



Accelerate Learning Now

Strategies for Sustaining High-impact Tutoring Post-ESSER

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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic school closures had significant impacts on student learning, resulting in historic declines in math and reading test scores. Early in the pandemic, education leaders identified high-impact tutoring as a promising practice to help students accelerate learning. With federal funding set to expire in September 2024 (and with extended spending possible through 2026), school leaders are seeking ways to sustain investments in evidence-based practices such as high-impact tutoring. With only roughly 10 percent of education funding – in a typical year – coming from the federal government, it is clear that the role of states and localities in financing learning recovery will be critical in the future.

In developing this paper, we conducted interviews with education experts and tutoring program managers, identifying 13 strategies to help support the sustainability of high-impact tutoring beyond the expiration of federal emergency funds. Recent data on student learning suggests that recovery is happening. However, it has been uneven across the country and students in high-poverty school districts – who started the pandemic further behind – fell even further behind than peers in the high-income districts. Continued and sustained investment in high-impact tutoring will be needed to help students recover and avert long-term impacts to their socioeconomic futures.

Overview

COVID-19 created “not only a once-in-a-century public health crisis, but a once-in-a-century public education crisis,” according to a 2023 Aspen Economic Strategy Group paper.^[1]

The federal government responded by sending an unprecedented level of funding to states and school districts. Through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund, the federal government provided \$189.5 billion to schools.^[2] Schools were required to set aside 20 percent of the stimulus funds for evidence-based interventions to address COVID-related learning interruptions, with many schools embracing high-impact (also referred to as high-dosage or high-intensity) tutoring to help students accelerate learning.

States and school districts that relied on these funds to kickstart or expand high-impact tutoring will need to identify alternate funding sources to continue helping students close achievement gaps. High-impact tutoring represents one of the strongest evidence-based practices for helping students make academic progress and address COVID-related interrupted learning. The National Student Support Accelerator (NSSA) notes that the effectiveness of high-impact tutoring to deliver substantial learning gains for students is supported by eight meta-analyses representing over 150 studies. Studies have demonstrated that students who participate in high-impact tutoring can make substantial learning gains.^[4]

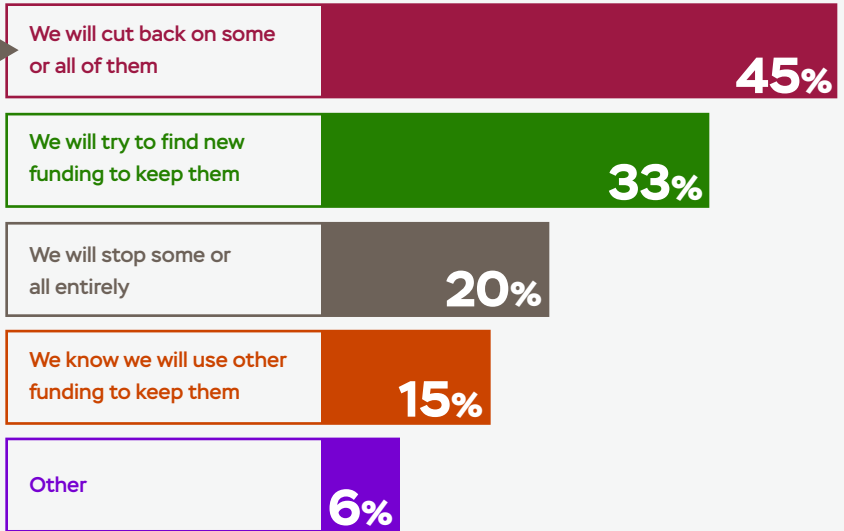
A recent survey of school and district staff across the U.S., conducted by Saga Education, revealed that nearly half of school districts expect to significantly reduce the number of students served by tutoring programs when federal emergency funds expire. Saga Education, in partnership with the National Association of Federal Education Program Administrators (NAFEPA), engaged Whiteboard Advisors to conduct this survey on tutoring with 120 school and district staff around the country. Survey participants included districts’ federal and state program directors, district administrators,

High-impact tutoring is typically characterized by:

- Small group instruction where the student-to-tutor ratio is 3:1
- Consistent interaction where students see the same tutor for 30-60 minutes 3 times a week over 10 to 36 weeks
- Well-trained and well-supported tutors who use curriculum aligned with classroom instruction^[3]

What will happen to your tutoring programs after the stimulus funds either run out or expire?

In a December 2023 survey, nearly half of survey participants say that they will reduce or cut back on tutoring programs after federal funds expire.



Note: Participants were allowed to select multiple responses

district leaders (including superintendents and assistant/deputy superintendents), school principals, and other school staff.

The survey found that “nearly three out of four respondents say they are currently using federal stimulus funds to pay for tutoring. When these funds run out, tutoring programs will likely face either downsizing (reducing the number of students served, for example) or elimination.” Nearly half say they will try to find new funding or already know of alternate funding streams to keep their tutoring programs going, according to the survey results.

Since 2004, Education Resource Strategies (ERS), has worked with about 100 school districts around the country to assist districts with aligning their resources with their priorities. Jess O’Connor, who leads ERS’s school design practice, says that for the districts with whom they are working, fiscal sustainability and the post-ESSER financial cliff are the biggest concerns.

“Every district that we’re working with is asking themselves about how to sustain not only their supplemental programs but also the core functions,” O’Connor says. “I think high-dosage tutoring is one of the areas folks have invested a lot of money in, and I also think it’s probably on the highest priority list to keep and also probably highest on the chopping block to reduce.”

