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# 2023-2024 Wittenberg University High-Impact Tutoring Program Implementation Report

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## Key Takeaways

- A total of 129 K-5th grade students received tutoring from 79 tutors in ELA and math across the 2023-24 school year. The number of elementary students receiving math instruction increased from Fall to Spring, as did the number of sessions each student received on average.
- Elementary students consistently reported positive attitudes towards tutoring experiences across the 2023-24 school year.
- Tutors (preservice teachers) reported high levels of confidence in their instructional self-efficacy in selecting and implementing ELA, Phonics, and Math strategies during tutoring sessions, though they had mixed perceptions of their tutoring experience.
- Wittenberg's tutoring program showcases how institutions of higher education can integrate a tutoring program into reading and math methods coursework for preservice teachers to promote hands-on field experience for future educators. It demonstrates how universities can have local impact by building rapport with surrounding school districts and fostering meaningful relationships with students in need.

## Overview

In recent years, school districts across the U.S. have invested in high-impact tutoring as a promising approach to accelerate K12 student learning. Such efforts to scale tutoring have focused on design elements proven to be the most effective on student outcomes, namely consistent instruction from a trained tutor, integration with classroom instruction, tutoring informed by data, using quality curricula, and occurring at least three times per week (Nickow et al., 2024). Studies indicate that effective tutoring programs share these core characteristics, even while they vary in the types of tutors they employ, scheduling strategy, and in-person or virtual delivery model (Cortes et al., 2024; Robinson et al., 2024).

The state of Ohio has been active in advancing legislative efforts aimed at the implementation and long-term sustainability of high-impact tutoring, though most of its programs have been funded by temporary federal funding sources (see Appendix B for legislative action on tutoring). The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (ODEW) allocates funding to numerous tutoring initiates throughout the state. Such investments include partnerships with the Boys and Girls Clubs for students who reside in rural areas and Learning Aid Ohio for students with 504s and IEPs. In 2022, ODEW awarded $14.8 million in a statewide math and literacy tutoring grant to Ohio colleges and universities with teacher preparation or education programs planning to create or expand math and literacy tutoring programs for Ohio's K-12 students in one-on-one or small-group settings. The state believed having preservice teachers serving as tutors in local school districts would provide direct field experience, community service opportunities, and incentives such as course credits and stipends for preservice teachers who served as tutors.

Wittenberg University, a small liberal arts college located in rural Ohio, received nearly $420,000 to support a two-year high-impact tutoring program. The goal of the university's tutoring initiative was to promote content knowledge and self-efficacy for preservice teachers and provide tutors to accelerate K-5 student learning in reading and math during the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years. The program was designed to integrate tutor experiences with university course content to promote pedagogical knowledge, particularly for phonics, ELA methods, and math methods education courses.

This brief reports on year two of Wittenberg University's in-person, high-impact tutoring program that provided reading and math instruction to 129 K-5 students across four elementary school campuses in two local school districts. Wittenberg's case provides an example of how one university, with the appropriate infrastructure and coherence to support preservice teachers and faculty leaders, can provide tutoring to local districts. We draw on administrative data from both districts and tutor session and survey data to examine the following questions about program implementation:

- How did Wittenberg University implement high-impact tutoring in two local school districts during the 2023-24 school year?
    - How much tutoring did students receive?
    - How do the characteristics of the students who attended tutoring compare to those in the district overall?
    - Did tutoring dosage vary by student characteristics?
- What were the experiences of students? Did tutoring have an effect on their feelings about school?
- What were the experiences of tutors? Did tutoring increase their perceptions of tutoring and feelings of instructional self-efficacy?

