HOW TO BUILD IT AND ENSURE THEY WILL COME

Educators' Advice on High-Dosage Tutoring Programs

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Introduction and Background

High-dosage tutoring — defined as consistently scheduled tutorials during the school day in which students work with a trained tutor in small groups (for example, four students to one tutor) at least three times per week — is now widely recognized as being among the most promising educational interventions for improving student learning.[1] Recent national data show that over 80 percent of public schools offer some form of tutoring and nearly 40 percent offer a tutoring program that can be considered high dosage.[2] Despite their appeal, high-dosage tutoring programs can be challenging to deliver well; in particular, research has shown that ensuring students can participate in the expected number of tutoring sessions per week is a common obstacle.[3] Students can only benefit from tutoring interventions if they are able to attend. Thus, it is critical to identify and address the barriers schools face to delivering a truly high dosage of tutoring.

The Personalized Learning Initiative (PLI) — led by the University of Chicago Education Lab in collaboration with MDRC — seeks to understand whether and how school districts can expand the benefits of high-dosage tutoring and more affordable alternatives.[4] Recent research has explored district leaders' and tutoring vendors' perspectives on what affects students' receipt of tutoring services.[5] This research has identified challenges with scheduling, tutor attendance, and reliable data tracking as barriers to students receiving the intended dosage. This brief aims to elevate the perspectives of school staff members and tutors at schools that are part of PLI to deepen the field's understanding of the challenges schools face in delivering a high dosage of tutoring to their students and strategies they

use to overcome them. Hearing from people who are directly involved in the delivery of tutoring programs can surface new and innovative ideas and can help to ensure that they are feasible for school staff members to implement.

During the 2022–2023 school year, the PLI research team conducted an implementation study in two urban school districts—Chicago Public Schools and Fulton County Schools in Georgia—to explore how participating schools implemented high-dosage tutoring programs during the school day. The PLI study schools for this implementation study include a mix of elementary, middle, and high schools. From March to June 2023, the research team conducted surveys and semis-tructured interviews with school staff members and tutors who were involved with high-dosage tutoring programs.[6] This brief is based on surveys from 30 schools and interviews from a subsample of 18 schools.[7] Participants comprised the school employees who coordinated their school's tutoring program, tutors, and teachers of tutored students.[8] Coordinators and tutors were invited to participate in surveys and interviews (in the subsamples of interview schools). Teachers only participated in interviews. For brevity, the remainder of this brief refers to the collected survey and interview participants as staff members.

Drawing on staff members' insights, this brief offers recommendations schools and district offices can use to help students receive the intended dosage of their school-day tutoring programs.[9] The takeaways are related to the logistics of setting up a tutoring program, the support needed from individuals who are not directly involved in tutoring sessions but are still integral to their success, and the critical role that tutors and students play.

Why Do Students Miss Tutoring Sessions?

By and large, PLI study schools designed tutoring programs that aligned with best practices for student dosage: They hosted tutoring sessions at least three times a week for at least 30 minutes a session.[10] In practice, achieving consistent student receipt of tutoring sessions was a challenge. Nearly one-half of coordinators mentioned in surveys that student attendance at tutoring was a challenge. Moreover, almost two-thirds of tutors reported in surveys that at least a few of their sessions were canceled each week.

According to staff members in interviews, students missed tutoring sessions for many reasons. School administrators canceled some tutoring sessions due to competing school activities (such as assemblies or state testing); tutors were sometimes absent or left their jobs. Students could miss sessions when school staff members pulled the students into other interventions (for example, speech therapy or detention) or when teachers asked them to stay in class to finish classwork. Students also missed sessions because they were absent from school.[11] Other students skipped sessions because they overlapped with school periods they valued (like gym or lunch) or because nobody had told them to go.

As they were facing these challenges during the 2022–2023 school year, the PLI study schools were also learning from them. The takeaways that follow are the staff members' ideas for how

schools and district offices that are implementing a tutoring program might overcome these challenges to achieve truly high-dosage tutoring.

Promising Ideas for Increasing Tutoring Dosage

Staff members' methods for increasing student attendance and decreasing cancellations of tutoring sessions align with three critical components of implementing a tutoring program: setting up the tutoring program, engaging supporters (principals, teachers, and families), and engaging participants (students and tutors). The sections that follow detail these methods. Box 1 summarizes the steps schools and school districts can take to increase tutoring dosage.