“Every district that we’re working with is asking themselves about how to sustain not only their supplemental programs but also the core functions”

- Jess O’Connor of Education Resources Strategies

She says several factors will affect how much the ESSER cliff affects school districts and states. One of those factors is the share of funding provided by the state, she explains. States that are investing their own resources to backfill on expected losses have the greatest opportunity to be strategic about investments, O’Connor says. The second is a concentration of high-poverty school systems that received more federal relief funding, so they may see a greater impact from the ESSER cliff than other districts. A third factor is overall population and enrollment changes. Enrollment decline could amount to millions of dollars lost and make it challenging for districts to consider new investments. The fourth factor is overall funding levels generally, she says.

High poverty districts in “places like Mississippi or Alabama are going to see huge declines because ESSER, in some cases, made up to 20 percent of their annual budget for those three years,” O’Connor says, whereas more affluent districts may have only had 5 to 7 percent of their budget boosted by ESSER.

The Children’s Funding Project (CFP), which maps federal, state and local funding available to support children and youth programming, currently works directly with 13 communities, has 16 partners collaborating to create [state fiscal maps](#), and collaborates with over 50 voter-approved children’s funds that generate over a billion dollars annually.

CFP’s Senior Associate Esther Grambs says that though many districts and states embraced high-impact tutoring and summer programs to help students catch up in the first two years of federal emergency funding, those interventions haven’t had enough time to have an impact on students’ academic recovery. (Some researchers have suggested that students affected by pandemic-induced learning interruptions may not recover before they end their public-school education.)^[5]

Why should states and school districts sustain investment in high-impact tutoring programs? National data shows student academic performance declined to historic levels because of pandemic-related school closures. The 2024 Education Recovery Scorecard, created by Professors Tom Kane of Harvard and Sean Reardon of Stanford, notes that “during the pandemic, students missed out on half of a year’s typical learning in math and a third of a year in reading.” Recent data, however, suggests students are on a path to recovery. According to the Education Recovery Scorecard, “Between 2022 and 2023, students recovered approximately one-third of the original loss in math and one-quarter of the loss in reading.” Despite this recovery, the Scorecard notes that students in the highest poverty districts “lost twice as much in math achievement and four times as much in reading achievement” than peers in the wealthiest districts.

The progress is a positive sign that recovery efforts are working. However, it also signals that states and school districts will need to continue investing in evidence-based interventions such as high-impact tutoring to help students catch up.

Below, we offer a series of proposed strategies for helping students recover from learning interruptions by sustaining high-impact tutoring programs after federal COVID-19 emergency funding expires later this year. We organize these strategies through the lenses of funding, program placement, partnerships, and student impact.



Federal, State, and Local Funding

States and school districts should explore and, if feasible, request extensions for ESSER-funded programs.

NSSA’s Susanna Loeb noted in a recent webinar titled “Big Bets Working: Keeping the Commitment to Tutoring Alive and Strong,” that there is a huge opportunity to extend federal funding into 2026. As of January 2024, The Education Recovery Scorecard reported that states and school districts still have about \$51 billion of the \$189.5 billion in federal ESSER funds to obligate before the September 2024 deadline. Whiteboard Advisors Sr. VP David Deschryver explains that a large part of this spending hasn’t occurred because much of the spending is for people. “Because it’s labor heavy, it won’t be spent down until the last moment when everybody has completed their work,” he explains.

If a state is granted an authorized extension by the U.S. Department of Education, school districts could have up until March 2026 to liquidate their funds, as long as costs are properly obligated by September 30, 2024. An extension can offer schools that may have encountered delays in getting tutoring programs started more time to demonstrate their impact on student achievement.

As a strategy to continue to elevate the Administration’s support for education recovery, the White House announced its [Improving Student Achievement Agenda](#) in January 2024, aimed at intensifying the drive toward three evidence-based strategies for accelerating student learning:

2024 Improving Student Achievement Agenda

- 1 Increasing student attendance
- 2 Providing high-dosage tutoring
- 3 Increasing summer learning and extended or after school learning time

Source: [Whitehouse.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov)

We encourage the White House and the U.S. Department of Education to continue to use their far-reaching “bully pulpit,” guidance, and other means to encourage state and local leaders to use federal, state, and local funding for evidence-based programming, including high-impact tutoring.

ERS’ Jess O’Connor agrees that school systems should take advantage of federal stimulus extensions available from the U.S. Department of Education. “It is very difficult for school systems to spend that amount of funding in three years and shift cost structures to align with priorities,” she notes.

Districts with policies that allow them to rollover funds year to year – such as Texas and New Mexico – can expand the time horizon of ESSER by spending more ESSER funding and less of their operating budget and sort of stashing it away in an increased fund balance, she says. She notes that one political aspect of ESSER spending is that “no district wants to admit to their board that they’re not spending free money and that they might have to send it back.”

CFP’s Esther Grambs questions the transparency of reporting requirements for ESSER funding. “The reporting standard for what a district has to inform the government about what it’s doing with the money is set at the state level, and states have wildly varying standards,” she says. Some reporting documents state that schools have obligated 80 percent of funds to tutoring, but “you don’t know if they were actually able to spend it,” Grambs says. She says that perhaps a school district wanted to hire 30 paraprofessionals but there weren’t 30 people seeking those jobs, “so they still have half the money left over.” Like O’Connor, she worries that some districts just don’t have the capacity to move around the amount of federal money they received or the structures in place to run a tutoring program and time is running out.

