Do Teachers Support High-Impact Tutoring? A Survey Experiment

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July 2022

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, tutoring has increasingly become a popular tool for learning recovery. By the end of the 2021-22 school year, 23 states (including the District of Columbia) initiated or passed legislation mandating or encouraging tutoring initiatives, and federal pandemic relief funds were made available for school districts to spend directly on tutoring programs. This is all for good reason: over 100 randomized controlled trials show that high-impact tutoring is one of the most effective ways to accelerate student learning.

For tutoring to be a sustainable and effective strategy, however, teachers need to be bought-in and support the practice. Despite the influx of policymakers and educational leaders pushing for schools to adopt the intervention, we know little about how teachers feel about tutoring. For example, research has focused extensively on the benefits of tutoring for students, but teachers may also experience benefits of their own when their students receive personalized tutoring. On the other hand, teacher may not be supportive of tutoring programs due to competing priorities and a fear that tutoring may deplete school resources. We studied the extent to which teachers report supporting tutoring as a pandemic recovery strategy. In doing so, we explored what influences teachers' perceptions about tutoring. We tested whether teachers were more supportive of tutoring when they considered the benefits of the intervention for themselves or for their students. We also examined what types of benefits teachers report, and whether teachers were more or less likely to support tutoring if it was offered to all students versus academically struggling students.

Suggested Citation: Lee, M.G., & Robinson, C. D. (2022). *Do Teachers Support High-Impact Tutoring? A Survey Experiment.* Providence, RI: Annenberg Institute at Brown University.

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Executive Summary

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, tutoring has become a popular tool for learning recovery. By the end of the 2021-22 school year, 23 states (including the District of Columbia) initiated or passed legislation mandating or encouraging tutoring, and the federal government made pandemic relief funds available for school districts to spend directly on tutoring programs. This activity is for good reason: over 100 randomized controlled trials show that high-impact tutoring, which is tutoring by a consistent tutor for more than three days or 90 minutes per week, can accelerate student learning.[1] Effective tutoring is typically embedded into the school day or occurs immediately before or after the school day, aligns instruction with the school's curriculum and standards, provides oversight and supports for tutors, and monitors student knowledge and skills.

For high-impact tutoring to be a sustainable and effective strategy, however, educators need to buy-in and support the practice.[2] Despite the influx of policymakers and educational leaders pushing for schools to adopt tutoring, we know little about teachers' perspectives. While research has focused extensively on the benefits of tutoring for students, teachers may also experience benefits of their own when their students receive personalized tutoring. For example, having tutors support struggling students who would have required extra time from teachers might reduce teachers' workloads overall, or allow teachers to deploy their instruction more efficiently. On the other hand, teachers may not be supportive of tutoring programs due to competing priorities or a fear that tutoring would deplete school resources.

Working with a large urban district on the West Coast, we studied the extent to which teachers support tutoring as a pandemic recovery strategy. We also tested whether teachers were more supportive of tutoring when they considered the benefits of the intervention for themselves or for their students. In addition, we examined the types of benefits teachers highlight and whether teachers were more or less likely to support tutoring if it were offered to all students or only to academically struggling students.

In this brief, we address the following three questions:
1) How supportive are teachers of personalized tutoring for students?
2) What do teachers believe are the primary benefits of tutoring?
3) What drives teachers' support for tutoring?

We find that teachers support tutoring and consistently rank it as one of their top choices for addressing student learning loss. Teachers are more likely to prioritize tutoring when they considered the benefits for students, as

