Getting Down to FACTS

Beyond the Whole Class: Systematizing Engaging, Individualized Support at Scale

Susanna Loeb
Stanford University

Lauren Ziegler
Stanford University

May 2026

Stanford | SCALE Initiative
Accelerator for Learning

Beyond the Whole Class: Systematizing Engaging, Individualized Support at Scale

Susanna Loeb and Lauren Ziegler

Stanford University

Introduction

California's classrooms are stratified by prior achievement, language background, and academic readiness. Most students spend the majority of their instructional time in whole-class settings designed for a broad middle range of performance. As within-class variation grows, the constraints of uniform instructional models become more salient. This report examines how relationship-based individualized instruction, and high-impact tutoring in particular, functions as a structured response to that variation. National data indicate that this approach is already widely adopted: in June 2025, 42% of public school principals reported that their school offers high-impact tutoring, with prevalence remaining between 37% and 46% over the prior three years (NCES, 2025).

High-impact tutoring has one of the strongest causal evidence bases among contemporary K–12 interventions. Meta-analyses of experimental studies find pooled effect sizes of 0.36–0.37 standard deviations on academic achievement—equivalent to 3 to 15 months of additional learning gains. The literature identifies specific design features associated with stronger and more replicable impacts: sustained dosage of at least three sessions per week, group sizes of four or fewer students, alignment with core instruction, data-informed practice, and consistent tutor-student relationships. These features distinguish high-impact tutoring from lower-intensity or ad hoc supplemental support.

This report synthesizes this research base alongside original qualitative and descriptive evidence from California. Data sources include interviews with 82 principals and 94 district leaders, survey responses from 27 district and county leaders (hereafter Local Education Agency [LEA] leaders) participating in a tutoring design sprint, and three district case studies. These data allow examination of how relationship-based individualized instruction is structured in practice, the degree to which

implementation aligns with research-supported design features, and the conditions under which programs are sustained.

The analysis is organized around three questions:

1. What does causal research show about the effects of relationship-based individualized instruction on student learning and engagement?
2. How are California districts currently structuring tutoring and related supports within existing policy, funding, and instructional frameworks?
3. What do research findings and implementation evidence suggest about the institutional conditions associated with expanded and consistent access?

The report proceeds in seven sections. The initial sections examine the instructional and equity implications of whole-class delivery models. Subsequent sections synthesize evidence on high-impact tutoring and examine the mechanisms through which program design influences outcomes. The report then analyzes the current policy and funding landscape in California and documents district-level implementation patterns. The final section considers governance and implementation trade-offs associated with moving from fragmented provision toward more systematic access. Throughout, the analysis distinguishes between evidence of program effects and evidence regarding feasibility, design constraints, and scale.

California has directed billions of dollars toward tutoring, intervention blocks, and tiered academic supports, including $7.9 billion through the Learning Recovery Emergency Block Grant, $4 billion through the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program, and $50 million through the Learning Acceleration System Grant. These investments indicate policy prioritization of additional instructional intensity for students who are not meeting grade-level expectations. At the same time, variation across districts in scheduling, staffing models, dosage, and alignment with core instruction indicates uneven incorporation of research-supported design features. The interaction between funding structures, accountability systems, organizational capacity, and local implementation decisions shapes the extent to which high-impact tutoring conditions are realized in practice. Understanding that interaction is central to interpreting the state's current investment landscape.

The evidence presented in this report indicates that high-impact tutoring is an effective response to instructional heterogeneity, and that features of California's governance and funding context are associated with divergence between research-based design and observed implementation. Taken together, these findings point to the importance of institutional conditions in shaping whether effective interventions are delivered with fidelity at scale.

Data and Methods

This study draws on five sources of evidence to examine what the research shows about high-impact tutoring and how California schools and districts structure relationship-based individualized instruction. First, we review experimental and quasi-experimental research on tutoring effectiveness and summarize national and California trends in tutoring adoption. Second, we analyze semi-structured interviews with 82 California principals to describe how tutoring and related intervention models operate in practice and the extent to which they align with research-supported design features. Third, we draw on semi-structured interviews with 94 TK–8 district superintendents and senior leaders to document district approaches to differentiated mathematics instruction, including both in-class differentiation and structures for providing additional academic support beyond the core classroom. Fourth, we analyze surveys from California LEA leaders who participated in a statewide tutoring design sprint to capture system-level perspectives on program design, implementation needs, and sustainability. Fifth, we present three illustrative case studies of districts employing high-impact tutoring to examine how these models operate under varying organizational and resource conditions.

Review of the Literature

To establish the research foundation for high-impact tutoring, we draw on Robinson and Loeb (2021), which synthesizes experimental and quasi-experimental studies of tutoring interventions and identifies program characteristics associated with effectiveness. Their framework emphasizes three inclusion criteria: (1) tutoring must consist of one-on-one or small-group instruction that supplements, and does not replace, classroom instruction; (2) studies must include a clearly defined comparison group, typically through random assignment or well-identified quasi-experimental designs, to support causal

inference; and (3) evaluations must report standardized estimates of program impacts on student academic outcomes.

This synthesis builds on two foundational meta-analyses. Dietrichson et al. (2017) examined interventions targeting low-income elementary and middle school students and found that tutoring was both among the most frequently evaluated intervention and among the most effective, with an average effect size of 0.36 standard deviations. Nickow et al. (2020) analyzed 96 randomized controlled trials of K–12 tutoring interventions and reported a pooled effect size of 0.37 standard deviations on academic outcomes, with effects remaining substantial in larger-scale implementations.

To update this evidence base, we reviewed studies published since 2021, prioritizing randomized controlled trials and well-identified quasi-experimental evaluations with clearly specified comparison groups and academic outcome measures. We identified relevant studies through citation tracking from prior meta-analyses, targeted searches of education research databases including ERIC and Education Source, and curated compilations from the National Student Support Accelerator tutoring research database. This approach allowed us to synthesize both causal evidence on program effectiveness and descriptive research examining implementation conditions at scale.

Principal Interviews

Between September and December 2025, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 82 school principals across California. Schools were selected using a stratified sampling approach designed to ensure representation by district type and geographic region. The final sample includes 30 elementary schools, 19 middle schools, and 33 high schools, representing 69 districts across 38 counties. Participating schools reflect substantial variation in size, locale, and student demographics, including rural districts, small elementary districts, and large comprehensive secondary schools.

At the start of each interview, principals were provided with a standardized definition of high-impact tutoring adapted from the National Student Support Accelerator (Robinson et al., 2024): tutoring delivered three or more times per week in small groups of no more than four students, led by a consistent tutor and targeted using diagnostic assessment or ongoing progress monitoring. Principals

were asked whether their school provided tutoring meeting this definition. Follow-up questions examined grade levels served, subject areas, staffing models, scheduling structures, student identification processes, perceived enabling conditions, implementation challenges, and sustainability. Additional details on sampling, protocol design, and analytic procedures are provided in the Appendix.

District Leader Interviews

To complement school-level perspectives, we draw on semi-structured interviews with 94 district superintendents and senior leaders conducted between May and August 2025. These interviews focused specifically on TK–8 mathematics instruction. District leaders were asked how they conceptualized differentiated mathematics instruction, what expectations they hold for in-class differentiation, and what formal structures they use to provide additional academic support beyond the core classroom, including tutoring.

Districts were selected using stratified sampling by region and district size: small districts with five or fewer schools, mid-sized districts with 6 to 24 schools, and large districts with 25 or more schools. Mid-sized districts were oversampled to ensure adequate representation. The sample spans all five geographic regions of California and represents an approximately 50 percent district response rate. While interviews addressed a broad range of district priorities, this report draws exclusively on responses related to TK–8 mathematics differentiation and supplemental support structures. Additional methodological details are provided in the Appendix.

Education Leader Design Sprint Surveys

We also analyze surveys administered to education leaders from California LEAs that participated in a statewide tutoring design sprint. Between September and November 2025, 23 district and charter teams and 7 county offices of education engaged in an eight-week structured design process led by Results for America and the National Student Support Accelerator, in collaboration with the California State Board of Education, the Department of Education Expanded Learning Division, and the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence. The pre-sprint survey yielded responses from 21 districts and

charter schools, and 6 county offices of education. The post-sprint survey yielded responses from 11 districts and charter schools and 7 county offices of education.

The design sprint focused on structured program planning, including staffing configurations, scheduling models, student identification criteria, instructional alignment, and sustainability beyond time-limited funding streams. Participants completed structured surveys at the beginning and conclusion of the sprint. These instruments captured district leaders' descriptions of existing or planned tutoring models, perceived implementation challenges, areas of uncertainty in program design, and priorities for strengthening district-level infrastructure.

In this report, survey data are used descriptively to characterize how districts experience the process of developing tutoring programs. The surveys do not provide impact estimates and are not used to evaluate program effectiveness. Instead, they offer system-level insight into organizational and design considerations associated with moving from interest in tutoring to formal program development. Further details on survey instruments and analytic procedures are provided in the Appendix.

Illustrative Case Studies

In addition to interview and survey analyses, the report includes three illustrative case studies presented in the concluding sections. These cases provide in-depth descriptions of how relationship-based individualized instruction and tutoring operate in distinct California contexts.

The case studies draw on Local Control and Accountability Plan documentation and other publicly available materials. Sites were selected to reflect variation in grade span, district size, and tutoring implementation approach. While interviews and surveys identify cross-district patterns, the case studies provide more detailed accounts of staffing models, scheduling strategies, student identification processes, and integration with broader intervention systems.

The case studies are descriptive and do not estimate program impacts. They are intended to illustrate a range of implementation approaches observed across districts rather than to represent the full distribution of tutoring models statewide.

What We Know About Individualized Instruction: A Literature Review

Limits of Whole-Class Instruction

Students within a single classroom bring diverse academic skills and prior knowledge, and they vary considerably in the time and support they need to master new content. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results indicate that a substantial share of students perform below proficiency, with fewer than one-third of U.S. students meeting the NAEP Proficient standard in reading and mathematics in recent administrations (NAEP, 2024). In California, fewer than half of students meet grade-level standards in English language arts and mathematics, further widening the range of instructional needs teachers must address within a single classroom (California Department of Education, 2023). Whole-class instruction is typically organized around grade-level standards and paced for a broad middle of the distribution; as a result, students who are below grade level may not receive sufficient scaffolding or time to access core content, while students who are ahead may not be consistently extended. Against this backdrop, whole-class instruction is not well aligned to the full range of student needs in most California classrooms.

Whole-class instruction is not without value. It plays a critical role in building shared academic knowledge and fostering classroom community (Ornstein, 1995). It supports social learning and allows teachers to establish consistent expectations and instructional routines. However, whole-group formats are structurally limited in their ability to meet the full range of learner needs present in most classrooms (Tomlinson, 2014). Even when teachers employ differentiation strategies, whole-class instruction offers limited opportunities for frequent, individualized feedback or real-time adjustment based on student understanding. As a result, students who are significantly behind grade level often struggle to access instruction at an appropriate level of challenge and support.

Balancing instructional delivery with classroom management, assessment, and administrative responsibilities leaves little capacity for sustained one-on-one attention. Research documents that

strong teacher-student relationships, frequent feedback, and responsiveness to individual needs are central to student motivation and learning (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012)—conditions that are structurally difficult to provide at classroom scale, and that students furthest behind need most.

Equity and Access to Personalized Attention and Individualized Instruction

Access to individualized academic support has long been stratified by income. Students from higher-income families access private tutoring at far higher rates, deepening achievement gaps (Robinson & Loeb, 2020). The No Child Left Behind Act introduced Supplemental Educational Services (SES) to democratize access: low-income parents could enroll children in state-approved after-school tutoring if their school failed adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years. Participation peaked at approximately 23% of eligible students, and randomized trials found effect sizes ranging from -0.01 to 0.09 standard deviations—near zero on average. The few programs that showed positive impacts required minimum dosage, structured sessions, school-tutor coordination, and experienced tutors (Heinrich et al., 2010).

The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed a significant expansion in public school provision of high-impact tutoring, as district leaders deployed federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to implement accelerated learning programs (Kraft & Falken, 2021). This expansion occurred in the context of a long-running increase in private tutoring, which has grown substantially over the past two decades but remains concentrated in higher-income communities (Kim, Goodman, & West, 2025). High-impact tutoring now operates in approximately 42% of schools nationwide (Institute of Education Sciences, 2025), and more than 30 states have enacted legislation or dedicated programs (National Student Support Accelerator, 2025). Despite ESSER expiration, most of these programs have been sustained through alternative funding.

The Effectiveness of High-Impact Tutoring

This section synthesizes causal evidence on the effects of high-impact tutoring and related models of relationship-based individualized instruction, with attention to the magnitude, consistency, and mechanisms of impacts.

The tutoring research base spans multiple decades, countries, grade levels, and delivery models, and relies heavily on experimental or quasi-experimental designs with standardized outcome measures. This allows direct comparison of effect sizes across tutoring models and against other school-based interventions. Much of the evidence concentrates on early elementary reading and mathematics, where foundational skills are developing and structured small-group instruction is organizationally feasible.

Effects are well established in the early grades. Randomized and quasi-experimental studies of tutoring in kindergarten through third grade consistently show measurable gains in decoding, fluency, language comprehension, and early mathematics. These findings have led multiple states to incorporate structured tutoring as a core component of early literacy initiatives.

Not all tutoring is equally effective. To distinguish effective tutoring from lower-intensity models such as homework help or opt-in academic support, the National Student Support Accelerator (NSSA) uses the term “high-impact tutoring.” Tutoring of this nature is defined by several key characteristics:

- Students are paired with the same trained and coached tutor across sessions;
- Tutoring occurs at least three times per week for an age appropriate amount of time (usually a minimum of 30 minutes) in small groups (one-to-one is optimal, no greater than one-to-four) for at least 10 weeks;
- Tutoring occurs during the school day (including Expanded Learning as long as measures are in place to ensure students in need have access);
- The tutor uses student progress data to inform instruction; and
- The tutor uses high-quality instructional materials and instructional strategies that align with the student’s Tier 1 learning experience (Robinson et al., 2024).

