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Tutor901: High-Impact Tutoring for High-Needs Students

U.S. Department of Education: Office of Elementary and Secondary Education

Education Innovation and Research Program: Early-phase Grants (CFDA 84.411C)

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Introduction. Literacy Mid-South (LMS) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization with a mission to provide literacy resources to learners of all backgrounds and ages in the Greater Memphis, TN, area. Founded in 1974, LMS's work is driven by a vision of 100% literacy in the Memphis region, where all individuals have the literacy skills they need to access a liveable wage, keep themselves and their families healthy, advocate for their needs, and actively engage in their community. These services are essential to the continued success of Memphis, where more than one in four adults are considered at risk for difficulty understanding basic texts and 73% of 3rd graders are missing critical foundational reading skills.

As the leading literacy intermediary in our community, Literacy Mid-South has meaningfully increased the availability of high-quality literacy support for individuals who have traditionally been denied access. Programming is targeted to critical junctures in literacy development and in areas unserved by the larger ecosystem of service providers. In 2023, LMS provided high-impact tutoring services for 2,250 elementary students, coordinated more than 1,000 hours of tutoring for adults with low literacy levels, distributed over 100,000 new books, and ensured more than 5,000 K-5 students had access to summer learning opportunities.

Literacy Mid-South is uniquely positioned to respond to the Memphis community's literacy needs. In response to the learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2022 LMS leadership, Memphis-Shelby County Schools (MSCS), local public charter schools, and local philanthropic partners recognized an urgent need to create the community's first high-impact literacy tutoring initiative: Tutor901. That same year, in Summer 2022, LMS was one of five organizations state-wide to receive a two-year, \$4.5 million Tennessee Accelerating Literacy and Learning Corps Community Partner grant from the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) to support Tutor901. In less than two months, LMS hired six additional full-time staff members;

recruited, hired, and trained more than 60 paid part-time tutors; onboarded 13 partner schools; and provided high-impact tutoring to 750 elementary students each semester during School Year 2022-23. Based on the success of this program, LMS received a one-year, \$1.5 million Connected Literacy Partners (CLP) grant from TDOE in Spring 2023. Leveraging this investment, LMS doubled Tutor901 the next year, serving 1,500 students per semester in SY23-24 while maintaining fidelity to the high-impact model. This success is poised to continue: TDOE extended LMS's CLP grant through SY24-25, and LMS has received interest from a local philanthropic entity to provide **\$2.5 million annually** in matching funds should we be successful in securing an Education Innovation and Research (EIR) grant.

Project synopsis. Tutor901 is an innovative approach to the proven framework of high-impact tutoring (Absolute Priority 1: Demonstrates a Rationale) explicitly designed to support high-needs students' literacy development and sense of belonging and connection to school (Absolute Priority 4: Meeting Student Social, Emotional, and Academic Needs). Aligned to the Department's definition of "underserved students," for this project "high-needs students" are defined as a student living in poverty or attending a school with high concentrations of students in poverty, a student of color, and/or a student reading significantly below grade level.

Through the support of an Early-phase EIR grant and local philanthropic investments, Literacy Mid-South seeks to further refine and rigorously evaluate this unique approach to high-impact tutoring. LMS will provide high-impact tutoring services to 1,500 2nd-4th grade students each school year for five years across 18 MSCS elementary schools through the support of 150 highly trained, paid tutors. The Tutor901 program builds upon the proven high-impact tutoring intervention model by introducing three innovations tailored to high-needs students: 1.)

Equipping tutors to make tutoring sessions trust-filled, supportive learning spaces; 2.) Recruiting, tutors reflective of students tutored; and 3.) Bolstering students’ access to text-rich environments.

The evaluation component of this project will be conducted by the Center for Research in Education Policy (CREP) at the University of Memphis. Designated as a State of Tennessee Center of Excellence, for 35 years CREP’s primary mission has been to conduct research and evaluation for education systems and institutions. CREP will evaluate the Tutor901 program through a mixed-methods, matched-pair quasi-experimental design (QED) evaluation.