Leverage federal funding options to reduce tutoring’s biggest cost.

Two federal funding streams can support the major cost of high-impact tutoring: the tutor wage. Tutor wages often comprise the largest portion of the cost, but sourcing undergraduate student tutors from higher education institutions who benefit from the Federal Work-Study program can significantly reduce those costs, Saga Education CEO Alan Safran noted.

If tutors are college undergraduates doing this work part-time and receiving federal financial aid through Work-Study, the college will subsidize half or nearly all the tutor’s wage. Similarly, [AmeriCorps](#) will subsidize nearly all the tutor wage. (To learn more about the opportunities and challenges of leveraging the Federal Work-Study program for tutoring, read Saga’s white paper “[Leveraging the Federal Work-Study Program for P-12 Tutoring](#).”)

Reallocate existing federal funding sources such as Title funds and IDEA for tutoring programs.

Several organizations point to well-established federal funding sources to help sustain high-impact tutoring programs. Accelerate and the National Student Support Accelerator both encourage the use of federal programs including Title I, Part A, Title II, Part A, and Title IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) as key sources to support high-impact tutoring initiatives. Accelerate’s “[Beyond Recovery](#)” report offers guidance on how existing Title funding can be used to support tutoring programs. The National Student Support Accelerator also provides an extensive online list of [potential funding sources](#) that school districts can use to fund tutoring for a range of purposes such as tutoring focused on English language learners, economically disadvantaged students, and special education students. Both organizations note that different funds can be “braided” together to support tutoring programs, though this is a less understood and less common practice. (Learn more about blending and braiding funds at [WestEd](#).)

Whiteboard Advisor’s DeSchryver believes that school districts have an opportunity to reevaluate and reallocate their investments in programs and interventions that aren’t providing a

great return on investment. “I think parents saw this when the pandemic came. You had six different applications with seven different logins,” he says. “What you’re looking at is decades of categorical siloed spending by different divisions into different products and services without actually making sure they all work together. There’s plenty of room for efficiencies. Part of it may not be that you need more money but that you need to think about how to be cohesive and strategic about your existing spending.”

“The bigger, probably more impactful solutions are larger strategic shifts in the way existing funds are used,” DeSchryver says. He sees recent research suggesting “bursts” of tutoring as innovations that could allow schools to embed tutoring into the school day, reduce their costs and still address learning loss. A [recent study](#) conducted by Stanford University of Chapter One literacy tutoring in Broward County showed substantial gains for first-grade students at a cost of \$500 per pupil using shorter “bursts” of tutoring.

“The bigger, probably more impactful solutions are larger strategic shifts in the way existing funds are used”

- David DeSchryver of Whiteboard Advisors

“The things that [school] systems need to do to free up dollars for new investments are changing some of those deep underlying cost structures. That includes changing the staffing levels in schools, like changing the fundamental role of teachers. One teacher with 25 kids, that’s a really rigid way of investing resources,” O’Connor says. “And I don’t mean raising class sizes. I mean: How do you better use teachers in more flexible ways? There was a lot of disruption during the pandemic in a way that opened people’s eyes to . . . positive things about the ways teachers collaborated, worked differently, and leveraged technology.”

The challenge with using federal Title funds to finance tutoring programs, according to the NSSA’s Managing Director Kathryn Bendheim, is that districts are often already putting that money to work. “So, you have to eliminate staff or a program in order to use that funding for any new program, including tutoring. The issue is that people are very hesitant to let go of things, especially when it has to do with people,” she says. “That’s why Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is a little

more palatable because you could use some staff already involved in MTSS interventions and train them to be tutors so that they don’t lose their job.” Bendheim points to Baltimore City as one example of a program that effectively integrated tutoring with its [MTSS efforts](#).

Bendheim says where tutoring programs are situated in a district’s organizational structure matters. For example, if tutoring is located within the Teaching and Learning division, there is more likely to be more capacity to ensure success. “It’s the \$100 million question,” she says. “One of the keys to success is to put it in a place where [staff] have some dedicated capacity to strategically manage funding, check in on scheduling and make sure the relationship with whomever is providing the tutoring is working well.”

Reframe how school leaders think about the cost of tutoring.

District leaders frequently cite cost as a concern for investing in high-impact tutoring. Per student tutoring costs range from \$1,000 to \$3,000, depending on a variety of factors from dosage delivered to tutor wages, according to the National Student Support Accelerator. Those costs, however, could be reduced depending on the dosage students need and other adjustments to technology and human capital. “The cost of highly impactful in-school-day tutoring will soon be, in our view, \$1,000 per pupil, and that’s for a full-year dosage. There are plenty of students who don’t need a full year, so a half-year cost will approach \$500-600,” says Saga Education CEO Alan Safran.

However, the cost of not tutoring should not be overlooked, says Safran. Students who drop out of school cost districts thousands per pupil a year in funding, he says.

“From a district resource point of view, it’s imperative to take every step to prevent dropouts, and high-impact tutoring grade nine Algebra is one of the most effective ways to stop that loss,” Safran says. A [recent article in The 74](#) and a report from The Brookings Institution highlighted an alarming increase in enrollment declines. Over a four-year period that included the pandemic, Brookings reported that 12 percent of elementary schools and 9 percent of middle schools saw a 20 percent decline in enrollment. Schools in states such as

Oregon, New Mexico, and West Virginia are expected to see a 10 percent drop or more in enrollment between 2021 and 2031.^[7]

Studies suggest that students who fail Algebra I are four times more likely to drop out than those who pass.^[8] Saga co-founder AJ Gutierrez notes research conducted by the University of Chicago Education Lab on Saga's high-impact tutoring approach demonstrated a 63 percent reduction in math class failure rates.

