

Designing Instructionally Coherent Tutoring Programs

Instructional program coherence is often defined as "a set of interrelated programs [and instructional practices] for students and staff that are guided by a common framework for curriculum, instruction, assessment, and learning climate and that are pursued over a sustained period of time." [1] Researchers contend that reform and intervention efforts that work to strengthen coherence are more likely to advance student achievement than those that work to improve schools "through the adoption of a wide variety of programs that are often uncoordinated or limited in scope or duration". [2] In a nutshell, instructional program coherence forces educators to interrogate the alignment, consistency, and soundness of their instructional program and strategies against their vision for the student experience.

The COVID-19 pandemic created the perfect storm for coherence discussions. An influx of federal and state funding and demands for learning acceleration and recovery caused well-intentioned educators to adopt a host of interventions and improvement strategies to return their systems and classrooms to normalcy. Without a clear focus on instructional program coherence, this can easily lead to a set of programs and interventions that are not aligned and may even be contradictory. Anyone who has ever attempted to help a child with homework and heard, "that's not how they taught us to do it in school" has experienced an example of the confusion and frustration a lack of alignment can cause.

To understand what instructional program coherence looks like in practice, consider the following example. In an instructionally coherent program, fifth-grade students would not be asked to read the Phantom Toll Booth in core instruction and then about poisonous rainforest frogs in their Tier 2 small group intervention and Nikola Tesla's alternating-current system during high-impact after school tutoring. Students would not have this incoherent experience because coherent systems intensely train their educators to understand evidence-based best practices deeply. Because of this, educators in coherent systems design instructional supports that prepare students to extend core learning. Fifth graders in this system would read the Phantom Toll Booth in core instruction and prepare for or extend that learning in their Tier 2 small group intervention by reading texts that help them investigate topics and questions like 1) Why do people explore; 2) Is it important to have an imagination; 3) What influences our identity, and 4) What makes a person a hero? Fifth graders in a coherent system participate in high-impact tutoring that gives them opportunities to improve their fluency by reading or rereading passages from Phantom Toll Booth or the other supplemental texts within that unit. These supplementary texts focus on related topics to those found in Phantom Toll Booth—exploration, imagination, identity, and heroes and give students the chance to build their knowledge and academic vocabulary.

Systems should keep in mind that they have a twofold goal here: supporting all students and ensuring that the support that each student receives is working together in a coherent way. Tutoring is one of many supports and strategies that can be offered to students to accelerate their learning or support them having access to grade-level or Tier 1 content in the classroom, but to be effective it must be aligned with the other instructional programs and interventions they experience. Our goal in this document is to share some practical considerations for how districts can integrate high-impact tutoring as a promising, evidence-based support for students into their vision and ensure it does not feel disjointed or siloed from the rest of the student's educational experience.

TNTP’s High-Impact Tutoring Implementation Framework

TNTP developed the High-Impact Tutoring Implementation Framework to help sites address all the essential elements in the design and implementation of their tutoring programs. Within each element, there are also specific considerations for instructional program coherence, which we outline below.

High-Impact Tutoring Implementation Design Framework

Vision & Goal Setting	Student Needs & Opportunities	Community Engagement and Sustainability
<p>Districts define the short- and long-term goals of high- impact tutoring and how it aligns with their broader vision and strategic plan.</p>	<p>Districts engage schools to establish criteria to determine student selection, schedule / timing of tutoring and the length of the program. This also includes thinking through how programs will scale to reach more students over time.</p>	<p>Districts inventory and assess community resources—including tutor pipeline development opportunities— and perceptions of tutoring. Sustainability and community buy-in is a critical component in the beginning phases of planning.</p>
Model Design	Content & Curriculum	Tutor Pipeline Development
<p>Districts engage in program design, including mode of delivery, frequency and length of sessions, and student to tutor ratio for example.</p>	<p>Districts make critical decisions about the academic and social emotional content utilized in tutoring sessions. Impact relies on students engaging in content that will help them grow.</p>	<p>Tutor pipeline development involves both recruiting and training tutors. In partnership with schools, District leaders need to develop tutor recruitment, onboarding, and ongoing professional learning plan.</p>
Site Collaboration	Central Team	Data & Continuous Improvement
<p>Whether tutoring takes place in school or at other community organizations, districts must build a strong relationship with the site and prepare a site leader to successfully manage tutoring efforts and communicate with stakeholders.</p>	<p>Managing an effective high-impact tutoring initiative is a team effort, and there are specific roles—such as data management, tutor development, and tutoring content—that need dedicated planning. Districts should define how necessary roles will be fulfilled and how the team will coordinate with broader district efforts.</p>	<p>Districts should develop a plan for regular program improvement that involves assessing reach, satisfaction, and impact. This includes collecting and maintaining high-quality data on tutoring sessions and a process for how this data will inform decision making and program improvement.</p>

