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**The TutorMate Study**  
**Innovations for Learning**  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As students develop reading fluency in first grade, a core component of their reading instruction is reading increasingly complex stories with someone who can support their reading. This support is typically provided by the classroom teacher, one or more parents, and peers. This research focuses on a fourth potential source of support: volunteers, and in particular, volunteers that are connected to the students virtually while they read. By providing a virtual volunteer program, volunteer opportunities can be offered to a far larger group of potential volunteers who would otherwise be unable to serve children due to time or distance constraints. As a result, this program is scaling rapidly across 30 cities in the United States, Canada and Great Britain. This research highlights the positive learning outcomes of this program for first grade students in 29 cities in the United States plus London and Toronto.

### Key Findings

#### Reading Outcomes

**TutorMate had a positive impact on students' reading outcomes. The more tutoring sessions students participated in, the greater the gains.**

- **Students that participated in 15 or more tutoring sessions saw higher average gains (5.2 levels) in their reading level** than students that participated in 5 or less tutoring sessions (1.0 level).
- The percentage of students that made **reading level gains** was **higher in the group that participated in 15 or more tutoring sessions** (97% or 2,431) than for students in the group participating in 5 or less sessions (56% or 498).
- **More tutoring sessions resulted in higher average reading levels.** Those students that participated in 20 plus sessions averaged gains of 5.8 reading levels; students that participated in 15 sessions saw an average increase of 4.6 while students that participated in 5 sessions averaged an increase of 2 reading levels.
- **More tutoring sessions resulted in a higher percentage of students that completed Grade 1 proficient in reading** as measured by Innovations for Learning (IFL) leveled texts.

#### Teacher Perceptions

- **Teachers reported a high level of satisfaction with TutorMate.** Ninety-six percent or 105 were satisfied; 84% were extremely or highly satisfied.
- **Teachers described their students as motivated and excited to participate in the tutoring sessions** and commented that **students enjoyed connecting with an adult in the community.**
- **Nearly all teachers (97% or 106/109) believed the program benefited their students** (Figure 6). Among those, 89% (97) thought it was very or highly beneficial. They believed the overall greatest benefit they observed with participating students was the **combination of increased reading proficiency, improved confidence, and greater love of reading** (61.47% or 67 teachers).

- **The majority (28 or 57%) of teachers praised the program, some (15 or 30.6%) indicating they would like more tutors available to support more of their students.** 88% would like to have the program in their classrooms again.

### Tutor Perceptions

- **95% of tutors felt good about their experience with the TutorMate Program.** The percentage rating their experience excellent was 28.57, very good 52.38, and good 14.29.
- **The tutors compared volunteering in TutorMate favorably to other programs they've undertaken through their employer organization.** 76% thought it was more engaging than other experiences they've had.
- **95% said it was likely they would be tutoring in the program next year.**

## THE TUTORMATE STUDY

### Introduction

Tutormate is an online volunteer tutoring program designed to support literacy learning of students in under resourced, high needs schools. The program targets grade 1 students that teachers deem will achieve reading proficiency by the end of the school year with the additional support and practice a tutor provides. Tutors connect to their assigned student in the classroom via computer. Using IFL tools, the tutor and student read together and play learning games designed to strengthen the student's word knowledge. Sessions last approximately 30 minutes.

The purpose of the study was to better understand the impact of tutoring on students EOY Grade 1 reading proficiency when they received 15+ tutoring sessions as compared to those receiving 1-5 tutoring sessions during the year. Findings in this report represent data from 3,393 students that participated in TutorMate in the 2018-2019 school year. The group that received 15 or more tutoring sessions included 2,503 students; 890 students received between 1 – 5 tutoring sessions.

### Discussion of Key Findings of the TutorMate Study

#### Reading Proficiency Outcomes

In the online tutoring sessions, tutors and students read IFL leveled texts. Levels A – L represent a progression from beginning kindergarten through mid-year second grade content.

**Students that participated in 15 or more tutoring sessions saw higher average gains (5.2 levels) in their reading level than students that participated in 5 or less tutoring sessions (1 reading level) (Figure 1).** Also, the percentage of students that made **reading level gains** was **higher in the group that participated in 15 or more tutoring sessions (97% or 2,431)** than for students in the group participating in 5 or less sessions (56% or 498) (Figure 2).



