Instruction matters: Lessons from a mixed method evaluation of Supplemental Educational Services under No Child Left Behind

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Abstract:
Under Supplemental Educational Services (SES), a parental choice provision of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), schools that have not made adequate yearly progress in increasing student achievement are required to offer low income families free, after-school tutoring. Existing research shows little to no aggregate effects on achievement for students who do attend. This paper draws mainly upon qualitative findings from a mixed-method study of SES in five, urban districts to get inside the black box of instruction in Federally mandated tutoring. We describe in detail the character and quality of instruction taking place to better understand why we are not seeing significant effects on achievement from SES. We identify two, primary reasons for the lack of effects. One, there is a "treatment exposure" problem. And two, although treatment exposure may help explain the lack of effects of SES on student outcomes, we argue that the central challenge of seeing effects in SES is rooted in the details of instructional capacity and practice –the instructional core. We then use the qualitative lens to identify emerging best practices in SES. These insights are particularly important in an atmosphere of expanding market-based reforms, as well as the reauthorization of NCLB.

Introduction

Under Supplemental Educational Services (SES), a parental choice provision of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), schools that have not made adequate yearly progress in increasing student achievement are required to offer low income families the opportunity to receive free, after-school tutoring. Existing research suggests numerous design and implementation problems, demand for SES remains low (on average 12-17% of those eligible participate, with even lower rates in rural schools), the information made available to parents is limited, and districts and providers often compete for resources instead of collaborating. In the past several years, there have been a growing number of studies that employ statistical research in order to examine the effects of SES on student achievement. The trend in this research is one of no aggregate effects of SES on student achievement (Burch, 2009; Barley & Wegner, 2010; Heinrich, Meyer, & Whitten, 2010).

In this paper, we argue that persistently low attendance rates and a negligible level of effects on student achievement warrant a nuanced look at the core of the intervention: academic instruction. We make this argument based on insights emerging from our on-going, mixed-method study of SES practice in five, urban school districts. We focus on the unique contributions of qualitative research in understanding the nature of the instruction in SES, and how a greater understanding can help explain the relatively little effect of SES on student achievement. We then begin to establish best practices for instructionally rich SES programs and suggest new directions for research and policy based on these practices. This data is important for helping strengthen practice and using these lessons from our qualitative work we can suggest priorities for improving the value

added of SES in terms of student learning. These insights are particularly timely as Congress enters the reauthorization process for NCLB and states have been offered the opportunity to apply for waivers of certain requirements under NCLB where they must weigh the benefits and costs of continuing with SES.

First, we offer some background on SES as a policy intervention and the theory of incentives embedded in the design of the law. Next, we look at the research indicating SES to have little to no effect on student achievement, despite states and districts spending billions of Title I funds to implement the policy. We take these findings as impetus to then use our qualitative data to look inside the black box of instructional setting. Finally we discuss implications for both policy and research.

School Choice as a Policy Context for SES

School choice has been a popular reform strategy since the mid-1960s. The original vision behind parent choice (see Friedman, 1962) was to offer low-income parents the option of transferring out of their neighborhood schools to a school of their choice in the district, via monetary vouchers. The voucher was seen as a way of redistributing government dollars since the school would turn the voucher over to the government for reimbursement. The theory of action behind the reform was that schools that did not perform well would see their enrollment decline and they would go "out of business".

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), the Bush administration's reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, incorporates market-based, parental choice provisions that are similar in design to voucher plans of the 1960s. Under NCLB, districts not making test score targets must offer the parents of students attending "failing" schools the option to transfer to another school. If the school fails to

make test score targets for two consecutive years or more, the district must also offer parents SES, the choice of an after school program with the tuition for the program paid for by the district (which may be provided by public, private or faith based entities).

Thus, SES has been described as "mini-vouchers". The incentive structure is expected to weed out providers that are less capable and ensure that the most effective providers survive. Under this model the provider is considered the key axis in the quality of tutoring - defined through the delivery strategy, the curriculum it uses, its policies regarding teacher-student ratio and hiring practices. Provider-level information is used as a proxy for knowledge of instructional practice, and theoretically the ability of parents to choose the appropriate provider for their child turns on this information (U.S. Department of Education, 2005 & 2008). As we argue below, this information is an ineffective estimation of instructional quality, yet an obviously critical dimension of the intervention.

Existing Literature

Existing Research on SES

Although there has been little systematic research on the nuances of the implementation process and actual instructional landscape of SES, existing literature does suggest some patterns in attendance and effects.

Attendance or "treatment exposure". A number of studies, including early descriptive research on SES, document the problem of low attendance rates, on average 12-17% of those eligible to participate (Heinrich et al, 2010; Zimmer et al, 2010; USDOE, 2009). Rather than increasing over time (as policy and program implementation matures), the number of eligible students registering for SES has leveled off (Burch et al, 2011; Zimmer et al, 2010). Another common finding is that younger children—

specifically, elementary school students—are more likely to attend SES (after registering for a program) and to attend more hours than middle school or high school students (see Burch et al., 2011; Springer et al., 2009; Zimmer et al., 2007).

Effects. The second consistent finding in existing SES literature relates to the effects of the intervention on student outcomes. There have been a number of studies, either on the part of districts or outside researchers, which employ statistical research in order to examine the effects of SES on student achievement. The overall trend in findings is one of little to no statistically significant effects on student achievement (Barnhart, 2011; Burch, 2009; Heinrich et al 2010; Heistad, 2007; Springer et al, 2009; Zimmer et al, 2007; Zimmer et al, 2010).

An important insight from the broader literature on out-of-school tutoring programs, which is consistent with that of SES evaluations to date, is that reaching some minimum threshold of tutoring hours appears to be critical to producing measurable effects on students' achievement (as measured primarily by test scores) (e.g., Lauer et al., 2006). In our own ongoing research estimating the effects of SES, we find 40 hours of tutoring to be a critical threshold; below 40 hours of tutoring, we do not identify any statistically significant effects of SES on students' math and reading gains (as measured by changes in test scores). In addition, we find effects on both math and reading achievement for elementary students who receive at least 40 hours of SES, but only effects on gains in math for middle school students.[i]

Unique contributions of qualitative design to understanding the instructional landscape. The quantitative data on the impact of SES on student achievement offers valuable insight that helps us see the relationship between the inputs of SES (money and

time for additional supplemental instruction) and outputs (in particular, student achievement). However, statistical analyses offer little purchase for understanding what happens in between these inputs and outputs. The data gives us some broad measures of processes inside of classrooms, communities and schools that might contribute to effects, but there is much more to understand about the particularities of how SES is delivered in specific settings – what we term the "core" of SES practice.

Unfortunately, qualitative research on SES has been very limited. Early research on SES was largely descriptive, exploratory and focused on the challenges of SES implementation in a context of limited capacity and/or will on the part of district and state providers in informing parents about their options and in monitoring and reporting on the quality of tutoring provided (see Burch, 2007b; Burch et al, 2007, CEP, 2007; Fusarelli, 2007; GAO, 2006; Gill et al, 2008; Potter et al, 2007; Sunderman & Kim, 2004; Sunderman, 2006; Zimmer et al, 2007).

Existing qualitative studies have a number of limitations. One important limitation is the absence of context rich data on the nature and quality of tutoring. The majority of studies were conducted far from the instructional setting. They relied on the reports (through interviews) of providers, school administrators, and district and state officials. We view the reliance on interviews with policymakers, school administrators and district and state officials on what was happening in tutoring sessions as a shortcoming. In order to begin to understand the extent to which SES instruction is (or is not) working for students, one needs to collect data that is sensitive to the nature of instruction itself: at the classroom level and with the multiple stakeholders involved in actual instruction.

