

**“Tutoring is rewarding in knowing that you have made a difference in a child’s life; a difference that will have a lasting value to the child and to the community.”**

Volunteer Reading Tutor Training Handbook, Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Research has consistently shown that well-designed tutoring programs can be effective in improving children’s reading skills, which are essential to a student’s success in virtually all areas of learning. Four out of 10 children in the primary grades – Kindergarten through Grade 3 – are at risk in terms of literacy development. In urban communities, six out of 10 are at risk. Students who cannot read by the end of Grade 3 continue to fall behind in school. Tutoring is an efficient and effective way of delivering instruction to help struggling readers.

## Why Tutoring?

Tutoring improves learner-to-teacher ratios to promote learning. In the case of struggling readers, tutoring increases the time spent on reading, provides more opportunities to assess learner performance, and allows opportunities for learners to receive immediate feedback on their reading performance. Tutoring also promotes better grades in school, better behavior, increased motivation, and increased employment and post-secondary options (Carnine, Marchand-Martella, Hofmeister & Farkas, 2002).

## What Makes Tutoring Effective?

Tutoring is individually tailored to meet the unique needs of the learner. Tutors and learners work side-by-side, learning new skills and exploring avenues not previously traveled. Learners are often aided in skill development by a tutor who may be dealing, or have dealt with in the past, similar life and/or school issues.

Therefore, bonds between the tutor and the learner are established. Trust ensues and success follows (Carnine, Marchand-Martella, Hofmeister & Farkas, 2002).

## What are the Advantages of Tutoring?

### For Learners:

- Creates a more favorable teacher-to-learner ratio (particularly with the use of one-on-one instruction)
- Provides learners with more on-task time via increased opportunities to read with success and to receive feedback
- Allows for immediacy of positive and corrective feedback so learners stay on track and do not practice errors
- Increases reading performance of learners
- Improves learner motivation and decreases their frustration
- Enhances interpersonal skills and relationships due to established bonds/friendships between learners and tutors
- Allows for individualized progress monitoring to ensure learning is taking place

### For Student Tutors:

- Increases reading performance of student tutors as a result of serving as a teacher
- Enhances interpersonal skills and relationships due to established bonds/friendships between learners and student tutors

- Provides tutors with community service learning opportunities to expand their growth in human service related fields
- Gives student tutors an opportunity to experience firsthand what it would be like to be a teacher
- Establishes important skills in student tutors such as patience, trustworthiness, and responsibility

#### For Volunteer Tutors:

- Provides personal satisfaction of helping students
- Allows them to gain valuable work experience
- Gives them a chance to make a positive contribution to the community

### How Do We Know Tutoring Is Effective?

Researchers who identified 29 studies conducted between 1975 and 1998 examined the effectiveness of adult-delivered tutoring to children experiencing reading difficulties. All studies covered intervention in Grades 1-5 and included some type of control group.

They found that one-on-one reading tutoring, led by trained adults, can have a significant and positive effect on student reading, particularly for younger students. In fact, the average gain among students was equivalent to moving from the 50th percentile to the 65th percentile. They also discovered that tutoring programs that included decoding, word recognition, and comprehension, as well as programs focused specifically on comprehension, were the most effective. In addition, researchers found that shorter but intense tutoring programs had greater effect than longer, less-intense programs (Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes & Moody, 2000).

### What Elements Lead to Increased Achievement?

Researchers have identified the following components of effective tutoring programs:

- **Tutoring programs that incorporate research-based elements produce improvements in reading achievement.** An analysis of 65 published studies that used rigorous evaluation methods to evaluate high-quality tutoring programs found positive achievement effects across all studies (Cohen, Kulik & Kulik, 1982).
- **Tutoring sessions are well structured.** In that same analysis of 65 published studies, structured programs in which the content and delivery of instruction is carefully scripted demonstrated higher gains (Cohen, Kulik & Kulik, 1982). Similar conclusions were reached by other researchers (Wasik & Slavin, 1993).

