

The Tutoring Partnership

Tutor Demographics and Training Brief

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Ashley Hirilall, BA
Mallory Warner-Richter, MPP
Kathryn Tout, PhD
Child Trends

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Overview

The Tutoring Partnership was a network of 28 community-based programs that provided tutoring to students in Saint Paul and Minneapolis, operated by the Saint Paul Public Schools Foundation. In 2013, the Foundation was awarded a Social Innovation Fund subgrant from Greater Twin Cities United Way to examine both the implementation of the Tutoring Partnership and student outcomes from tutoring programs that had received various levels of capacity-building services from the Tutoring Partnership. This brief provides information about the Tutoring Partnership's tutors, to answer the following questions:

- Who were the Tutoring Partnership tutors?
- Did tutors attend trainings? Did they perceive these trainings as effective?
- After attending trainings, did tutors make changes to their work with students? If so, what supports did tutors use to make changes?
- What did tutors see as their greatest strengths and challenges?
- How did tutors perceive their program's efforts in racial equity?

To answer these questions, Child Trends collected 2013–2016 administrative data from the Tutoring Partnership and conducted a survey of tutors in Spring 2016. Descriptive statistics were used to address research questions. This analysis describes tutor characteristics, their participation in training, changes made to tutoring practice, tutors’ perceptions of their greatest strengths and challenges, and their program’s efforts to improve racial equity. Because these factors can affect the quality of tutoring and a student’s progress, we aim to highlight such findings to provide recommendations to other tutoring programs and capacity-building initiatives.

Key Findings

Who were the Tutoring Partnership tutors?

- The majority of tutors were white; however, they primarily tutored students who were black, Asian, or Latino (Warner-Richter et al., 2017, pending).
- Most tutors had a bachelor’s or graduate degree, and were ages 18–24 or 65–74.
- Nearly all tutors had five or fewer years’ experience volunteering or working in the education field.
- The majority of tutors had a caseload of 1 to 5 pre-kindergarten to third-grade students, tutoring them on literacy and math, and on nonacademic skills like focus and self-confidence.

Did tutors attend trainings? Did they perceive these trainings as effective?

- Tutors attended training more frequently as the program continued, skill-based tutor trainings had the highest rates of participation. Tutors in programs that received more intensive capacity building services were more likely to attend two or more trainings.
- While tutors perceived trainings as effective in improving their skills, fewer tutors viewed trainings as effective in managing students’ challenging behaviors.

After attending trainings, did tutors make changes to their work with students? If so, what supports did tutors use to make the changes?

- Most tutors made some changes to their tutoring practices after attending trainings.
- The majority used advice from program staff and their own experience tutoring students to make changes. More than half often applied something learned from trainings.

What did tutors see as their greatest strengths and challenges?

- More tutors selected social/emotional-based strengths (those that build strong, positive relationships with students) than academic ones (strengths that help students improve academically). Most tutors also chose student-related issues (i.e., student is unable to stay on task and lacks motivation) as their top challenges.
- About half of tutors would have liked more nonacademic trainings on such topics as social/ emotional development and cultural sensitivity.

How did tutors perceive their program’s efforts in racial equity?

- Although most tutors knew that their program was committed to racial equity, only one-third reported that their program demonstrated how to connect literacy to the racial/ethnic background of students.

The Tutoring Partnership

The Tutoring Partnership was a network of 28 nonprofit, community-based programs that provided intentional academic interventions through tutoring to students in Saint Paul and Minneapolis. The common goal across these programs was to improve academic outcomes for students. The Tutoring Partnership, operated by the Saint Paul Public Schools Foundation, supported this common goal by helping to improve program quality through capacity-building services like 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 the implementation of the Tutoring Partnership, as well as student outcomes in tutoring programs receiving various levels of capacity-building services from the Tutoring Partnership.

In the first two program years of the SIF sub-grant (2013–2014 and 2014–2015 school years), the Saint Paul Public Schools Foundation implemented the Tutoring Partnership model through two strategic approaches. **Strategy A**, the Tutoring Partnership model that pre-dated 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 and supplemental funding for four additional organizations in Saint Paul. In the third and final SIF sub-grant year (2015–2016 school year), the Tutoring Partnership expanded to serve Minneapolis locations of programs that received enhanced Tutoring Partnership services in Strategy B. In this brief, these Minneapolis-based locations receiving enhanced Strategy B services only in Year 3 are called **Strategy B3**.

In the middle of the third SIF year, the Saint Paul Public Schools Foundation announced its dissolution as an organization as of August 2016, and that the Tutoring Partnership would no longer operate 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 brief.

High-Quality Tutoring as a Strategy to Address the Achievement Gap

The reading and math achievement gaps in Minnesota are one of the largest in the country (Duncan et al., 2015). Saint Paul Public Schools' student achievement data show that the majority of students do not meet the minimum state educational standards in math and reading (Saint Paul Public Schools Data Center, 2013). Disparities in achievement are evident for students of color and students from low-income households; across the district, the population of students requiring extra support is growing.

Tutoring can be an effective way to help raise student achievement and close the achievement gap. For tutoring to be effective, high-quality tutors must be selected and trained. How programs recruit and select their tutors should be based on the needs of the students they serve, with special considerations for a tutor's cultural proficiency, academic background, and experience, as these characteristics can influence a student's progress. With proper training and supervision, however, tutors of varying backgrounds can successfully tutor students (Bixby et al., 2011).

Based on a request for more coordination among community programs in the Saint Paul Public Schools, the Tutoring Partnership began in 2007 as a small network of seven tutoring programs. Its goal was to create a coordinated city-wide effort to increase the number of well-trained tutors and improve the quality of tutoring programs in Saint Paul. Prior to the Tutoring Partnership, there were no standards or quality indicators for tutoring in Saint Paul Public Schools. Programs operated without mutually agreed-upon best practices or a common measurement system. Many tutoring programs did not have a process for continuous quality improvement or evaluation. Therefore, there was limited data showing associations of tutoring with desired outcomes. From 2007 to 2012, the Tutoring Partnership added more tutoring programs to the network and provided standards and research-based best practices toward which programs could work. In the 2012–2013 school year, the Tutoring Partnership instituted four requirements for programs to become part of the Partnership. Programs needed to agree to:

- Conduct criminal background checks on those working with minors
- Provide tutor orientation and ongoing training
- Participate in the study of tutoring by submitting student rosters and receiving information about their program
- Conduct a self-assessment of their program each year

In the 2013–2014 school year, with the new SIF award, the Tutoring Partnership further refined its service and sought to improve program quality through professional development, tutor training, and technical assistance. Through SIF, the goal of the Tutoring Partnership was to ensure that students who are more at-risk for academic challenges have access to higher-quality programs and (subsequently) better academic outcomes. The Tutoring Partnership also incorporated strategies to address racial equity through the Literacy Tutoring Network (a network of tutoring programs focusing on literacy), sponsored by Generation Next.¹

Brief Overview

The purpose of this brief is to share findings from the Tutoring Partnership’s work with tutors in the three years of the SIF grant (Year 1, 2013–14; Year 2, 2014–15; Year 3, 2015–16). By examining tutor characteristics and qualifications, uptake of tutor trainings, tutor’s satisfaction, perceptions of tutoring successes and challenges, and a final discussion on racial equity, this brief makes recommendations for tutoring programs and capacity-building initiatives as they continue to strive for the provision of high-quality tutoring services.