A. The significance of providing high-impact tutoring in the Memphis community.

Memphis-Shelby County Schools is the largest school district in Tennessee and educates approximately 11% of K-12 students in the state. MSCS students disproportionately fit the definition of high-needs. Among Metropolitan Statistical Areas with populations greater than one million, the greater Memphis community has the highest rates of overall poverty (15.7%) and childhood poverty (22.4%).¹ This poverty is concentrated in the areas served by MSCS: 55% of students are recognized as Economically Disadvantaged by the state of Tennessee, far outpacing the state as a whole and the next two largest school districts in the state. Additionally, 93% of MSCS’s 105,000 students identify as Black/African American, Hispanic, or Native American.²

Like many U.S. school districts educating a concentrated proportion of high-needs students, MSCS has struggled to ensure students meet critical measures of grade level proficiency. Since 2017, MSCS has not eclipsed 24% of elementary students demonstrating grade level proficiency on the ELA portion on the state standardized assessment (**Table 1**).

Table 1. MSCS elementary student ELA standardized assessment results³

	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022	2023
Grade-level proficiency	21%	24%	23%	14%	23%	24%

A.1. Literacy Mid-South’s tutoring is built on proven strategies. In light of this long-standing challenge, there is a critical need for bold solutions to support students’ literacy development in the Greater Memphis community. As the Department of Education’s 2024 Improving Student Achievement Agenda notes, high-dosage tutoring aligned with research-backed practices (i.e. “high-impact tutoring”) is a proven solution for significantly accelerating student learning. Tutor901 is aligned with the components of high-impact tutoring recognized by the Department of Education, the National Partnership for Student Success, and the National Student Support Accelerator at Stanford University (Table 2).

Table 2. Tutor901 replicates all key components of high-impact tutoring programs.⁴

Program characteristic	Research-based best practices	LMS Tutor901 program
Dosage	Provide each student with at least three 30-minute tutoring sessions per week.	Three 45-minute sessions per week.
High-quality materials	User-friendly, rigorous, and research-based.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Utilizes clearly structured grade-level workbooks aligned to in-class curriculum materials and pacing; ● Materials are aligned with the Wonders curriculum, which was adopted by TDOE’s Textbook and Instructional Materials Quality Commission as an HQIM for K-5 ELA; and ● 2nd & 3rd grade sessions integrate materials from TDOE’s Foundational Literacy Skills Curriculum Supplement, reinforcing a sounds-first approach to reading instruction happening in the classroom.
Instructional practices	Tutors receive explicit training, modeling, and coaching related to the use of effective instructional	LMS tutors receive pre-service training on tutoring skills, curriculum materials, and equity-informed

	strategies (e.g. strong questioning, pacing).	strategies for connecting with students, as well as ongoing training and targeted feedback.
Group size	Ratio of students to tutors does not exceed 4:1.	Ratio is consistently 3 students : 1 LMS tutor.
Routines & structures	Consistent lesson structure, set instructional routines, and standard procedures to maximize learning; tutor-specific modifications are intentional and informed by student needs.	Individual tutoring sessions and two-week lesson plans follow a consistent structure; curriculum materials establish clear cadence for tutors to implement.
Setting	Takes place during the school day or in OST/summer with necessary structures and systems in place to ensure student participation and engagement.	Tutoring occurs exclusively during the school day.
Student grouping	Strategically grouped by skill level or language needed to allow the tutor to deliver relevant instruction to the full group.	Students are grouped by reading ability.
Tutor consistency	Consistent tutoring from the same tutor; any adjustments to groupings occur sparingly and strategically.	Student - tutor pairings remain consistent throughout the school year whenever possible; adjustments due to discrepancies in grade level or behavior issues occur only as needed.

A.2. Literacy Mid-South’s project introduces promising new strategies to the high-impact tutoring design. Using this proven intervention as a starting point, Literacy Mid-South has introduced three promising strategies to the high-impact tutoring model to explicitly support high-needs students’ academic and social-emotional growth: 1.) Equip tutors to make tutoring sessions trust-filled, supportive learning spaces; 2.) Recruit and retain tutors reflective of students tutored; and 3.) Provide intentional student and family support beyond tutoring. These strategies have emerged as a result of LMS’s 50 years of experience providing literacy services to high-needs learners across the lifespan.

First, Literacy Mid-South's proposed design creates education settings that are supportive, positive, identity-safe, and inclusive by developing trusting relationships within tutor groups. Students' perceptions of their relationship with teachers has been found to play a role in their development of interpersonal trust and social adjustment.⁵ Tutor901 programming in SY23-24 demonstrates the rich potential for valuable relationships between students and tutors. In end-of-year surveys, 100% of tutors felt they made meaningful connections with their students, while 97% of students reported enjoying working with their tutors.

