Evaluating tutoring programs: What to look for

Written by Eva Heithausen, TC Daily Planet
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"Mom can you help me, please? I don't understand the homework." At some point, parents also have difficulty understanding the homework — or figuring out how to help their children understand it. Can a tutoring program help the student to learn better? And how can parents tell which program works?

If a child struggles in school, a tutoring program can help to improve the child's performance. Educational Outcomes of Tutoring: A Meta-analysis of Findings
found that the exam performance of students who were tutored was better than the exam performance of students in a conventional class. Tutoring programs have a positive effect not only on proficiency, but also on the students' attitudes toward the subject in which they are tutored. The
Best Practices for Tutoring Programs – A guide to quality
, published by the St. Paul Public Schools Foundation is a research-based guide to effective tutoring practices.

What makes tutoring programs work best?

The Center for Prevention Research and Development published background research on tutoring programs   in 2009.
This study acknowledges that tutoring models vary. Some focus exclusively on homework assistance or on skill-building and some combine both. Some tutoring programs work with community volunteers, others with same-age or older peers, and others with certified teachers.

The study found that:

Tutors and students who meet at least **three times a week** achieve better outcomes than tutors who meet twice a week or less.

The program duration is significantly related with positive outcomes. Tutoring programs with at least **45 hours of implementation** time are more effective.

In general, a **strategic tutoring program** does the most to the academic performance of

students.

One-on-one tutoring seems to be more effective to improve the reading skills of students than peer-tutoring.

The best results are reported for tutoring sessions from **10 to 60 minutes**. Longer session did not result in better outcomes.

Successful tutor-tutee relationships are characterized by strong reinforcement of progress, with reading and writing experiences ranging from being fully supported to working independently and an explicit demonstration of appropriate reading and writing processes.

Effective tutoring programs do not have to focus only on academics, but also can implement social **activities**.

If peer-tutoring pairs are used, the **teacher should monitor** and supervise these pairs in order to keep students on track with their activities and goals.

A **tutor-tutee relationship** is more effective when a low-achieving student is paired with a higher-achieving student.

Peer tutoring is more effective when pairs of students are taking turns with the role of tutor and tutee.

The AmeriCorps Tutoring Outcomes Study supports the findings of the previous studies, finding that tutors and students should at least meet three times a week to be effective and that tutoring sessions should last 1.5 hours per week.

What should parents look for in a tutoring program?

Parents have to look for some specific things when it comes up to picking the right place and program for their child. But most important is that the children feel comfortable and respected. They should not feel fear when they are going to their tutoring program but have fun. The Mass achusetts After-School Research Stud
y from 2005 revealed six major qualities of a good tutoring.

The first quality is a strong **staff engagement with youth.** The staff should be actively engaged in the activities and should appear to enjoy the work. A relaxed and respectful atmosphere is necessary to motivate the children and to provide a comfortable environment.

Not only the staff has to be engaged but the youth, too. **Youth Engagement** means that the pupils should be respectful of each other and the staff.

The third quality deals with **challenging activities,** which should be appropriate for youth and not overwhelming. The instructions have to be clear and be part of a larger project

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Even if a tutoring program provides a lot of different components, there should be a space in the schedule for **Quality Homework Time**. The staff should provide individual help and should help the children to think through problems.

A good relationship between the children and the staff is always necessary. If there is no trust between these two, there cannot be a productive atmosphere. However, the parents should also be interested in developing a relationship with the staff. The parents should greet the staff and chat with them a little bit when they are picking up their child. When the students sees that parents like the staff, it is more likely that they will accept them as well.

Appropriate Space is the sixth quality, a good tutoring program should provide. This includes environmental items related to comfortable heat, ventilation, noise, and light. If the space where the child should learn is not clean, organized and in a good shape, then there will be no comfortable environment for the child. The program should provide enough materials and supplies for all children.