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Chicago Public Schools Invests in Tutors, Interventionists and Teacher Coaches to Promote Academic Recovery

Students Receive Additional Academic Support Following COVID-19 Lockdown and Hybrid Learning

CHICAGO – More than three years after in-person teaching and learning was halted amid a global pandemic, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) continues to address student growth and academic recovery with a mix of new and expanded instructional support and services. Through strategic investments, CPS is providing additional staff to ensure targeted student interventions, more opportunities for connection and social-emotional support, as well as expert coaches who work with teachers to strengthen and enhance classroom instruction.

“As a District, we saw a great need to serve our students both academically and social-emotionally,” said CPS CEO Pedro Martinez. “We made a conscious effort to focus on and invest in research-based best practices to mitigate the unfinished learning our students experienced during the pandemic.”

The District’s laser focus on improving the instructional core means ensuring classroom content is rigorous and reflective of the student experience, fosters relationships and community, and that there are additional and ongoing supports for students who need extra help.

“Intentional and targeted academic supports help students address critical areas of unfinished learning in the core subjects of reading and math,” said CPS Chief Education Officer Bogdana Chkoumbova. “Our tutors and interventionists empower students with the tools and resources they need to overcome learning challenges and build the skills that allow them to thrive in and outside the classroom.”

MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT

The District’s efforts to lessen the pandemic’s impact on student learning begins with its [commitment](#) to educating and supporting the whole child by ensuring they are healthy, safe, and ready to move forward. To lead that effort, CPS turned to an established equity-based multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework. MTSS drives evidence-based systems and structures to support students and ensure schools can identify academic and social-emotional interventions for the students who need them. This work has included adding 39 more social workers and 69 additional school counselors in SY 2022-23 and establishing a school-based Behavioral Health Team (BHT) model, developed at Lurie

Children’s Hospital, to maximize resources and collaboration, provide early identification of students with behavioral health needs, and connect students to evidence-based interventions.

MTSS teams manage student-level data analysis, engage in the problem-solving process, collaborate with school-level Instructional Leadership Teams and Behavioral Health Teams, and provide professional learning for school teams to implement the MTSS framework.

In Logan Square, MTSS team members meet with tutors and teachers to develop targeted strategies to assist individual students in achieving their goals at Wolfgang Mozart Elementary.

“It’s important that everyone is on the same page to provide students with the resources and skills they need for math and reading,” said Mozart Elementary Principal Rachel Mota. “This is an all-hands-on-deck approach and MTSS gives us tools so we can best support our students and parents to help with recovery and close that gap.”

TUTOR CORPS

Among the services and resources implemented this year is high-dosage tutoring that takes place in a small-group setting during the school day, at a frequency of at least three times per week for 30-minutes per session. The District’s [tutoring program](#) focuses on kindergarten through fifth grade foundational literacy skills and math support for students in grades 6-12.

The District was in a unique position to expand academic student tutoring after the pandemic as it had already started and studied high-dosage tutoring efforts in collaboration with the [University of Chicago Education Lab](#). After the Education Lab’s initial research on a pilot tutoring program at a CPS school in 2012 found promising results, the District established a long-term partnership with [Saga Education](#) beginning in 2013 to provide math tutoring services to 15 District schools. Research conducted by the Education Lab in CPS schools between 2013 and 2015 found that students who participated in Saga Education’s high dosage tutoring program for a single year gained between one and two-and-a-half years of additional learning compared to students who did not. CPS has used these findings to expand this effective service to more students; Saga has since served more than 15,000 CPS students at schools in underserved communities.

As the District re-grouped following the lockdowns and hybrid learning of the pandemic, CPS created a new tutoring program - Tutor Corps - with 671 tutors now working in 232 District schools, representing one of the largest tutoring efforts in the country. The program is serving more than 3,700 students this year and the District is working to improve participation in these high-dosage sessions for this school year and next.

CPS has made a concentrated effort to recruit tutors from diverse backgrounds who look like the students they serve. About 47 percent of tutors are Black while 36 percent identify as Hispanic or Latinx, 11 are white and four percent are Asian with the remainder identifying as muliracial or other races/ethnicities. The largest share of CPS tutors are college-aged students, with more than 250 falling into the 21-30 age bracket.

Tutors work during the school day and throughout the entirety of the school year at schools most impacted by the pandemic on the South and West Sides of Chicago. New tutors go through a selection process, training, and onboarding before they begin tutoring one to four students at a school.

“The personalized support that tutors provide helps students build confidence in their ability to learn any subject,” said Abdelaziz Hsouna, a math tutor at Daniel Hale Williams Prep School of Medicine. “It’s rewarding to see students change their overall attitude toward learning, and I feel lucky to be a part of that change.”

The District continues to partner with the University of Chicago Education Lab and the nonprofit MDRC on a multi-year study called the Personalized Learning Initiative to better understand how to scale the benefits of tutoring, including continuing to strengthen implementation of Tutor Corps and understand its impacts on student learning. While the District continues to work with Saga for its math tutoring framework and curriculum, it also works with [Amplify](#) for the intervention program, professional learning, and school support for foundational literacy skills.

“The University of Chicago Education Lab is proud to have Chicago Public Schools as an anchor of our nationwide Personalized Learning Initiative,” said Monica Bhatt, Ph.D., Senior Research Director at the University of Chicago Education Lab. “We know that high-dosage tutoring is one of the most effective learning interventions ever studied - thanks in part to our work alongside CPS and Saga Education. This next phase of partnership will help the District better scale those supports in a high-quality manner to reach more students and better understand which students benefit from which types of tutoring services to address their unique academic needs.”

INTERVENTIONISTS

Interventionists provide students with a small group or one-on-one instruction that responds to their learning needs. To ensure every student had access to these targeted interventions, CPS provided every District-managed school with the resources in the 2022-23 school year for an interventionist. School-based interventionists identify students requiring additional support based on academic needs by reviewing findings from student screening and benchmark assessments, teacher-collected data, diagnostic assessments, and observations.

Additionally, CPS interventionists provide students with explicit and targeted instruction, and technology-based support through programs like Amira, to advance their skills. Services are provided in school and are scheduled so they do not conflict with core student instruction.

“It is so exciting to see a student repair their relationship with a particular subject as they work with an interventionist,” said Flora Monacelli, a reading interventionist at Steinmetz College Prep. “When we invest in our students, students become more invested in their education. Our students leave their intervention sessions ready to get back in the classroom to discuss new and more challenging topics.”

ACADEMIC COACHES

In addition to tutors and interventionists to support students, the District has invested in academic coaches to strengthen teachers’ instructional practices. In the past year, 268 District-run schools have added an academic coach solely dedicated to developing teacher pedagogy. Coaches work with teachers and other staff to strengthen current instructional practices and ensure student engagement.

CPS academic coaches provide teachers with data-driven instructional coaching and consulting to help improve classroom instruction. Coaches and teachers analyze and then make data-driven decisions as to what a teacher can do to drive student learning.

“Coaching doesn't just benefit our teachers, but it has an incredible impact on our students,” said Kathryn Doyle, an academic coach at John B. Drake Elementary School. “When we support our teachers and give them resources - like academic coaches - to develop their skills, we are supporting teaching and learning in a way we were not able to before, and that is what makes me excited to step into a classroom every day.”