Design Principles in Practice

EdResearch for Action

GROUNDED IN EVIDENCE, BUILT FOR SCALE: THE DESIGN OF THE NEW JERSEY TUTORING CORPS

Isabel Fitzpatrick | The Annenberg Institute at Brown University
Christina Claiborne | The Annenberg Institute at Brown University

Design Principles in Practice Series
NOVEMBER 2025

Annenberg Institute BROWN UNIVERSITY

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

EdResearch for Action

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

The EdResearch for Action initiative is a joint project of the Annenberg Institute at Brown University and Results for America.

We extend our deep appreciation to Katherine Bassett, CEO of the New Jersey Tutoring Corps (NJTC), and the entire NJTC team for their leadership and commitment to evidence-based improvement. We also thank the New Jersey school districts, site coordinators, and tutors who partnered with NJTC to bring these principles to life in classrooms across the state. Their collaboration and dedication have helped ensure that high-quality, high-impact tutoring reaches students most in need, offering a powerful example of how research-informed design can drive meaningful educational change.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES AT A GLANCE

PROGRAM FOCUS

Content + Level

Intensive tutoring can be effective across grade levels and subject matter—even for high school students who have fallen quite far behind. The most research is on reading focused tutoring for students in early grades (particularly grades K-2) but there is also significant research on math-focused tutoring and a smaller, but rigorous body of research on tutoring for older students.

Student Prioritization

There are three main models for prioritizing students for tutoring: need-driven, curriculum-driven, and universal. Decisions about which students to target should vary depending on the needs of the students, schools, and communities.

INSTRUCTION

Frequency and Duration

Effective programs include three or more sessions per week for a minimum of ten weeks. Older students can participate in 30-60-minute sessions, whereas young students can benefit from shorter sessions.

Group Size

The most effective programs have no more than three students per tutor. Moving beyond this number becomes small group instruction, which is less personalized and requires a highly skilled teacher to ensure learning gains for all students being tutored together.

Delivery Mode

Most research has focused on in-person tutoring programs, which have shown the greatest impacts on student achievement. However, emerging evidence indicates that virtual tutoring by a live tutor or through a blended model can also be effective.

TUTOR

Personnel + Support

A wide variety of tutors (including paraprofessionals, community members, college students, and classroom teachers) can successfully improve student outcomes, as long as they receive training and ongoing support.

Relationships

A consistent tutor (each student always meeting with the same tutor) fosters strong, motivating relationships and ensures continuity in the learning process.

LEARNING INTEGRATION

Scheduling

Tutoring interventions that are conducted during the school day consistently result in greater student attendance and academic outcomes than those that are held after school or during the summer.

Curriculum

Students are likely to learn more when their tutoring sessions use high-quality materials that focus on missed content and skills while complementing their classroom grade-level instruction.

DATA USE

Data Informed

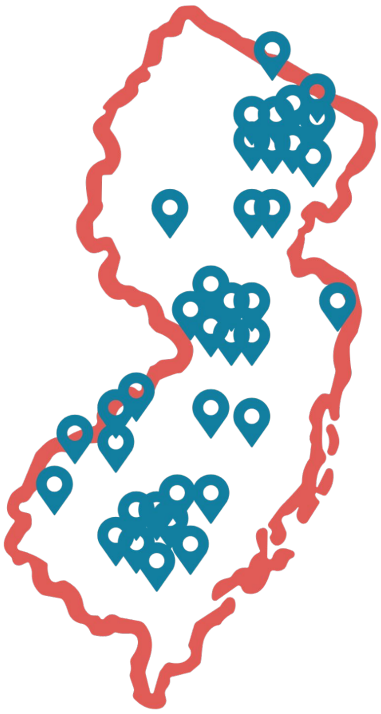
Tutoring programs that support data use and ongoing informal assessments are better able to identify successful practices, understand student progress, and make informed decisions about resource allocation.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Organizational Capacity

A designated program coordinator and a team of teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders are necessary to collaborate across academic and operational departments to effectively coordinate and implement the program.

Executive Summary



The New Jersey Tutoring Corps (NJTC) offers a powerful example of how to translate research into program design.