These design features distinguish high-impact tutoring from lower-intensity models. Nickow et al. (2020) estimate a pooled effect size of 0.37 standard deviations across 96 experimental evaluations of tutoring programs and report larger average impacts for tutoring delivered during the school day than after school. High-impact tutoring is structured to ensure participation and sustained support, increasing access for students who might otherwise face barriers to voluntary or opt-in programs (Robinson, Bisht, & Loeb, 2025).

Evidence of Effectiveness. High-impact tutoring has a robust causal evidence base. Six meta-analyses document 3 to 15 months of additional learning gains in reading and mathematics across varied K–12 settings (Baye et al., 2019; Dietrichson et al., 2017, 2021; Fryer, 2017; Neitzel et al., 2021; Nickow et al., 2020; Pellegrini et al., 2021). Figure 1 categorizes these meta-analyses by grade span and subject area. The largest share of evidence is concentrated in early elementary reading, where small-group or one-on-one tutoring consistently produces gains in foundational literacy skills. These findings have contributed to the inclusion of tutoring within state early literacy frameworks.

Longitudinal evidence indicates that tutoring effects can persist beyond the year of implementation. A recent study of small-group mathematics tutoring documents sustained academic gains that persist three and a half years after program completion, indicating that tutoring may alter learning trajectories over time (Finseraas et al., 2024).

Figure 2 compares effect sizes across interventions. Tutoring produces larger impacts than class size reduction and standalone education technology (Krueger, 1999; Lynch et al., 2019; Neitzel et al., 2022; Nickow et al., 2024; Slavin et al., 2009). The individualized and relational features of tutoring account for these differences.

Figure 1.

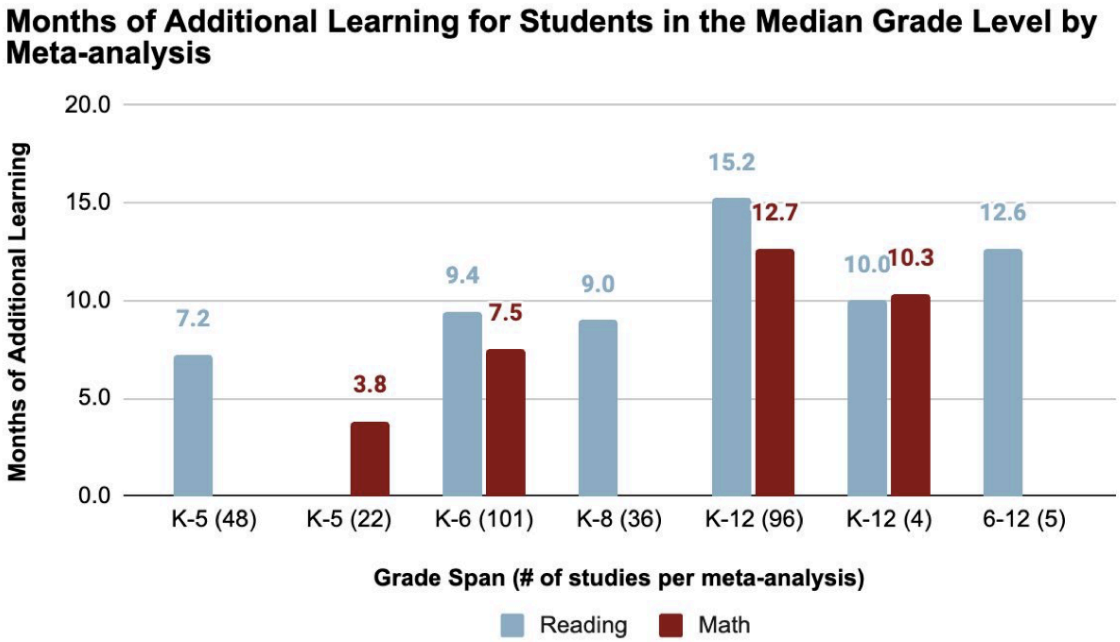
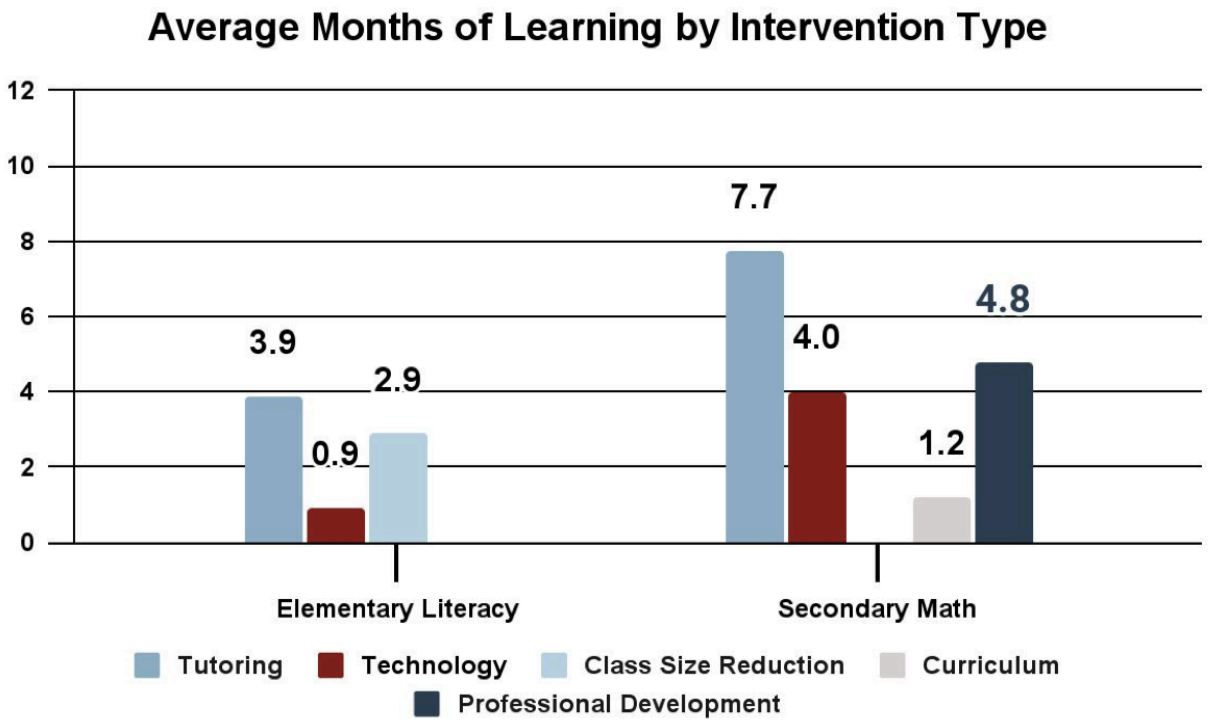

Months of Additional Learning for Students in the Median Grade Level by Meta-analysis
Months of Additional Learning
20.0
15.0
10.0
5.0
0.0
7.2
3.8
9.4
7.5
9.0
15.2
12.7
10.0
10.3
12.6
K-5 (48)
K-5 (22)
K-6 (101)
K-8 (36)
K-12 (96)
K-12 (4)
6-12 (5)
Grade Span (# of studies per meta-analysis)
Reading
Math

Figure 2.



In addition to affecting academic achievement, tutoring has demonstrated positive effects on student attendance. Attendance impacts are informative because they indicate that tutoring influences daily engagement with school as well as skill development. A study of high-impact tutoring in Washington, DC found that students were more likely to attend school on days they had a scheduled tutoring session, with particularly strong effects for middle school students and those with prior chronic absenteeism (Lee, Loeb, & Robinson, 2025).

Human-delivered tutoring has the strongest and most consistent evidence base. Virtual tutoring by human tutors also produces measurable gains, though in-person formats are associated with higher attendance and stronger relationship formation (Robinson et al., 2025; Hashim et al., 2025). Emerging hybrid models that give tutors real-time AI support show early promise for novice tutors, but evidence on fully autonomous AI tutoring is insufficient to support program-level conclusions (Wang et al., 2025).

Given the strength and consistency of the research base, the central policy question concerns how systems structure access to tutoring. California's funding streams and accountability structures create both opportunities and constraints in translating research-based design features into widespread practice.

Mechanisms of Effectiveness: Evidence from experimental and implementation studies identifies several mechanisms through which high-impact tutoring improves student outcomes: individualized instruction, instructional alignment, sustained relational support, and increased productive instructional time. These mechanisms operate under specific design conditions, including sufficient dosage and consistency of delivery.

First, high-impact tutoring enables individualized instruction that is responsive to students' current levels of understanding. Teaching at the right level has strong causal evidence of effectiveness (Banerjee, 2007), and programs that fail to match instruction to students' learning levels produce smaller or null effects (Huffaker et al., 2025). Small group sizes and ongoing assessment allow tutors to adjust pacing, target specific skill gaps, and provide immediate feedback in ways that are difficult to achieve in whole-class settings.

Second, instructional alignment with core classroom content strengthens the effectiveness of tutoring. When tutoring is coordinated with classroom materials and pacing, students receive reinforcement and additional practice on content they are expected to master. Experimental evidence shows that aligned tutoring produces larger learning gains than tutoring delivered with separate materials, with an effect size difference of 0.12 standard deviations (Jackson & Shakeel, 2025). Alignment also reduces fragmentation in students' learning experiences and increases the likelihood that tutoring supports progress in grade-level coursework.

Third, tutoring increases productive instructional time while reducing disruption. Compared to whole-class settings, small-group or one-on-one environments allow for more continuous engagement and fewer behavioral interruptions, increasing the proportion of time students spend actively engaged in learning tasks. This increase in time on task is a key mechanism through which tutoring produces

gains (Guryan et al., 2021). Structured tutoring sessions also provide protected instructional time that is less susceptible to the competing demands that often interrupt classroom instruction.

Fourth, sustained tutor–student relationships support engagement and persistence. Consistent tutors provide continuity, motivation, and accountability, particularly for students who may be disengaged in larger classroom settings. Smaller tutor-to-student ratios are associated with stronger attendance and engagement (Lee, Loeb, & Robinson, 2025), and the combination of personalization and relational continuity appears central to maintaining participation over time.

These mechanisms depend on enabling conditions, particularly sufficient and consistent instructional dosage. While dosage itself does not generate learning, it determines whether the underlying mechanisms, including individualization, alignment, increased time on task, and relational continuity, can operate effectively. Programs with insufficient or inconsistent delivery do not provide enough instructional exposure for these mechanisms to produce measurable gains (Bhatt et al., 2022; Huffaker et al., 2025).

Across studies, effects are largest for students who enter tutoring behind grade level, for those with prior attendance challenges, and for programs closely aligned with core classroom instruction. In elementary schools, high-frequency small-group tutoring is more feasible due to more flexible schedules and existing intervention blocks, making early literacy a particularly strong context for implementation.

Implementation Challenges

Recent studies of tutoring during and since the pandemic highlight gaps between design and implementation. To support the uptake of high-impact tutoring, NSSA developed a set of 27 research-based quality standards (National Student Support Accelerator, 2025). These standards articulate evidence-based design principles; however, in practice, implementation often diverges from these principles. Common implementation challenges include funding, staffing, scheduling, and adherence to dosage (Groom-Thomas et al., 2023; White, Carey, O'Donnell, & Loeb, 2021).

Funding: Tutoring programs require resources to cover the costs of tutors, materials, and administration. Costs typically range from $1,000 to $2,500 per student, though for younger students, short-burst models can be delivered at lower cost (e.g., approximately $450 per student). Funding is typically drawn from a combination of federal, state, and local sources, including Title funds, philanthropic support, and workforce-aligned funding streams such as Federal Work Study, which supports the use of college students as tutors. While tutoring programs expanded under federal ESSER funding, many districts have sustained programs through other sources.

Staffing: While trained educators tend to be the most effective tutors, a wide range of individuals can serve effectively as tutors with appropriate training (Baye et al., 2019). This includes college students, retirees, paraprofessionals, and employee volunteers. Staffing challenges vary by context and can be addressed in two ways: via delivery mode (switching from in-person to virtual) and via recruiting different and/or additional tutor types. In some areas, such as rural communities, the supply of tutors is low. In these contexts, virtual tutors are therefore an effective way to counter limitations. The pool of tutors is no longer limited to a geographic area. Note, however, that emerging research points to stronger efficacy of tutors who are in the same state as the student, which may suggest that when tutors and students share a geographic and/or cultural connection, tutoring is more effective (Robinson, Pollard, Novicoff, White, & Loeb, 2024). For expanding staffing beyond educators, programs can look to paraprofessionals (provided they are given the agency to tutor and are not pulled into other classroom needs), college students (both pre-service educators and students of any major), community volunteers, and parents.

Scheduling: Integrating tutoring into the school day offers clear advantages over after-school programming, including higher attendance, stronger alignment with classroom instruction, and more equitable access. At the same time, it introduces substantial logistical challenges. School schedules operate under multiple competing demands, and allocating time for tutoring requires explicit trade-offs.

Many schools already have intervention blocks or support periods embedded within their schedules, often as part of MTSS structures. These existing blocks present an opportunity to deliver high-impact tutoring, particularly when they are intentionally structured and aligned with Tier I curriculum, which

research suggests can strengthen learning outcomes (Jackson & Shakeel, 2025). However, effective scheduling requires ensuring that tutoring supplements rather than displaces core instruction, especially in the subjects students are working to improve.

These decisions take place within the broader constraint that instructional time is both limited and unevenly allocated across schools (Kraft & Novicoff, 2024). Some schools address this by restructuring master schedules to include dedicated tutoring blocks, though doing so requires substantial planning and coordination. Alternative models attempt to reduce scheduling friction, including short-burst tutoring embedded within classroom instruction for younger students, which eliminates the need for pull-out time (Cortes, Kortecamp, Loeb, & Robinson, 2025). Emerging tools, such as AI-assisted scheduling platforms, may further support schools in navigating these constraints (Lu et al., 2025).

Dosage: Instructional dosage is a central design feature of high-impact tutoring, but its effects depend on the amount of tutoring students actually receive rather than what is scheduled or intended. While standards often define high-impact tutoring in terms of frequent sessions over sustained periods, implementation frequently falls short of these targets. Student absences, school events, testing windows, and tutor availability reduce realized exposure, creating a systematic gap between designed and received dosage.

