



A Citywide Approach to Acceleration

Early Lessons from CityTutor DC

March 2022

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Executive Summary

CityTutor DC (CTDC) is a coalition-driven initiative to address the pandemic's impact on student achievement and well-being by dramatically expanding access to high-impact tutoring (HIT) in our nation's capital.

Since its inception in May 2021, CTDC has catalyzed tutoring for over 4,000 students across 102 sites, with plans to expand impact to a total of 10,000 students by Fall 2022.

Preliminary results across schools consistently show a positive association between total minutes tutored and academic growth. Survey results from the 2021-2022 school year demonstrate students forming strong relationships with their tutors and increasing confidence in their academic abilities.

This comprehensive mobilization of the city's stakeholders to meet the needs of students, in the face of numerous pandemic-related roadblocks, has been made possible by strategic coalition-building, guided design work, continuous improvement cycles, and a commitment to equity and research-backed methods.

At the midpoint of the initiative's first year, an independent data partner gathered evidence in the form of surveys, interviews, observations, and tutoring session data. These data yielded useful insights into implementing such a wide-reaching strategy, namely:

A decentralized system demands a strong intermediary.

The District consists of 69 autonomous Local Education Agencies (LEAs), with little centralized coordination or operational support, each of which can decide how they will meet the challenge of responding to the impact of the pandemic. CTDC plays an important role by building support for HIT and coordinating a citywide approach to tutoring that

removes barriers to implementation and anchors on standards for impact. This approach has created a support network for LEAs and providers launching new tutoring programs.

A unified coalition of stakeholders is essential to widespread HIT implementation.

CTDC built trust across LEAs and educational organizations in the District by assembling a coalition of stakeholders and ensuring that CTDC's strategy reflected their feedback and input. The strength of the coalition has created space for partners to innovate: local universities have taken the risk to create wholly new tutoring initiatives, and schools have redesigned schedules to provide tutoring to students most in need.

Guided design work strengthens equity mindsets and enables school-based tutoring.

Thirty-five schools across the District participated in Design Sprints, a five-week workshop to reimagine and redesign school schedules to implement HIT with an equity lens. At the mid-year point, 72% of participating schools have launched their tutoring programs, and 88% of participants report that the experience has made them more confident in their abilities and pushed them to be more attentive to the needs of their most marginalized students in their tutoring strategies.

A commitment to continuous improvement spurs action balanced with a focus on quality.

CTDC launched tutoring not only with providers whose models meet HIT standards, but also with partners who were willing to engage in Communities of Practice to push their models towards meeting HIT standards. Communities of Practice support schools and providers in engaging in a cycle of continuous improvement, allowing them to address the urgency of the problem by starting tutoring sooner while also consistently moving towards meeting the fullness of the standards.

While CTDC was created in response to the pandemic, its aims reach beyond pandemic recovery: research shows that HIT is an effective tool for closing the opportunity gap which undercuts the potential of Black, Hispanic, and Latino students across the nation.

The CityTutor Initiative

Introduction

In December 2020, drawing on an analysis of thousands of interim assessments, the DC-based education data analysis group EmpowerK12 declared that the city's students were experiencing a dramatic "COVID slide."

Analogous to the oft-lamented "summer slide," pandemic-related disruptions resulted in DC students missing the equivalent of four months of instruction in mathematics and one month of instruction in English language arts by the midpoint of the 2020-2021 school year.

If left unchecked, EmpowerK12 concluded that the effects of this COVID slide would likely continue, and the effects of lost instructional time would increase dramatically.

In addition to decelerating academic progress, the pandemic has had a profound impact on student well-being. In surveying DC students, EmpowerK12 found that over 77% of students reported experiencing anxiety related to the pandemic. Nearly half reported that their family's financial situation has become somewhat or significantly more stressful due to the pandemic, and nearly one in five students had recently experienced the loss of a family member with whom they live.

As schools grappled with how to support students during this time, high-impact tutoring (HIT)—a standards-based, research-backed* strategy shown to help accelerate learning and impact student well-being—emerged as a potential solution. In early 2021, CityBridge Education engaged in conversations with stakeholders across the city about implementing HIT. Discussions uncovered a clear need for more centralized citywide coordination for tutoring at scale and a desire for

*Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab. "The Transformative Potential of Tutoring for Pre K-12 Learning Outcomes: Lessons from Randomized Evaluations."

the creation of a unified coalition of local organizations working to increase access to tutoring. CityTutor DC (CTDC) is an initiative created to respond to these needs. The initiative relies upon a tight degree of coordination between schools, tutoring providers, out-of-school time providers, and parents and families.

Through a combination of grant making, design workshops, data collection, and deep relationship building, CTDC has enabled 4,000 students in the District to engage in tutoring by the midpoint of the 2021-2022 school year and plans to expand that impact to a total of 10,000 students by Fall 2022. CTDC’s path to this point has yielded valuable lessons on the large-scale operationalizing of HIT in a highly-decentralized educational ecosystem. What follows is an overview of the DC landscape, the CTDC strategy, and the insights generated from implementing said strategy.

A Unified Approach to a Decentralized System

The DC educational system is decentralized to an unusual degree for US cities: within the District, there are 69 distinct Local Education Agencies (LEAs)—collectively representing 238 public schools and 90,000 students—that each operate as autonomous school districts, maintaining administrative control of public elementary and secondary schools. Each LEA is free to develop independent and unique systems around data collection, interventions, and vendor selection. While this system allows for LEAs to innovate and tailor their practices to student needs, the nature of decentralization makes it difficult to create “one-size-fits-all” citywide initiatives.

For the success of any citywide initiative, then, it becomes necessary to develop a coalition-driven strategy—one that not only takes into account the various needs and idiosyncrasies of each LEA, but also strives to centralize data for the purpose of continuous growth. CTDC is one such initiative, supported and informed by a large coalition of LEAs, state agencies, and stakeholders across the city.