"That is a big number. It is logical to invest in this so that students stay in school. Let's say a district invests \$1,500 per student in high-impact tutoring to move students to pass Algebra 1 and graduate high school," he explains. "Instead of dropping out, the student stays in sophomore, junior, and senior year. That's roughly \$15,000 every year per year, so that's \$45,000 that the district didn't lose because

the student stayed in school. That \$1,500 spent resulted in a 30-fold return on investment. From a purely financial perspective, if you invest in strong, evidence-based models with a high leverage point, it will effectively pay for itself in the long term."

Continue to advocate for additional sources of state funding for tutoring.

States and school districts have made important progress in developing innovative approaches to creating and sustaining high-impact tutoring programs that help their students succeed academically. According to NSSA, 16 states have passed tutoring related policies. However, to date, most of the funding has come from the federal relief packages. Also, the NSSA notes that while 40 states currently provide funding for tutoring programs, only 26 require that funding be aligned with high-impact tutoring standards.

Here are a few states we think are taking steps in the right direction:

Colorado

The Colorado legislature passed a bill creating the Colorado High-Impact Tutoring Program, which was signed into law by Governor Jared Polis in 2021. The law established a grant that provides incentives for local education providers to implement high-impact tutoring programs. The law appropriated nearly \$5 million from unanticipated state tax revenues to implement the act. The state also leveraged ESSER funds on top of state dollars as well as a philanthropy-funded Accelerate States Leading Recovery grant. In its first year, 17 grantees served 3,800 students in 74 schools and provided 35,000 hours of tutoring, according to the Colorado Department of Education. In the 2022-23 school year, another 17 grantees served over 5,300 students in 128 schools and provided over 200,000 hours of tutoring.

North Carolina

The North Carolina State Board of Education and Office of the Governor created the NC Education Corps (NCEC) in 2020. The Corps works with local public schools to recruit, train and support literacy tutors and help accelerate K-5 student learning. NC Education Corps was funded through a mix of ESSER funds (\$13.5M), federal Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund (\$726K), and philanthropic donations. The NCEC is now an independent nonprofit. In the 2021-22 school year, NCEC served 3,000 K-3 students in 21 counties. The nonprofit plans to engage with state legislators to secure recurring funding for high-impact tutoring as well as explore additional sources of funding such as AmeriCorps and private philanthropic support. NCEC partners with Duke University and NC State University to evaluate its programmatic outcomes. The proposed 2024-25 state budget includes \$3 million in 2024-25 to support the NCEC with partnering with public schools to recruit, train, and deploy corps members as tutors to work with students.

Tennessee

Beginning in 2021 and continuing through summer 2024, the Tennessee Department of Education invested its ESSER 3.0 funding in the Tennessee Accelerating Literacy and Learning Corps (TN ALL Corps) tutoring. Currently in 87 districts across Tennessee, TN All Corps' goal is to serve 200,000 students. The state created a matching grant program and the total investment in tutoring between the state and local education agency matching grants is projected to be over \$200 million. TN also incorporated high-impact tutoring into its funding formula, incorporating \$8 million for literacy tutoring to 4th graders who did not pass the third-grade state literacy assessment.

Virginia

In September 2023, Virginia released the results of its Standards of Learning (SOL) Assessment showing that over half of 3rd to 8th grade students were at risk or had failed to meet grade level expectations in reading and two-thirds of students in the same grades were at risk or had failed to meet grade level expectations in math. Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin launched the ALL In VA Tutoring program, which focuses on offering high-intensity tutoring to those students who failed their Standards of Learning (SOL) tests or who demonstrated risk of failing. The state invested an additional \$418 million from its ESSER allocation in public education to support tutoring, expand literacy instruction and combat chronic absenteeism. The state's "ALL In VA" tutoring initiative requires 18 weeks of tutoring for at-risk (students who scored low proficient) third through eighth graders and 36 weeks of tutoring for those third through eighth graders who did not pass the 2023 reading and/or mathematics SOL assessment. By the end of 2023, all 131 school districts had developed All in VA plans to boost student achievement.

Michigan

In 2023 in Michigan, Governor Gretchen Whitmer signed the state's FY 24 education budget, which includes \$150 million for individualized tutoring or academic support through the MI Kids Back on Track program using state supplemental aid funds to help children who are behind in reading or math. The state also used \$52 million in ESSER funds to fund Section 98c Learning Loss grants to districts, "which do not have to be but are often used for tutoring," according to the National Student Support Accelerator.

Maryland

Maryland passed a bill creating the Blueprint for Maryland's Future in 2021. This legislation provides a framework to reform the state's education system and significantly increases annual state education funding over a 10-year period, allocating over \$3.8 billion in additional funding annually when fully implemented. The Blueprint specifically funds small group tutoring for students who perform below grade level in ELA in grades K-3. Using federal funds, Maryland also established two tutoring initiatives – the Maryland Leads grant initiative and the Maryland Tutoring Corps. The Maryland Leads initiative, launched in 2022, provided districts with funding and guidance to implement high-impact tutoring (HIT) programming. All 24 Maryland LEA's applied to the Maryland Leads program and received an award. The Maryland Tutoring Corps, announced by Governor Moore in 2023, is a \$28 million competitive grant program, (including a 2:1 match requirement) that leverages one-time ESSER III relief funds to launch and scale high-quality, school day math tutoring programs.