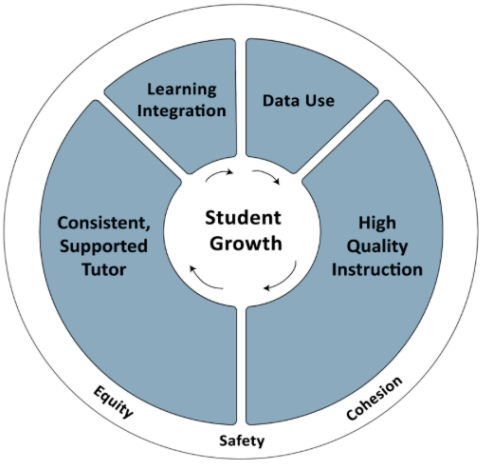
# SY 2023-2024 Implementation

In Fall 2023, Wittenberg returned to the two local school districts that participated in the tutoring program during the 2022-23 school year. Similar to the first year of tutoring, both districts requested phonics, ELA, and math tutoring for low-performing K-5 students in schools with no community programs. Preservice teachers served as tutors as part of course requirements in Wittenberg's teacher preparation program. Wittenberg's Tutoring Program Director and Tutoring Coordinator worked with preservice teachers' academic schedules and coordinated with district leaders to integrate tutoring into the school day without disrupting existing master schedules. The Program Director oversaw tutor training, data collection, and budget management while adhering to state compliance requirements for grant awardees. The tutoring coordinator worked closely with preservice teacher tutors and the schools to address day-to-day logistical and instructional issues.

## Program Features

Features that characterize effective high-impact tutoring are well-established in the literature (Robinson & Loeb, 2021)[1] and Wittenberg's program aligns with several characteristics of high-impact tutoring. Tutoring is provided during a designated intervention block during the school day so tutors could meet consistently with students throughout each semester. Tutors completed regular check-ins with classroom teachers to ensure session content aligned with classroom instruction. Tutors received initial training and ongoing support in Phonics, ELA, and Math evidenced-based practices through semester-long methods courses as part of Wittenberg's teacher preparation program. In addition, tutoring sessions were structured as either 1:1 or 1:3 (reading and math, respectively) in 30-45 minute sessions, 2-3 times per week.

| High-Impact Tutoring | Wittenberg's Tutoring Program |
|---|---|
| Learning integration | -Designated intervention block during the school day<br>-Tutors checked in regularly with classroom teachers |
| Consistent, supported tutor | -Preservice teachers trained in Phonics, ELA, and Math evidence-based practices<br>-Met consistently with student throughout the semester |
| High-quality instruction | -Group size 1:1 (Reading) and 1:3 (Math)<br>-2-3x per week<br>-30-45 min sessions |




[1]Robinson, Carly D., and Susanna Loeb. (2021). High-Impact Tutoring: State of the Research and Priorities for Future Learning. (EdWorkingPaper: 21-384). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: https://doi.org/10.26300/qf76-rj21

## Students Served

Each district was responsible for identifying students who would benefit the most from tutoring. This included students struggling to meet grade-level benchmarks based on documentation from classroom instruction and assessment scores. Figure 1 below displays the characteristics of students who attended at least one high-impact tutoring session compared to the characteristics of all K-5 students enrolled in both districts. Many tutored students were considered economically disadvantaged (85%) and/or identified as White (65%). Fourteen percent of students who received tutoring identified as Black and nearly 12% identified as more than one race, indicating that Black and multiracial students were more likely to receive tutoring than their peer counterparts in the district (11% and 10%, respectively). Notably, 4% of tutored students received special education services and 6% were classified as English Learners.

In total, 32 Wittenberg preservice teachers tutored in the Fall (25 ELA/Phonics; 7 Math) and 47 Wittenberg students tutored in the Spring (27 ELA/Phonics; 20 Math), serving a total of 129 K-5th grade students across the 2023-24 school year. Fifty-five of these K-5th grade students received tutoring in reading and 76 were tutored in math (2 students were tutored in both math and reading), which corresponds to 7.5% of all students in the two districts. While the program was small in scale, Wittenberg successfully coordinated academic schedules of preservice teachers with master schedules in each district to serve students in four schools across both districts in 2023-24 (the same locations as year 1). Overall, tutored students were generally representative of each district's student population; however, economically disadvantaged students and Black students were proportionally more likely to receive tutoring compared to their White peers.