The CityTutor Coalition

A coalition, as CTDC defines it, is a group of stakeholders which agrees to an overarching vision for impact, shares common beliefs and values about the way in which that impact is achieved, and helps shape the strategy for implementation. The following stakeholder groups make up the CTDC Coalition:

Community Based Organizations

Community Based Organizations (CBOs)—organizations and programs that meet with students out of school, often in their own communities, and have deep existing relationships with students and families—are important partners in this work. Although research suggests that HIT is most effective when implemented during the school day, CTDC felt that it was important to build on the trust CBOs have earned with families and children and pair academic tutoring with the broader, “whole-child” supports CBOs deliver. A key part of CTDC coalition-building has been to partner with CBOs to deliver HIT at their community-based sites.

Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Office of the Deputy Mayor of Education

While the District’s system is decentralized, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and the Office of the Deputy Mayor of Education (DME) wield influence over various aspects of the system itself and have prioritized supporting HIT efforts and working collaboratively with partners doing this work. When OSSE and the DME adopted HIT as the District’s primary pandemic-recovery strategy, CTDC moved to coordinate with them to come to a shared understanding of what constitutes high-impact tutoring, how to help schools navigate the path towards implementing HIT, and how to critically assess HIT efforts.

School Leaders

School leaders are essential partners in the effort to provide HIT, as they decide which interventions and strategies to implement in their buildings. As part of the CTDC coalition, they provide key insights into tutoring within schools, illuminating barriers to implementation and indicators of success

Representative Advisory Group

The CityTutor Advisory Group consists of representatives of the above stakeholder groups, as well as other leading voices in education across the District. This is the space where coalition members wrestle with the challenges of expanding access to HIT with CTDC staff. The group has been instrumental in honing the CTDC vision, providing feedback on strategy and program design as well as insights into the needs of teachers, students, and parents. The Advisory Group meets once a month to discuss progress and problem solve, opening lines of communication and collaboration between otherwise siloed organizations.

CityTutor DC's Four-Part Strategy

With key input from the coalition, CTDC identified four critical problem areas that required innovative solutions for the success of the initiative:



The tutoring ecosystem lacked coherence and coordination, and leaders needed opportunities to collaborate and learn from each other with a common data set.



School leaders found it challenging to evaluate potential tutoring providers while also integrating tutoring into their school schedules.



Tutoring needed to be accessible to students who could not attend school in-person, and tutoring providers needed to be trusted by the communities in which they worked.



The available pool of tutors was insufficient to meet the needs of all students in the District.

These problem areas drove the formation of the CityTutor DC strategy, which can be categorized into four large areas of work*:



Strengthen the tutor force

CTDC dramatically increases the number of tutors in the District by funding the growth of existing tutoring providers, supporting the creation of new providers, and creating tools to align tutoring to HIT standards.



Build and strengthen HIT networks

CTDC coordinates providers and leaders around research-backed standards for HIT via training and technical assistance workshops, centralized data analysis, and Communities of Practice.



Build school capacity for equitable tutoring design

CTDC supports school leaders in reimagining and redesigning their school schedules to equitably implement tutoring via intensive guided design work.



Support out-of-school tutoring and learning

CTDC reaches students within their own communities and ensures that tutoring is accessible to students most in need via the creation of community-based tutoring centers.

*For more reading on the CTDC strategy, see the CTDC Theory of Change in the Appendix.

Anchoring the Strategy

CTDC's four-pronged approach is necessarily complex: lacking both the authority and desire to dictate in-school practices in a decentralized system, CTDC must leverage the wisdom and capacity of school and CBO leaders and provide them with targeted supports to expand access to HIT. But while the particular forms this four-pronged approach takes may vary by context, CTDC's vision is held fast by three key anchors: shared standards for HIT, a focus on continuous improvement, and a commitment to equity.

Standards for High-Impact Tutoring

Not all tutoring is created equal: according to research, there are certain aspects that must be true of a tutoring program in order for it to have "high-impact". Taking into account research from The Brookings Institute, the Poverty Action Lab, and the Annenberg Institute, CTDC has worked with the Advisory Group to delineate seven standards of HIT:

1. Based in Trusting Relationships

Students who know their tutor cares about them will be more deeply engaged in teaching and learning. The care tutors show and the trust they build fuels the motivation necessary for students to move forward academically.

2. Focused on Tutor Effectiveness

Tutor knowledge, background, and preparation is critical—tutors must, therefore, be chosen, trained, and retained carefully. Tutors should have a solid grasp of the subject matter they are teaching, receive close supervision, and have access to opportunities for professional growth. As much as possible, tutors should reflect the communities they serve.

3. Supported by High-Quality Curriculum

The curriculum that tutors use with students should be aligned with state standards and grounded in high-quality research (particularly in areas such as early literacy). The course of study should be specifically designed for use by tutors, who may not have as much pedagogical content knowledge as classroom teachers.

4. *Occurring Frequently*

Research has conclusively shown a connection between the intensity of tutoring—provided it meets other standards of quality—and its impact. Sessions lasting 60 minutes, occurring three times per week, over the course of at least three months have been proven most effective.

5. *Organized in Small Groups*

Tutors should work with no more than four students at any given time. Research has found that a one-on-one student and tutor relationship, where possible, is most ideal.

6. *Data-Driven*

Effective tutors have access to regular, high-quality assessment data so they can adjust their focus to meet the needs of each student. In addition to assessment data, tutoring efforts should incorporate other key data, such as attendance and student satisfaction, for continuous improvement.

7. *Collaborative with Schools*

Ideally, tutoring should be embedded within the student’s school. These deep partnerships between schools and tutoring providers enable tutors to connect with teachers and administrators to learn what supports their students need. Schools also increase equity of access—when they are open, school buildings are the place most likely for all students to be throughout the day. However, tutoring can take place in other settings, as long as efforts are made to connect the curriculum tutors are using to the content students are learning in school.