Setting Up the Tutoring Program

There are several factors to consider when planning the tutoring program to set the stage for high student attendance.

When Scheduling Tutoring Sessions, Consider What Students Will Miss.
New tutoring programs can be a challenge to fit into packed school schedules.[12] In the survey, 48 percent of coordinators cited scheduling as a challenge. Though it can be difficult to fit tutoring into crowded school calendars, it is critical to carefully consider when to schedule the sessions: The period students must miss to attend a tutoring session can influence students' motivation to go and teachers' willingness to release them from class.

In interviews, staff members agreed that scheduling is difficult yet the timing of tutoring sessions is important. A tutor who said her sessions had "really good attendance" explained, "[Students] won't miss my groups because I get them when they're not being seen by anyone else." Expanding on this subject, other interviewees observed that students were more likely to attend tutoring sessions when they were not scheduled at the same time as periods that students may enjoy, such as lunch or gym. "A lot of the students don't want to, like, miss their lunchtime, which is sometimes when they're scheduled to go [to tutoring]," a teacher commented. "So they might not go to every session that they're supposed to go to."

Some staff members found that scheduling a tutoring session during the class on the same subject improved student attendance. Some teachers and coordinators thought students may be more inclined to join a tutoring session that takes place during that subject's class period because it operates like a standard part of that class (for example, the class can be split into small groups, with the tutoring session functioning as one of the small groups). When students are pulled from a class on a different subject, it can feel stigmatizing and result in students missing a more desirable period or content from another class. A teacher explained that integrating tutoring into the relevant classes has made it less stigmatizing because students could receive help without looking like they were being singled out.

Box 1. Recommendations for Setting up a High-Dosage Tutoring Program

1. When scheduling tutoring sessions, consider what students will miss.

    • Do not schedule tutoring sessions during lunch or gym class.

    • Schedule tutoring sessions during intervention blocks to avoid cutting into core instructional time.

2. Plan transitions to maximize time in tutoring sessions.

    • Have a tutor pick up students when the students are coming from the same classroom.

    • Identify school staff members who can help the tutor gather students from different classrooms.

    • If a tutoring session must be scheduled during a core academic class, be sure it is the same academic subject and try to schedule it for the part of the class when students do small-group work or independent practice.

3. Garner support from school leaders.

    • Meet with school leaders to explain the importance of tutoring, including how it will benefit students, teachers, and the school.

    • School leaders can encourage staff members to prioritize tutoring (especially when scheduling other school activities), ensure tutors are not used to cover nontutoring activities (like lunch duty), and tell teachers and other staff members that students' attendance at tutoring sessions is not optional.

4. Foster teacher buy-in.

    • Ensure teachers grasp the purpose and logistics of the tutoring program at the start of the school year — consider hosting a schoolwide kick-off meeting and making sure teachers have information on where, when, and which students are tutored.

    • During the program planning process, ask teachers for their input on issues like which students to assign to tutoring sessions, when to schedule tutoring, and what content to teach. Consider including teachers on planning committees for the tutoring program.

    • Enable tutors and teachers to meet regularly to discuss students' attendance and academic progress, collaborate to overcome issues, and share the content they are teaching in tutoring sessions and class. Provide guidance to tutors and teachers on what types of information they should share.

    • Recognize and celebrate teachers who send students to tutoring sessions.

5. Involve families.

    • Ensure messages to families about the tutoring program clearly state its benefits and expectations; consider highlighting that it is a unique opportunity for children.

(continued)

Box 1 (continued)

- Communicate with families frequently. Use multiple modes of communication (email, meetings, calls, newsletters) to make sure messages are received.

6. Collect, monitor, and share attendance data.
   - Simplify the data entry and review process by embedding tutor attendance data into a preexisting school database where school-wide attendance data are stored.
   - Ensure tutors have easy access to the database and dedicate time and resources to training tutors on how to enter attendance data.
   - Develop processes for ensuring tutoring attendance data is regularly shared with and reviewed by school leaders and teachers.