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[1] Dietrichson, J., Bøg, M., Filges, T., & Klint Jørgensen, A.-M. (2017). Academic Interventions for Elementary and Middle School Students With Low Socioeconomic Status: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Review of Educational Research, 87*(2), 243–282.
Nickow, A., Oreopoulos, P., & Quan, V. (2020). The Impressive Effects of Tutoring on PreK-12 Learning: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the Experimental Evidence. Working Paper 27476. *National Bureau of Economic Research*.
Roland G. Fryer J. The Production of Human Capital in Developed Countries: Evidence from 196 Randomized Field Experiments. In: *Handbook of Field Experiments. Vol. 2.* Amsterdam: North-Holland; 2017. pp. 95-322.
[2] White, S., Carey, M., O'Donnell, A., & Loeb, S. (2022). Early Lessons from Implementing High-Impact Tutoring at Scale. Retrieved from https://studentsupportaccelerator.org/briefs/early-lessons

opposed to themselves. Moreover, even when asked to consider how tutoring might help them personally, teachers tend to focus on the advantages for their students. Additionally, teachers view tutoring as most beneficial when it targets academically struggling students, although those who acknowledge the non-academic benefits of tutoring (e.g., social-emotional learning benefits) see more potential for tutoring to help all students.

Our findings have implications for how district leaders design and introduce high impact tutoring initiatives to teachers. First, leaders who want to implement a tutoring program may want to consider teachers as allies. Moreover, sharing how a tutoring program will positively impact students may be the most effective way to promote buy-in among teachers, as teachers' support for tutoring appears to be driven, first and foremost, by the learning gains academically struggling students may be able to make if they are paired with a tutor.

Study Design

We conducted a survey, including experimental questions, to examine teachers' perceptions of tutoring, focusing particularly on two aspects: the population receiving tutoring and whom we identify as the recipient of tutoring. We implemented the survey in a large, urban school district on the West Coast at the end of the 2020-2021 school year. A total of 1,683 teachers responded to the survey, for a response rate of 62% across all teachers in the district. We linked the survey data to administrative data on teachers, including their demographics and experience, as well as the school where they taught.

At the beginning of the survey, we randomly assigned teachers to reflect on the benefits of tutoring either for teachers or for students. Teachers completed one of the two open-ended writing prompts below:
- Give one example of how <u>teachers</u> could benefit from their students receiving personalized tutoring during the school day;
- Give one example of how <u>students</u> could benefit from receiving personalized tutoring during the school day.

Immediately following the writing prompt, all teachers answered the following questions using a Likert-style response option (No benefit at all – Benefit slightly – Benefit somewhat – Benefit quite a bit – Benefit a tremendous amount):
- How much do you think <u>teachers</u> would benefit if <u>all of their students</u> received personalized tutoring during the school day?
- How much do you think <u>teachers</u> would benefit if <u>students who are struggling with academics</u> received personalized tutoring during the school day?
- How much do you think <u>all students</u> would benefit from receiving personalized tutoring during the school day?
- How much do you think <u>students who are struggling with academics</u> would benefit from receiving personalized tutoring during the school day?

The order of these questions varied depending on which prompt teachers had received at the beginning: Those who received a prompt on benefits for <u>teachers</u> answered the two questions about benefits for <u>teachers</u> *before* they answered the two remaining questions about benefits for <u>students</u>. Those who received a prompt on benefits for <u>students</u> answered the two questions about benefits for <u>students</u> *before* they answered the two remaining questions about benefits for <u>teachers</u>.

Lastly, all teachers answered the following two questions:

1) To what extent do you support your school incorporating personalized tutoring into the school day? (Do not support at all – Support slightly – Support somewhat – Support quite a bit – Support a tremendous amount)
2) Which of the following options do you think would be most useful for combating COVID-related learning loss? Please rank in order of usefulness (A rank of 1 is most useful, and a rank of 6 is least useful).
   o Personalized tutoring during the school day
   o Personalized tutoring outside of the school day
   o Longer school day
   o Adding a summer semester
   o Smaller class sizes
   o Hiring additional support staff

After analyzing teachers' responses to the survey questions, we took two approaches to code teachers' open-ended responses to the writing prompt. First, we coded the responses for whether they focused on benefits for teachers or students, in order to determine whether teachers' responses adhered to initially assigned experimental condition. Second, we summarized and then categorized the responses using a grounded approach to identify all the types of benefits teachers cited to understand what benefits were most salient to teachers.

Findings

RQ #1: How supportive are teachers of personalized tutoring for students?

Takeaway #1: Teachers support tutoring as a top choice for recovering learning loss.