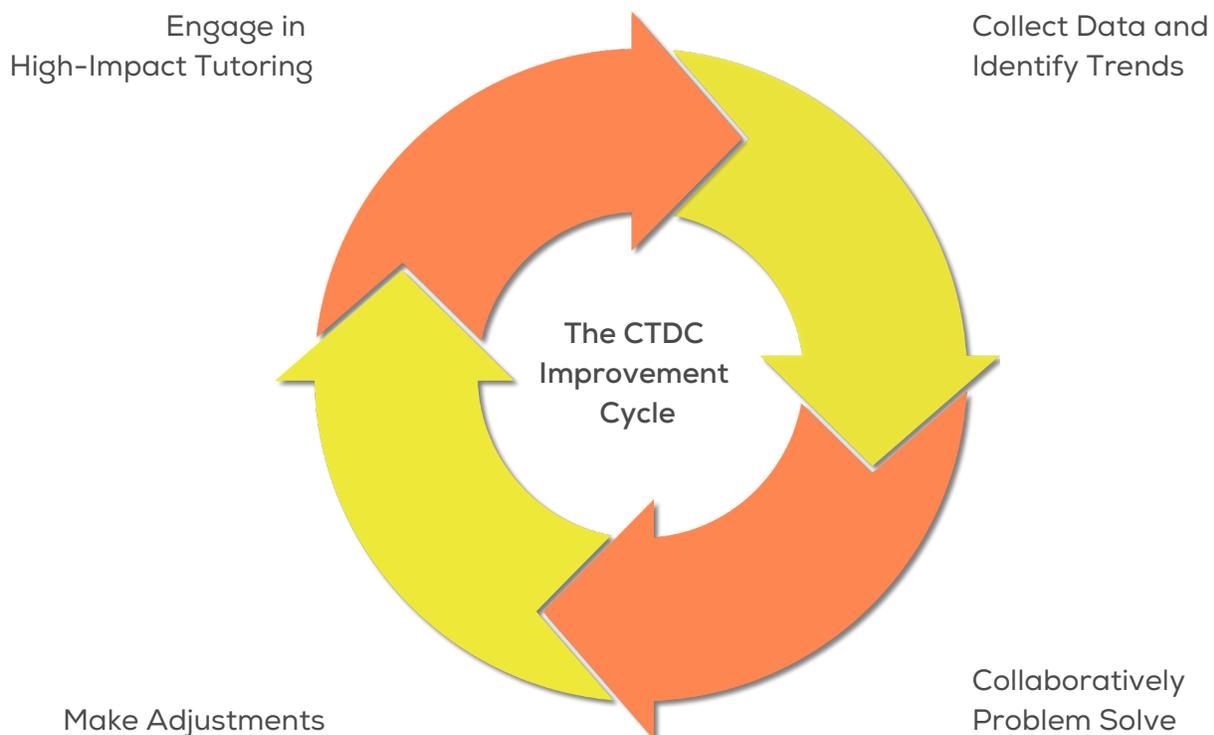
These are the standards by which CTDC defines “high-impact tutoring”. When vetting potential tutoring partners and training materials, conducting tutoring observations, or reporting out on citywide trends of HIT implementation, these standards are used as a North Star. It is important to note, however, that insisting upon absolute adherence to the standards would minimize the pool of potential partners so dramatically as to diminish the prospective impact of the initiative. Moreover, some providers which deviate from these standards in some

ways have proven through rigorous evaluation that they can achieve results for students. So instead of partnering only with providers that meet all standards, CTDC uses them to identify areas of growth and provide support through a cycle of continuous improvement.

Continuous Improvement

A strategy as complex and urgent as this requires balancing the importance of quality with the need for flexibility. A bias towards piloting ideas and a focus on continuous improvement helps reconcile these seemingly divergent imperatives. Data collection and analysis, led by third-party data partner EmpowerK12, is focused on unearthing and understanding trends and, critically, problem-solving with an eye towards improvement, not accountability in the punitive sense.

This frame plays a crucial role in trust-building as well: schools and providers can be wary of sharing data with a third-party for fear that it will be used as justification for corrective measures, rather than as an aspect of support. EmpowerK12 has an established reputation for using school data responsibly and supportively in the past. Their partnership with CTDC has signaled to schools that assistance and continuous improvement is the focus of the initiative.



Engaging in cycles of continuous improvement means making small adjustments, informed by data, throughout the life of any program at a rapid cadence and with an eye toward quality. CTDC guides partners through the continuous improvement cycle by hosting Communities of Practice, periodic convenings where partners use CTDC-analyzed data to collaboratively problem-solve.

Commitment to Equity

The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on communities of color, exacerbating the existing educational inequities for Black, Hispanic, and Latino students in particular, as well as highlighting the systematic disenfranchisement of communities of color as a whole. Tutors have typically been a tool for families with significant disposable income to use for student acceleration. These are inequities that already existed and will continue to exist without intentional intervention. CTDC believes it is a moral and civic imperative to ensure that HIT reaches the students who need it most, and key aspects of the CTDC strategy emphasize the following:

- Design Sprints helps school leaders “design at the margins” and intentionally allocate tutors to students most in need.
- Learning Hubs were chosen based on their locations and the needs of their communities.
- Subsidized tutors are offered to schools serving high proportions of at-risk students when possible.

Further, a commitment to equity demands a commitment to sustainability. There can be, at times, a tension between the urgency for short-term impact and the necessity of sustainable, long-term systems-building. However, CTDC’s approach illuminates a path forward: scaling programs that already meet HIT standards while giving providers that

In the 2021-2022 school year:

46% of DC public school students are designated as at-risk of academic failure

59% of students, on average, are considered at-risk of academic failure at schools where CTDC has tutored

83% of DC public school students identify as Black, Hispanic, or Latino

92% of students at schools where CTDC has tutored identify as Black, Hispanic, or Latino



have established relationships with schools and communities the chance to evolve their models as well. This allows for smaller local partners—often led by BIPOC community leaders—to be at the same table as larger, more established national organizations, helping ensure that tutoring solutions have the local buy-in required for lasting transformation.

