

Proven Practices



Balancing Efficiency and Impact for Tutor Coaching and Observations



Reading Corps is a Tier 2 intervention program for K-3 students that has strong empirical evidence in support of its impact on key literacy skills (Markovitz et al., 2014; 2018). The program provides tutors with multiple layers of coaching to ensure high fidelity—Internal Coaches are school staff that provide on-site coaching support and Coaching Specialists are program staff that provide program expertise and additional coaching support.

The Project

This report outlines the results of an evaluation in North Dakota focused on the impact of reducing the number of coaching observations for returning tutors (N = 24) with a previous record of strong implementation. The project compared two groups—one reflective of the standard model and the other reflective of a reduced coaching model—by examining perceptions of coaching, tutor implementation fidelity (defined as adherence to key instructional steps), and the literacy growth of students.

Why It Matters

Student impact is central to the identity of Reading Corps. On-site coaching and support are core components of the program model; however, coaching has significant operational demands for programming. This project was borne out of feedback from Internal Coaches and Coaching Specialists who saw an opportunity to reduce observational effort for a subset of tutors with a record of strong implementation. It was hypothesized that higher efficiency at no cost to impact or quality of implementation could allow coaches to distribute time more effectively.

Key Takeaways

1

Tutors and Coaches Preferred a Reduced Coaching Model.

100% of tutors in the treatment group indicated that the number of observations was “just right” whereas 44% of tutors in the BAU group reported there were “too many” or “far too many.” Coaching specialists agreed - 100% indicated that fewer observations allowed them to allocate time more efficiently.

2

Program Fidelity and Literacy Growth were Equivalent Across Groups.

Average fidelity ratings across the year differed by less than a half percent across groups, whereas the number of coaching observations was significantly lower in the treatment group. In addition, there were no differences in weekly literacy growth rates between the reduced coaching and business-as-usual group.

Results - In Context

All tutors and coaches in this study viewed coaching as deeply valuable for guidance and problem solving. However, a reduced observation schedule was observed to be an efficient strategy with no impact on program quality when used with returning tutors who had previously demonstrated high fidelity levels. Observations of fidelity are likely to be needed more frequently for new tutors and tutors without a record strong fidelity.



The evaluation focused on a subset of tutors (N = 24) who were returning for another year of service and demonstrated an average fidelity rating of 90% or greater the previous year. Eligible tutors were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the Business as Usual (BAU) condition, Coaching Specialists conducted monthly observations and Internal Coaches observed tutors twice each month. In the Treatment condition, Coaching Specialists and Internal Coaches observed tutors at the outset of the year (September), at midyear (January), and at the end of the year (May).

In the study, tutors in the treatment group were **observed for an average of 12 fewer times** relative to tutors in the comparison group. The outcomes of interest for the evaluation were fidelity ratings of tutors (i.e., their correct delivery of important instructional steps), perceptions of coaching frequency from tutors and coaches, and student literacy growth.

Results – Additional Details

Impact on Implementation Fidelity

The average fidelity score for tutors in both groups was 99%, with no differences between groups. All tutors demonstrated high quality program implementation regardless of the number of observations.

Impact on Student Growth

Student growth during tutoring was unrelated to group assignment. The impact of tutoring was generally the same among the entire sample of experienced tutors, with students demonstrating accelerated growth independent of which coaching group tutors were assigned to.

Tutors and coaches viewed coaching as an important factor in program impact, but generally preferred fewer observations. Tutors were more likely to report that the number of observations was “too many” or “far too many” (45%) in the BAU condition relative to the treatment condition (0%). Internal Coaches and Coaching specialists held similar views, but were more variable in their perceptions (e.g., a small number of coaches reported too few observations in both conditions). Regardless of group assignment, all tutors and coaches underlined the value of coaching interactions. In general, participants shared that coaching was deeply valuable for guidance and problem solving—and that included the observations that were the focus of this study. The reports also noted a ‘cascade effect’ in terms of resource implications, with some coaches in the treatment group reporting that the reduced number of observations gave them more time for supporting other tutors (e.g., first year tutors) who needed additional support to produce strong programmatic outcomes.