In a study involving the use of tutorial scripts in teaching mathematics, researchers found that most successful tutors often have well-rehearsed scripts for responding to student errors. The results are general enough to apply to reading also (McArthur, Stasz & Zmuidzinas, 1990).

- **Tutors receive intensive and ongoing training and feedback.** Several studies reinforce the importance of tutor training. For instance, when tutors participated in ongoing, intensive training as part of a Dade County tutoring program, their students outperformed students whose tutors did not complete the training sessions (Wasik & Slavin, 1993). It's also very important that tutors are trained in interpersonal skills so they do not become impatient with students (Jenkins & Jenkins, 1985). Training should include strategies for reinforcing correct responses and correcting incorrect responses (Warger, 1991).

### Can We Just Read to Those Who Struggle in Reading?

Simply reading to those who struggle in reading is not enough. Tutoring sessions must be structured and should include direct instruction in various skill areas to enhance the ease with which learners read and understand what they read.

The most important strategies for improving early literacy of children with reading difficulties are to:

- Develop awareness of printed language and the writing system.
- Teach the alphabet.
- Develop student's phonological awareness.
- Develop phonemic awareness.
- Teach the relationship between sounds and letters.
- Teach children how to sound out words.
- Teach children how to spell words.
- Help them develop fluent, reflective reading.

Source: Carnine, Marchand-Martella, Hofmeister & Farkas, 2002.

- **Each student’s progress is monitored and assessed regularly.** Successful tutor-student relationships were characterized by explicit demonstration of appropriate reading and writing processes, as well as a high number of reading and writing experiences in which the student moved from being fully supported to working independently (Juel, 1996).
- **Tutoring is intensive and consistent.** Several studies have found positive results for programs with frequent and regular tutoring sessions, with each session lasting between 10 to 60 minutes daily. Programs in which tutors met with students at least three times a week were more likely to generate positive achievement than programs in which tutors met with students twice a week (Reisner, Petry & Armitage, 1990).

### How Are Effective Tutoring Programs Developed?

Before developing a tutoring program, consider the following steps:

- Determine the school/organization’s commitment and administrative support for scheduling, financing, space allocation, transportation, etc.
- Train an on-site supervisor to coach and train tutors as well as monitor the tutoring program.
- Establish tutor expectations, including time commitments, professional behavior, and training requirements.
- Recruit volunteers who are motivated to help others and who make a commitment to tutor on a consistent basis.
- Establish a system for teachers to identify, prioritize, and request tutoring services.
- Identify learners and establish expectations. Incorporate the use of placement testing for appropriate skill entry to ensure learner success.
- Screen and match tutors with students. Provide rapport-building activities such as “getting to know you” games.
- Provide daily tutoring sessions with at least 10 minutes (and preferably more) of instruction. If the sessions cannot be daily, they should be at least two to three times per week.
- Demonstrate teaching skills to tutors. Show them how to give appropriate instructional commands, specific praise statements, and how to correct errors

without negative comments. Explain the procedures and answer questions. Include role-play and practice activities as well as problem solving scenarios during tutor training.

- Use one-on-one tutoring. Although an excellent tutor can work with two students at the same level at once.
- Use an evidence-based program to teach reading. This program should include tutoring prompts on what to say and what to do. Incorporate phonemic awareness activities, sounds practice, word lists, and oral reading of text that incorporates previously taught sounds/words.
- Use oral reading, comprehension questions, and writing activities whenever possible.
- Gather materials such as magnetic letter boards, dry erase boards/markers/erasers, and timers/stopwatches to use during instruction.
- Develop a record-keeping system to ensure tutors are conducting the program at a quality level, at the suggested number of sessions per week, and that learners are progressing.
- Observe how tutors deliver instruction, provide praise and error corrections, and record learner progress. Deliver feedback and coaching based on this observation.
- Provide additional tutor training at scheduled intervals to allow tutors to work more effectively with learners.
- Hold regular meetings with tutors to provide a forum for discussion and problem solving.
- Collect data showing progress made by students to measure the effectiveness of the tutoring program.

