

Examining Implementation and Outcomes of the Project On-Track High-Dosage Literacy Tutoring Program

Launched in 2021 in response to a literacy crisis in northeastern Tennessee, Project On-Track provides high-dosage, small-group literacy tutoring to students in grade 1-3. The program specifies how to group students based on their skill levels and provides tailored mini-lessons that tutors deliver in small groups. Schools that use Project On-Track must provide tutoring to students at least two days a week for at least 30 minutes a session, but schools can choose when they provide tutoring, whom they hire as tutors, what grade levels receive tutoring, and which students to serve within those grade levels. This flexibility can facilitate program adoption and allow schools to select an implementation approach that best meets the needs of their students. This study examined data for 1,126 students in 56 schools to investigate how schools implemented Project On-Track, the characteristics of students who received Project On-Track tutoring, and how variation in implementation is associated with improvement in student literacy scores at the end of the school year.

Key findings

- **Most schools offered tutoring during the school day (66 percent) and more than twice a week (64 percent), and there were no differences in student literacy scores based on timing or frequency of tutoring.** Rural schools were more likely than nonrural schools to offer tutoring during school—92 percent of rural schools compared with 47 percent of nonrural schools. Compared with schools that offered tutoring outside of school hours, schools that offered tutoring during school tended to serve students in lower grades and students with lower beginning-of-year literacy scores. Although previous research suggests that tutoring offered during school and tutoring offered three days a week are more effective than tutoring offered outside of school hours and less frequently,¹ this study does not provide evidence that variation in the timing or frequency of tutoring results in differences in student progress in literacy during the school year. The prescribed content of Project On-Track tutoring sessions may have helped to ensure consistency in the quality of tutoring that students received regardless of variation in implementation.
- **Most tutors were current teachers (55 percent) or retired teachers (12 percent), and this study does not provide evidence of differences in student literacy scores based on tutor qualifications.** Tutors also included paraprofessionals, students in teacher preparation programs, administrators, and others with some teaching experience in nonprofits, higher education, and private schools. This study found no difference in student literacy scores based on tutor qualifications, whereas previous research found that tutoring is most effective when delivered by teachers, followed closely by paraprofessionals.¹ Hiring preservice teachers as tutors could be a useful option in communities where it is challenging to recruit and retain high-quality tutors.
- **Most students (55 percent) who participated in Project On-Track for a full school year scored in the highest risk category for reading difficulties at the beginning of the school year.** Forty-two percent of these students improved to a lower risk category after one year of Project On-Track tutoring.

1. Nickow, A. J., Oreopoulos, P., & Quan, V. (2024). The promise of tutoring for preK-12 learning: A systematic review and meta-analysis of the experimental evidence. *American Educational Research Journal*, 61(1), 74-107.