Tutor901 tutor training includes an intentional focus on relationship building strategies, including an overview of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and strategies for engaging students who have experienced ACEs. Training also includes an historical overview of public education in Memphis and the specific neighborhoods tutors will be working. This component ensures tutors are sensitive to the rich history and assets of the respective community.

Within tutoring sessions, Literacy Mid-South embeds intentional relationship building activities to foster trusting bonds. The small group (3:1) model fosters bonding between tutors and students and groups are consistent for a full year whenever possible to build consistency and trust. Sessions begin by tutors expressing their excitement around seeing the students, and expressing that they missed any students who were not present for the previous session. This reinforces the importance of consistent school attendance while letting students know they are valued. Tutors then ask students how they would like to be greeted (wave, fist bump, or high five), encouraging students to establish daily boundaries and trust their tutor will respect these boundaries. Students are then provided the opportunity to share how they are feeling that day with their tutor and small group. Through this grant, LMS will continue to introduce strategies for tutors to develop supportive, trusting, and identity safe learning spaces for students.

Second, Literacy Mid-South utilizes intentional tutor recruitment strategies to ensure tutors are reflective of the large proportion of students of color receiving tutoring. The benefits of learning from teachers of colors are well documented for all students, but especially for students of color. Studies have found academic benefits including improved reading and math scores, graduation rates, and aspirations to attend college. Diverse teachers also yield important social-emotional benefits for young people (e.g. fewer unexcused absences and suspensions).⁶ While the benefits of pairing students of color with tutors of color have not been studied, we posit that students will experience similar academic and social-emotional benefits. Reflecting the diversity of the student community served (75% Black/African American), in SY23-24, 74% of LMS's 150 tutors identified as Black/African American. The Memphis community provides a rich context for the continued recruitment of diverse tutors: Memphis is the largest majority-Black city in the United States, with 64% of residents identifying as Black.

Finally, the Tutor901 program includes an infusion of literacy resources throughout the school ecosystem. Decades of research has found that access to and engagement with high-quality texts is one of the most important indicators for a students' ability to read on grade level.⁷ However, studies of print availability find significant and consistent discrepancies in the availability of text resources between middle- and low-income communities.⁸ This finding rings true for the 18 MSCS schools in which LMS provided tutoring in SY23-24: all schools hold Title I designations and have an average TDOE-assigned letter grade of a D, 65% of enrolled students are identified as economically disadvantaged and 93% are students of color.⁹

Interventions designed to support high-needs students and schools must incorporate the intentional distribution of high-quality texts to narrow this discrepancy in book access. Since 2021, LMS has distributed more than 320,000 new books to the Memphis community. Tutored

students receive at least four new books each semester and LMS tutors and full-time staff support partner schools' family engagement efforts by distributing books and building excitement and knowledge around the importance of reading at home.

B. Quality of the program design's framework, goals, and relevance to target population.

B.1. Literacy Mid-South's program is based on a high-quality conceptual framework. The Tutor901 program's conceptual framework combines the proven success of high-impact tutoring with best practices for supporting high-needs students. Our theory of change (please see Logic Model, **Appendix G**) posits that recruiting individuals representative of the students they serve and equipping them to provide intentional literacy support aligned to in-class instruction in a nurturing, small group setting will accelerate students' literacy development and increase students' sense of belonging within and connection to school. This framework can be divided into four key components.

B.1.a. High-impact tutoring. The Tutor901 model builds off of the high-impact tutoring intervention, a term used within the tutoring field to identify a set of components consistent within effective tutoring interventions. These common components have been identified by multiple field-level studies of high-impact tutoring.¹⁰ A meta-analysis of multiple interventions designed to accelerate student achievement (e.g. class size reduction, extended learning time, and summer school/vacation academies) found tutoring to be the most effective option.¹¹ The Logic Model posits that providing tutoring aligned to all research-backed components of high-impact tutoring (please refer back to **Table 3** on pp. 4-5) for one year will result in statistically significant growth on ELA assessments and increased student confidence in reading (Short-term outcomes), leading to more high-needs students reading on grade level (Long-term outcome).

B.1.b. Student-tutor bonding. Connecting high-needs students with trusted mentors who reinforce the importance of attendance is a proven strategy for increasing school connection and engagement.¹² The Tutor901 framework leverages the small group model of high-impact tutoring while incorporating tutor-student bonding activities within tutoring sessions and SEL components within tutor training, which we believe will lead to students forming trusting relationships with tutors (Short-term outcome) and decreased absenteeism (Long-term outcome).

