



# Insights into the Tutor Workforce

## Tutors' Experiences, Diversity, and Retention in the Personalized Learning Initiative

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**A**ddressing teacher shortages and preventing teacher turnover are policy priorities for many states and districts. In October 2024, 35 percent of public school leaders reported one or more teaching vacancies.<sup>1</sup> Teacher turnover can be costly for localities and has been shown to harm schools' instructional quality and student achievement.<sup>2</sup>

Alongside increasing teacher recruitment and retention, many states and districts are interested in increasing the diversity of the teacher workforce.<sup>3</sup> Research has demonstrated that students of color benefit from being taught by a same-race teacher, with improved test scores for Black and Hispanic students when they are taught by teachers of the same race or ethnicity.<sup>4</sup> Yet national education data from the 2021-2022 school year showed that only 20 percent of public school teachers identified as people of color, compared with 54 percent of public school students.<sup>5</sup>

“Tutor” is the fastest-growing position in kindergarten through high school (K-12) education, and is therefore a promising avenue to introducing and



potentially integrating people into the field of education.<sup>6</sup> Tutoring offers an entry-level and part-time opportunity for prospective educators to experience the school setting.<sup>7</sup> And as of October 2024, 78 percent of schools reported providing some type of tutoring.<sup>8</sup>

A number of models for tutor-teacher pipelines (conduits to move people from tutoring into teaching) are currently being implemented.<sup>9</sup> Yet there are only limited data available on how frequently tutors transition into teaching or the effectiveness of former tutors who become teachers. A recent report from Stanford University contains the finding that working as a tutor for Teach for America's Ignite Tutoring Fellowship nearly triples a person's likelihood of applying for Teach for America's teacher-training program.<sup>10</sup> Research also shows that paraeducators (those who provide instructional support to teachers but are not licensed teachers themselves) who become teachers may be as effective as teachers who enter the profession by other means.<sup>11</sup> Given its promise as a potential source of future teachers, it is important to better understand the current tutor workforce and its members' interest in future careers in K-12 education.

What is the profile of K-12 tutors? How do tutors feel about their tutoring experiences? What are tutors' future career goals? How might schools and districts facilitate effective tutor-teacher pipelines? This brief addresses these questions using survey data about the experiences of over 400 tutors who worked in 81 schools across seven states that were participating in the Personalized Learning Initiative (PLI) during the 2023-2024 school year. Additionally, the brief reflects on information collected from a subsample of schools about successes and challenges regarding tutoring recruitment and retention, which could promote or undercut tutoring's potential as a source of teachers. It also provides an overview of different strategies policymakers and educational leaders are using to promote tutoring as a pipeline into teaching.

## Background

Since the 2021-2022 school year, the PLI research team has worked in seven states around the country with eight sites — which include both large and small districts in urban, suburban, and rural areas; an entire state; and a charter network — to support the implementation of higher- and lower-cost high-dosage tutoring while also studying tutoring's effects on student learning. ("High-dosage tutoring" is defined as consistently scheduled tutorials in which students work with a trained tutor in small groups — for example, four students to one tutor — at least three times per week.) The project is led by the University of Chicago's Education Lab, in partnership with MDRC. Interim findings documenting the effects of the tutoring programs on student learning from the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years have demonstrated that the tutoring models improve student learning, with meaningful variation in the size of the effects across sites and types of programs.<sup>12</sup>

## Data Sources and Sample

During the 2023-2024 school year, the research team surveyed tutors in the 84 schools participating in the PLI study and surveyed school-based staff members (for example, instructional coaches, school administrators) overseeing the schools' tutoring programs. The PLI study team fielded two waves of a tutor survey during the 2023-2024 school year. In the fall of 2023, PLI tutors at four sites that launched tutoring early in the fall of 2023 were sent a short survey about their past educational experiences and demographics.<sup>13</sup> In the spring of 2024, PLI tutors at all eight PLI sites were surveyed about their experiences with tutoring as well as their future career aspirations.<sup>14</sup> Tutors taking a PLI survey for the first time in the spring were also asked questions about their past educational experiences and demographics. A total of 467 tutors at the 84 PLI study schools were surveyed in the spring of 2024, with 90 percent of tutors from 81 schools responding.<sup>15</sup>