7. Make tutoring appealing to students.
   - Build student buy-in and excitement for tutoring by celebrating students' attendance, such as by awarding tutoring groups extra recess time or special parties for high attendance.
   - Acknowledge students' participation in tutoring by thanking them personally for attending.
   - Provide incentives to attend sessions by offering treats, gift cards, or other prizes or by building attendance into schools' established incentive systems, such as by awarding school store points for going to tutoring sessions.

8. Make tutors feel valued and like they are a part of the school community.
   - Connect tutors with teachers (for example, align their planning periods so they can meet).
   - Include tutors in school staff meetings and other school-wide events.
   - Ask tutors for their input, listen to their responses, and be straightforward and accessible.

A coordinator went further and said one of the main reasons tutoring sessions occurred largely as intended was because they were scheduled during small group time in the relevant class:

> We intentionally set it up . . . where when the teacher is doing small groups, these babies are pulled out to get that extra support [from the tutors]. . . . I believe in letting the teachers work with the tutors. So I'll let the teacher and the tutor tell me what time that they need [to schedule tutoring].

Teachers observed that their fellow teachers were hesitant to let a student leave their class for tutoring sessions on another subject, likely because they were concerned the student would fall behind in their subject — which shows another benefit of scheduling tutoring session during a class period on the same topic.

There were some drawbacks to scheduling tutoring sessions during the class on the same subject. For a student struggling in that subject, missing class time may be counterproductive. A coordinator said that tutoring "should be extra really, [but] it's just impossible to make [it fit perfectly]." For this reason, scheduling tutoring time during a preexisting period that is designed to deliver supplemental instructions — what some schools call an intervention block — may be ideal, as students would not miss classroom instruction or periods they find desirable. For high school students — who are often concerned about missing time in credit-bearing courses — it is best to offer tutoring sessions as credit-bearing classes, which has been found to be effective in studies of high school math tutoring programs.[13]

Plan Transitions to Maximize Time in Tutoring Sessions.

Tutoring sessions are typically relatively short (about 30 minutes) and thus it is essential for tutors and students to maximize that time. Accordingly, it is crucial to plan a system to get students to their sessions. At the PLI study schools where tutors did not host the tutoring sessions inside the students' classrooms, tutors or school staff members either met students at their classrooms and accompanied them to the tutoring location or students walked on their own. In interviews, school staff members recommended establishing transition procedures to ensure students make it to tutoring on time. Students could miss a part or all of a tutoring session when transition processes were nonexistent or inefficient. One tutor described needing to walk around the building to find students for each session.

Using different school staff members to support the transition was a common element of transition procedures that interviewees thought worked well. For instance, one school overcame attendance challenges by having the coordinator retrieve students for tutoring sessions. A tutor from another school offered an example, "The school started sending out people to get the students out of the class and bring them to the media center for the tutoring. And so, that week, I had a lot better attendance." Different school staff members could lead or be involved in the transition process depending on their school's context (for instance, their students' ages or the amount of time allocated for the transition). Soliciting input from teachers and tutors on what might work best for transitioning students to tutoring sessions can help coordinators establish processes that fit best with their school's daily schedule, routines, staff availability, and building layout.

Teachers and tutors also saw opportunities for teachers to help ensure students make it to tutoring sessions. However, teachers and tutors from some schools reported that teachers lacked essential information about tutoring — such as which students in their classes were assigned to tutoring, and where and when sessions were scheduled — that made it difficult for them to help. A teacher noted that one reason students miss tutoring is that "they're unclear about when they should go . . . the teacher whose class they're sitting in when they're supposed to go may tell them something different" about when to attend. If coordinators gave teachers this information, they could help with the transition process — as another teacher said, "If I [have] a list of kids that were supposed to go [to tutoring during a specific] period and I see them in the hallway, I can make sure that they get [to tutoring]."

Coordinators may consider working with teachers to post the tutoring schedule in a place in the classroom where it is easily visible. According to one tutor, teachers who were informed about tutoring sessions helped ensure students made it to tutoring. "The only time . . . that students miss sessions is typically just [their] absence [from] school," that tutor said, "because the teachers have a list of students, and when I, you know, come pull them from the classroom . . . the students are ready to come."

Engaging Supporters

While individual tutoring sessions include just a single tutor and a small group of students, successfully launching and sustaining a tutoring program requires the development of robust infrastructure and support from the broader school community.[14]

Garner Support from School Leaders.

