



# HIGH-IMPACT TUTORING

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Guide for School Leaders,  
Educators and Tutoring Providers

## Purpose

In Washington, DC, high-impact tutoring (HIT) plays a critical role in supporting schools and accelerating learning for students. This document describes seven evidence-based standards that make up the District’s definition of HIT and establishes a quality benchmark for all HIT programs serving DC students. Originally developed in the immediate response to learning disruptions from the COVID-19 public health emergency, these standards are now updated to reflect the latest national HIT research as well as years of insights from tutoring providers and local education agencies (LEAs) in the District that have worked in concert to effectively scale programs.



**What is high-impact tutoring (HIT)?** HIT is an **evidence-based strategy for advancing student learning** through one-to-one or small group intensive tutoring tailored to individual student needs and aligned with their classroom instruction. HIT in Washington, DC [expanded significantly since 2021](#) in public and public charter schools as leaders have built programs off the strong body of evidence for its effectiveness and determined how to best integrate HIT into their programming.

**Who is this guide for?** This guide is meant to help **school leaders, educators, and tutoring providers** understand how the District defines HIT programs, the essential components of strong implementation, and the commitment to continuous improvement required to achieve the quality that students deserve.

## What does the research say about the effect of high-impact tutoring?

HIT is among the most well-examined educational interventions in the field and is proven to outperform other education interventions studied by researchers ([Kraft & Falken, 2021](#); [Nickow et al., 2024](#)). A rigorous review of 89 experimental studies of well-run tutoring programs declared an “estimated pooled effect size (ES) of 0.288 standard deviations (SD)” ([Nickow et al., 2024](#)). But what does this mean? Accelerate, a national education nonprofit, equates the 0.288 standard deviations to approximately four additional months of learning ([Kohlmoos & Steinberg, 2024](#)). Research coming out of the pandemic also suggests that the average student needs about four to five additional months of schooling to catch up in reading and math ([Lewis & Kuhfeld, 2024](#)). Based on these findings, students receiving HIT can make up the lost schooling time over the course of a year.

The above analysis pools studies on many different programs to give a sense of tutoring’s potential and identify the characteristics of HIT that lead to the largest positive impact:

- Programs utilizing **teachers and paraprofessionals** as tutors see stronger outcomes;
- Programs held **during school** see stronger outcomes than those held after school;
- **Earlier grade** programs performed better than higher grade programs; and
- Programs that **met at least three times a week** saw stronger outcomes.

## Standards for HIT

HIT programs can help students make impressive gains if the program model follows the research and if educators consistently strive to meet the following standards. Programs designed to meet all the standards below are borne out in research to produce positive academic results more frequently than those meeting only some of the standards. For example, tutoring frequency (sometimes called dosage) is important but insufficient without a high-quality curriculum and trusting relationships. Conversely, a tutor can have a great relationship with a student, but



insufficient frequency of tutoring sessions can negatively impact academic progress. Programs that find it difficult to meet one or more of the standards (e.g., after-school programs that are unable to easily collaborate with teachers) should strengthen their efforts to meet the standards within their locus of control.

STANDARD	KEY ACTIVITIES
1. <b>Grounded in trusting relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruit caring and consistent tutors</li> <li>Train tutors in establishing rapport with students</li> </ul>
2. <b>Focused on tutor effectiveness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Select tutors based on their commitment and content knowledge</li> <li>Provide comprehensive training aligned with tutoring program’s goals and methods</li> <li>Observe tutors and give regular actionable feedback for support and growth</li> </ul>
3. <b>Supported by high-quality curriculum</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ground in research</li> <li>Align to state educational standards</li> </ul>
4. <b>Occurring frequently</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Occur multiple times per week</li> <li>Occur at least 90 minutes per week</li> <li>Occur for at least 10 weeks total for each individual student</li> <li>More than 10 weeks highly recommended</li> </ul>
5. <b>Organized in small groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limit tutoring groups to no larger than four students</li> <li>Understand 1:1 tutoring is ideal for personalization but limits number of students who may access tutoring</li> </ul>
6. <b>Data-driven</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regularly assess student progress</li> <li>Use assessment data to group students and adjust tutoring</li> </ul>
7. <b>Collaborative with schools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connect tutors and tutoring program leads with teachers regularly</li> <li>Hold tutoring, ideally, during the school day or immediately adjacent to it (i.e., just before or after school)</li> <li>For tutoring taking place in other non-school community settings, connect what tutors are doing with what students are learning in school</li> </ul>