Other states, including Arkansas, Delaware, Louisiana, New Jersey, Ohio, and Texas are also implementing high-impact tutoring models. State leadership in Louisiana plans to introduce legislation in the 2024 session to ensure tutoring becomes a component of the state education infrastructure.

Education advocates can often overlook innovative state funding approaches that could support a diversity of children's programming. For example, state "sin" taxes such as marijuana, lottery, and sports betting in some cases are dedicated to support education. Funds from major court settlements that in the past included tobacco and currently involve opioid settlements could also be sources. Alaska and Colorado are examples of states that devote a portion of marijuana tax revenue to education and after-school programs.

Encourage passage of federal legislation to fund high-impact tutoring initiatives and establish guidance and guardrails for implementing high-quality, high-impact tutoring.

High-impact tutoring has strong bipartisan support and future legislation, including the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), should include funding for high-impact tutoring. Several bills are already on the table. In mid-January, Congresswoman Susie Lee (NV-03) and Congressman Anthony Esposito (NY-04) introduced the bipartisan Partnering Aspiring Teachers with High-Need Schools (PATHS) to Tutor Act. The legislation would expand access to one-on-one and small group tutoring for students in underserved communities. A companion bill was introduced in the Senate by Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ), John Cornyn (R-TX), Chris Murphy (D-CT), and Roger Wicker (R-MS). The act helps place teacher-candidates into tutoring roles, bolstering the teacher pipeline, offers loan forgiveness through national service awards and it expands access to tutoring through a \$500 million competitive grant program.

In 2023, Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill (NJ-11) introduced the Expanding Access to High-Impact Tutoring Act alongside Republican Rep. Nancy Mace (SC-01). The legislation would provide grant funding for states to create high-impact tutoring programs and provide funding to the Department of Education and states to create a nationwide tutoring workforce. ^[9]



Program Placement

Locate tutoring programs with other well-established programs/offices such as Multi-tiered Systems of Support or Title I district offices.

Where a tutoring program lives within the school system can make a difference in its long-term sustainability. TNTP (formerly known as The New Teacher Project), a nonprofit consultancy that trains new teachers and advises districts on a wide range of issues, notes that where school districts place their tutoring team can affect how well they align with the district's overall vision, instruction and the student experience. Some districts have placed the team within Offices of Teaching and Learning while others are based in other departments such as Offices of Strategic Partnership. For example, according to TNTP, placing tutoring in Offices of Teaching and Learning allows teams to have "direct access to school-based stakeholders" while putting it in Offices of Strategic Partnerships allows them to "more easily form external partnerships."

In Virginia, Fairfax County Public Schools' (FCPS) Tutoring Program Manager Joash Chung notes that their tutoring program resides in the Office of School Support, part of the Department of School Improvement and Supports. The Office of School Support works primarily to support FCPS schools around school improvement and accreditation. However, the office partners with the county's Title I office, who are dedicating a few staff members to support tutoring programs in Title I schools. "The Title I office sees HIT as an opportunity to provide direct services to students, which they may continue to do after ESSER and state funds go away," he says.

The National Student Support Accelerator (NSSA) also suggests that districts have an opportunity to situate tutoring programs with their [Multi-tiered Systems of Support](#).^[10] The NSSA asserts that "given the September 2024 deadline to obligate ESSER funds, now is a critical time for education agencies to plan for more effective support of students for the long run. Using high-impact tutoring as a delivery structure within a system's MTSS framework could dramatically improve student learning and reduce inequities in student experiences and outcomes without substantial additional costs."

From a sustainability lens, O'Connor agrees that tying high-impact tutoring to MTSS is an important strategy. "All the research that we've seen points to tutoring needing to be tightly aligned to the curriculum. So, it's really important that you're targeting those resources for the kids that need the most support. A functioning MTSS is the way I think you could most accurately target those needs." She adds that high-impact tutoring is not something all districts can afford for every single student at the dosage the research recommends for optimal impact, so targeting students who are most in need of additional support can help sustain strategic investment in tutoring.

Kelli Easterly, Executive Director of Chicago Public School's Department of STEM, says that CPS decided to scale high-impact math tutoring around 2016, after the University of Chicago released a study of high-impact tutoring at Harper High School. In 2017, Janice Jackson, then CPS CEO, included a strategy in the district's 5-year-plan around improving pathways to advanced mathematics in high schools. Easterly says this included strengthening the middle grades Algebra program and improving math outcomes so students could have opportunities to take the AP Advanced Math course.

High-impact math tutoring was supported through CPS's Five-Year Strategic Plan using Title funding, according to Easterly. High-impact math tutoring is funded through the Department of STEM and the program has expanded to 22 sites over the years. Within Chicago Public Schools, Easterly says that students have their regular math course and the Math Lab, where high-impact tutoring occurs. (This math tutoring program is managed by Saga Education.)

"It was important that the math department be responsible for executing the vision of what happens to determine if the goal of full integration between tier one instruction and high-dosage tutoring is being met," she says.

Chicago also launched its Chicago Tutor Corps using \$25 million in federal pandemic emergency funding in 2021. The program has grown to 600 tutors and provides early literacy tutoring and grades 6-12 mathematics tutoring. That program is based in Chicago's MTSS office.