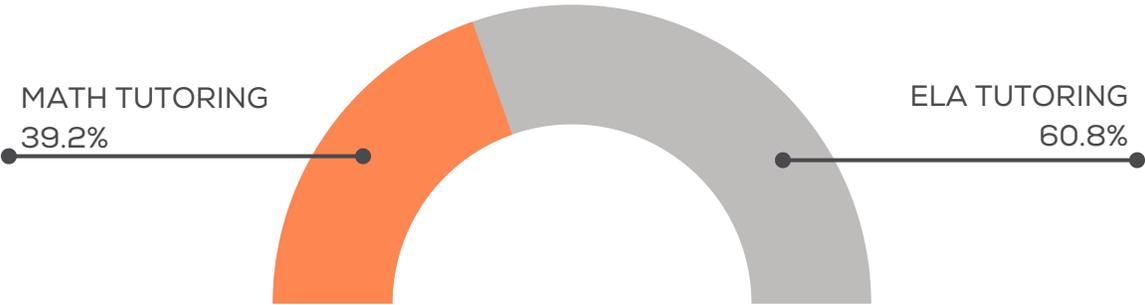
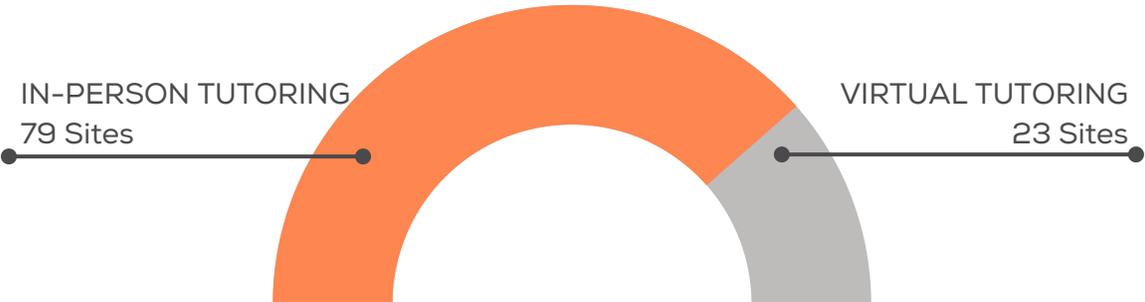
Coherent Coalition

CTDC has three core anchors that help forge a coherent coalition: HIT must be standards-based, continuous improvement is fundamental to success, and equity is central to the initiative’s work. While the ecosystem is decentralized and tutoring must be adjusted for different schools, these beliefs help unify stakeholders across the city to enact the change CTDC hopes to achieve in the District.



Key Implementation Strategies and Lessons

As of January 2022, CTDC has catalyzed tutoring for 4,000 students across 102 sites in the District:



ELEMENTARY
67 Sites



MIDDLE SCHOOL
29 Sites



HIGH SCHOOL
6 Sites

Design Sprints

Research suggests that tutoring is most impactful when integrated into the school day*. The act of integrating tutoring into a school schedule, however, is operationally complex, and school leaders attempting to do so are often left asking the same questions:

*How do I balance core instructional needs with intervention needs?
Who will do the tutoring? How should I prioritize students for tutoring?
Where will I find time to design and implement a new schedule while responding to in-the-moment COVID needs?*

An essential piece of the CTDC strategy, then, is the Design Sprint. The program is a five-week learning series which supports schools in designing and implementing high-impact tutoring. Core activities of the Sprint include:

- Creating a new student schedule for scaled implementation, considering an intervention block
- Designing a plan to strengthen the strategies to accelerate and supplement academic learning
- Identifying and setting measurable student learning targets

Principles of the Design Sprint

In addition to the above activities, the program curriculum was aligned to principles of Caroline Hill's equityXdesign** framework to foster the adoption of the following mindsets:

- Design at the margins. An equitable design process activates the voices and experiences of those most significantly impacted by the problem.
- Personal experiences and biases influence solution building. When unchecked, these biases can unintentionally recreate the inequity the solution seeks to disrupt.
- True disruption requires identifying the source and impact of biases and seeking ways to transform practices towards equity. When designers become aware of bias in their thinking patterns, they actively disrupt those patterns to better serve marginalized stakeholders.
- Clear, detailed plans are essential to implementing solutions with fidelity.

*Standards for HIT: Collaborative with Schools

**Caroline Hill et al., "equityXdesign: A Practice for Transformation"

CTDC believes that internalizing these principles is essential to effective implementation of HIT.

Lessons Learned

Since the inaugural Design Sprint in March 2021, CTDC has trained and supported four cohorts of “Sprinters”—72 participants from 35 schools—collectively working with over 4,500 K-8 students.

The earliest Design Sprint participants planned summer tutoring pilots for their schools. CTDC collaborated with a research team from American University (AU) and conducted a case study using surveys, any available academic data, and qualitative interviews with school leaders, teachers, and tutors. The findings of that case study, along with evidence from follow-up surveys and interviews conducted between December 2021 and January 2022, are as follows:

Design Sprints strengthen participants’ equity mindsets. Sprinters were more likely to engage with a wider set of stakeholders when designing solutions around tutoring, were more likely to take their own identities into account when designing solutions, and were overall more confident in their ability to design a solution to implement HIT in their schools.

Mid-year update: In a follow-up survey from December 2021, 88% of respondents to the question “How has your experience of the Design Sprint affected the way you're thinking about tutoring this year?” responded positively, with one respondent reflecting that “[The Design Sprint] has pushed us to be more creative, more systematic, and also more equitable with who is prioritized [for tutoring]”.