The PLI study team also electronically fielded a survey to the 84 school staff coordinators of the tutoring programs in PLI study schools in Spring 2024. Seventy-six coordinators (90 percent) responded. Among other things, the survey asked coordinators to share the details of the tutoring programs that they managed and their perceptions of successes and challenges.<sup>16</sup>

Analyses present descriptive statistics, primarily frequencies and central tendencies, calculated overall and by site. Sites varied in the size of their PLI tutor workforces, depending on their numbers of schools, numbers of students, and tutoring models (that is, whether tutoring was delivered virtually or in person). For example, Rocketship Public Schools (a charter school network in California) included a sample of only 21 tutors serving 562 students in two elementary schools with in-person tutoring, while Greenville, South Carolina employed a virtual tutoring model and had 186 tutors serving 1,170 students from three middle schools. While it was not designed to be representative of all tutors across the country, to the authors' knowledge the PLI tutor survey is the largest survey of tutors to date. It is therefore uniquely situated to provide important insights into the characteristics, experiences, and aspirations of a growing and important sector of the educational workforce.

## PLI Tutors Represented a Diverse Workforce Aligned with the Diversity of the Students They Served

Table 1 provides the characteristics of tutors working at the eight PLI study sites and of the PLI student sample. Tutors are racially and ethnically diverse, with 45 percent identifying as White, 39 percent as Black or African American, and 27 percent as Hispanic or Latino.<sup>17</sup> The student sample has higher percentages of students of color than the tutor sample, but the racial mix of tutors is closer to that of students than what is documented for students and teachers nationally.<sup>18</sup>

Notably, the variation among sites in tutor background characteristics mostly follows the same pattern of differences among sites in the demographics of the student population. For example, 80 percent of students in the Fulton County PLI sample are Black and 83 percent of Fulton tutors identified as Black on their survey. Similarly, 52 percent of New Mexico students in the PLI study

**Table 1. Tutor and Student Background Characteristics**

SITE	TUTORS (%)				STUDENTS (%)			
	Black	White	Hispanic	Multilingual	Black	White	Hispanic	English Language Learners
Chicago	57.4	34.0	50.0	54.2	43.7	1.3	53.9	36.6
Fulton	83.0	15.1	12.5	21.8	80.0	2.2	18.9	10.6
Greenville	25.2	49.7	16.8	37.8	25.0	11.9	58.5	45.2
Guilford	75.0	25.0	7.7	15.4	42.4	16.3	25.6	13.8
Miami	50.0	42.9	60.0	57.1	19.9	2.8	76.9	33.0
New Mexico	2.2	80.4	51.1	34.8	1.1	31.9	51.6	16.4
Rocketship	14.3	50.0	20.0	56.3	1.2	2.0	83.4	56.4
Winston-Salem	46.7	46.7	20.0	26.7	42.2	8.8	42.8	25.7
All	38.5	45.1	27.3	38.0	38.9	7.3	49.1	29.4

SOURCES: Tutor surveys and administrative records from the eight PLI sites.