Recent experimental evidence highlights the consequences of this gap. In randomized evaluations conducted through the Personalized Learning Initiative, Bhatt et al. (2025) document substantial divergence between planned and delivered sessions, with lower realized dosage associated with smaller achievement gains. Similarly, Huffaker et al. (2025) examine two randomized controlled trials of paraprofessional-led tutoring in early literacy and numeracy and report null average intent-to-treat effects in both programs. Implementation data show that students received only a fraction of intended sessions: in numeracy, average receipt was approximately 36 percent of the planned curriculum, and nearly half of students assigned to treatment attended no sessions; in literacy, no school reached 70 percent of the 140-session target.

Variation in received dosage is closely tied to variation in impacts. In the numeracy program, treatment effects increased with school-level average receipt, reaching 0.28 standard deviations at campuses

where students completed roughly 80 percent of intended sessions, while effects at lower dosage levels were near zero. These patterns are consistent with broader meta-analytic evidence indicating that sustained, high-frequency tutoring produces the largest gains, and that diluted implementation attenuates effects.

Dosage is therefore best understood as delivered instructional time rather than program design. Measures based on scheduled sessions systematically overstate students' exposure, and impact estimates depend on whether implementation reaches empirically supported intensity thresholds. Programs designed with nominally sufficient dosage may nonetheless produce limited effects if students do not receive the intended instructional time.

In summary: Implementation failures reduce effectiveness. Meta-analytic work finds that effect sizes decline in larger implementations, with reductions in average dosage and increases in student-tutor ratios explaining a substantial share of that gap (Kraft, Schueler, & Falken, 2025). Maintaining fidelity to core design features is therefore essential to maintaining impact at scale.

State Adoption of High-Impact Tutoring in Early Literacy Policy

Several states have incorporated high-impact tutoring into comprehensive early literacy reform efforts by linking tutoring access to statewide screening systems, literacy benchmarks, and accountability structures. In these contexts, tutoring operates as an intervention mechanism within a defined policy architecture: screening or assessment identifies students below proficiency thresholds; state guidance establishes minimum expectations for instructional intensity; and funding mechanisms support implementation at scale. Early elementary grades have been a focal point of these strategies, reflecting both the developmental salience of foundational reading skills and the organizational feasibility of structured small-group instruction within elementary school schedules.

Louisiana provides a clear example of this integrated approach. Act 771 (2024) requires school-day, high-dosage tutoring for eligible students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Eligibility for early-grade students is tied directly to statewide literacy screener results, creating a formal linkage between assessment and instructional response. The Louisiana Department of Education has issued detailed implementation guidance specifying dosage thresholds, duration requirements, reporting expectations, and allowable funding uses. Tutoring is positioned within the state's broader literacy improvement framework and aligned with screening and progress-monitoring systems. The policy combines centralized expectations regarding instructional intensity with district-level discretion over staffing and operational delivery.

Tennessee has developed a statewide tutoring infrastructure through the Tennessee Accelerating Literacy and Learning Corps (TN ALL Corps). Established in statute and supported through state funding, the program provides high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring to students across the state, with particular emphasis on literacy and mathematics acceleration. The state supplies funding, implementation guidance, and centralized coordination to support districts in adopting research-aligned tutoring models. By building a statewide corps model, Tennessee has reduced local design burden while maintaining consistent expectations regarding dosage and group size.

Arkansas has embedded tutoring within its broader literacy reform agenda under the LEARNS Act. The state established a Literacy Tutoring Grant Fund to expand access to structured literacy tutoring for

students demonstrating reading need. Arkansas has also implemented a state-approved provider system and issued implementation guidance to districts, reducing variability in program design and vendor quality. Funding allocations, provider vetting, and literacy priorities are integrated within a unified reform strategy focused on strengthening foundational reading skills.

Delaware has adopted a statewide high-dosage tutoring initiative that includes an approved vendor list and guidance emphasizing alignment with Tier 1 curriculum and evidence-based literacy practices. The state's approach integrates tutoring into school improvement and curriculum alignment efforts, reinforcing coherence between supplemental instruction and classroom literacy instruction.

Ohio has similarly established a state-approved vendor directory for high-quality tutoring programs and linked tutoring supports to districts identified through early literacy performance indicators. State policy defines criteria for approved tutoring programs and ties funding eligibility to those standards. This quality assurance infrastructure seeks to reduce cross-district variation and align tutoring provision with state literacy priorities.

Texas has incorporated high-impact tutoring guidance within its accelerated instruction framework. Under state policy, students who do not meet assessment benchmarks are entitled to accelerated instruction, and state guidance emphasizes high-impact tutoring characteristics as a preferred delivery model. By connecting tutoring to assessment-based eligibility and compliance requirements, Texas has integrated tutoring within its broader accountability and intervention system.

Across these states, several governance features recur. First, statewide literacy screening or assessment systems provide standardized criteria for identifying students in need of additional instructional intensity. Second, states articulate minimum parameters regarding dosage, duration, group size, or program standards, thereby defining baseline expectations for quality. Third, funding mechanisms, provider vetting systems, or corps models are aligned with these expectations, reinforcing coherence between policy design and implementation. These elements create a structured pathway from identification to intervention and reduce variability in access and program characteristics across districts.

Implementation at scale in early elementary grades is supported by structural features characteristic of elementary schools, including dedicated literacy blocks, intervention periods, and greater flexibility in regrouping students for targeted instruction. These organizational conditions facilitate regular, high-frequency small-group tutoring during the school day and enable alignment with classroom scope and sequence. When tutoring is integrated within established systems and supported by defined implementation standards, it operates as a core instructional strategy within statewide efforts to improve early reading outcomes. While these programs have focused on literacy, the same approach could be applied to math or to other subjects.

Key Findings and Implications

The research base and descriptive evidence presented in this report point to a consistent set of conclusions regarding both the effectiveness of high-impact tutoring and the conditions under which it can be implemented at scale. These findings clarify not only what tutoring can achieve, but the institutional conditions required to realize those effects.

1. Whole-class instruction is not sufficient to address current levels of instructional heterogeneity. Students within classrooms vary substantially in prior achievement and learning needs, and a large share are not meeting grade-level expectations. While whole-class instruction remains central to content delivery and classroom coherence, it offers limited opportunity for sustained individualized feedback and adaptation. As a result, systems require structured mechanisms for delivering additional instructional intensity beyond the core classroom, rather than relying exclusively on within-class differentiation.
2. High-impact tutoring has a well-established causal evidence base. Experimental and quasi-experimental studies conducted across multiple contexts consistently find meaningful positive effects on academic outcomes, with effect sizes large relative to many other school-based interventions. The central policy question is therefore not whether tutoring is effective, but how to organize and deliver it in ways that preserve these effects under typical operating conditions.
3. Effects are contingent on specific program design features. A consistent set of characteristics including frequent sessions, small instructional groups, alignment with core instruction,

data-informed teaching, and continuity in tutor-student relationships, is associated with stronger and more replicable impacts. Program expansion that does not maintain these features should not be expected to yield comparable results, making the distinction between high-impact and lower-intensity models consequential for both implementation and evaluation.

4. Implementation fidelity, particularly instructional dosage, is central to realized impact. Recent large-scale studies document substantial divergence between planned and delivered tutoring, with lower levels of received instructional time associated with attenuated or null effects. Scaling tutoring is therefore primarily an implementation challenge. Systems must ensure consistent delivery through stable scheduling, strong attendance, and monitoring of sessions actually received, rather than those merely scheduled.
5. Delivery during the school day is more reliably associated with participation and instructional alignment. After-school tutoring models face persistent barriers related to voluntary attendance, transportation, and coordination with classroom instruction. In contrast, in-school delivery is associated with higher participation and stronger alignment with curricular pacing. Expanding access for students with the greatest instructional need will likely require prioritizing in-school delivery models, despite the additional organizational complexity they introduce.
6. Existing school-based intervention structures provide a foundation for expansion. Many schools operate small-group, data-driven instructional supports that meet the operational criteria for high-impact tutoring but are not conceptualized or labeled as such. Expansion efforts can therefore build on existing intervention infrastructure, focusing on strengthening alignment with research-based design features rather than creating entirely new programmatic structures.
7. Staffing capacity represents a primary constraint on scale. Across contexts, schools report greater difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified personnel than securing funding. Effective tutoring requires instructional skill and consistency, not simply additional staffing allocations. As a result, policy strategies that focus solely on funding are unlikely to produce substantial expansion without parallel investment in workforce development, training, and staffing models.
8. Conceptual and definitional inconsistency limits system coherence. Variation in how tutoring is defined and understood across schools and districts contributes to inconsistent implementation and under-recognition of existing capacity. Establishing a shared definition of high-impact

tutoring, along with clear quality standards, would support more coherent implementation and facilitate alignment across policy, research, and practice.

Overall, the evidence indicates that high-impact tutoring is a high-leverage strategy for addressing instructional heterogeneity, but that its effectiveness at scale depends on the extent to which systems are able to maintain core design features under real-world implementation conditions.

Tutoring in California: Policy and Implementation Landscape

National Expansion After COVID

When the pandemic exposed and deepened longstanding learning gaps, states and districts across the country turned to high-impact tutoring as one of their primary recovery strategies. Federal stimulus funding, particularly the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds, gave schools unprecedented resources to invest in intensive academic supports, and high-impact tutoring became one of the most visible beneficiaries of that investment. Now, as pandemic-era funding winds down, tutoring is not retreating with it. Increasingly, states and districts are preserving and even expanding their programs because they have seen firsthand what the research has long established: intensive, relationship-based tutoring accelerates student learning in ways that whole-group instruction alone cannot achieve.

National prevalence data from IES's School Pulse Panel reflects this sustained commitment. In June 2025, 42% of public school principals reported their school offers high-impact tutoring (also referred to as high-dosage tutoring), part of a three-year pattern in which prevalence has ranged from 37% to 46% (NCES, 2025).

These figures partly reflect differences in how schools define tutoring rather than changes in adoption alone. Some states—Louisiana, Tennessee, and Texas—have enacted legislation establishing statewide programs and have tied tutoring requirements to third-grade reading promotion policies. Others have left program design to districts, producing variation in vendor arrangements, delivery format (in-person

vs. virtual, school-day vs. after-school), and quality. Organizations such as the National Student Support Accelerator have developed shared frameworks and quality standards to reduce that variation.

California's Policy and Funding Infrastructure

California has no single statewide tutoring system. Tutoring efforts have instead emerged unevenly across the state's more than 1,000 school districts, supported by multiple, often overlapping funding streams and driven largely by local initiative. The primary funding mechanism is the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), enacted in 2013, which distributes approximately 80% of general state funding on a per-student basis with additional resources for high-need populations. Districts document their tutoring investments through Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs), and analysis of 2025–26 LCAPs shows that 80.7% of California school districts now reference tutoring in their strategic plans, a signal of widespread intent, though not yet consistent execution (Burbio, 2025).

Beyond LCFF, several dedicated funding streams support tutoring programs. The Extended Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P), a $4 billion expanded learning program, funds before- and after-school programming for disadvantaged students but is restricted to time outside the regular school day (California Education Code § 46120). The Learning Recovery Emergency Block Grant (LREBG), which allocated $7.9 billion in 2022 for use through 2027–28, explicitly permits individualized and small-group tutoring as an evidence-based use of funds (California Education Code § 43522). For 2025–26, the state mandated $40 million for K–2 reading and dyslexia screening, with intensive supports including high-impact tutoring for students below benchmark (California Budget Act of 2024). State Superintendent Tony Thurmond's proposed "literacy moonshot"—a five-year initiative—would embed high-impact tutoring within a coordinated early literacy strategy (California Department of Education, 2026). The $50 million Learning Acceleration System Grant, philanthropic investments, and municipal initiatives add further resources, though funding flexibility has produced wide variation in how tutoring is defined and implemented across districts.

California's screening policies create a consistent mechanism for identifying students who require additional instructional intensity in the early grades. High-impact tutoring provides a structured

method for delivering that intensity. Aligning tutoring access with screening results allows the state to connect early identification of literacy needs with sustained instructional response. Several states have formalized this linkage within their early literacy frameworks.

California's tutoring landscape is also shaped by regional and organizational activity. Convenings led by the Bay Area Tutoring Association and joint efforts involving Results for America, the National Student Support Accelerator, the California State Board of Education, the Department of Education Expanded Learning Division, and the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence have created forums for shared learning and implementation guidance. County offices of education have expanded technical assistance in related areas. These efforts contribute to emerging professional networks and shared infrastructure that influence how tutoring is structured across districts.

Funding flexibility has produced wide variation in how tutoring is defined, scheduled, and implemented. Alignment with research-based design features varies considerably across California's more than 1,000 districts.

Implications for Implementation Capacity

Despite a supportive policy and funding environment, implementation challenges remain. Understanding of high-impact tutoring varies across schools and districts. Some leaders are still clarifying how it differs from general tutoring or homework help and which design features are essential for effectiveness. In addition, many districts are working through the practical details of how to design, staff, schedule, and sustain programs that meet high-impact criteria. These operational decisions require coordination across staffing, scheduling, curriculum alignment, and progress monitoring systems.

School systems across the country have long recognized that students require varying levels and types of support to succeed academically. In response, districts have adopted a range of differentiation strategies designed to provide more individualized, relationship-based instruction beyond what a single classroom teacher can offer during whole-group instruction. In California, as nationally, the most comprehensive and widely adopted framework for this work is Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS),

which provide a systematic structure for delivering evidence-based support based on students' academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support as the Dominant Framework

The MTSS framework comprises four essential components: (1) universal screening to identify students requiring additional support; (2) a multi-level prevention system that provides integrated, evidence-based interventions; (3) progress monitoring using valid and reliable assessment tools; and (4) team-based data analysis to inform instructional decisions (Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports, 2023). Within this system, students receive "just-in-time" academic support across three tiers: Tier I provides universal supports for all students through grade-level instruction; Tier II offers strategic support for identified students who need targeted skill development to access grade-level instruction; and Tier III delivers intensive support for students needing more significant intervention or those not responding adequately to Tier II supports. It is important to clarify that MTSS is designed to meet the needs of all learners and is not a special education initiative, though it can complement special education services and inform referrals and IEP development.