Methodology

Mixed Method Design

The findings from this paper draw on data from an ongoing multi-site study of the implementation and impact of supplemental educational services. The central purpose of this study is to understand whether and how providing students with academically focused out-of-school tutoring in reading and mathematics contributes to improvements in their academic performance, specifically in reading and mathematics. We are conducting this research in five urban school districts located in four states and representing a variety of student demographics: Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Chicago, Illinois; and Austin and Dallas, Texas.

The larger study addresses the following core questions about the implementation and efficacy of SES: (1) How can school districts maximize participation in SES by students who are eligible and most likely to benefit? (2) What factors influence parent or student choices in selecting (and staying with) SES providers? (3) What are the key characteristics of different program models of SES tutoring, as enacted by providers and as regulated by districts and states, and how do they influence SES program impacts? (4) What is the net impact of SES on student achievement? and (5) What are the policy levers and program administration variables that state and local educational agencies and providers can use to increase SES program effectiveness? This paper addresses the last three of these questions, primarily drawing on findings from the qualitative potion of the study as a means of understanding instructional processes that may contribute to effects and the role of policy in shaping these very processes.

Qualitative Approach and Case Study

Qualitative case study research "involves exploration of a 'bounded system' or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). This tradition is well suited and widely used in the fields of education, urban studies and political science (Ibid). Within case sampling - conducting multiple observations of tutoring practices for providers - was intended to help us see tutoring practices in greater depth. As noted above, in case studies the focus of the study is the case, which becomes the unit of analysis. Our case was analysis of tutoring practices across five districts, and 24 tutoring providers of varying formats (in-person, online, at home, in school or community settings, profit and non-profit, etc).

Data collection activities. The first two years of the study involved the following data sources:

- *Observations of full tutoring sessions* (n=94) using the a classroom observation instrument (described below) designed to capture key features of instructional settings
- *Interviews with provider administrators* (n=52) about structure of instructional program, choice of curricula and assessments, challenges in implementation, and choices in staffing
- *Interviews with tutoring staff* (n=73) about instructional formats, curriculum, adaptations for special student needs, staff professional background and training
- *Interviews with district and state administrators* (n=20) involved in program implementation

- *Parent focus groups* (n= 168) with parents of students who were eligible to receive SES, most with children currently receiving SES; two focus groups of approximately 1.5 hours each were conducted in each site and translation was offered in Spanish, Hmong and Somali
- *Document analysis:* formal curriculum materials from providers, diagnostic, formative, or final assessments used, policy documents on federal, state or district policies concerning the implementation of SES

Please note, these sample sizes (n) are cross-site and for the 2009-10 and 2010-11 research years, upon which the analysis in this paper is based.

We developed a standardized observation instrument in order to more accurately capture the nature of the SES intervention. The instrument has the capability of not only providing descriptive information on instructional materials and teaching methods *in use* but also detecting the impact of different kinds of format, resources (curriculum materials, staffing, etc.), and instructional methods on students' observed levels of engagement. The observation instrument includes indicator ratings at two, 10-15 minute observation points as well as materials collection, a rich description in the form of a vignette, and follow-up information provided by the tutor(s).[ii]

The provider characteristics used in our initial sample selection included high market share, high attendance levels relative to other providers in the same district, two or more years providing SES in the district, and equal sampling among online, in-home, in-school, and community-based tutoring, as well as among for-profit, not-for-profit, district-provided, and, when applicable, faith-based organizations. When possible, we

also attempted to include providers that advertise that they target ELL populations and students with disabilities.[iii]

Data analysis. Case study is a research strategy employing triangulation with data, investigators, theories, and even methodologies (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Consistent with this approach, we developed and used common protocols, by role group, and in our observation of tutoring sessions. We used a constant comparative method (both within and across method) to develop and refine our understanding of patterns and dissimilarities in tutoring practices across providers. Further, the same data were analyzed and discussed simultaneously by different researchers in an effort to consider and develop multiple interpretations of events observed. Throughout the process we sought to examine potential trends in the instructional setting that may help in understanding the shortcomings and challenges faced by the policy "in action". Analytic codes were developed from these patterns and in response to the research questions, and then reapplied to the data in order to establish findings. As with any qualitative study, data analysis occurred both concurrent to and after the data collection process.

Framing Ideas

Qualitative research is uniquely suited to help us understand *why we are not seeing significant effects* on achievement from SES. These include problems linked to the intensity of the treatment, the quality of the treatment, limited information for parents and limited services for ELL and student with disabilities. Second, we can use the qualitative lens to *identify emerging best practices in SES*, by combining decades of research on out of school time (OST) best practices (sequence, active learning, etc.) with our data from

observations to determine what may be going well in SES instruction. We conclude by suggesting *future directions for research on SES,* based on our findings.

In our qualitative design and analysis, we draw on two bodies of literature: a) the theoretical frame of Cohen and Ball (1999) on the importance of the instructional capacity and setting (interactions between students, teachers and materials), and b) research on important indicators of after school program quality.

Research on Instructional Practice

First, we draw on existing research of instructional practices in K-12 school settings (Coburn, 2004; Cohen and Ball, 1999; Elmore, 2004; Spillane, 1996). These studies, which vary both in their foci and methods, generally explore the dynamics of instructional change internal to classrooms and argue for greater precision and attention to the importance of interactive processes within classroom settings. The work of Cohen and Ball (1999) offer one example of this approach. They argue that in understanding why and how interventions contribute to improved student outcomes, researchers must attend carefully to the interactions within these dynamics – how students interact with teachers, how teachers view and approach the tasks, whether and how instructional resources made available (e.g., by the policy) are activated or used in the setting. Other educational researchers, looking at the relationship between policy and classroom practice have conducted studies along similar lines in arguing for greater attention to the instructional core (Elmore, 2004) and to the practices of teaching and instructional leadership (Coburn, 2004; Spillane, 1996). Figure 1 illustrates how the instructional capacity of SES tutoring is directly related to how the instructional core (tutors, content,

students) interact with a multitude of factors and stakeholders (e.g. policy's theory of action, technology, Non-Governmental Organizations, etc.)

Unfortunately, while there is an abundant body of qualitative research that adopts the perspective defined above in order to understand day school classroom practices, the framework has yet to be leveraged in research on supplemental educational services in particular, and market-oriented education reforms in general. The problem originates in part from the fact that quantitative studies have drawn the most attention and resources in examining SES. As noted above, these studies have made important contributions in understanding outputs but have left classroom and school variables relatively unexamined.

Drawing on ideas from Cohen and Ball (1999), our observation instrument is intended to measure instructional capacity – the capacity to produce worthwhile and substantial learning as a function of interactions between the numerous stakeholders in the implementation process, such as students, teachers and instructional materials/technologies. (see Figure 1). This is in contrast to a view that sees teachers or the quality of curriculum alone as the main source of instruction . The instrument is intended for use in observations of federally-mandated after school tutoring which has an explicit policy focus on the use of after school tutoring as a mechanism for improving student performance on standardized tests in schools that have not made state-designated test score benchmarks for two or more years.

Existing Research on Out of School Time (OST)

Although relatively little research has been done on best practices specific to Supplemental Educational Services, prior research on out of school time programs in

general tells us that quality programs are characterized by a number of particular characteristics (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Little et al., 2008; Vandell et al., 2007; Beckett et al., 2009; Lauer et al., 2006). First, a quality OST curriculum is content-rich, differentiated to student needs, and connected to students' school day. Second, instruction is organized into small grouping patterns (no larger than 10:1, ideally 3:1 or less) and instructional time is consistent and sustained (Farkas and Durham, 2006). Furthermore, instructional strategies are varied (both structured and unstructured, independent and collective, etc.), active (not desk time, worksheets, etc.), focused (program components devoted to developing skills), sequenced (using a sequenced set of activities designed to achieve skill development objectives), and explicit (targeting specific skills).