#### Appropriate Settings for Tutoring

- Provide a convenient location with good lighting.
- Identify a “defined” area that is convenient, quiet, and away from distractions.
- Include comfortable seating, a table for writing activities, and a place to store materials.
- Provide an open area where the tutoring pair can be observed at all times.

## Tips for Tutors

- Begin instruction immediately after the start of the tutoring session.
- Provide clear instructions (e.g., “Read this list of words” rather than “Could you read this list of words?”).
- Use explicit teaching techniques (i.e., showing learners what to do and providing opportunities for learners to practice with clear tutor supervision and feedback) rather than simply reading to the learners.
- Be positive. Praise goes a long way with learners who struggle in reading. Include praise and encouraging words that are specific to the task at hand (e.g., “Yes. The word is Sequoia.”).
- Stop learners immediately after an error. Show them what to do and give them an opportunity to do it correctly (e.g., “That word is trouble. What word is this?”). Try not to use the word “no.”
- Chart learner performance data (graphs) to allow a visual display of improvements made in the program.
- Be patient. Show learners that you care about them by your commitment and encouragement.
- Record learner performance. Be mindful of mistakes made during the session. Review anything that learners miss or to what they do not respond confidently. Remember, learners “should say it like they know it.”
- Work from the beginning to the end of the period. Maintain a rapid pace of instructional delivery to keep learners focused and on task.
- Keep tutoring sessions lively. Learner success and tutor support go a long way in keeping learners motivated to come back.
- Ignore inconsequential and unwanted learner behavior. Focus on what learners are doing well rather than dwell on what they have missed.

### Tutoring Works!

Students with below-average reading skills who are tutored show significant gains in reading skills when compared with similar students who do not receive tutoring from a high-quality tutoring program. For example, an after-school tutoring program in which low-achieving Grade 2 and 3 students were tutored for one hour twice each week by university students, retirees, and suburban mothers generated strong improvements in the students’ reading skills. Two reading specialists selected the children for tutoring, recruited and trained the tutors, and monitored the tutoring sessions. In each of two years, the tutored group outperformed a closely matched comparison group on word recognition, passage reading accuracy, and spelling. Fifty percent of the tutored children made a full year’s gain in reading while only 20 percent of the comparison group children did (Morris, D., Shaw, B., & Perney, J., 1990).

With the right preparation and research-based programs, tutoring sessions help students improve their self-confidence about reading, their motivation for reading, and their overall reading proficiency.

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### Research-Based Programs are Ideal for Tutoring

Tutoring programs that incorporate research-based curricula lead to improved academic achievement. SRA/McGraw-Hill provides several programs that include well-defined, systematic and explicit instruction for teaching reading and math strategies:

READING PROGRAMS	Grade Level	Tutoring Time	Phonemic Awareness	Phonics	Fluency	Vocabulary	Comprehension
Early Reading Tutor	K-2	10 minutes					
Early Interventions In Reading	1-3	30 minutes					
Corrective Reading Decoding	3-Adult	30 minutes					
Corrective Reading Comprehension	3-Adult	30-45 minutes					
Horizons	1-3	30 minutes					
Reading Mastery Classic	K-3	30 minutes					
MATH PROGRAMS	Grade Level	Tutoring Time	Number Concepts	Basic Facts	Computation	Problem Solving	Fractions, Decimals, Percent
Corrective Mathematics	3-Adult	20-30 minutes					
Number Worlds	K-6	30 minutes					

For additional information, try these Web sites:

[www.ed.gov/teachers/how/read/tutors.html](http://www.ed.gov/teachers/how/read/tutors.html)

[www.k12.wa.us/curriculum/instruct/reading/readingcorps/pubresources.aspx](http://www.k12.wa.us/curriculum/instruct/reading/readingcorps/pubresources.aspx)

[www.nea.org/esea/images/esea-tutor.pdf](http://www.nea.org/esea/images/esea-tutor.pdf)

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