B.1.c. Employing tutors reflective of students served. Research has found significant academic and SEL benefits when students of color learn from teachers of color.¹³ Following these findings, the Tutor901 framework posits that the program’s proven strategies for recruiting and retaining tutors of color (74% Black/African American in SY23-24) will result in statistically significant growth on ELA assessments, students forming trusting relationships with tutors, and more Black tutors interested in education careers (Short-term outcomes), leading to more high-needs students reading at grade-level proficiency, decreased absenteeism, and more Black teachers supporting MSCS schools (Long-term outcomes).

B.1.d. Distribution of high-quality texts. Exposure to high-quality literacy materials is a key component in the development of a students’ reading comprehension, technical reading skills, and spelling.¹⁴ By distributing books and family literacy materials to tutored students and partner schools, LMS anticipates students having greater access to text-rich environments at home and in school and increasing their confidence in reading (Short-term outcomes), leading to more high-needs students reading at grade-level proficiency (Long-term outcome).

B.2. Goals, objectives, and outcomes of the Tutor901 program. This program has four proposed goals: 1.) Accelerate students’ literacy development; 2.) Foster trusting, safe learning spaces for students; 3.) Develop a pipeline of highly-trained, diverse tutors; and 4.) Support

students’ access to text-rich environments. Tutor901’s goals, objectives, and outcomes are clearly specified, measurable, relevant to the students targeted, and equity-informed (**Table 3**).

Table 3. Goals, objectives, and outcomes of the Tutor901 program.

Goal 1: Provide 1,500 high-needs students with high-impact tutoring annually in order to accelerate students’ literacy development and increase students’ reading confidence.	
Objectives	Outcomes
1.1. High-needs students receive high-impact tutoring consistent with research-proven practices.	1,500 high-needs students receive one year of high-impact tutoring (45 minute sessions, 3 sessions per week, 24 weeks per year, 3:1 student-to-tutor ratio) each year.
1.2. Students grow ELA skills towards grade level proficiency.	Tutored students demonstrate statistically significant academic gains as determined by end-of-program data evaluation.
1.3. Students increase their confidence in reading.	10% increase in students’ reported confidence in reading abilities between baseline and end-of-year surveys.
Goal 2: As a result of intentional tutor recruitment, training, and in-session activities, students will form trust-based, meaningful relationships with tutors.	
Objectives	Outcomes
2.1. Students and tutors develop trusting, impactful relationships.	90% of students report enjoying working with their tutor on end-of-year surveys.
	90% of tutors report making meaningful relationships with their students on end-of-year surveys.
Goal 3: Develop a pipeline of highly-trained, qualified tutors committed to educational equity that are more disposed to pursuing a career in education.	
Objectives	Outcomes
3.1. Tutors reflect the diversity of the student community they serve during tutoring.	At least 65% of tutors identify as Black/African American.
3.2. Tutors receive comprehensive pre-semester training and ongoing support.	90% of tutors report feeling qualified to lead tutoring sessions following training.
	90% of tutors report receiving high-quality

	professional development and support (e.g. coaching, observations, and ongoing feedback) throughout the semester.
3.3. Tutors receive education and support in pursuing careers in education.	50% of tutors report being more interested in pursuing a career in education.
	A minimum of 10 tutors enroll in teacher preparatory programs, Teach For America, or take full-time roles in education each year.
Goal 4: Provide intentional infusion of high-quality, culturally responsive literacy resources to schools and families resulting in text-rich environments that support literacy development occurring through tutoring.	
Objectives	Outcomes
4.1. Families of tutored students are able to provide text-rich home environments.	Distribute 9,000 high-quality, culturally responsive books to tutored students each school year.
4.2. Partner schools are able to provide literacy resources and information at family engagement events.	Support 3 family engagement events at each partner school each school year.

B.3. The Tutor901 program will successfully address four critical needs of Memphis students. Memphis-Shelby County Schools is an ideal partner for the development of these strategies. Literacy Mid-South and MSCS have a long-standing partnership serving high-needs students and are committed to partnering together to further develop this intervention for high-needs students.