Beyond MTSS, schools employ other differentiation approaches including within-class and between-class ability grouping, technology-based assessments and adaptive learning platforms, and after-school tutoring or homework help programs. While well-intentioned, these programs vary considerably in quality. Technology-based interventions often lack the relationship-based component that research suggests is essential for student engagement and learning (Kraft & Falken, 2021), and after-school programs frequently suffer from inconsistent attendance, lack of alignment with classroom instruction, insufficient tutor training, and high student-to-tutor ratios that prevent truly individualized support.

The Implementation Gap

The awareness and knowing gaps described above manifest most visibly in the distance between what MTSS frameworks call for and what schools are actually delivering. Among LEA leaders surveyed prior

to the design sprint, not a single respondent rated their Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention supports as highly satisfying. More than a third rated Tier 2 as "slightly" or "not at all" satisfying, and half said the same about Tier 3. This finding is striking given how central these tiers are to the MTSS model. Implementation challenges cited by respondents include insufficient time for tiered interventions during the school day, lack of appropriately trained personnel to deliver intensive supports, inadequate progress monitoring systems, and limited coordination between classroom instruction and supplemental services.

This implementation gap identifies a clear area for system-level improvement. The MTSS framework is in place in most districts, and in many cases funding exists. The gap is in execution: fewer than half of district leaders surveyed reported offering tutoring that meets high-impact design criteria before the sprint, yet 90 percent expressed intent to integrate high-impact tutoring into their MTSS systems after participating. Districts need practical infrastructure and site-level leadership capacity to act on that intent—not additional persuasion of its value.

Implementation in Practice: Evidence from California Principals

Principal interviews reveal three distinct patterns: schools with established high-impact tutoring programs that principals plan to sustain; after-school tutoring and homework help programs with persistent access and quality problems; and intervention structures that meet the operational definition of high-impact tutoring but that principals do not label as such. Across all three, implementation quality varies in ways that directly affect student access and alignment with research-supported design principles.

Strong Implementation and Commitment to Continuation in Established High-Impact Tutoring Programs

Approximately one-third of principals we interviewed described tutoring programs closely aligned with the high-impact tutoring model. These programs operate during the school day, serve students

identified through diagnostic assessments, employ trained staff, and maintain consistent schedules over extended periods. Notably, many principals described these structures as "intervention" instead of as "tutoring," though the operational features match research-supported design principles.

A northern California elementary principal described their comprehensive approach: "We have a teacher on special assignment for intervention. We have highly trained paraprofessionals who have been kind of deemed intervention paraprofessionals, and they've been doing this for a very long time." The program serves approximately 75 students—roughly 20% of their student body—with students "selected based on diagnostic assessments and progress monitoring." The principal emphasized the importance of skilled staffing and strategic scheduling: "It starts at 8:45 and it ends about 1:30, and it's planned with grade levels so that students are being taken during times that aren't pulling them from core curriculum."

This careful attention to scheduling reflects a key design principle: tutoring is more beneficial when it supplements, rather than replaces, essential classroom instruction. Multiple principals noted the challenge of fitting high-impact tutoring into the school day without compromising other instructional priorities, which often limits the number of students who can be served and the subjects that can be addressed. The elementary principal quoted above explained: "I'm lacking in something similar that would support mathematics. I would need a program, I would need additional staffing, and I would need to be very creative in how to fit that within the school day. Because typically a student who needs reading high-impact tutoring probably also needs math high-impact tutoring. We typically see the need is dual."

Principals operating established tutoring programs expressed remarkably strong commitment to continuation, grounded in visible results from student achievement data. When asked about the likelihood of continuing their program next year, a rural district principal stated emphatically: "100%, it's something that will never go away with our district. When we look at the before and the after with that student and the progress that they've made, you're always getting your bang for your buck as long as the teachers are willing to do it." Another principal concurred: "All 100%. Our districts are very much data driven, and the data really supports it. When we look at the progress that students have made, I think it's something that will never go away."

This sustainability stems from integration into core operations, not reliance on temporary funding. Schools with effective programs fund tutoring through general funds or stable categorical sources. One principal described the deliberate approach to pandemic relief funds: "We tried very hard not to hire people using COVID dollars because we knew that the COVID dollars were going away. You don't want to hire somebody only to unhire them two years later." Avoiding structural dependence on one-time funding is a defining feature of programs that persist.

Staffing configurations vary but share common features: consistent adult-student relationships, sufficient training for tutors, and appropriate student-to-tutor ratios. Beyond specialized intervention teachers and trained paraprofessionals, some schools leverage partnerships with local universities. A central California principal described their arrangement: "We partnered with the local college here, Cal Poly, and we have part of a program called College Core, where we have six college core candidates who come over, earn hours, and actually get paid for those hours to earn their credential. They have been helping with these literacy centers."

After-School Tutoring and Homework Help have Persistent Challenges with Access and Quality

In contrast to during-school intervention programs, after-school tutoring faces two interconnected problems: difficulty recruiting the students who need support most, and lack of targeted, skills-based instruction. These challenges appear particularly acute at the middle and high school levels.

A middle school principal described their after-school program's limitations candidly: "We have an after-school program that does probably about 50 kids that stick around. It's through the college, but it's Teach America. I wouldn't say it's quality. It's more of like just I'll help you with your homework and keep them going to finish their homework. But there's no filling any gaps. There's no modifying curriculum to find out where a kid stands. It's more of just after school fun."

Even when schools offer more structured after-school tutoring, participation patterns create a challenge: students who need help the most are often least likely to attend. An elementary principal explained: "In middle school, we found it's not as impactful. The kids that are willing to come don't

need to come, right? So we can't wrangle the ones that really need the support. They don't want to stick around after school." Another principal elaborated on the dynamics: "What I would want is for kids to stick around three days a week. But we can't get parent cooperation to help us with that. They don't want their kids hanging out at school any further than what they have to be. The kids that we would like to focus on are the kids that are two and three grade levels below, and we would like to recruit them, but the parents are not into it."

Transportation emerged as a critical and often insurmountable barrier to after-school participation, particularly in rural communities. One principal explained how rising costs eliminated a key support: "We used to be able to run the buses, and we would have a bus that took them home after the tutoring. But because transportation costs are so much, we can't offer that service anymore at 4:05. So it has to be the parent either picks them up at 4:05 right when it gets over, or if they have them signed up for [the after-school program], they can go there and the parent picks them up sometime between 4:05 and 6:00. That's the biggest challenge we've had. Transportation definitely becomes an issue because some of the students that you really wish could come, it's transportation."

For teachers willing to provide after-school tutoring, compensation and workload become significant concerns. Principals noted difficulty recruiting teachers for after-school hours even when stipends are available. One principal explained: "The challenge is getting somebody who has the time and wants the extra hours to do that." Another emphasized: "Honestly, personnel—finding the people willing to stick around for the half hour, 45 minutes after school. I'm fortunate in that I have the funding to provide that. My budget allows me to do so, but it's having people, finding teachers that are willing to stick around."

The Intervention-Tutoring Recognition Gap is a Missed Connection for Supporting Students

Perhaps the most striking pattern in our interviews was how many principals described practices meeting the operational definition of high-impact tutoring without initially recognizing them as such. When presented with our formal definition—tutoring three or more times per week from a consistent

tutor in groups of four or fewer students—multiple principals paused and reconsidered their initial response. One elementary principal's reaction exemplifies this pattern: "High impact tutoring to me, sounds a little bit like intervention."

This recognition gap has direct consequences for implementation quality and scale. Schools delivering strong during-school intervention are often not drawing on the broader research base on high-impact tutoring, and therefore miss opportunities to strengthen their models through evidence-based design features. The research literature specifies four key elements: consistent adult relationships that build trust and motivation; multiple sessions per week over extended periods to provide adequate dosage; instruction driven by ongoing assessment; and use of high-quality instructional materials (Robinson et al., 2024). Most schools implement some but not all of these features.

The terminology gap also distorts resource allocation and policy conversations. When state or district leaders discuss “tutoring,” principals often exclude their intervention programs from that category—understating existing capacity and creating missed opportunities for coordination. When new funding targets “tutoring,” schools with strong intervention programs frequently do not recognize themselves as eligible recipients.

Several principals explicitly noted discovering the connection during our interview. After describing their literacy center model serving students in small groups multiple times per week with trained staff, one principal concluded: "So, yeah, we have our literacy center model. So we do our literacy centers in small group." When asked directly about high-impact tutoring, the principal initially said no, then revised: "One on one, no. Small groups—yes."High-impact tutoring, by definition, includes group sizes of up to four students per tutor, meaning this principal's literacy center model qualified all along.

Resource Constraints and Implementation Barriers

Across all implementation models, principals identified personnel recruitment and training as the most significant barrier to expanding or improving tutoring. Even schools with adequate funding struggle to find qualified staff. One elementary principal stated bluntly: "I have the funding. I have the space. The logistical aspects are covered, so the logistics are not a problem. The support would be in finding

people to do so, qualified people to do so, finding people that really understand how to teach. Because the students that are going to be there in the intervention are students that really need support. So it's got to be someone that understands how to provide it."

This emphasis on instructional skill reflects principals' recognition that effective tutoring requires more than subject matter knowledge or good intentions. Students receiving intervention are those who have struggled to learn through standard classroom instruction and therefore require particularly skilled teaching to fill learning gaps and build foundational skills. One principal explained their staffing priorities: "Skilled and adequate staffing, a quality program, and the ability to figure out how to do that high-impact tutoring during the school day so that students aren't missing core curriculum. All those things."

Access to high-quality curricula and instructional materials also varies substantially. Schools with strong programs emphasized the value of evidence-based resources that provide both structure and diagnostic tools. A middle school principal described their experience with a new mathematics program: "Next Gen Math—we brought that on board last year. You can be more prescriptive with it, and you can get instant feedback. We did our diagnostic tests, and it tells you what their percentage is on standards taught, and what their percentage is overall. It gives you better insight into what you've already taught them, how you need to go back and readdress it and spiral back to it, and it gives you resources in order to do it."

Funding sustainability remains a persistent concern, particularly as ESSER dollars expire. Principals whose programs rely on general funds expressed confidence in continuation, while those dependent on categorical or time-limited grants acknowledged greater uncertainty. Several principals noted strategic decisions to avoid creating positions dependent on temporary funding. Schools also navigate complex regulations around categorical funding that can limit flexibility. One principal explained: "We use ELO-P funds. Those are the funds that we're using to timesheet and pay teachers who are interested in doing tutoring groups. I would love to have the flexibility to use those funds in other ways, but I don't."

Implications for Practice and Policy

Interview data show California schools operating across a wide range: from research-aligned tutoring programs serving students during the school day, to after-school homework help with no diagnostic targeting, to intervention structures that meet high-impact tutoring criteria but are not recognized as such. Four implications follow.

First, significant capacity already exists in schools delivering high-quality during-school intervention, but this capacity is routinely excluded from policy conversations focused narrowly on the term "tutoring." Existing intervention blocks, small-group instruction, and targeted supports often incorporate the core elements of high-impact tutoring. Expansion efforts can formalize and strengthen that infrastructure rather than build from scratch. Technical assistance focused on scheduling, instructional alignment, and dosage monitoring can connect existing practice to research-supported models.

Second, after-school tutoring faces structural barriers—transportation costs and voluntary attendance—that incremental improvements cannot solve. Students who most need support are least likely to stay after school. During-school models achieve higher participation and stronger instructional alignment, but require different funding mechanisms and staffing than after-school programs. Policymakers expanding access face a direct trade-off between the broader nominal reach of after-school programs and the more reliable actual access achieved through during-school delivery.

Third, personnel recruitment and training are the binding constraint for most schools, even those with adequate funding. Additional dollars for tutoring do not translate into more students served without concurrent investment in workforce development, compensation structures, and alternative staffing pipelines such as trained paraprofessionals and university partnerships.

Finally, the gap between research terminology and practitioner language suggests the need for stronger knowledge translation and clearer shared definitions. Schools implementing effective intervention strategies may not be drawing from the broader tutoring research base or connecting with other schools facing similar implementation challenges, in part because key terms are used inconsistently across contexts. Establishing a common, statewide definition of high-impact tutoring would provide a

shared reference point for districts, researchers, and technical assistance providers. Professional learning opportunities, communities of practice, and targeted technical assistance could then build on that shared language, helping schools strengthen their approaches through evidence-based refinement while also contributing their implementation experience to inform research and policy.

Evidence from California District Leaders

The following section draws on two datasets: 1) insights from interviews with a second set of 94 district leaders around mathematics differentiation and 2) pre- and post-sprint surveys completed by LEA leaders participating in the 2025 statewide tutoring design sprint. This section will describe how districts approach differentiation within the MTSS system and the design and development of tutoring programs, including how district-level planning interacts with school-level implementation.

The district leader interviews, design sprint surveys, and principal interviews provide distinct perspectives on tutoring implementation. Principal interviews describe how tutoring operates within schools, including scheduling, student identification, and coordination with classroom instruction. District-level data document system design decisions, including staffing pipelines, curriculum alignment, funding strategy, and cross-site sustainability. The design sprint captures LEAs during active program development, offering insight into implementation planning processes rather than retrospective descriptions of established models.

District Leader Interviews

Interviews with 94 California district leaders reveal a consistent pattern: aspiration for systematic mathematics differentiation paired with candid acknowledgment that implementation lags behind. Small-group instruction is the most commonly cited goal, but what that means in practice varies widely—from brief informal reteaching to structured, data-driven cross-classroom regrouping. Leaders openly acknowledged the gap: one superintendent stated flatly, “We use the word differentiation. We don’t actually do it.” Another reflected: “We jumped into Tier 2 before we started to really address Tier 1. And as we quickly learned, you can’t solve a Tier 1 problem with Tier 2 intervention.” Roughly

one-third of respondents either reported no formal differentiation expectations or described implementation as inconsistent across their schools.