Figure 1: Students' Average Reading Level Gains by Number of Tutoring Sessions

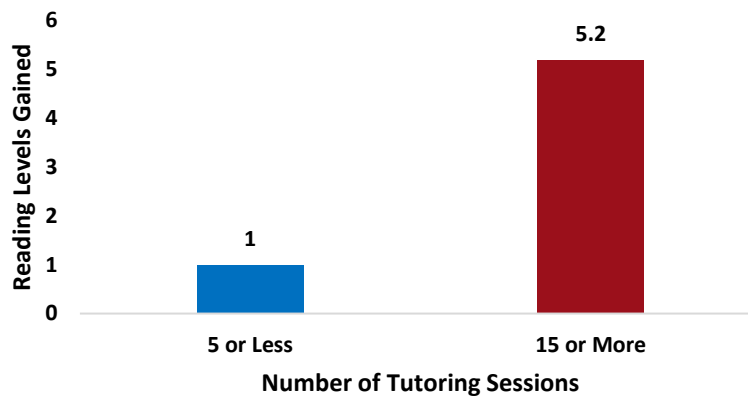
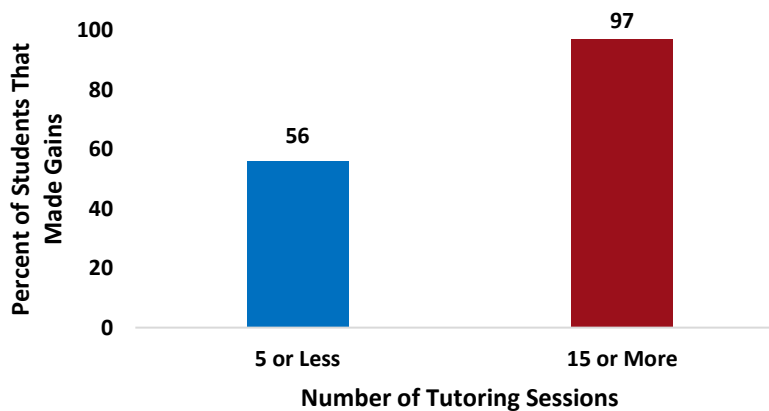


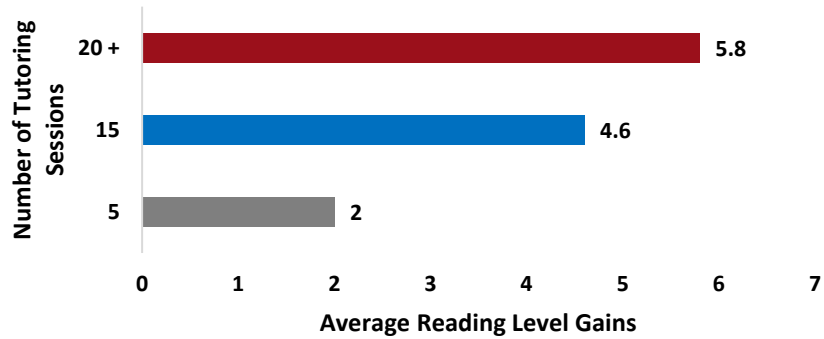
Figure 2: Percentage of Students that Made Reading Level Gains by Number of Tutoring Sessions



The difference in student's progress based on their number of tutoring sessions is evident when looking at the results for students that received 5, 15, or 20 plus tutoring sessions (Figure 3). Data show that **more tutoring sessions resulted in higher average reading levels**. Those students that participated in 20 plus sessions averaged gains of 5.8 reading levels; students that participated in 15 sessions saw an average increase of 4.6 while students that participated in 5 sessions averaged an increase of 2 reading levels.

