High-Impact Tutoring Evaluation

ExpandED and New York City Public Schools

Summer 2024

Since 2022, ExpandED Schools has partnered with New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) to adapt and scale a high-impact tutoring (HIT) model within the NYC ecosystem. HIT is widely recognized as an effective strategy for building academic, social, and emotional competencies of elementary and middle school–aged students.

The NYCPS and ExpandED HIT initiative aims to provide personalized support to students, especially those impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, helping them achieve their full potential through targeted tutoring sessions that address individual learning needs.

The American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) partnered with ExpandED Schools in 2024 to achieve two primary goals:

- First, to build a **multi-phase evaluation strategy** to empirically evaluate and strengthen the HIT initiative.
- Second, to **contribute more information to the future of high-impact tutoring** centering the voices of ExpandED and NYCPS partners.

Phase One Findings

About the Evaluation

This brief summarizes three key findings gathered from interviews and a focus group with ExpandED and NYCPS partners and students. The brief is divided into six sections addressing each of the following topics:

- Keys to Provider Success
- Lessons in Student and Tutor Attendance
- Student-Tutor Relationships
- Implications
- Partner Descriptions
- About the Evaluation

Major Findings

Provider Success with School Buy-in. Tutoring providers believed that buy-in from parents, administrators, and teachers is one of the most essential aspects of a successful HIT initiative at the school level.

A shared belief in the program's potential to positively influence student outcomes is crucial for fostering strong partnerships. Several partners also believed that effective communication and collaboration with these partners are critical for program success.

Lessons in Attendance from Tutors and Schools. Partners felt their programs either met or exceeded dosage and ratio requirements which many believe are affected by the time of day when programming takes place. Others described barriers like unpredictable tutor attendance as potential contributors to decreased tutoring dosage and frequency.

Student-Tutor Relationships. Student–tutor relationships emerged as a pivotal element in program implementation. Students spoke emphatically about building strong, positive bonds with their tutors, distinct from their interactions with classroom teachers.

Details about the methodology can be found in About the Evaluation.

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Keys to Provider Success

Tutoring providers believed that school staff **buy-in to the potential impact of high-impact tutoring is essential for success at the school level**. A shared belief in the program's potential to positively influence student outcomes is crucial for fostering a strong partnership.

When tutoring providers gained buy-in with teachers, they described how tutors and teachers often collaborated more often than others to create continuity between their sessions and classroom instruction by sharing resources, coordinating plans, and addressing aligning topics.

Several partners also believed that **buy-in with families is essential for program success**. Tutoring providers appeared increasingly committed to improving communication with families about the program. Through effective communication and collaboration, providers and tutors attempted to build and strengthen relationships with families.

This included staying connected as students enrolled and received tutoring, especially when students participated in the daytime, and parents were unaware of their student's participation. One partner affirmed that by staying informed and involved, parents can help ensure that their child remains enrolled in the program.

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Keys to Provider Success

To ensure streamlined communication between tutor and teacher about student needs, one tutor recommended providing tutors and teachers with **sufficient, overlapping preparation time**.

When discussing ineffective school–provider relationships, one provider described a scenario where a classroom teacher requested that a student not attend tutoring and stay in-class, whereas the principal insisted that students attend tutoring.

The provider stressed the significance of clear and assertive communication, stating that while the tutor was physically present, the provider could only exert so much influence over an already tense situation. This anecdote underscored the critical nature of effective communication and alignment between schools and external provider.

"

Make sure tutors have prep time. I think also being very clear about if the tutors are checking in with teachers. It's like [in] their prep time teachers are always doing a million things, and so short and sweet is good. Make it useful. Yeah, no one's trying to sit around and just blab."

"

–HIT Tutor

Spotlight Voices

| Tutoring Providers | Tutors | Students | Partner Descriptions |

Lessons in Student and Tutor Attendance

Many partners felt their programs **either met or exceeded dosage and ratio requirements** which many believe are affected by the time of day when programming takes place. Others described barriers like unpredictable tutor attendance as potential contributors to decreased tutoring frequency and dosage.

Schools often started programs with specific implementation strategies, but these **changed in response to student attendance and tutor feedback**. For instance, when faced with low in-person attendance, schools may opt for virtual tutoring to ensure continued access for students.

Conversely, one school transitioned between external tutoring providers to allow for in-school tutoring instead of afterschool tutoring with the hopes of increasing student attendance rates. One participant asserted that student feedback shaped these program adjustments, as sites sought to align tutoring practices with student need and preference.

> *The thing about middle schoolers is legally they can leave the building at the end of the day. So, we found it challenging. Some kids really benefited from the program, and it kind of broke my heart that we didn't keep doing it [after school]."*
> *- Tutor Provider*

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Lessons in Student and Tutor Attendance

Two partners cited the ways that life events led to unexpected absences for tutors, disrupting the continuity of tutoring. One tutoring site in particular reported frequent tutor turnover, which they believed negatively impacted student learning.

Tutor attendance also influenced the relationships between schools and tutoring providers, with one partner claiming that poor tutor attendance led to searching for different providers.

Practices to remedy tutor attendance issues included **hiring current school staff as tutors, switching tutoring providers, compensating tutors at fair rates, and adjusting the time of day for tutoring**. Additional inquiry into tutor experience is required to understand other potential practices.