The vast majority of teachers indicated that they support their school incorporating personalized tutoring into the school day: almost 70% of teachers supported this idea "quite a bit" or "a tremendous amount" (see Figure 1). Only two percent of respondents (n=35) indicated that they do not support embedding tutoring into the school day at all.

Figure 1: Teacher support for in-school personalized tutoring.

"To what extent do you support your school incorporating personalized tutoring into the school day?"
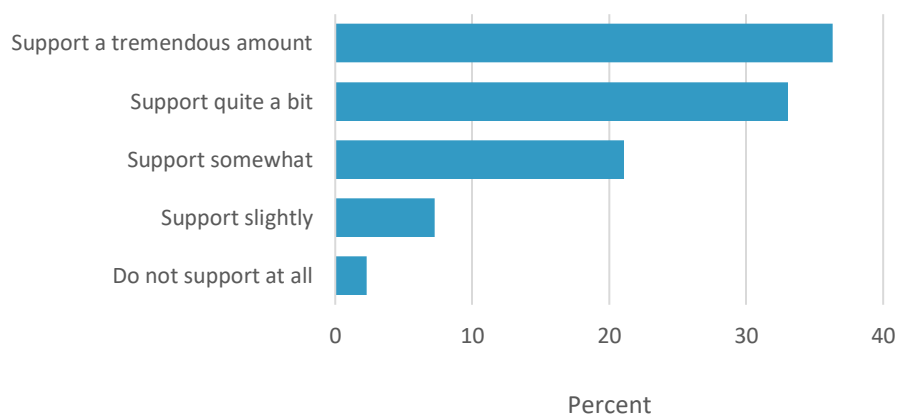
Teachers also ranked tutoring highly amongst a range of options for addressing COVID-induced unfinished learning (see Figure 2). Given the options of personalized tutoring, longer school days, smaller classes, a summer semester, and hiring additional support staff, teachers choose tutoring second only to adding a summer semester, which about half of respondents indicated as the most useful option for COVID learning loss. One-quarter of respondents felt that personalized tutoring, either during or outside of the school day, was the most useful option for mitigating COVID learning loss.

Figure 2: Percent of teachers opting for each choice as most useful for mitigating COVID learning loss.
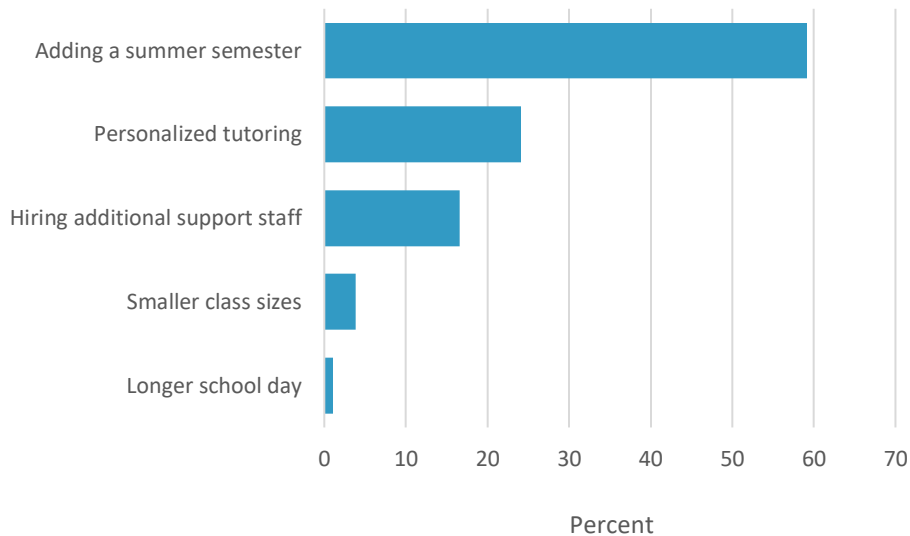
RQ #2: What do teachers believe are the primary benefits of tutoring?

Takeaway #2: Teachers believe that tutoring primarily benefits their students, not themselves.