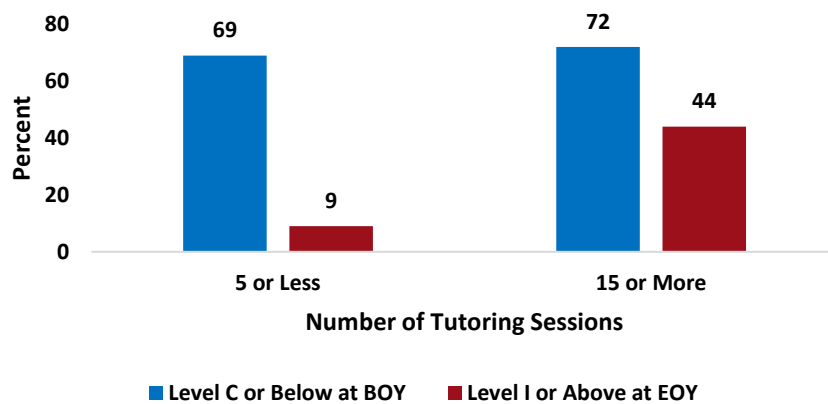


Figure 3: Comparison of Average Reading Level Gains by 5, 15, and 20 Plus Tutoring Sessions



Given the difference in gains it was important to consider students reading level when they began tutoring. It was found that a similar percentage of students in each group began reading at level C or lower; 69% of students in the 5 or less group and 72% in the 15 or more group. Level C is below BOY Grade 1 proficiency. In contrast, 44% (1,110) of students in the 15 plus group achieved level I or higher (Grade 1 EOY proficiency) following their tutoring compared to 9% (83) of the 5 or less group (Figure 4). **More tutoring sessions resulted in a higher percentage of students that completed Grade 1 proficient in reading.**

Figure 4: Percentages of Students that Began Tutoring at Reading Level C or Below and Finished at Level I or Above

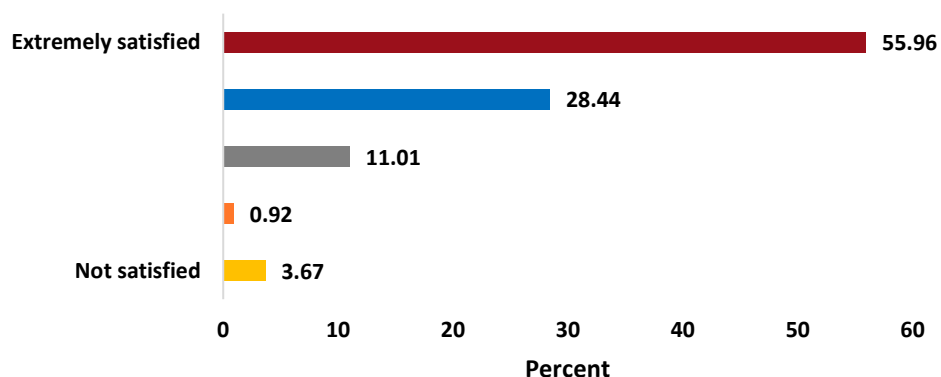


### Teacher Perceptions

Teachers were invited to complete an end-of-year survey about the TutorMate Program. One hundred nine teachers in 20 school systems responded. The survey assessed teachers' satisfaction with and benefits of the program, what they liked about the program and whether they would

continue with it next year, the level of support they received from the IFL Program Ambassador, and recommendations they had to improve the program. **There was a high level of satisfaction with TutorMate among the 109 teacher respondents** (Figure 5). Ninety-six percent or 105 were satisfied; 84% were extremely or highly satisfied.