**Figure 1. Characteristics of Students in Tutoring**

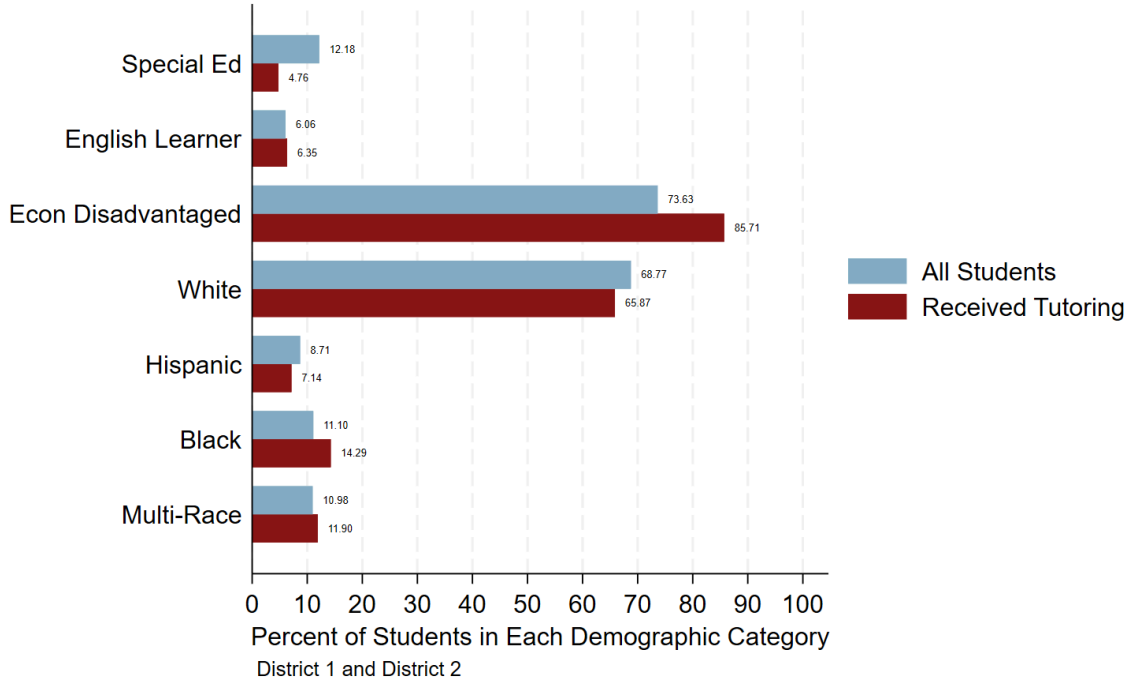
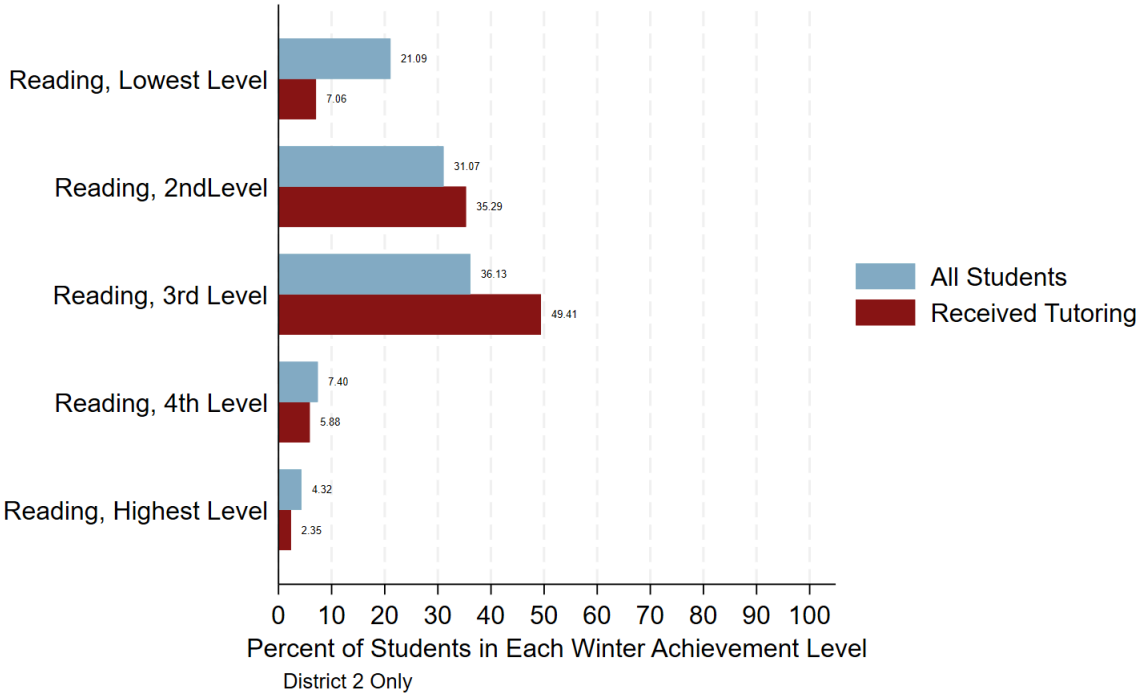


