WHY HIGH-DOSAGE TUTORING?

Tutoring is one of the surest ways to combat learning loss and improve student outcomes. ESSER provides district leaders with a once-in-a-lifetime chance to fund it.

The education leaders in our study resoundingly identified learning recovery as a topmost priority – alongside COVID safety – going into the 2021-2022 school year.

For district leaders, ESSER represents a once-in-a-lifetime infusion of funding that comes with very few restrictions. While leaders can benefit from the flexibility of ESSER, its lack of prescriptive guidance has caused many to delay their use of the funds while they determine how best to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on students' academic progress.

Research suggests that implementation of high-dosage tutoring is one of the most effective possible uses of these funds. Next, we explore why.

The case for tutoring

Tutoring is a well-studied intervention with clearly demonstrated benefits for students. An analysis of **196 studies identified high-dosage tutoring as one of the few educational interventions that reliably promotes significant student improvement in math and reading**[1]. Another meta-analysis of 101 studies showed that tutoring is one of the few interventions to markedly improve learning outcomes for students of lower socioeconomic status[2].
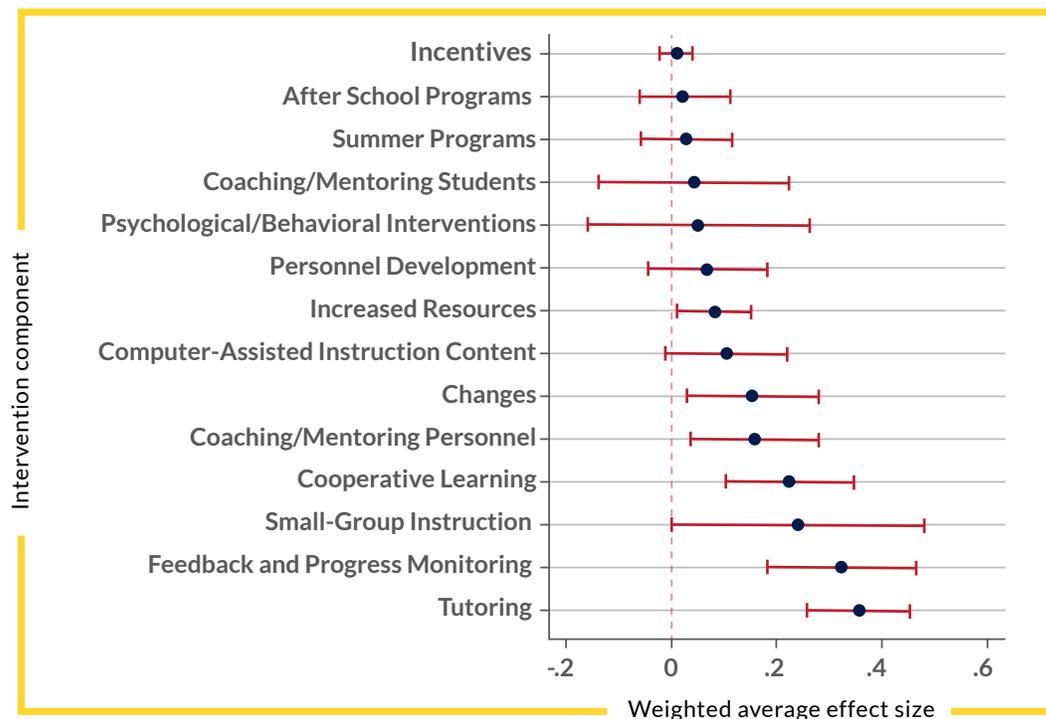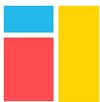

FIGURE 5. Weighted average effect sizes by component.

1 https://www.nber.org/papers/w22130
2 Meta-analysis

In our survey and interview work, we found that 74% percent of leaders agreed that small group tutoring is the most powerful way to address unfinished learning.

Tutoring likely offers notable ancillary benefits as well. Investing in tutoring can help states and districts build a tutor-to-teacher pipeline by building relationships with teacher certification programs or local colleges. Studies have also shown that it can boost student attendance rates.