**Figure 5: Teachers Satisfaction with the TutorMate Program**

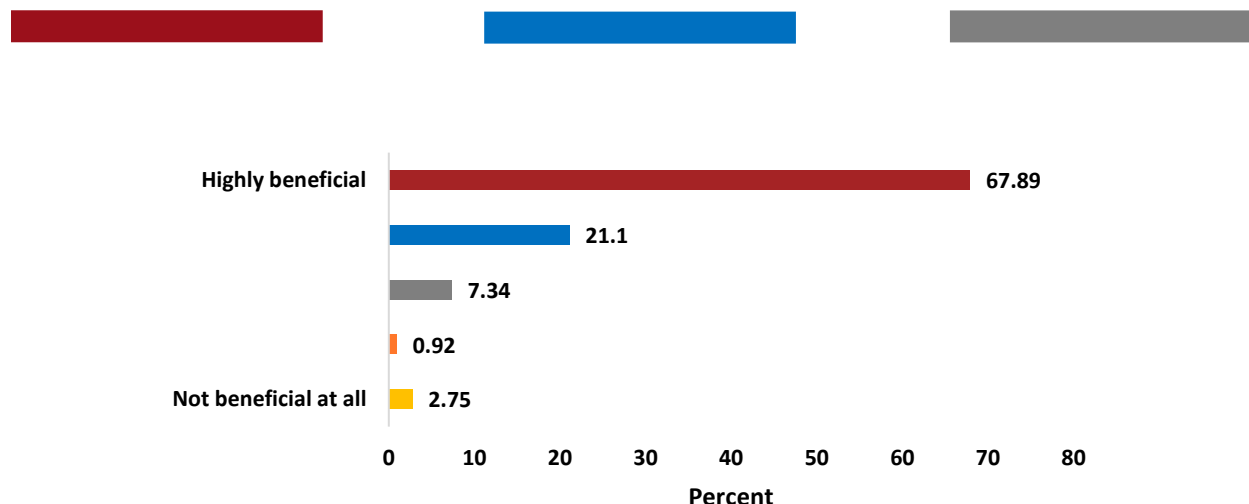


Teachers commented that students were motivated and excited to participate in their tutoring sessions and that they enjoyed connecting with an adult in the community. Their responses to the question, “What do you like about the TutorMate Program?” included:

- My students were excited to answer the calls as well as participate in the lesson.
- The happiness of the students when they are called and played with the tutor.
- The students are inspired to have a friendly person they did not know read to them and make them smile.
- The connection that is made between the tutors and the students and how they build trust in their ability to learn and a love of reading.
- Tutors developed relationships with my students and got to know them beyond just making a weekly call to volunteer their time.

Nearly all teachers (97% or 106/109) believed the program benefited their students (Figure 6). Among those, 89% (97) thought it was very or highly beneficial. Three (2.75%) felt the program did not have any benefit for students.

**Figure 6: Teachers Perceptions of the Benefit of the TutorMate Program to Students**

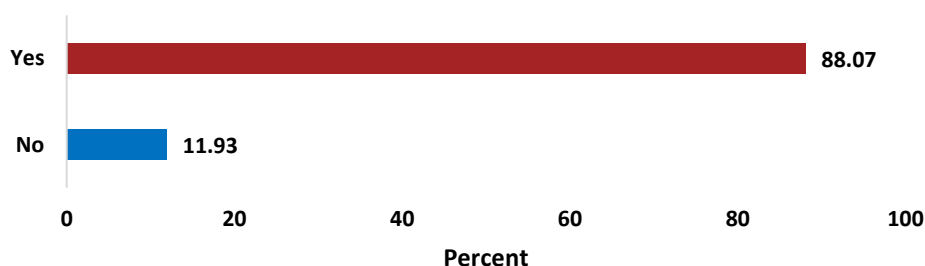


Teachers believed the overall greatest benefit they observed was the combination of increased reading proficiency, improved confidence, and greater love of reading (61.47% or 67 teachers). Fifteen teachers (13.76%) identified increased reading proficiency only; 14 (12.84%) thought it was improved confidence only and 5 (4.59%) believed it was greater love of reading. Five (4.59%) teachers specified other benefits:

- Developed verbal and listening skills.
- Many times, the students enjoyed talking to and interacting with their tutors.
- The relationship. My students had with their tutors.
- Having a buddy to read with online.
- All of the above. My kids learn to read in Spanish first, but TutorMate has enabled them to start reading in English as well, which is an important goal.

Asked if they would like to have the TutorMate Program in their classroom again next year, 88% (96) responded ‘Yes’ (Figure 7). Thirteen or 11.93% responded ‘No’.

**Figure 7: Percentage of Teachers that Would Like to Have TutorMate in Their Classrooms Again**



The great majority of teachers (100 or 91.7%) were satisfied with the level of support they received from the IFL Program Ambassador (Figure 8). Five teachers (4.59%) found the support minimally helpful and 4 (3.67%) thought it poor. Among the comments offered by 29 (26.6%) teachers most (24) described the helpful support the ambassador provided to address technical

issues and to answer questions and highlighted the consistent availability of the ambassador. The comments of 5 (4.69%) teachers suggest a poor relationship between them and their assigned ambassador.

