said the district is following the same Annenberg research that shows consistent relationships and high doses of tutoring are most effective. The program is new, so the district doesn’t yet have data to track students’ progress, but it will be assessing students throughout the program to see how well it’s working.
To Get Tutoring Right, Connect It to the Classroom

Tutors should be using the same high-quality materials that teachers use in the classroom

By David M. Steiner & Ethan Mitnick

Meet Emma, a 4th grader. Last year, her school building was closed, and she attended only about half her distance-learning classes. Based on her performance on an assessment administered at the beginning of the school year, she is required to participate in a math-tutoring program to help her catch up. But instead of helping Emma feel more successful, tutoring creates additional stress.

In class, Emma is learning about adding fractions with like denominators, but in tutoring, she’s working on finding the area of rectangles. There is no connection to her classroom work, and as a result, tutoring isn’t helping Emma.

School systems across the country are making major investments in tutoring. A recent review of school year 2021-22 district plans by the Center for Reinventing Public Education found that 52 percent of districts are planning to use federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds to help students make up instructional time, and for many districts, this involves providing tutoring.

The research base tells us that, when done right, tutoring can significantly boost students’ success. There is also powerful evidence that addressing unfinished learning should take a learning acceleration approach that focuses on strategically preparing students to tackle grade-level content rather than (impossibly) trying to remediate all missed content.

“Students are likely to learn more,” write the authors of an EdResearch for Recovery white paper on high-dosage tutoring, “when their tutoring sessions complement and are responsive to their classroom grade-level instruction.”

As educators who advocate such tutoring and work with states and districts to accomplish it, we know that a critical question is: How do we make tutoring connect closely to what is taught in the classroom? Without such a connection, Emma and many other students will be far less likely to benefit from tutoring.

Tutoring programs can take deliberate steps to fold core existing instructional resources right into their tutoring plans. Using high-quality instructional materials that are already the basis for classroom instruction in tutoring sessions helps streamline the work of leaders, teachers, tutors, and students while helping ensure that tutoring effectively accelerates student learning. Curriculum-based diagnostics such as Eureka Math Equip help identify critical content to reinforce in tutoring what will best prepare individual students for upcoming lessons. Additionally, using high-quality materials in tutoring benefits tutors and students alike because of the familiar look, feel, and instructional approaches of the materials. Access to these materials helps guide all tutors’ acceleration efforts regardless of their prior experience. Novice tutors can preview upcoming lessons and content from the curriculum with students, while more experienced tutors can leverage diagnostic data to identify students’ unfinished learning and deliver individualized, just-in-time support.

Here are some specific steps that leaders can take to connect tutoring to classroom instruction.

First, pay attention to details. For instance:

• Determine what you want tutors to focus on. Prioritize curriculum-embedded data sources. Identify diagnostic assessments from within your materials (such as the Eureka Math Equip mentioned above) that can be used to pinpoint the content to be taught and to monitor the efficacy of the tutoring. Establish a set of clearly defined milestones and goals including dates when you will review the data with the tutors for any mid-course corrections.

• Diagnostics may point to the need to reinforce foundational-skills math content and provide practice with decoding and vocabulary. In each case the skills should be needed for access to current grade-level work.

• Ensure tutors have access to the right materials. Whether digital or print materials, tutors need easy access to these resources. This may require a procurement process and assigning staff members to distribute print materials and/or logins to tutors.

Second, invest in your people. You can:

• Include tutors in teacher professional learning. Whenever possible, have tutors attend curriculum-specific professional learning and training alongside teachers. This will build a shared investment in the materials and better prepare tutors with the knowledge and skills they need to accelerate instruction.

• Hire a training partner/vendor. A trusted professional learning provider can conduct training and coaching for tutors on the instructional materials you
are using, especially if your materials do not contain specific resources for tutors. This may be available through your curriculum vendor or from external professional learning organizations.

- Identify and use in-house educators who can support your tutors. Teachers or leaders who have been trained on the curriculum can provide ongoing site-based support and coaching for tutors on the use of the curriculum or serve as tutoring-program supervisors.

Several agencies and organizations launching tutoring initiatives have taken steps to align their tutoring programs with core instruction. Here are two examples:

- The Arkansas education department’s elementary and secondary division and Gary Community Ventures’ Learning League (based in Colorado) are leveraging Zearn for use in their tutoring programs to accelerate classroom instruction. Tutors receive robust training from SchoolKit on Zearn.

- The Texas Education Agency has released a list of vetted tutoring content providers. The materials on this list align to the core instructional materials being provided as open educational resources to Texas districts as part of the TEA’s COVID Recovery Supports. The result is a coherent package of high-quality materials for districts wishing to align their instructional materials to those used in tutoring.

In addition to streamlining their own efforts, when educators connect tutoring closely with classroom instruction and high-quality materials already used in classrooms, they can change the tutoring experience for students like Emma. Rather than being an exercise in frustration, tutoring that’s classroom-connected boosts confidence and academic ability in and out of school.

That’s when students get the full power of tutoring, an urgently needed intervention.

David M. Steiner is the executive director of the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, which currently supports multiple state agencies and districts in accelerating instruction for all students. Ethan Mitnick is the president of SchoolKit, a professional learning organization that provides content-area-specific trainings for leaders, teachers, and tutors.
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