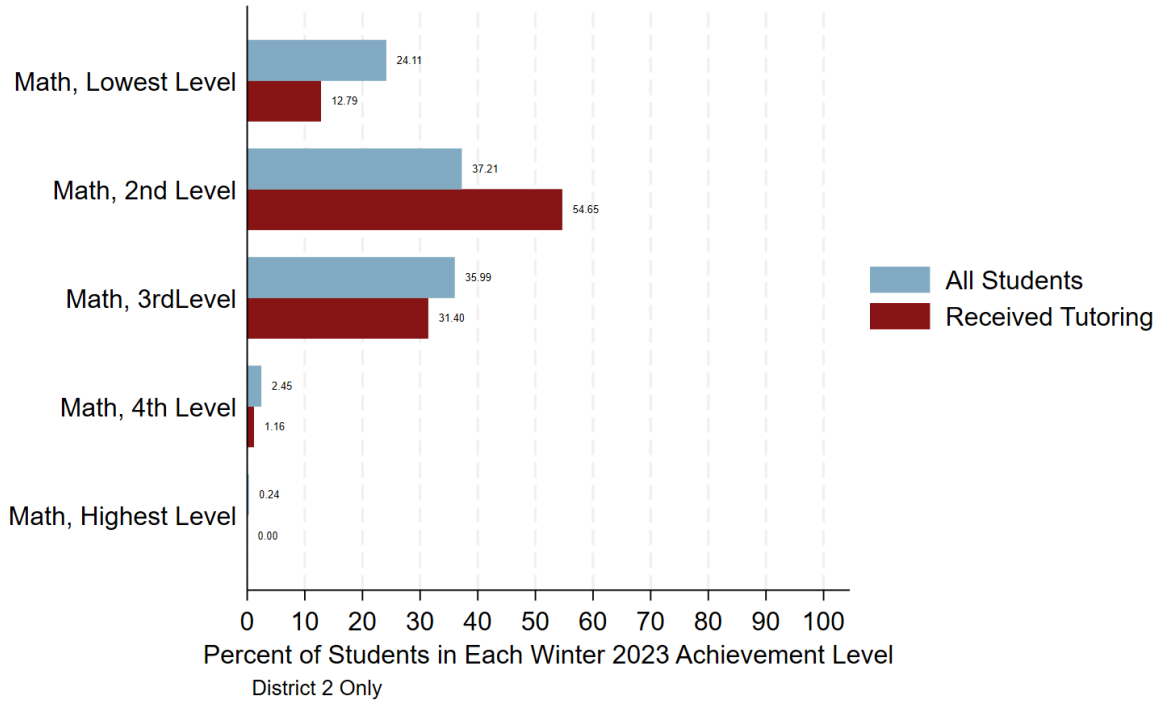

*Figure 1 compares the characteristics of students who participated in tutoring to all students in grades K-5 at both school districts in the 2023-24 SY.*

**Figure 2. Reading Achievement Level of Students Tutored**



Students selected for tutoring were those struggling to access grade-level material but not considered to have significant delay, characterized as “bubble” students. This aligns with MAP student achievement levels for reading and math in Figures 2 and 3, with the majority of students in Level 2 (two grade levels below) or Level 3 (one grade level below). It is important to note, however, that 7% and 12% of tutored students were in the Lowest Level category for Reading and Math, respectively (3 or more grade levels below). This data is only complete for District 2.