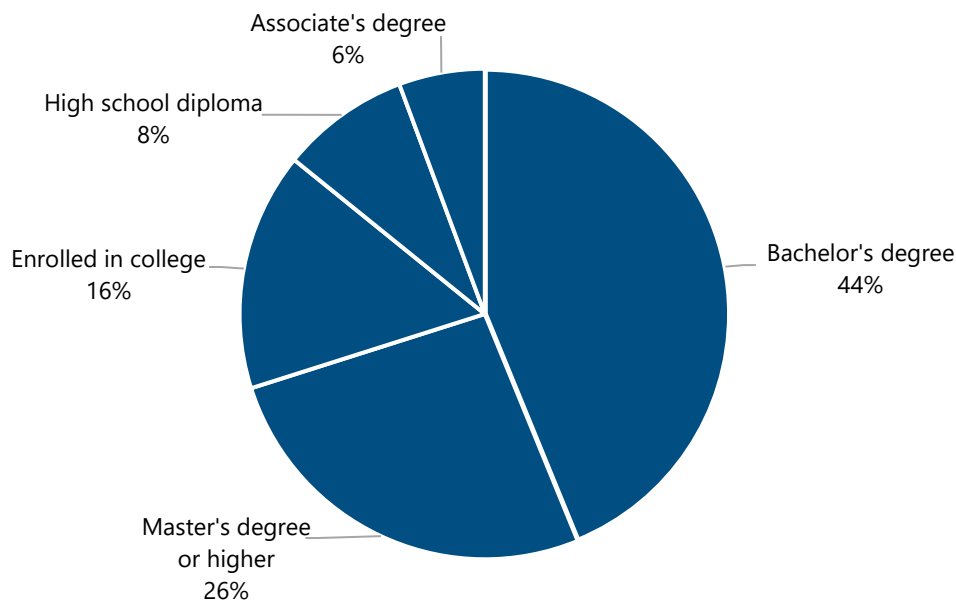
NOTES: Tutor characteristics are from the MDRC tutor surveys administered in the fall or spring of the 2023-2024 school year. They reflect responses from 348 tutors who answered questions about race/ethnicity and 374 tutors who answered a question about Hispanic ethnicity. Tutors could provide multiple responses on race and ethnicity. Student characteristics are based on administrative records data obtained by the University of Chicago Education Lab from the eight PLI sites for students randomly assigned to receive tutoring who attended at least one tutoring session during the 2023-2024 school year and had nonmissing data on their race/ethnicity (7,647 students) and English Language Learner status (7,609 students). Reporting protocols about student race and ethnicity differed among sites, with some reporting mutually exclusive categories and others not.

are Hispanic, which nearly matches the percentage of PLI tutors there who identified as Hispanic or Latino. There are notable exceptions to this trend. Greenville used a virtual tutoring company with tutors working from their homes across the country. Greenville students are predominantly Black or Hispanic but only 17 percent of their tutors identified as Hispanic or Latino and only 25 percent identified as Black. New Mexico also employed a virtual model. However, during the 2023-2024 school year, New Mexico made an effort to recruit and hire tutors residing in New Mexico, which may have contributed to the alignment of tutors and students identifying as Hispanic.

The profile of PLI tutors suggests that tutors also offered some multilingual students the opportunity to learn from tutors who spoke their home languages. A significant proportion of PLI students (29 percent) are identified as English Language Learners. A substantial number of tutors (38 percent) reported speaking a language other than English and most multilingual tutors (61 percent) reported that the languages spoken in their homes were also spoken by at least some of their students in tutoring (not shown).

Most tutors indicated having educational experience beyond a high school diploma (92 percent), but there is variation in the extent of their postsecondary experiences, as shown in Figure 1. Nearly half (44 percent) reported having bachelor's degrees and about a quarter (26 percent) reported graduate degrees. Sixteen percent of tutors reported being enrolled in college or university at the time of the survey. Indeed, some sites (including New Mexico, Chicago, and Guilford County) made a concerted effort to recruit tutors from local universities.