Obtaining support from school leaders (such as principals) can be key to successful implementation.[15] In interviews, staff members stressed that it was important for school leaders to buy in to the program and communicate to the staff that tutoring was a school-wide priority. When tutoring is a priority for school leaders, they and their staff are more likely to make sure other school activities (like assemblies) are not scheduled at the same time as tutoring sessions.

School leaders can help ensure tutors are available to lead tutoring sessions by making sure that tutors are not deployed to cover nontutoring staffing gaps (like covering for an absent lunch monitor). A tutor remarked that she rarely missed tutoring sessions:

> Our principal made it known, like, "Let's try not to pull [the tutor]; she needs to be tutoring these kids as much as possible. . . . Try not to pull [the tutor] unless [you] absolutely have to." Which is rare. So I'm with these babies every single day.

To foster school leader buy-in, staff members who were interviewed suggested that coordinators meet with school leaders to explain the importance of tutoring, including how it will benefit students, teachers, and the school. School leaders can show they prioritize tutoring by celebrating program successes in all-school communication and events, acknowledging the tutors and other staff members' hard work, and requesting regular reviews of tutoring program data.

Foster Teacher Buy-In.

Teachers can be important partners by fostering students' interest in tutoring and making sure students attend their assigned sessions.[16] During interviews, staff members echoed the idea that teachers can influence students' decisions to attend tutoring. One teacher said,

> Maybe 50 percent of [students in my class who were assigned to tutoring] were showing up . . . regularly. I spoke to one young man with his parents and he said, "Oh, my teacher told me I didn't have to go — like, some days, I could just stay and play basketball." So it was his PE class and he liked playing basketball, so he wanted to stay and play basketball. And nobody was there to say, "Go."

There are a number of ways to develop teacher buy-in so they encourage students to attend tutoring sessions. Interviewees suggested sharing information about the goals of the tutoring program and the way it benefits students, teachers, and the school beyond the topic areas the sessions cover.[17] A math teacher hypothesized that teachers of other subjects did not send students to math tutoring when those teachers did not understand how it helped students and the school overall:

> I am hearing [those teachers] won't let them go . . . [because] why would they have [students] taken out of another class to go to tutoring? I don't think it was explained to the whole school why we're doing what we're doing. . . . I don't think [everyone] understands how Algebra 1 scores affect the [state test] score for the school, so they don't find [math tutoring] as valuable. . . . They're saying, "Well, they're missing my class now."

Staff members who were interviewed suggested coordinators meet with teachers at the beginning of the year to explain the importance of tutoring, including how it would benefit the students and the school. One coordinator said that coordinators could meet with teachers as a way of motivating teachers to send students to tutoring:

> [The students] definitely are getting their groups in the [tutoring program] because we did . . . an expectations[-setting] meeting with our teachers to say, "This is not optional." Like a tutor comes in — they're not there so you can go to the bathroom . . . they have to meet their groups. And all of our teachers except one have been super receptive. And then I had a conversation with the one and we [have] since turned around our attitudes. So now everyone seems to be moving [to] their [tutoring] groups, from what I'm hearing from the tutors.

To help ensure students attend tutoring sessions, teachers need details about the tutoring program, such as which students are chosen to attend tutoring sessions; why, when, and where sessions take place; what content is being taught; and what credentials the tutors have. As another math teacher explained, teachers are not always given this information:

> I am responsible for half the math students and I'm not even sure who's in tutoring. The process this year — it was very disorganized. Like, I wasn't aware that [tutoring] was a thing. I wasn't aware [of] . . . who's . . . tutoring the kids. . . . Do they know the [middle school math] standards? . . . If we're doing it again next year, it's certainly something that before school even starts . . . let's discuss [and] let's have rationale [for the tutoring program]. . . . The bumps we had this year in terms of scheduling — it felt like [they were related to tutoring not being] mentioned [until], like, the third week of school. . . . It was like, "Oh yeah, now we're going to pull kids out for tutoring." I was kind of like, "Wait, what? We're taking them out of math class? They're going to leave?"

This teacher also said it was important to include teachers in initial discussions about the tutoring program to build their understanding of and trust in the program. Coordinators can further build teacher buy-in by consulting with teachers when making programmatic decisions.