B.3.a. The need to support elementary literacy with high-impact tutoring. For years, Memphis-Shelby County Schools has not exceeded 24% of elementary students demonstrating grade level reading proficiency (please refer back to **Table 1** on page 4). To address this need, MSCS has identified high-impact tutoring as a key strategy for supporting students’ literacy development. The potential academic benefits of high-impact tutoring for high-needs students

are well documented. A meta-analysis of 101 interventions for students with low socioeconomic status found tutoring to be the most effective at accelerating student learning.¹⁵

B.3.b. The need to foster trusting relationships between high-needs students and tutors. One of the many long-run effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is students' increased sense of disconnection from school. During SY22-23, Memphis-Shelby County Schools had a chronic absenteeism rate of 28%. While many factors affect student attendance, students' sense of belonging—"the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment"¹⁶—is a critical factor in school engagement.¹⁷ Caring relationships with adults can increase high-needs students' attachment to school and decrease chronic absenteeism.¹⁸ Tutoring that fosters supportive educational spaces is an ideal opportunity for developing students' sense of belonging in school.

B.3.c. The need for a diverse pipeline of highly-trained tutors and future educators. Research has found notable benefits for students learning from educators who match their racial identity, with Black students benefiting the most from having a Black teacher.¹⁹ These benefits are not limited to the short-term. Black students who learned from at least one Black teacher during their K-3 years were more likely to graduate from high school and attend college, in part due to Black teachers' function as a role model.²⁰ While the impact of pairing Black students with Black tutors has not been studied, this program posits a similar positive impact is possible.

Initial programming data suggest this strategy provides long-term benefits to partner schools. In SY23-24, 15 tutors chose to take full-time positions in the schools where they were tutoring and 89% of tutors reported being more interested in a career in education. While only 1% of public school teachers are Black men,²¹ 15% of Tutor901 tutors in SY23-24 were Black men, 83% of whom reported being more interested in an education career at the end of the year.

Black male tutors can play a critical role as a mentor for students who are Black boys, who often do not see teachers who look like them. As one Black male Tutor901 tutor put it: “I chose to become a tutor because when I was in school I only had a couple teachers who I connected with and could really make learning enjoyable and they usually had the same skin tone as me. I wanted to be a tutor that is also Black and Brown to help the generation coming up.”

B.3.d. The need for an intentional infusion of literacy materials to schools and families. A meta-analysis of book access studies found a meaningful relationship between the presence of books in the home and a child’s academic performance that holds consistent across social contexts, socioeconomic status, and parent education level.²² However, surveys of book access have found significant disparities in the availability of text between middle- and low-income students.²³ The Tutor901 model seeks to address this need by providing students enrolled in tutoring with new, high-quality books that are culturally relevant and positively reflective of students’ identities. Recently distributed books include *Opal Lee and What it Means to Be Free*, a history of Juneteenth by a Memphis-based author; *We Are Water Protectors*, the story of an Ojibwe girl protecting the water supply of her people; and *Ada Twist, Scientist*, which introduces STEM careers through a protagonist inspired by Ada Lovelace and Marie Curie.

C. Literacy Mid-South and CREP employ high-quality, diverse project personnel.

Literacy Mid-South has a proven track record of hiring and retaining high-quality, diverse employees. LMS is a Black-led nonprofit; 62% of LMS staff identify as people of color (50% of the Leadership Team), and 71% identify as women (67% of the Leadership Team). Similar to our management team, LMS has been especially successful in recruiting high-quality tutor candidates who are reflective of the students receiving tutoring (**Table 4**).

Table 4. Literacy Mid-South recruits a diverse portfolio of high-quality tutors.

Characteristic	Percentage of tutors (SY23-24)
Identify as Black/African American	74%
Has experience working for nonprofit organizations	39%
Is interested in a career in education	37%
Is a former educator	33%
Attended Memphis-Shelby County Schools or public charter schools	31%
Is a parent of a child enrolled in Memphis-Shelby County Schools or public charter schools	25%
Is currently enrolled in a school, college, or university	24%
Identify as male	19%

C1. Qualifications of key personnel. This project will be supported by a broad team of individuals who have been critical in designing, implementing, and evaluating the Tutor901 program since its inception in Summer 2021. Full resumes for CREP and LMS key project personnel are included in **Appendix B**.

CREP: As a long-term contributor to the educational research field, CREP has extensive experience in research design, execution, and program evaluation and has proven expertise in literacy and urban education reform. Specialty areas include research and evaluation design, instrument development and validation, managing and analyzing large data sets of qualitative and quantitative tools, developing and running quasi-experimental and randomized controlled trials, and knowledge of What Works Clearinghouse procedures and standards.

[REDACTED], Chief Executive Officer, leads Literacy Mid-South’s efforts to embed literacy in cross-sector initiatives, while pushing the ways literacy can empower historically marginalized populations. As one of Memphis-Shelby County School’s Strategic Partners for

Literacy, [REDACTED] regularly collaborates with MSCS leadership and key community partners to ensure alignment of tutoring efforts with district priorities.