**Figure 1. Tutors' Educational Backgrounds**

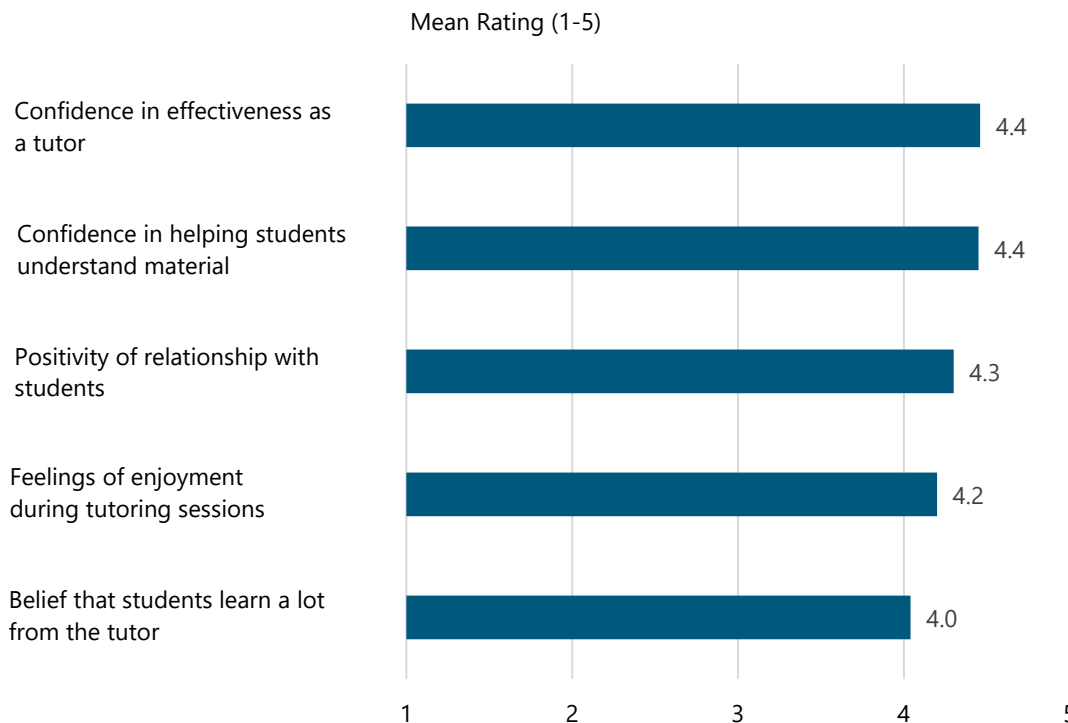


SOURCE: Tutor surveys.

NOTE: Tutor characteristics are from the MDRC tutor surveys administered in the fall or spring of the 2023-2024 school year. They reflect responses from 388 tutors who answered questions about their educational background.

## Tutors Mostly Enjoyed Their Experiences and Intended to Remain in the K-12 Sector

PLI tutors were asked about their enjoyment of tutoring, their relationships with their students, and their confidence in their tutoring ability. As shown in Figure 2, across all indicators of the quality of tutoring experiences, mean scores were 4 or above on a five-point scale where higher numbers indicated a more positive experience. For example, 83 percent of tutors reported that they enjoyed tutoring quite a bit or a tremendous amount (for the average score shown of 4.2) and 88 percent reported that they had quite positive or extremely positive relationships with students (for

**Figure 2. Tutors' Perceptions of Their Tutoring Experiences**

SOURCE: Tutor survey from the spring of 2024.

NOTES: Sample size varies between 391 and 394 tutors, depending on the number who responded to each question. Each question was asked on a Likert scale from one to five, with one representing the most negative response and five representing the most positive response.

the average score shown of 4.3).<sup>19</sup> While most tutors reported fairly limited training (typically about four hours), they generally felt confident in their ability, with 91 percent reporting they were confident that they could be effective instructors in their tutoring sessions (for the average score shown of 4.4).<sup>20</sup> Tutors' positivity about their experiences stands in contrast to findings about teachers' morale and stress in recent research.<sup>21</sup>

Tutors' reports of mostly positive experiences with tutoring and high levels of confidence in their effectiveness could make them likely to stay in their roles as tutors or to continue to other roles in K-12 education. Indeed, nearly three-quarters of tutors surveyed in the spring of 2024 reported that it was quite likely or extremely likely that they would continue as tutors after the semester was over, as shown in Figure 3. When asked more broadly about their likelihood of pursuing or continuing careers in K-12 education in the future, the majority (52 percent) reported it was quite likely or extremely likely that they would continue with careers in K-12 education.

