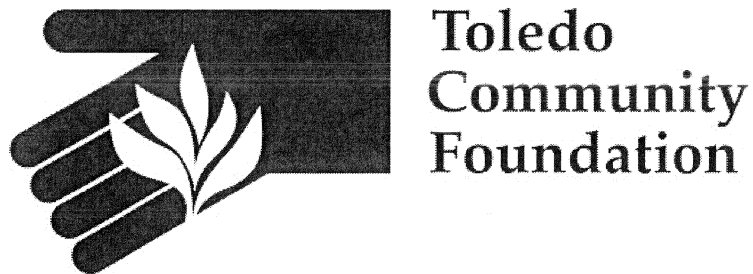


# **Community Report:**

## **A Tutoring Program Assessment**

**September 2007**



*Inspiring and Connecting Thoughtful Giving*

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# **Community Report: A Tutoring Program Assessment**

Community Report: A Tutoring Program Assessment is based on research findings presented in the report: An investigation of seven tutoring sites within an urban setting in Northwest Ohio: A technical report submitted to the Toledo Community Foundation by Michael P. French, Ph.D.<sup>1</sup> and Joyce P. Litten, M.S.S.A, L.I.S.W.<sup>2</sup>, School of Professional Studies at Lourdes College (April 18, 2007).

## **Scope of the Project**

Through an interview/qualitative analysis design, seven tutoring sites in Toledo, Ohio were reviewed. As a result of this investigation this Community Report provides information regarding the formulation of services as compared to a list of best practices identified in pertinent research—including curriculum at the sites investigated, the role of volunteers and professionals, level of parental (family) involvement, use of technology, and professional development programming and evaluation. The review of programs began in January 2007 and was completed in April 2007.

## **General Method of Inquiry**

The inquiry began with an orientation meeting at Lourdes College. At this session, Program Officer Sarah Harrison from the Toledo Community Foundation introduced Michael French and Joyce Litten from Lourdes College. French and Litten provided an overview of the key steps in the process. Personal interviews with program directors and selected personnel were conducted. Transcription of the interviews was completed and copies of the transcripts were provided to the respondents for confirmation. Review of the transcripts for key trends was conducted. A focus group session was scheduled to review the identified trends. Following a review of selected literature,<sup>3</sup> a 50-item checklist of best practices was composed. Review of the transcripts for key mentions of identified research variables was conducted. Analysis and discussion of findings were composed based on the research.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael P. French is the Director of the Master of Education Program at Lourdes College.

<sup>2</sup> Joyce P. Litten is the Chair of the Social Work Department at Lourdes College.

<sup>3</sup> This review included information from the AmeriCorps program, America Reads, and selected published scholarly articles on tutoring processes.

## Contextual Framework

### Defining the concept of tutoring

One of the first goals of the study was to determine whether there is a standard definition of the term “tutoring.” In reviewing the literature, there is not a clear definition of the word tutoring. Preferred terms include *educational system*, *educational program*, or *supplemental educational services*. Taken from the basic definition of *tutor* as one who instructs another in a one-to-one or group setting, tutoring can be defined as the provision of instruction in a one-to-one or group setting. Typically, *tutoring* is seen to be a supplemental educational service—that is, not a required part of a school curriculum. Tutoring can be conducted in a single subject or for the completion of a single task. By inference, most would apply the use of the word *tutoring* to a compensatory or remedial situation. The National Tutoring Association<sup>4</sup> uses the term *academic assistance* as the collective term for tutoring.

Many programs, including those sampled in the study, use volunteers in the role of tutor. These individuals may come from the community, from local high schools or colleges, or from churches. These individuals may also be paid for their service and hold certification as educators. In the present study, program directors mentioned various high schools and colleges by name. They also commented on the difficulty in retaining quality volunteers.

These educational programs (as used in the context of this study) can take place after school hours, on weekends, or during the summer months when schools are not in session. Lauer et al.,<sup>5</sup> use the term *educational intervention* in describing the tutoring attribute of out-of-school-time programs (OST programs).

### Research on tutoring

Based on findings from existing research studies, these guidelines provide an overview of best practices related to the provision of tutoring services. The items can be applied to program goal setting, mission statement writing, and program evaluation. Applied to the present study, we used this list of practices to determine a set of indicators we would use to assess the consistency of the interview scripts. Generally, the list includes elements that one would expect to see in a list of tutoring best practices.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ntatutor.org>

<sup>5</sup> Lauer, P. A. et al, (2006). Out-of-school-time programs: A meta-analysis of effects for at-risk students. *Review of Educational Research*, 76(2), 275-313.

