Accelerate's 2023-24 Call to Effective Action: A Year in Review

In the 2023-24 academic year, Accelerate selected 33 grantees from a pool of 110 applicants to join the second cohort of the Call to Effective Action grant program (CEA). These organizations include high-dosage tutoring providers, school districts, and community-based organizations that have implemented a range of tutoring models—virtual, in-person, and hybrid/blended approaches—serving students from Pre-K through 12th grade in Math and English Language Arts (ELA). While Accelerate's funding approach has evolved across grant cycles, many of the key findings shared in this review reinforce and build upon insights from previous years.

As part of their participation in the 2023-24 CEA cohort, organizations documented and shared valuable insights about delivering tutoring services, including research findings, implementation successes and challenges, and general feedback. This synthesis incorporates evaluations of each grantee's project execution and outcomes, drawing from regular progress updates, a mid-year interview, and year-end reporting. Some independent research studies are still in progress, with results expected in the coming months.

The purpose of this review is threefold: (1) to analyze and share the progress of grantees over the past year, (2) to utilize these insights to guide future funding decisions, and (3) to provide practical lessons that can benefit the broader tutoring field. It offers a panoramic view of the diverse initiatives undertaken during this period, showcasing both the triumphs and hurdles encountered by these organizations. The collective efforts represent and inform Accelerate's mission to expand and sustain high-quality tutoring services, especially to the students furthest behind and furthest from opportunity.

Through this assessment, Accelerate has identified several high-dosage tutoring models and methods of personalized learning that show promising results and scalability potential. Building on insights gathered through continuous evaluation efforts over the past three years, this report deepens understanding of effective tutoring implementation. These insights contribute to the growing pool of best practices for high-dosage tutoring and move the field forward by offering specific, actionable lessons that can provide guidance to other tutoring providers, districts, and education organizations.

From Implementation to Insights: CEA Evaluation Process

Throughout the 2023-24 academic year, participating organizations engaged in regular documentation of their work, providing five opportunities for real-time views into program delivery. Information shared includes:

- **Grant Activities**: Overview of activities and accomplishments during the grant period, including context related to program design, students served, and implementation indicators.
- **Impact**: Qualitative and quantitative, relative to the grantee's milestones and application, with reference to any differences in outcomes by student population or unanticipated positive results.
- **Challenges**: Internal or external challenges and how they were mitigated and/or resolved.
- **Lessons Learned**: What went well, what could be improved.
- **Storytelling**: Anecdotes that best represent the impact of the CEA grant.
- **Future Plans**: Ongoing tutoring work, including any program design changes.
- **Research/Evaluation Findings**: Final research findings and/or impact evaluation report, where available.

Four Key Dimensions of Effective Tutoring Programs

Through its evaluation of tutoring programs, Accelerate has identified four critical dimensions of a program's potential for lasting impact and growth. These core elements provide a framework for understanding what makes tutoring programs successful and sustainable:

Scalable Growth: As conceptualized (not necessarily as executed), the ability of a tutoring program to grow substantially and serve many more students. This includes having a model that is already working at scale or could easily expand, clear plans for growth, and solutions for potential growing pains.

Equitable Access: The project's demonstrated commitment to equity, evidenced by how well the program serves and includes historically underserved students. This covers everything from who gets tutoring and who does the tutoring, to whether the program design reflects community input and cultural responsiveness.

Reliable Model: The fundamental reliability of the program's structure. This means having dependable tutors, clear student selection criteria, quality teaching materials, and a solid foundation for maintaining quality as the program grows.

Data-Driven Implementation: The program's success in meeting its promised goals—specifically around student enrollment, consistent tutoring delivery, understanding when things aren't working as planned, and hitting key milestones. In other words, the program's ability to both deliver on its promises and track its progress reliably through data.

Understanding Program Maturity: Key Findings from Accelerate's 2023–24 CEA Portfolio

Analysis across these programs revealed several important patterns:

Scalable Growth	Scalability presented the greatest opportunity for growth across our portfolio. While most grantees have identified reliable tutor sources through either consistent human capital pools or technology solutions, scaling to serve substantial student populations remains an area for development. The primary gaps appear in having concrete, feasible scaling pathways and demonstrating readiness to address growth-related challenges. This suggests an opportunity for Accelerate to provide targeted support in strategic planning for scale.
Equitable Access	Nearly all grantees serve historically underserved communities, likely reflecting our intentional selection criteria. While many programs showed commitment through diverse tutor representation and culturally responsive curriculum, fewer demonstrated robust stakeholder engagement in program design. Only select grantees specifically designed their models to support hard-to-reach student populations, such as older students needing foundational literacy instruction or multilingual learners.