## Despite Interest from Tutors, Schools Face Challenges with Tutor Hiring and Retention

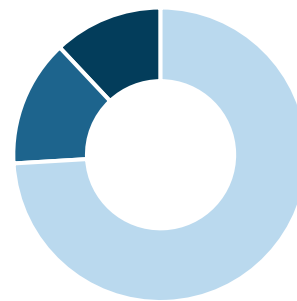
Tutor hiring has been a perennial challenge in efforts to bring tutoring to a larger scale.<sup>22</sup> Close to 40 percent of PLI school-based coordinators reported on the spring 2024 survey that tutor hiring was a challenge and a third cited tutor turnover as a difficulty. Only 64 percent of tutors at PLI schools in the fall remained in their positions in the spring.<sup>23</sup> The tutor-teacher pipeline is moot if potential tutors do not start tutoring or leave prematurely.

This study did not observe directly what factors entice tutors and potential future teachers to start and stick with tutoring. However, broadly, across sectors, wages are an important factor in employee retention.<sup>24</sup> Research on teacher retention shows that salaries play a role in teacher attrition.<sup>25</sup> Many PLI sites offered tutor wages similar to those offered for entry-level roles at places like Target and Starbucks, typically with tutoring offering less flexibility and lower access to benefits such as health care and sick leave.<sup>26</sup> The PLI research team collected data on tutor wages at the eight PLI sites, as shown in Table 2. Average, actual hourly tutor wages ranged from \$20 to \$50. Notably, the wages did not correlate strongly with working conditions. For example, tutors who were expected to report in person were paid wages similar to or in some cases lower than those of tutors who worked virtually, from home. Nor did the wages correlate with the cost of living. Some of the lower-cost-of-living areas in the PLI study offered wages that were higher than those in higher-cost-of-living areas (both adjusted to the cost of living and in absolute terms).

**Figure 3. Tutor Responses About Career Aspirations**

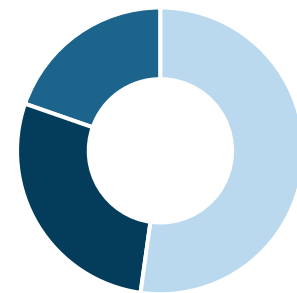
### 1. How likely is it that you will continue tutoring after this semester?

- Not at all or slightly likely (12%)
- Somewhat likely (14%)
- Quite or extremely likely (74%)



### 2. How likely is it that you will pursue or continue a career in K-12 education in the future?

- Not at all or slightly likely (28%)
- Somewhat likely (20%)
- Quite or extremely likely (52%)



SOURCE: Tutor survey from the spring of 2024.

NOTES: Sample size varies between 393 and 395 tutors, depending on the number who responded to each question. Each question was asked on five-point scale from "not at all likely" to "extremely likely."

**Table 2. Tutor Wages by Region and Modality**

Region	Modality	Average Actual Hourly Wage (\$)	Average Hourly Wage Adjusted for Cost of Living (\$)
New Mexico <sup>a</sup>	Virtual	50.00	58.07
Winston-Salem, North Carolina	In person	31.50	34.46
Fulton County, Georgia	In person	25.00	25.20
Miami, Florida	In person	26.00	23.25
Guilford County, North Carolina	In person	21.75	23.09
Greenville, South Carolina <sup>b</sup>	Virtual	20.00	21.37
Chicago, Illinois	In person	21.00	20.48
San Jose, California	In person	24.50	18.55

SOURCES: Cost-of-living data come from Federal Reserve Economic Data and Bureau of Economic Analysis Regional Price Parities. Actual wages come from study records, job postings, and district contracts.

NOTES: <sup>a</sup>New Mexico represents an entire state while other areas in the PLI study are metropolitan areas.

<sup>b</sup>Greenville, South Carolina, uses remote tutors who are not location-bound, and thus this wage adjusted to the regional cost of living should be interpreted with care.

Sites with the highest wages had the lowest rates of midyear tutor turnover. Of the tutors who started in the fall in New Mexico, where tutors were paid \$50 an hour for virtual tutoring sessions on average, over 90 percent were still tutoring in the spring. The study average was around 64 percent of tutors remaining in their positions in the spring. Researchers did not set out to study tutor retention and more data are needed to draw strong conclusions about the relationship between tutor wages and retention. However, the pattern suggests that relatively low tutor wages in some localities could dampen the potential for tutoring to serve as a pipeline into the teaching profession.