- This year was my first time with TutorMate; I also have several technical issues with the laptop and phone set-up in my classroom. Each time there was a concern, my IFL program Ambassador got on top of the issue to help get it resolved in a timely manner and get my students back connected with their tutor.
- Every problem I had was solved quickly whether needing new headsets or anything I asked for. [Name of Program Ambassador] rocks!
- [Name of Program Ambassador] is the best! She is literally just an email away in addition to dropping by. She is patient and passionate about her work and I truly enjoy working with her.
- Any time I had questions she was available to help. Even when I did not ask, she was contacting me throughout the year to be certain that everything was running smoothly and if not, she handled any questions that I had.

Several themes emerged in teachers' responses to the question of what they liked about the TutorMate Program. **Teachers** (29 or 25.6%) **most liked the positive reactions their students had to participating in the program and the opportunity to connect with an adult in the community** followed by **the 1:1 instructional support** the program provides (26 or 23.8%) and **the growth they saw in students' learning** (25 or 22.9%). Many (17 or 15.5%) noted **the reliable, consistent schedule kept by their tutors** and 13 (11.9%) either said 'everything' or that **the program provides support to students and teachers**. Here is some of what they said:

#### Positive Student Reactions

- The students love it!
- I love the connections students make while learning.
- I appreciated that TutorMate gave a few of my kids another positive adult relationship, which they desperately needed. I like that it gave them confidence and made them feel important.
- Students being able to connect with people in the community.
- The wonderful interactions the students get with other adults outside the classroom.

#### 1:1 Support

- Seeing the student have the extra one-on-one time in reading and using technology.
- The students get one-on-one attention.
- One-on-one attention for struggling readers.

#### Growth

- The encouragement helps each student have confidence to read orally.
- I have seen tremendous growth in the confidence and achievement of the students.
- Reading fluency and comprehension improved.
- I've been part of this program for years. . . it's priceless! It builds such confidence and helps my ELL students gain great language & vocabulary as well.



### Tutors

- My volunteers were exceptional!
- My tutors were consistent with calling in and my students looked forward to reading with their tutor.
- The tutors were so sweet and supportive. They really cared for the kids and the TutorMate Program made it easy do reports for teachers.

### Support

- Additional support in the classroom.
- The additional support for students.
- Helps students that need extra reading help outside of what the teacher can provide.

Forty-nine (44.9%) teachers offered suggestions or recommendations to improve the IFL TutorMate Program. **The majority (28 or 57%) of teachers praised the program, some (15 or 30.6%) indicating they would like more tutors available to support more of their students.** Twenty teachers (40.8%) offered suggestions to improve the program that included different approaches to scheduling tutors and the end-of-year celebration, ensuring that all volunteers understand the program's expectations, and more assessment results to demonstrate student progress.

### Praise for the Program

- We have surpassed our goal each year!
- I hope to continue this awesome program and connect students to a supportive outside professional who will help nurture their reading and life goals.
- It was a great experience and our students really enjoyed their calls each week. I believe that the students learned a lot when their tutor called regularly.

### More Tutors

- I just wish that I could increase my number of participants by at least two more students. The growth and productivity of participating students is phenomenal.
- Please try to tutor more students than 4! The program is so amazing and our students need the help.
- It would be great if all students had a TutorMate tutor.
- I hope that we continue to have this program at our school and it would also be great if there were tutors for all students.

### Improvements

- Ensure that the TutorMate lead can handle scheduling for the program, not the teacher.
- The end-of-year celebration could be better coordinated so that all participating students/classes can meet and interact with the tutors simultaneously.
- The volunteers for my fellow teachers' classes were very inconsistent while my volunteers constantly went above and beyond – some offering extra sessions. Expectations of volunteers need to be clearly consistent for all and reinforced.
- Tutors need to understand that the classroom is still running while they are tutoring. It is not going to be a quiet environment.
- I would like to see more assessment results to demonstrate student progress.