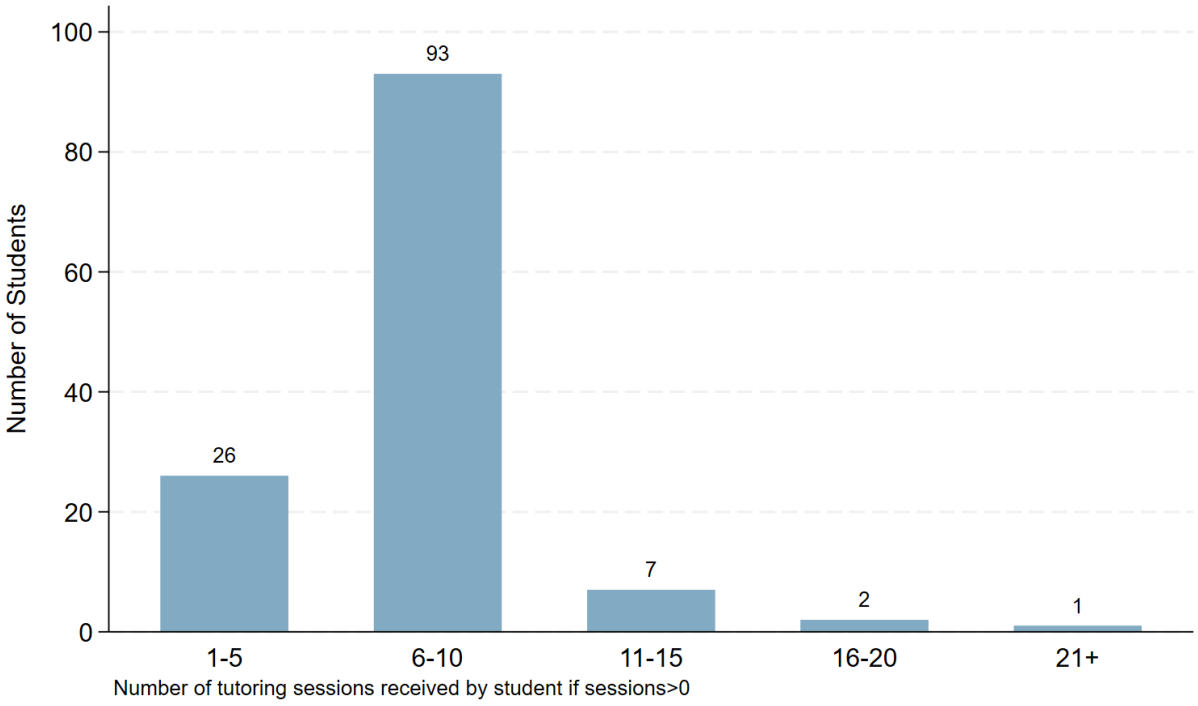
**Figure 3. Math Achievement Level of Students Tutored**




## How much tutoring did students receive?

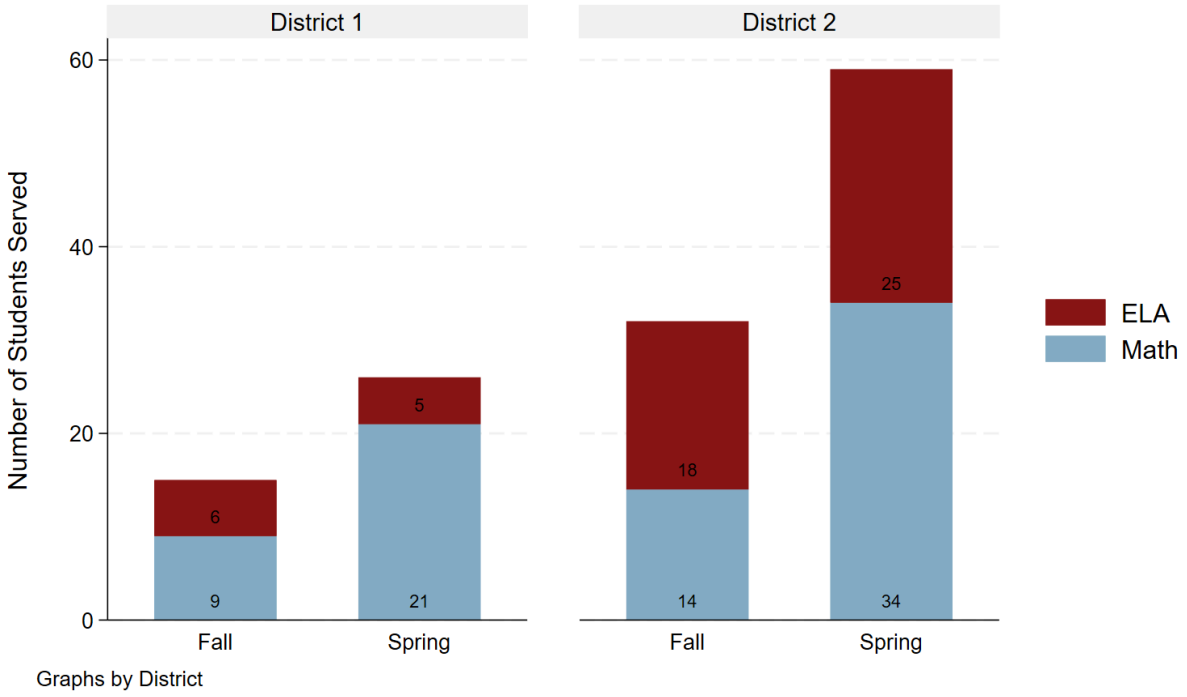
Wittenberg designed the program to provide tutoring sessions two to three times per week over the course of fall and spring semesters; however, individual students did not always attend each scheduled session due to absences (student or tutor), conflicting school activities or other issues. The vast majority of students who attended at least one tutoring session received between six and ten tutoring sessions (see Figure 4) per semester, equating to roughly 4.5 hours of instruction in both school districts. On average, tutoring sessions lasted 31.5 minutes and was most prevalent in grade 2; the amount of tutoring received did not significantly differ across grades among tutored students.