Reliable Model	Most grantees in the 2023-24 portfolio demonstrated clear student selection criteria and identified reliable tutor pools, whether through human capital or technology. However, we observed a notable divide between established and newer programs, particularly in areas of instructional materials quality and implementation planning. Newer programs faced more challenges with human capital management and deploying consistent, high-quality materials.
Data-Driven Implementation	Review of implementation and data collection revealed significant variation across the portfolio. While milestone achievement was consistently strong, there were notable differences in meeting enrollment targets and maintaining intended tutoring dosage. Importantly, several grantees who faced challenges in these areas demonstrated strong analytical capacity by providing data-backed explanations for implementation shortfalls.

Evaluation & Research Outcomes

Research findings from the 2023–24 CEA grant cycle are being analyzed on a rolling basis throughout 2024–25, with outcomes measured against ESSA Evidence Tiers. Several grantees are anticipated to meet ESSA Tier 1 or Tier 2 evidence standards through experimental or quasi-experimental designs demonstrating causal impact on student outcomes. The remaining grantees conducted foundational research in 2023–24 that positions them for more rigorous studies in subsequent years. To that end, our grantee's evaluative work should be understood as part of a continuum, as visualized below.

Formative
Actionable Feedback

Summative
Evidence of Outcomes

Usability	Feasibility	Pre-Post Correlational	Quasi-experimental	Randomized Control

Notably, nine grantees conducted randomized control trials (RCTs) in 2023–24: Air Education, D.C. Public Schools, Guilford Public Schools, KIPP Indy, Littera Education, Once, READ USA, Reading Futures, and Step Up Tutoring. Through participation in the CEA, providers strengthen their evidence base while building capacity to scale their programs effectively; they may continue this research journey through future CEA grant cycles or independently pursue more rigorous evaluation when their programs are ready for the next phase of evidence-building.

Key Findings & Lessons Learned

Building on insights from our inaugural 2022-23 grant cycle—which cast a wide net across the high-dosage tutoring ecosystem—the 2023-24 CEA marked a more targeted strategic shift toward supporting tutoring providers. The current portfolio spans 20 states, with programs focused on ELA (48%), math (29%), or both subjects (23%). As we review the emerging themes and lessons from this cohort, many reinforce findings from our previous year while offering new insights to guide Accelerate's strategic direction and future grantmaking. The following findings represent the most significant implications for expanding effective tutoring programs at scale.

☑ Creative Staffing May Serve as a Path to Sustainable Tutoring

The 2023-24 CEA cohort revealed multiple promising pathways to sustainable tutoring through creative staffing and resource allocation. D.C. Public Schools and Once demonstrated how existing school staff could be effectively redeployed for tutoring, maximizing institutional knowledge while minimizing human capital costs. Several organizations tapped into national service programs, with Joyful Readers and Reading Partners successfully leveraging AmeriCorps members. Step Up Tutoring accessed Federal Work-Study funding to support their staffing needs, an approach especially well-suited to California's funding context.

The Literacy Lab took a long-term approach through their Leading Men Fellows program, an opportunity designed for young men of color who recently graduated from high school, building sustainable tutor recruitment pipelines rather than relying on short-term solutions. Peer and near-peer models also emerged as innovative approaches. PeerTeach's in-class peer tutoring and READ USA's use of high school student tutors not only controlled costs but yielded an unexpected benefit: students showed heightened engagement when working with tutors close to their own age.

As federal pandemic recovery funding winds down, these diverse approaches demonstrate that effective tutoring programs can be built using many different personnel strategies. Programs can adapt their staffing strategies to local contexts and resources while maintaining quality and financial viability, offering a promising path forward as schools transition away from pandemic-era funding.

☑ Virtual Tutoring Can Enable Equitable Tutoring Access and Opportunity

Many grantees successfully delivered synchronous virtual tutoring across subjects, grade levels, and languages, demonstrating technology's potential to democratize access to specialized instruction. Reading Futures connected students with significant learning difficulties and dyslexia in Muncie, Indiana to highly-trained tutors skilled in their intervention—support that might be logistically impossible to provide in-person given the small number of students requiring such specialized services at any given school. Similarly, Tutored by Teachers provided American Sign Language tutoring to a native Spanish-speaking migratory student in North Carolina—the kind of highly specialized, needs-based service that would be difficult to deliver consistently without technology-enabled solutions. Finally, Third Space Learning met specialized learning needs by delivering virtual, targeted math instruction to students within a self-contained Special Education classroom in New York City. Their model not only addressed these students' specific learning requirements but also offered an unexpected benefit through their international tutor pool—providing students authentic exposure to different cultures and perspectives without leaving their classroom.

