

# PROMISING PRACTICES: Smart State Strategies for Building Intensive Tutoring Systems



The Education Trust



In May 2021, Education Trust, Education Reform Now, and FutureEd published [State Guidance for High-Impact Tutoring](#) to help states implement successful tutoring programs. This follow-up publication outlines the features of effective and equitable state tutoring initiatives and provides examples of states that show promise in implementing them, to further support the work of state and district education leaders.

## PROMISING PRACTICES: SMART STATE STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING INTENSIVE TUTORING SYSTEMS

WHEN SCHOOL BUILDINGS CLOSED NEARLY TWO YEARS AGO, STUDENTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY EXPERIENCED many educational, familial and life disruptions. Students, especially students of color, endured illness and death of family members, economic hardships, uneven instruction, inadequate internet access, and stress. They witnessed racial injustice and negative encounters with police. These challenges had a direct impact on students' learning and have exacerbated educational inequities. The latest [studies show](#) that schools serving Black and Latino students are getting even fewer students to grade level than they were before the pandemic. These students deserve the best, and research should be driving state level strategies and supports.

To address the challenges students, educators, and school systems are facing, Congress sent unprecedented relief funds to states and districts. The American Rescue Plan requires states to spend at least 5% of their allocation to implement evidence-based strategies to address students' unfinished learning, what federal officials in the plan call "learning loss."<sup>1</sup> This has created a window of opportunity to provide the supports that too many schools haven't had the resources to provide. One such support stands out: well-implemented, targeted, and intensive tutoring programs, which research suggests is highly effective in catching students up.

Many state education leaders have recognized this. In the plans submitted to the US Department of Education, at least 17 states have committed to investing in targeted intensive tutoring, at least five have committed to building statewide tutoring programs, and at least six have committed to providing state-level guidance and support targeted intensive tutoring programs.



1. We use the term "unfinished learning," as opposed to "learning loss" or "learning gaps," to describe material that should have presented to students, but has not yet been mastered. The idea that learning is not complete better reflects the reality that all students can learn and "gaps" can be closed with equitable opportunities, materials, assessments, and high-quality instruction. With this phrasing, our goal is to redirect any focus on "fixing students" toward a focus on systemic changes to meet the needs of students.

Unfortunately, most of these plans lack details around how they plan to support districts and schools to offer tutoring or how districts should go about implementing high quality tutoring programs. Questions such as who and how to hire tutors, what curriculum to use, or how to schedule tutoring during the school day are largely unaddressed. These hurdles may seem particularly daunting when many school districts are struggling to find enough qualified teachers to staff their classrooms.

A handful of states, however, have presented tutoring plans that show promise. They reflect a commitment to tutoring systems that incorporate best practices that have emerged from research literature. This policy brief highlights these practices and describes how several states are using them to build effective tutoring systems.

The strategies include:

- Statewide investments in creating a tutoring workforce
- Research-based program guardrails
- Publicly available resources for district and school leaders
- Statewide professional development opportunities
- Legislative action
- Creation of central sources of information on state-approved, high-quality tutoring programs and vendors
- Targeting services to schools' most underserved students

There is much work to be done to get from blueprints to fully built-out tutoring systems. State education officials have a particularly important role to play in helping schools and school districts deploy effective, evidence-based tutoring systems, including issuing research-based guidance, providing technical assistance, and supporting district leaders to ensure that underserved students, in particular, receive the support they need. This publication aims to help state and district leaders achieve those goals, while acknowledging that evidence-based tutoring programs should be implemented alongside strategies to ensure all students have strong and racially diverse teachers.

### **Key Strategies by State**

	Colorado	Louisiana	New Mexico	Tennessee	Texas
Investments in Tutor Workforce			X		X
Research-Based Guardrails	X	X		X	
Publicly Available Resources	X	X		X	
Professional Development		X	X	X	X
Legislative Action	X	X		X	X
Vetted Program Hub		X		X	X
Equity Focus	X	X	X	X	

## COLORADO

Colorado is receiving a total of \$1.8 billion in education relief funding, with a state set-aside for unfinished learning of \$58 million. Colorado has issued guidance to districts highlighting acceleration rather than remediation in addressing unfinished learning. The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) has not stated how much of this set-aside it plans to spend on tutoring, but the state legislature has allocated [\\$4.8 million](#) in state funds to support Colorado's statewide tutoring program.