The main research questions included the following:

- Who were the Tutoring Partnership tutors?
- Did tutors attend trainings? Did they perceive these trainings as being effective?
- After attending trainings, did tutors make changes to their work with students? If so, what supports did tutors use to make changes?
- What did tutors see as their greatest strengths and challenges?
- How did tutors perceive their program’s efforts in racial equity?

Measures

Tutor Survey (Year 3)

Tutors who participated in programs responded to an online survey in the spring of the third (final) year of the SIF. The survey asked tutors about their histories with tutoring, demographics, attendance at tutor training offered by the Tutoring Partnership, perceptions of tutor training, strengths and challenges, and perceptions of their program’s approach to racial equity. Survey completion took approximately 15 minutes and respondents’ names were entered in a raffle for a \$25 gift card as an incentive to complete the survey.

A total of 669 tutors across all tutoring programs in Year 3 responded to the survey, for a response rate of 45 percent. The survey analysis included both complete and partially complete responses. We analyzed the survey using descriptive statistics, including frequency and mean for each survey question. The survey contained two new scales developed to measure tutors’ perceptions of their strengths and the challenges encountered in their roles. Finally, we compared frequencies and means for tutors based on their program participation in Tutoring Partnership Strategies (A, B, and B3).

¹ [Generation Next](#) is a network of civic, business, and education leaders from across Minneapolis and Saint Paul dedicated to closing achievement and opportunity gaps by using the community’s knowledge, expertise, and actions to ensure that every child can thrive.

Program Documentation (Years 1-3)

For each year, the Tutoring Partnership maintained detailed records of each program’s participation in its capacity-building services. These records included tutor training attendance records.

We reviewed Tutoring Partnership program records and documentation for each of the three years funded through SIF. When data were available, we compared records within and across years. We determined which tutors attended each training and developed a tutor involvement metric for how many tutors attended more than one training.

Tutor Description

Most tutors were white and had a bachelor’s or graduate degree.

Based on results from the Year 3 Tutor Survey, 75 percent or more of tutors across each strategy were white/Caucasian (see Table 1). Fifteen percent or less of all other tutors were black/African American (11-15%), Asian or Pacific Islander (11%), Hispanic or Latino (6%), multiracial (4%), or American Indian or Alaskan Native (1%). Overall, Strategy A had a larger portion of tutors of color than Strategy B or Strategy B3.

Table 1. Tutor Race/Ethnicity per Strategy

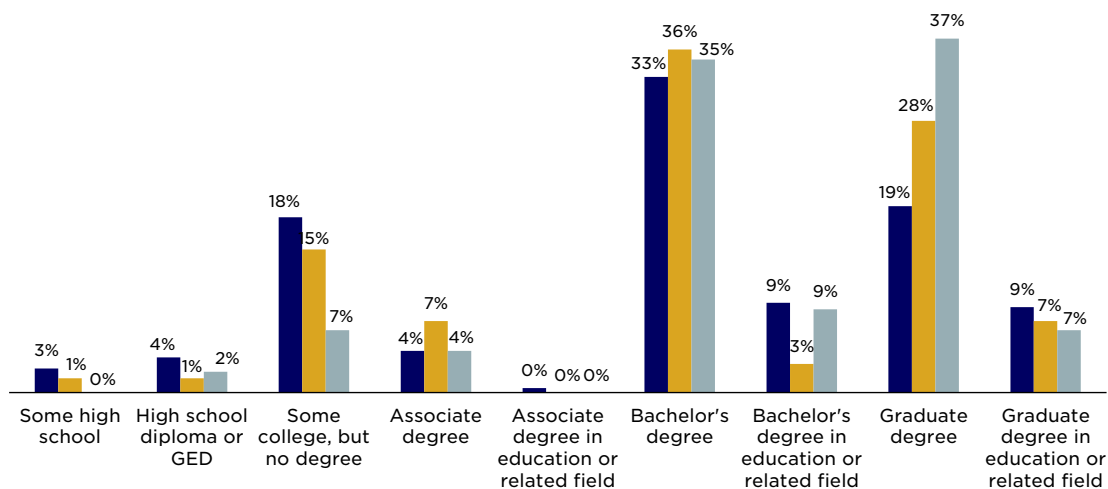
	Strategy A		Strategy B		Strategy B3	
	Percentage	n	Percentage	n	Percentage	n
American Indian or Alaska Native	1%	5	*	*	*	*
Asian or Pacific Islander	11%	48	*	*	*	*
Hispanic or Latino	6%	25	*	*	*	*
Black or African American	11%	48	15%	10	11%	5
White or Caucasian	78%	343	75%	50	79%	37
Multiracial	4%	15	*	*	*	*
Other	*	*	*	*	*	*

Source: Child Trends Tutor Survey, Spring 2016.

*Indicates that the number of respondents was less than five and not reported to protect respondent confidentiality.

Figure 1 shows the highest level of education completed by tutors in each strategy. Over one-third (37%) of Strategy B3 tutors had a graduate degree, while only 28 percent of Strategy B tutors and 19 percent of Strategy A tutors reported the same. A larger portion of Strategy A tutors had some college, compared to tutors in Strategy B3. Differences between Strategy B and B3 tutors are notable, because these were the same programs that served students in different cities (either Saint Paul or Minneapolis).

Figure 1. Tutor’s Highest Level of Education per Strategy



Source: Child Trends Tutor Survey, Spring 2016.

Over one-quarter (29%) of tutors in Strategy A were ages 18 to 24 (see Table 2). Strategy B3 and Strategy B had more tutors ages 65 to 74 (30% and 26%, respectively) than Strategy A. In addition, a higher portion of tutors were ages 35 to 44 in Strategy B3 than in the other two strategies.

Table 2. Age Distribution of Tutors per Strategy

	Strategy A		Strategy B		Strategy B3	
	Percentage	n	Percentage	n	Percentage	n
Under 17 years	2%	10	*	*	*	*
18-24	29%	126	21%	14	13%	6
25-34	18%	77	14%	9	20%	9
35-44	5%	24	*	*	11%	5
45-54	5%	20	11%	7	*	*
55-64	18%	80	20%	13	20%	9
65-74	18%	81	26%	17	30%	14
75 years or older	5%	20	*	*	*	*

Source: Child Trends Tutor Survey, Spring 2016

*Indicates that the number of respondents was less than five and not reported to protect respondent confidentiality.

Nearly all tutors spoke English at home (see Table 3). Larger portions of Strategy A tutors were Spanish and Hmong speakers, while Strategy B and Strategy B3 had no tutors from non-English-speaking homes.