In addition to elements specific to curriculum and instruction, quality OST programs not only hire and retain tutors with both content and pedagogical knowledge, but also provide instructional staff with continuous support and authentic evaluation. Lastly, research suggests the importance of OST programs actively supporting positive relationships between tutors and students, as well as between students themselves. In the absence of a rigorous research base specific to instruction in SES, we draw upon research on OST in subsequent sections when examining instructional quality in SES programs. This is an appropriate choice as in many ways, the after school context is distinct from that of the day school because it occurs *after* school. In other words, students typically have already received six hours of instruction in a day *before* attending an OST program. Therefore, we draw on best practices literature specific to OST, as opposed to general research on instructional quality or on tutoring within the day school hours.

Findings: The Nature of SES Instruction

Qualitative research is uniquely suited to help us understand *why we are not seeing significant effects* on achievement from SES. From our mixed method study we identify two, primary reasons for the lack of effects. There is a "treatment exposure" problem (low attendance, actual amount of instructional time, variation between provider) and a quality problem (instruction is not enriching and is "more of the same", the curriculum does not tie into the day school curriculum, instruction does not equally meet all students' instructional needs). We also use the qualitative lens to *identify emerging best practices in SES*, by combining decades of research on OST best practices (sequence, active learning, etc.) with our data from observations to determine what is going well in SES instruction.

"Treatment Exposure"

This section will discuss issues related to "treatment exposure" in SES: attendance rates, advertised time versus the actual instructional time of sessions, "attendance flux" and variations in treatment within providers. As noted earlier, existing quantitative research on SES consistently shows low take-up rates among eligible students of between 12-17%. The quantitative portion of this study builds on this research by separately analyzing the multiple stages of selection—registration, attendance, and the number of hours attended. For example, we found across multiple sites and years that whites, Hispanics, and Asian Americans are significantly *less* likely to register for or attend SES, but if they attend, they are significantly *more* likely than African Americans to reach the important attendance threshold of 40 or more hours. English language learners (ELL students), alternatively, are more like to register and to attend more hours than non-ELL students.

If the research on effects of SES indicates that the students who do realize effects of SES must reach a threshold of attendance around 40 hours, our quantitative data offers important insight into why we may not be seeing effects. For example, looking at hours of tutoring across the five districts in our study, we find that only in Chicago are substantial numbers of students receiving at least 40 hours of SES (56% of elementary students), compared to 11% in Milwaukee and 14% in Minneapolis. The number of hours students attend SES (after registering) is influenced by a number of factors, including the dollars allocated per-student by the district for SES. For example, in 2008-09, Austin allocated $1334 per student for SES, while over 70% of the participating students received SES from a provider charging $75 or more per hour. At this rate per hour and with a budget of $1334, the maximum amount of tutoring a SES provider could offer a student was approximately 18 hours. In contrast, in Chicago (mentioned above), about 15% of students were served by the district provider that charged $13.25 per hour in 2008-09, and about 50% of students received SES from a provider charging $50 or less per hour. Lower hourly rates in Chicago led to students receiving more "treatment".

Clearly, quantitative work goes a long way in explaining the lack of significant effects on student achievement, especially considering the findings that suggest a threshold of attendance for effects. But, in conjunction with the quantitative work, our qualitative research offers critical insight into a more complex picture of "treatment exposure" that goes further in explaining low levels of effects on student outcomes.

Advertised versus instructional time. First, through over 90 observations of full tutoring sessions across districts we consistently observed a difference between the advertised time of a tutoring session and the actual instructional time. Providers are

required to advertise the average length of their sessions. Districts are invoiced at an hourly rate, based on the time students spend in tutoring. In our sample, advertised sessions ranged from 60 to 150 minutes. Irrespective of the format, students received less instructional time than what was advertised by providers, although the magnitude of these differences varied by format. As displayed in Table 1, online organizations most closely matched instructional time with advertised time. In school and community settings, average instructional time was often considerably less than average advertised time: approximately 19 minutes in the case of school-based tutoring and approximately 38 minutes in the case of community based tutoring.

Our fieldwork also offers insight into possible reasons for these discrepancies. In school-based tutoring, the format necessitates administrative tasks (e.g., rosters, snacks, transportation). In addition, tutoring sessions have to compete with other activities (such as sports activities) for time. On average, there tends to be larger numbers of students and time is needed for students to transition from school dismissal to the SES session. A school-based SES tutor in Milwaukee gave an example of these challenges:

> There's just too much material in one lesson - by the time you go pick up the students and bring 'em to your room they lost about five minutes. You know? Then you pass out the materials. I probably have 'em for about fifty-five minutes.

In some community sessions as well, logistics of transportation (e.g., handing out bus tokens, making sure that students get outside to meet the bus in time, or checking in with families as the provider picked up and dropped off students) sometimes prevented sessions from lasting for the full, advertised time. School and community settings also often include food, which is not the case in online or in –home sessions. Regardless of the

reasons, in sessions where there are demands on tutors to conduct activities other than instruction, participating students may not be getting the full instructional treatment and therefore not realizing significant effects. Again, where we do see effects on student achievement, it is when they receive a minimum threshold of treatment (i.e. 40 hours over the course of a school year).

Attendance flux. Second, observation data indicated a large number of tutoring sessions had considerable student mobility or "attendance flux", as measured by comparing the number of students observed in Observation Point A with the number of students observed in Observation Point B. When these numbers were not the same, we counted this observation as having attendance flux. Of the 63 observations with two or more students, 26 (41.3%) had mobility. Six out of the 26 sessions with mobility took place in community-based settings (6 out of 12 total community-based observations). 19 out of the 26 sessions with mobility took place in school-based settings (19 out of 52 total school-based observations). One out of two online sessions had mobility, and zero out of one home-based session had mobility. As noted above, the higher proportion of school-based attendance flux may reflect competition with other school-based activities. Through observations as well as interviews with both tutors and provider administrators, we know that school-based SES programs often compete with other after school programs (e.g. athletics, clubs, etc.) for students' time. For example, in one school-based tutoring observation, we noted a handful of students leaving a tutoring session early to attend a school-sponsored club that meets weekly to improve students' self-esteem. In addition to decreased instructional time during sessions, students who move frequently in and out of sessions may realize fewer benefits of the SES program.

Variation within provider. Lastly, we observed considerable variation in the "treatment" or instructional program *within* provider. The theory of action behind SES is that variation *between* providers creates a competitive marketplace from which parents can choose the most appropriate program for their students' needs. Variation *within* providers confounds the assumption that the axis of parental choice lies on the provider level, and also may complicate determining effects of the program on the provider level.

For example, sessions of very different instructional styles and quality were observed from one provider who offers services both in schools and homes. In one session at a school site, the tutor worked with three students together for one hour on a variety of math activities all focused on the same concepts around long division. This tutor was also the math specialist for the school and incorporated a number of activities and strategies from her day school resources to engage students in active learning. On the other hand, a tutor from the same provider worked with one student at home for two hours. She was not a certified teacher, although had coursework and experience in tutoring. She relied exclusively on the printed worksheets from the provider and jumped from concept to concept, even from math to reading, depending on the worksheet. The student was not actively engaged.