Virtual tutoring removes geographic constraints in matching students with specialized tutors, emerging as a critical tool to ensure all students can access effective academic interventions regardless of their local community's capacity to recruit highly skilled instructors.

✓ Technology Innovation and Integration Enhances Tutoring

The 2023–24 CEA cohort demonstrated innovative applications of technology across delivery models. READ USA used a custom-built data platform to progress monitor students and guide high school tutors with explicit next steps for addressing specific skills—from phonics to comprehension—where their students needed additional support. Technology integration also emerged through Illuminate Literacy's (now Magpie) computer-based personalized learning tool coupled with virtual early literacy tutoring from OnYourMark, and Littera Education's virtual delivery of math tutoring aligned with Tier 1 high-quality instructional materials (HQIM). OKO Labs showcased the use of AI in tutoring through collaborative, game-based math instruction for middle school students.

As expected, technology is streamlining the operational aspects of tutoring programs, but more significantly, it's being leveraged to ensure quality, targeted instruction across subjects, grade levels, and, critically, different types of tutors. These technological solutions are proving essential in supporting tutors of all backgrounds, from volunteers to college students to trained educators, in delivering the right instructional content to the right students at the right time.

Areas of Opportunity

- ☐ **Data Collection and Analysis is a Critical Gap to Bridge**
- ☐ **School-Based Research Demands Coordinated Planning and Alignment**
- ☐ **Strong Implementation Remains Critical, and Challenging, for Tutoring Impact**

☐ Data Collection and Analysis is a Critical Gap to Bridge

Our 2023-24 CEA portfolio revealed significant variation in programs' ability to collect, analyze, and act on data effectively. While some programs still relied on paper-based tracking systems or made problematic assumptions like equating school attendance with tutoring attendance, the majority of our tutoring providers demonstrated sophisticated data practices that often surpassed those of their district and state education agency partners. A number of tutoring providers in the cohort utilized specialized software platforms and assessment tools to track student progress, attendance, and learning outcomes—placing them ahead of many state and district systems still developing their data infrastructure. However, two key challenges remain: (1) there is substantive friction interfering with bi-directional communication of actionable data between providers and school systems; and (2) due to a lack of standards, there is no guaranteed interoperability between provider and district/school data. Solving these problems would ensure that the rich data being collected can effectively drive program improvements and student outcomes.

Nevertheless, several grantees demonstrated how robust data systems can drive program success. Ignite! Reading's digital platform integrated attendance, dosage, and progress monitoring, enabling tutors to respond to individual student needs in real-time while providing teachers insight into both individual and group-level progress. PeerTeach developed a dashboard accessible to all stakeholders, automatically generating targeted reports for

teachers and school leaders. Similarly, Guilford Public Schools built a custom data platform that not only tracked program-specific metrics but was designed to support rigorous research. GPS successfully conducted a randomized control trial (RCT) with a system that seamlessly supported the program's evaluation.

Our experience points to several essential elements for effective data practices in tutoring programs. First, data collection must be automated and integrated into the tutoring delivery platform whenever possible, eliminating manual processes that can introduce errors and delays. Second, programs need clear systems for tracking not just attendance, but actual dosage and progress toward specific learning outcomes. Third, data must be readily accessible to and frequently shared with all stakeholders in formats that facilitate action, from tutors adjusting their instruction to administrators making program-level decisions.

School-Based Research Demands Coordinated Planning and Alignment

A core purpose of the Call to Effective Action is identifying tutoring models that effectively drive student outcomes—a goal that requires rigorous research. While we've seen improvement from our 2022–23 to 2023-24 CEA portfolios in successfully executing planned studies, facilitating robust research in school settings remains challenging. Even with this improvement, some planned randomized control trials still had to be modified to less rigorous designs or weren't conducted at all.

Our portfolio revealed that timing and stakeholder engagement are critical success factors. Grantees who waited until late summer or fall to initiate research conversations with districts often struggled to execute their planned randomized control trials (RCTs), underestimating the extensive coordination required for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, data sharing agreements, school board authorization, parent permission, and implementing the program within a school's master schedule. Others faced challenges in articulating the value proposition to school partners, failing to align research goals with district priorities or provide sufficient incentives to overcome the perceived implementation burden of an RCT.

However, several grantees demonstrated how effective research could advance both program and institutional goals. KIPP Indy successfully conducted an RCT specifically to build an evidence base for sustainability funding. Despite inadequate (i.e., underpowered) sample sizes, organizations like Reading Futures, Step Up Tutoring, and READ USA pursued RCTs driven by a genuine desire to understand and improve their programs' impact. D.C. Public Schools maintained their commitment to rigorous research despite tutor staffing challenges across multiple sites.