Table 3. Tutor’s Language(s) Spoken at Home

	Strategy A		Strategy B		Strategy B3	
	Percentage	n	Percentage	n	Percentage	n
English	97%	424	100%	67	100%	46
Spanish	5%	20	0%	0	*	*
Hmong	4%	18	0%	0	*	*
Somali	1%	4	*	*	*	*
Vietnamese	*	*	0%	0	0%	0
Arabic	1%	5	0%	0	0%	0
Karen	1%	5	0%	0	0%	0
Other	2%	10	*	*	0%	0

Source: Child Trends Tutor Survey, Spring 2016

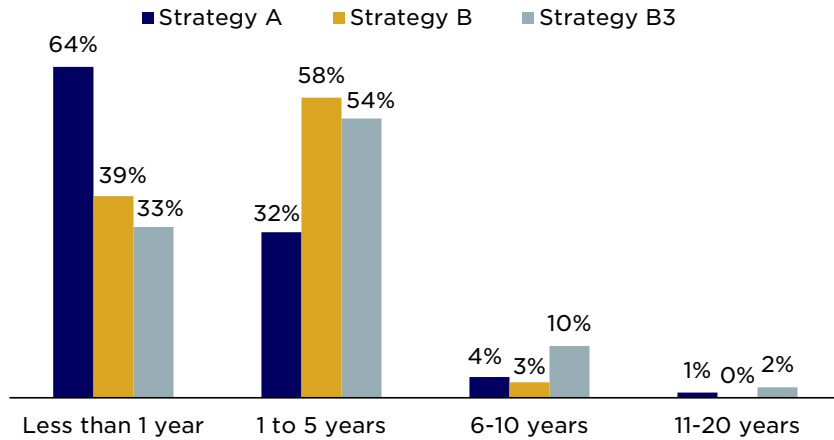
*Indicates that the number of respondents was less than five and not reported to protect respondent confidentiality.

Nearly all tutors worked with their program for 5 or fewer years.

Almost all tutors had worked at their 2015–2016 program for 5 or fewer years (see Figure 2). Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Strategy A tutors were in their first year of tutoring at their program, whereas most tutors in Strategy B and Strategy B3 (58% and 54%, respectively) had been at their program from 1 to 5 years. Unlike Strategy A and Strategy B tutors, 10 percent of Strategy B3 tutors had been at their tutoring program for 6 to 10 years.

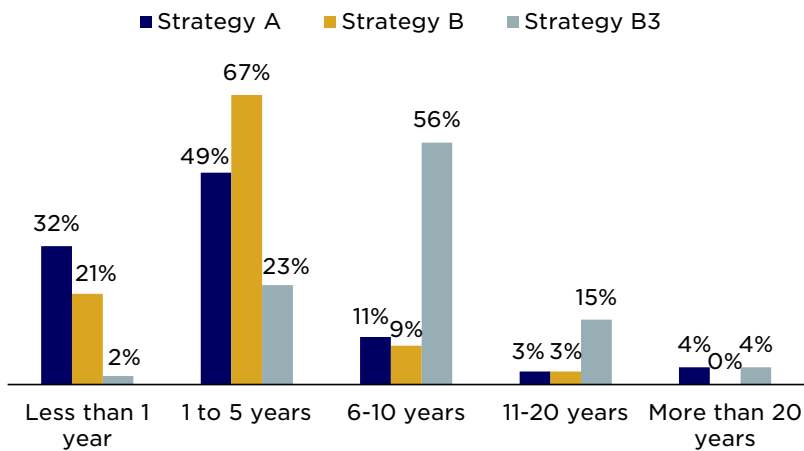
When asked how many years of tutoring experience they had, the majority (67% and 49%) of Strategy B and Strategy A tutors had 1 to 5 years (see Figure 3), while over half (56%) of Strategy B3 tutors had 6 to 10 years of tutoring experience.

Figure 2. Length of Time Tutoring at 2015-16 Program



Source: Child Trends Tutor Survey, Spring 2016

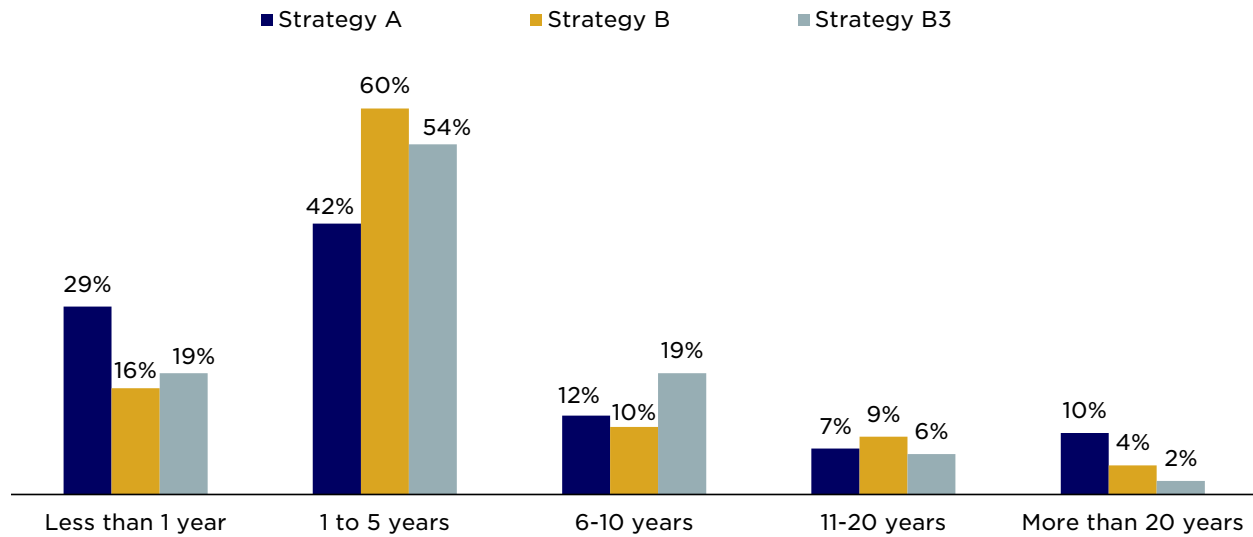
Figure 3. Length of Time Tutoring Overall



Source: Child Trends Tutor Survey, Spring 2016

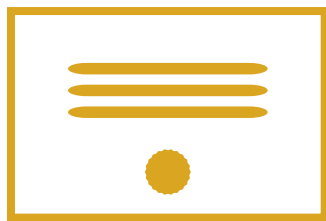
Tutors were asked how many years they had been working or volunteering in the education field. Figure 4 shows that nearly all tutors across each strategy had 1 to 5 years of work or volunteer experience in the education field. Strategy B had the largest portion (60%) of tutors with 1 to 5 years of experience, and almost one-third (29%) of Strategy A tutors had less than a year of experience in the education field.