## Tutor Perceptions

Twenty-one tutors that tutored students in the same county responded to a survey of their experiences volunteering in the program. For all of them, it was their first year tutoring in the program. **The tutors compared volunteering in TutorMate favorably to other programs they've undertaken through their employer organization (Figure 8).** Sixteen (76%) indicated that it was a much more or somewhat more engaging experience; 3 (14.29%) thought it was similarly engaging and two (9.52%) that it was somewhat less engaging. **Nearly all (20 or 95.2%) of the tutors rated their experience as excellent, very good, or good (Figure 9).**

Figure 8: Tutors Comparison of Volunteering in TutorMate to Other Programs

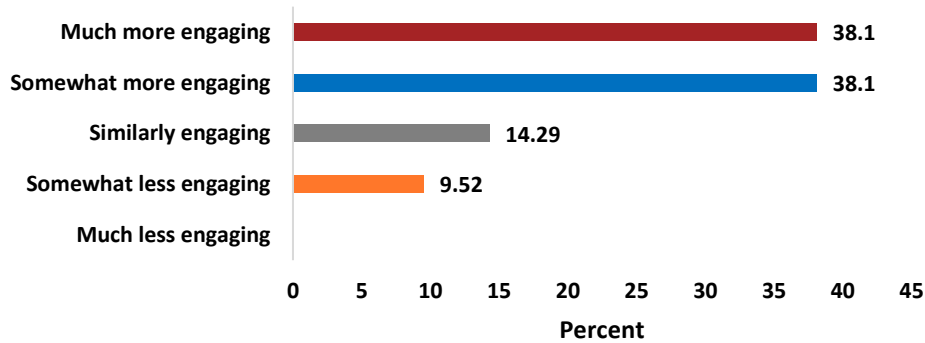
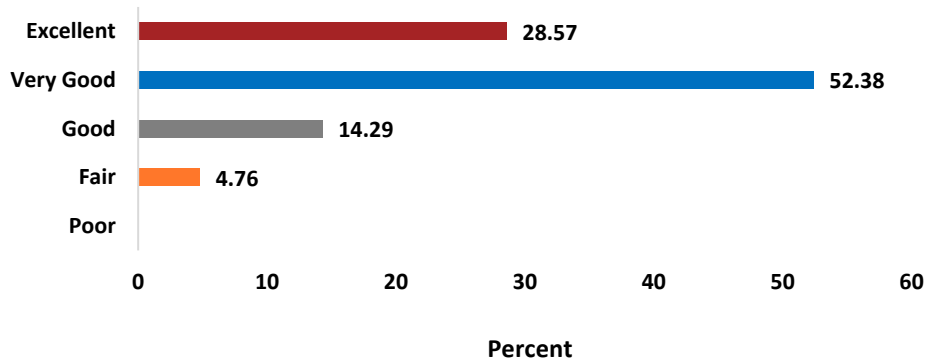
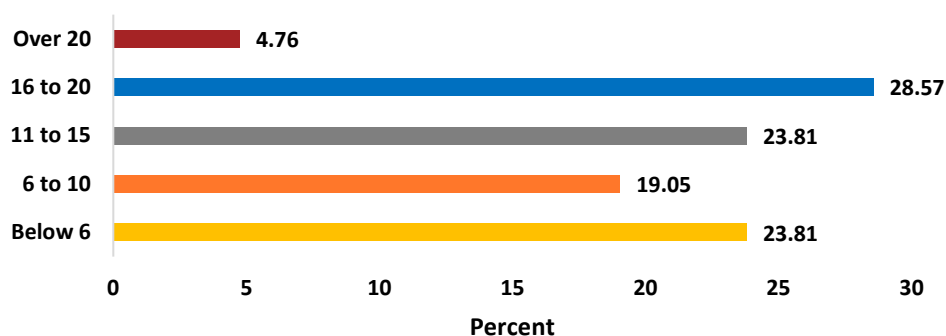


Figure 9: Tutors Rating of Their Experience



To gauge **tutors' perceptions of how productive they felt their tutoring sessions were**, they were asked to identify how many productive sessions, meaning 15 minutes or more or quality talk time, they had with their student. The number of productive sessions ranged from below 6 to over 20 (Figure 10). **The large majority (16 or 76.1%) had 6 or more productive sessions;** a third of these (7 or 33.3%) had 16 or more productive sessions. Five (23.81%) tutors had fewer than 6 productive sessions.