As this example illustrates, there is intra-provider variation in both instruction and in curriculum materials, as they came from a variety of formal (website or materials directly from provider administrators) and informal sources (tutors own resources or students' work from day school). The "in-use" curriculum often included formal materials, but was supplemented by materials from the tutor, which at times may be inconsistent with the formal curriculum.

"Quality Problem"

Although treatment exposure may help explain the lack of effects of SES on student outcomes, we argue that the central challenge of SES is rooted in the details of instructional capacity and practice –the *instructional core* (see Figure 1). None of the other elements of the SES program (attendance rates, costs, organizational structures) can make up for low quality instruction. Specifically we employ Cohen and Ball (1999) to focus on the instructional activities and resources in use, as well as the nature of tutor interactions with students. Through this frame we illustrate how SES instruction tightly mirrors traditional instructional methods and any examples of innovative instruction were not systematic, SES curriculum typically does not tie into the day school curriculum, and programs do not meet all students' particular instructional needs.

Instruction mirrors traditional formats. Research on OST tutoring emphasizes the importance of varied and activity based programming. However, the general model of the tutoring observed tended to mirror traditional academic learning environments. In other words, rather than providing something innovative, active and completely different from the school day, after school tutoring was based on traditional forms of teacher-directed instruction with reliance on worksheets and drilling. Although it may be possible for traditional instructional approaches to lead to quality OST programs (especially if other factors such as well-trained staff and small ratios are present), research on OST argues for differentiated programming that responds to students' different learning styles or needs. While there was some evidence of tutors responding to students' different learning styles, these were mostly included as part of written structures such as workbooks and worksheets. Students attending tutoring who might learn best via project-

based learning, arts integration or links to community-based activities encountered few opportunities of this sort. They were more apt to enter a tutoring session that looked a lot like the classroom they just left.

Specifically, only on very rare occasions did we observe students being provided with artistic/physical recreation activities. One example of this rare practice was a group project involving storyboarding a student-written comic strip and creating an artistic final product using graphic design tools. In addition, while students appeared relatively engaged in tutoring practice, the sessions themselves were largely teacher-directed. Students followed directions, but rarely had occasion to determine the nature of learning activities or engage with their tutors in thinking through the bigger questions behind the lessons (e.g. "What if the main character had not responded in the manner that she did to the central conflict?" or "Instead of adding up these two angles, what happens when you take one angle and you split it up in a particular way?") Lastly, while students often sat together at large tables or in pairs, there were very few opportunities in any district for small group work or cooperative activities. Rarely did we see students working cooperatively with each other on a lesson, in spite of clear opportunities for this to happen (i.e., students of varying abilities working together, students working on the same assignment).

Two providers across the five-district sample provide systematic exceptions to this pattern, although the degree to which tutors received training and/or followed through on multi-modal instructional approaches varied. One of these two providers encouraged their tutors to devise lessons and activities that situated learning in the context of students' cultures; this context may include particular content areas or artistic

forms. However, in some observed cases, hands-on and multi-modal activities were undercut by a lack of classroom management skills. The other of these two providers has developed a highly structured curriculum around the pedagogical approach of multiple intelligences. While these curricular materials are not rooted in a particular culture, they depend on tutors leading students to skill development via various methods, such as visual, kinesthetic, artistic, and aural, as well as traditional verbal instruction and discussion. One example of such curriculum in an observed session was recorded as follows:

> The tutor led the students in a vocabulary hunt. The students gathered together on the carpet in the back of the room while the tutor explained the activity. Each partnership was to walk around the room and find three cards taped throughout. While looking through the room they were to be holding hands or locking arms at all times. Once a group had their three cards they returned to the carpet. Some of the cards had pictures of a side of a coin or a symbol like "$" or the cent symbol. The other cards had words on them such as "dollar", "cent", "nickel", etc. The students all worked together to match the words with the appropriate symbol or picture. When they were done matching the teacher asked a series of questions such as "How much is a nickel worth?"

Again, observed examples of enriching instruction were rare, and as noted above, poor classroom management or pedagogic skills on the part of tutors could mute attempts at innovative instruction.

Qualitative interviews with stakeholders offer a nuanced picture of instruction, in particular the perspectives of providers, district administrators and parents. In general,

providers had a more positive view of SES instruction. Some reported the actual nature of their instruction was more innovative and enriching, for example through integrating arts and culture into instruction, or drawing on their own experiences in areas such as creative writing or theater. Many providers also cited the low ratio of students to tutors as enriching in and of itself, or their customer-driven approach. By tutoring a few students, the tutors feel they get to really know the students, the academic areas in which they are struggling in, and how to tailor their instruction to meet the unique needs of each individual student. In addition, providers talked about the connection a tutor can develop with a student's family and teachers. Providers call the students and their families regularly and check-in with parents on what the student needs while being tutored. Many providers also mentioned building relationships with the students' teachers to better understand in what areas the students are struggling and how best to help them.[iv]

Lastly, some providers cite their experience working with the particular population of students in the SES program. Several providers mention that they have experience working with English language learners and students of color, so they know how to connect with their students and their families. For example, one tutor described an instructional interaction with one of her students:

> So I'm like, 'Read to a tune.' 'Ah Miss, I can't do that.' 'Okay, well rap to the tune. Whatever you have to do to read this.' And then when he gets stuck on a word, 'Okay sound it out. How would you say it if you slowed it up and you rapped it? How would you use it?' And usually that clicks in his head and he gets. So he loves doing it that way. So we would do little assignments where, 'Okay next week I want you to go over this what we just read, and I want you to give me

> a beat to it.' So when you come back it's pretty much he has it memorized because it's like he made a beat to it, and now in his head he's like, 'Ah I can read. Like I can really read this and understand it.' Because most people listen to music, but you don't understand it. And that's the way he is. He could read stuff, but he couldn't really comprehend it. But when it comes to music, like he comprehends music, he understands it.

This illustrates a positive example of instruction being enriching, but as subsequent sections will discuss, this type of innovation is seldom systematized or sustainable.

In contrast, district administrative staff felt SES instruction tended to be traditional and used rote/drill techniques. For example, one administrator commented, "Well it's just that what they're mostly doing is all generic. It's all, 'Oh, you're in seventh grade? Okay, here's your seventh grade packet. Here's seventh grade [state test preparation workbook]. Start with worksheet one and go to worksheet 12.' You know, and just go down the line." Some districts also noted that they do not have adequate staffing or authority to sufficiently evaluate the quality of the SES providers' instruction. Similarly, parents felt the nature of SES instruction was not innovative and in fact, in many cases lacks the pedagogical structure that may take place in a traditional classroom setting. Parents witnessed cases were the SES tutors or instructors were disengaged which led them to question the efficacy and rigor of the services. In some cases parents were unaware of the instructional practices and requested more information from the providers beyond the individualized student reports. One parent described their child's experience with an online provider:

> That's why I'm sayin' that with that one, she stayed after school and there was the promise of the laptop at the end. I wouldn't do it again. Because the instructor didn't seem to be engaged. She just seemed to kinda be waiting for it to be over. And the kids kinda seemed to be playin'. They were supposed to be doin' work on the computer. I couldn't see whether she had actually completed anything that was substantial.

Although we certainly observed some uninspired instruction and disengaged students, there were tutors who exhibited thoughtful curriculum planning, as well as experienced and skilled teaching techniques. Yet, the majority of these examples of quality instruction were atomized - the result of individual tutors, not provider-level efforts. One tutor described her process of integrating more enriching curriculum materials into her tutoring sessions:

> I am not um a big fan of [the provider's] materials. I like to pick and pull - I'm not a drill and kill person. Just from my experience in the classroom. So a lot of the stuff that I pull is from investigations. You know, from hands-on type curricular material that was a curriculum that we had in the district several years ago. So that's the main thing that I use for fractions. So we worked with pattern blocks and they got to use the manipulatives and then I moved them to the more concrete.