## Identification of Best Practices

Reviewing the guidelines and using a key word method, the following checklist of 50 elements of “best practice research” was compiled.<sup>6</sup>

Table 1: Checklist of best practices

1	1:2 tutor/child ratio	26	Program director (qualified)
2	Access to technology (computers)	27	Program handbook
3	Assessed student needs	28	Reading and math focus
4	Attendance is promoted	29	Recognition of students
5	Books provided	30	Recognition of tutors
6	Classroom setting	31	Recruitment plan for students
7	Commitment to high risk youth	32	Recruitment plan for tutors
8	Definition of roles	33	Research-based tutor training (initial)
9	Developmentally appropriate practice	34	Screening of tutors
10	Family communication is regular	35	Session duration at least 60 minutes
11	Family improvement programs	36	Session planning (use of a "lesson plan")
12	Formal curriculum	37	Stakeholders involved
13	Formal goals	38	Steering committee
14	Formal school relationships	39	Success oriented
15	Highly committed program staff	40	Systematic record keeping
16	Home activities provided	41	Teens are involved as tutors or mentors
17	Incentives provided	42	Times for services are variable
18	K-12 inclusion	43	Transportation is coordinated or provided
19	Leisure and application activities included	44	Tutor commitment
20	Needs assessment for program	45	Tutor handbook
21	One-to-one and small group	46	Tutor observation
22	Parent orientation	47	Tutor orientation
23	Physical & psychological safety is ensured	48	Tutor training (ongoing)
24	Private sector support	49	Tutor/child assignment (same tutor)
25	Program coordinator on-site	50	Two sessions a week

## Applying the Best Practices Checklist

These 50 points were used to code the individual transcripts. In addition to use of the transcripts, comments made by participants in the focus groups as well as information provided in written documents was used in the analysis. The primary coding task was to note “mentions.” As applied in this study, a mention is a string of text that captures the essence of the checklist item.

In using a “mention” based method, no attempt is made to make inferences about the quality of the mention content. For example, a program can “mention” the use of student assessments (#3) but not be using assessments of high quality.

<sup>6</sup> In using the key word method, each item is reduced to a two-three word phrase. From this review, revising for duplicates, we were able to express the practices as a 50-item checklist.

Further, the omission of a mention should not necessarily be viewed as a negative. No program is likely to have all 50 elements in place. Likewise, it is possible that a program does have the element in place, but the drift of the interview did not elicit the comment. Because we did not want the programs to feel they were being evaluated, we did not provide them with the analysis of mentions for review.

Table 2: Ranked review of mentions from the transcripts

	Finding from Research		Mentions
3	Assessed student needs		7
7	Commitment to high risk youth		7
13	Formal goals		7
15	Highly committed program staff		7
18	K-12 inclusion		7
23	Physical & psychological safety is ensured		7
26	Program director (qualified)		7
28	Reading and math focus		7
39	Success oriented		7
50	Two sessions a week		7
6	Classroom setting		6
12	Formal curriculum		6
14	Formal school relationships		6
20	Needs assessment for program		6
25	Program coordinator on-site		6
32	Recruitment plan for tutors		6
35	Session duration at least 60 minutes		6
40	Systematic record keeping		6
44	Tutor commitment		6
8	Definition of roles		5
9	Developmentally appropriate practice		5
10	Family communication is regular		5
19	Leisure and application activities included		5
24	Private sector support		5
29	Recognition of students		5
31	Recruitment plan for students		5
37	Stakeholders involved		5
38	Steering committee		5
43	Transportation is coordinated or provided		5
4	Attendance is promoted		4
22	Parent orientation		4
42	Times for services are variable		4
48	Tutor training (ongoing)		4
2	Access to technology (computers)		3
11	Family improvement programs		3
16	Home activities provided		3
21	One-to-one and small group		3

47	Tutor orientation								3
17	Incentives provided								2
27	Program handbook								2
36	Session planning (use of a "lesson plan")								2
45	Tutor handbook								2
46	Tutor observation								2
5	Books provided								1
30	Recognition of tutors								1
33	Research-based tutor training								1
41	Teens are involved								1
1	2:1 tutor/child ratio								0
34	Screening of tutors								0
49	Tutor/child assignment (same tutor)								0

## Discussion

### Using the tables to describe best practices

In developing a description of an ideal program (a mythical composite of all seven programs reviewed), we used the sorted list in Table 2 to compose the following description:<sup>7</sup>

All the programs work with K-12 students, especially those at high risk, in success oriented programs that emphasize developmentally appropriate reading and math instruction as specified in individual curriculum documents. Based on individual goals, the programs assess student needs and provide services in classroom settings at least twice per week for at least 60 minutes. The programs have close relationships with schools ranging from providing services within the actual classrooms to providing supplemental educational services instruction. Each program has a qualified program director (on-site) that is responsible for leading highly committed program staffs, conducting needs assessments for the programs, maintaining systematic records assessment of children in the programs. These directors have been successful at including stakeholders and steering committees in their programs as well. Each program has a plan for obtaining and retaining committed tutors who provide the instruction in the program. The programs involve family members in various ways (conferences, programs, and classes).