The state program was created by [House Bill 21-1234](#) and will provide districts with up to \$2,200 per participating student to develop district tutoring programs. The law requires that tutoring programs have several research-based features, including:

- Tutors work with four or fewer students
- Sessions happen during the school day
- Sessions happen throughout the school year for a minimum of three times per week
- Students work with the same tutor throughout the year
- Tutors are teachers, paraprofessionals, community providers, and others who receive training

To assist districts in developing their tutoring programs, CDE has published general guidance on [program guardrails](#) and developing a [district strategy and implementation guide](#). Additionally, CDE's guidance site links to publicly available resources including the National Student Support Accelerator's district toolkit and a national database of high-quality tutoring vendors. However, the state has made no indication that it plans to provide any structured professional development program to further support district implementation.

**Equity Focus:** As part of the grant application process, CDE will prioritize districts with high percentages of rural students, from low-income backgrounds, students of color and other students hit hard by the pandemic.

## LOUISIANA

Louisiana has received \$4.1 billion federal education relief funding, of which the state must spend \$130 million on addressing unfinished learning. The [state is planning](#) to spend \$90 million on its academic and social-emotional recovery programs, of which Accelerate, Louisiana's tutoring program, is a part.

LDOE is devoting significant department resources to support school districts in their implementation efforts. In February 2021, LDOE released their initial [Accelerate](#) guidance, which emphasizes the importance of shifting from a remediation mindset and instructional model to a focus on accelerating students' learning.

The guidance also outlines features of tutoring programs need to be effective. These "core pillars" include:

- Giving all students access to tutoring during the school day
- Avoiding cutting core instructional time to deliver tutoring
- Ensuring students receive at least 30 minutes of tutoring at least three times per week
- Using formative assessment data to inform tutoring sessions
- Using effective teachers to tutor

These are guidelines rather than requirements, but LDOE is working with districts to ensure they're implemented with fidelity.

LDOE officials worked in collaboration with the state's extensive teacher-leader community to develop a year-long math and ELA [tutoring curriculum](#), aligned with state standards and widely-adopted classroom curriculum.

The most robust aspect of Accelerate is its suite of professional development and support opportunities available to teachers and school and district leaders. In early spring 2021, LDOE released guidance on staffing and scheduling, including a series of webinars for system leaders, to help schools and districts rework their schedules to enable school staff to tutor within the school day. The state reinforced the guidance through three half-day workshops and a [statewide professional-development series](#) focusing on topics such as training educators to use data to strategically group students. Each session is being offered 20 times, both in-person and virtually. LDOE is also working closely with a cohort of eight LEAs over the course of this school year, providing extra implementation support, while simultaneously studying the process and its outcomes with the help of the research organization WestEd.

All schools will be required to offer summer instruction to their teachers in the use of the Accelerate framework in summer 2022, and all schools identified for intervention (about 500 schools statewide) will be required to have a fully implemented tutoring program to receive state funding, starting in fall 2022.

In order to help LEAs provide their students with supplemental tutoring in addition to Accelerate tutoring during the day, LDOE has provided a vendor guide of state-approved private tutoring providers for LEAs to partner with.

**Equity Focus:** Finally, the department [is emphasizing the importance](#) of implementing tutoring programs in ways that affirm student's identities and solve longstanding inequities.

## NEW MEXICO

New Mexico has received a total of \$1.5 billion in pandemic-relief education funding and the state must set aside \$176 million of that money to address unfinished learning. The state has [committed](#) \$22 million dollars to support districts in the development of targeted, intensive tutoring programs and an additional \$40 million to a teacher-pipeline program that will provide tutors in participating districts.

As part of its effort to accelerate student learning, the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) is finalizing the implementation of a new [Multi-Layered System of Supports](#) (MLSS) and the department is encouraging districts to include tutoring in the system, to ensure it's integrated into districts' larger acceleration strategies.

NMPED plans to help districts design local tutoring programs that are aligned with MLSS. The coaching will target district's neediest students, the identification and use of high-quality curriculum, and the use of data for monitoring student and program progress. NMPED also plans to use some federal funding to build a dashboard to track districts tutoring efforts as a way to disseminate best practices across the state. The state emphasizes the importance of curriculum that reflects the experiences of all students, including in tutoring programs.

The state plans to develop multiple sources of highly qualified tutors and to partner with local schools of education to provide training to college students to serve as tutors in nearby schools. And New Mexico is planning to invest \$40 million in an Educator Fellows program to train 500 instructional aides who will help teachers deliver interventions, including tutoring, to accelerate learning in elementary schools statewide.