**Figure 4. Tutoring Sessions Received**




As shown in Figure 5 below, Wittenberg's tutoring program increased capacity from Fall to Spring, although this varied by district. For both districts, the number of students tutored in math increased from 23 to 55; the number of students tutored in reading also increased from 18-25 from Fall to Spring in District 2. For District 1, however, the number of students tutored in reading dropped slightly from Fall to Spring. This decrease in tutoring participation and overall lower number of tutored students in District 1 may be due to scheduling challenges given that the district engaged in other reading tutoring programs in the 2023-24 school year or that District 1 is smaller and therefore fewer students to participate in the program.

**Figure 5. Students Tutored in ELA and Math**




## Student Perceptions and Feelings About School

Throughout Fall and Spring semesters, tutored students completed short surveys regularly to gauge their feelings about tutoring at the end of sessions. These "pulse checks" included three questions:

1. *How did you feel about your tutoring session today?*
2. *How do you feel about this subject?*
3. *How do you feel about school?*

Response options were on a scale from "bad" to "great" (1 to 5, respectively). We averaged recorded responses across the year for all students with pulse check data who attended more than one tutoring session. The most common response for the first and last item is "great" (5); the most common response for the second item is "good" (4); indicating that students felt great about their session, school in general, and good about the subject matter. Very few students reported feeling "bad" or "not good" across the first two items; 17% of students reported feeling "bad" or "not good" the third item, indicating that while more students felt great about school, school was also the category in which the highest number of students felt bad.

Students provided the most favorable responses to the first question, "How did you feel about your tutoring session today?" ($M$ = 4.64, $SD$ = .70), with significantly more students selecting "great" (73%) than the bottom three options (6%). Responses to the remaining two items were similar across all pulse

check surveys ("How do you feel about this subject?"; *M* = 3.86, *SD* = .98 and "How do you feel about school?"; *M* = 3.71, *SD* = 1.26), indicating that students generally felt more positively about their tutoring sessions than they felt about school or the subjects in which they received tutoring. We also compared students' first and last recorded responses in the pulse check data to measure changes in their feelings towards tutoring and school across the year. The modal change is zero across all three items, indicating that most students' responses stayed the same between their first and last recorded pulse check response.

## Tutor Perceptions and Feelings of Self-Efficacy

Each semester, tutors completed a pre-post survey on their experience as a tutor, their perceptions of and relationships with their students, their sense of self-efficacy around conducting sessions and interacting with students, self-efficacy with selecting and implementing reading and math strategies, and their feedback on professional development and workplace support. This survey included questions for constructs such as overall tutoring experience, perceptions of student engagement, and self-efficacy. A full list of constructs and example survey questions are listed in Appendix A.