Requesting teachers' input about which students are assigned to tutoring, when sessions are scheduled, and what content should be taught can cultivate teacher investment in the tutoring program while also making the program stronger. One teacher said,

> A little more collaboration [would strengthen the program]. I was kind of just told, "This person's coming in, these are the kids, this is what they're working on." I would like to have a little more say in that and input about . . . the students [assigned to tutoring], the skills, the materials, all of those things. So I know what they're doing, and hopefully, it could be something that I have access to, too. So I can see *Oh, they're not doing great. Maybe I'll throw some [tutoring lesson content] in when I pull them into a small group*. . . . I would love that. Just more input, more collaboration.

This teacher explained that when tutors share information about how students are doing in tutoring sessions it can help teachers tailor instruction in class. Additionally, requesting teachers' advice on topics like how to navigate student attendance challenges can yield valuable information while also alerting teachers about the issue.

To continue building teachers' engagement, coordinators can encourage regular communication between tutors and teachers, such as by scheduling brief weekly meetings or inviting tutors to teacher professional development days and setting aside time for teachers and tutors to collaborate. Another approach to encouraging tutor-teacher collaboration is to align tutors' and teachers' planning periods. Joint planning periods can give tutors and teachers the opportunity to troubleshoot student attendance issues, learn about students' academic progress in tutoring sessions and in the classroom, and share the content that is being taught that week in the tutoring sessions and classes. A coordinator hoped to implement tutor-teacher meetings the next school year:

> We're working on bridging that relationship with the teachers. I know that the teachers will love to have more intimate time with the tutors to really sit down, plan, and even co-plan with them. As of right now, because we're on borrowed time, we don't have the opportunity where the teacher and the tutor can sit down, truly collaborate, and develop a plan. [The other coordinator] and I often serve as the middleman for that.

In interviews, teachers also expressed an interest in getting more details about what happens during tutoring sessions. A teacher explained,

> I would like to see, maybe, an update of what they're doing [in tutoring]. Maybe a little checklist report card or something, just to see how they're faring with [the tutors] . . . how they're doing, whatever concept they were working on.

Finally, another way to make tutoring a priority for teachers is to recognize and commend teachers whose students attend tutoring sessions. "I started celebrating the teachers," a coordinator said. "The 13 teachers who had any kid attend tutoring [sessions] consistently, we bought them lunch." When teachers feel appreciated for sending their students to tutoring sessions, they may be more motivated to send students to future sessions.

Involve Families.

A parent can support strong student attendance in a number of ways: building their child's excitement about attending tutoring; speaking with teachers or administrators when their child reports not being pulled for tutoring (which can discourage future session cancellations); and helping tutors, teachers, and administrators troubleshoot attendance issues.[18] How parents enact these methods may look different depending on their child's age, but all parents have the potential to be strong supporters. On surveys, most coordinators reported communicating with families about the tutoring program. However, only 24 percent reported communicating about the program more than once annually. Coordinators reported using several communication tactics with parents of students who were enrolled in tutoring sessions: they sent parents tutoring contracts that formally acknowledged the parents' understanding of the attendance requirements, embedded information about tutoring in family newsletters, informed parents of their child's participation in a letter, and mentioned tutoring when parents came to school to pick up report cards or attend a meeting.

One school coordinator noted the importance of engaging parents through multiple channels:

> It took about three times, me communicating with parents. So it took me sending home a letter, emailing, and then having a parent meeting for them to help and be a partner with getting their students to understand why tutoring was important.

In addition to considering the frequency of communication, school staff members need to consider the content and style of their messages. One coordinator said,

> I know going forward how to brand it better . . . how to brand it to parents. Not just giving them this wonderful piece of paper and saying, "Hi, these are all the benefits." Parents need more than that. . . . I want the [tutoring vendor] to talk to these parents as well. . . . If the parents don't see it as being beneficial, the kid has a problem understanding.

Another coordinator portrayed the tutoring program as a scarce resource:

> [Tutoring is] a service. . . . That's a slot that we could be giving to somebody else [who is] not here. And it's to let the parents know, "We need your help so the babies can get here." . . . [Parents have] been receptive to [this messaging] and we've seen that the attendance has improved. Students are coming on time, and . . . they're ready to work.

Another promising idea for sustaining parent support for the program is sharing attendance and academic progress data with parents to showcase the success their children experience in the program. It may also be effective to share when students are struggling due to poor attendance or other issues.