Pilots prove to be an effective mechanism for leaders to learn how to scale tutoring for the 2021-2022 school year. Based on interviews and surveys, the AU research team reported that school leaders who conducted a summer pilot felt more prepared to scale their solutions for the upcoming school year and had begun to identify the steps necessary for doing so.

Mid-year update: In a follow-up survey from December 2021, 72% of Sprinters reported that they have implemented tutoring in their schools, and of the schools that had not yet implemented tutoring, 80% reported having a plan to do so. For those schools, a clear barrier is finding a good provider-to-school match, based on contract prices, tutoring models, and school needs.

Teacher involvement is likely to result in better implementation outcomes. HIT in the pilots was most consistent and more highly rated in terms of satisfaction when classroom teachers were involved in the planning and implementation process. When teachers did not feel included, they reported feeling left out of essential planning and did not have a clear idea of what occurred during tutoring sessions. Subsequently, they felt they could not be as effective in the classroom as they would have been otherwise (note that true support of a teacher might require divergence from a planned implementation).

Mid-year update: In a follow-up interview from January 2022, one school leader reflected that one of the biggest lessons they learned during implementation was “the need for a [non-administrative] staff member to lead this work, not the principal.”

Strong tutor-student relationships make implementation smoother. At sites where implementation was smoothest (in terms of attendance, student and teacher buy-in), American University researchers found evidence of strong tutor-student relationships. This mirrors existing research about teacher-student relationships: the stronger the relationship, the better the outcomes for students. In a pilot where the principal and teachers said that tutors “exceeded expectations” in building genuine relationships with students, they also saw academic gains. Data results showed that 82.4% of students increased their Math MAP scores*.

Mid-year update: In a follow-up interview from January 2022, one school leader reflected that “1:1 relationships are key to driving participation [in tutoring]”.

*Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) tests use Rasch Interval Units (RIT) scores to measure student growth. 52% of students receiving tutoring increased their MAP RIT score by at least 3 RIT points.

CityTutor Learning Hubs

In the spring of 2021, while DC schools remained in a largely virtual posture, national vaccine uptake was slow, and officials had not yet approved vaccines for children, an urgent question arose:

What happens if schools remain virtual?

Members of the Advisory Group anticipated that some portion of their students may not return to school in-person, meaning that the most vulnerable students might be unable to access the types of in-school tutoring supports developing across the city.

In response, CTDC planned and launched six CityTutor Hubs (“Hubs”), each operated by an existing CBO provider serving students in areas of most need. Hubs are meant to meet student needs outside of school. For example, one Hub is operated by an organization known for its strong parent engagement model and is based in one of the highest-poverty neighborhoods in the city, and another has paired a tutoring provider with a transitional housing partner to support students experiencing homelessness.

Even after it became clear that most students would return to school, coalition members pointed out that establishing the Hubs would foster partnerships with organizations that have built deep relational trust with the communities in which they work. By engaging these CBO providers, students could benefit from the same tutoring strategies their peers received in school and simultaneously take advantage of the important non-academic services these organizations offered. This served two purposes: first, it ensured that tutoring efforts reached more students deemed at-risk. Second, it strengthened the the CTDC coalition by including these trusted CBOs.



Over the next year, CTDC will add new sites, continuing to provide funding, training, tools, and collaboration to ensure Hubs are successful and meeting the needs of every student.

Lessons Learned

Through observations, data collection, and informal interviews with Hub leaders, CTDC gathered the following conclusions:

A commitment to continuous improvement spurs action balanced with a focus on quality. Rather than wield funding to motivate action, CTDC has taken the route of close collaboration and support to ensure Hub success. Communities of Practice –part of the CTDC continuous improvement strategy–give space for Hubs to openly discuss the barriers to launching and scaling, as well as to collaboratively problem-solve. This focus on launching with an eye towards improvement allows for iteration on implementation strategies and develops a deeper understanding of what works and why.

By the midpoint of CTDC’s first year, 100% of Hubs have participated in Communities of Practice and developed launch plans, and all Hubs have launched their programs and begun tutoring serving 106 students with the intent to grow to 256.

Raising pay rates is not always enough to increase tutor recruitment rates. The primary barrier to on-time launch for most Hubs was tutor recruitment. Due to national labor trends (see the section on the “National Labor Shortage” below), recruiting tutors was more difficult than originally anticipated. In response to this difficulty, some Hubs dramatically increased their hourly rate to create more attractive offers for potential tutors (from as low as \$15/hour to up to \$40/hour). Even with this increase, hiring remained a barrier, suggesting that other exogenous factors were affecting recruitment.

Resourcing Hubs with tools to streamline data collection allows providers to focus on solving problems around tutoring itself. Academic tutoring was not a primary function—or a function at all—for most of the organizations that have launched Hubs. Consequently, leaders had to work quickly to develop plans to hire and train tutors, as well as

collect data around session characteristics and tutor quality. To reduce the burden on Hubs, CTDC developed observation rubrics aligned to the HIT standards, conducted observations, and tasked EmpowerK12 to develop a bespoke data collection app for Hubs to log tutoring sessions. By taking on this work, CTDC enabled Hub leaders to fully focus on issues of tutor recruitment, logistics, and program launch.

Communities of Practice

Continuous improvement as a field is concerned with seeking incremental improvement that is informed by data and supported by a clear Theory of Change or articulated strategy. By engaging in a cycle of action, data collection, problem-solving, and adjusting (sometimes referenced as the “Plan-Do-Study-Act” cycle), it is possible to quickly launch pilot versions of a complex strategy and scale incrementally. CTDC itself engages in this cycle—regularly returning to the CTDC Theory of Change, analyzing city-wide data, and making strategy adjustments—and supports partners and providers in doing the same.