**Equity Focus:** The state emphasizes the importance of using curriculum materials in tutoring that [reflect students' cultural backgrounds](#) and the value of using assessments to effectively identify unfinished learning and ensure students receive targeted supports. Says New Mexico's *Roadmap to Accelerated Learning*: "Accelerated learning enables educators to connect unfinished learning with new ideas and new information, all while engaging with grade-level content and celebrating student cultural wealth."

## TENNESSEE

Tennessee is receiving \$3.9 billion in federal education relief funding and must spend at least \$124 million of that money to address unfinished learning. But the state is spending more than that — an estimated [\\$200 million](#) — on a statewide tutoring initiative called Tennessee Accelerating Literacy and Learning (TN ALL) Corps.

The Tennessee legislature established ALL Corps under a [Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act it passed in January 2021](#). The law directed the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) to help recruit tutors, provide training and ongoing professional development for participating school districts, develop instructional content for tutoring sessions, and provide matching grants to school districts and charter schools.

Tennessee is also investing heavily in the TN ALL Corps, primarily through matching grants to LEAs. TDOE has committed \$700 per participating student, just under half of the estimated \$1,500 per student cost of offering tutoring, through 2024. As of the end of September 2021, [79 school districts](#) (54% of the districts in the state) had been approved to participate in the matching-grant program.. Additional districts may apply to launch programs in summer 2022.

While TDOE emphasizes that TN ALL Corps allows for significant local flexibility, participating districts are required to include several research-based features. Among them:

- Tutoring groups must be a maximum of three students in elementary schools and four in middle schools
- Sessions must be 30-45 minutes in length
- Sessions must occur at least twice per week and continue for at least a full semester

Notably, TDOE doesn't require tutoring to occur during the school day. However, it does note that this is more effective than before- or after-school programming. The department also does not stipulate who districts use for tutors, as long as they receive adequate training, a policy that expands the pool of potential tutors at a time when many schools are struggling with staffing shortages.

Math resources will be [available for optional use](#) by participating districts and TDOE will be providing grants to LEAs and other groups to develop ELA and reading content for tutors. Additionally, the department has published a [guide to state-approved tutoring vendors](#) for districts without the internal capacity to develop their own programs.

Finally, the state is planning to make a variety of [professional development](#) opportunities available to districts participating in TN ALL Corps, including support for school in the development and implementation of tutoring programs and online tutor training. Starting spring 2022, district leaders will have the opportunity to participate in tutor leadership training hosted by state universities.

**Equity Focus:** Tennessee's guidance notes that tutoring is for all students, but that districts should prioritize underserved students, those who may need more time to master skills, and those who haven't received other academic supports.

## TEXAS

The federal government is sending a total of \$19.2 billion in education relief funding to Texas, with a required state set aside of \$620 billion for addressing unfinished learning. Texas is going beyond that, allocating a total of \$1.4 billion in services and supports to accelerate learning, some of which will support targeted intensive tutoring.

The Texas legislature in 2021 passed [HB 4545](#) which requires accelerated-learning services for all students who did not receive a satisfactory rating on Spring 2021 academic assessments. While the bill does not explicitly mention tutoring, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) has interpreted the law to include tutoring as the prominent piece of this programming.

Along with the requirement that districts provide acceleration for students, HB 4545 also requires that TEA provide guidance and supports to districts to aid with program design and implementation. As a part of this work, TEA has outlined [three main options](#) for districts: develop Grow Your Own programs; contract with a private provider; or participate in the state program, Vetted Texas Tutor Corps.

For districts building their own programs, TEA has developed [guidance](#) that includes an outline of key research-based components of successful tutoring programs, suggestions for the development of district tutoring leadership teams, and guidelines for implementation and evaluation. To further aid districts developing tutoring programs in-house, Texas provided a series of webinars and implementation workshops over the summer of 2021.

However, nothing in TEA's guidance is a requirement for districts, meaning there is nothing to ensure districts follow the outlined best practices. This is particularly concerning given the short timeline districts have to develop their programs, potentially limiting the impact of tutoring in these districts.

For districts opting to contract with a third-party provider, TEA has provided a [list of state-approved vendors](#). Some vendors take care of all aspects of a districts' program, while others help districts recruit qualified tutors. These districts, as well as those in the Tutor Corps program, are also eligible for small grants of up to \$500,000 to support building their pipeline of qualified tutors.

Finally, TEA has developed [Vetted Texas Tutor Corps](#), which provides districts free access to instructional materials for tutoring that can be used for both in-person and virtual tutoring and TEA-subsidized tutor training. Tutor Corps districts will also receive ongoing technical assistance via Regional Education Service Centers.