We then examined whether teachers' perceptions of the benefits of tutoring varied depending on whether they considered the potential benefits for students or for teachers (i.e., themselves).[3]

Teachers who reflected on the benefits of tutoring for students were 7.5 percentage points more likely to indicate personalized tutoring as the most useful resource for mitigating COVID learning loss, compared to those who reflected on the benefits for teachers (Figure 3, left axis). However, teachers across the board expressed similar levels of support for tutoring when asked the extent of their support (Figure 3, right axis), regardless of whether they were asked to reflect on the benefits for students or benefits for teachers.

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[3] We ran linear regression models that predicted responses to each of the aforementioned survey questions, controlling for whether the respondents considered the benefit for students or themselves first alongside other demographic characteristics (gender, race/ethnicity, years of experience, household income, school level taught) as well as school fixed effects.

Figure 3. Respondents indicating tutoring as most useful resource and level of support for tutoring, by condition.
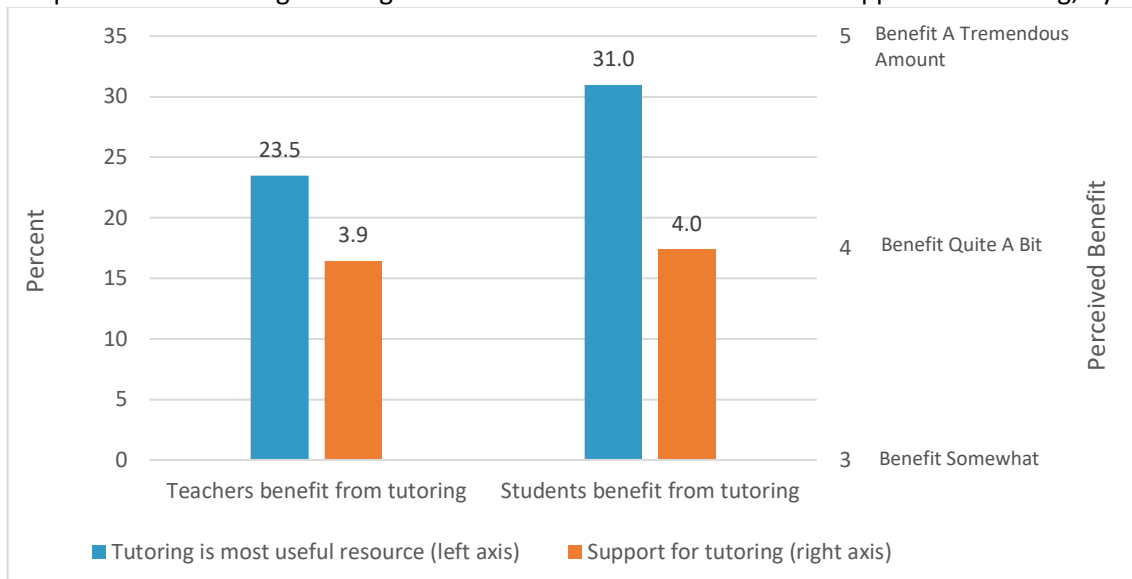
Although teachers were assigned to specifically consider the benefits of tutoring for either teachers or students, teachers' written responses did not necessarily reflect their assigned condition. As seen in Figure 4, half of those who were randomly assigned to consider the benefits of tutoring to teachers wrote about benefits to students. Only 38.6 percent of teachers who were assigned to consider benefits to teachers explicitly mentioned teacher-facing benefits. On the other hand, a vast majority (77.6 percent) of teachers assigned to consider the benefits of tutoring to students did write about a student-facing benefit.