Collect, Monitor, and Share Attendance Data.

Getting active involvement and support from school leaders, teachers, and families requires that coordinators have high-quality data on student attendance at tutoring sessions, as well as efficient ways of analyzing and sharing that information. Coordinators who were interviewed high-

lighted the importance of collecting and tracking data on tutoring dosage, and how difficult it can be, which aligned with previous research on implementing tutoring models.[19] Coordinators who were interviewed also highlighted the importance of reliably collecting and carefully monitoring attendance data. However, data collection can be time-consuming and redundant. One tutor, who needed to enter attendance data into multiple databases, said, "I have two attendance [spread-sheets] I have to record, one for [the coordinator] for the school and one for [the tutoring vendor]. . . . [Entering data in two places was] a little bit tough." The tutor found a workaround for managing the different databases, though it was slow and increased the chances of reporting errors.

Interviewees discussed integrating tutoring attendance data into the school-wide database. They saw benefits to keeping all data in one system: Staff members would not need to enter the same data in multiple places and the data would be more accessible to school leaders. Though the idea is promising, interviewees also described hurdles to regularly and accurately using an integrated database. They encountered glitches or restrictions on adding tutoring groups without classifying them as a class. Some tutors did not know how to use the integrated database. "It did take me a while to figure [the attendance database] out," a tutor said. "Last month, I wasn't up-to-date with [entering attendance into the database] just yet. I still had trouble with it." These troubles led to a few tutors not recording data for several weeks and made the attendance data less reliable.

Collecting quality tutoring attendance data is an important first step to improving attendance. However, in order to put the data to use, it is critical that schools also have resources and routines in place to regularly share, review, and act on that data. One way to build routines is to include tutoring attendance data as part of a school's formal review of other supplemental support inter-ventions. Another approach is to regularly share attendance data with school leaders, tutors, and teachers, as it can encourage buy-in. For instance, a coordinator reported that she reviews attend-ance data "every single Monday . . . in my senior leadership team meeting, before I meet with my principal; I must come to her with the exact data." Meetings to share information on tutoring attendance can also provide opportunities for a variety of staff members to weigh in on how to overcome attendance challenges; as one coordinator explained,

> The tutors will let me know such and such [student was absent] this week, whatever, and [then] I collaborate . . . with the MTSS [Multi-Tiered System of Supports] team. . . . We talk about our students whose attendance is bad and . . . we make sure we correlate.[20]

Another coordinator noted that "attendance is good" because of her process for collecting, moni-toring, and sharing attendance data. She described her process, echoing ideas that staff members discussed in interviews for how to use data to support high dosage:

> [Students] won't be absent from tutoring, there is no choice about that. . . . [I'm always] checking in with the tutors and also the teachers. . . . [Tutors take attendance] in a chart . . . we create in the school, and . . . they are doing it . . . to make sure that we ensure that the students are here. . . . [The attendance data is shared with] the teachers, myself, and the tutors.

These tactics suggest that it is important for coordinators to feel ownership over and accountable for the attendance data collection process.

Engaging Tutoring Program Participants

It is important to address scheduling challenges and solicit active engagement from principals, teachers, and families. At its core, however, a tutoring session involves just a tutor and students. Thus, it is critical to consider what motivates tutors and students to consistently attend tutoring sessions.

Make Tutoring Appealing to Students.

Students skipping tutoring sessions or arriving late was a challenge some schools faced when trying to achieve high dosage. A teacher posited that her school's lax policies contributed to this challenge:

> I think [attendance] could have been a little more tightly reined. . . . I feel like it's a culture-of-the-building thing. *If I go [to tutoring], I go; if I don't, I don't*. There's no real consequence if they don't go but they complain about not understanding when they have the opportunity to go.

To address attendance issues and foster student buy-in, interviewees endorsed establishing a positive school climate that supported tutoring. They recommended different tactics for boosting attendance by making tutoring more appealing to students.

Just as celebrating staff efforts to support the tutoring program is a way to sustain staff buy-in, acknowledgment of student participation can also be helpful. A coordinator noted she makes a point of telling students, "Thank you for showing up today and giving it your best," so they feel recognized and appreciated for attending the tutoring session.