Figure 4. Length of Time in the Education Field (work/volunteer)



Source: Child Trends Tutor Survey, Spring 2016

When asked whether they had a teaching license, most tutors reported that they did not; however, Strategy A programs had the largest portion of tutors with a teaching license (19%). About 15 percent of Strategy B and Strategy B3 tutors had a teaching license. Strategy A programs also had the largest portion of paid tutors. Nearly one-third (32%) of Strategy A tutors were paid, while 28 percent of Strategy B tutors and 21 percent of Strategy B3 tutors reported the same.



17% of all tutors
had a teaching
license.



27% of all tutors
were paid.

The majority of tutors worked with 1 to 5 pre-kindergarten to third grade students on literacy and math, as well as nonacademic skills such as focus and self-confidence.

Most tutors worked with a caseload of 1 to 5 students (tutors in some programs worked one-on-one with students, while other tutors worked in small groups) across all strategies (see Table 4). While about one-quarter of Strategy B3 and Strategy B tutors reported tutoring 6 to 10 students (27% and 24%, respectively), 22 percent of Strategy A tutors reported tutoring more than 15 students.

Table 4. Number of Students Tutored during the 2015–16 School Year (per tutor)

	Strategy A		Strategy B		Strategy B3	
	Percentage	n	Percentage	n	Percentage	n
1-5 students	60%	270	66%	44	65%	31
6-10 students	12%	55	24%	16	27%	13
11-15 students	6%	25	*	*	*	*
More than 15 students	22%	100	*	*	*	*

Source: Child Trends Tutor Survey, Spring 2016

*Indicates that the number of respondents was less than five and not reported to protect respondent confidentiality.

As shown in Table 5, over two-thirds of Strategy B3 and Strategy B tutors worked with students in pre-kindergarten to third grade (69% and 64%, respectively), while 51 percent of Strategy A tutors worked with students in these grades.

Table 5. Grades of Students Tutored during the 2015–16 School Year

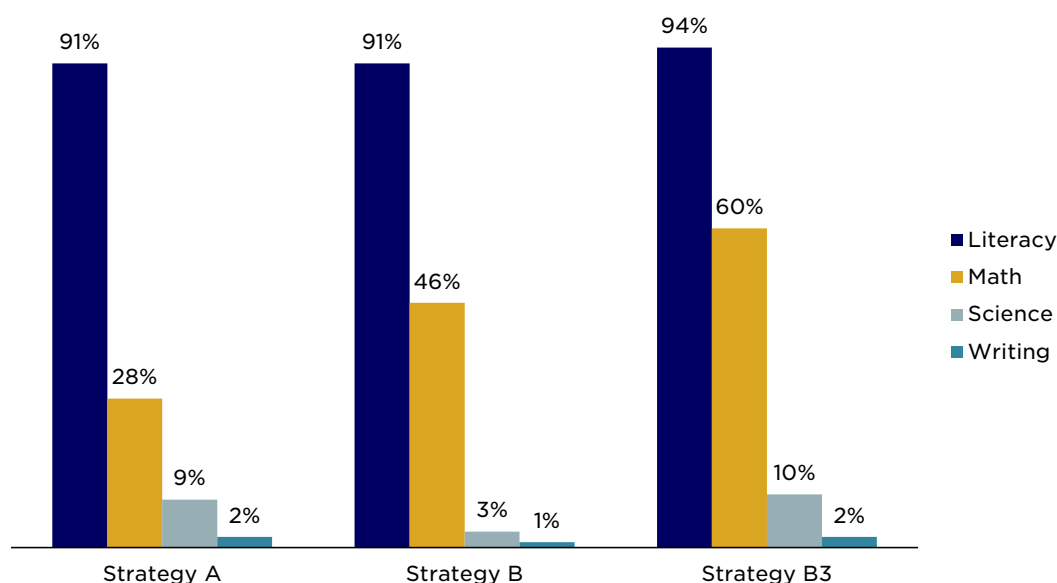
	Strategy A		Strategy B		Strategy B3	
	Percentage	n	Percentage	n	Percentage	n
Pre-K–grade 3	51%	844	64%	79	69%	50
Grades 4–6	23%	387	30%	37	21%	15
Grades 7–12	25%	418	6%	7	10%	7

Source: Child Trends Tutor Survey, Spring 2016

*Indicates that the number of respondents was less than five and not reported to protect respondent confidentiality.

Tutors across all strategies reported that they primarily provided literacy tutoring to students (see Figure 5). About half, or more, of Strategy B and Strategy B3 tutors also provided math tutoring (46% and 60%, respectively), compared to less than one-third (28%) of Strategy A tutors. A few tutors also helped students with science and writing.

Figure 5. Primary Academic Subjects Supported by Tutors



Source: Child Trends Tutor Survey, Spring 2016.

When asked which nonacademic skills they focused on when tutoring students, over half of the tutors in each strategy reported focusing on self-confidence with students (i.e., the student’s trust in his/her abilities). Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Strategy A tutors reported this. Roughly three-quarters or more of the tutors in Strategy B and Strategy B3 programs reported working on students’ focus, and on their ability to stay on task and pay attention (73% and 83%, respectively), while only 58% of Strategy A tutors reported working on this with students.

Table 6. Nonacademic Skills Covered by Tutors

	Strategy A		Strategy B		Strategy B3	
	Percentage	n	Percentage	n	Percentage	n
Self-confidence	64%	289	58%	39	56%	27
Focus	58%	262	73%	49	83%	40
Persistence	46%	207	46%	31	52%	25
Self-regulation	28%	126	42%	28	52%	25
Study habits	20%	91	22%	15	21%	10
Organization	17%	78	19%	13	13%	6
No skills	14%	62	3%	2	0%	0

Source: Child Trends Tutor Survey, Spring 2016

Tutor Training Attendance and Satisfaction

Training attendance increased across each year and strategy.

In addition to providing subject-specific tutor trainings related to literacy and math, the Tutoring Partnership also offered a variety of skill-based trainings about tutoring students, including behavior management, active learning, and intercultural competency. As part of the agreement to become a Tutoring Partner, all programs—regardless of strategy—pledged that all tutors would receive both an onboarding orientation and additional training on literacy, math, or skill-based tutor training. Some programs provided this training themselves, while others relied on trainings provided by the Tutoring Partnership to support ongoing training needs for their tutors.

Rates of training participation were calculated by dividing the number of tutors who participated in Tutoring Partnership tutor trainings, per strategy and year, over the total number of tutors within each strategy by year. Table 7 shows that participation in Tutoring Partnership tutor training increased in each strategy over the years. Nearly one-third of Strategy B tutors in Year 1 attended literacy tutor trainings. Skill-based tutor trainings had the highest rates of participation throughout all strategies and years. In Year 3, over three-quarters of the Strategy B/B3 tutors attended skill-based tutor trainings, which accounts for the high participation rate. The Tutoring Basics training, encouraged by the Tutoring Partnership for all new tutors, was the most highly attended skill-based training. Moreover, nearly all Strategy B/B3 tutors in Year 3 attended some kind of tutor training.