On average, tutors expressed mixed feelings about their experience in the program and confidence in their ability to help students. They reported the highest average responses when asked about their instructional self-efficacy, namely their confidence in selecting and implementing appropriate teaching strategies in Phonics, ELA, and Math (*M* = 3.27 - 4.24 on a likert scale of 1 = Not at all to 5 = A tremendous amount). Tutors felt somewhat confident in their relational self-efficacy and ability to engage students, such as feeling they are capable of designing relationship-building activities or confidence that they can engage students during a tutoring session (*M* = 2.24, *SD* = .52; *M* = 2.31, *SD* = .57, respectively). Tutors perceived that students had generally positive attitudes towards tutoring (*M* = 3.1 - 3.8) and interest in the subject matter (*M* = 3.41, *SD* = .7). Although tutors reported that they looked forward to their tutoring session on average (*M* = 3.10; *SD* = .81), they were less likely to report enjoyment from tutoring (*M* = 2.8, *SD* = .78).

## Considerations for Tutoring Programs in IHE

Over the course of two school years, Wittenberg implemented individual and small-group tutoring sessions in two local school districts. A total of 155 Wittenberg tutors served 238 elementary school students; sixty-eight Wittenberg preservice teachers tutored during Fall semesters (52 ELA; 16 Math) and 87 tutored in the Spring (49 ELA; 38 Math). Ninety-seven K-5th grade students received tutoring in reading and 145 were tutored in math (4 students were tutored in both math and reading). Overall, tutored students were generally representative of each district's student population; however, economically disadvantaged students and Black students were proportionally more likely to receive tutoring compared to their white peers.

This case is an example of how institutions of higher education can integrate a tutoring program into reading and math methods coursework for preservice teachers to promote hands-on field experience for future educators. The Wittenberg tutoring program also showcases ways in which universities can get involved in local impact by building rapport with surrounding school districts and fostering meaningful relationships with students in need.

Implementing an academic program in any school district is complex. Between coordinating logistics, choosing curricula, and collecting data to inform decisions about ongoing programming, there are many barriers to overcome. It is necessary to have adequate resources, planning, and communication to facilitate successful implementation of a well-designed tutoring program (Heinrich et al., 2020). Wittenberg highlights the importance of these components and areas to improve in order to create a program infrastructure that is sustainable and effective.

*Resources*

Key resources included funding, personnel capacity, and lesson materials for their tutoring program. The influx of state dollars through a competitive grant process enabled Wittenberg to cover all program-related costs for both school districts. Grant funds were designated to purchasing and printing materials, hiring staff, tutor transportation costs, and data and project support. Wittenberg hired a part-time tutoring coordinator to work with the Program Director, preservice teachers, and school personnel to oversee scheduling logistics and manage day-to-day operations during program implementation. The tutoring coordinator worked with schools to identify a point person at each location who was the priority contact for troubleshooting absences and scheduling issues or other communication needed during program launch and implementation. In addition, Wittenberg was able to select tutoring curricula that aligned at the higher education level and at the district level; the university trained preservice teachers that aligned with school instruction, creating continuity across tutoring session and classroom instruction.

*Planning*

When coordinating their tutoring program, Wittenberg allocated significant time towards planning logistics and coordinating implementation and data collection across the two school districts. The Program Director worked closely with each district to identify an intervention block designated to tutoring each week during the program. In addition, the tutoring coordinator collaborated with tutors and classroom teachers on master schedules to plan time slots for tutoring sessions that worked for classroom teachers as well as tutors' academic schedules. This included accounting for school and university breaks, testing windows, and available tutor transportation. Moreover, the Program Director trained tutors during methods classes, which included lesson planning for tutoring sessions, how and

when to collect student pulse check data and complete lesson reflections, and pre and post tutor surveys needed for program evaluation.

*Communication*

Transparent and consistent communication was instrumental in building rapport with school and district level leaders as well as university decision-makers. Wittenberg built and maintained a relationship with school and district leaders in the first year of the tutoring program, as evidenced by school requests for tutors to return to schools in year 2. This rapport was key in sustaining tutoring buy-in at the district and university level, as district interest and ongoing conversations with the University Provost were necessary for integrating tutoring permanently into preservice educator programming such that tutoring could continue even after grant funds were exhausted. The tutor coordinator met regularly with tutors in their placement schools to provide feedback and check in with classroom teachers to see how the program was running; tutors were required to meet with classroom teachers on a weekly basis to ensure continuity of tutoring lessons with general classroom instruction. The Project Director, who is a faculty member in the Wittenberg Education Department, taught tutors methods courses at the time of tutoring and could address questions or issues that arose during tutoring as a form of ongoing coaching support.