Vision and Goal Setting

This component involves districts defining the short and long-term goals of high-impact tutoring and how it aligns with their broader vision and strategic plan. Considerations for instructional program coherence within Vision and Goal Setting includes:

- Consider how tutoring fits into your vision for effectively supporting students. Tutoring can be used successfully as a tier 1 intervention (where every student gets support tailored to their unique strengths and areas of challenge) or tier 2 intervention (to support small groups of students who would benefit most from access to intensive tutoring and small group adult connection).
- When designing your vision and goal for this work, start with your district or school's overall vision for what you want to be true for every student. HIT should be seen as one of the integrated supports to individualize learning and meet the needs of groups of students.
- Invest school leaders early in this process. If the program does not fit into their instructional vision for their school, implementation will be piecemeal and challenging and can create confusion for students and caregivers. School leaders who understand the power of this support and have a vision for how they can make it work will be the strongest advocates.

Student Needs and Opportunities

This component involves districts engaging schools and establishing criteria to determine which students will receive support, when, and for how long. This also includes thinking through how programs will scale to reach more students over time. This is an opportunity to ensure that the program design is student and equity centered. Considerations for instructional program coherence within Student Needs and Opportunities include:

- The HIT program should be asset-based, humanize students, and avoid reinforcing bias by acknowledging and leveraging the voice of diverse perspectives in the development of the district's student support system
 - This means:
 - Including family and student perspective on their strengths and needs.
 - Centering relationships so that the supports are attuned and responsive to student needs and create a greater sense of belonging.
 - Flexible and built with the understanding that the brain is malleable.
 - Built with the knowledge that all educators and all students will need support and enrichment at different times, and in different ways.
 - Consider where robust support for students and grade levels might already exist and focus your program. Consult the research and consider starting in grades and subjects where opportunity gaps are widest and most damaging and/or where high-impact tutoring has been shown to have the greatest impact.

Sustainability and Community Engagement

It is important to think about sustainability and community buy-in from the beginning. This component is about districts taking stock of community resources—including tutor pipeline development opportunities—and perceptions of tutoring. Considerations for instructional program coherence within Community Resources include:

- Ensure that caregivers and families know and understand the aims of the HIT program and the support their student will be receiving. We have seen examples of caregivers being unaware of their student receiving this support because it is integrated into the school day. Without the

engagement and communication around the program, it is impossible for caregivers to support and reinforce the content students are receiving.

- Additionally, HIT programs provide an opportunity to engage caregivers and community members in serving the school community and being a part of the work. Volunteers and parent groups are potential sources of tutors and are already invested in the school and goals of the program. Additionally, volunteers, caregivers, and university students can all be seen as potential pipelines as schools and districts work to address staffing shortages.
- Understanding your community and the organizations and resources available is essential as districts work toward sustainable programs.

Model Design

The research behind high-impact tutoring is overwhelming but also leaves room for local design decisions. This component involves defining the specific design decisions of a district's program. Considerations for instructional program coherence within Model Design include:

- If possible, include tutoring as part of the school day. We recommend those involved in planning and decisions spend a day shadowing a student in the grade level you are considering for implementation. This will ensure the student experience is centered and model decisions are made with a lens of empathy and equity. Consider using something like the "[Day in the Life](#)" protocol. This can be a helpful activity to understand what a student experiences over the course of a day in your building. You can also ask students about their day and the kinds of learning they experienced.
- Ensure that tutors are trained in the district and schoolwide instructional expectations. This will ensure they are aware of school and district wide strategies and are able to support students in a way that aligns with the rest of their instructional experience.