A notable pattern is leaders' difficulty distinguishing core instructional differentiation from supplemental intervention. When asked about in-class practices, many respondents blended Tier 1 strategies with pull-out programs, push-in support, and technology-based intervention. Several districts cited adaptive technology platforms—most commonly iReady, IXL, and ALEKS—as their primary differentiation mechanism. Leaders themselves questioned the approach: "Kids probably do a ton of math on the computer in elementary and middle, which I'm not necessarily a huge fan of just because it hasn't proven necessarily to be super effective. But it's a way for the teachers to feel like it's differentiated."

Despite this fragmentation, nearly three-quarters of districts (69 of 94) reported having supplemental structures for mathematics support beyond core instruction. These structures go by a remarkable proliferation of locally invented names — "What I Need" time, "walk to learn," "math lab," "flex blocks," "academic coaching," "Bobcat Academy," and "Sting sessions," among many others — but share common functional features. The most prevalent model is pull-out intervention staffed by credentialed teachers: interventionists, education specialists, or teachers on special assignment were by far the most common providers of additional support, selected by 50 of 67 respondents to that question. Paraprofessionals play a secondary role, and dedicated tutors are nearly absent from the landscape. The small number of districts using external providers described ad hoc arrangements with community organizations, volunteers, and, in one case, a PTA-funded parent with a teaching credential providing 1:1 and 3:1 support on specific math concepts.

Critically, no district leader used the term "high-impact tutoring" or referenced the evidence base defining it. Yet several districts described structures that closely match its core features — small groups, data-driven identification, trained instructors, and consistent frequency. This mirrors the trend we saw in the principal interviews. One district pulls the bottom 10–15% of each grade level for 40 minutes of daily intervention with a dedicated math teacher on assignment. Another provides Tier 2 support in which students "get 20 to 30 minutes, 4 to 5 times a week, depending on the level of need," delivered by paraprofessionals trained in a dedicated intervention curriculum and identified through universal

screening three times per year. A third district runs ELOP-funded after-school tutoring with credentialed teachers for 3rd through 6th graders, one hour per session, three days per week, focused on specific identified standards — and reports roughly 80% attendance, aided by providing transportation. These districts have, in effect, built high-impact tutoring programs without the label or the framework.

Many districts, however, default to after-school tutoring funded through the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELOP), which presents structural challenges. Because participation is voluntary, attendance is inconsistent, and several leaders noted that quality suffers. As one superintendent acknowledged: "I know our extended learning program — we have probably about half of our students staying for that after school program, so those students are automatically getting tutoring. It's just not the best quality." Others flagged alignment problems: "The tutoring that you offer after school has to be linked to what you're doing in school," one leader relayed as a persistent concern from teachers and families. Multiple districts also reported that their intervention staff focus primarily on literacy, with math receiving secondary attention or being relegated to after-school time entirely: "Given the need to focus on ELA during the school day with our interventionists… we leverage our ELOP funding to bring teachers in to provide after-school intervention, and that's typically all focused on math."

Middle school emerged as a consistent weak point. Elementary schools generally have more scheduling flexibility for intervention blocks, but the departmentalized middle school schedule creates a recurring tension between offering enrichment electives that keep students engaged and carving out time for math support. One leader captured the tradeoff: "We needed to engage kids back into school. And so we've got to figure out, how can we engage kids in school and give them these electives that are making them want to come to school and also supplement our math program." Some districts have created flex periods, advisory blocks, or math-specific support classes at the middle school level, but these are inconsistently implemented and often contested. Where during-the-school-day intervention is unavailable, middle schools lean most heavily on technology-based solutions — the very approach leaders themselves acknowledge may be insufficient.

These findings show California districts independently building structures that incorporate core elements of effective tutoring—data-driven identification, small groups, qualified instructors—but without a shared framework that defines how those elements work together. A common statewide

definition of high-impact tutoring, linked to existing district practices and accompanied by clear quality benchmarks, would create consistency in how tutoring is structured and measured across districts.

LEA Leader Design Sprint Surveys

To capture districts during active program development rather than fully established implementation, we draw on survey data from an eight-week design sprint. Twenty-three school districts and charter schools, along with seven county offices of education, participated in teams of two to five members. Because these teams sought technical assistance to design or strengthen tutoring programs, they represent a self-selected group and do not constitute a representative sample of California districts.

Pre-Sprint Conditions: Pre-sprint responses (N=27 of 30 teams) describe substantial instructional need paired with uneven intervention infrastructure. Half of the respondents estimated that more than 40 percent of their students required support beyond regular classroom instruction to access grade-level content, with eight respondents placing that figure above 60 percent.

Respondents reported widespread dissatisfaction with their existing tiered supports. Nearly half rated their Tier 2 supports (41%) and their Tier 3 supports (52%) as slightly or not at all satisfying. Leaders cited inconsistency across sites, unclear definitions of Tier 2 practice, after-school scheduling that constrained access, and staffing ratios that limited individualized instruction. Notably, several described a reliance on special education referral pathways due to the absence of intensive general education interventions.

Baseline knowledge of high-impact tutoring design features, data practices, and evidence-based spending strategies was limited; roughly 85% of responses related to these three areas indicated the respondent had a less than significant understanding. While roughly half reported offering high-impact tutoring at baseline, scheduling patterns reflected a heavy reliance on expanded learning time, with over 80 percent indicating that at least some tutoring occurred during this time. LEA leaders identified training and materials as the most frequent implementation challenges, followed by staffing and funding .

Post-Sprint Updates: Eleven of the original 21 districts and all 7 county offices submitted post-sprint surveys (N=18). Despite the sample attrition, the results provide directional information on the impact of structured program development. Following the sprint, 12 of the 18 responding teams reported moving into active implementation, and nearly all (94 percent) expressed confidence in launching or expanding high-impact tutoring within the following year. Just over half planned to rely primarily on internal staff—most commonly teachers and paraprofessionals—while the remainder considered external vendors, frequently requesting ongoing training and coaching support.

Nearly all respondents indicated plans to integrate tutoring within existing MTSS structures, most often through Tier 2 and Tier 3 systems, LCAP goals, and English Learner supports. While state funding sources (such as LCFF and ELO-P) predominated their financial planning, several respondents raised concerns about long-term sustainability.

These survey responses document districts with high levels of perceived student need, uneven intervention infrastructure, and active efforts to clarify implementation decisions. The findings highlight the value of technical assistance while describing program development in progress, rather than stable systemwide implementation.

Implementation Examples Across California Contexts

Three districts—Oakland Unified, Santa Ana Unified, and Los Angeles Unified—illustrate different implementation approaches within California's decentralized system. These case studies were selected based on geographic diversity, variations in provider type, and their unique uses of funding streams. We intentionally omitted districts participating in the design sprint, as those districts are still in the early design phase. Instead, the profiles below represent districts that have moved beyond initial planning into active implementation across one or more school years.

Methodologically, these case studies rely primarily on a desk review of official district documentation—such as Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs)—and publicly available reports. As such, they reflect district-reported programmatic structures, funding strategies, and stated goals rather than independently evaluated implementations or causal impact studies. They are

included here to serve as illustrative examples of how different theoretical design models and funding mechanisms are being operationalized on the ground.

These districts represent three distinct archetypes of California tutoring, providing a diverse look at how varied resources are leveraged. Oakland Unified provides a compelling example of a model that evolved from a community-driven pilot into a robust, district-wide system. While local philanthropic partnerships and community initiatives like Oakland REACH were foundational to its start, the district has since dramatically expanded its programming to cover a wider range of grade levels and subjects, including a significant shift into mathematics. Most notably, Oakland has embraced in-school-day delivery, a strategy most closely aligned with high-impact tutoring research. In contrast, Santa Ana Unified represents contractual innovation through its pioneering use of Outcomes-Based Contracting (OBC), which drives vendor accountability by tying ELO-P resources to specific student growth goals. Finally, Los Angeles Unified illustrates a model of high-impact tutoring at scale, managing a massive rollout that prioritizes high-need learners through a multi-provider delivery system. This effort is uniquely supported by a braiding of ELO-P, federal resources, and legal settlement funds from *Shaw v. LAUSD*.

Case Study 1 | Oakland Unified School District

From Community Pilot to Systemic Integration: Scaling During School Tutoring via Philanthropy and State Funding

Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) serves 33,970 students. The student body is 48.2% Latino, 19.4% African American, 11.7% White, 9.5% Asian, 7.0% multi-ethnic (two or more races), 0.8% Pacific Islander, 0.5% Filipino, and 0.3% Native American; 81.4% of students qualify for free or

reduced-price school meals, and one in three students are English learners (Oakland Unified School District [OUSD], 2025). On the 2024 California School Dashboard, OUSD's overall performance in both English language arts and mathematics was at the Yellow level, with Red status for English learners and long-term English learners in both subjects and for Latino students in English language arts; African American students, foster youth, homeless students, and students with disabilities were at the Orange level across both subjects (OUSD, 2025).

OUSD positions tutoring as a central element of its district-wide improvement strategy, embedding tutoring within its Tier 2 and Tier 3 academic support systems across both literacy and mathematics. What began in 2021 as a K–2 early literacy tutoring initiative has expanded to encompass secondary literacy tutoring in middle and high schools, high-dosage 1:1 tutoring, and elementary math tutoring—spanning in-person and virtual modalities and drawing on both district-employed and community-trained tutors (Jochim et al., 2023; OUSD, 2025).

Funding for these tutoring efforts draws on multiple sources. The district's Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) allocates ongoing LCFF Supplemental and Concentration grant funds to support tutoring positions across literacy and math. In addition, the district is using one-time Learning Recovery Emergency Block Grant (LREBG) funds available over the 2022–23 through 2027–28 period. These funds include $8.2 million for literacy tutors and Literacy Teachers on Special Assignment at schools with Low or Very Low ELA performance on the California School Dashboard, and an additional $984,768 for math tutors at schools with Very Low math performance (OUSD, 2025). Philanthropic investment has been substantial: in 2024, the Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation committed $25 million over five years to provide one-on-one professional literacy tutoring for approximately 10,000 OUSD elementary students reading two or more grade levels behind (Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation, 2024). This combination of public and philanthropic funding reflects a strategy of integrating tutoring into core improvement planning while leveraging external partnerships—including with The Oakland REACH, a grassroots parent advocacy organization, and FluentSeeds, a literacy training nonprofit—to expand staffing and program capacity.

For K-2 students at Tier 2, Oakland Unified's early literacy tutors work alongside classroom teachers to provide 30 minutes of differentiated, small-group instruction daily. The district also recruited community members through The Oakland REACH's Literacy Liberator Fellowship program to deliver tutoring, and CRPE's evaluation found these community-trained tutors produced literacy gains comparable to those of classroom teachers (Jochim et al., 2023; Jochim & Daramola, 2023).

For K-2 students at Tier 3, virtual, high-dosage, 1:1 literacy tutoring is provided through external providers. With funding from the Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation, OUSD piloted this model at 18 elementary schools in spring 2024, serving nearly 600 students in partnership with three providers: Hoot, Ignite Reading, and OpenLiteracy (Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation, 2024). In 2024-25, the district expanded the program to 33 schools, with plans to scale to all elementary schools in 2025-26 (OUSD, 2025). An evaluation by CRPE found tutored students gained the equivalent of 1.3 additional months of learning, and students who received 15 or more hours of tutoring showed gains of 1.6 months (Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2025).

Oakland has also extended its tutoring model into mathematics. The 2025-26 LCAP allocates funding for site-based elementary math tutors using LREBG funds (OUSD, 2025). In partnership with The Oakland REACH, the district launched the Math Liberator program (MathBOOST), which recruits and trains parents and community members as math tutors for students in Grades 3-5, following the same community-based pipeline established through the Literacy Liberator model (Napolitano, 2024). The district has noted, however, that limited coaching and professional learning for elementary math tutors has been an area of ineffectiveness, and plans to partner with Blueprint to provide ongoing coaching for math tutors in 2025-26 (OUSD, 2025).

Oakland illustrates an approach to tutoring as a targeted, tiered intervention embedded within existing student support infrastructure, and one that leverages external partnerships. The district's trajectory, from a small community-driven literacy pilot in 2021 to a multi-tiered system spanning literacy and math, elementary and secondary, in-person and virtual modalities, demonstrates both the potential and the complexity of building tutoring at scale within a large urban district.

Case Study 2 | Santa Ana Unified School District

Maximizing Expanded Learning Time Through Contractual Innovation

Santa Ana Unified School District (SAUSD) serves approximately 38,000 students. Approximately 96% of students are Hispanic/Latino, with 2% Asian and 2% other racial/ethnic groups. Roughly

39% of students are English learners, with Spanish, Vietnamese, and Khmer among the most common home languages, and approximately 85% of the student population comes from low-income families (SAUSD, 2025). On the 2024 California School Dashboard, SAUSD's overall performance in English language arts and mathematics both remained at the Orange level, with persistent Red status for students with disabilities, foster youth, and homeless youth in both subjects (SAUSD, 2025).

SAUSD has leveraged California's Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P) funding to build a literacy-focused tutoring initiative for its most vulnerable students, positioning tutoring within broader extended-day and extended-year learning structures. In 2023, the district identified that nearly 3,000 of its highest-need students—English learners, students experiencing homelessness, and foster youth—were scoring below the 40th percentile on NWEA reading assessments, and allocated $3 million in ELO-P funding to strengthen academic supports (Center for Outcomes Based Contracting, 2026).

Rather than a traditional fee-for-service model, SAUSD partnered with the Center for Outcomes Based Contracting (OBC) to structure contracts that tied 55% of provider payments directly to student outcomes on three assessments: NWEA MAP Growth Reading, the Basic Phonics Skills Test (BPST), and grade-level reading fluency benchmarks (Center for OBC, 2026). The Expanded Learning department launched the initiative targeting literacy for students in grades 3–5 at two elementary schools (SAUSD, 2024).