In response to the learning gaps exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the New Jersey Tutoring Corps was launched in 2021 to deliver high-dosage, research-aligned tutoring to students in under-resourced districts across the state. In November of 2022, the organization became an independent nonprofit, operating with a Board of Trustees. By the 2023–24 school year, NJTC had scaled to serve over 3,600 *scholars*—a term the organization uses deliberately to convey capability and potential and reinforce an asset-based approach—in 25 school districts at 80 sites with the support of 226 trained tutors and 57 site coordinators and instructional coaches.

Research consistently shows that tutoring accelerates student learning, but only when designed with certain key features. High-impact tutoring (HIT) refers to a specific model supported by research of intensive, relationship-based, individualized instruction that includes:

- Sustained and strong tutor-student relationships
- Tutoring at least three times a week (per content area) for a minimum of 10 sequential weeks
- One-on-one or small groups (up to three-on-one)
- High-quality instructional materials
- Frequent monitoring of student progress using data
- Alignment with school-day curriculum
- Rigorous tutor oversight and training

NJTC's program was intentionally designed around these evidence-based characteristics, drawing directly from EdResearch for Action's Design Principles for Accelerating Student Learning with High-Impact Tutoring. This case study highlights how NJTC operationalized those principles in practice, navigating real-world trade-offs while staying grounded in the evidence base.

While the program has not been causally evaluated, descriptive analyses point to encouraging improvements in K–8 math proficiency that warrant further study. The results from the 2023–24 school year show that K-8 math grade level proficiency for tutored students increased from 4% to 26%, and literacy grade level proficiency increased from 12% to 30%. Additionally, scholars and staff alike reported high levels of satisfaction, confidence, and engagement with the program.

This case study highlights how NJTC used research-based principles as a blueprint to design and scale a tutoring program statewide. The organization's experience illustrates how leaders can put evidence into practice, navigating trade-offs, adapting to local contexts, and maintaining fidelity to the elements research suggests matter most. NJTC's work offers a practical example of what it looks like to design a program with research at its core.

Background and Program Overview

The New Jersey Tutoring Corps began as a pilot program launched by The College of New Jersey in partnership with the New Jersey Pandemic Relief Fund and the Overdeck Family Foundation in the summer of 2021. Originally focused on math confidence and skill-building, NJTC quickly evolved into an independent nonprofit in 2022, expanding its statewide footprint and its subject offerings to include literacy.

During the 2023–24 school year, NJTC operated in 80 sites, spanning 25 district partners and one Boys and Girls Club. The majority of its programs were embedded within the school day, with some sites running after-school programs. Across the state, 226 tutors delivered instruction to more than 3,600 K–8 scholars. About 25 percent of scholars identified as Black and over 40 percent as Hispanic, underscoring NJTC's focus on serving historically underserved learners.

Sites were supported by a three-tiered onsite staffing system:

1. **Site Coordinators** provide oversight at one to two program sites each and largely handle program logistics such as managing tutor and student schedules and groupings, ensuring curriculum materials and other resources are available to tutors, covering absences, checking on tutor progress, and assisting with evaluation activities.
2. **Instructional Coaches** are responsible for observation and subsequent pedagogical support for tutors. Site Coordinators and Coaches meet weekly throughout programming to troubleshoot challenges and solve problems. In School Year 2023 - 2024, there were a total of 23 Site Coordinators (SC) and 34 Instructional Coaches (IC) across the 80 sites.
3. **Dual-Role Staff (SC & IC)** perform both job duties for smaller tutoring locations.

The organization's vision is clear: Every scholar should have access to academic and social-emotional support that enables them to thrive. To achieve this, NJTC co-designed programming with district partners and tailored content to meet local instructional priorities while enhancing scholar mastery of foundational skills and adhering to a rigorous evidence base on what makes tutoring effective. In practice, this meant not only advancing students academically, but also fostering confidence and resilience. As CEO Katherine Bassett explained, many scholars entered the program multiple grade levels behind and doubted their own abilities. A central goal was therefore to help them build the mindset of "I am a learner," and to approach mistakes as opportunities for growth and discovery rather than as setbacks.