Easterly notes that a good relationship with tutoring vendors helps with coordination and communication when school

leaders are trying to understand the value added from tutoring programs. The relationship of the math director with the tutoring program and with school leaders helps communicate the connection between math classroom instruction and tutoring.

Asked what lessons Chicago's tutoring program offers other programs, Easterly says that "the things that are a priority in school districts are what gets funded. If there isn't a strong math vision that includes acceleration of learning ensuring students have access to grade level content, it might be hard to convince stakeholders and taxpayers and boards to allocate a large number of dollars."

High-impact tutoring programs, Easterly suggests, should be able to articulate answers to questions such as the following:

- What are the academic expectations for students?
- Why is access to advanced math important for students?
- What research are you pointing to to justify investment in programs?
- How successful are you in meeting your outcomes?

Restructure teaching and classrooms to integrate tutoring.

Most high-impact tutoring happens a day or two after classroom instruction, according to Saga CEO Alan Safran. But he points out that tutoring doesn't need to be its own separate class or be held after school or in the summer sessions. Classroom time can be restructured to integrate tutoring.

In an integrated model, teachers deliver new material to students at the beginning of class and then students can work in small groups with tutors in a face-to-face or live-online session. These students can be grouped by ability:

Students who are behind can get the extra support they need while students who are ahead can work on more advanced applications of concepts. Teachers can then monitor tutoring sessions, engaging students with questions and coaching tutors in real time. Safran says this provides teachers with a crew of micro-instructional aides while also enabling tutors to observe classroom instruction and learn what being a teacher is like, supporting a tutor-to-teacher pipeline. Safran says that having a team of tutors to support a teacher can also help solve another challenge facing school districts – finding substitute teachers. More than three-quarters of public schools reported it is more difficult to get substitutes than it was before the pandemic, according to the US Department of Education. Tutors may be able to fill in and gain practical teaching experience.

Fulton County, Georgia, was among the first in the state to launch a high-impact tutoring program upon returning to school after the pandemic, says Hannah Zey, an analyst for the Strategy & Governance Department in the Fulton County Office of the Superintendent. She manages the county's involvement in the University of Chicago Education Lab's Personalized Learning Initiative (PLI) study of high-impact tutoring and partnership with the University of Chicago, the nonprofit MDRC, and Saga Education.

Using federal CARES funding (which funded the first round of ESSER), Fulton County focused on high-impact tutoring with a 4-to-1 student-to-tutor ratio as one of its major interventions. The district put out a request for quotes to engage with tutoring vendors and certify vendors that schools can work with for high-impact tutoring support. The district identified students needing learning acceleration and put them into groups for tutoring primarily for the subjects of math and literacy. The amount of money schools received from CARES was based on a formula that considered the needs of the school, the level of academic risk and the enrollment of the school, Zey explains. Schools were able to engage in a contract with a vendor from the approved list and develop a program to provide high-impact tutoring for their students.

She says that tutoring took off immediately at elementary schools. With the federal funds, elementary schools were able to hire one additional paraprofessional to provide vendor tutor support. With federal funds expiring, Zey says elementary

schools will no longer have that paraprofessional funding so they will need to pull from their own budgets to keep that role.

In the PLI study, the high school model being investigated is targeted at Algebra students on a block schedule. On "A" days, students attend their regular Algebra I class. On "B" days, students attend a math support class. In this math support class, 6-7 tutors push into the same classroom, each tutor working with a group of 4 students in a pod of desks with moveable whiteboards. One week "B" day math support classes occur Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays and then alternate the next week to Tuesdays and Thursdays for 60 minutes, Zey explains. The teacher provides a 10- to 15-minute introductory lesson at the beginning of class and then students work with tutors using Saga's curriculum to reinforce content taught by the teacher. In the middle school version, students go to high-impact tutoring two days a week (either Monday and Wednesday or Tuesday and Thursday for a 70-minute period).

The study is also looking at a "sustainable" model where tutors work with a larger ratio of students (8:1), but half of the time students are working directly with a tutor and the other half of the time using an ed tech platform. The study aims to examine whether a tutor can work with more students without negatively affecting learning outcomes. Preliminary results of a blended learning tutor model alternating between tutoring and computer-assisted learning days (similar to Fulton County's approach studied by the University of Chicago Education Lab, in partnership with Saga Education, Chicago Public Schools, and New York City Department of Education), showed that this "blended learning model improves math test scores by the equivalent of an extra one to two years of additional math learning for the typical American high school student, in a single year – a result that is similar to a study of Saga's traditional tutoring."^[1] (Saga's traditional tutoring model is an intensive 2:1 student-to-tutor ratio, conducted daily in school for an hour.)

Embed HIT with aligned programs.

While Saga and other national leaders in the HIT field advocate for in-school tutoring, not all districts are able to adopt that approach. The Children's Funding Project, together with the After-School Alliance and Grantmakers for

Education, published a 2023 guide titled “[Funding Out-of-School Time Programs—Now and in the Future](#).” Significant funding for after-school and summer programming could help finance high-impact tutoring within those out-of-school time programs.

Similarly, localities and states have a variety of other funding streams that could enable HIT. For example, in states like California, there has been a major expansion of community schools. Often tutoring and other academic support are a component of the community schools program.



Building Partnerships

Build and strengthen relationships with external partners including higher education institutions, nonprofits, and other intermediaries.