[REDACTED], **Senior Director, Strategy & Innovation**, oversees all educational components and in-school logistics for Tutor901. She is an experienced classroom educator and interventionist who has designed literacy interventions for both the in-school and out-of-school time spaces. [REDACTED] oversees curriculum and resource selection, guides instructional development to ensure alignment to TDOE & MSCS requirements and best practices, ensures equity and efficacy in the tutoring model, and oversees all program staff.

[REDACTED], **Manager, Data & Evaluation**, leads data collection and analysis efforts for the Tutor901 program. [REDACTED] helps identify key metrics to measure programmatic success and provides technical expertise in devising tools to collect this information. [REDACTED] work informs continuous improvement efforts and ensures data is collected and analyzed responsibly and in compliance with LMS's commitment to Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging.

[REDACTED] **Tutor Support Manager**, is one of seven Tutor Support Managers (TSM) supporting the Tutor901 program, all experienced educators well-versed in early literacy skills and tutoring interventions. This role includes training, observing, and providing ongoing feedback and professional development to a cohort of tutors. [REDACTED] is a former ELA & Creative Writing teacher, Content Lead, and Workshop Facilitator. A lifelong literacy advocate, [REDACTED] is a published author and co-owner of Memphis's only Black-owned bookstore.

Tutors. Literacy Mid-South ensures all tutors are equipped to provide high-quality tutoring regardless of their background and previous education experience. Tutors receive two weeks of pre-service training, including: overview of high-impact tutoring; training on utilizing curriculum materials; practice sessions with targeted feedback; and Course One of the Tennessee

Department of Education's Reading360 Early Reading Training, which is the same training provided to Tennessee K-5 teachers. Throughout the semester, tutors are regularly observed by their TSM and receive targeted feedback, as well as quarterly professional development. In SY23-24, 98% of tutors felt prepared to lead tutoring sessions, and 97% of school-based staff reported that tutors were well equipped to support students with their literacy development.

C2. Literacy Mid-South is committed to equitable hiring practices. LMS's hiring practices are guided by its Equal Employment Opportunity Policy, which includes a commitment to recruiting, hiring, training, and promoting persons in all job classifications without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression or other state/federally protected classification.

D. Literacy Mid-South has a high-quality management plan in place to execute project goals. The LMS team leading this program has successfully managed two Tennessee Department of Education grants, ensuring students are served with fidelity and within established budgets (See TDOE letter of support, **Appendix C**). Key individuals responsible for the implementation of this project are: **Chief Executive Officer (CEO)**: works with MSCS to secure school selection, data agreements, etc.; **Senior Director, Strategy & Innovation (SD)**: manages educational components of program and program staff; **Finance Manager (FM)**: ensures expenses remain within budget; **Manager, Data & Evaluation (DM)**: oversees data collection and analysis; and **Tutor Support Managers (TSM)**: hire, train, and supervise tutors. The core grant oversight team possesses the strong institutional knowledge and extensive LMS experience necessary to ensure a successful project: CEO (3 years), Senior Director (9 years), Finance Manager (10 years). Our larger Leadership Team has served LMS for a collective 38 years; they understand the importance of this effort and are poised to provide cross-organizational support.

The Tutor901 program has been a key organizational priority within LMS’s long-term strategic plan and annual operations for two years. The organization’s 17-member Board of Directors and 20-person staff are all committed to supporting the successful implementation of this program, including LMS’s Treasurer, who is prepared to account for these additional grant funds within LMS’s operating budget. The larger Memphis community is also poised to support LMS in reaching established milestones, including a number of local philanthropic entities, community-based organizations, government officials, the Memphis business community, and Memphis-Shelby County Schools (See letters of support in **Appendix C**).

Our Board of Directors and management team have assembled a project management plan to ensure the grant is successful, and operates adjunct to our daily operations. The establishment of this plan allows LMS to quickly take on the scale of this work. Our community’s learning needs are great, and LMS is prepared to ensure our work can be immediately impactful to the Memphis community, should we receive funding. **Table 5** lays out the 13 key milestones to be achieved over the 5-year grant term in order to ensure successful programming, along with responsible parties and LMS project leads.

Table 5. Tutor901 project management plan.