<sup>7</sup> This text, composed by the researchers, is based primarily on those items that were mentioned five, six, and seven times. It could be used as a sample "ideal goal statement" for entities that offer or are considering offering SES services.

## **Defining the concept of tutoring**

The second priority in the inquiry was to identify an operational definition of tutoring. Several of the individuals interviewed actually prefer that this term not be used in describing their programs. They feel that this term does not adequately capture the essence of the services provided in their programs. Based on the review of the transcripts as well as the discussion at the focus meeting, the group suggested that the following four types of involvement with children be identified and used in describing their programs. In composing this list, a draft set of definitions was presented to the program directors in attendance. Each director provided feedback and spoke to the validity of the description provided. All agreed that these are not mutually exclusive and that these will overlap in some cases. Also, this list is not presented as a hierarchy. It was the consensus of the focus group that describing practice according to types of service is a more appropriate way to describe supplemental educational services programs.

For programs, different types of services require different program plans, tutor types, and assessment schemes. Where adopted services are used, programs will need to carefully review the local mission and goals with the stated purposes of the program to be adopted. Further, it will be necessary to blend the identity of the adopted program with the personality of the local program.

## **Types of Tutoring Services**

### **Incidental services**

- These are services in which tutoring is provided on a needs only basis.
- This may be seen in a drop-in center or library, for example.
- The instructional contact is made for a particular short-term need or purpose. There is little or no assessment completed.
- The content of the session is mostly the responsibility of the student.
- The student will generally not meet with the same person each time.
- There is a lower level of academic preparation required on the part of the tutor as the main task is to supervise the student in the completion of the task.
- These services may be offered in conjunction with other program elements—e.g., sports or art activities.
- Services may be provided in a group format or individually.

### **Focused services**

- These are services in which tutoring is provided for one particular reason—completion of homework or academic exercise.
- Generally, the student is required to remain in the instructional location for a set period of time.
- No other instructional activity takes place—although incidental teaching may be seen.



- There is little or no formal assessment completed, although informal assessment may take place as part of instruction.
- The student may be able to meet with the same person so that a personal relationship evolves.
- There is a higher level of academic preparation on the part of the tutor.
- Responsibility for content is reliant on the activity which may be selected by the student, assigned by school, or initiated by the tutor.
- These services may be offered in conjunction with other program elements—e.g., sports or art activities.
- Services may be provided in a group format or individually.

### **Instructional services**

- These are services in which instruction is provided in specific content areas especially reading or mathematics.
- The curriculum may be developed by the program or other educational agency.
- Assessment is conducted to focus and evaluate the instructional activity.
- Although homework may be completed during these sessions, it is not the main focus.
- The student may meet with the same individual who has specific academic preparation to provide the needed instruction.
- Although other activities may be present at the same location, this service is the main focus.
- Services may be provided in a group format or individually.

### **Adopted services**

- The local site adopts or obtains these services which are then provided under the supervision or design of a corporate agency.
- There may be a contractual commitment related to this adoption.
- The scope and type of instruction is specified by the program, which is also responsible for supervision and training of tutors.
- All aspects of assessment and accountability requirements are determined by the adopted program.
- Services may be provided in a group format or individually as specified by the adopted program.

### **Family involvement**

One of the attributes of high quality instructional programs is the integration of family activities. Further discussion centered on the types of involvement of families (here defined as parents, guardians, caregivers) in the program. Engaging families in tutoring is an important aspect, especially for young children. Family practices were mentioned in some but not all programs.

Accordingly, in order to get a more complete picture of the inclusion of family activities in the programs, we asked the program directors in attendance at the focus group to list the practices involving families currently in place in their centers. The following list resulted:

- Orientation programs are offered (some required) for the families. These programs include general information about the agencies involved to specific expectations of the family.
- Attendance at sessions with children is offered by several programs. All programs encourage the involvement of families.
- Conferences with parents or caregivers. These conferences held in the programs range from required and formal to informal and spontaneous.
- Programs or classes related to parenting or family relations. Selected programs, predominately the centers, offer specific activities for families.
- Recognition of children with their families in attendance. Several programs indicated that special events are scheduled to highlight the work of children.

Therefore, based on the prevailing research and trends in early learning, any program that strives to be of high quality should have a well defined family/parent component.