Both the [National Partnership for Student Success](#) and the [National Student Success Accelerator](#) provide hubs for school districts to identify potential partners and strengthen their knowledge of the latest practices in high-impact tutoring.

“We suspect that there are communities and organizations that have money and people that they could put behind this but they either don’t know how to connect with districts or that districts aren’t organized to do it,” ERS’s O’Connor says. “We’ve all seen poorly done community-based partnerships. I think there’s an opportunity in that space.”

She adds that, “There are so many different ways I think that districts are starting or have been starting to expand the way that they’re engaging [with] higher ed,” who can offer stipends to student teachers and deeply embed them in schools.

Universities and colleges can support school districts with a pipeline of tutors as well as collect research data to help validate outcomes. Since its inception, Saga has benefited from its partnership with the University of Chicago Education Lab, which has conducted randomized, controlled trials to track the effectiveness of high-impact tutoring on student learning gains.

Those research partners provide a wider network for sources of funding since universities and colleges are almost always engaged in working with private donors and foundations. In New Mexico, the state’s tutoring program received a one-time philanthropic donation through the University of Chicago for participating in a study of their tutoring program as well as funds based on the numbers of students who participate in the research. In addition, higher education institutions are often required to make [PILOT](#) payments (Payments in Lieu of Taxes) to cities where they reside.^[12] These “payments” could include support for student tutoring.

As school systems look to alternatives to federal funding, CFP suggests that advocates should align with important networks. For example, the community schools movement is growing and tutoring could be a part of the extra services offered during the school day. All states also have After-School Alliances and combined messaging power around the importance of school enrichment programs could elevate HIT’s advocacy. Other organizations might also serve as sources for support, advocacy, and funding, including Children’s Service Councils and Children’s Trusts. Though many of these organizations are focused on early childhood services, some have a broader focus on children and youth services. Some states such as Maryland have local management boards that help facilitate interagency funding and services for the wellbeing of children, youth, and families.

In many communities, the philanthropic and nonprofit groups (who raised their own funding) will partner with school districts to offer additional support for students. Many

philanthropic leaders are interested in investing in evidence-based interventions like high-impact tutoring. While tutor providers and districts should be cautious about relying on philanthropy alone, there could be a creative braiding of public and private funds to serve more students.

Prepare outreach plans and mobilize supporters and advocates including parents, students, and teachers to promote the value of tutoring at the state and local levels.

There may soon come a time when high-impact tutoring programs are on the chopping block in school budgets. Mike Goldstein, founder of the Match Charter Schools in Boston, advises programs to capture testimonials and prepare plans to mobilize its strongest supporters to help share stories of success and impact in the school communities. Storytelling, Goldstein argues, is more powerful than the evidence. He says that school boards and superintendents will need to hear from parents and students individually and collectively.

Advocates will also need to garner teacher support for programs, who can be key allies in sustaining tutoring. In one Chicago Public School where Saga works, a school leader wanted to cut the tutoring program; however, the school's team of math teachers advocated for the program to continue because they had witnessed the learning outcomes students gained from participating in tutoring.

Historically, the courts have played a critical role in advancing educational equity. Several states in the last ten years have significantly updated their school funding formulas to direct more resources to high poverty students. A unique case in California, filed in 2020 and brought by the families of students across Oakland and Los Angeles and by a pair of community organizations, Oakland REACH and Community Coalition, argued that the students "received only a handful of days of live teaching after their schools were shuttered in the spring of 2020." The State of California settled the suit in January 2024, agreeing to designate at least \$2 billion "to spend on learning recovery for disadvantaged students who fell behind during the pandemic," reports The 74.

Because so much of education funding is locally driven, The Education Trust advises advocates to scrutinize budgets and claims of scarcity in resources. In their brief "Watch Out for the Fiscal Cliff," the Education Trust points to an example in

Washington, D.C., where advocates analyzed budget data and "identified \$3 million within the . . . central office budget to fund a full-time librarian in every school in the DC Fiscal Year 2022 budget."^[13]



Student Impact

Strengthen research on links between tutoring and other benefits such as attendance.

High-quality, high-impact tutoring programs can offer schools and students an accelerated learning intervention. But "tutoring is more than a strategy to accelerate learning," says Saga's AJ Gutierrez. One study conducted in New York City found that students who received high-impact tutoring saw increased attendance compared with those who did not receive tutoring. In that study conducted by the University of Chicago, students who received Saga tutoring attended school 18 more days more than students who had not received tutoring.

"Through high-impact tutoring, you build mentorship and tutors can also serve as reliable communicators with families," Gutierrez says. "You can also nurture the next generation of teachers. This is a human capital strategy that adds value." And as tutoring helps reduce variability in student academic levels, teacher satisfaction could be expected to rise as they have less heterogeneity in classrooms as kids are catching up, says Safran.

Ensure collection of data on tutoring outcomes both qualitatively and quantitatively to demonstrate results.

Getting more data is key for the strategic planning process, says Kathryn Bendheim, Managing Director of the National Student Support Accelerator. Districts should be “making sure [they] have data that shows high-impact tutoring’s effectiveness and how effective it is relative to some of the other things they’re doing,” Bendheim says. Having that data will help when addressing school leadership and school boards about requests to reallocate funding to high-impact tutoring, she explains.