13 Key Milestones	Project Lead	2025				2026				2027				2028				2029			
		Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4
1. Review project goals, outcomes, timeline, and budget to determine next steps for implementation and evaluation	LMS (CEO) CREP	X																			

2. Establish and renew MOU between MSCS, LMS, and CREP	LMS (CEO) CREP MSCS		X				X						X				X		
3. Finalize data collection and evaluation tools and measures	LMS (DM) CREP		X																
4. Identify school partners for implementation	LMS (CEO) MSCS			X			X			X			X				X		
5. Recruit and train 150 new and returning tutors	LMS (TSM)			X			X			X			X				X		
6. Onboard school staff to program & research expectations	LMS (SD) MSCS			X			X			X			X				X		
7. Establish pre-intervention baselines	LMS (DM) CREP MSCS			X			X			X			X				X		
8. Provide 24 weeks of tutoring to 1,500 2nd-4th grade students	LMS (TSM) MSCS			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
9. Ongoing tutor PD & observations	LMS (TSM)			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
10. Distribute 6,000 books per semester	LMS (SD)			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
11. Submit annual reports per grant requirements	LMS (SD) CREP				X			X			X			X				X	

12. Evaluator data collection	CREP			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X						
13. Evaluator data analysis	CREP						X				X				X						
14. Final evaluation report	CREP																			X	X

E. CREP has designed a rigorous project evaluation plan. The Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP) at the University of Memphis (biographies of key researchers in **Appendix B**) will serve as independent third-party evaluator for *Tutor901: High-Impact Tutoring for High-Needs Students (Tutor901)*, which is focused on high-dosage tutoring support for Tier 2 and Tier 3 students. CREP’s previous experience designing and implementing evaluations *meeting WWC standards without reservations* includes a Tier 2 literacy intervention using an RCT design, with analyses of (a) student outcomes on multiple independent measures of literacy, (b) measures of implementation fidelity, as well as (c) examining impacts on high needs subgroups. An additional research design *meeting WWC standards without reservations* was CREP’s evaluation of a five-year Investing in Innovation (i3) Validation study of SSEC’s *Leadership and Assistance for Science Education Reform (LASER) Model*, with analyses of student outcomes from both an elementary and middle school cohort.

Most recently, CREP led the evaluation of a five-year Early-phase EIR study of *Smithsonian Science for North and South Carolina Classrooms*. The *Results of Strength of Evidence Review* for the Early-phase EIR study found the evaluation, as planned, *Meets WWC Standards without Reservations*. Once confirmed by WWC review, the main analyses conducted for the study’s elementary cohort will meet the requirements to receive this highest rating.

(1) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well implemented, produce evidence about the project’s effectiveness that would meet the WWC standards with or without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook.

CREP proposes a mixed-methods, matched-pair quasi-experimental design (QED) evaluation to examine both impacts and factors affecting variation in outcomes—learning what works, for whom, and under what conditions. The evaluation will involve approximately 36 schools, 144 tutors, and 1,200 students annually in Memphis-Shelby County Schools. Schools recruited to the project will be matched using publicly available data on factors such as grade levels taught, prior student performance on tests of reading/ELA, and student demographics (e.g., socioeconomic status) to increase the likelihood that baseline equivalence will be attained.

During the study, CREP will track academic outcomes for three cohorts of students (the “study cohorts”) who are in 2nd - 4th grades beginning in Assessment Year (AY) 2025-26, 2026-27, or 2027-28, and no late joiners will be included in main or supplemental analyses. To provide a standardized measure of student achievement across all schools, CREP will work with existing valid and reliable standardized assessments such as the iReady and Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP).

The **main findings** will be the effects of program implementation on student achievement for the overall sample (i.e., all students combined) in treatment vs. control schools in one domain, Student Achievement, with one outcome – reading. Three cohorts of 2nd - 4th grade students will be tracked: One for each year of data collection, with main findings limited to the year the cohort received tutoring (e.g., the main findings for Cohort 1 in 2025-26 will be spring 2026 scores). The outcome measure for the **main findings** for all grades (shown in **bold** in **Table 6**) will be *TCAP ELA* (the TN state assessment), with scores on the TCAP used to determine

whether students in 3rd and 4th grades are retained.²⁴ Student SEL outcomes and effects within high-needs student subgroups (females, BIPOC status, IEP students, and economically disadvantaged) will be examined as **supplemental analyses**. Available iReady scores in all grades and TCAP ELA scores at the end of 5th and 6th grades will also serve as **supplemental outcome measures (Table 6)**.