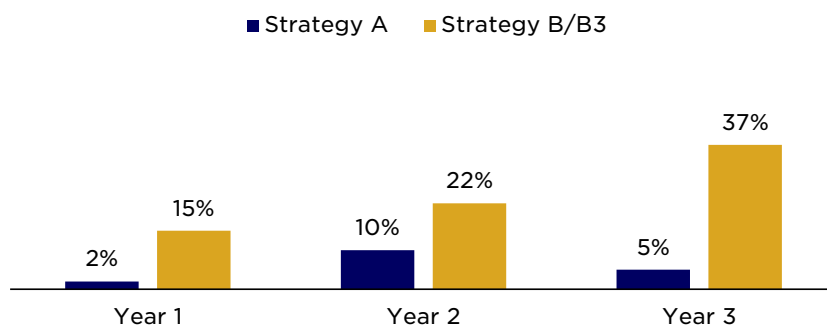
Table 7. Number of Attendees, and Percent Attendance, at Tutoring Partnership Tutor Trainings, by Strategy and Year

	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3	
	Strategy A (n=731)	Strategy B (n=179)	Strategy A (n=926)	Strategy B (n=183)	Strategy A (n=850)	Strategy B/ B3 (n=183)
Literacy Tutor Training	3% (n=22)	20% (n=35)	9% (n=65)	10% (n=19)	8% (n=65)	8% (n=15)
Math Tutor Training	2% (n=14)	4% (n=7)	5% (n=38)	20% (n=36)	8% (n=71)	15% (n=27)
Skill-Based Tutor Training	4% (n=32)	17% (n=31)	18% (n=135)	45% (n=83)	28% (n=236)	77% (n=141)
Total Attendees	7% (n=54)	26% (n=47)	27% (n=203)	68% (n=124)	37% (n=311)	86% (n=158)

Source: Tutoring Partnership Tutoring Training Attendance Records, 2013–2016

Given that tutors were expected to engage in ongoing training, we compared tutor training attendance records to identify which tutors attended more than one training offered through the Tutoring Partnership each year. Across all years, Strategy B/B3 tutors were much more likely to attend more than one tutor training than Strategy A tutors (see Figure 6). That said, because the Tutoring Partnership worked more intensely with Strategy B/B3 programs, tutors within these strategies were encouraged to participate more and provided with exclusive trainings.

Figure 6. Percent Attendance at More than One Tutor Training, by Year and Strategy



Source: Tutoring Partnership Tutoring Training Attendance Records, 2013–2016

Tutors perceived trainings as effective in improving their skills; however, fewer tutors viewed trainings as effective in managing students’ challenging behaviors.

We asked tutors about their perceptions of the effectiveness of trainings for addressing and improving tutoring skills. Across most tutoring skills—including comfort with tutoring English Language Learners, interactions with others, and intentional interactions with students—tutors in each strategy reported that trainings were somewhat to very effective (see Table 8). However, lower rates of perceived effectiveness were reported in tutors’ comfort with managing students’ problematic behaviors during tutoring sessions.

Table 8. Perceptions of Training Effectiveness

	Strategy A (n=229-304)		Strategy B (n=33-57)		Strategy B3 (n=36-39)	
	Somewhat /very ineffective	Somewhat/ very effective	Somewhat/ very ineffective	Somewhat/ very effective	Somewhat/ very ineffective	Somewhat/ very effective
Comfort level managing students' problematic behaviors during tutoring sessions	21%	79%	18%	82%	17%	83%
Ability to effectively tutor English Language Learners	14%	93%	9%	91%	9%	91%
Comfort level interacting with other program staff, teachers, students, and families of diverse backgrounds	8%	92%	9%	91%	14%	86%
Ability to effectively tutor students	8%	92%	5%	95%	10%	90%
Intentional interactions with tutored students	8%	92%	5%	95%	8%	92%
Commitment to education	7%	86%	5%	95%	6%	94%

Source: Child Trends Tutor Survey, Spring 2016

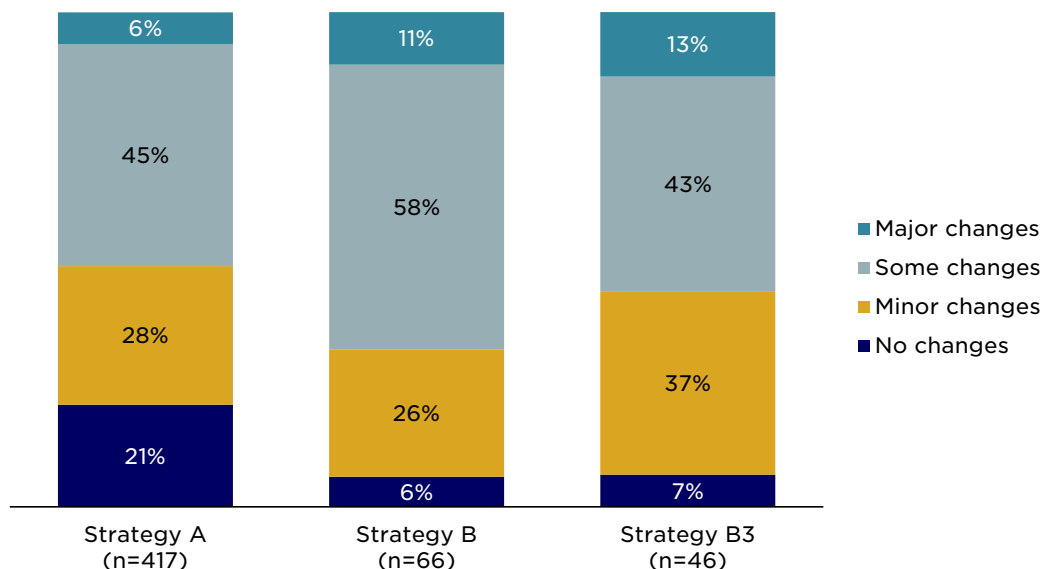
Note: Tutors were able to skip any survey items they did not want to answer. Number of responses are reported as a range across items.

Perceptions of Changes Made

Most tutors made some changes after attending trainings.

When asked about their perceptions of changes made to their tutoring practice as a result of attending tutor trainings, most tutors across strategies reported that they had made some changes (see Figure 7). About half of the Strategy A tutors (49%) claimed that they had made only minor changes, or no changes, since attending tutor trainings.

Figure 7. Changes Made since Attending Tutor Trainings



Source: Child Trends Tutor Survey, Spring 2016

While the majority of tutors used advice from program staff and their own experience when tutoring students, over half frequently applied something learned from trainings.

We asked tutors how often they used available supports to change their work with students. In strategies A and B, tutors reported that they most frequently used advice from program staff (79% and 81%, respectively), followed closely by using their own experience (77% and 76%). In Strategy B3, tutors relied slightly more on their own experience (76%) than advice from program staff (74%). About half of tutors across all strategies reported using materials from trainings to change their work with students somewhat to very often. Similarly, around half of all tutors used advice from other tutors somewhat or very often.