The 2023–24 pilot year illustrates both the promise and the implementation challenges of embedding tutoring within ELO-P structures. SAUSD initially planned to serve 1,500 students but encountered significant barriers, including limited provider staffing, California's fingerprinting and background check requirements for remote tutors, and difficulties coordinating tutoring schedules within the existing expanded learning programming. These challenges delayed the start from fall 2023 to January 2024, reducing the pilot to 42 students at two schools (Center for OBC, 2026). Rather than viewing the reduced scope as a failure, the district treated it as an intensive learning opportunity, convening bi-weekly improvement meetings that brought together leaders from the Expanded Learning, Research & Evaluation, and Teaching & Learning departments alongside providers to troubleshoot issues like attendance data discrepancies and session scheduling conflicts in real time (Center for OBC, 2026).

Despite the compressed timeline, the pilot showed promising early results. Two-thirds of participating students met at least one contracted outcome in growth, proficiency, or fluency, with more than half demonstrating significant gains on NWEA MAP. Roughly one in four reached

phonics proficiency and nearly one in five met grade-level fluency targets—notable given how far below benchmark the students began (Center for OBC, 2026). Students also maintained attendance rates of 89–90% at the two pilot schools, a level of engagement the district attributed in part to deliberate investment in family outreach and relationship-building (SAUSD, 2024; Center for OBC, 2026).

In 2024–25, SAUSD scaled the program from 2 schools to 27 and from 42 to 1,152 students, bringing on two providers—Air Tutors and Littera Education—and incorporating operational lessons from the pilot around staffing timelines, credentialing logistics, and family communication (Center for OBC, 2026). The district's 2025–26 LCAP reports that over 1,100 students participated in high-impact tutoring through Expanded Learning that year (SAUSD, 2025). At scale, 72% of students met at least one contracted outcome, program-wide attendance was 78%, and tutor-student consistency—a key element of high-impact tutoring design—reached 89% (Center for OBC, 2026).

Family engagement was central to the program's design. SAUSD used ELO-P funds to host a culminating literacy celebration in partnership with the Santa Ana Public Library's Knowledge Mobile, and encouraged parents to record video testimonials in Spanish sharing their children's progress. These community-facing efforts helped generate trust and interest from additional schools seeking to join the program the following year (Center for OBC, 2026). This investment in family partnership reflects broader district priorities; SAUSD stations full-time Family and Community Engagement (FACE) liaisons at every school site as part of its commitment to embedding family voice across the system (SAUSD, 2025).

Santa Ana's approach illustrates how ELO-P funding can serve as a viable platform for tutoring expansion when paired with outcomes-based accountability structures. At the same time, the district's experience surfaces the operational complexities—provider onboarding, state background check requirements, scheduling within extended learning structures, and the time needed to build assessment-aligned data systems—that districts must navigate to align extended learning models with the intensity and consistency emphasized in high-impact tutoring research.

Case Study 3 | Los Angeles Unified School District

High-Impact Tutoring at Scale: Prioritizing High-Need Learners Through

Multi-Provider Delivery

Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the second-largest school district in the United States, serves over 516,000 K-12 students across more than 1,000 schools and educational centers (LAUSD, 2025c). Approximately 84% of students are either eligible for free and reduced-price meals, are English Learners, or are in the foster care system. The student body is 73.1% Latino, 9.9% White, 7.1% Black/African American, 3.6% Asian, and 1.8% Filipino, with 83,923 students learning to speak English proficiently (LAUSD, 2025c). On the 2024 California School Dashboard, LAUSD achieved Yellow performance levels in English language arts, mathematics, chronic absenteeism, and English Learner Progress, with Green in college/career readiness (45.4% of graduates prepared) and Blue—the highest level—in both graduation rate (87.0%) and suspension rate (0.4%), marking the first time in the district's history that no All Students indicator fell in the Red or Orange range (Blume, 2024; LAUSD, 2025c).

LAUSD operates a multi-provider tutoring system, contracting with external organizations to deliver targeted high-impact intervention for students most in need. This system is sustained by a braiding of state and local resources. The district's 2025–26 Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P) budget allocates $50.0 million specifically to high-dosage tutoring, part of a total $612.3 million ELO-P investment (LAUSD, 2025b). To provide deeper support for high-need campuses, the district leverages Equity Multiplier Funding—a state allocation for schools with high "nonstability" and socioeconomic disadvantage—to provide high-frequency literacy tutoring during and after school (LAUSD, 2025c). Furthermore, schools utilize discretionary Student Equity Needs Index (SENI) funds to customize interventions and staffing according to local student priorities. All high-dosage tutoring sessions, whether in-person or virtual, take place on campus in small groups of three to five students, at least three times per week, with sessions typically lasting 30 minutes depending on the student's age (LAUSD, n.d.-a).

LAUSD uses a structured framework to prioritize students for tutoring who are not already receiving other interventions. Eligibility is primarily based on academic performance, such as scoring below benchmark on DIBELS (K–2), i-Ready, or the Smarter Balanced Assessment, and receiving grades of D or F in core secondary courses. Across all levels, the district prioritizes high-need populations, including English Learners, students with disabilities, foster youth, and homeless students. Generally, students in the lowest performance bands are first referred to locally designed school-level interventions (often funded via SENI) before being assigned to high-dosage tutoring. For the youngest learners (K–1), the district specifically prioritizes in-person tutoring over virtual formats (LAUSD, n.d.-b).

Additionally, in September 2025, a group of parents and guardians reached a settlement in *Shaw et al. v. Los Angeles Unified School District et al.*, a class action lawsuit filed in 2020 alleging that LAUSD's distance learning policies during COVID-19 school closures violated students' constitutional rights and disproportionately harmed Black and Latino students from low-income backgrounds ("Shaw Settlement FAQ," 2025). A state court judge granted final approval of the settlement in February 2026 (Kirkland & Ellis, 2026). The settlement requires the district to provide eligible students access to no fewer than 45 hours of high-dosage tutoring per year—defined as small-group or one-on-one instruction, aligned with classroom learning, at least three times per week in 30-minute sessions—for three consecutive school years beginning in 2025–26 ("Shaw Settlement FAQ," 2025). Eligibility extends to all K–12 students who were enrolled with LAUSD during the 2019–20 or 2020–21 school years and remain currently enrolled, with an estimated 100,000 or more students qualifying based on academic, language, and demographic criteria that closely mirror the district's existing prioritization framework ("Shaw Settlement FAQ," 2025). The settlement also mandates regular progress-monitoring assessments, teacher training, family outreach to address chronic absenteeism, and annual evaluation of tutoring program effectiveness, with the court retaining jurisdiction to enforce compliance ("Shaw Settlement FAQ," 2025).

LAUSD’s multi-provider model serves as a powerful blueprint for maintaining program quality and coherence while rapidly expanding access to individualized instruction. By effectively coordinating a diverse ecosystem of providers, the district is demonstrating how to align varied tutoring formats with core classroom instruction. As LAUSD meets the ambitious scale required by the recent settlement, its approach to provider oversight, data collection, and student matching offers an actionable roadmap for other large urban districts seeking to achieve high-impact tutoring at scale.

Implications and Tradeoffs

This section brings together the evidence presented above to examine how structural features of California's education system shape the feasibility of delivering relationship-based individualized instruction at scale. It focuses on implications that follow from the patterns observed and on the trade-offs embedded in different ways of organizing tutoring access.

Three findings recur across this report. First, high-impact tutoring produces learning gains larger than most commonly used school-based interventions—meta-analytic pooled effect sizes of 0.36–0.37 SD. Second, California districts are investing heavily through multiple funding streams: 80.7% of districts reference tutoring in their LCAPs. Third, implementation quality is inconsistent: dosage, staffing, scheduling, and instructional alignment vary widely across districts, and none of the district leaders interviewed used the term "high-impact tutoring" or referenced its evidence base. These patterns raise a direct structural question: what role should state policy play in ensuring that investment translates into the design features associated with measured learning gains?

From Piecemeal to Coherent: The Current Challenge

Analysis of LCAPs shows 80.7% of California districts referencing tutoring, indicating substantial annual expenditure statewide. Yet implementation varies in the degree to which programs reflect design features associated with stronger outcomes. Differences in terminology, structure, funding, and delivery model indicate that tutoring is locally defined and unevenly implemented. None of the 94 district leaders interviewed used the terms "high-impact tutoring" or "high-dosage tutoring." At the school level, multiple principals described practices meeting the operational definition—consistent tutors, multiple weekly sessions, small groups—without initially labeling them as tutoring, and revised their responses only after hearing the formal definition. Existing capacity is therefore systematically undercounted in planning conversations.

The state's largest tutoring-related funding stream further shapes delivery conditions. ELO-P's $4 billion allocates funding exclusively to before- and after-school settings. Meta-analytic evidence consistently

finds larger effects for school-day tutoring than after-school tutoring, attributable to higher attendance and stronger instructional alignment. California's funding structure thus ties its largest tutoring investment to delivery conditions associated with smaller impacts.

California's decentralized governance structure produces wide variation. Districts independently determine how tutoring fits within MTSS frameworks, how funding streams are combined, how staffing constraints are addressed, and how tutoring aligns with core instruction. The result is substantial cross-district divergence in design and quality.

Structural Context for Implementation

Integration into core instructional systems is associated with stronger tutoring outcomes. Tutoring operates across MTSS tiers: in early literacy it sometimes functions within Tier 1 for broad groups; in other settings it is organized as Tier 2 or Tier 3 support for students needing greater intensity to access grade-level content.

Across districts, scheduling, curriculum alignment, and coordination with classroom teachers are directly tied to student participation and program coherence. Districts embedding tutoring within the school day and connecting it to core content report fewer attendance and alignment problems. After-school models consistently encounter participation constraints.

California's existing infrastructure includes several elements relevant to tutoring implementation. Many districts operate intervention blocks within MTSS frameworks. Significant public investment has flowed through ELO-P, the Learning Recovery Emergency Block Grant, and other mechanisms. The Literacy Moonshot situates tutoring within a broader literacy framework that includes screening, professional learning, and family engagement. The statewide design sprint led by Results for America and the National Student Support Accelerator, in collaboration with the California State Board of Education, Department of Education Expanded Learning Division, and the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence provides an example of coordinated implementation support at the state level and reflects active district interest in structured guidance.

Choices and Trade-offs

California's decentralized structure and funding architecture generate recurring trade-offs in how tutoring access is organized.

During-School versus After-School Implementation: Meta-analytic evidence reports larger pooled effects for school-day tutoring than after-school tutoring, attributed to higher attendance and stronger instructional alignment. California's largest tutoring funding stream—ELO-P at $4 billion—restricts use to outside the school day. This creates a direct structural misalignment: the state's primary investment is locked to delivery conditions associated with smaller impacts. Some leaders described interest in expanding school-day tutoring if ELO-P rules permitted; others cited scheduling constraints favoring after-school models.

Centralized State Programs versus Local Implementation: California's decentralized approach contrasts with Louisiana, Tennessee, and Texas, which have statewide tutoring programs with defined dosage standards, approved provider lists, and compliance requirements. Statewide models produce greater consistency and clearer quality controls. California's local model allows each district to determine how tutoring funds are used, producing wide variation in take-up and implementation quality. Hybrid approaches—shared standards, approved provider lists, technical assistance networks—distribute responsibility across state and local levels while preserving district flexibility. Several states link tutoring eligibility directly to early literacy screening results, creating common criteria without mandating delivery models.

New Dedicated Funding versus Optimization of Existing Streams: Expansion of tutoring may occur through new dedicated funding or through revised use of existing streams. California districts draw on ELO-P, LREBG, Title I, and LCFF, each with distinct restrictions and timelines. Dedicated long-term funding would increase stability and signal policy priority; optimization of existing streams avoids new appropriations. The evidence in this report consistently shows that implementation challenges involve coordination, program design, and workforce capacity as much as financial resources—additional dollars alone do not determine outcomes.

Instructional Time Allocation: Supplemental Support versus Competing Priorities: Providing tutoring during the school day requires reallocating limited instructional time. Schools must determine what is reduced or displaced to create space for additional support, particularly in middle and secondary grades where schedules are more rigid. Leaders described trade-offs between allocating time for targeted reading and mathematics support and preserving access to electives, enrichment, and other courses that support student engagement. These decisions shape both who receives additional instructional time and what opportunities remain available to students. Expanding tutoring therefore requires explicit prioritization of instructional goals within constrained schedules, with clear trade-offs in how time is allocated.

Workforce Strategy: Expanding New Capacity versus Developing Existing Staff: Across principal interviews, staffing constraints were more binding than funding constraints. Schools consistently reported difficulty identifying personnel with the instructional expertise to diagnose learning gaps and adjust instruction in real time—a skill distinct from general teaching. This creates a strategic decision about how systems build tutoring capacity: whether to recruit new personnel (e.g., external tutors, college students, or community members) or to develop and redeploy existing staff (e.g., paraprofessionals, interventionists, or teachers in specialized roles).

Each approach carries distinct implementation demands. Expanding new pipelines can increase capacity more quickly but requires investment in recruitment, onboarding, and supervision, as well as systems to ensure instructional quality. Developing existing staff builds on established relationships and school knowledge but requires sustained training, role clarity, and protection of time, and may compete with other responsibilities. In practice, most districts pursue hybrid approaches, but expansion depends on how systems allocate effort between building new human capital and strengthening the instructional capacity of existing personnel, both of which are required to deliver individualized instruction at scale.

Emerging System-Level Developments

Recent state and district-level developments show tutoring shifting from a locally variable intervention toward a more formalized component of instructional systems.

The Literacy Moonshot places tutoring within a broader early literacy strategy that includes universal screening, professional learning, curriculum alignment, and family engagement. Embedding tutoring within this framework reduces the gap between identification and instructional response. Screening provides a consistent signal of student need, and tutoring functions as one structured response. Other states have adopted similar approaches by linking tutoring directly to assessment systems and instructional guidance. District leaders interviewed for this report described comparable challenges in mathematics, particularly around student identification, staffing pipelines, and alignment with core curriculum. California does not currently have a statewide mathematics framework that provides similar coherence.