## Research and practice evidence for HIT Standards

### 1 GROUNDED IN TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS

The strong, caring relationships tutors build with students are a critical lever in strengthening students' sense of belonging and engagement within their school communities. Surveys conducted by [CitySchools Collaborative](#) at the end of the 2024-25 school year indicated that 90 percent of students in kindergarteners through grader 3 say they get along well with their tutors, and 91 percent of students in grades 4-12 felt respected by their tutors. The importance of these relationships cannot be underestimated, and tutoring sessions should include time and space for relationship building.

#### EVIDENCE FROM RESEARCH

- A study out of [Stanford University](#) (2025) found that DC students participating in HIT were less likely to be absent on days they had a tutoring session scheduled. Moreover, the study showed that students were 1.2 percentage points less likely to be absent on days they were scheduled for tutoring, a 7.0 percent reduction.

### 2 FOCUSED ON TUTOR EFFECTIVENESS

Well-trained, culturally competent tutors serve as the foundation for student engagement, academic outcomes, and well-being. Tutors must be fluent in the academic content, trained in effective facilitation strategies, and prepared to respectfully enter school communities. Ongoing feedback and coaching are essential to continuously improving HIT programs, and program directors should collaborate with schools, build systems for feedback, and provide ongoing training opportunities to ensure tutors are confident and prepared to serve students well.

While research shows that teachers are generally the most effective tutors ([Nickow, 2020](#)), rigorous studies have shown that [paraprofessionals](#), [paid volunteers](#), and even [unpaid volunteers](#) can make a significant difference on student achievement provided they are well-selected, managed, and monitored. (See also [Neitzel, 2021](#) and [Pelligrini, 2021](#).)

#### EVIDENCE FROM RESEARCH

- The Brookings Institution found that service fellows can be [as effective as teachers](#) in delivering high-impact tutoring.

### 3 SUPPORTED BY HIGH-QUALITY CURRICULUM

Tutoring is most effective when tutors use instructional materials that are aligned to state standards and closely connected to the school's core curriculum. Materials should emphasize both conceptual understanding and procedural skill in math and foundational literacy skills in reading, with lessons grounded in evidence-based practices such as the science of reading. Because many tutors may have limited content knowledge, curricula should include structured guidance, such as scripted or semi-scripted lessons, clear instructions, and scaffolds to support accurate and consistent delivery. Tutoring programs should work with school leaders and teachers at the outset of a partnership to ensure materials reinforce classroom learning and prioritize acceleration toward grade-level standards, rather than remediation.

#### EVIDENCE FROM RESEARCH

- The [National Student Support Accelerator](#) (NSSA) calls for a [tutoring curriculum that is aligned to state standards and to research on what works in instruction](#).
- Accelerate's [2022-23](#) synthesis found that grantees who aligned tutoring curricula to classroom instruction—including using pre-assessments and structured scripted lessons—saw stronger implementation fidelity and were better able to meet students' grade-level learning needs.

#### Learning from the field: Taking advantage of free training and curricular resources

CitySchools Collaborative, in partnership with OSSE, developed a tutoring-ready [math curriculum](#) specifically designed for tutors who may have limited content knowledge. The curriculum provides clear, structured lessons, guided prompts, and scaffolds that make it easy to deliver high-quality instruction. By aligning closely with classroom standards and focusing on both conceptual understanding and procedural fluency, this curriculum helps tutors accelerate student learning while ensuring consistency with core instruction. Schools and tutoring providers across DC have successfully integrated these materials into their HIT programs, demonstrating how tailored resources can empower tutors and support students in meeting grade-level expectations.

## 4 OCCURRING FREQUENTLY

All tutoring standards matter for strong HIT implementation, but dosage is highly critical. Research shows that the more often students receive tutoring, the better their outcomes. At a minimum, students should get 90 minutes of tutoring each week, spread across multiple sessions—adding up to at least 900 minutes over 10 weeks. Programs will ideally schedule more than 10 weeks of tutoring to account for potential absences and maximize the proportion of students who receive full dosage.

