



Promising Practices: High-Impact Tutoring

Saga Education



What Is Small Group “High-Impact” Tutoring?

High-impact tutoring, sometimes referred to as “high-dosage tutoring,” is defined as one-on-one or small group instructional programming by teachers, paraprofessionals, volunteers, or parents at least three times a week for 50 hours a semester.¹ A recent meta-analysis found that this is “one of the most versatile and potentially transformative educational tools in use today.”² There is also evidence that this type of intervention is effective for students with reading and math deficits, especially in early grades,³ and math deficits in later grades.⁴ Even peer tutoring, a less formal type of tutoring done by individuals without expertise or formal training in education, has shown to have significant positive effects on academic success and social-behavior outcomes for students with disabilities.⁵ A number of tutoring programs across the country follow this type of model.



Example From the Field: Saga Education

Saga Education is a tutoring program in Chicago, New York City, Florida, and Washington, DC, that began in 2015.

Saga's Model

Saga Education's model involves pairing two to four high school students with a tutor who is interested in public service – often a recent college graduate who is an AmeriCorps member. Saga describes this as “high-impact tutoring.” Tutors work in the program for one year and receive a stipend and pre-service training. Students participating in the program are identified as being behind grade level and needing additional support. These students attend one 50-minute class period per school day, which counts as a credit-bearing elective course. Importantly, tutoring sessions do not replace participation in full-class grade-level instruction with teachers who have content expertise. Instead, the tutoring sessions take place in addition to grade-level instruction and simply provide a double dose of instruction to support and accelerate learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the historic and systemic inequities affecting students with disabilities, students impacted by poverty, and students who are Black, Indigenous, or persons of color (BIPOC). Even before COVID-19, these students experienced persistent opportunity gaps and low achievement compared to their nondisabled, native English speaking, and affluent peers. For instance, proficiency and graduation rates of students with disabilities continue to trail those of their peers, even though research demonstrates that these students can meet the same academic standards when provided high-quality instruction and needed services and supports.

Saga's Impact

Students who received Saga tutoring achieved up to 2.5 years of growth in math in one year.⁶ Among participating students, there was a 50 percent decrease in math course failures.⁷ The impact also spilled over into content areas outside of those targeted by tutoring with a 28 percent decrease in non-math course failures.⁸ AJ Gutierrez, co-founder and chief marketing officer of Saga Education, said that this data includes students with learning disabilities, but excludes other types of disabilities. A subsequent report stated that students with “autism, traumatic brain injury, emotional/behavioral disorder, educable mentally handicapped, and speech/language disabilities” were not included in the studies.⁹ Saga Education is working with the University of Chicago Urban Education Lab to conduct additional research to determine the effectiveness of the program on specific subgroups of students, including those with mild to moderate learning disabilities.

Key features of this approach:

- Uses multiple modalities and small group instruction
- Creates additional time to integrate necessary prerequisite skills
- Customizes instruction to strengths and areas of growth for each student

Saga's Approach to COVID-19

During the 2020–2021 school year, Saga Education will serve 5,000 students in 42 high schools across Chicago, New York City, Washington, DC, and Broward County, FL. During the pandemic, Saga Education has moved to mostly virtual tutoring sessions. They developed an online platform to continue offering small group sessions. In cases where students are in-person, site directors are the only adults in the classroom, and the tutors work with students via videoconference. Saga Education plans to release their online platform for public use later this year at cost so any other tutoring organization can benefit from the structured model.

One benefit of this is that the organization has a much wider talent pool to recruit from because being onsite is no longer a requirement. Gutierrez said that one issue they've faced is the limited number of AmeriCorps members that they are able to have. While going primarily virtual has expanded the applicant pool, Gutierrez says they would welcome an increase in the number of AmeriCorps members and a national call for public service.

“ In order to scale, it’s important that we have the opportunity to have more AmeriCorps members and school districts have the funding that they need to implement these programs. ”

– Antonio “AJ” Gutierrez
Co-founder + Chief Marketing Officer
Saga Education

High-Impact Tutoring and Policy Implications

The federal government can assist in scaling high-impact tutoring programs to support all students, including students with disabilities, through a variety of mechanisms. These include:

- **Increasing funding for school districts:** Schools and districts can and often do implement tutoring programs (such as Saga Education) with funding through Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act. In addition, school districts can use Title IV Part A funds for tutoring services. In order to ensure that more schools have the opportunity to implement high-impact tutoring, Congress should provide an increase in funding for these two grant programs.