Figure 4. Assigned experimental condition vs. actual responses on benefits to tutoring.
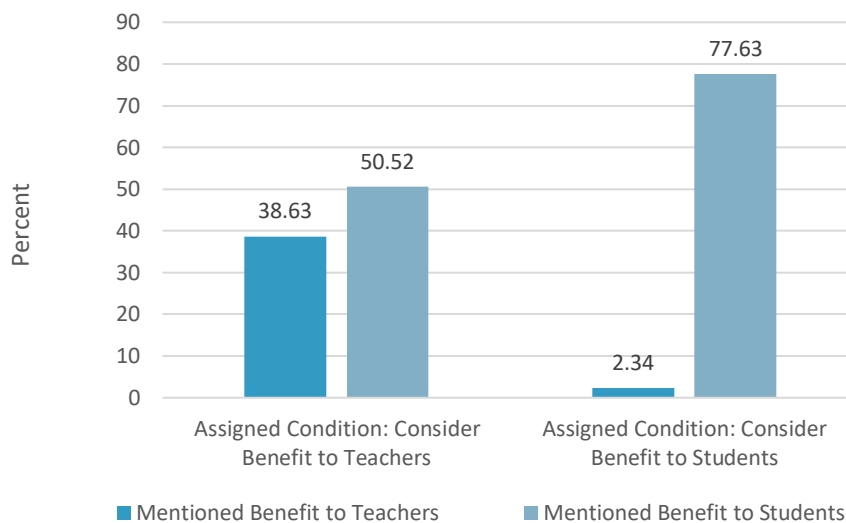
N=1543. Sums do not add up to 100 percent. 10.2 and 10.3 percent of responses pertaining to the assigned condition of considering benefits to teachers and considering benefits to students, respectively, were not codable as mentioning benefits to either group. Also, codes are not mutually exclusive and a single response can be coded as both mentioning benefits to teachers and to students: 9.4 percent of those assigned to the teacher benefits condition mentioned benefits to both groups while 0.9 percent of those assigned to the student benefits condition did so.

Our analysis of teachers' written prompts uncovered many types of tutoring benefits. Perhaps unsurprisingly, teachers most commonly cited academic benefits of tutoring. These benefits include academic growth, the ability of students to progress at their own pace, and opportunities for students to review or preview concepts. Some respondents wrote about the academic benefits of tutoring within the context of specific subjects, such as math or English language arts. Teachers also described several instructional benefits, such as being able to use class time more efficiently or being able to focus on complex concepts rather than reviewing topics. They also wrote about benefits specific to certain student populations such as English Learners, students with IEPs or disabilities, and low-performing students; and they wrote about social-emotional, relationship-building, and engagement-related benefits. Table 1 describes the types of benefits mentioned, as well as an example response pertaining to each type of benefit.

Table 1. Breakdown of benefits of tutoring mentioned by respondents in writing prompt

| Benefit Type	Percent	Example Response
Academic	48.3%	"Students would benefit by having the one to one experience and learning at their pace to clarify instructions or provided more prompts to get them thinking about the topic. It would provide another way of accessing the curriculum."
Instructional/Pedagogical	18.0%	"[Teachers would spend] less class time on review & reteach, wouldn't have to slow down pacing or water down curriculum, more class time for learning and engagement when students are progressing at the same level."
Beneficial to Specific Student Populations	16.9%	"students who struggle academically, in particular, reading in English, can benefit from strengthening foundational phonics skills in one-on-one targeted sessions with a tutor."
SEL and/or Engagement	11.0%	"This would encourage students and have their confidence levels improved upon and also motivates them to be better engaged in academic studies."
Academic: English Language Arts / Reading	10.0%	"Students can get more practice in learning and understanding basic foundational skills such as letter sounds, sight words, writing, and beginning reading skills."
Relationship Building	5.8%	"Students' skills would be stronger and they would feel more connected to school by building personal connections. And there would be an extra adult available to support certain students. (This would make our jobs easier)."
Academic: Math	3.2%	"I find that my heterogeneous classes have a huge gap in students who do/do not have foundational math skills. This can be addressed directly by tutoring for providing students an opportunity to practice such skills and fill in the gaps of learning that are not addressed in our curriculum"
Academic: Other Subjects	0.3%	"A number of students, including, but not exclusively, second language learners, have difficulty reading scientific text for comprehension. Many students would benefit in partnering with a tutor to learn and practice reading comprehension strategies specifically to tackle science related text."

Notes: Because writing prompts can cite more than one benefit, the total adds up to more than 100 percent. Subject-specific benefits are academic benefits that mention a specific subject. N=1543.