By the Numbers

1 Statewide coordinated program
25 Districts
57 On-site staff (SC's and IC's)
80 Total partner locations
226 Tutors
3,600 Scholars served

Numbers are from 2023-24

Evidence-Based Program Design

Implementing research-based practices, especially in large-scale initiatives, requires thoughtful adaptation to context and inevitably involves trade-offs. Early in its planning, NJTC committed to uphold a number of design principles from the research to steer program development. The principles fall within six main categories: Program Focus, Instruction, Tutor, Learning Integration, Data Use, and Organizational Capacity. EdResearch for Action's Design Principles for Accelerating Student Learning with High-Impact Tutoring examines these design principles and the underlying research base in greater detail. NJTC was also awarded a Program Design Badge by the National Student Support Accelerator for the rigor of its program design.

PROGRAM FOCUS

Research Design Principles

Content + Level: Intensive tutoring can be effective across grade levels and subject matter—even for high school students who have fallen quite far behind. The most research is on reading-focused tutoring for students in early grades (particularly grades K-2), but there is also significant research on math-focused tutoring and a smaller, but rigorous body of research on tutoring for older students.

Student Prioritization: There are three main models for prioritizing students for tutoring: need-driven, curriculum-driven, and universal. Decisions about which students to target should vary depending on the needs of the students, schools, and communities.

Design Principles in Practice

Content + Level: NJTC offered literacy and math tutoring to K-8 scholars.

Student Prioritization: NJTC implemented a needs-driven model. Scholars (and their assigned content area focus) were identified for tutoring through a collaborative, data-informed process in which partner districts used their own criteria—often leveraging MTSS frameworks and academic data—to target students below grade level or in need of supplemental or intensive support.

NJTC implemented a needs-driven model for student selection, aligning with research indicating that tutoring is most effective when targeted toward students below grade level or otherwise in need of additional support. To ensure local relevance and ownership, NJTC empowered each partner district to identify students using its own established criteria, while providing guidance on which scholars were likely to benefit most from high-impact tutoring. Most districts relied on their Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) frameworks to determine eligibility, grouping students based on demonstrated academic need. Scholars assigned to NJTC tutoring typically fell within Tier 2 or Tier 3 supports—those requiring supplemental or intensive interventions. The data informing these decisions varied by district but commonly included attendance records, New Jersey Student Learning Assessment (NJSLA) results, and other local or formative assessment data. This collaborative, data-informed process ensured that tutoring resources were directed to the students who stand to gain the most, while allowing for flexibility across diverse district contexts.

INSTRUCTION

Research Design Principles	Design Principles in Practice
Frequency and Duration: Effective programs include three or more sessions per week for a minimum of ten weeks. Older students can participate in 30-60-minute sessions, whereas young students can benefit from shorter sessions. **Group Size:** The most effective programs have no more than three students per tutor. Moving beyond this number becomes small group instruction, which is less personalized and requires a highly skilled teacher to ensure learning gains for all students being tutored together. **Delivery Mode:** Most research has focused on in-person tutoring programs, which have shown the greatest impacts on student achievement. However, emerging evidence indicates that virtual tutoring by a live tutor or through a blended model can also be effective.	**Frequency and Duration:** NJTC tutors met with scholars 2-3 times per week, with tutoring sessions lasting from 30 to 60 minutes, depending on school district schedules. **Group Size:** NJTC implemented small tutor-to-scholar ratios of 1:1 up to 1:3. NJTC went as high as 1:4 in some instances. **Delivery Mode:** In-person.

From the outset, NJTC adhered to research-backed 30-60 minutes of in-person tutoring per session. Some of their district partners had previously run 15-20 minute sessions. NJTC strongly enforced the 30-60 minute window while giving districts the autonomy to choose the duration within that window that best suited their schedule.

Building on their commitment to research-backed session lengths, NJTC's model aimed to deliver tutoring three or more times per week in small groups of three or fewer students—the approach research suggests has the greatest impact—but real-world constraints required flexibility. In practice, some sites ran only two sessions per week or slightly larger groups. These adjustments were not matters of preference, but of circumstance: delayed state funding shortened the programming window, and schools faced scheduling and staffing limitations that made three sessions per week impossible at every site. When districts requested tutoring in both math and literacy but had only four time slots available, NJTC split them evenly between subjects rather than forgoing one entirely. As CEO Katherine Bassett explained, "We did the best we could with the time that we were given." These decisions highlight a key reality for system leaders: high-impact tutoring research provides a critical roadmap, but implementation must respond to logistical constraints and local priorities.