Communities of Practice (CoPs) are meetings facilitated by CTDC to support continuous improvement efforts. On their own, individual partners only have insights into how tutoring is unfolding within their own contexts. Thanks to citywide data collection efforts, CTDC has a much larger context and is able to identify trends across many partners. These trends form the basis of each CoP session: CTDC facilitators bring together providers who are experiencing similar barriers or strengths and coach them to collaboratively problem-solve or iterate around these common issues.

CoPs are most effective when ample longitudinal data is available, so this has been the most nascent component of the overall CTDC strategy. However, to date, CTDC has facilitated two CoPs for Hub leaders which were unanimously rated as helpful time spent even with limited data from observations and tutor logs from the app.

Lessons Learned

Creating space to build community allows for creative problem solving. While the primary focus of CoPs is data-driven problem solving, CTDC facilitators decided to focus the first CoP on building community across

Hub leaders, creating space for leaders to discuss barriers and strengths, and find points of connection as they built tutoring programs.

At the end of CoPs, leaders reflected that the experience helped them feel that they were not alone in this work, and felt reinvigorated to tackle the issues around tutor recruitment and data collection they had discussed.

Socializing the concept of continuous improvement creates demand for CoPs. All CTDC programming in some way promotes the concept of continuous improvement and CoPs as a vehicle for improvement. Integrating this idea across programs has yielded a citywide desire for CTDC-led CoPs: in a December 2021 survey, 73% of Sprinters indicated that they wanted to join a CoP, and 100% of Hub leaders plan on continuing attending CoPs. In interviews conducted in January 2022, school leaders reflected on the need for CoPs to improve their tutoring solutions; when asked what CTDC should spend time and money on, one school leader said “[the most worthwhile element would be] providing a CoP or ongoing professional development in support of folks who are coaching/managing tutors.”

The National Labor Shortage

At the heart of CTDC’s work is facilitating high-quality tutors to join the team of people working to support and accelerate student learning, mostly during the school day, which means that the same hiring market forces responsible for a national teacher shortage are creating a national tutor shortage. Washington, DC is experiencing the same tutor shortage locally. This has resulted in widespread, significant delays in the ability to launch tutoring programs. Because many tutoring contracts were signed mid-2021, when the scope and impact of the national labor shortage was not yet clear, many tutoring providers were unable to hire enough tutors to meet agreed upon numbers by the start of the school year.

A similar issue has affected the timeliness of Hub launches, causing three Hubs to delay their launches until February 2022 rather than November 2021 as initially planned. The shortage reaches beyond

tutors and into schools as well: a number of partner schools have reported issues hiring enough teaching staff, which in turn affects their ability to work with external tutors or implement in-house strategies.

The causes and possible solutions to the shortage are numerous and beyond the scope of this paper; however, citywide recruitment efforts have generated useful insights. *As this issue is multi-faceted and widespread, it is important to note that the following lessons should be taken only as reflections of the current state of affairs, not recommendations for action.*

Providers using federal tutoring subsidies struggle more in hiring tutors. Many tutoring providers leverage Americorps subsidies to pay their tutors. These subsidies limit the overall pay that a tutor can earn from that provider. As recruiters across all fields become more competitive in their compensation strategies, it is likely that tutoring—from a financial standpoint—becomes less attractive of an offer. This competition effect has been most acute for potential tutors highly proficient in mathematics, a skill in high demand across multiple sectors.

Recruiting volunteers is easier than filling paid positions. In response to the tutor shortage, CTDC has engaged in an ad campaign to encourage residents of the District to volunteer as tutors with partner providers. The rate of volunteer signups far exceeds the hiring rate for paid tutors, suggesting again that prospective tutors may be engaging in a cost-benefit analysis—there are more responses from those who already have paying jobs, or are not in need of one, compared to those who will rely on tutoring as a main source of income. It is important to note that this does not fully explain the phenomenon: as stated above, even as Hubs dramatically increased their hourly rates, they still struggled to hire at the rate they had hoped.

Social media influencers can be useful partners for recruiting tutors. CTDC funded ad campaigns across the city in a variety of media: ads in city buses, in *The Washington Post*, on community websites. The most fruitful of these efforts has been a partnership with a popular Instagram account, @washingtonianproblems, known for playfully lampooning life in the District. The account posted information about how to sign up to tutor and directed followers to the CTDC website.

This strategy has by far yielded the most tutor sign ups, with 30 volunteers signing up within the first 24 hours of the post helping to bring the total volunteers recruited to approximately 150. Those volunteers have been matched to Hub partners and tutoring providers.



Notes on Program Evaluation

The main purpose of this paper is to explore the mid-year lessons learned from implementing a citywide strategy of expanding access to HIT in a decentralized ecosystem. Measuring impact on students associated with CTDC is important, but given the realities of schooling, hiring, and learning during the pandemic, data collection has been too slow to make any claims regarding tutoring efficacy at the mid-year point.

There are, however, certain evaluation questions that CTDC will investigate as the initiative continues and more data is collected, with a goal of answering the following questions:

*Which actions resulted in an increased uptake of tutoring?
With what fidelity to HIT standards did tutoring happen?
To what extent did student outcomes improve?*

It is important to note at the outset that it is not CTDC's goal to make causal claims. However, CTDC will make assertions about impact based on clear associations that emerge from analysis, as well as findings about the validity of the chain of impact outlined in CTDC's Theory of Change.

CTDC, along with external data partners like EmpowerK12, will evaluate academic impacts using assessment data (e.g., NWEA MAP and iReady) and any growth data maintained and shared by tutoring

providers. CTDC and partners will also assess well-being impact using survey data. These analyses have been made possible by the efforts that CTDC and EmpowerK12 have made securing data sharing agreements across LEAs and supporting data collection for session-level tutoring, which have resulted in a citywide data set that did not exist prior to the initiative.