RQ #3: What drives teachers' support for tutoring?

Takeaway #3: Teachers believe tutoring is most beneficial when it is targeted for academically struggling students. However, teachers who consider the non-academic benefits of tutoring see more potential for tutoring to help all students.

Teachers report that benefits of tutoring are higher for academically struggling students than for all students. Figure 5 shows teacher perceptions of how much students would benefit from tutoring, overall and separately by the type of benefit teachers mention in the initial writing prompt. Overall, they report that all students would benefit quite a bit (which corresponds to a value of 4.0) but, on average, struggling students would benefit between quite a bit and a tremendous amount (4.5, on average). This pattern is clear across the types of benefits: academic benefit, SEL or relational benefit, benefit for a specific group, or instructional benefit. Beliefs about the benefits of tutoring for all students are strongest when teachers consider the socioemotional or relational benefits of tutoring. They are also strong when teachers consider instructional benefits. Meanwhile, beliefs about the benefits of tutoring just for academically struggling students are fairly consistent across the board, but do appear strongest when teachers consider the benefits of tutoring for specific student populations, as well as the instructional benefits of tutoring.

Figure 5. Perceived benefits of tutoring for given student population (all students vs. academically struggling students) by type of benefit mentioned.
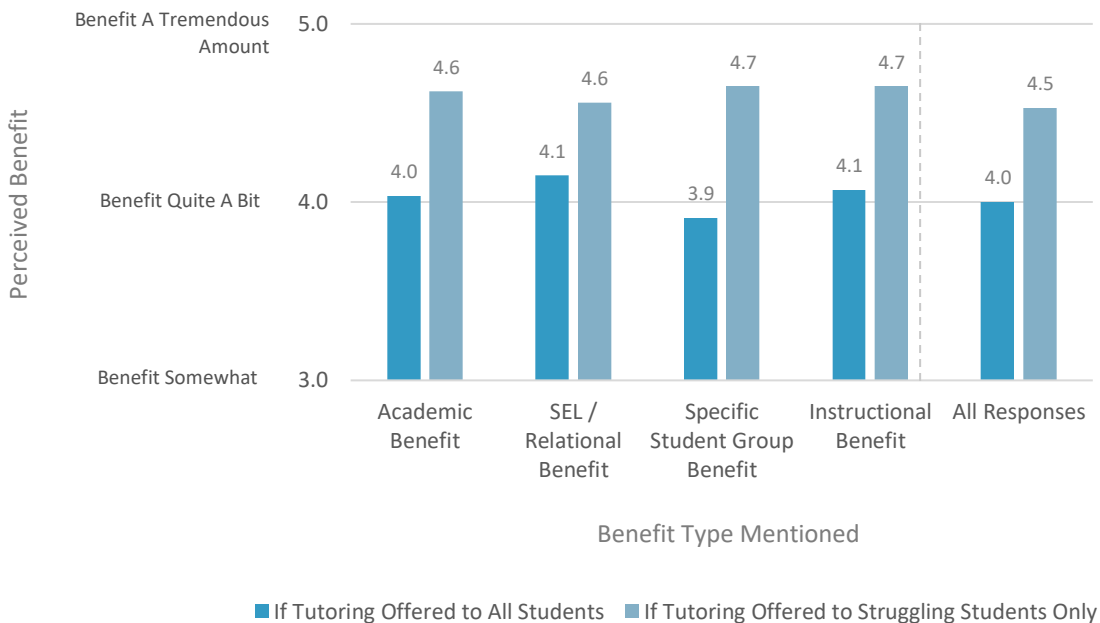
The difference between how beneficial teachers see tutoring for struggling students relative to all students varies a little by whether they are considering benefits that accrue to students or to teachers (see Figure 6). When they consider benefits for teachers, they see somewhat higher benefits for all students than when they consider benefits for students. Conversely, they report benefits for struggling students as somewhat higher when they are considering benefits that accrue to students.