Table 9. Supports Used when Tutoring Students

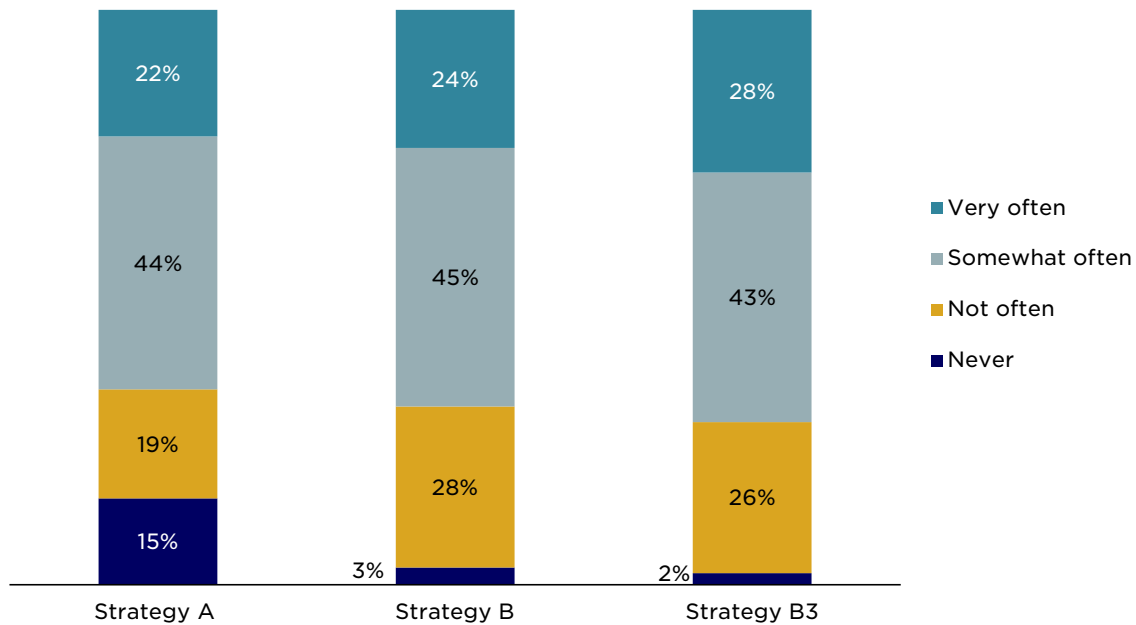
	Strategy A (n=421-426)			Strategy B (n=67)			Strategy B3 (n=46-47)		
	Support not offered	Never/not often	Somewhat/very often	Support not offered	Never/not often	Somewhat/very often	Support not offered	Never/not often	Somewhat/very often
Own experience in education	9%	14%	77%	7%	16%	76%	13%	11%	76%
Advice from program staff	6%	15%	79%	0%	19%	81%	0%	26%	74%
Materials from the training	14%	33%	53%	1%	45%	54%	7%	39%	54%
Advice from other tutors	12%	34%	54%	1%	46%	52%	0%	49%	51%

Source: Child Trends Tutor Survey, Spring 2016

Note: Tutors were able to skip any survey items they did not want to answer. Number of responses are reported as a range across items.

When asked about the frequency with which they applied something learned from a tutor training to their work with students, about one-quarter of all tutors reported doing so very often—defined as applying something learned monthly or more (see Figure 8). However, the majority of tutors in each strategy applied something learned from a tutor training somewhat often (three or four times per year). Fifteen percent of Strategy A tutors reported never using something learned from trainings when working with students, whereas only 3 percent of Strategy B and 2 percent of Strategy B3 tutors reported the same.

Figure 8. Frequency of Training Use when Working with students



Source: Child Trends Tutor Survey, Spring 2016

Perceptions of Strengths and Challenges

More tutors selected social-emotional-based strengths than academic ones. Most also chose student-related issues as their top challenges.

We asked tutors to identify their top three tutoring-related strengths and challenges. Strengths were divided into two categories: (1) social-emotional tutor strengths (those that help build strong, positive relationships with students) and (2) academic strengths (those that help the student improve academically). Table 10 shows the top social-emotional and academic strengths that tutors selected. Overall, half or more of the tutors reported an ability to meet students where they are, both academically and emotionally. The most common social-emotional strengths included “I’m good at building relationships,” “I bring humor and playfulness to tutoring sessions,” and “I show up to tutoring on a consistent, regular schedule.” Fewer tutors selected academic-based strengths, including “I explain things in different ways so the student understands,” “I implement strategies to increase reading comprehension,” and “I can address key literacy skills for early readers.”

Table 10. Perceptions of Tutoring Strengths

	Strategy A (n=427-434)		Strategy B (n=67)		Strategy B3 (n=46-47)	
	Percentage	n	Percentage	n	Percentage	n
I meet students where they are (academically, emotionally).	48%	208	48%	32	57%	26
I'm good at building relationships.	45%	196	49%	33	39%	18
I bring humor and playfulness to tutoring sessions.	38%	161	43%	29	34%	16
I show up to tutoring on a consistent, regular schedule.	32%	138	51%	34	37%	17
I explain things in different ways so the student understands.	38%	163	33%	22	26%	12
I implement strategies such as question asking and reflection activities to successfully increase reading comprehension.	29%	124	27%	18	28%	13
I can successfully address key literacy skills for early readers (e.g., letter names, letter sounds, blending, etc.).	22%	92	16%	11	22%	10

Source: Child Trends Tutor Survey, Spring 2016

Note: Tutors were able to skip any survey items they did not want to answer. Number of responses are reported as a range across items.

Similarly, tutoring challenges were divided into two categories: student-based (a student's behavior/abilities) and non-student-based (a tutor's abilities or situational challenges). As shown in Table 11, tutors selected challenges related to the student's behavior more often than challenges unrelated to students, such as time and tutor unpreparedness. About 75 percent of Strategy B and Strategy B3 tutors selected "Student struggles to stay on task" as one of their top challenges, while only 65 percent of Strategy A tutors chose this response. Around half of tutors across all strategies also selected "Student is not motivated" and "Student unwilling to do the work" as top challenges. Top non-student challenges included limited time during the school day (which affected more Strategy A tutors than Strategy B and Strategy B3 tutors), and the fact that about one in four tutors felt upset by a student's behavior.