Emerging Insights

While the data that has been collected to date is too limited to make claims about outright efficacy, some evidence has been collected on over 25,000 hours of tutoring for a subset of 1,700 students to suggest the following trends:



Delivering high dosage after the school day ends is difficult. There are structural advantages for attendance at tutoring sessions when students are in school, as opposed to after school programming, even with equally committed leadership. The pandemic challenges have been manifold, but results thus far suggest school day tutoring has resulted in higher dosage.



Schools using staff as tutors show early promise to meet HIT standards. Models using school staff are likely to already meet some of the HIT standards (e.g., trusting relationships, collaboration with schools). Through future Design Sprints and CoPs, CTDC will work with school leaders to make intervention blocks more impactful.



Pushing towards fidelity to HIT standards can result in academic growth. While reaching a threshold of 60 minutes of tutoring per week has been feasible for schools and providers, research suggests that 90 minutes per week will have the greatest impact on student academics. A smaller sample of academic data from 200 students in the District help corroborate this, showing that more tutoring minutes is associated with more academic growth. As we support schools and providers to reach standards-based dosage, we expect to see this trend hold.



Student and tutor experiences are positive. According to survey results, 80% of students reported confidence in understanding material in tutoring sessions, and 83% reported that their tutor is encouraging to them. Additionally, 90% of tutors reported strong relationships with their students, and 90% reported confidence in their ability to teach difficult material.

Final Lessons and Recommendations

The difficulties of coordinating a citywide strategy to increase the availability and uptake of academic tutors for marginalized students in a decentralized system and in the midst of a pandemic cannot be overstated. Despite this, CTDC has been able to catalyze tutoring for 4,000 students in the District since Summer 2021 and is on track to deliver tutoring to a total of 10,000 students by Fall 2022.

At the mid-year point in this work, bolstered by evidence in the form of observations, surveys, interviews, and tutoring session data, CTDC feels confident in sharing the following lessons and recommendations:

A decentralized system demands a strong intermediary.

The individual aspects of the CTDC strategy are based on the idiosyncrasies of its local context. The decentralized DC education landscape makes CTDC support necessary in areas not fully discussed here, including securing data sharing contracts for every partner LEA, centralizing data analysis and learning groups, navigating contracts with tutoring providers for partner LEAs, and finding ways to streamline the arduous background check system in the District to allow tutors to enter buildings. The guiding question when deciding to pursue these activities was: *What will make it easier for local schools to implement HIT as quickly as possible and with as much fidelity to standards as possible?* The unique local landscape played as much a role in forming the CTDC strategy as the corpus of research backing HIT itself.

Recommendation: When working within a decentralized system, organize around strategies that streamline or consolidate otherwise disparate processes.

A unified coalition of stakeholders is essential to widespread HIT implementation.

The coalition-based strategy was a necessity in the decentralized context of the District; however, the power of coalitions to build trust amongst stakeholders and trigger widespread change can and should be harnessed in any ecosystem. Evidence of coalition-based change can be seen throughout the initiative:

- Faculty members from American University (AU) and George Washington University (GWU) collaborated with CTDC to create brand-new tutoring programs (AU Future Teacher Tutors and GWU Math Matters, respectively) within their education departments, allowing college students to become tutors for students in the District.
- The Advisory Group—made up of education leaders from across the city—helped write and publish an op-ed in *The Washington Post*, emphasizing the need for HIT as a primary pandemic recovery strategy.
- Intentional coalition-building with CBO providers allowed for the creation of Hubs, making tutoring accessible to students who could not participate in in-person school.

Education is deeply important to all members of any community, and the implementation of a widespread strategy requires a high degree of trust from all stakeholders. The CTDC approach—developing a strategy that is inclusive of all institutions involved in the work—allows for multiple voices to be heard and for trust to be built and strengthened.

Recommendation: Assemble a coalition as early as possible, focusing on conversations and activities that build trust in the initiative.

Guided design work strengthens equity mindsets and enables school-based tutoring.

By far the most visible and evidence-backed activity so far was the Design Sprints. Engaging with school leaders and tutoring providers to intentionally design in-school tutoring programs that focused on equity of student prioritization and standards for HIT was a key factor in catalyzing tutoring across the city. Essential to this success were also

the “post-Sprint” supports: school leaders had follow-up coaching conversations with subject matter experts, were supported in contract negotiations with tutoring providers, and will eventually participate in CoPs to improve the quality of tutoring in their schools. Further, the Design Sprints helped strengthen the coalition by influencing mindsets around equity and continuous improvement. CTDC is currently planning additional Design Sprints in response to demand from school leaders and LEAs, especially those looking to increase the effectiveness of their intervention blocks.

Recommendation: Engage with local experts to explicitly support school leaders in designing their own implementation plans.

A commitment to continuous improvement spurs action balanced with a focus on quality.

CTDC did not wait for optimized conditions for HIT before facilitating tutoring launches, and opted instead to launch imperfectly and improve together as a coalition to meet HIT standards. As seen with the Hubs experience, as well as the clear demand for CoPs from Sprinters and other school leaders, a focus on continuous improvement has allowed for quick launches, and crucially, numerous opportunities to learn before scaling and improving quality. In the context of pandemic-related delays (e.g., school closures, workforce loss, hiring issues), this strategy allowed partners to focus on what was important: ensuring that as many students as possible were receiving tutoring at any given time.

Recommendation: Build community and momentum by regularly convening schools and providers around data-driven conversations.

Beyond COVID-19

CTDC was created as a response to the effects the pandemic had on students in Washington DC, but HIT is more than a recovery strategy. In order to truly recover—not from the pandemic, but from a long history of inequitable education—tutoring cannot be treated as merely

a short-term solution to a time-bound problem. The push for HIT, then, is part of a broader goal of sustainable systemic change. In order for the opportunity gap to truly close, education must be redesigned: just as tutoring is being reimagined to be a consistent support for all students, other aspects of school are ripe for reinvention. Lasting change also requires a commitment to high-quality research and early support for innovative solutions and the inclusion of marginalized stakeholders in the creation of those solutions.