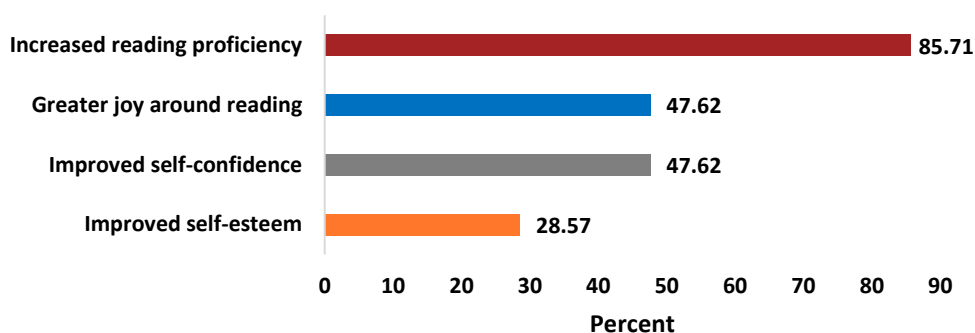
Figure 10: Number of Productive Tutoring Sessions Tutors Experienced



The reasons tutors gave for experiencing some unsuccessful sessions were that the student was absent (3 or 23.08%); their schedule conflicted (2 or 15.38%); the classroom was noisy (2 or 15.38%); the student was disinterested (2 or 15.38%), the calls were routinely unanswered (1 or 7.69% or that they experienced difficulty syncing (1 or 7.69%). Four teachers provided other reasons that included loud background noise and a student withdrawal from school.

Tutors identified the **areas in which students made the most improvement** (Figure 11). Their perceptions are consistent with teachers' perceptions of the benefits of the program. Topping the list was **increased reading proficiency** (18 or 85.71%), **greater joy around reading** (10 or 47.62%), **improved self-confidence** (10 or 47.62%), and **improved self-esteem** (6 or 28.57%). One (4.76%) reported that the student seemed to enjoy the sessions, but the tutor wasn't sure there was enough time for the student to improve.

Figure 11: Tutors' Perceptions of Areas in Which Students Most Improved



Nineteen (90.4%) tutors reported reaching out to chat support and/or the help desk at IFL. All 19 tutors found the support very (15 or 78.95%) or somewhat helpful (4 or 21.05%) (Figure 12). All but one tutor said it was very likely (14 or 66.67%) or somewhat likely (6 or 28.57%) they will be tutoring again in fall 2019 (Figure 13).



Figure 12: Tutors Experience with IFL Tech Support

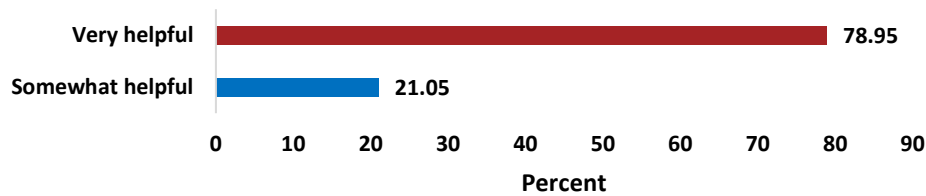
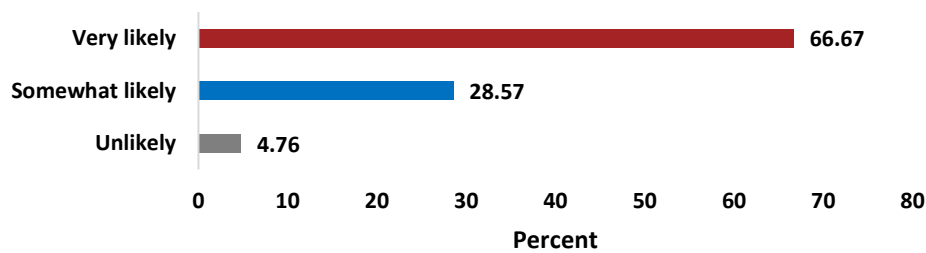
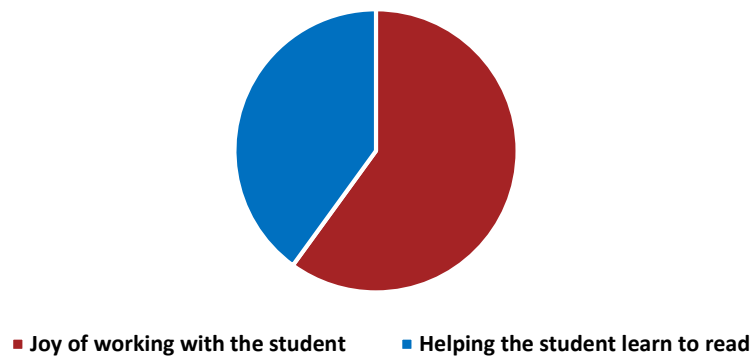