Table 11. Perceptions of Tutoring Challenges

	Strategy A (n=427-433)		Strategy B (n=67)		Strategy B3 (n=46-47)	
	Percentage	n	Percentage	n	Percentage	n
Student-based challenges						
Student struggles to stay on task.	65%	281	75%	50	72%	34
Student is not motivated.	53%	227	48%	32	46%	21
Student is unwilling to do the work.	50%	213	46%	31	48%	22
Non-student based challenges						
There is limited time during the school day.	29%	124	22%	15	17%	8
I don't know how to address a student's challenges.	19%	79	13%	9	22%	10
I feel upset by a student's behavior.	14%	58	19%	13	13%	6

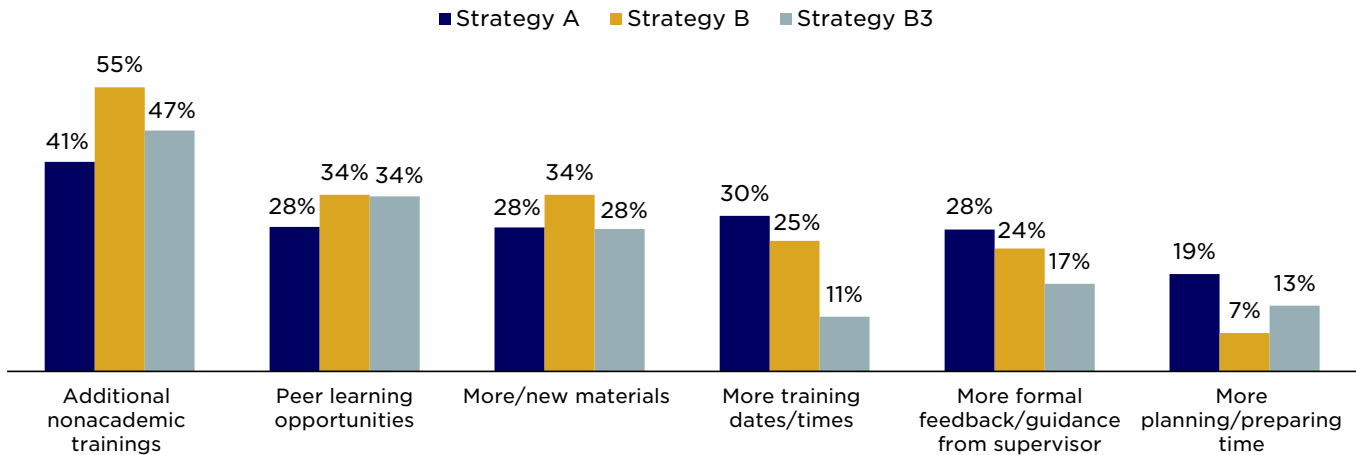
Source: Child Trends Tutor Survey, Spring 2016

Note: Tutors were able to skip any survey items they did not want to answer. Number of responses are reported as a range across items.

About half of the tutors would have liked more nonacademic trainings on topics such as social/emotional development and cultural sensitivity.

When asked what additional supports would be beneficial in the future, about half of Strategy B and Strategy B3 tutors chose additional nonacademic trainings, while 41 percent of Strategy A tutors selected the same (see Figure 9). Nonacademic trainings provided as examples for the response option were social/emotional development and cultural sensitivity. Around one-third of tutors also reported that peer learning opportunities and more/new materials (e.g., books, whiteboards, markers) would be beneficial in the future. Roughly 30 percent of Strategy A tutors would have liked more training dates and times, along with more formal feedback and/or guidance from supervisors.

Figure 9. Additional Supports Needed



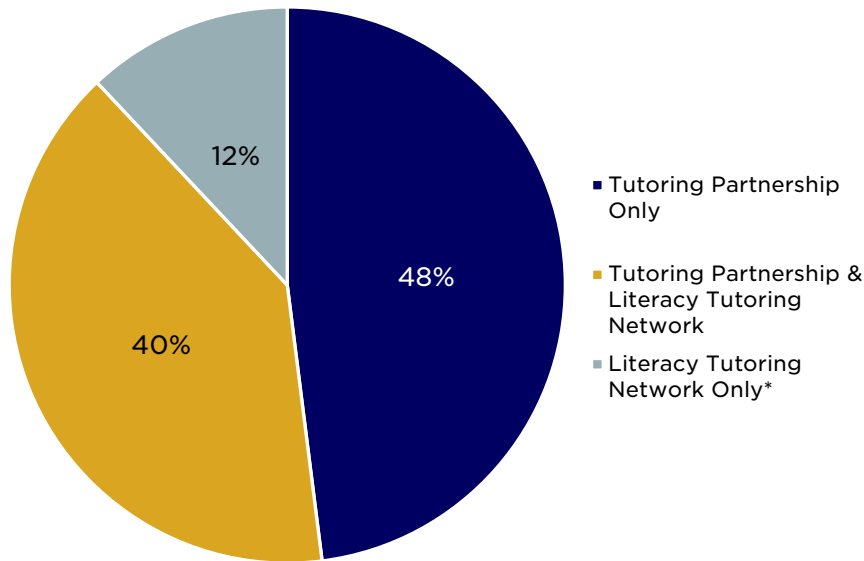
Source: Child Trends Tutor Survey, Spring 2016

Racial Equity

Although most tutors in the Literacy Tutoring Network knew that their program was committed to racial equity, only one-third reported that their program demonstrated how to connect literacy to students' racial/ethnic backgrounds.

As part of the Tutoring Partnership, Generation Next funded the Literacy Tutoring Network, a collaboration between tutoring programs focusing on increasing third grade reading proficiency. Among its many approaches, the Literacy Tutoring Network focused on reinforcing and building racial equity for participating tutoring programs. The questions discussed in this section were designed by the Literacy Tutoring Network to capture the work of programs to promote racial equity. Items were chosen based on conversations among the Literacy Tutoring Network and aimed to highlight practices that build racial equity. As shown in Figure 10, 40 percent of Tutoring Partnership programs participated in the Literacy Tutoring Network; these programs accounted for 70 percent of all tutors who completed the survey.

Figure 10. Program Participation in Tutoring Partnership and/or Literacy Tutoring Network



Source: Child Trends Tutor Survey, Spring 2016

*Literacy Tutoring Network only programs were not included in analysis.

Programs in the Literacy Tutoring Network were offered the same capacity-building services as in the Tutoring Partnership, including professional development workshops and tutor trainings; however, these programs had a stronger emphasis on implementing tutor recruitment, training, and organizational development to improve racial equity. That said, tutors in the Literacy Tutoring Network were asked a series of questions about how their program implemented racial equity practices.

Table 12 shows that the majority of Literacy Tutoring Network tutors (70%) knew that their program was committed to racial equity when recruited; however, two-thirds (66%) reported that their program did not demonstrate how to connect literacy to the racial and ethnic backgrounds of students. While most tutors (93%) had not observed racial bias in their program's tutoring or assessment materials, 75 percent reported that their program did not provide training and/or support about engaging students in conversations about race. About half (49%) of tutors had not talked with students about race.

Seventy-five percent of tutors reported that their program did not provide them training or support on engaging in conversations about race with their students. Nearly three in four (71%) tutors did not know whether there were formal or informal complaint procedures for race-related complaints. In addition, two-thirds (66%) of tutors reported that their program did not demonstrate how to intentionally and verbally connect literacy to the racial/ethnic backgrounds of their students.