### **Behavior strategies**

Although specific strategies for behavioral modification and development of appropriate behaviors are not included in the research reviewed or identified as a best practice, several of the program directors noted the strong emphasis on behavior in their programs. The following list reflects the types of behavioral strategies discussed:

- Development of goals. Several of the programs reviewed have a formal process for goal setting within the instructional context.
- Incentives for appropriate behavior are seen in several of the programs reviewed. These incentives range from earning points (see below) to allowance of certain activities (use of athletic areas, computers, etc.)
- Formal behavior modification. Certain programs include behavior programs for all enrolled students within the context of the instructional services.
- Recognition of students. Several of the programs include appropriate behavior as one criterion for student recognition.
- Use of tokens, points, stores. Selected programs allow the student to earn points for completion of work, appropriate behavior, and participation. These are used to “purchase” rewards.
- General behavior as related to instruction. Although not specifically mentioned, one can infer that all programs expect appropriate behavior in support of the instruction being provided.

### **Use of computers**

In reviewing the transcripts, only three of the seven programs specifically mentioned the use of computers by children enrolled in their programs. The following list provides an overview of how computers are utilized in these programs:

- Formal computer lab. Selected programs have dedicated labs used in the tutoring process. The uses range from free exploration of the internet to specific applications related to instruction.
- Computer-based assessment. Selected programs mentioned children are assessed using computer-based testing.
- Specific instructional software applications. Selected programs mentioned the use of leveled applications used in tutoring (computer-aided instruction).
- Free use of computers as a leisure-time activity or incentive. Selected programs mentioned that computers could be used when specific instructional activities (homework) were completed.

Although not a specific use, those who mentioned the use of computers in their programs specifically noted the importance of “closing the technology gap” that exists in the children enrolled in their programs as well as the importance that children in school today understand and use technology appropriately.

In programs based on incidental services, computer use may be seen as a recreational activity (e.g., using the internet for email and web-surfing or playing games). However, in instructional programs, computer use would more likely be seen as a tool for assessment and instruction using specific software applications. Further research is warranted in this area.

### **Gaps in service identified in the research**

In reviewing the research, there are certain areas that appear either as concerns or gaps in the content:

- **Transportation.** Several of the respondents commented on the importance of transportation. Specifically, program directors are concerned about the need to provide transportation for children—both to ensure safety and regular attendance. However, for some, the cost is prohibitive.
- **Recruiting and retaining quality individuals for the provision of all types of service.** There is an obvious relationship between the quality and the skills of the individuals providing instructional services and the achieved outcomes of those services. When relying on a volunteer base for many of these positions, there can be difficulties in regard to recruiting, training, and retention. One recourse, stated by the programs, is to use paid instructors rather than (or with) volunteers. An obvious outcome of this decision is the allocation of monies that could be spent for materials and other services such as transportation. Although all the programs reviewed had a plan for recruitment, this remains a concern for all involved. Further, few of the programs mentioned ongoing training and recognition for the tutors in their programs. Both of these elements are included in the best practices checklist. Finally, although it was not mentioned (and perhaps not asked), the screening of individuals working with children should be a requirement for any tutoring programs.

- **Administrative aspects.** The development of program handbooks and instructional manuals (and resources) is a “best practice” in the research. Of the programs reviewed, only two have formal handbooks.
- **Instructional aspects.** With regard to the instruction in reading and math, one point of “best practices” research involves instructor/child ratio. While individual instruction for less able students is ideal, this is not always practical in terms of staffing, allocation of time or available space. In this regard, programs that endeavor to provide services to the most at-risk children should investigate how low instructor/student ratios might be achieved.

## Selected Resources and References

### Web Sites

- <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20074005/>  
Effectiveness of Reading and Mathematics Software Products: Findings from the First Student Cohort  
Published 2007.  
Provides a report on the use of instructional software in reading and mathematics in elementary schools. The investigation found no significance differences between control and treatment groups.
- <http://bob.nap.edu/readingroom/books/sor/>  
Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success. This is a primary resource for the America Reads Program.
- <http://nationalserviceresources.org/>  
The Corporation for National and Community Service. This website provides links to 87 specific resources that address the area of tutoring. This organization oversees the AmeriCorps program and Learn and Serve America.
- <http://www.ntatutor.org/>  
National Tutoring Organization. This website provides links to resources, certifications, and conferences dealing with all aspects of tutoring.

### Journals

- Baker, J. D., Rieg, S. A., & Clendaniel, T. (2006). An investigation of an after school math tutoring program: university tutors + elementary students = a successful partnership. *Education*, Winter 2006, 127(2), 287-293.
- Crawford, P. A. & Zygouris-Coe, V. (2006). All in the family: Connecting home and school with family literacy. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 33(4), 261-267.
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- Lauver, S. C. & Little, P. M. D. (2005). Recruitment and retention strategies for out-of-school-time programs. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 105, 71-89.

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