Similarly, another tutor described how he deviated from the provider's curriculum to further engage one of his students:

> It's just whatever gets the job done, you know? A number of weeks this one child had been trying to bring his transformers to the table where we were working.

> And his mom was always taking 'em away from him. And we would begin every session rather upset because he didn't have his Transformers. So one day I said, 'Hey. Let's work with the Transformers. You think you can teach Megatron here how to count to twenty?' And we did.

In our experience, the high-quality instruction hoped for in parent choice programs such as SES sporadically emerged more as a result of the motivation and abilities of individual tutors, as opposed to the systematic efforts of an entire provider. Previous studies in the area of market-based educational reforms also have shown competition to result in conformity as opposed to diversity and innovation (Adnett & Davies, 2000).

In yet another example, a classroom was observed where students rotated between three tutors, each focused on a different skill set. One tutor worked on pre-reading strategies using a real telescope, video clip on constellations, and finally, a short reading passage. A second tutor did a math activity on fractions using M&Ms to chart color distributions. A third tutor used discussion around a collection of pictures to focus on science, specifically species classification. The tutors explained that although they sometimes use the provider's formal curriculum as supplemental materials, they came up with this system and the activities on their own in response to the needs of their students. This was the only classroom at this school site, from this provider, that used a system of rotating stations.

Curriculum is seldom aligned to the day school. In addition to suggesting instruction (the "how" of learning) is innovative and enriching, research on after school academic programs suggests that the curricula of tutoring programs (the "what" of

learning) should align with that of students' day school. Although alignment to common curriculum standards is important, we argue this does not go far enough. For example, if a district uses Six Trait Writing as the structure of its language arts instruction, it is best practice for tutoring instruction to do the same. Yet, in our fieldwork, coherence between tutoring and day school curricula was typically a default connection resulting from tutors also being staff at the students' school. It was up to individual tutors to seek quality connections between students' school work and the content of tutoring sessions.

In the best of these instances a tutor took advantage of these connections by frequently touching base with students' teachers, and in some instances, accessing students' special education IEPs (Individual Education Plans) if necessary. These connections were less likely to happen with online and in-home formats, where tutors had less interaction with the school context. In these instances, curricular connections to the day school curriculum would have to come through the student.

It should be noted that SES sessions mirrored the day school in terms of content focus, with the majority of time spent on reading, language arts and mathematics. However, this focus on reading and mathematics reflects the stated focus of the SES legislation. SES is a sanction of not meeting AYP and thus the goal of SES is to help schools get off AYP lists, which are tied to state tests in reading, language arts and math. Across districts, providers followed the letter of the law in terms of the instructional focus of programming. In 49 of 94 observations (52%), reading and language arts was the focus of the intervention. Slightly more tutoring sessions included mathematics than reading sessions. In 55 out of 94 (59%) of the observations, math enrichment was the focus of the tutoring session.

Interestingly, in 15 out of 56 sessions observed (27%) in year 1 and in 6 out of 38 sessions observed (16%) in year 2, the explicit focus of the tutoring was test preparation activities. In Texas—a state that has explicitly adapted and expanded its school-day materials to be closely aligned with state standards and assessments (TAKS)—students completed worksheets photocopied from the test preparation booklet for their grade level. Although aligned to curricular content (math, reading, language arts) is important, it is not as nuanced as a provider aligning a curricular approach to that of the day school.

Stakeholders' perspectives on curriculum. Again, our qualitative interviews with stakeholders offer a nuanced picture of the nature of SES curriculum. Many of the providers report using their own, proprietary curriculum, particularly in the case of national providers. Others purchase packaged curriculum from educational publishers. Especially for national providers, this makes it even more challenging to tailor tutoring curriculum to the particular curricular context of their students' schools. Some providers were critical of the district curriculum and felt they had to offer a better product. Others felt the prohibition of homework help in the policy limits what non-school-staff tutors can do to align with day school curriculum. Yet, many saw the benefit of alignment. For example, a tutor in Austin explained "You wanna hopefully give them activities that will review previous concepts that the teachers have already gone over, or I don't know, present them in different modes, or in different ways."

A number of providers described having a greater connection with the day school program when they had a positive relationship with a principal. For example, one provider in Chicago talked about how wonderful it is to work in a school where the principal is supportive of SES and is very concerned with the success of their students as

that mindset carries over into the teachers they hire and the way they run the school. Both providers and district administration in one district report an improved effort to align curricula, partly as a result of a new district policy where schools can identify "preferred providers". Providers in Austin indicated that they believe their curriculum is aligned with the day school day curriculum because they communicate with the students' teachers and school and district staff to determine where the students are academically and in what areas they need help. It should be noted that this does not necessarily equate to tutors using the same curricular approaches. In addition, providers in two of the districts report that both the SES curriculum and the school curriculum are designed to teach test skills for the state standardized assessment. They also use data the district provides on the students (i.e., state test scores) to determine student needs. However, this does not mean day school and tutoring curricula progress through these skills in the same order or speed. This provides further illustration of how important content (instructional materials) is to instructional capacity (see Figure 1), as well as how complicated establishing strong and consistent instructional content can be.

District staff indicated the SES curriculum should be aligned with the day school curriculum, but they thought many providers do not communicate with teachers. As a result, the curriculum used by many providers is not aligned with the day school day curriculum. District staff did say providers use district data to create student learning plans. An administrator in one district described the importance of alignment, as well as what it would look like in an actual tutoring session:

> If I'm a tutor, I would come in and say, 'what'd you do in class today?' 'Worked on polynomials,' whatever, or 'we worked on reading comprehension of a

> narrative story,' or something like that, and I would mine for some data. I wouldn't, you know, say 'pull out your homework assignment and let's just work from that,' no, mine for data from the student, find out what's going on in the classroom, and then see how you can connect the instruction that's taking place during the tutoring session with the prior knowledge and experience that the student is getting on a regular class. I mean, that's just basic, 101, teaching, but, with no highly qualified teacher provision in SES, maybe some of the tutors didn't get basic 101 teaching.

This same administrator points out that such alignment requires structure as well as commitment from both the district and providers:

> I got a couple calls from SES site coordinators this year, who said, 'I've got teachers that want to know what the students are doing in their tutoring sessions, because they're improving in the classroom,' and we didn't have a systematic way to allow teachers to see what the individual learning plans were for students or to look at the progress notes that students were, that providers were writing up on students. So one of the things that we'd really like to do for next year is encourage providers to do a more rigorous job of providing feedback on the progress reports that they're required to do four times a year.

Indeed, a number of districts felt they had begun to put structures in place to better facilitate communication and alignment between schools and providers. For example, a district administrator explained:

> We've had conversations with providers about alignment in the sense of letting them know very clearly what's happening in the regular day. What the curricular

> side of our house has articulated as the goals, and, you know, needs of our students at large and encouraging them to try to align their practices with those things. And so those things have been very formal and very intentional. And other things have just been kind of informal conversations with providers on how you can, you know, navigate the school community and understand how to build those relationships. But it has all been towards the end of serving kids best.

Similarly, administrators in one district felt many providers were moving closer to alignment, partly as a result of the district action such as requiring students' tutor learning plans to match with district learning targets and opening up district professional development around curriculum to tutoring staff.