> *We pay our people very well. We pay about 25 to 30 percent above market, and I think that's another reason why we have pretty strong tutor attendance. I think that sometimes if people are not paid well to begin with, they may not feel as supported because you put your money where your mouth is. But we also make sure our tutors feel very supported with their check-ins.*
>
> —Tutoring Provider

Spotlight Voices

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The Power of Student-Tutor Relationships

Student-tutor relationships proved pivotal, fostering positive learning environments, and providing emotional support.

HIT thrives when the role of a tutor extends beyond academic instruction. Successful tutors often cultivate strong relationships with their students, fostering a supportive and nurturing environment. These connections can play a profound role in a young person's development, both academically and socially.

Student–tutor relationships emerged as a pivotal element in program implementation. Students spoke emphatically about building strong, positive bonds with their tutors, distinct from their interactions with classroom teachers. Students described tutors as patient, supportive, and respectful, creating a conducive environment for learning. As the work continues, a deeper understanding of the specific relationship-building techniques employed by effective tutors will follow.

> *"In general, [students are] very happy to spend time with their specific instructor, and they look for them. They look for them during the day when they're not receiving instruction. And it's nice to see the students socializing with students from other classes or grades that they wouldn't normally interact with in a kind of a low-pressure way. It's just different from during the day."*
>
> *– HIT Tutor*

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The Power of Student-Tutor Relationships

When speaking about successes with student-tutor relationships, an interviewee described their school's approach to hiring current school staff and tutors. In this example, schools with non-teaching staff working as tutors created opportunities to **build positive relationships with students outside of the traditional classroom setting**.

One teacher/tutor believed that when non-teaching staff built relationships with students outside of the classroom, students more freely engaged with the curriculum without shame, thus pushing back on negative classroom experiences.

" *Our model of HIT is kind of unique because **we use school staff**. I think there's only a couple of other schools that are doing that right now. And that is really one of the reasons I think it's been really successful for us because we have the relationships with the students and the staff. So, there's a dynamic established there already.* "

-Teacher/Tutor

Spotlight Voices

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Implications

Takeaways

This brief synthesizes insights gleaned from interviews with tutoring providers, tutors, and students. School-community buy-in emerged as a critical element for establishing partnerships and fostering a shared belief in the possibilities of HIT programming.

Student attendance rates in tutoring sessions, which many believe are influenced by factors such as the time of day for a tutoring session and tutor attendance, can potentially play a role in the overall dosage and frequency of tutoring services. While many programs believe they met or exceeded dosage and ratio requirements, unpredictable tutor attendance posed a challenge for others.

Building strong, positive relationships between students and tutors appeared to be another pivotal aspect of program implementation. Students expressed the significance of these relationships in both navigating subject material and social dynamics within schools, particularly emphasizing their distinctness from interactions with other educators.

Future iterations of this evaluation will focus on specific tutoring practices, such as the scaffolding and pacing techniques used by tutors, as well as the ways in which partners build relationships with partners. Upcoming work will also delve into how partners integrate social-emotional learning and student identity into tutor-student relationships. Additionally, we intend to further examine ExpandED and NYCPS' efforts to expand a pipeline of tutors to transition into teaching roles in response to growing teacher shortages.

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Partner Descriptions

This evaluation focuses on the experiences of 12 participants, including eight ExpandED partners and four students (see Exhibit 2). Seven of the partners identify as tutoring provider administrators, two identify as tutors/teachers, and one identifies as a school administrator.

Participants (n = 12)	
Descriptors*	%
School administrator	8
Tutoring provider	58
Teacher	16
Tutor	16
Student	25
Percentage of female (adults)	100
Percentage of female (students)	50

Spotlight Voices

Tutoring Providers   Tutors   Students   Partner Descriptions

Appendix A. Background and Methods

About this partnership

The American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) is partnering with ExpandED Schools to build a multi-phase evaluation strategy to empirically evaluate and strengthen the HIT initiative. This evaluation strategy aimed to provide useful evidence on the implementation of the HIT model and inform continuous improvement efforts. The current phase of the evaluation focused on analyzing partners' experience and perception data from the 2023–2024 program year to understand implementation across the initiative.

Methods

This evaluation uses a formative implementation evaluation framework, a systematic approach used to identify barriers and facilitators to process, dosage, and structure of implementation efforts. Building upon a growing body of research on HIT this evaluation uses the NYCPS and ExpandED HIT definitions and standards as guiding principles for ExpandED partners implementing HIT programs.

The extent to which these partners implement programs with fidelity to these standards was assessed. AIR conducted a qualitative inquiry to understand how ExpandED and its partners describe adherence to HIT standards and definitions. Data collection included select participant demographic information and verbal responses to prompts **in eight interviews with ExpandED partners and one student focus group**. The evaluation team analyzed transcriptions of interview conversations. Analysis centered on participant perceptions and experiences with attention to the evaluation questions domains from ExpandED and NYCPS' HIT definitions and standards.

As the analysis progressed, an inductive approach deemed necessary to capture emergent themes not explicitly addressed within the original framework. This dual approach resulted in the identification of a total of 62 coded themes and patterns. The themes and patterns included in this report include those frequently mentioned by partners as well as outliers for investigation in future iterations of this work.

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