

Is this program a Golden Opportunity for students? An evaluation of a local community-based tutoring program.

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Many communities offer tutoring programs to help students who are performing below grade level improve in school. Previous research indicates positive impacts of one-to-one tutoring in academic and non-academic ways for students below grade level, and that children can benefit from having a long-term tutoring (mentoring) relationship. However, research findings on the effect of tutoring on academic performance varies and comparative analyses are uncommon. Also, few studies focus on areas outside of academics, such as social-emotional skills.

Our team conducted a program evaluation of a community tutoring program, called Golden Opportunity (GO), offered to students in grades 2-8 in the Ithaca City School District (ICSD). This program provides a one-to-one tutoring to students that qualify for and are willing to participate in the program. Students are recommended (by their teachers) to the GO program director at the end of 1st grade. The criteria to enroll in the program is first, performance below grade level in reading and/or math at the end of 1st grade; second, qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch (an indicator of economic needs), and not having an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) at the beginning of second grade. Data included NYS Math and English Language Arts (ELA) test score for 4th and 5th grade students and local math and reading scores for grades 2-5 for GO students and a comparative sample. We also analyzed qualitative data gathered through surveys from teachers, parents and tutors. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the program in helping students reach grade-level competence and increase their academic confidence.

Statistical analysis showed that students in the GO group are making strides toward grade level performance, and they showed academic growth overtime, both in reading and math. However, there were no statistically significant differences between the GO group and the comparative sample. On the other hand, qualitative analyses of parent and tutor surveys shows that they were highly satisfied with the impact that GO had on students' academics and the growth in social and emotional skills that helped improve the way the students approached school-related tasks.