Despite attempts on the part of providers and districts, the overarching theme among parents was that SES provider curriculum is not fully synchronized to the day school curriculum. For example, one parent lamented, "Well, the services did a lot of good to my son. But at the same time I was finding it was not syncing with the homework that he was getting from the school." In many cases, students would work on one of the two subjects (ELA or Math) and it would not coincide with what students were learning in their day school classrooms, ""[My son], he's tellin' me that they're not covering any- it's like totally different levels of what they're studying [at school]. Here at the tutoring it's math, but it has no connection." Many parents requested that they would like to see more cooperation between the providers and the school in order to bridge the content gap that occurs during the SES services.

All student needs not equally met. Through observations, interviews and focus groups we found that SES instruction typically does not equally meet all students' instructional needs, especially for students with disabilities and English language learners (ELL). Such data sheds important light on the nature of instruction, as well as possible factors in the low level of effects on student achievement. This is particularly critical insight when considering how important these two student populations are to the mandate of NCLB (e.g. increased spotlight on accountability for subgroups' performance).

According to providers' advertised services, 14 out of 20 providers in our sample advertised that they could serve ELL students, at least in a limited way or for limited languages. Thirteen out of 20 (though not necessarily the same) providers advertised that they could serve students with disabilities, at least in a limited way or for limited special needs. A major obstacle for providers, tutors, and researchers was identifying students with documented ELL or special education needs. The majority of tutors we observed and interviewed did not have access to IEPs or district data on ELL identification. Therefore, both instructional methods as well as observations of these methods for such subgroups may have limited ability to project patterns. However, in a few cases there was evidence of tutor knowledge of ELL and special needs students. The following composite vignette of providers serving ELL students in one site illustrates the ways in which students in these subgroups were and were not served.

> Providers and tutors discuss difficulty in communicating with students and/or their parents who speak less common foreign languages (e.g., Somali, Vietnamese). Several Spanish-speaking tutors reported using Spanish and English to instruct and clarify; with non-Spanish-speaking families, tutors used a variety

of strategies. Some bilingual (Spanish-English) tutors used their informal knowledge of language learning to check vocabulary (e.g., Tutor: "What is this word? 'Gen-er-a-tion.' What that means is, you have a son, [starts drawing a diagram/picture] a father, a grandfather, a great-grandfather..." "Grandmother," adds the student). Since nearly all tutors had only informal language training, if any, accurate knowledge of students' fluency levels was sparse and checks for understanding were sporadic.

Regarding students with disabilities, many providers did not have sufficient information to appropriately identify students with disabilities. Most providers only knew of students with disabilities because their tutors also were teachers in the day school or parents notified them. In our sample of districts, from the providers' perspective, the districts did not have a systematic process to provide this information. This could be the result of legal issues with sharing IEP information. With a few exceptions, tutors did not have specific training or certification in working with students with disabilities. Although we did observe many sessions with certified teachers as tutors. Most of these tutors would have had training related to students with disabilities as part of their certification process and in many cases considerable experience working with students with disabilities in their day classrooms. We did not find any examples of curriculum specifically formatted to accommodate the particular needs of students with disabilities. For example, one tutor described using the same curriculum with students with disabilities as with the other students, and the only instructional adaptation was she gave them more "one on one attention." In addition, existing curriculum was sometimes "slowed down" for students with disabilities or a lower grade level was used. When

asked what is different in how he approaches a tutoring session with students with disabilities, one tutor responded, “I guess everything - I mean in terms of what I'm planning on achieving for that lesson, how I behave, the speed with which we conduct the session.”

Stakeholders’ perspectives on students with special needs. An important component of this qualitative data is interviews with providers, district staff and parents, which help to explain what is unobservable in tutoring sessions. Interviews, along with all the facets of our qualitative data, offer critical detail to these themes, expanding on what the quantitative data alone can provide. In general, the providers feel they are providing services tailored to students’ individual needs. Many providers help ELL students by having bilingual staff, “I have not had very many students so far who struggle with language to the degree that it’s really been a barrier, and I take all comers. Um, there’ve been a few issues with Spanish-speaking families, I speak a smattering of Spanish, I’ve been able to work through family members, so again it’s just a matter of that pragmatic approach, I just do what needs to be done.” But in very few instances did providers discuss using a specific curriculum or instructional strategies for ELLs or students with disabilities. For example, one tutor described her approach to working with a student with a learning disability, “With D we started out doing the basic I do with all my kids, but it was just a little harder for him. So we changed it up. I simplified all of the questions that I was asking him and I broke down the concepts.” Although the tutor slowed down the instruction, it was not specifically differentiated to the special needs. .

District staff did not think SES providers were responding to all students’ needs, especially ELL and students with disabilities. Some district staff spoke about providing

IEPs, state test scores, and information regarding student ELL and disability status to the providers, but the providers do not use this information to differentiate their instruction. One district administrator said it was the providers' job to find and train qualified staff who could meet students' and parents' language needs:

> You want to provide services in [this district]? Get a multilingual staff, period. The people who are monolingual have no business in the business. This is who our district is, we are over one-fourth English language learners, we are almost a third families who speak a language other than English in the home, you want to do business here, figure it out. I have no patience for that. That's, that's where these folks are choosing to do business, they have to figure it out, just like we have to figure it out.

While district administrators acknowledged the challenges in disseminating information about student language or disability status, many felt it was the primarily the providers' responsibility to figure out how to get the right services for students with particular instructional needs.

Understanding the quality of instruction means looking at classroom practice, but also listening to how students and parents filter these experiences. Somewhat different from our observational data, many parents in our focus groups felt that their child's needs were met related to language and disability. For example, one parent reported, "They told me things that they would do. Like give her time to talk when she needs to talk. If she needed to have a little more time for testing or something, that they would do that. They were pretty compensating about that." Regarding students with disabilities, many parents actually approached the provider to inform them of their child's disability, "I informed.

But the first day I went with [my daughter] and I just informed them of that." They felt with smaller student to teacher ratios, SES instructors were able to provide instruction that would service students with disabilities. With regards to helping ELLs, parents also felt that SES providers did what they could. There was more of an issue regarding the dissemination of information and explanations of the implementation of the programs in Spanish than issues with instruction. Although it is promising that many parents felt their students' special needs were addressed by providers, our other data sources suggest considerable room for improvement in the quality of instruction for ELLs and students with disabilities.

Findings: Emerging Best Practices

Much of these findings (lack of enriching instruction, curriculum not aligned to day school, and insufficient attention to particular student needs) point to a need to map, systematize and encourage any emerging best practices in SES instruction. Our work in this area is emerging, but suggests ways in which qualitative research can examine a program such as supplemental educational services in ways quantitative cannot. We are developing more sensitive measures of instructional practice that go beyond test scores and laying the foundations for being able to not only establish best practices for SES, but suggest ways to structure organizations and policy to facilitate these best practices.

First, what did we observe specific to OST best practices research in relation to the instructional core: how educators approach and understand their role in the instructional setting, the instructional activities and resources that they use, and the nature of their interactions with students in these settings (see Figure 1)? To assist in this analysis we compiled clusters of indicators from the observtion instrument into each best

practice area. The cluster groups, based on the above highlighted OST research, are: varied, active, focused, targeted, relationships, tutor knowledge; and, differentiation. We added another cluster called "student engagement" that included all of the engagement-oriented indicators.