TUTOR

Research Design Principles	Design Principles in Practice
Personnel + Support: A wide variety of tutors (including paraprofessionals, community members, college students, and classroom teachers) can successfully improve student outcomes, as long as they receive training and ongoing support aligned to their incoming capabilities.	**Personnel + Support:** NJTC tutors were pre-service, in-service, paraprofessional, retired, and substitute educators who all worked directly with scholars. Tutors were recruited and trained through a robust onboarding process. Tutors continued to receive training and support throughout the program from Instructional Coaches.
Relationships: A consistent tutor (each student always meeting with the same tutor for the duration of the program) fosters strong, motivating relationships and ensures continuity in the learning process.	**Relationships:** The same NJTC tutor worked with the same scholars for the duration of the program.

NJTC tutors came from diverse backgrounds and participated in a fully-paid training process designed to ensure consistency and quality across sites. This mandatory curriculum combined virtual and live sessions, using a "gradual release" approach—*I Do, We Do, You Do*—to build clarity, confidence, and tutoring skills. New hires were paired with mentors and completed modules on the i-Ready curriculum and assessments, the Tutor With Pearl platform for attendance and surveys, role-based training, SEL and social justice, professionalism, organizational culture, and logistics.

Training continued throughout the school year with ongoing coaching from Instructional Coaches who observed sessions, provided feedback, and guided tutor growth using a modified Danielson framework. Weekly site check-ins surfaced needs and informed updates to professional learning content, ensuring instruction remained both research-based and responsive to students' needs.

Each student was paired with the same tutor for the entire program, fostering trust and continuity. Tutors incorporated SEL practices, including the Zones of Regulation, and began and ended each session by asking students, "How are you feeling coming into this session? How are you feeling leaving this session?" This routine helped scholars recognize and manage their emotions while allowing tutors to demonstrate empathy and responsiveness, deepening the tutor–scholar bond.

Additionally, NJTC used the Tutor With Pearl platform's post-session surveys to gather feedback from both tutors and scholars about learning and engagement. This reflection loop reinforced student voice and helped tutors tailor support. By combining high-quality personnel, ongoing training and coaching, consistent tutor assignments, structured SEL practices, and reflective feedback, NJTC created an environment where scholars felt seen, supported, and motivated.

> *"The NJTC culture really focuses on the kids and allows us to first build relationships with our scholars rather than jumping right in.*
>
> - Tutor

LEARNING INTEGRATION

Research Design Principles	Design Principles in Practice
Scheduling: Tutoring interventions that are conducted during the school day consistently result in greater student attendance and academic outcomes than those that are held after school or during the summer.	**Scheduling:** While NJTC offered three tutoring models—embedded school day, after-school, and summer— 88% of tutoring was embedded during the school day. This meant that NJTC pushed into classrooms, working with small groups of scholars at a time while classroom teachers worked with the rest of their class.
Curriculum: Students are likely to learn more when their tutoring sessions use high-quality materials that focus on missed content and skills while complementing their classroom grade-level instruction.	**Curriculum:** NJTC partnered with Curriculum Associates to use their i-Ready Curriculum for literacy and math. They collaborated with teachers and used diagnostic assessments to identify scholars' academic gaps to address.

District co-design also played a major role in implementation: NJTC program management teams collaborated with site leaders to set schedules, select focus areas (math, literacy, or both), and ensure scholars were placed appropriately. Schedules were designed within district parameters and ensured each tutor received a daily prep period for every subject and grade-level change, plus one hour of weekly instructional coaching with an NJTC instructional coach.

Early implementation was not without challenges. Some teachers initially misunderstood the purpose of tutoring and were hesitant to release students, and scheduling consistent sessions while avoiding classroom assessments proved difficult. Through proactive communication and collaborative planning, NJTC built trust and alignment across school teams. Over time, teachers began viewing tutors as instructional partners, tutoring blocks became protected instructional time, and schedules were coordinated to prevent assessment overlaps. As the Executive Director of Programs, Jessica Kelly, reflected, *"Building strong school partnerships takes time, communication, and clarity of purpose."* These improvements laid the groundwork for the strong relationships and effective coordination described by district leaders and school staff.

Tutors present in the building but not actively tutoring assisted classroom teachers, providing support where needed. This fostered strong relationships with scholars and school staff and allowed tutors to observe grade-level standards. This observation was crucial for lesson planning, enabling tutors to focus on prerequisite skills to address learning gaps. District leaders and principals consistently emphasized the value of NJTC's responsiveness and alignment with school goals.