A proposed settlement in *Shaw et al. v. LAUSD* creates a distinct implementation context. The agreement, pending final approval, would require the district to provide eligible students with at least 45 hours of high-dosage tutoring per year for three consecutive years. Public descriptions of the settlement specify small-group or one-on-one tutoring aligned with classroom instruction. The settlement establishes defined expectations regarding instructional time and program structure rather than leaving participation to discretionary funding decisions. Implementation at this scale will generate practical evidence regarding staffing capacity, provider oversight, scheduling in secondary schools, and monitoring of delivered instructional time within a large decentralized system.

The statewide design sprint represents another form of system-level development: coordinated technical assistance. District leaders participating in the sprint identified recurring uncertainties, including staffing pipelines, scheduling tutoring during the school day without displacing core instruction, monitoring delivered rather than scheduled dosage, and coordinating across schools within MTSS frameworks. The sprint provided a structured setting for addressing these questions and clarifying program design decisions. Its primary contribution was to strengthen program architecture and shared definitions rather than to expand funding.

These developments reflect multiple efforts to increase coherence. State literacy initiatives link tutoring to screening and instructional guidance. The LAUSD settlement defines enforceable expectations within a large district. The design sprint strengthens local design capacity. Each approach addresses a different element of scale, including policy alignment, access guarantees, and implementation infrastructure.

Summary Implications

California's tutoring landscape is defined by high investment and inconsistent implementation. Districts are spending significantly on tutoring and related supports, yet dosage, staffing, scheduling, and alignment with core instruction differ substantially across settings. Because these features determine the magnitude of student learning gains, spending alone does not predict outcomes.

Three implications follow.

First, capacity exists but is unevenly recognized. Many districts operate intervention models that incorporate the core elements of high-impact tutoring without using that terminology. Differences in labeling, structure, and delivery obscure the extent to which research-aligned practices are already present. Increasing coherence depends on clarifying definitions and aligning existing practice with research-supported design features—not only on creating new programs.

Second, governance structures shape access and quality. California's decentralized system produces wide variation in implementation intensity. Each funding stream carries distinct restrictions and incentives—most consequentially, ELO-P's restriction to after-school settings. Policymakers face recurring trade-offs among flexibility, consistency, reach, and fidelity to research-based design. These structural features explain why investment levels and implementation conditions do not align across districts.

Third, workforce capacity is central to sustainability. Effective tutoring requires adults who can diagnose specific learning gaps and adjust instruction in real time—a skill that cannot be assumed from general teaching credentials or good intentions. Expansion depends on recruitment pipelines, training systems,

supervision structures, and compensation that determine tutor supply and stability. Financial resources alone do not produce instructional expertise.

Scaling relationship-based individualized instruction is an institutional challenge as much as a financial one. Impact depends on whether tutoring is delivered under conditions associated with measured learning gains: consistent tutors, sufficient instructional time, integration with core curriculum, and reliable identification of student need. These conditions are shaped by policy architecture, funding design, and workforce systems. Emerging tools, including AI-assisted scheduling platforms and tutor-support technologies, may help systems manage logistical complexity and extend instructional capacity, but they do not substitute for the core instructional and relational components that drive effectiveness.

California has directed billions of dollars toward tutoring and expanded learning—through ELO-P ($4B), LREBG ($7.9B), LCFF, and targeted grants. This report finds that investment alone does not determine impact. Outcomes depend on whether governance structures, funding rules, and workforce systems support sustained, research-aligned implementation. Dosage must be delivered, not just scheduled. Tutors must be trained and consistent. Programs must be embedded in the school day and aligned to core instruction. Until those conditions are reliably met, variation in program quality and effectiveness will persist regardless of spending levels.

References

Banerjee, Abhijit; Cole, Shawn; Duflo, Esther; & Linden, Leigh (2007). "Remedying Education: Evidence from Two Randomized Experiments in India." *Quarterly Journal of Economics, 122*(3), 1235–1264.

Baye, A., Inns, A., Lake, C., & Slavin, R. E. (2019). A synthesis of quantitative research on programs for struggling readers in elementary schools. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *54*(2), 149–179.

Bhatt, M. P., Chau, T., Condliffe, B., Davis, R., Grossman, J., Guryan, J., Ludwig, J., Magnaricotte, M., Mattera, S. K., Momeni, F., Oreopolous, P., & Stoddard, G. (2025). *Personalized Learning Initiative interim report: Findings from 2023-24* (June 2025) [Report]. University of Chicago Education Lab. https://educationlab.uchicago.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2025/06/UChicago-Education-Lab-PLI-Interim-Report-06.2025.pdf

Blume, H. (2024, November 22). LAUSD tests, graduation rates are looking better, according to state dashboard. *Daily News*. https://www.dailynews.com/2024/11/22/lausd-tests-graduation-rates-are-looking-better-according-to-state-dashboard/

Burbio. (2025). *California district LCAP analysis 2025–26*.

Cal. Educ. Code § 41570.

Cal. Educ. Code § 43522.

Cal. Educ. Code § 46120.

California Budget Act of 2021, Cal. Stat. ch. 240 (2021).

California Budget Act of 2024, Cal. Stat. ch. 12 (2024).

California Department of Education. (2024). *Enrollment data*. https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/

California Department of Education. (2026). *Literacy moonshot initiative* [Proposed initiative].

Center for Outcomes Based Contracting. (2026). *Impact in action, Vol. 2: Starting small, thinking big: How Santa Ana USD transformed literacy support through outcomes based contracting*. Southern Education Foundation.

Center on Reinventing Public Education. (2025). *Virtual 1:1 literacy tutoring in Oakland Unified School District: Implementation and effectiveness of a pilot at scale*. https://crpe.org/virtual-11-literacy-tutoring-in-oakland-unified-school-district-implementation-and-effectiveness-of-a-pilot-at-scale/

Cortes, K. E., Kortecamp, K., Loeb, S., & Robinson, C. D. (2025). A scalable approach to high-impact tutoring for young readers. *Learning and Instruction*, *95*, Article 102021. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2024.102021

Dietrichson, J., Bøg, M., Filges, T., & Klint Jørgensen, A.-M. (2017). Academic interventions for elementary and middle school students with low socioeconomic status: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, *87*(2), 243–282. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654316681714

Dietrichson, J., Filges, T., Klokker, R. H., Viinholt, B. C. A., Bøg, M., & Jensen, U. H. (2021). Targeted school-based interventions for improving reading and mathematics for students with or at risk of academic difficulties in Grades K–6: A systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, *17*(2), Article e1152. https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1152

Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation. (2024, August 29). *Eat. Learn. Play. makes historic commitment to advance literacy in Oakland with $25 million investment* [Press release]. https://www.eatlearnplay.org/news/literacy-launch24

Finseraas, H., Nyhus, O. H., Salvanes, K. V., & Sandsør, A. M. J. (2024). Sustained effects of small-group instruction in mathematics. *CESifo Working Paper No. 11021* https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4783701

Fryer, R. G., Jr. (2017). The production of human capital in developed countries: Evidence from 196 randomized field experiments. In A. V. Banerjee & E. Duflo (Eds.), *Handbook of field experiments* (Vol. 2, pp. 95–322). North-Holland.

Groom-Thomas, L., Leung, C., Loeb, S., Pollard, C., Waymack, N., & White, S. (2023). *Challenges and solutions: Scaling tutoring programs*. IDB Publications. https://doi.org/10.18235/0005070

Robinson, C. D., Pollard, C., Novicoff, S., White, S., & Loeb, S. (2025). The effects of virtual tutoring on young readers: Results from a randomized controlled trial. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 47, 1245–1265.

Hashim, S., Pace Miles, K., & Croke, E. (2025). Experimental evidence on the impact of tutoring format and tutors: Findings from an early literacy tutoring program. https://doi.org/10.26300/ZGY5-SR80

Heinrich, C. J., Meyer, R. H., & Whitten, G. (2010). Supplemental education services under No Child Left Behind: Who signs up, and what do they gain? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *32*(2), 273–298. https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373710361640

Hsieh, Hsiaolin, David Gormley, Carly D. Robinson, and Susanna Loeb. (2025). The Power of Personalized Attention: Comparing Pedagogical Approaches in Small Group and One-on-One Early Literacy Tutoring. (EdWorkingPaper: 25-1289) https://doi.org/10.26300/ykhg-zr64

Huffaker, E., Lee, M. G., Zhou, H., Robinson, C. D., & Loeb, S. (2025). Beyond the one-teacher model: Experimental evidence on using embedded paraprofessionals as personalized instructors (EdWorkingPaper No. 25-1326). Annenberg Institute at Brown University. https://doi.org/10.26300/pzy2-wr51

Institute of Education Sciences. (2023). *National survey on tutoring programs in U.S. schools*. U.S. Department of Education.

Jackson, C., & Shakeel, A. (2025). *Creating coherence: Does instructional alignment affect the impact of tutoring?*(EdWorkingPaper No. 25-1332). Annenberg Institute at Brown University. https://doi.org/10.26300/en9j-xp53

Jochim, A., & Daramola, E. J. (2023). *Communities in the driver's seat: Intensive training, deep investment power parent-led literacy programs in Oakland*. Center on Reinventing Public Education. https://crpe.org/communities-in-the-drivers-seat/

Jochim, A., Daramola, E. J., & Polikoff, M. (2023). *Teachers and tutors together: Reimagining literacy instruction in Oakland*. Center on Reinventing Public Education. https://crpe.org/teachers-and-tutors-together-reimagining-literacy-instruction-in-oakland/

Kim, E., Goodman, J., & West, M. R. (2025). Kumon in: The recent, rapid rise of private tutoring centers. *Education Finance and Policy, 20*(3), 473–493. https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp_a_00438

Kirkland & Ellis. (2026, February 20). *Litigator of the week runners-up and shout-outs*. https://www.kirkland.com/news/in-the-news/2026/02/litigator-of-the-week-runners-up-and-shout-outs-lausd-feb-20

Kraft, M. A., & Falken, G. T. (2021). *A blueprint for scaling tutoring and mentoring across public schools*. Annenberg Institute at Brown University.

Kraft, M. A., & Novicoff, S. (2024a). Time in school: A conceptual framework, synthesis of the causal research, and empirical exploration. *AERA Open*, *10*, 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584241246619

Kraft, M. A., & Novicoff, S. (2024b). How instructional time is allocated in schools: Evidence from administrative data and teacher surveys. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *43*(1), 105–134. https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22532

Krueger, A. B. (1999). Experimental estimates of education production functions. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *114*(2), 497–532. https://doi.org/10.1162/003355399556052

LAUSD. (n.d.-a). *About us—LAUSD tutoring*. Los Angeles Unified School District. https://tutoring.lausd.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=4398195&type=d&pREC_ID=2619395

LAUSD. (n.d.-b). *Student prioritization criteria and guidance for coordination of tutoring services*. Los Angeles Unified School District. https://tutoring.lausd.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=4398195&type=d&pREC_ID=2619401

LAUSD. (2025a). *2025–26 budget: Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P)* [Board presentation]. Los Angeles Unified School District.

LAUSD. (2025b). *2025–26 Local Control and Accountability Plan*. Los Angeles Unified School District. https://lcap.lausd.org/

LAUSD. (2025c). *Fingertip facts 2025–26*. Los Angeles Unified School District. https://communications.lausd.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=4401650&type=d&pREC_ID=2654752

Lee, M. G., Loeb, S., & Robinson, C. D. (2025). *The impact of high-impact tutoring on student attendance: Evidence from a state initiative* (EdWorkingPaper No. 24-1107). Annenberg Institute at Brown University.

Lu, A., Rouhanifard, P., Cleveland, C., Gilbert, E., & Loeb, S. (2025, March 19). *The key resource of time: Master schedules and effective allocation of students and educators*. National Student Support Accelerator. https://nssa.stanford.edu/briefs/master-scheduling

Lynch, K., Hill, H. C., Gonzalez, K. E., & Pollard, C. (2019). Strengthening the research base that informs STEM instructional improvement efforts: A meta-analysis. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *41*(3), 260–293. https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373719849044

Lynch, K., Kim, J. S., Biancarosa, G., & Cutting, L. E. (2019). The quality and frequency of technology-enhanced literacy instruction: Relation to student reading outcomes. *Educational Psychology Review*, *31*, 365–387. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-019-09465-1

Morning Consult & EdChoice. (2025). *The public, parents, and K–12 education* (National Polling Report No. 60). https://edchoice.morningconsultintelligence.com/assets/323038.pdf

Napolitano, J. (2024, April 17). After literacy wins, Oakland REACH's parent 'Liberators' take on math tutoring. *The 74*. https://www.the74million.org/article/after-literacy-wins-oakland-reachs-parent-liberators-take-on-math-tutoring/

National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). *National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP): 2024 results*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://www.nationsreportcard.gov

National Student Support Accelerator. (2024a). *2024–25 snapshot of state tutoring policies*. Stanford University. https://nssa.stanford.edu/briefs/2024-25-snapshot-state-tutoring-policies

National Student Support Accelerator. (2024b). *Section 6.1: Scheduling tutoring sessions*. In Toolkit for tutoring programs. Stanford University. https://nssa.stanford.edu/toolkit-tutoring-programs/section-6/6-1

National Student Support Accelerator. (2024c). *Timely: AI-assisted master scheduling to expand access to high-impact tutoring*. Stanford University. https://nssa.stanford.edu/briefs/master-scheduling

National Student Support Accelerator. (2025). *Toolkit for Tutoring Programs.* Stanford University. https://nssa.stanford.edu/toolkit-tutoring-programs

National Student Support Accelerator & Innovate Public Schools. (2024). *High-impact tutoring: Family and caregiver toolkit*. https://nssa.stanford.edu/family-caregiver-toolkit

National Center for Education Statistics. (2025, September). *School Pulse Panel: June 2025—Learning strategies and recovery, tutoring, and absenteeism* [Data release]. Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/spp/results.asp

Neitzel, A. J., Lake, C., Pellegrini, M., & Slavin, R. E. (2021). A synthesis of quantitative research on programs for struggling readers in elementary schools. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *57*(1), 149–179. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.379

Neitzel, A. J., Lake, C., Pellegrini, M., & Slavin, R. E. (2021). A synthesis of quantitative research on technology-based versus face-to-face approaches to teaching struggling readers. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *57*(3), 895–918.