Implementing tutoring with ESSER funds

For leaders considering a high-dosage tutoring program, best practices are well-established. Tutoring is best provided 3-5 times per week, in sessions ranging from 30-60 minutes that take place during the school day. Research suggests a student-to-tutor ratio of no greater than 4:1[3].

While well-trained tutors (like teachers) have shown to be able to manage groups of 4 students effectively, college students and others with less training likely should only manage 2 to 3 students at a time.

Clearly, this kind of intensive, small-group help poses significant logical challenges for schools. Indeed, we found that despite the proven benefits of high-dosage tutoring, it's relatively low on the priority list for education leaders – with only 17% identifying tutoring as a planned use of ESSER funds. Of the leaders who did indicate they were likely to invest in tutoring, less than half said that they planned to incorporate tutoring into their long-term budget.

Why are districts not viewing ESSER as an opportunity to invest in something that can help them achieve their goals? Specific implementation barriers include:

- Scheduling tutoring sessions during the school day may require re-arranging students' and teachers' schedules.
- Hiring tutors is time-consuming, especially in a tight labor market. Writing and posting job openings, evaluating applicants, and completing background checks are essential to identifying and selecting tutors.
- Selecting students for limited tutoring spaces requires developing a system that considers assessments, educator recommendations, and possibly parent requests.

Fortunately, ESSER funds can help district leaders not only to fund a tutoring initiative – but to overcome these barriers, too. Districts can use ESSER funds to cover the up-front costs necessary to launch a high-dosage tutoring program, find support to overcome operational challenges, and evaluate impact — allowing them to make the case for long-term investment.

More specifically, ESSER funds may allow districts to:

- **Contract with an established tutoring company to design and launch a tutoring program**. Contractors can identify tutoring staff, provide curriculum support, and help districts make decisions about scheduling and dosage.
- **Enlist support to embed the program in the school day and budget for the long-term.** Technical assistance providers can help districts design solutions to scheduling, staffing, dosage, and student assignment (e.g., which students participate in tutoring programs vs. other interventions).
- **Pair tutoring with programming that engages a broader group of students**. This can more deeply embed the tutoring program in districts' core operations and build support for the program in the community.
- **Evaluate tutoring program investments.** Districts can use ESSER funding to track student progress both during and after receiving tutoring support and to pair tutoring with other popular programs.

Using ESSER funds to invest in the evaluation of a tutoring program is critical for sustainability. By assessing student progress, districts can gain insights into program effectiveness and make decisions to increase impact. Additionally, program evaluation will help leaders make the case for additional or ongoing public resources. Tutoring has a track record of garnering bipartisan support due to its effectiveness.

See next page for Additional Resources

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

We recommend the following process to create a high-impact tutoring program:

1 - Familiarize yourself with important design considerations and quality standards.

Some helpful resources include:

- The National Student Support Accelerator's (NSSA) [Tutoring Quality Improvement System Quality Standards](#)
- EdResearch for Recovery's [Accelerating Student Learning with High-Dosage Tutoring](#)
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's [Intentional Futures Target Program Profile](#)

2 - Assess how prepared you are to launch a high-impact tutoring program.

It's important to identify the specific goals that tutoring can help you achieve. NSSA's [High-Impact Tutoring: District Playbook](#) offers in-depth checklists and materials that can help you set up the program.

3 - Review the availability of high-quality providers.

NSSA's [tutoring database](#) provides a good starting point. In addition:

- Saga has a long [history](#) of achieving impressive student impact, and also offers services to get others a head start on strong implementation through training ([Saga Coach](#)) and technical assistance ([Saga Consult](#)).
- [Zearn](#) makes it easy to connect tutoring to core curriculum at scale.
- [Math Corps](#) provides strategic support to help K-8 math students build skill and confidence in math.

4 - Explore ways to manage costs.

Helpful resources include:

- The Southern Education Foundation's [Outcomes Based Contracting pilot](#)
- NSSA's [High-Impact Tutoring: District Playbook](#)