Incentivizing attendance is one way to build excitement about tutoring. "Student attendance is fine . . . [because] I incentivize it a lot," one coordinator remarked. Tutoring groups were allowed to stay at recess for more time; she said, "It looks like a privilege to be a part of [a tutoring group] because while the rest of [the students] are going in, I'm still outside [with the tutoring students]."

Tutors also found success by offering prizes for attendance, such as food or gift cards. One tutor explained,

> I use a ticket system and I say, "Okay, for every attendance, I give you a ticket." At the end of the week or two weeks . . . the person with the most tickets would be awarded a $10 or $20 gift card . . . and they're happy to get something. And we do also have some candies that the school provides . . . some Jolly Ranchers, and the kids love it. . . . Incentive is a plus. It's not constant, but it is something additional for them to look forward to. And you can be creative, and it doesn't have to be cards all the time. I can mix it up.. . . . I might also do [a] $24 [gift card] — "The Most Regularly Attending Student" — like a super reward.

Some tutors described using their own money to purchase gift cards as rewards; others noted that the tutoring vendors or the school provided small rewards or incentives. Principals and coordinators may consider adding student incentives to their tutoring budgets and giving tutors a stipend to purchase the type of incentives or prizes they think would work best.

Integrating rewards for tutoring attendance into schools' existing incentive or rewards systems is a way to further embed tutoring in the school culture and encourage buy-in. For example, schools can give students school "dollars" when they attend tutoring sessions that can be used at the school store. A coordinator said,

> [Students] get PBIS [school name for their points system that is tied to positive behavior interventions and supports] for attendance. . . . I think that that has people showing up. . . because they love the PBIS store. They can, you know, spend . . . PBIS points to go to a big celebration or buy something out [of] the store.

Make Tutors Feel Valued and a Part of the School Community.

Tutor absence and turnover were barriers to achieving high dosage and about one-half of coordinators reported one or both as a challenge in their survey, echoing findings from other studies on tutoring programs.[21] The drivers of tutor absenteeism and turnover are multifaceted but likely include some tutors' tenuous connection to the school. To combat tutor absence and turnover, coordinators who were interviewed suggested including tutors in school staff meetings and training sessions, as well as aligning tutors' and teachers' planning periods so they can connect and feel more integrated in the school community. Going further, a coordinator emphasized the importance of making tutors feel valued so they are motivated to show up for tutoring:

> The tutors . . . [are] here regularly. . . . They try to come every day and when they don't, they communicate. . . . [A school staff member] has everybody in a group chat including the tutors. So [the school staff member] treats the tutors like they are part of the staff. They're not looked at as just miscellaneous people. . . . They're held accountable as well; they feel like they are part of our community here. That they're not just, *Oh, that's just a tutor*. We don't make them feel like that. . . . We like them and we like to hear their voice too so that they feel their voice matters.

A few tutors from another school shared that their coordinator "makes us feel very included. She makes us feel heard." They explained that the coordinator does this by doing "very well in communicating and being straightforward . . . [and] honest." They also agreed that the coordinator is accessible: "We'll call or email her; she's right there, like, ASAP."

Tutors appreciated when coordinators asked for their input, listened to them, and were accessible. They said they valued open and clear communications.

Conclusion and Looking Forward

Surveys and interviews with coordinators, teachers, and tutors confirmed the challenges of actually delivering high-dosage tutoring at the intensity needed to be effective, yet also suggested practices that could mitigate some of the challenges. They discussed considerations for program setup, such as schedules, data systems, and transition practices; tactics for engaging school administrators, teachers, and families who are not directly involved in tutoring delivery but who can play a key role in supporting student attendance; and approaches for motivating tutors and participating students. District and school leaders can apply some or all of these tactics when considering whether to revise an existing tutoring program to increase dosage or when designing a new tutoring program.

Looking forward, the PLI project team will share program findings from the 2023–2024 school year, when the PLI study expanded to include programs — run by districts, state governments, and charter management organizations — in 84 schools at seven sites. Preliminary findings on the impacts of tutoring on student academic achievement outcomes from the 2022–2023 school year are available in a related report.[22] Stay tuned for future project updates on MDRC's Personalized Learning Initiative website.