Table 12. Implementation of Racial Equity

	Yes	No	I don't know
Did you think the program valued your individual strengths as a tutor?	83%	7%	11%
When you were recruited as a tutor, was it clear that the program was committed to racial equity?	70%	30%	0%
Did you think the program valued your personal background as a tutor?	69%	7%	24%
Were behavior policies implemented consistently across racial and ethnic groups in the program?	61%	3%	36%
Did your program provide you with activities that helped you and your student(s) get to know each other's backgrounds?	51%	49%	0%
Did your program share its racial equity policy with you?	46%	54%	0%
Did students have an opportunity to provide input and feedback on the content and activities of tutoring?	46%	16%	38%
Did you engage in conversations about race with your student(s)?	41%	49%	0%
Did your program intentionally provide opportunities for students to share their own culture and background?	41%	25%	33%
Did your program demonstrate how to intentionally and verbally connect literacy to the racial and ethnic backgrounds of your student(s) (e.g., share the history of literacy in African culture)?	34%	66%	0%
Did your program provide you training and/or support to engage in conversations about race with your student(s)?	25%	75%	0%
Were there effective formal and informal complaint procedures for you as a tutor regarding race-related complaints?	21%	8%	71%
Did you observe racial bias in the program's tutoring/instructional materials?	7%	93%	0%
Did you observe racial bias in the program's assessment materials?	7%	93%	0%

Source: Child Trends Tutor Survey, Spring 2016

Discussion and Recommendations

Increasing Use of Training Materials and Strategies

While most tutors reported making some changes to their tutoring practice after participating in training from the Tutoring Partnership, they continued to rely primarily on their own experience in education when faced with tutoring challenges. While relying on experiences may not inherently be negative, there are opportunities for tutoring programs and capacity-building initiatives to further incorporate materials and strategies from trainings into everyday practice.

Recommendations for tutoring programs

- Because tutors rely so heavily on their own experiences, it may be helpful to give them opportunities to reflect and share these experiences with other tutors. This type of reflection can unearth a tutor's strengths, and any underlying assumptions or biases that they may unknowingly bring to their work with students.
- Tutors may also benefit from follow-up trainings or structured opportunities to practice new tutoring strategies with support from their on-site coordinators or program directors. Incorporating a new strategy often requires multiple attempts, and tutors may need continued support in trying materials learned in training.

Recommendations for capacity-building initiatives

- Capacity-building initiatives can support tutors in reflecting on their own educational experiences by incorporating time for reflection into training sessions. Multiple types of reflection opportunities will give tutors a chance to better understand their strengths and embrace new ways of thinking.
- Initiatives can also encourage program staff to attend trainings with tutors to increase the likelihood that training materials and strategies will be incorporated into tutoring sessions. Trainers could develop additional follow-up materials for use by program staff after the training to continue coaching tutors and helping them practice new skills. Research on professional development shows that implementation of newly learned skills is more likely with follow-up coaching and support (Bixby et al., 2011).

Role of Social-Emotional Learning

Most tutors worked with 1 to 5 pre-kindergarten to third grade students on areas beyond just literacy and math. They also helped students with nonacademic skills such as focus and self-confidence. About half of the tutors believed themselves good at meeting students where they are (academically and emotionally) and building relationships. However, when most tutors ran into issues, they generally used advice from program staff and their own educational experience as supports.

Recommendations for tutoring programs

- Tutors should be encouraged and taught how to help students on issues beyond just academic subjects. The social and emotional development of students can promote academic proficiency, especially for at-risk students (Payton et al., 2008).
- Program staff should be well-trained on both the academic and social-emotional development of students to best help tutors. Studies show that connecting social and emotional development to academics promotes positive youth development (Taylor et al., 2017).

Recommendations for capacity-building initiatives

- Capacity-building initiatives can support tutoring organization by providing or linking organizations to tutor trainings and professional development workshops for program staff on social and emotional development.
- Initiatives can also provide guidance on best practices for tutoring organizations to assess and measure the social and emotional development of students.

Tutors' Experiences Engaging Students

Nearly all tutors had 5 or fewer years of experience directly relevant to the education field (volunteer or work experience). While 56 percent of Strategy B3 tutors had 6–10 years of overall tutoring experience, most tutors in Strategy A and Strategy B had 5 or fewer years. Minimal formal experience in the education field and limited tutoring experience overall may explain why most tutors across strategies cited student-related challenges as particular issues (including students' struggles to stay on task, lack of motivation, and unwillingness to do work). The most highly attended tutor trainings focused on nonacademic skills; however, most tutors perceived these trainings as ineffective in helping them deal with students' challenging behaviors.

Recommendations for tutoring programs

- Tutors may require additional support to gain the skills necessary to work with students. Additional supports should focus on behavior management and student engagement, as these were consistently reported as challenges for all tutors.

Recommendations for capacity-building initiatives

- Tutoring organizations would benefit from capacity-building initiatives that provide or link tutors to trainings on basic teaching strategies, including behavior management and student engagement.

Racial Equity in Tutoring

Across each strategy, 75 percent of tutors (or more) were white/Caucasian, while all other races/ethnicities were represented by 15 percent or less of tutors per strategy. For tutors in the Literacy Tutoring Network, racial equity was known to be important to programs; however, few programs provided tutors with examples of how to connect literacy to a student's racial, ethnic, or cultural background.

Recommendation for tutoring programs

- Students benefit when they receive instruction from someone of their racial, ethnic, or cultural background (Bixby et al., 2011). While most tutors were white/Caucasian, they primarily tutored students who were black, Asian, or Latino (Warner-Richter et al., *pending*). Tutoring programs may benefit from reaching out to people of color to learn more about their interest in tutoring, which barriers may prevent them from tutoring, and the ways in which communities of color would like to be involved.
- All tutors can benefit from more training and continuous support on cultural competency. Roughly half of the tutors reported that more nonacademic trainings on topics like cultural sensitivity would have been helpful. Tutors will need a variety of ongoing support and training (e.g., support from program staff, peer support, basic training on such topics as addressing race and culture in age-appropriate ways, the difference between equity and equality, and the difference between accepting diversity and promoting equity).

Recommendations for capacity-building initiatives

- Capacity-building initiatives can support tutoring organizations through partnerships on community outreach to better understand the needs of potential tutors of color, and working across organizations to decrease barriers to becoming a tutor.
- Initiatives should encourage tutoring organizations to be explicit about their focus on racial equity by incorporating and creating lessons and materials that are more culturally relevant to the students they serve. Moreover, tutoring organizations should consider how to structure lessons to allow for more conversations about race and/or relationship-building time.

With support from capacity-building services, tutoring programs can develop ways to improve the quality of tutoring and, in return, a student's progress. Tutors should be provided with comprehensive trainings that cover, not only, academic content but also nonacademic skills such as engaging students, reducing challenging behaviors, social-emotional learning, and cultural competency. Furthermore, tutoring programs and capacity-building services should create ways to ensure that training content is continuously implemented, by way of well-trained program staff to support tutors, making time for tutor reflection, and creating culturally inclusive lesson plans that include both academic and social emotional learning.

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