## Conclusion

Proponents of high-dosage tutoring have highlighted the potential for tutoring to be an effective pipeline program into teaching.<sup>27</sup> These surveys of the PLI tutor workforce add credence to those theories. The tutoring programs that were part of the PLI study in the 2023-2024 school year recruited a diverse sample of tutors who largely enjoyed a positive experience tutoring and who mostly intend to remain committed to K-12 education through tutoring or other roles. PLI obtained these results even though only a small portion of PLI tutors were part of district programs explicitly designed to bring them into a pipeline to teaching.

It is possible that tutoring programs with such explicit aims to bring tutors into the teacher workforce might have even more success in these areas. What might a program designed with this goal look like? Examples of some programs currently being implemented are:

- **Metropolitan Chicago Tutoring Corps:** This program recruits teacher candidates (along with college students and recent college graduates) to participate in the Chicago Public School Tutor Corps program.<sup>28</sup> In addition to the standard salary, training, and support that all Chicago Tutor Corps participants receive, teacher-candidate participants are eligible for additional coaching, financial support to offset transportation or childcare expenses, and a waiver of their field-experience requirements for their teacher-preparation programs. Chicago Public Schools' Tutor Corps program is part of the PLI study and some of its Metropolitan Chicago Tutoring Corps tutors worked in participating schools.<sup>29</sup>
- **Teach for America's Ignite Fellowship:** Teach for America, an alternative teacher-certification program with demonstrated effectiveness at improving student outcomes, has launched a virtual, paid tutoring program.<sup>30</sup> Ignite tutors are fast-tracked into the Teach for America application process if they choose to apply. Recent research shows that being an Ignite tutor nearly triples a person's likelihood of applying to the Teach for America teacher-training program.<sup>31</sup>
- **Teaching Apprenticeship Programs:** A growing number of states now offer teacher apprenticeship programs that combine paid on-the-job training and mentoring in teaching with opportunities for supplemental education that results in teaching credentials ([see here](#) for an overview of programs).<sup>32</sup> Some localities, including the District of Columbia, are recruiting among tutors for such programs.<sup>33</sup>
- **Deans for Impact's Aspiring Teachers as Tutors Network (ATTN):** The ATTN is a collaboration of tutoring programs across the country that blend educator preparation with the delivery of high-impact (high-dosage) tutoring for K-12 students. These programs see tutoring as a way to improve teacher candidates' instructional skills through field experience while also expanding K-12 students' access to high-quality tutors. In addition to connecting these tutoring programs and publicizing their work, the ATTN has developed a policy framework outlining state and federal policy actions that could support the expansion and sustainability of similar programs.<sup>34</sup>

The PLI data suggest that the tutor workforce would be receptive to these types of policy and program innovations that ease the transition into other, more permanent roles in education. However, for programs such as these to achieve their goals of giving students access to high-dosage tutoring while also addressing teacher-shortage challenges, it will be important that they retain the tutors they hire. The patterns from the PLI study's tutor midyear retention data suggest that higher pay could be one solution; alternative strategies could also include providing tutors with additional incentives such as tuition for higher education credits or apprenticeships.

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13. The four sites that launched tutoring in early fall of 2023 and were included in the fall tutor survey were Fulton, Chicago, Greenville, and New Mexico.
14. All surveys were delivered electronically using Qualtrics.

15. Tutors in the spring sample who had responded to the fall tutor survey were not asked questions about their demographics for a second time and so their demographic and educational background data from the fall 2023 survey are used.
16. Schools could have multiple types of PLI tutoring programs since the broader study is evaluating small-group tutoring and more affordable alternatives. Questions about successes and challenges were therefore asked separately by tutoring program.
17. Questions about tutors' race and ethnicity are not mutually exclusive. Tutors could select as many categories as they wished.
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