> *"[NJTC is good at] providing services for struggling students, monitoring data, and effective communication with staff.*
>
> - School Principal, Waterford Township School District

Instruction was anchored in the i-Ready curriculum, aligned to New Jersey state standards, and NJTC supplied all of the materials needed for effective math and literacy tutoring. While tutors could bring in additional resources if they chose, the organization ensured that the core instructional materials were consistent and high-quality. Tutors typically used their own devices, unless schools provided them, to access i-Ready and the Tutor With Pearl system for instruction and progress monitoring. Scholars used devices supplied by district partners or by NJTC in community-based sites.

> *"Overall, the program helped renew my passion for teaching, taught me what it means to create a learning and nurturing environment, and taught kids that learning can be fun. One extra thing was the materials. They were FANTASTIC. I felt I had absolutely everything I needed so I couldn't wait to do projects and activities with the scholars."*
>
> - Tutor

DATA USE

Research Design Principles

Data Informed: Tutoring programs that support data use and ongoing informal assessments are better able to identify successful practices, understand student progress, and make informed decisions about resource allocation. They are also able to provide information to tutors about student understanding and where to focus instruction to best support each student's learning.

Design Principles in Practice

Data Informed: NJTC commissioned an independent review by external evaluators to summarize program activities and describe scholars' progress, using pre/post data to understand how students were developing through the program and provide insights into the program's potential impact.

NJTC supported data-informed instruction through both ongoing formative assessment and end-of-cycle evaluation. Instructional coaches observed tutors and provided weekly feedback, while mini-surveys collected reflections from both scholars and tutors after each session, asking whether learning occurred, how enjoyable the session was, the quality of the scholar–tutor interaction, and engagement levels. These insights helped tutors adjust instruction in real time, identify effective practices, and ensure that each scholar's learning needs are addressed.

> *When we launched New Jersey Tutoring Corps (NJTC) in 2021, our highest priority was to provide our partners, funders, staff, and supporters with transparency and precise data so that we can continuously evaluate our results. As part of our mission, we commission an independent evaluator each tutoring cycle to review our work and our scholars' progress to ensure NJTC is providing the strongest possible impact to the communities we serve.*
>
> - Katherine Bassett, CEO

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Research Design Principles	Design Principles in Practice
Organizational Capacity: A designated program coordinator and a team of teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders are necessary to collaborate across academic and operational departments to effectively coordinate and implement the program.	**Organizational Capacity:** NJTC built an internal structure that includes executive leadership, program management staff, and operational roles, all overseen by a Board of Trustees, enabling smooth coordination across academic and administrative functions.

NJTC's internal capacity and leadership were structured as such:

- Executive Leadership: CEO, COO, CDO
- Program Management: Program Director, Program Assistant, Summer Program Manager, School Year Program Manager
- Finance Director
- Hiring Manager

NJTC's organizational capacity was strengthened by its commitment to building a workforce and culture that reflect the diversity of the communities it serves. Forty-two percent of tutors and site staff identified as non-white, and the organization's active Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee played a central role in sustaining an equitable, inclusive, and high-performing workplace. The DEI Committee not only fostered community and belonging across staff but also contributed directly to organizational effectiveness by reviewing and updating training resources, internal practices, and policies. Its efforts included ensuring ADA compliance and web accessibility on NJTC's website, strengthening marketing materials and staff handbooks to reflect equitable practices, and hosting ongoing professional learning on recognizing and mitigating bias. This intentional investment in equity and inclusion enhanced NJTC's internal operations, strengthened its leadership capacity, and modeled for partner districts how to embed equity and belonging into the infrastructure of program delivery.

Data Collection Process and Learnings

From the outset, the NJTC committed to using data as a tool for learning, accountability, and continuous improvement. Each program cycle, NJTC partnered with an independent evaluator to review program implementation and scholar progress, with the goal of ensuring the tutoring model remains aligned to both research-based design principles and the needs of local communities.