### EVIDENCE FROM RESEARCH

- NSSA recommends tutoring sessions be arranged multiple times per week but [notes that three - five sessions](#) are most effective. Additionally, they name the [importance of a minimum of ten weeks](#) for an implementation to be effective.
- [EmpowerK12 analysis on the impact of math tutoring found that students who received a full dosage of high-impact tutoring - exceeded academic gains by 44 percent](#) and experienced growth equal to two more months of learning, compared to their non-tutored peers.

### Learning from the field: Building dosage into the master schedule

DC school leaders face the difficult task of ensuring students receive the required tutoring dosage within the school day. This becomes more manageable when schools proactively adjust the master schedule or integrate tutoring into existing intervention blocks. Embedding tutoring during the school day not only increases accessibility for students but also simplifies logistics for both staff-led and external provider-led programs by clearly defining when and where tutoring will occur. Intervention blocks are especially effective when schools have already identified the students best positioned to benefit from HIT.

## 5 ORGANIZED IN SMALL GROUPS

What makes tutoring effective, even when implemented by those without teacher training or experience, is that a tutor can personalize instruction for each student. As group size increases; however, tutors have less time to customize instruction and must spend more time on student engagement. Tutoring sessions ideally have one or two students with a maximum size of four students. Group sizes of three to four can allow for expanded impact as more students can receive tutoring. Generally, the major difference between HIT and “traditional” small group intervention is who is leading the group and the number of students receiving support. HIT is, in practice, a small group intervention, but not all small group interventions are necessarily HIT. Small groups can be larger than four, however HIT research states groups should be no more than four students. Additionally, small groups are typically led by a classroom teacher and/or interventionist, while HIT can be led by a wide range of staff, volunteers, and/or tutors.

### EVIDENCE FROM RESEARCH

- Rigorous reviews of literacy ([Neitzel, 2021](#)) and math ([Pelligrini, 2021](#)) tutoring interventions point to examples of effective programs that have four students per session.

### Learning from the field: Designing tutoring sessions with intentional group size connected to context

It makes sense that smaller tutoring group sizes would be more effective, and school leaders and tutoring providers should keep this top of mind during intervention design. Multiple factors including, but not limited to, scheduling, cost, student data, and tutor availability must be considered when determining appropriate group size for implementation. The smaller the size of the tutoring group, the more personalization and attention each student will get. For example, some early literacy tutoring providers in the District that target students with significant reading challenges limit their group sizes to up to two students in alignment with their models. However, many of the staff-led HIT programs in DC schools opt to build groups of three to four based on staffing capacity and cost. When establishing group size, school leaders must strike a balance between what is ideal and what works to maximize positive impact in their context.

## 6 DATA-DRIVEN

HIT works best when instruction is guided by regular, meaningful assessment. Tutors should use formative assessments that are aligned with the curriculum to understand what each student needs and adjust lessons in real time. Programs should also track key indicators such as attendance, session frequency, progress on grade-level standards, and student engagement. Reviewing these data pieces regularly helps tutors and program leaders ensure instruction is targeted and effective, and highlights opportunities to strengthen the tutoring program itself.

### EVIDENCE FROM RESEARCH

- Paraprofessionals can deliver [highly effective tutoring](#) when trained and coached to use formative assessments. Research from NSSA shows that regularly tracking student progress allows paraprofessionals to adjust instruction in real time, keeping sessions targeted and aligned with classroom goals.
- Research from the [NSSA](#) indicates that HIT is more effective than standard tutoring models, with studies demonstrating that the practice increases students' learning by an additional three to 15 months across grade levels.

#### Learning from the field: Building a culture of continuous improvement

OSSE partners with CitySchools Collaborative to help DC schools and tutoring providers create a culture of continuous improvement. Quarterly communities of practice bring together role-alike practitioners and leaders to reflect on data, share best practices, and address common challenges. Through regular convenings and structured discussions, participants review dosage reports, student progress, attendance, and survey results to identify patterns and adjust instruction or program strategies. This collaborative approach enables leaders and practitioners to learn from one another's experiences, refine their practice, and implement solutions that strengthen HIT across multiple sites.