Figure 6. Perceptions of tutoring benefits, depending on the tutored population.
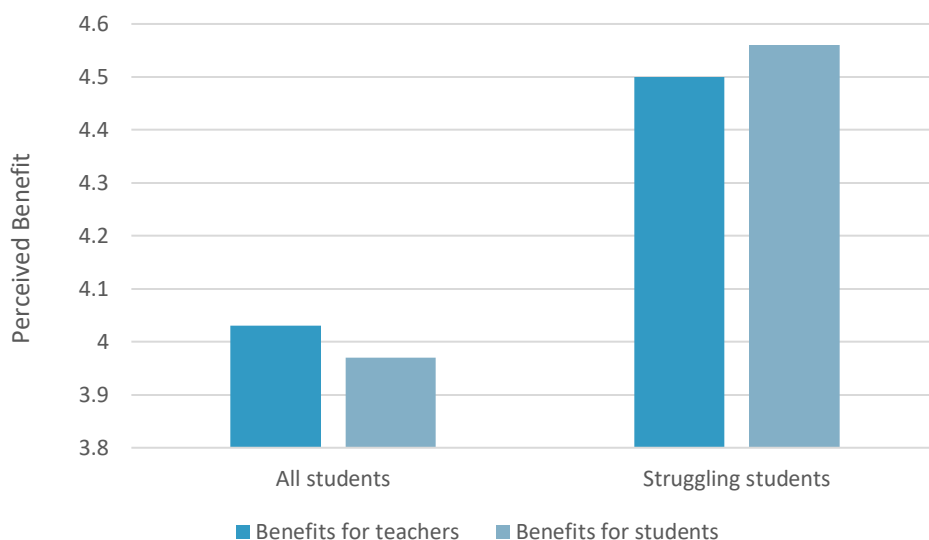
Conclusion

Tutoring has emerged as a leading pandemic learning recovery strategy. Our findings show that teachers are highly supportive of tutoring, which is crucial for the execution and sustainability of any tutoring initiative. The most effective tutoring programs occur during the school day and are aligned with the school curriculum, making them accessible to the students who need it most. These features of high-impact tutoring make teachers key stakeholders who can influence whether the implementation of personalized tutoring in schools is successful.

We find that teachers consistently support tutoring as a recovery strategy regardless of whether it is framed as benefiting themselves or their students. However, teachers do see tutoring as more useful after reflecting on the benefits for students. This finding highlights an important takeaway: When considering the adoption of an additional instructional resource, like tutoring, the majority of teachers consider the advantages for students over and above anything else—even when they are asked to consider benefits to themselves. Our findings may indicate that stressing the benefits of tutoring for students (rather than for teachers) may increase the likelihood of support and buy-in, even for teachers.

Additionally, we find that teachers perceive the greatest benefits of tutoring for specific student populations. Teachers believe tutoring will be most beneficial if it targets academically struggling students, as opposed to all students in their schools. Teacher buy-in around tutoring program implementation in schools may then be improved by stressing the potential benefits for academically struggling students rather than for all students.

Finally, teachers are attuned to multiple benefits – both academic and non-academic – that tutoring can provide. Academic benefits are definitely of interest to teachers, which is not surprising, given the potential disruptions in learning experienced by many students during the pandemic. Teachers also consider socioemotional benefits of tutoring for their students, as well as the instructional benefits. Teachers are on the front lines and are observing the negative ramifications of the pandemic on students beyond academic

performance.[4] Tutoring is a potentially powerful tool for supporting other aspects of teaching and learning. We find that teachers' beliefs about the benefits of tutoring for all students are strongest when considering the socioemotional and relational benefits of tutoring.

Further research on the socioemotional or relational aspect of tutoring, as well as on the benefits of tutoring in increasing the effectiveness or efficiency of classroom instruction, can inform how and when schools utilize tutoring. As we learn more about the many ways tutoring can impact students, we can provide teachers with research-based evidence that shapes their support for tutoring.

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[4] Hamilton, L., & Gross, B. (2021). How Has the Pandemic Affected Students' Social-Emotional Well-Being? A Review of the Evidence to Date. *Center on Reinventing Public Education.*