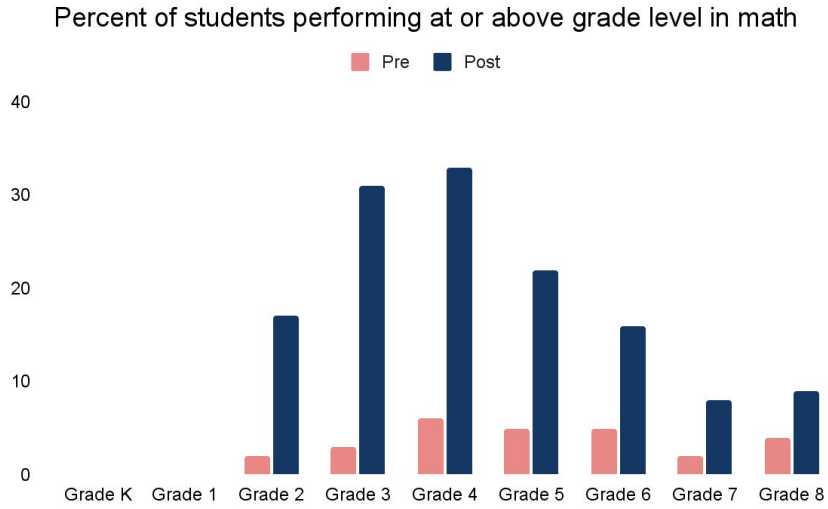
The evaluation drew on both quantitative and qualitative sources

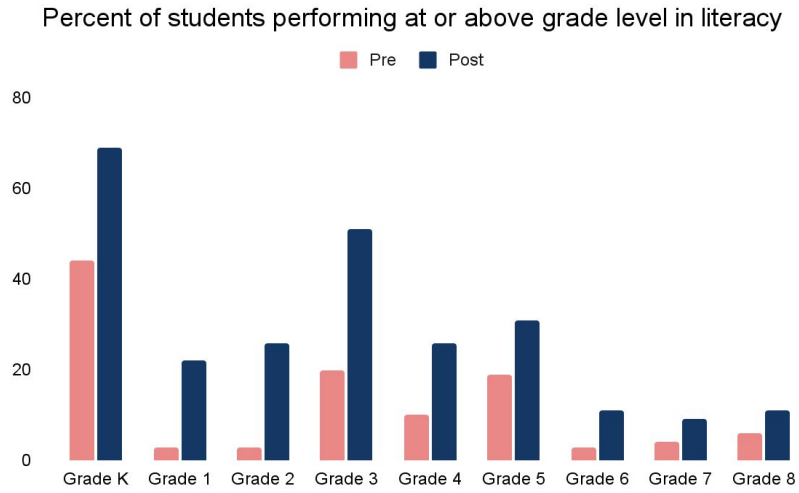
- **Quantitative**: i-Ready pre- and post-diagnostic assessments provided a snapshot of student progress across program cycles
- **Qualitative**: Session-level and post-program student and tutor surveys captured dimensions of engagement, confidence, and program quality.

Over 2,200 scholars had pre-and post-data from the math assessment, and over 2,100 had literacy data. Across grade-level results included:

- **Math proficiency** rose from 4% to 26%; **literacy proficiency** from 12% to 30%.
- **Strongest growth among scholars furthest behind** (2+ grade levels below)

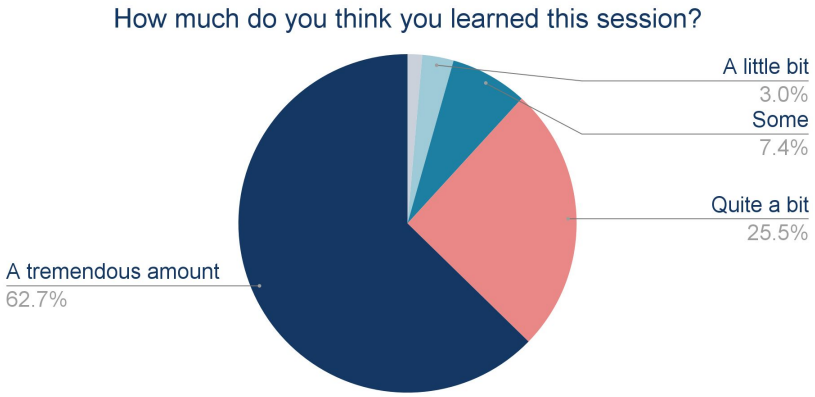
Math gains were seen within all grade levels, with statistically significant gains in 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th grades.