We compared ratings on this cluster to the ratings on the seven best-practice clusters (See Table 2). OST cluster numbers were calculated by adding the total ratings for each indicator in each cluster and dividing that sum by the total possible ratings. Unobservable or not applicable indicators were not included. In general, these rating clusters illustrate two of the larger themes examined above, that instruction lacked:

> *Enrichment or innovation*. Across the board the "Active" cluster received very low ratings (average = .14), while the "Varied" cluster was higher (average = 0.56) but still had room for improvement.
>
> *Differentiation to student needs*. The "Differentiation" cluster was also higher, but showed room for improvement (average = 0.57).

On the other hand, one of the areas of best practice receiving the highest rating was "Focused", with an average of 0.77. In other words, tutors structured sessions around instructional tasks and were focused on student learning for the duration of the session. Interestingly, one positive relationships *between* clusters stood out: in all individual observations that had high ratings (>.8) for student engagement, ratings for the "Focused" cluster and the "Relationships" cluster were also high (>.8). This positive relationship indicates a need to look more closely at these two best practices in order to understand

how, if at all, these specific patterns of tutoring practice result in higher student engagement.

Second, we found grouping patterns in most tutoring sessions to be in line with OST best practices research (<1:10). By grouping pattern, we mean the allocation of staff to students *for the purpose of* instruction. Based on our observations, grouping pattern is a more accurate indicator of staffing resources than tutor/pupil ratio. To illustrate, two tutors may be assigned to four students (ratio = 2:4), but only one of the tutors might be involved in instruction (grouping pattern = 1:4). Structured academic support in a one-on-one setting is typically impossible in day school classrooms, unless the student is pulled out of the classroom. On the other hand, in the tutoring we observed, grouping patterns of 1:3 or less were available in the majority of sessions (67/94, or 71%). No tutoring session had a grouping pattern larger than 1:11. We found that certain tutoring formats were more likely to have smaller grouping patters. Namely, home-based tutoring almost always involved a 1:1 grouping. Slightly over half of all other observations, (i.e. excluding home-based tutoring) involved some 1:1 grouping. Parents across districts expressed satisfaction with the grouping patterns in their programs, "In general the tutoring programs have smaller teacher to student ratios. It's a positive thing!"

Lastly, an important element of our observations to examine is that tutors were often observed "engaging positively" with students (.89) across all districts and formats.[v] In addition, tutoring sessions had high ratings on a variety of related indicators such as "Provide constructive criticism"; "Encourage participation from disengaged students"; and "Listen actively and attentively to students").

This attention to positive tutor-student relationships was reflected by a number of providers who noted both the instructional and personal benefits. One tutor described the important effects of positive relationships:

> I cannot teach them everything they need to know in the amount of time that I have to work with them, but if I can make them realize that they're capable learners, that they're smart, that the world is interesting, that they're gonna raise their hand more in class. They're gonna pay more attention during the school day so that the school day teacher is more effective with that student.

When asked to describe a unique contribution of SES to students' lives, many tutors first mentioned the opportunity it provides to have another adult who cares about a student's success. [vi]

Conclusion: Implications for Policy and Research

As discussed in previous sections, states and districts are spending billions of Title I dollars to implement SES and a growing body of research is showing SES to have little to no effect on student achievement. Therefore, we employed a critical, nuanced lens to look inside the black box of the SES instructional setting and identify two, primary reasons for the lack of effects. There is a "*treatment exposure*" problem (low attendance, actual amount of instructional time, variation between provider) and a *quality problem* (instruction is not enriching, the curriculum does not tie into the day school curriculum, and instruction does not equally meet all students' instructional needs). Yet, we also observed some best practices emerging in SES that must be systematized and structures put in place to best facilitate them. Access to and quality of OST programs improve when there are coordinated systems in place (Bodilly et al, 2010).

We drew upon instructional research such as Cohen and Ball (1999) to frame our investigation in terms of the "instructional capacity" (see Figure 1) in SES and focused on the instructional core of SES, meaning how educators approach and understand their role in the instructional setting, the instructional activities and resources that they use and how they use them (e.g. what they do under the broad set of activities termed homework help) and the nature of their interactions with students and families within and beyond these settings. An important element of our inquiry was to consider the multiple factors interacting with the instructional core of tutoring (see Figure 1), which in turn, affect the instructional capacity and quality of tutoring.

Our research on the instructional core of SES indicates that while there are some dominant patterns BY provider in how the SES model is implemented (i.e. instructional delivery strategies), the details of how SES as an instructional intervention is enacted can vary *within* provider. In other words, the same provider can exhibit very different approaches depending on the setting or individual tutor. These variations can have an impact on how students and families encounter the intervention and its efficacy in improving student learning, as well as create challenges in measuring effects on the provider level. Further, the default mode of SES instruction frequently mirrors traditional classrooms with desktime and worksheets, contrary to the idea that providing parents with tutoring "vouchers" inject more innovation and greater diversity in programming.

Previous studies in the area of market-based educational reforms also have shown competition to result in conformity as opposed to diversity and innovation (Adnett & Davies, 2000). While there are atomized exceptions to the rule, under conditions of uncertainty and minimal supports, SES instruction can end up very similar to the most

ineffective public schooling in terms of its emphasis on "skill and drill" rather than innovative and differentiated learning informed by careful and thoughtful assessment of student needs. As a consequence, programming offered to students by the *same* provider can be uneven; and where innovation and quality instruction occurs it tends to be hidden from view and therefore replication. In addition, instruction is seldom differentiated to the unique needs of critical student populations, such as ELLs and students with disabilities.

Clearly, it is not an easy task to transform a policy design founded on the principles of the marketplace into something that is connected to and integrated with the goals and processes of public education. In order for SES to better synchronize with the realities of the instructional setting faced by tutors and students, as well as the real issues that matter most for students, we suggest that researchers examining parental choice reforms go beyond focusing on the choice mechanism itself, but to the reality of what parents and their students experience. We urge researchers to attend to instructional setting so that we can see and understand SES from students', parents' and educators' experiences…from inside of the classroom as opposed to primarily from the external, overly-rational vantage point of classic market theory. The theory of action behind SES is that parental choice in after school programming will increase competition in the marketplace and contribute to more responsive and innovative programming for students needing remedial instruction.

Following the lead of policy, much research to date on the quality of SES has focused on trying to understand what kinds of treatments by individual providers work best. The idea is that once this treatment has been identified, it can and should be brought

to scale. Improving what we know about SES as a treatment writ large - whether it contributes to improved student outcomes and how – requires that we get closer to the instructional core.