## Takeaways

To our knowledge, Wittenberg is one of few universities that has embedded tutoring as part of preservice teachers' coursework and field placement while aligning program characteristics with those proven effective for accelerating students' learning. While state grant funds through ESSER were the catalyst for launching this program, it serves as evidence that institutions of higher education have a unique opportunity to engage in local work in ways that can build rapport with surrounding districts and serve students in need while also fulfilling college requirements for the next generation of educators. It is notable that Wittenberg has continued their tutoring program into the 2024-25 school year after state grant funding has expired due to their ability to establish strong program infrastructure for implementation in the first two years of the program.

This work is not without its challenges and limitations. For instance, the number of students who received tutoring generally increased from Fall to Spring both years, perhaps due to logistical hurdles at the start of the school year. Future endeavors should consider planning in the Fall and implementing in the Spring semester to maximize the number of tutoring sessions students receive. It is notable that Wittenberg tutoring grew from the first to second year in total number of students served, although the program was relatively small and did not have the capacity to grow larger. Future programs aiming to scale should consider important conversations with district and university leaders on ways to

integrate tutoring into permanent coursework and field experience for preservice teacher programs. Lastly, integrating tutoring into teacher preparation programs may alleviate the burden of program costs. Creative solutions such as these may support a sustainable model through which universities can provide local, long-term impact for students in need.

## Appendix A. Tutor Survey Questions

| **Construct (Total items)** | **Example items** |
|---|---|
| Tutoring experience (5) | • How confident are you that you can engage students during a tutoring session?<br>• How much do you look forward to your tutoring sessions? |
| Tutor Perception of Students' Engagement (4) | • On most days, how enthusiastic are the students about tutoring?<br>• How interested are your students in this subject? |
| Self-Efficacy (5)<br><br>Phonics Self-Efficacy (18)*<br><br>ELA Self-Efficacy (18)*<br><br>Math Self-Efficacy (18)* | • How confident are you that you can effectively teach this subject?<br>• How confident are you that you can help your students who are facing the biggest challenges learn?<br><br>• How confident are you in selecting/implementing appropriate teaching strategies for short and long vowels?<br><br>• How confident are you in selecting/implementing appropriate teaching strategies for determining the meaning of unknown vocabulary words?<br><br>• How confident are you in selecting/implementing appropriate teaching strategies for completing math equations involving fractions? |
| Relational (9) | • How often do you say something encouraging to your students?<br>• How caring do you think your students are towards you? |
| Relational Self-Efficacy (8) | • How much can you do to cultivate a positive relationship with students who are not performing well?<br>• To what extent do you feel capable of designing relationship building activities for your tutoring sessions? |
| Professional Development & Workplace (6) | • To what extent do you feel like a respected member of the community?<br>• How likely is it that you will continue tutoring after this semester? |

**Note: For Year 2, Wittenberg asked tutors about their ability to select and implement strategies to promote students' learning in related content areas of Phonics, ELA, and Math.*

## Appendix B. Legislative Action on Tutoring

Ohio continues to integrate high-impact tutoring into legislative efforts for long-term success. In summer 2022, House Bill 583 was passed, which designated $26.2 million toward the inclusion of key provisions for high-dosage tutoring to (1) to create a high quality tutoring provider vendor directory and gear funds toward contracting with approved vendors to provide services directly to districts and schools and (2) establish a statewide tutoring program, Tutor Kids Ohio, in coordination with education service centers across the state to hire, train, and deploy tutors. Both programs are ongoing at this time. In summer 2023, Ohio passed House Bill 33, mandating high-dosage tutoring opportunities for all students on reading improvement and monitoring plans (RIMPs) beginning in the 2023-24 school year as part of third grade reading guarantee requirements. Today, high-impact tutoring is considered a Tier 2 intervention and integrated into existing MTSS models in school districts across the state.