



# The Tutoring Partnership

SIF Implementation and Outcome Evaluation

*Executive Summary*

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# Acknowledgments

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# Executive Summary

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## Background

The Tutoring Partnership was a Saint Paul and Minneapolis network of 28 community-based programs that provided intentional academic interventions through tutoring. The common goal across these programs was improving students' academic outcomes. The Tutoring Partnership, operated by the Saint Paul Public Schools Foundation, supported participating programs by helping them improve program quality; the Partnership provided research-based professional development, technical assistance, and tutor training.

In 2013, the Saint Paul Schools Foundation was awarded a Social Innovation Fund (SIF) sub grant from Greater Twin Cities United Way to examine 1) the implementation of the Tutoring Partnership, and 2) student outcomes in tutoring programs receiving various levels of capacity-building support from the Tutoring Partnership.

In the first two program years of the SIF grant (2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years), the Saint Paul Public Schools Foundation implemented the Tutoring Partnership model through two strategic approaches, consisting of specific services. **Strategy A**, the Tutoring Partnership model that pre-dates the SIF grant, included professional development, technical assistance, and tutor training for programs in Saint Paul. **Strategy B**, the enhanced Tutoring Partnership model, included increased intensity and depth of support (e.g. mandatory participation in professional development workshops, technical assistance, and tutor trainings), and supplemental funding for four additional organizations in Saint Paul. In the third and final SIF grant year (2015-2016 school year), the Tutoring Partnership expanded to serve Minneapolis locations of the programs receiving enhanced Tutoring Partnership services in Strategy B. For this report, services provided in Minneapolis only in Year 3 are called **Strategy B3**.

In the middle of the third SIF year, the Saint Paul Public Schools Foundation announced that it was dissolving as an organization in August 2016, so the Tutoring Partnership would no longer be in operation after Year 3. The mid-year announcement was accompanied by staff layoffs and changes in plans to meet more ambitious service delivery goals in the 2015-2016 school year. The implications of the program closure are discussed throughout the report.

Below is a summary of findings from the implementation and outcomes study of the Tutoring Partnership.

## Description of Study

The study builds on previous research about the Tutoring Partnership by examining both student-level and program-level outcomes. In addition to focusing on the effect of the Tutoring Partnership, the study team answered a series of questions about how the Partnership was implemented in the SIF years.

## Implementation Evaluation Questions

To better understand the implementation of the Tutoring Partnership, the evaluation posed four primary implementation evaluation questions. Data to answer three of the four questions were collected in all

three years of the evaluation. To answer the last question, we collected additional data only in Year 3. The questions were:

1. Years 1-3: What are program and tutor characteristics?
2. Years 1-3: To what extent and how did the tutoring programs in Strategies A, B, and B3 participate in the services offered by the Tutoring Partnership (e.g. professional development, technical assistance, and tutor training)?
3. Years 1-3: To what extent do programs achieve *Best Practices for Tutoring Programs* (Bixby et al., 2011) as rated by programs on the Best Practices self-assessment?
4. Year 3 only: How do programs perceive the effectiveness of services provided to them through the Tutoring Partnership? What is their level of satisfaction with the services? How do programs perceive their growth?

## Outcomes Evaluation Questions

The outcome of the Tutoring Partnership was measured both by changes in program quality and by the reading achievement of tutored students. Because the Tutoring Partnership was especially concerned about the reading achievement of disadvantaged students, the evaluation explored data by those subgroups of students. Due to limited sample size, the evaluation question about changes in program quality is exploratory.

### Confirmatory Outcome Questions

1. Years 1-3: To what extent do the three capacity-building strategies (Strategies A, B, and B3) affect reading growth for students?
2. Years 1-3: To what extent do the three capacity-building strategies (Strategies A, B, and B3) affect reading proficiency for students?

