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Innovate
Public Schools

ELEMENTS OF HIGH-QUALITY TUTORING

COVID-19 shed light on pre-existing inequities that became exacerbated during the pandemic. Some of these inequities included the opportunity gap, the digital divide, and socio-emotional issues that impacted low-income students and students of color.

In the Learning Loss Blog Series, we shared the devastating impacts of learning loss on students of color and students with special needs.¹ Now, we would like school district leaders and elected officials to focus on solutions to address learning loss and help students thrive long-term. There are many strategies to accelerate learning. Innovate Public Schools parent leaders believe tutoring is the most important and effective right now. Tutoring supports recovery, social-emotional wellbeing, and preparing students to thrive as independent learners. However, tutoring is a resource that has not been available or accessible to all students. We believe that high-quality tutoring is an ongoing public investment to support low-income Black and Latino students. This is an opportunity to rebuild education with strategies that work in the 21st century.

Decades of research shows that tutoring is one of the most effective strategies for academic recovery.² Tutoring that happens in small groups with regular, frequent sessions can increase learning by up to 10 months.³ It is also one of the most cost effective recovery strategies schools and districts can consider.⁴ We have gathered the research on what makes tutoring 'high quality.' The chart below shows the best practices and key elements of high quality tutoring.

BEST PRACTICES



TUTORING IS NOT HOMEWORK HELP

A common misconception is that tutoring is 'homework help' or 'reteaching' material.⁵ Reteaching or homework help does not help students learn critical thinking skills. The main goal of tutoring is to empower students to become independent learners. Tutors should help build existing knowledge with new content and skills.



INDEPENDENT LEARNING IS THE GOAL

The goal of high quality tutoring is to help students to become independent learners.⁶ Trained tutors help students develop independent learning skills⁷ that will set them up to learn on their own.⁵ Independent learning is a skill that supports students beyond academics. Students learn critical thinking and problem solving skills that are important in college and their careers.⁷



TRAINING TUTORS ON SOCRATIC QUESTIONING

Training tutors in Socratic questioning is important so tutoring sessions can be effective.⁵ Socratic questioning can help students develop critical thinking skills that will be helpful in homework, school, and college.⁸ In Socratic questioning, tutors do not ask "yes" or "no" questions but rather ask open-ended questions.⁹ This process continues until students discover answers and understand the problem on their own. In the long-term students learn how to break down problems and figure out solutions on their own.

KEY ELEMENTS OF HIGH QUALITY TUTORING



AT LEAST 2-3 SESSIONS A WEEK

High dosage tutoring, which is defined as 3 or more sessions each week, is most effective.¹⁰ Each tutoring session can be anywhere from 10- 60 minutes each day. The more tutoring sessions per week, the more effective the tutoring will be.¹¹



1:1 & SMALL GROUPS WORK BEST

One-on-one tutoring is individualized and therefore most effective, especially for pre-K-1st grade students.¹² Tutoring up to 1:4 can be effective for grades 2- 5. A ratio of more than 1:4 becomes less focused and personalized.^{10 13}



TUTORS CAN HAVE DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS BUT MUST BE WELL TRAINED AND SUPPORTED

A variety of tutors can improve student outcomes.¹¹ This includes college students, AmeriCorps fellows, peers, parents, and retired teachers. The most effective tutors are teachers and paraprofessionals. Paid and trained tutors are also more effective.¹⁰ There should be some incentive for the tutors which is why volunteers have been found to not be as effective. Training is essential.¹⁴ Tutors should have initial and ongoing training and coaching, along with clear lines of accountability.¹⁰



SOCIO-EMOTIONAL ATTENTION & RELATIONSHIP BUILDING IS KEY

Socio-emotional attention between tutors and students helps increase engagement and motivation.¹¹ One way to ensure this is by providing tutors with social-emotional training. Training will help tutors connect with students and handle the social-emotional needs of students from all backgrounds.

Research suggests that strong tutor-student relationships play an important role in effective tutoring.¹¹ Effective relationship-building strategies include: 1) Working with the same tutor over time, 2) tutors intentionally spending time to build strong relationships as a part of their sessions, or 3) matching students with "similar" demographics as students (such as background or race).^{10 11}



INTEGRATE TUTORING WITH WHAT KIDS LEARN AT SCHOOL

Tutoring programs that take place during the school day are most effective.¹⁰ Specifically, tutoring is effective when it is integrated with teachers, parents, and students' academic schedules. When tutoring takes place during school or immediately after school, learning gains and attendance is higher.



TUTORING IS DATA-DRIVEN

Tutoring programs that use data and ongoing assessments are more effective because tutors can personalize their instruction based on students' needs¹⁰, and overall practices can be improved by making adjustments based on data.¹¹

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