Notes and References

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5. Carbonari et al. (2022); Jeffrey Max and Kate Place, "Accelerate's First Call to Effective Action: A Synthesis of Lessons Learned" (New York: Accelerate, 2022), website: https://accelerate.us/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Lessons-Learned-from-Accelerate-CEA-2022-23.pdf.

6. The broader PLI study also focuses on alternatives to high-dosage tutoring models that lower costs by increasing group size — and that often integrate education technology. However, this brief focuses on staff members' insights on traditional high-dosage, in-person tutoring models.

7. Interviews lasted 15 to 60 minutes (depending on the participant's role) and took place in person during school visits or virtually over videoconference. The majority of the interviews were one-on-one; however, some were conducted with two to five participants. The research team audio-recorded the interviews, transcribed the recordings, and coded the transcripts using the cloud-based application Dedoose. A team of trained coders developed a codebook using prespecified codes based on the interview protocols and refined the codebook to include codes emerging from the data. A smaller team analyzed the coded excerpts in Excel for emerging themes and trends across schools.

8. Coordinators included principals, assistant principals, and interventionists, among others. Some tutors in PLI schools were district- or school-based employees, and others were employees of external tutoring vendors.

9. Tutoring programs can also run in after-school and summer settings. However, the PLI study focuses on school-day programs since there is more evidence they are effective. See Andre Nickow, Philip Oreopoulos, and Vincent Quan, "The Impressive Effects of Tutoring on PreK-

12 Learning: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the Experimental Evidence," NBER Working Paper 27476 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2020), website: https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w27476/w27476.pdf.

10. Carly D. Robinson, Matthew A. Kraft, Susanna Loeb, and Beth E. Schueler, "Design Principles for Accelerating Student Learning with High-Impact Tutoring," February (Providence, RI: Annenberg Institute at Brown University, 2021).

11. Chronic absenteeism is a growing challenge facing schools nationwide. See Sarah Mervosh, "Students Are Missing School at an Alarming Rate," *New York Times* (November 17, 2023), website: https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/17/us/chronic-absenteeism-pandemic-recovery.html. Students cannot participate in tutoring during the school day if they are absent. Chronic student absence from school was cited by school staff members interviews as one of the top barriers to student attendance of tutoring sessions. Although student absenteeism is clearly a barrier to schools' achieving adequate dosage of tutoring sessions, this brief focuses on actions that individuals who are responsible for tutoring programs can take to overcome challenges to tutoring dosage.

12. Recent studies on implementing school programs like high-dosage tutoring presented the logistical challenges of determining how to schedule sessions. See, for example, Carbonari et al. (2022); Max and Place (2023); Alvin Makori, Patricia Burch, and Susanna Loeb, "Scaling High-Impact Tutoring: School Level Perspectives on Implementation Challenges and Strategies," EdWorkingPaper 24-923 (Providence, RI: Annenberg Institute at Brown University, 2024), website: https://studentsupportaccelerator.org/sites/default/files/ai24-923.pdf.

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15. Max and Place (2023); White, Groom-Thomas, and Loeb (2023).

16. Max and Place (2023).

17. Coordinators can demonstrate how tutoring benefits school attendance overall by discussing one study that found evidence that high-dosage tutoring increased students' attendance at school. On days when students had tutoring sessions scheduled, they were less likely to be absent. See White, Groom-Thomas, and Loeb (2023).

18. Research on recovery efforts from the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that it is important to engage families and communities as partners in the provision of academic support interventions like tutoring to ensure strong implementation, but it is hard to do and is often skipped. See Max and Place (2023).

19. Max and Place (2023).

20. Eesha Pendharker, "MTSS: What Is a Multi-Tiered System of Supports?" *EducationWeek* (October 13, 2023), website: https://edweek.org/teaching-learning/mtss-what-is-a-multi-tiered-system-of-supports/2023/10.

21. Max and Place (2023).

22. Monica Bhatt, Terence Chau, Jon Guryan, Jens Ludwig, Matteo Magnaricotte, Fatemeh Momeni, Philip Oreopoulos, and Greg Stoddard, *Realizing the Promise of High Dosage Tutoring at Scale: Preliminary Evidence for the Field* (Chicago, University of Chicago Education Lab, 2024), website: https://educationlab.uchicago.edu/resources/realizing-the-promise-of-high-dosage-tutoring-at-scale-preliminary-evidence-for-the-field/.

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