

COVID-19 Impact Memo

Promising Practices In Education

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused major disruption to all levels of education that could impact student outcomes for months and possibly years ahead. The SCORE series of COVID-19 Impact Memos analyzes challenges, examines emerging innovations and research-supported practices, and highlights student-centered approaches for educators to consider.

High-Dosage Tutoring That Works For Students

Spring 2021

As Tennessee and the nation begin recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on students, educators and leaders must emerge from the pandemic with practices that not only accelerate student learning but close opportunity gaps for students. Despite enormous demands on educator and leader capacity to maintain school operations during a pandemic, educators must be positioned and supported to adopt practices that make up for lost learning time and quality over the past year. This is particularly true for students from [economically disadvantaged backgrounds](#), students facing [digital divide challenges](#), and Black and Hispanic students, who disproportionately lacked in-person learning options or did not choose them out of concern for safety.

With substantial state and federal resources — and policies that articulate a focus on recovery — Tennessee schools and districts should make investments and implement practices based on research while nimbly responding to student-specific needs. One [consensus approach from education research](#) is the use of high-dosage tutoring — a high-impact approach that provides more intensive support and accelerates learning for students. In order to succeed with this approach, schools and districts must adopt a research- and data-driven approach that meets the unique needs of their students.

What Is High-Dosage Tutoring?

In a [review of hundreds of studies on tutoring](#), high-dosage tutoring tied to classroom content has been found to be very effective at addressing learning loss and accelerating learning. Some of the most effective models, like the [Match Corps](#), cost approximately \$2,500 per student with a two-student-per-tutor ratio. Some key considerations in this design are captured in this [implementation guide](#) and include the guidelines shown at right:

5 KEYS TO EFFECTIVE HIGH-DOSAGE TUTORING



FREQUENCY: 30-Minute Sessions 3 Times A Week

Tutoring is most likely to be effective when delivered at least three times per week for at least 30 minutes per session. A consistent tutor helps build the relationship that supports student learning.



GROUP SIZE: No More Than 4

Tutors can effectively instruct up to four students at a time, but these higher ratios require a greater level of tutor skill. If using novice tutors, keeping group size to 1:1 or 1:2 is ideal.



SCHEDULING: During The School Day

Tutoring interventions that are conducted during the school day tend to result in greater learning gains than those that are after-school or during the summer. This also ensures equitable access for all students.



TRAINING: Preparation For Teachers And Non-Teachers

Current teachers who are serving as tutors will need training on expectations, routines, and progress monitoring. Tutors who are non-educators should receive robust training on content, instructional strategies, and relationship-building.



PROGRESS MONITORING: Data For Tailored Instruction

Tutoring programs that utilize ongoing informal assessments allow tutors to more effectively tailor their instruction. Regularly monitor the tutoring program to examine what is working, what needs adjustment, and what changes should be implemented to improve effectiveness.



[Research on tutoring in the early 2000s](#) found the practice ineffective, but it is worth noting that the tutoring studied did not align with the above design principles. These earlier models leveraged outside providers, were not embedded in the school day, and did not meet the minimum dosage recommendations. High-dosage tutoring design principles account for what the field has learned since the 2000s.

Emerging Examples In Tennessee

As districts across Tennessee continue the work of recovery, leaders will need to approach this work with a continuous improvement mindset. Educator capacity has been stretched during the pandemic, so strategic utilization of their time will be key. Three pilots in Tennessee school districts demonstrate the student-focused and continuous improvement mindsets needed to make high-dosage tutoring an enduring practice for learning acceleration.

Lenoir City Schools (LCS)

LCS, serving roughly 2,500 students outside Knoxville, launched a [five-week high-dosage tutoring pilot](#) to address high school learning gaps in February 2021. With school closures last spring disrupting in-person study of geometry, LCS chose to address high school math learning gaps to help prepare students for the ACT in March. To prioritize those students, LCS leaders sent an electronic survey to the junior class and identified about 20 students to receive intensive math tutoring for the five weeks leading up to the ACT. The opt-in approach helped create word-of-mouth buzz around the program that attracted more student interest in tutoring over the course of the pilot.

- ◆ **Frequency and scheduling:** Daily during the 30-minute homeroom block. For some students, use of elective course time, virtual option, or Saturday sessions.
- ◆ **Group size and personnel:** LCS relied on three experienced math teachers — the district’s math instructional coach, a current geometry teacher, and a recently retired teacher — which enabled group sizes of up to four or five students.
- ◆ **Progress monitoring:** LCS leaders tracked academic growth via ACT pre- and post-tests, engagement via daily attendance and student surveys, and implementation through observations conducted by school administrators. They also conducted interviews with tutors and students after the tutoring sprint wrapped up to gather some more anecdotal feedback to inform future efforts.

LCS saw 18 of their 19 students make growth in ACT-aligned pre- and post-tests. Both tutors and participants reported strong engagement and found value in the tutoring opportunity.

- ◆ *Student quote:* “I would give it a 5 [-star rating] because the way she taught it to us, she was able to walk us through it — and it was a lot easier than being in class. She made it really interesting.”
- ◆ *Tutor quote:* “With tutoring, you get to see where your class might have missed those opportunities to learn whatever you’re tutoring on. It’s going to be helpful when I teach my class later. I’ll know what individuals are going to struggle with.”