Nickow, A. J., Oreopoulos, P., & Quan, V. (2020). *The impressive effects of tutoring on PreK–12 learning: A systematic review and meta-analysis of the experimental evidence* (EdWorkingPaper No. 20-267). Annenberg Institute at Brown University.

Nickow, A. J., Oreopoulos, P., & Quan, V. (2024a). The impressive effects of tutoring on PreK–12 learning: A systematic review and meta-analysis of the experimental evidence. *Journal of Human Resources*, *59*(1), 218–264. https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.0321-11538R1

Nickow, A. J., Oreopoulos, P., & Quan, V. (2024b). The promise of tutoring for PreK–12 learning: A systematic review and meta-analysis of the experimental evidence. *American Educational Research Journal*, *61*(1), 74–107. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231211103

Oakland Unified School District. (2025). *Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) and ESSA Federal Addendum, SY 2025–2026*. https://www.ousd.org/about-us/local-control-and-accountability-plan-lcap

Pellegrini, M., Lake, C., Neitzel, A., & Slavin, R. E. (2021). Effective programs in elementary mathematics: A best-evidence synthesis. *AERA Open*, *7*, 1–29. https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858420986211

Robinson, C. D., Bisht, B., & Loeb, S. (2025). The inequity of opt-in educational resources and an intervention to increase equitable access. *Educational Researcher*, *54*(1), 38–51. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X251331518

Robinson, C. D., Lee, M. G., Dearing, E., & Rogers, T. (2019). Reducing student absenteeism in the early grades by targeting parental beliefs. *American Educational Research Journal*, *55*(6), 1163–1192. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831218772274

Robinson, C. D., & Loeb, S. (2021). High-impact tutoring: State of the research and priorities for future learning (EdWorkingPaper No. 21-384). Annenberg Institute at Brown University. https://doi.org/10.26300/qf76-rj21

Robinson, C. D., Kraft, M. A., Loeb, S., & Schueler, B. (2024). *Design principles for accelerating student learning with high-impact tutoring*. National Student Support Accelerator.

Robinson, C. D., Pollard, C., Novicoff, S., White, S., & Loeb, S. (2024). The effects of virtual tutoring on young readers: Results from a randomized controlled trial. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *46*(4), 714–735. https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737241288845

Santa Ana Unified School District. (2024). *2024–25 Local Control and Accountability Plan*. California Department of Education. https://cdeunifiedstoragewest.blob.core.windows.net/lcaps/06a5b51a-d542-4c1b-884b-3b84f0b13c36.pdf

Santa Ana Unified School District. (2025). *2025–26 Local Control and Accountability Plan*. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aSdilEVCdbHVw-r_SzaVHKZCkilwLPZd/view

Shaw et al. v. Los Angeles Unified School District et al., No. 20STCV36489 (Cal. Super. Ct. Los Angeles Cnty. Feb. 18, 2026).

Slavin, R. E., Lake, C., Chambers, B., Cheung, A., & Davis, S. (2009). Effective reading programs for the elementary grades: A best-evidence synthesis. *Review of Educational Research*, *79*(4), 1391–1466. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654309337489

Slavin, R. E., Lake, C., & Groff, C. (2009). Effective programs in middle and high school mathematics: A best-evidence synthesis. *Review of Educational Research*, *79*(2), 839–911. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308330968

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2017). *National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), Public School Teacher Data File, 2017–18* [Data set]. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/tables/ntps1718_fltable06_t1s.asp

Wang, R. E., Ribeiro, A. T., Robinson, C. D., Loeb, S., & Demszky, D. (2025). Tutor CoPilot: A human-AI approach for scaling real-time expertise. https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2410.03017

Appendix: Data Collection Methodology

Principal Interviews

Sample: Between September and December 2025, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 82 school principals across California. We selected schools through stratified random sampling of local education agencies by district type (elementary, high school, and unified), with random selection of schools within each district. Our recruitment process involved contacting 414 principals across 126 districts, achieving a response rate of 17% at the principal level and 30% at the district level.

The final sample includes 30 elementary schools, 19 middle schools, and 33 high schools, representing 69 districts across 38 California counties. The sample comprises 77 traditional public schools, 2 charter schools, and 3 continuation or alternative schools. Participating schools reflect California's geographic and demographic diversity, including rural districts, small elementary districts, and large comprehensive secondary schools serving varied student populations.

Interview Protocol and Procedure: Interviews followed a semi-structured protocol lasting approximately 45–60 minutes and covering multiple domains of school operations, including staffing, special education, generative AI, math pathways, and academic interventions. For this report, we focus specifically on principal responses regarding high-impact tutoring.

During each interview, we provided principals with a standardized definition of high-impact tutoring adapted from the National Student Support Accelerator (Robinson et al., 2024). Principals were told that high-impact tutoring refers to tutoring where participating students receive tutoring three or more times per week from a consistent tutor; sessions are one-on-one or in small groups of no more than four students per tutor; and tutoring is targeted to student needs based on diagnostic assessment or ongoing progress monitoring.

Principals were then asked whether their school provided tutoring meeting this definition during the current academic year. For those who indicated yes, follow-up questions explored which grade levels and subject areas received tutoring; who provided the tutoring (e.g., teachers, paraprofessionals,

external providers); what resources and supports enabled implementation; where they faced challenges or needed additional support; and how likely they were to continue the program in future years. These questions were designed to document both the prevalence of tutoring models aligned with high-impact design features and the operational conditions shaping implementation in real school contexts.

Data Processing and Analysis: All interviews were conducted via Zoom, audio-recorded with participant consent, and transcribed using automated transcription software (Otter.AI). Research team members subsequently hand-cleaned and anonymized each transcript, removing identifying information about individuals, schools, and districts to protect participant confidentiality.

We analyzed transcripts using thematic coding to identify patterns in how principals described tutoring and intervention structures, the implementation models they employed, the barriers they encountered, and their approaches to sustainability. A key analytic challenge is that principals often used locally embedded terminology—such as "intervention," "extended learning," "literacy centers," or "MTSS support"—rather than the specific label "high-impact tutoring," even when describing practices meeting the definitional criteria. We therefore coded both (1) programs principals explicitly identified as tutoring and (2) intervention structures that met the operational definition regardless of local naming conventions. This approach allows us to document the range of relationship-based individualized instruction operating in California schools, including models that may not be understood locally as part of the tutoring landscape.

Throughout the report, we present illustrative quotations from principal interviews to ground findings in practitioners' language. Quotations are presented verbatim with minor edits for clarity where needed, and principals are identified only by school level (elementary, middle, or high school) and general region to preserve anonymity.

District Leader Interviews

Sample: Between May and August 2025, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 94 district superintendents and senior leaders across California. We selected districts through stratified random

sampling by region and district size, with mid-sized districts oversampled to ensure adequate representation across the size distribution. District size was defined as follows: small districts serve five or fewer schools; mid-sized districts serve between 6 and 24 schools; and large districts serve 25 or more schools. The regional strata followed California's five geographic regions: Los Angeles and Inland Empire; Southern California; Central Valley and Central Coast; Bay Area, Foothills, and Sierra; and Northern California. The achieved sample of 94 represents approximately a 50% response rate.

Interview Protocol and Procedure: Interviews followed a semi-structured protocol covering a broad range of topics related to TK–8 instruction, including district priorities, curriculum adoption, teacher professional development, and mathematics instruction. For this report, we draw exclusively on responses to two domains of the interview: district expectations for in-class mathematics differentiation and the structures districts use to provide additional math support beyond the core classroom. Specifically, we analyze responses to questions asking how districts approach varied student needs in mathematics and what practices teachers are expected to use consistently for in-class differentiation; whether districts have additional structures for differentiating mathematics instruction such as pullout or push-in support, tutoring, or mathematics-specific intervention; and who provides any such additional support.

Data Processing and Analysis: Research team members anonymized each transcript, removing identifying information about individuals and districts to protect participant confidentiality. We analyzed transcripts using thematic coding to identify patterns in how district leaders described their approaches to mathematics differentiation, the structures they used to support students beyond core instruction, and the staffing models underlying those structures. As with the principal interview analysis, a key analytic challenge was that district leaders described functionally similar programs using highly localized language — the same basic structure of small-group, data-driven supplemental support appeared under dozens of distinct names, including "What I Need" time, "walk to learn," "math lab," "flex blocks," "academic coaching," "Bobcat Academy," and "success coaches," among others. We therefore coded both programs leaders explicitly named as tutoring or intervention and structures meeting functional criteria for additional targeted support, regardless of how they were labeled locally. A related coding challenge was that responses to the in-class differentiation question (CI) frequently

blended Tier 1 classroom practices with descriptions of pull-out, push-in, or supplemental structures, suggesting that many leaders do not draw sharp conceptual boundaries between core instruction and intervention — a finding that is itself analytically significant. Notably, no respondent used the term "high-impact tutoring" or referenced the research base defining it, even when describing structures that closely matched its core features. For the selected-choice question on who provides additional support, we analyzed responses quantitatively to document the distribution across staffing types: credentialed teachers (interventionists, education specialists, and TOSAs) were by far the most common providers, selected by 50 of 67 respondents, with paraprofessionals playing a secondary role and dedicated tutors nearly absent. The small number of open-ended "other" responses (n=7) pointed to ad hoc arrangements including volunteers, PTA-funded parents, and community-based organizations, complementing the qualitative coding of open-ended interview responses. Throughout the report, illustrative quotations from district leader interviews are presented verbatim with minor edits for clarity.

Design Sprint Surveys

Sample and Administration: Between September and November 2025, 23 districts and charter schools and 7 county offices of education took part in an eight-week design sprint led by the National Student Support Accelerator and Results for America, in collaboration with the California State Board of Education, the Department of Education Expanded Learning Division, and the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence. Of these 30, two districts did not complete the eight-week program. Each of the design sprint teams included a group leader and 1-4 additional participants. Group leader were given surveys at the beginning and end of the sprint, resulting in 27 pre-sprint responses and 18 post-sprint responses. The pre-sprint survey yielded responses from 21 districts and charter schools, and 6 county offices of education. The post-print survey yielded responses from 11 districts and charter schools and seven county offices of education.

Survey Instruments: The pre-sprint survey was designed to establish a baseline understanding of each district's existing tutoring infrastructure and satisfaction with current intervention supports. It covered the following domains: whether the district currently offers high-impact tutoring and what other

tutoring models are in place; which grade spans and subject areas receive high-impact tutoring; how students qualify to participate; when tutoring occurs relative to the school day; and who provides tutoring, including teachers, paraprofessionals, outside vendors, and other staff. The survey also asked district leaders to estimate the proportion of students needing support beyond Tier 1 instruction, describe approaches taken to support students within Tier 1, and rate their satisfaction with current Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention supports.

The post-sprint survey covered a broader range of topics, including participant satisfaction with the sprint itself, which are not analyzed in this report. For this report, we analyzed post-sprint responses related to the following domains: funding sources secured to support high-impact tutoring, including general operating funds, other local sources, state funding, federal funding, and philanthropic funding; specific funding mechanisms in use; progress in moving from planning to implementation; confidence in launching or expanding high-impact tutoring within the next year; current program status; interest in growing programs using LEA staff versus partnering with outside providers; and plans to integrate high-impact tutoring into broader academic systems such as MTSS.

Data Processing and Analysis: Survey responses were analyzed descriptively to characterize the range of tutoring models, funding arrangements, staffing approaches, and implementation conditions across participating districts. Open-ended responses were reviewed thematically to identify common challenges, areas of uncertainty, and priorities for program development. In this report, design sprint survey data are used to describe how districts experience the process of developing tutoring programs, rather than to evaluate program effectiveness. District survey responses provide a system-level perspective on the organizational and implementation considerations involved in moving from interest in high-impact tutoring to concrete program design.

Illustrative Case Studies

Overview: The illustrative case studies in this report were selected to highlight a diverse range of funding streams, organizational models, and implementation stages for relationship-based individualized instruction. While the report's findings are informed by a broad survey of California

districts, these specific sites were chosen to provide a deep-dive look at mature, operationalized programs.

***Selection Pool**:* The initial pool of districts was identified through NSSA's extensive network of past collaborations, direct consultations, and ongoing research into California districts known to be implementing tutoring. This landscape scan included districts such as Fresno Unified, San Francisco Unified, Sonoma County, Rocketship Public Schools, Riverside Unified, and Milpitas Unified, as well as 21 additional districts that participated in the High-Impact Tutoring Design Sprint. While this collective provided a wealth of data regarding district priorities, many of these districts were still in the nascent stages of their programming. Consequently, we narrowed the selection to focus on districts with higher programmatic maturity to ensure the case studies could provide actionable insights rather than just intended designs. This refinement allowed us to highlight sites with established structures, clearly defined funding mechanisms, and sufficient publicly available data for a thorough descriptive analysis.

Final Selection: The final selection of Oakland Unified, Santa Ana Unified, and Los Angeles Unified was intentional, representing three distinct "archetypes" of California tutoring to ensure a diverse look at how various resources are leveraged. Oakland Unified provides a compelling example of a model that evolved from a community-driven pilot into a robust, district-wide system. While local philanthropic partnerships and community initiatives like Oakland REACH were foundational to its start, the district has since dramatically expanded its programming to cover a wider range of grade levels and subjects, including a significant shift into mathematics. Most notably, Oakland has embraced in-school-day delivery, a strategy most closely aligned with high-impact tutoring research. In contrast, Santa Ana Unified represents contractual innovation through its pioneering use of Outcomes-Based Contracting (OBC), which drives vendor accountability by tying ELO-P resources to specific student growth goals. Finally, Los Angeles Unified illustrates a model of high-impact tutoring at scale, managing a massive rollout that prioritizes high-need learners through a multi-provider delivery system. This effort is uniquely supported by a braiding of ELO-P, federal resources, and legal settlement funds from *Shaw v. LAUSD.*

***Data Collection and Methodology**:* The development of these case studies relied on a "desk review" methodology, synthesizing information from official district documentation, primarily 2024–25 and

2025–26 Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs). This analysis was further informed by publicly available reports and the research team's prior institutional knowledge gained through direct engagement and past collaborative work with the selected districts.