### Exploratory Outcome Questions

1. Years 1-3: Low-income students receiving tutoring:
  - a. To what extent does tutoring have a differing effect on reading growth and proficiency for low-income students, compared to students not from low-income families?
2. Years 1-3: Racial/ethnic subgroups receiving tutoring:
  - a. To what extent does tutoring have a differing effect on reading growth and proficiency for specific racial and ethnic groups (i.e., American Indian, Asian American, Latino, black, and white)?
3. Years 1-3: Program quality:
  - a. To what extent does participation in the Tutoring Partnership improve program quality as measured by Program Quality Assessment over time? Does this growth differ by strategy? Does this growth differ based on the number of years receiving the intervention?

## Measures

The implementation study used a mixed method approach to answer the implementation evaluation questions. These included surveys of both tutors and tutoring program staff, as well as interviews of Tutoring Partnership staff and tutoring program staff. Administrative records about participation in Tutoring Partnership services were also included in the implementation study.

The outcome study used school district assessments administered by Saint Paul Public Schools and Minneapolis Public Schools for tutored students in kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Finally, the Program

Quality Assessment was used to measure program quality across all strategies. Table 1 summarizes the outcome study measures.

**Table 1: Outcome Study Measures, Student-level and Program-level (2013-2016)**

	Saint Paul <u>Strategies A and B</u>	Minneapolis <u>Strategy B3</u>
<b>Student-level measures</b>	<b>Grade(s)</b>	<b>Grades(s)</b>
MPS Total Literacy fall-to-spring gain	Not administered	K
Mondo Text Level fall-to-spring gain	K-5	Not administered
MAP fall-to-spring gain	Not administered	1-5
MCA spring scale score	3-5	3-5
MCA proficiency	3-5	3-5
<b>Program-level measures</b>	<b>Years</b>	<b>Years</b>
Program Quality Assessment (PQA)	1-3	1-3

Note: All analyses compare all tutored students and students in different subgroups when sample sizes allow (students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch; white, black, Latino, Asian, and Native American students).

## Analysis

Interviews and surveys were coded and analyzed descriptively. Where sample size allowed, t-tests were used to detect significant differences between groups. T-tests were also used to examine differences between domains and the total score on the Program Quality Assessment. Student-level assessments were analyzed using multivariate regression and a difference-in-difference approach. This approach compared the reading growth and proficiency of tutored students in the year they were tutored to the year before and after they received tutoring services.

## Findings

### Implementation Evaluation Findings

- Programs served students in schools and community-based settings. Programs varied widely in size, number of staff, and number of tutors.
- Tutors in all strategies had high levels of education, were mostly white, and were predominately English-speakers.
- Strategy B/B3 programs had higher rates of participation in key Tutoring Partnership services such as professional development workshops, technical assistance, and tutor training. Requiring participation in these services did have an association with higher levels of participation when comparing rates to Strategy A, whose staff were not required to participate.
- Overall, program staff felt the support they received from the Tutoring Partnership was beneficial. Programs found the tutor trainings to be most helpful; however, participation in

Tutoring Partnership tutor trainings were relatively low across all strategies, as some programs may have provided their own trainings to tutors.

- Programs across all strategies self-reported using *Best Practices for Tutoring Programs* (Bixby et al., 2011).

## Outcome Evaluation Findings

### Students overall

- Tutored students in Strategy A had significantly higher growth than the comparison group in all five Mondo subscales<sup>1</sup> (Letter Recognition, Letter Sound, Print Concepts, Phonemic Awareness, and Word Knowledge) in Years 1 and 2. These students also showed significant gains over the comparison students in three subscales in Year 3 (Letter Recognition, Letter Sound, and Print Concepts).
- Tutored students in Strategy B had significantly higher growth in all five Mondo subscales in Year 2. There was not significant growth on any Mondo subscales for Strategy B programs in Years 1 and 3.
- Tutored kindergarten students in Strategy B3 had significantly higher growth in Year 1 (a year when their programs were not participating in the Tutoring Partnership), and all tutored students in Strategy B3 programs had greater growth on the MCA in Year 3 (the only Tutoring Partnership year).