The strategies and beliefs at the heart of the CTDC initiative ask partners to imagine a world where all students benefit from an excellent, equitable education. CTDC asks that any organizations looking to develop a tutoring strategy in their own communities look beyond pandemic recovery as well and to a brighter future for all students.



Acknowledgements

CTDC would not be possible without the input and partnership of all members of the CTDC coalition working to making tutoring high-impact in Washington, DC, and the following people and organizations:

Empower K12
The Annenberg Institute at Brown University
Bloomberg Philanthropies
Carol and Gene Ludwig Family Foundation
Leon Lowenstein Foundation
Donald E. Graham
Harman Family Foundation
TDF Foundation
The Morningstar Foundation
Irene and Alan Wurtzel

About CityTutor DC

CityTutor DC is a coalition of 50+ schools, community organizations, and city leaders aiming to overcome the educational impacts of the pandemic by expanding access to high-impact tutoring for 10,000 students across DC. CityTutor DC is managed by CityBridge Education.

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About CityBridge Education

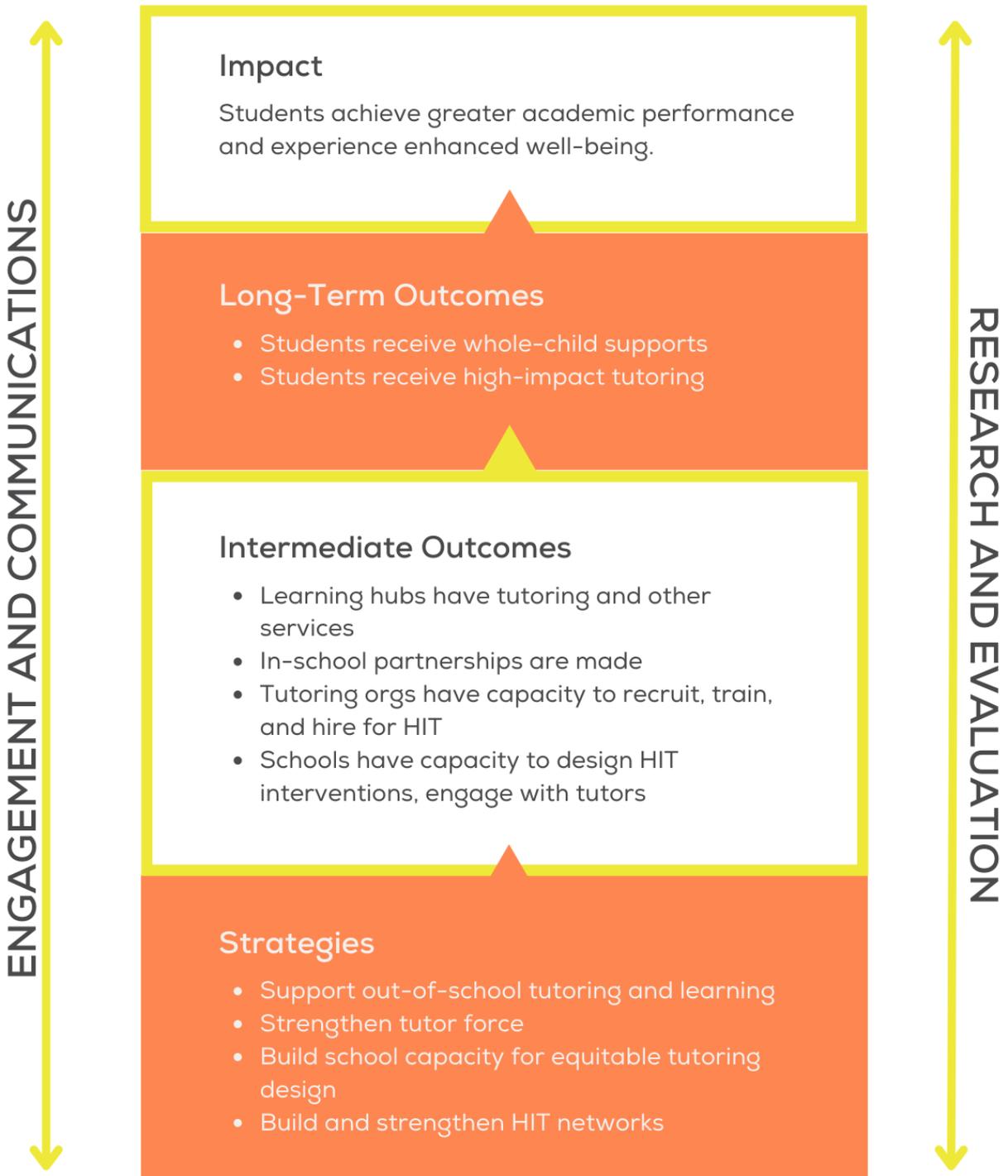
CityBridge Education incubates the people, ideas, and conversations needed for equity-driven innovation in DC's schools. Our vision is that DC is the first city-level proof point for an excellent and equitable public education system.

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Appendix: The CityTutor DC Theory of Change

CITYTUTOR DC THEORY OF CHANGE

This visualization of the CTDC Theory of Change (TOC) outlines the primary likely causal factors that will contribute to the intended impact. CTDC uses a more detailed and complex representation of the TOC to guide internal cycles of continuous improvement.



Primary Assumptions

- "Increased capacity" will result in high-quality, high-impact tutoring actually happening
- Data-sharing agreements exist such that CTDC may monitor quality and encourage cycles of continuous improvement
- Implementation of best practices with varying degrees of fidelity (eg, due to existing restrictions around scheduling) will still result in a net positive impact on student outcomes