Figure 13: Likelihood of Tutors Continuing in TutorMate in Fall 2019



Overwhelmingly, tutors described the highlights of their TutorMate experience. Responses fell within two themes: the joy of working with their student (9 or 60%) or helping the student learn to read (6 or 40%) (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Highlights of Tutors' Experience



Joy

- Reading with [student name] was an honor. He was eager to learn and made progress every week. The highlight was meeting in person at the end of the year celebration. It really made the experience complete!

- Hearing my student's excitement and seeing her growth in reading.
- My student was a super reader with a big personality. He was a pleasure to speak to and was always very engaged and enthusiastic.
- The joy my student had when I called to tutor him.

### Helping

- I helped build confidence in a struggling reader. I got to share my love of reading with a student.
- I love to help children learn to read in any way I can.
- It was so easy to help my student and I think she made quite a bit of progress in reading.
- My student learning to read better and having fun doing it!
- Building a relationship with my student and seeing his reading improve.

The final question on the survey asked tutors how they think the program can be improved. Ninety percent of the **nine tutors** that responded **pointed to the need to set up the tutoring station in a quieter space**. They explained that the background noise of the classroom made it difficult to hear the student and was distracting. **One tutor (10%) recommended creating a face-to-face component** of the program so that tutors and students can see one another and **one (10%) suggested having tutors and students meet before they begin tutoring sessions**.

### Quieter Space

- Background noise made it hard to hear my student.
- It would be nice if the environment could be quieter.
- For students that have trouble concentrating, it would be nice if they could have a quiet space to be tutored although I know that it's not feasible at all schools.
- Encourage teachers to lessen background noise so that students can be heard more easily.

### Face-to-Face

- I wish there was a face-to-face component. I think having the student actually see the person who is helping will keep the student on task and will also assist in improving reading proficiency.

### Meeting Before the Sessions

- Have tutors meet the students before they begin tutoring. My sessions were more meaningful after I met my student.

## Conclusion

The TutorMate Program had a positive impact on participating students' reading outcomes. Results of the study show that on average, progressively more tutoring sessions led to progressively higher reading outcomes. And, to achieve optimal results, students would participate in 20 or more tutoring sessions.

Teachers recognized the benefits of the program, particularly the increase in reading proficiency, confidence, and self-esteem they saw in their students. They liked the connections their students made to an adult in the community and the caring attitudes of the tutors. For their part, tutors

enjoyed helping their students learn to read and they too, saw the benefits as students' growing proficiency and confidence.

Teachers and tutors offered suggestions to make the program even stronger. To the extent it is within the control of IFL, increasing the number of tutors available to each classroom and reducing the distraction of classroom noise would further enhance student and tutor experiences. Yet, the overwhelming positive results of this study indicate that TutorMate provided a welcome support to teachers by helping struggling students gain the skills they need to become successful readers.



## **Appendix I – Methodology**

**IFL Leveled Texts used by the TutorMate Tutors throughout the school year.**

**School System Benchmark**

**IFL Database of tutored students that includes the number of tutoring sessions they participate in and their initial and end-of-tutoring reading levels.**