Table 1: Advertised versus instructional time by format, in minutes

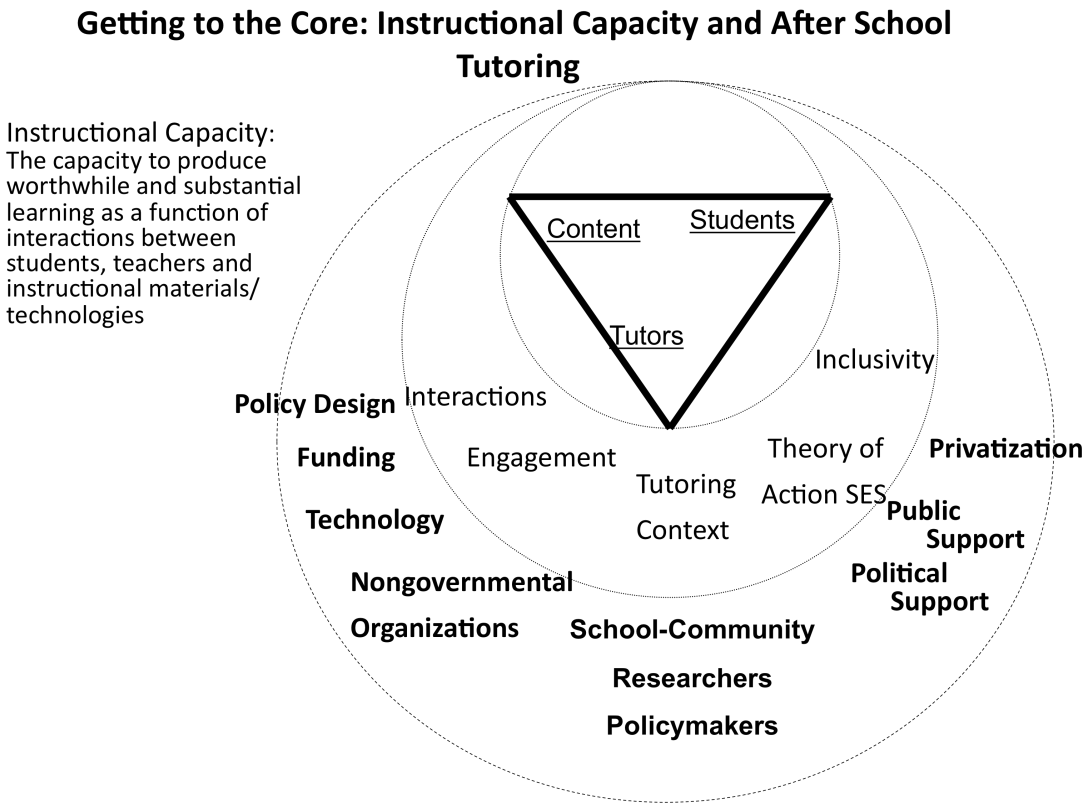
FORMAT	*Advertised time*			*Instructional time*			*Difference*		
	Year 1	*Year 2*	*All*	*Year 1*	*Year 2*	*All*	*Year 1*	*Year 2*	*All*
Online	67.5 (N=6)	55 (N=6)	61.3 (N=12)	57.8 (N=6)	54 (N=6)	55.9 (N=12)	-9.7 (N=6)	-1 (N=6)	-5.3 (N=12)
Offline	90.6 (N=50)	87.2 (N=32)	89.3 (N=82)	70.8 (N=50)	70.2 (N=32)	70.6 (N=82)	-19.8 (N=50)	-19.0 (N=32)	18.7 (N=82)
Home	64.3 (N=14)	60 (N=4)	63.3 (N=18)	60.6 (N=14)	55.3 (N=4)	59.4 (N=18)	-3.6 (N=14)	-4.8 (N=4)	-3.9 (N=18)
School	95.6 (N=27)	91.2 (N=25)	93.5 (N=52)	76.3 (N=27)	71.8 (N=25)	74.2 (N=52)	-19.2 (N=27)	-19.4 (N=25)	-19.3 (N=52)
Community	116.7 (N=9)	90 (N=3)	110 (N=12)	70.0 (N=9)	76.7 (N=3)	71.7 (N=12)	-46.7 (N=9)	-13.3 (N=3)	-38.3 (N=12)

Table 2: OST best practices indicator clusters

OST Best Practice:	Indicators in Cluster:	Average Rating:
Curriculum that is **Differentiated** to student needs	• Curriculum differentiated to ELL (3.2.11) • Curriculum differentiated for students with disabilities (3.2.12) • Show evidence of accommodations (3.3.10) • Check that ELL students understand (3.3.9) • Deal effectively with language barriers (3.3.14) • Inclusive practices (3.3.15)	0.57
Instruction that is **Varied** (both structured and unstructured, independent and collective, etc.)	• Encourage students to solve own problems (3.3.7) • Actively facilitate discussion (3.3.12) • Choose what/how they do something (3.3.19) • Provide direct instruction (3.3.3) • Demonstrate/model concept (3.3.4)	0.56
Instruction that is **Active** (not desk time, worksheets, etc.)	• Actively facilitate discussion (3.3.12) • Community/family-linked (3.2.7) • Artistic/physical recreation activities (3.2.6)	0.14
Instruction that is **Focused** (program components devoted to developing skills)	• Cognitive/enrichment activities (3.2.5) • Clearly focused on instruction (3.3.11) • Students demonstrate understanding of a concept/skill (3.3.23) • Constructively critique/offer feedback (3.3.6) • Students focused/actively participating (3.4.10)	0.77
Instruction that is explicit (**targeting** of specific skills)	• Provide clear instructions (3.2.9) • Indicate skill focus (3.2.2) • Communicate goals, purpose (3.3.2) • Demonstrate/model a concept or skill (3.3.4)	0.77
Positive **relationships** between tutor and student, as well as between peers	• Listen actively and attentively (3.4.2) • Work cooperatively (3.3.18) • Engage in peer-peer tutoring (3.3.22) • Praise/encourage students (3.4.3) • Engage positively w/students (3.4.4) • Student interactions positive (3.4.8) • Students respond to staff (3.4.9)	0.71
Teachers/tutors who have both content and pedagogical **knowledge**	• Provide accurate answers (3.3.8) • Actively facilitate discussion (3.3.12) • Demonstrate/model concept or skill (3.3.4) • Clearly focused on instruction (3.3.11)	0.72
Student Engagement Cluster	• Materials used by student in goal of instruction (3.2.19) • Discuss/ask questions about materials (3.2.20) • Listen actively to presentation (3.3.17) • Work cooperatively (3.3.18) • Choose what or how they do something (3.3.19) • Participate in structured discussions (3.3.20) • Ask why, how, or what-if questions (3.3.21) • Engage in peer-peer tutoring (3.3.22) • Demonstrate understanding of a concept or skill (3.3.23)	0.57

	• Push themselves intellectually, creatively, etc. (3.3.25) • Student interactions positive with one another (3.4.8) • Respond to staff directions (3.4.9) • Focused and/or actively participating (3.4.10)	

Figure 1: Getting to the core: Instructional capacity and after school tutoring



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[i] Springer et al. (2009) and Zimmer et al. (2006) likewise found more consistent, positive effects of SES on students' math (vs. reading) gains in their studies of SES in large, urban school districts.

[ii] To date, we have conducted three reliability training sessions with the qualitative research team to ensure consistency in ratings. In each session the research team rated the same video segment of an instructional session and went through each indicator to compare ratings. Validity of the instrument is ensured by the development process, whereas its structure and content is based on well-tested, existing observation instruments for OST, existing literature on the best practices for OST, and the theory of action in the SES policy. We continue to test and refine the data collection process as the study progresses. A copy of the instrument is available upon request.

[iii] However, obtaining a sample perfectly representative of these provider characteristics proved challenging. Limitations include reluctance on the part of providers; low numbers of providers with more than one year of service in smaller urban districts (i.e., districts that only recently had to start offering SES); and limited numbers of providers that target ELL students and students with disabilities.

[iv] Although these characteristics may represent a departure from the traditional day school format (e.g. 1:1 ratio), they may not be terribly different from traditional tutoring formats.

[v] As described in our manual, "engaging positively" means: "Staff have generally positive interactions with students. These interactions are constructive and supportive. Staff use affirming words and tone of voice, speaking in a manner that indicates respect, appreciation, and belief in the value and potential of students. Staff initiate informal conversations with students and respond to students' efforts to talk to them by showing interest and extending the conversation. Staff make an effort to build relationships with the students through a variety of means. Staff also move around to student work spaces, instead of staying in one place (i.e., their desk) the entire session."

[vi] It should be noted that homework was not done in the vast number of tutoring sessions observed. In approximately 13% of all sessions observed (12 of 94 sessions), students attending SES tutoring sessions worked on homework assigned by day classroom teachers.