

How can tutoring help address the educational impacts of COVID-19?

International evidence suggests that the educational disruptions caused by COVID-19 had the most severe impact on vulnerable groups. Students with disabilities, those living in poverty, and students from racialized and newcomer communities experienced not only a greater burden of disease and COVID-related hardships, but also more challenges accessing and engaging in remote schooling.

Targeted academic support through small group tutoring has emerged as a promising intervention, and is a central plank in several countries' recovery plans. However, not all tutoring is created equal. Funding for tutoring is likely to have the greatest impact on pandemic recovery if it supports the introduction or scaling-up of well-designed tutoring programs that complement the work of classroom teachers – and that are carefully monitored and evaluated.

What are the benefits?

Reviews of diverse educational interventions point to tutoring as among the most effective. Tutoring can support classroom learning through customized instruction and personalized engagement, caring, and mentoring. Tutors in no way replace the broader and more complex work of teachers. Rather, tutors can work with teachers to provide just-in-time catch-up. Their work can also promote a wide range of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that support students to fully engage and take advantage of classroom instruction. High quality evaluations have shown that frequent tutoring can:

- improve early literacy and middle-school math learning
- boost graduation rates, school connectedness, and tests scores for high-school students – allowing students to gain up to 2.5 years in one.

In addition, mounting evidence shows benefits for tutors themselves, particularly in programs that engage young people in service learning/work-integrated learning. The tutoring experience can enhance tutors' academic competencies, professional skills, civic engagement, and commitment to education and equity.

What are the characteristics of effective tutoring programs?

Tutoring can be delivered in different ways, but some characteristics are particularly important:

- Frequency and attendance: one-on-one or small-group tutoring (three to five students) offered three or more times a week is particularly effective for all students, especially those facing academic difficulties.
- Tutors' background and training: tutoring by certified teachers has the strongest impact, but paraprofessionals such as teaching assistants, graduate students, and full-time college graduates can be almost as effective.
- Pedagogical approach: programs with strong results are closely aligned to the school curriculum and adopt formative assessments to monitor student learning.

What do we still not know?

Much of the evidence on tutoring focuses on remedial literacy and numeracy programs offered in school settings. Community based models, especially after-school programs that integrate tutoring with nutritional, social, and physical activities, are still under-researched. Also, while online tutoring is logistically simpler for volunteer tutors and the pandemic context, results on its effectiveness are still limited.

What does the international experience say?

Australia, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States have invested in large-scale tutoring as a response to the pandemic educational disruption. These initiatives share an emphasis on targeting students with the greatest need. Implementation challenges have included difficulties in reaching the target group, staffing, and promoting adequate linkages with schools. These challenges draw attention to the need for careful policy design and articulation of tutoring programs within the education system at large.

For online resources and references please visit:
www.edcan.ca/facts-on-education

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