As LCS looks beyond the pilot, they are working on a tutoring pay scale as they consider how to expand the pool of tutors, attempting another pilot for 8th graders that leverages high school juniors as tutors, and looking for ways to provide more students with tutoring opportunities.

Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS)

MNPS, serving more than 85,000 students, first adopted tutoring to support Class of 2020 graduates matriculating at Nashville State Community College in the summer and fall of 2020 using an on-demand, student-driven model supported by the partner organization [BrightPath Tutors](#). Learning from that experience and its limitations, MNPS is piloting high-dosage tutoring for 150 students in three schools focused on literacy in grades 3-5 and numeracy in grades 6-9 in Spring 2021. The district is also adopting a



randomized control trial approach to assess effectiveness and solve key implementation issues before working with additional schools in the future.

- ◆ **Frequency and scheduling:** Students receive tutoring at least three times a week during a “Personalized Learning Time” block that is built into their regular school day. Students who are in person at a school building engage with their tutors — who are all virtual — while at school.
- ◆ **Group size and personnel:** Because MNPS leveraged trained volunteer college students recruited via a partner organization rather than educators, the district is providing a 1:1 ratio for tutors. The partnering organization developed a matching algorithm to connect students and tutors based on availability, with most matches connected within one to two days.
- ◆ **Progress monitoring:** MNPS is conducting student and tutor surveys to collect qualitative data while leveraging existing MAP testing to assess student learning.

MNPS saw a 95 percent attendance rate during tutoring sessions in Spring 2021. District leaders credit the high attendance rate to individualized outreach and nudging by district support staff and others to encourage students to attend these sessions. In the months ahead, MNPS hopes to work with school leaders to serve up to 500 students and align resources to implement this evidence-based practice.

Trousdale County Schools (TCS)

TCS, serving roughly 1,300 students in Middle Tennessee, launched a high-dosage tutoring pilot in April 2021 aimed at first-grade students as a Tier 2 intervention strategy. This pilot leverages existing high-quality instructional materials in use by teachers, aligning with a key design principle of effective tutoring. This pilot is launching a new intervention block built into the school day that will continue during Summer 2021 through summer learning camps. Based on the learning from this pilot, high-dosage tutoring may be rolled out schoolwide in the fall.

- ◆ **Frequency and scheduling:** Students receive three tutoring sessions per week during an intervention block that is built into the school day. TCS is on a hybrid schedule with students attending in person twice a week; all tutoring will be done in person, so students will have two intervention periods on one of their in-person days and one intervention block the other day.
- ◆ **Group size and personnel:** Tutors are current instructional aides who have received additional training on high-dosage tutoring strategies leveraging high-quality instructional materials. TCS is staffing a 1:3 tutor-to-student ratio.
- ◆ **Progress monitoring:** TCS is tracking academic growth using individual student targets, engagement via student attendance records and biweekly student surveys, and implementation through tutor observations and regular check-ins.

Advancing Student-Focused Priorities Through High-Dosage Tutoring

In addition to the potential for substantial gains for students, high-dosage tutoring can also address several other issues in education policy and practice:

- ◆ **Inspiring new potential teachers:** Tennessee has seen a [decline in teacher candidates completing training programs](#) in recent years. The state’s [educator diversity](#) continues to be mismatched to the racial demographics of Tennessee students. Engaging pre-service teacher candidates or college students — particularly by prioritizing recruitment and support of students of color — may be a way to engage students who have potential to be great future educators.
- ◆ **Student engagement:** Even before the pandemic, student disengagement from school was an issue. Thirteen percent of Tennessee students, or approximately 129,000 students, were [absent more than 10 percent](#) of the 2018-19 school year. National surveys of student perceptions prior to



the pandemic showed that [only a third of 11th graders felt engaged at school](#). When implemented well, high-dosage tutoring has the potential to put more students in touch with adults who can nurture positive relationships that keep students engaged at school.

- ◆ **Reimagining intervention and the school day:** While Tennessee has had policies requiring schools to provide intervention services for students who needed more support, there were limited available resources to effectively provide those services for all students who needed them. With the recent infusion of [federal stimulus funds](#), schools have the opportunity to build the infrastructure necessary to leverage high-dosage tutoring as an enduring practice beyond the pandemic.

While the full toll of pandemic-related instructional disruption and learning loss remains to be seen, students will need opportunities to fully reengage with learning and get the support they need. High-dosage tutoring provides students a chance to receive personalized support to address their specific learning gaps, and it is a high-resource practice made much more possible with multiple rounds of federal education recovery resources. As leaders and educators continue responding to the pandemic, it is more critical than ever to embrace opportunities like high-dosage tutoring and to emerge from the pandemic with student-focused practices that make schools better than when the pandemic began.

Additional Resources

- ◆ [SCORE Institute: High-Dosage Tutoring That Works For Students](#) (webinar recording)
- ◆ [High-Dosage Tutoring Planning And Implementation Guide](#)
- ◆ [Five Keys To Effective High-Dosage Tutoring](#)
- ◆ [Lenoir City Tutoring Pilot Aims To Address Math Learning Gaps](#)