Content and Curriculum

Impact relies on students engaging in content that will help them grow. This component involves making decisions about the specific academic and social emotional content that will be used in tutoring sessions. Considerations for instructional program coherence within Content and Curriculum include:

- Select curriculum that works for tutoring: Curriculum decisions need to be made and materials need to be made available before tutor training can begin. Proactively start these conversations early in the design stage.
- Consider how the curriculum aligns with topics and content that has already been taught in the core subject areas.
- Ensure there are communication systems between the teacher and the tutor and other stakeholders that will allow for a consistent and aligned experience for the student.
- Involve any vendors or partners early in the process to ensure alignment and they can either adapt their curriculum to meet the needs of the district or have time to be trained on the content the district has selected that aligns with their core curriculum.
- Start with high quality curricular resources.

Tutor Pipeline

Tutor pipeline development involves both recruiting and training tutors. District leaders need to directly and in partnership with schools, plan to find tutors and decide what ongoing training and development will look like for tutors. Considerations for instructional program coherence within Tutor Pipeline include:

- Thinking about tutor pipeline development early and its connection to the goals for the number of grade levels and content areas you have selected for tutoring is essential. We have seen that it takes months to build a pipeline robust enough to support even a moderate sized program.
- College students, graduate assistants, volunteers, and adults already embedded in the school are important sources to consider. As decisions are made about the source of tutors, it is essential to consider how the district will ensure tutors have the information, communication channels, content knowledge, and skills they need to align with and enhance the content students are already receiving.
- If vendors are selected to support tutoring, ensure that representatives are part of the district decision-making team, and district/school-specific training is also offered.

Site Collaboration

Many tutoring programs take place in schools, though some take place at other community sites. In either case, the district needs to build a strong relationship with the site and prepare a site lead to successfully manage tutoring efforts and communicate with their stakeholders. Considerations for instructional program coherence within Site Collaboration include:

- Ensure that every site has a lead or coordinator. This will ensure communication is strong and help ensure there is alignment and cohesion between the district priorities, school priorities, and the execution of the tutoring program.
- Within a district or site, there is also an opportunity to build in cross-site collaboration and problem-solving. Create communication and collaboration opportunities for the leads and those involved in the HIT program at each site to work together to address common challenges.

Central Team

Managing an effective high-impact tutoring initiative is a team effort, and there are specific roles—such as data management, tutor development, and tutoring content—that need dedicated planning. Districts will need to define how these roles will be fulfilled and how the team will coordinate with broader district efforts. Considerations for instructional program coherence within the Central Team include:

- Assembling a diverse coalition of perspectives on the team is essential to ensuring tutoring is part of a coherent instructional vision.
- Ensure that the lead for the program is housed in a district department that will have influence to coordinate many internal and external partners.
- As mentioned earlier, ensure the central team is set up in a way to solicit input and engagement from all stakeholders including students, caregivers, and community members.

Data and Continuous Improvement

Tutoring programs can only improve through a robust process for assessing reach, satisfaction, and impact and analyzing this data to make improvements. This involves collecting high-quality data about tutoring sessions, and a process for making decisions based on data analysis. Considerations for instructional program coherence within Data and Continuous Improvement include:

- Rehearse the operations and technology: Determine what data to collect. In the first phase of setting up the program, process data is important to examine. For example, attendance and time/frequency of the sessions.
- From a coherence standpoint, it is important to also have a system for capturing the skills tutored, and the content covered, so all stakeholders understand what is being taught by tutors. Additionally, think about what indicators or quality might be important long term.
- Consider how you will measure progress and indicators of success for the program:

- Measures should be integrated with what is happening in the rest of the school day and shared with educators and caregivers.
- Ideally, measures will look across social, emotional, relational, cognitive, academic factors.
- Assessments should be frequent and formative to provide real-time data.
- Ensure metrics measure both the context/environment/conditions as well as student skill development.
- Framed and used in asset-based ways.
- Inclusive of caregiver and student perspectives.
- Adults in the system have opportunities to collaborate to refine educator practices that are promising and make improvements and/or refinements to address challenges.

Putting it All Together

The suggestions above include considerations for each element of TNTP's High-Impact Tutoring Implementation Framework, and it can be helpful for systems to consider each element in turn to ensure that nothing critical has been missed in the planning process. However, it is also critical to put the pieces back together and examine the tutoring program in the context of the core instruction and other interventions experienced by students. As highlighted above, TNTP's High-Impact Tutoring Implementation Framework can be a helpful tool for engaging in this inquiry.

Focusing on instructional coherence as the starting point and ensuring high-impact tutoring (and all the interventions, enrichments, and supports) for students allows educators to prioritize the student experience will be critical to the success of any intervention.

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