These experiences have shaped Accelerate's evolving approach to supporting research; for the current 2024–25 CEA, Accelerate contracts directly with research partners to reduce the burden on grantees to manage the research relationship. Additionally, Accelerate also requires written district commitments to participate in research—including explicit agreement to randomization—at the CEA application stage. We've also developed resources to help stakeholders understand and embrace RCTs, reframing randomization as the fairest way to allocate limited resources while building evidence for what works. This includes offering guidance on study designs that maintain research integrity while giving school leaders some control, such as ensuring certain high-need students receive tutoring while randomly assigning the tutoring "treatment" to others.

The path to building robust evidence for effective tutoring models and programs requires not just sound research design, but careful consideration of and transparent communication with multiple stakeholders—from research partners and funders to district leaders, school boards, teachers, and parents. Our evolving approach reflects these lessons learned, positioning us to better support grantees in conducting the kind of rigorous research needed to scale and sustain effective tutoring programs.

Strong Implementation Remains Critical, and Challenging, for Tutoring Impact

The experience of our 2023–24 CEA cohort reinforces that implementation quality significantly influences program effectiveness. Like any academic intervention, variability in implementation leads to variability in impact. Many programs, particularly community-based organizations delivering high-dosage or in-school tutoring for the first time, faced significant challenges. One CBO grantee struggled consistently with scheduling and student enrollment, while another failed to achieve even half of their intended tutoring dosage. Perhaps most tellingly, we observed multiple instances across our CEA portfolio where the same tutoring program, implemented within the same district, showed dramatically different outputs between school sites—thriving at one location while struggling to maintain basic attendance at another. These disparities often stemmed from a lack of clear bi-directional expectations between the provider and school from the outset, or from tutoring not being positioned as a visible strategy embraced by all stakeholders—from principal to teachers to students. These challenges intensified at the secondary level, where scheduling and dosage proved especially difficult. As one grantee observed, for middle and high school students, tutoring needs to be scheduled into the regular school day "like any other course, with academic credit" attached to ensure students recognize its value.

Our portfolio revealed that strong school and district partnerships are perhaps the single most critical factor in overcoming these implementation challenges. Several grantees demonstrated how the right partnership structures can drive success. Air Reading's strong district relationships in Texas enabled them to execute a randomized control trial (RCT) with significant positive outcomes in just their second year of existence, while Air Tutors achieved exceptional attendance rates in Colorado and Texas through Outcomes Based Contracts (OBC) that established clear mutual accountability metrics between the districts and provider. OnYourMark's experience in Lincoln Parish shows how strong partnerships can fuel program growth - starting with an 80-student pilot, they expanded to serve over 200 students in the same school year, exceeding their projected reach through consistent, hands-on customer support that resulted in high session completion rates.

The experience of our 2023-24 CEA cohort revealed several non-negotiable elements for successful implementation. Programs need clearly defined expectations between tutoring providers and schools before launch, along with a dedicated school champion who views the tutoring program as a school priority. Critically, this champion must have both the institutional authority and resources to ensure the program's success. Drawing on these implementation lessons, Accelerate partnered with ProvenTutoring to create a playbook to guide organizations, especially community-based organizations, in launching and implementing evidence-based tutoring programs. When these partnership elements align, especially through use of an OBC, implementation challenges that might otherwise derail a program can be systematically addressed, transforming into significant positive student outcomes and sustainable, scalable program success.

Conclusion

The 2023–24 Call to Effective Action grant cycle has yielded key lessons that continue to shape Accelerate's approach to expanding effective tutoring access. Review of these grantees across multiple delivery models and contexts has reinforced previous insights about the conditions necessary for successful program implementation, the use of technology to drive impact and access, and the various paths to sustainability, while also surfacing new insights about improving data practices and better supporting research implementation in the field.

As we launch our 2024–25 CEA program with 18 new grantees, we're strategically applying these lessons across our program, policy, and research initiatives. Through this new cohort, we are supporting both established models ready for rigorous evaluation and promising approaches in earlier stages of development, representing a total investment of $3.5 million.

Even as our approach evolves, Accelerate continues to bring an unwavering focus on reaching students furthest behind and furthest from opportunity. Through careful analysis of our grantees' experiences, we're working to identify and scale tutoring models that can effectively serve these populations while creating the policy conditions necessary for widespread adoption. This includes building a culture for rigorous research that can guide evidence-based decision-making, promoting outcomes-based contracting, developing shared data standards, and developing a cost-analysis tool that can assess academic return on investment.

Looking ahead, Accelerate remains committed to bridging research, practice, and policy to expand access to effective tutoring. By continuing to learn from our grantees' experiences while fostering innovation and rigorous evaluation, we aim to build a sustainable ecosystem of high-impact tutoring programs that can serve students most in need of additional academic support.

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