## 7 COLLABORATIVE WITH SCHOOLS

Whether or not a school chooses to use an external provider or internal staff, working collaboratively across the school is essential to strong HIT implementation. Ideally, tutoring should be embedded into the school day schedule, and there should be a point of contact from both the provider and school that are connecting on a regular basis. Not only should there be clear coordination between school and tutoring providers, but tutors should be able to readily sync with teachers and other instructional staff to learn about participating students and the support they need. This will allow for greater equity of access to tutoring, targeted lesson planning, and more strategic coordination of programs.

### EVIDENCE FROM RESEARCH

- A report by the DC Policy Center states [the need for a high level of coordination between providers](#) and school sites for successful implementations.

#### Learning from the field: HIT Managers in District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)

In 2021, OSSE funded the role of HIT Managers at several DCPS schools to serve as on-site leads for implementation. HIT Managers were responsible for overseeing all aspects of the program, including:

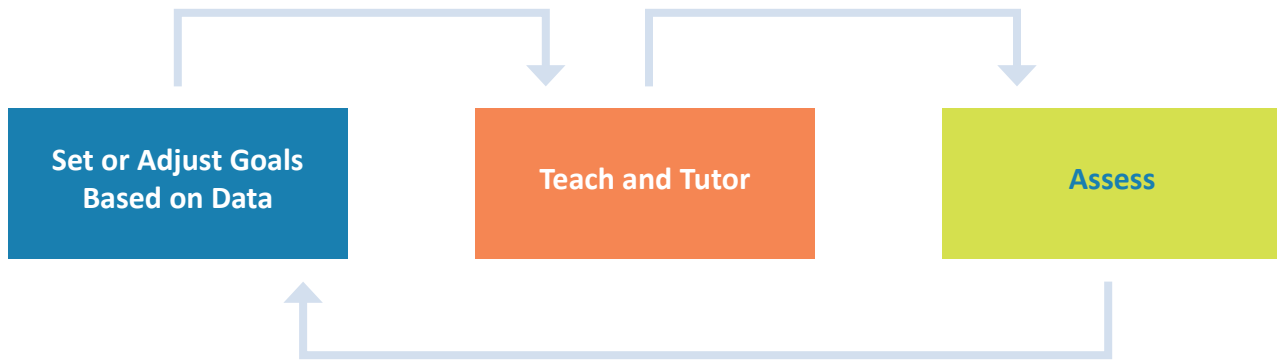
1. Acting as the primary point of contact for HIT providers
2. Collaborating with teachers, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) teams, and school leaders to identify students who would benefit from tutoring
3. Managing program administration, including developing and maintaining tutoring schedules
4. Ensuring alignment between tutoring efforts and the school's academic goals

This role proved essential to strong implementation because it created clear ownership within the school and streamlined communication between HIT providers and school staff. By having a dedicated leader focused on partnership management and program fidelity, schools were able to protect HIT from being sidelined by competing priorities.

## Continuous Improvement

HIT accelerates student learning when adults commit to a cycle of continuous improvement both for students individually, and for the tutoring program itself. In this approach:

- Students' initial goals and overall program goals are set based on diagnostic data.
- Tutoring supplements academic instruction including remediation and acceleration.
- Tutors collect formative assessment data (e.g., exit tickets) to understand students' progress.
- Tutoring providers (tutors and sites leads) and school teams (teachers, administrators, other academic leadership) discuss formative and benchmark data to determine new goals and/or adjust instruction.



Tutoring programs, no matter how well-established or well-studied, will sometimes fail to reach every HIT standard. The best way to improve is to collect and analyze data, benchmark it against the standards for HIT and other research and adjust. Gathering program leaders and other stakeholders in a community of practice powers the improvement process, as the discussion of best practices is tailored to specific, common challenges. Together, the coalition of stakeholders interested in student success can raise the quality of HIT to the point that it becomes an indispensable strategy, not only for pandemic recovery but an activity that is woven into the fabric of public education.



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1050 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002