- **Expanding national service programs:** The tutors in many high-impact tutoring programs are members of federally funded national service programs. In order to scale up tutoring programs, Congress should increase funding for these programs that allow recent college graduates and others to serve as tutors for high school students through local, state, and national nonprofit partners. Additional funding should also be used to allow successful programs to rapidly expand.
- **Initiating a public campaign for public service:** The White House can publicly adopt and promote a national campaign for public service and expand the student federal loan relief provided by completing the year of service.
- **Issuing guidance to clarify how tutoring programs can effectively serve students with disabilities:** The U.S. Department of Education (ED) should issue guidance to make clear that schools and districts must not use tutoring services as a replacement for special education or related services, nor in lieu of providing compensatory education. Guidance should make clear that *all* students who are behind grade level are eligible for tutoring and that it must take place outside of the core instruction provided by general education. In addition, guidance from ED must emphasize that tutoring programs must be accessible to students with disabilities, that students with disabilities should receive access to tutoring at the same rate as their peers, and that when possible, tutors should receive some specialized training on how to support students with disabilities.

¹ Kraft, M., & Goldstein, M. (2020). *Getting tutoring right to reduce COVID-19 learning loss*. Brookings Brown Center Chalkboard. Retrieved from: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2020/05/21/getting-tutoring-right-to-reduce-covid-19-learning-loss/>

² Nickow, A., Oreopoulos, P., & Quan, V. (2020). *The impressive effects of tutoring on preK–12 learning: A systematic review and meta-analysis of the experimental evidence*. (NBER Working Paper, w27476). Retrieved from: <https://www.edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/ai20-267.pdf>

³ Fuchs, L. S., Seethaler, P. M., Powell, S. R., Fuchs, D., Hamlett, C. L., & Fletcher, J. M. (2008). Effects of preventative tutoring on the mathematical problem solving of third-grade students with math and reading difficulties. *Exceptional Children*, 74(2), 155–173. doi:10.1177/001440290807400202

⁴ Fryer Jr, R. G. (2017). The production of human capital in developed countries: Evidence from 196 randomized field experiments. In: *Handbook of economic field experiments* (Vol. 2, pp. 95–322). North-Holland.

⁵ Moeyaert, M., Klingbeil, D. A., Rodabaugh, E., & Turan, M. (2019). Three-level meta-analysis of single-case data regarding the effects of peer tutoring on academic and social-behavioral outcomes for at-risk students and students with disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, 0741932519855079.

⁶ Cook, P. J., Dodge, K., Farkas, G., Fryer Jr, R. G., Guryan, J., Ludwig, J., ... & Steinberg, L. (2014). *The (surprising) efficacy of academic and behavioral intervention with disadvantaged youth: Results from a randomized experiment in Chicago*. (No. w19862). National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from: <https://www.nber.org/papers/w19862>

⁷ Ander, R., Guryan, J., & Ludwig, J. (2016). *Improving academic outcomes for disadvantaged students: Scaling up individualized tutorials*. Report prepared for the Brookings Institute. Brookings Institute. Retrieved from: <http://www.eve-yarr.net/attachments/store/d796bf620fe3674d42bb578ff1eef687c82a27de1e30f433d6cdc69f0900/Improving%2BAcademic%2BOutcomes%2Bfor%2BDisadvantaged%2BStudents%2B-%2BHamilton%2BProject.pdf>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Cook, P. J., Dodge, K., Farkas, G., Fryer Jr, R. G., Guryan, J., Ludwig, J., ... & Steinberg, L. (2015). *Not too late: Improving academic outcomes for disadvantaged youth*. (Working Paper WP-15, 1). Institute for Policy Research Northwestern University. Retrieved from: http://www.k12accountability.org/resources/At-Risk-Students/Not_Too_Late_for_Disadvantaged_Youth.pdf



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