### Low-income students

- Low-income and higher-income students tutored in Strategies A and B saw significant growth in reading skills in Years 1-3 combined.
- In Strategy B3, low-income comparison group students had significantly greater gains than tutored students on the MAP assessment.

### Race/ethnicity subgroups

- Tutored students in Strategy A from all racial/ethnic backgrounds made significantly greater gains than comparison students from the same racial/ethnic backgrounds on the five Mondo subscales.
- Significant gains were also found for most subgroups among tutored students in Strategy B, on Letter Recognition Letter Sound, Print Concepts, Phonemic Awareness (Asian, black, Latino, and white students made significant gains), and Word Knowledge (Asian, black, and Latino students made significant gains).
- Black students tutored in Strategy B3 programs made significantly greater gains on Total Literacy.
- Latino and white students in the comparison group for Strategy B3 made significant gains over Latino and white tutored students on the MAP.

### Program Quality

- Programs in Strategy A saw a decline in the quality of Academic Climate/Skill Building<sup>2</sup> from Year 1 to Year 3.

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<sup>1</sup> Mondo Bookshop Assessment (Saint Paul Public Schools only) is administered to kindergarteners through fifth graders in Saint Paul Public Schools. The Mondo measures aspects of reading such as Text Level (overall reading ability), Print Concepts (e.g., understanding how books work), Letter-Sound Correspondence (i.e., ability to read nonsense words), Word Knowledge (i.e., ability to read a list of sight words), and Oral Language (measures of receptive vocabulary).

<sup>2</sup> Academic Climate/Skill Building includes items about targeted learning, scaffolding, learning how to learn, and higher order thinking.

- Strategy B3 programs had a significant increase in scores in the Supportive Environment domain, with the highest average score achieved in Year 3.

## Conclusions

**Overall, staff of tutoring programs were satisfied with the Tutoring Partnership services, and found them to be helpful to their programs.** Staff found tutor training to be the most helpful service, though it was not used by most tutors. For initiatives like the Tutoring Partnership, engaging tutors who may not be familiar with their services may be a difficult challenge. Initiatives and programs offering tutor training may need to provide additional incentives to entice tutors to training opportunities, make trainings highly practical and hands-on, and provide training at a variety of times and locations to boost training participation.

**Requiring participation in Tutoring Partnership services increased uptake.** Strategy B and Strategy B3 programs had requirements regarding their participation in Tutoring Partnership services. Thus, they had higher levels of participation in professional development workshops and technical assistance services. Programs in Strategy A could opt in to services, and tended to have lower levels of participation. Initiatives like the Tutoring Partnership should consider the requirements regarding participation and the programs' readiness to change, when they are working with programs on quality improvement.

**Tutor and student demographics are not aligned.** The Tutoring Partnership had a primary goal of closing the achievement gap that exists between low-income and high-income students, and between white students and students of color. While tutors were highly-educated, their language and racial/ethnic backgrounds did not match those of students they were working with, who were primarily students of color and more than 40 percent of whom were English Language Learners. Students benefit when they receive instruction from someone of their racial, ethnic, or cultural background (Bixby et al., 2011). Efforts by the Tutoring Partnership to increase the cultural competency of tutoring programs and their tutors were just getting underway during the SIF grant. Tutoring programs should try to continue building cultural competency, awareness of racial biases, and relationship building skills as key aspects of their training.

**Overall, tutored students made greater gains in the year they were tutored.** These gains were present for low-income and higher-income students, and for students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds. Limitations in the sample sizes and sample demographics made it challenging to determine whether one Tutoring Partnership Strategy was more effective than another in producing these gains.

**Programs maintained moderate levels of quality.** Based on Program Quality Assessment (PQA) scores, programs in all three strategies had moderate levels of quality in the three years of the SIF funding. It was difficult to determine changes in program quality because of limited sample sizes; further study into the associations of program quality to student outcomes would benefit the tutoring field.