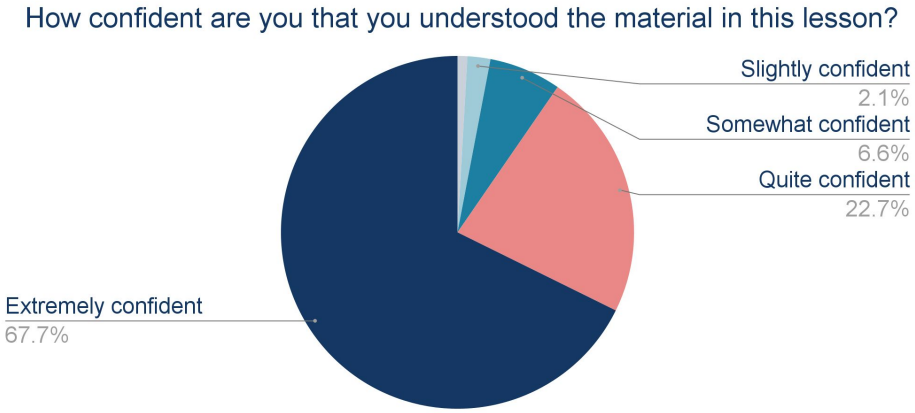




Survey data added depth to this picture. After each session, scholars reported on their confidence, enjoyment, and perceived learning, while tutors rated scholar engagement, their own enjoyment, and how much they believed scholars had learned. Post-program surveys revealed:

- **90.5%** of scholars reported feeling confident that they learned after sessions
- **97%** enjoyed working with their tutor; **84%** enjoyed learning more than before
- **95%** of tutors said NJTC met their needs; **76%** would highly recommend it
- Instructional coaches and site coordinators reported near-unanimous satisfaction, professional growth, and confidence in their impact
- Program partners affirmed NJTC's professionalism and effectiveness, with **85%** noting improvements in scholars' confidence and **88%** likely to recommend the program to peers.





These findings highlight the importance of two of NJTC's priority design principles: **relationships and data use.** Scholars' sense of enjoyment, confidence, and learning growth underscores how strong, consistent tutor–scholar relationships build trust and motivation. At the same time, the systematic collection of session-level and post-program data through Pearl ensured that NJTC could monitor engagement and progress in real time, pairing relational insights with academic outcomes. This integration of evidence and experience was critical to driving both measurable learning gains and lasting shifts in scholar confidence.

> *"I like going to tutoring because I know more math than I used to.*
>
> *- Math Scholar*

Key challenges reported by various stakeholders included training logistics, communication with classroom teachers, student grouping, and the timing of diagnostic testing. For upcoming program cycles, NJTC plans to:

- offer more hands-on (in-person) training on iReady and Pearl
- improve collaboration opportunities between tutors and classroom teachers to better align tutoring with the current school curriculum
- group students by skill and not solely by availability
- support districts to ensure no scholar is being taken out of direct instruction in order to attend tutoring
- move EOY (end of year) diagnostic testing to be not so close to statewide standardized testing

Ultimately, NJTC's approach to data reflects its philosophy of research-informed design in practice. By commissioning independent evaluation, engaging in ongoing reflection, and making iterative changes, NJTC models how tutoring programs can remain accountable to evidence while responsive to the realities of implementation.

V. Conclusion

The New Jersey Tutoring Corps demonstrates what it looks like to design a large-scale program directly from research evidence. By grounding its model in well-established principles of high-impact tutoring, such as frequent sessions, small group instruction, strong tutor training and coaching, and integration with curriculum, NJTC offers a concrete example of how evidence can guide program development. Just as importantly, NJTC's story underscores that implementation requires adaptation: leaders balanced fidelity to research with local constraints around scheduling, staffing, and resources.

This case study does not claim definitive causal impacts on student outcomes. Instead, it highlights how NJTC has translated design principles into practice, building a tutoring program that is both research-aligned and responsive to context. For other states and districts seeking to launch or strengthen tutoring initiatives, NJTC provides a model of how to use research not only as inspiration but as a blueprint for program design.

This EdResearch for Action case study is a collaboration among:

Annenberg Institute
BROWN UNIVERSITY

New Jersey
TUTORING CORPS, INC.

RESULTS
FOR AMERICA