Districts should be “making sure [they] have data that shows high-impact tutoring’s effectiveness and how effective it is relative to some of the other things they’re doing”

- Kathy Bendheim of NSSA

“When federal or state funding goes away, I think school districts will have to decide what evidence there is to offer a compelling argument that tutoring should be included in operational budgets,” Chung says. “On the one hand, there is state funding coming in, but leaders are already asking how much of this is going to stick around after funds are gone. And we just don’t know yet because we’re still in the early stages of launching tutoring programs while also trying to evaluate the efficacy of our current programs.”



Conclusion

No single funding source or strategy alone will sustain high-impact tutoring in public schools long term. As Saga CEO Alan Safran notes, in funding education programs “you want to put many pieces in play.” Federal, state, local, and private funding sources as well as public-private partnerships will all play roles.

In Chicago, where high-impact tutoring has been generating positive results for students for over a decade, Easterly believes that delivering consistent student outcomes in terms of both improved classroom grades and standardized test scores as well as increasing student confidence and perseverance in math have contributed to the sustainability of their tutoring program within CPS.

“I think a lot of school boards and superintendents have a lot of really important decisions to make through the rest of the fiscal year and next year,” she says. “I do know that for STEM, in particular, there’s more access and availability to STEM jobs than any other industry. I think choosing now to deprioritize any STEM instruction is putting children at a continued disadvantage.”

Coming out of the pandemic, school districts have demonstrated that high-impact tutoring is a framework worthy of deeper exploration for helping enhance equity in learning at scale. Many kinds of high-impact tutoring models exist that school districts can leverage for benefits beyond accelerated learning. The addition of technologies such as artificial intelligence and computer-assisted learning programs can help reduce costs and increase the effectiveness and efficiency of tutoring.

Key Takeaways

Encourage the Development of Flexible Tutoring Models

– One bright spot of the pandemic recovery is that many states and school districts were given latitude to experiment with what works (and what doesn't) in tutoring. Tutoring can be adapted to a range of school schedules, student needs, instructional settings, and cost models. Schools should continue to pilot in-school, in-class, summer, and after-school tutoring programs that integrate with community programs and services to offer students holistic support.

Embed Tutoring In Schools to Address Multiple Challenges

– Investing in tutors can help schools address many needs, in addition to unfinished learning. Tutors serve as mentors, helping to address students' socio-emotional needs. Tutors can progress through a pipeline to become teachers, helping to address the teacher shortage and diversity challenges. And tutors can help reach out to parents to address chronic absence. Importantly, tutors can be a key component of a school's MTSS intervention strategy.

Expand Higher Education and Community Partnerships –

A powerful opportunity exists for collaboration between public K-12 schools and higher education institutions to support college tutors, a tutor-to-teacher pipeline as well as research partnerships that can help evaluate and refine tutoring programs for greater effectiveness. But we also need broader engagement with an array of community organizations – nonprofit youth-serving organizations, philanthropy, local businesses, faith-based, and parent and civic groups – to explore joint funding opportunities and other tutoring resources.

Keep Improving Tutoring Through Research – Strong evidence already exists for the effectiveness of high-impact tutoring when delivered with fidelity to key programmatic criteria. However, the evidence base for high-impact tutoring could be strengthened by funding longitudinal studies that track the long-term academic and socioeconomic outcomes of tutored students.

Identify Alternative Funding with a Focus on Covering Tutor Wages - Other federal resources, as well as state and local funds, are available in most districts to support HIT. School districts should seek out state commission-granted AmeriCorps awards to help address tutor workforce needs. Districts can also partner with higher education institutions and nonprofits who employ college students using Federal Work Study funds to cover tutor wages.

Leverage Technology and Innovation – By thoughtfully integrating adaptive learning technologies that personalize tutoring for students, schools can potentially reduce costs by allowing tutors to more effectively manage larger groups of students. As AI advances, there are opportunities to explore how these tools can assist teachers and tutors in creating individualized learning plans based on student performance data. AI may also help tutors with professional development, reducing the cost of training new talent.

Measure Return on Investment to Create High-Quality and Sustainable Models – Some districts are already experimenting with pay-for-success models or K-12 education savings accounts that could provide new ways to fund tutoring services. School districts would benefit from a toolkit to help them assess the cost-effectiveness of their tutoring programs, including methodologies for calculating return on investment in terms of both academic outcomes and long-term societal benefits.

Align with Educational Equity Advocates – Across the U.S., parent groups and civil rights and educational equity advocates are pushing for new funding formulas and grant programs that drive more resources to the students that need them the most. (In some states, the courts are playing a key role in advancing education finance equity.) At the local community level, high-impact tutoring should be added to the advocacy agenda of these networks for many reasons, including that tutoring is one of the most effective interventions advancing student achievement gains. As with any public awareness campaign, advocates should include “storytelling” of the impact of HIT on real students and involve outreach to key policymakers and influential leaders.

Explore Innovative Financing Models – Some communities have [special funds](#) to support children and youth that might be available to fund tutoring. These funds might focus on mentoring or youth development or after-school/summer programs where tutoring can play an important role. Philanthropists can also play a major role in elevating and leveraging resources for high-priority interventions.

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About Saga Education

Saga Education is a national leader in high-impact, in-school tutoring. We leverage the power of human capital and technology to accelerate student outcomes and create more equitable learning for students.

Rigorous research shows our program works—not only to raise math scores—but to foster the confidence and sense of belonging that underpin all academic success.

As the time-tested leader in powerful tutoring relationships, we help states and districts develop and implement high-quality tutoring models and have best-in-class learning technology tools and resources to help education leaders succeed.

Contact us at info@saga.org.

