

Proven Practices

Increasing the Value-Add of Tutoring with Strategic Student Selection



Reading Corps is a high-dosage tutoring program for K-3 students that has strong empirical evidence in support of its impact on key literacy skills (Markovitz et al., 2014; 2018). Tutors deliver 20 minutes of daily support to students to build foundational literacy skills known to support long-term reading proficiency. A key feature of Reading Corps is its application of a data-based decision-making framework for selecting students, monitoring growth, and making tutoring exit decisions.

The Project

This report outlines the results of an evaluation that examined program guidance on student selection decisions. Schools adopting a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) typically make instructional and resource allocation decisions by examining student literacy skills relative to grade-level benchmarks across the school year. The evaluation focused primarily on how selection decisions affect the distribution of students meeting grade-level literacy benchmarks at the end of the school year. Evaluators used data from a large school district in Iowa to examine the rate at which students reached grade-level benchmarks as a function of tutoring exposure and initial skills at the beginning of the school year.

Why It Matters

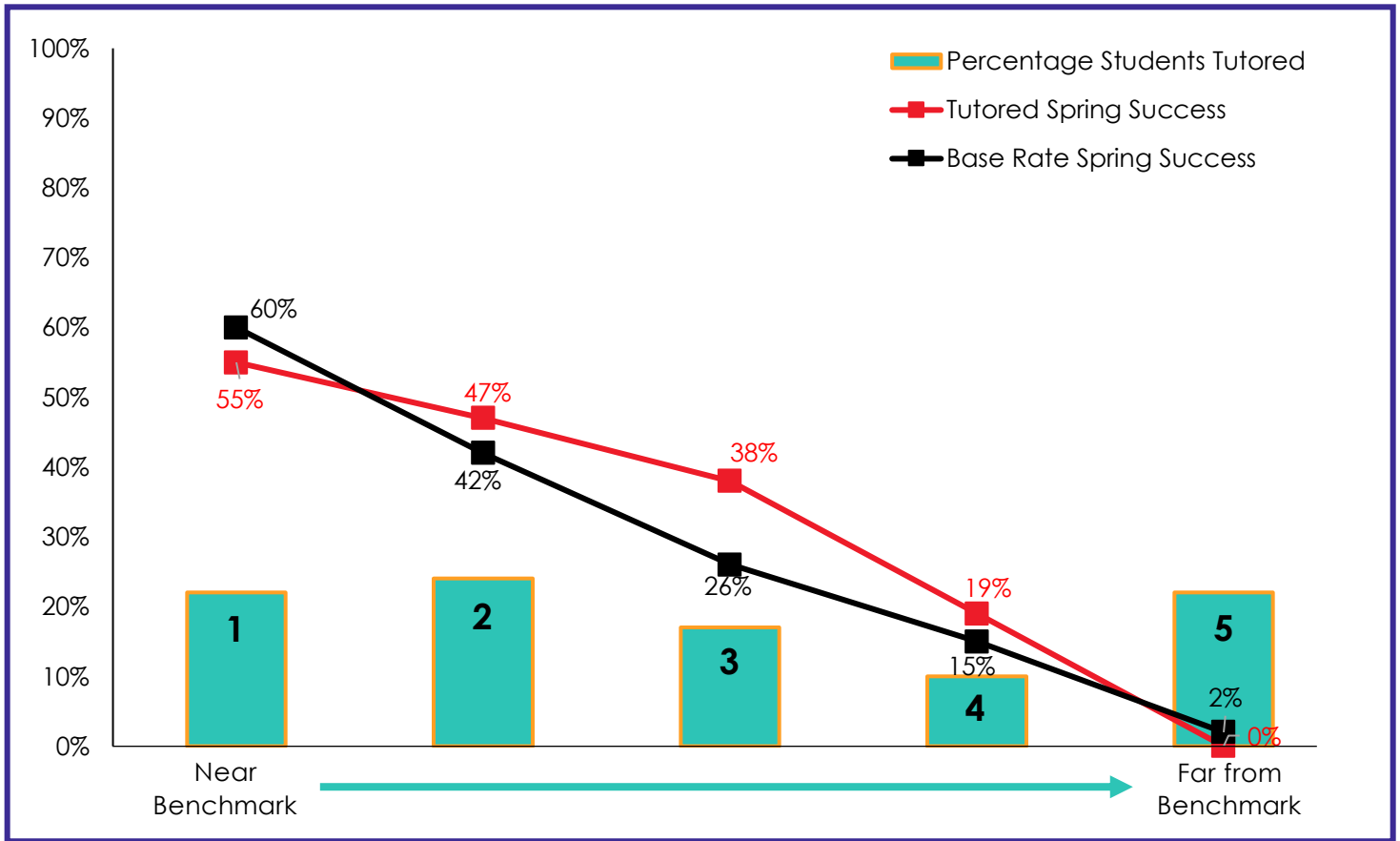
When making decisions about which students to provide supplemental support to, schools and tutoring programs may prioritize students who are “near benchmark” over students who are further away from benchmark performance at the beginning of the year, because these students often respond quickly to extra support and are likely to meet grade-level benchmarks at the end of the school year. In this regard, selecting students who are near benchmark performance may increase the proportion of students meeting expectations at the end of the year. However, given the proximity of their skills to grade-level expectations at the beginning of the year, these students may also naturally respond to core instruction in ways that position them for success without extra support. Recognizing that resources are limited, it is important to better understand the unique value-add of tutoring across initial skill levels.

Methodology Overview

The evaluation used fall and literacy scores for K-3 students in a large school district in Iowa ($n = 24,018$), along with the fall and literacy scores of a subset of students in the district who received support from a Reading Corps tutor ($n = 516$). There were two points of interest in the evaluation: students' baseline literacy performance relative to the fall literacy benchmark and students' end-of-year literacy performance relative to the spring literacy benchmark. The fall benchmark scores were used to organize students into categories of performance that were near and increasingly far away from the benchmark. Evaluators examined the rate of students meeting end-of-year expectations for both student groups (those received tutoring and those who did not) and also across fall baseline categories of performance to gather insight on where tutoring offered the most value for schools.

Results

The figure shows third-grade evaluation results. The numbered bars indicate the share of Reading Corps students at different distances from the fall oral reading fluency benchmark. The two lines show the percentage of those students who met the spring benchmark, grouped by their fall scores. The black line represents all district students, and the red line represents students who received tutoring.



These results are representative of patterns across all grades and facilitate a number of insights.

- 1** The vertical bars demonstrate that schools selected students across a continuum of need, with some students beginning the year very close to the fall benchmark score and others beginning the year much further.
- 2** When considering **only** the percentage of students who successfully reached the spring benchmark, tutoring was more successful for students who began the year near the fall benchmark (55%).
- 3** When considering the rate of end-of-year benchmark attainment between all students and those who received tutoring, **the unique value of tutoring was largest among students who were substantially below benchmark, but not prohibitively far from expectations in the fall (categories 2, 3, and 4 above)**.

Practical Takeaways

Tutoring benefits all students regardless of selection decisions. Tutored students who begin the year near the benchmark tends to have the highest probability of end-of-year success, but this can be misleading because that's already true for these students (even without tutoring). For schools focused on increasing the number of **unique students** meeting end-of-year expectation, selecting students somewhere *between* near-benchmark performance and very low performance may produce the largest benefit.