Table 6: Achievement outcomes for the study cohorts.

Cohort	Grade	2025-26		Grade	2026-27		Grade	2027-28						
		Pre	Post		Pre	Post		Pre	Post					
Cohort 1	2	iReady	iReady	3		iReady	4		iReady					
		iReady	G2 TCAP			G3 TCAP			G4 TCAP					
		SEL	SEL			SEL			SEL					
	3	iReady	iReady	4		iReady	5		iReady	iReady				
		G2 TCAP	G3 TCAP			G4 TCAP			G5 TCAP					
		SEL	SEL			SEL			SEL					
	4	iReady	iReady	5		iReady	6		iReady	iReady				
		G3 TCAP	G4 TCAP			G5 TCAP			G6 TCAP					
		SEL	SEL			SEL			SEL					
Cohort 2				2	iReady	iReady	3	iReady						
					iReady	G2 TCAP		G3 TCAP	G4 TCAP					
					SEL	SEL		SEL	SEL					
				3*	iReady	iReady	4*	iReady	5*	iReady	iReady			
					G2 TCAP	G3 TCAP		G4 TCAP		G5 TCAP				
					SEL	SEL		SEL		SEL				
				4*	iReady	iReady	5*	iReady	6*	iReady	iReady			
					G3 TCAP	G4 TCAP		G5 TCAP		G6 TCAP				
					SEL	SEL		SEL		SEL				
Cohort 3							2	iReady	iReady					
								iReady	G2 TCAP	G3 TCAP	G4 TCAP			
								SEL	SEL	SEL	SEL			
							3	iReady	iReady	4	iReady	5	iReady	iReady
								G2 TCAP	G3 TCAP		G4 TCAP		G5 TCAP	
								SEL	SEL		SEL		SEL	

		4	SEL	SEL
			iReady	iReady
			G3 TCAP	G4 TCAP
			SEL	SEL

Note: **Bold** indicates **Main Findings**. All other outcomes are Supplementary. Cohorts in red are a combination of new and returning students.

* New students to the cohort only (i.e., were not in Cohort 1 in 2025-26).

The statistical model (HLM) will account for the nested nature of the data (i.e., students within schools), comparing the post-test controlling for pre-test measures, and an effect size (Hedges' *g*) calculated to determine the magnitude of the impacts. The actual statistical analyses conducted will be dependent on the properties of the data collected. If baseline equivalence is met (based on $g \leq 0.25$), this study design will produce evidence with the potential to meet WWC standards with reservations if sample attrition is sufficiently low.²⁵ Results from the student data analyses will be used to address Evaluation Question 1 (**Table 7**).

(2) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes.

In addition to assessing student reading achievement outcomes, CREP will collect data from tutors, administrators, classroom teachers, and students during Project Years (Y) 1 – 4. Results will be used to provide formative feedback to Literacy Mid-South (LMS) and to evaluate the suitability and effectiveness of the intervention in urban public school settings.

To evaluate the support and mentorship that the tutoring relationship provides to students, CREP will conduct pre/post assessments of students' social-emotional learning (SEL) competencies using a validated SEL measure such as the Panorama Student survey.²⁶ Results will provide formative feedback for LMS and address Evaluation Question 2 (**Table 7**).

Furthermore, LMS tutors, classroom teachers and school administrators will complete a Tutor901 survey to gather stakeholder feedback on programmatic implementation and provide

insight into impacts on participating students such as attendance, behavior, SEL competencies, and student achievement in ELA. Results will provide formative feedback for LMS and address all four evaluation questions (**Table 7**).

The Literacy Observation Tool (LOT) will be used by trained site researchers (e.g., observers) at multiple points each year 1-4 to observe a subset of tutors delivering tutoring sessions in 9 treatment and 9 comparison schools. The LOT is CREP's validated and reliable tool for evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation of research-based literacy strategies via a 5-point rubric (Not observed to Extensively observed) and includes five essential components of reading identified by the National Reading Panel²⁷ as important in achieving effective reading instruction: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Text Comprehension, and Vocabulary.²⁸ To ensure data reliability and increase the extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide valid and reliable performance data, observers participate in an initial eight-hour training course, monthly conference calls, and interrater reliability will be established to ensure the data across site researchers meets acceptable reliability thresholds (e.g., $\alpha > .70$). Observation results will provide information about the literacy strategies used during tutoring sessions in treatment and comparison conditions and will be used to answer Evaluation Question 3 (see **Table 7**).

To assess the professional development training provided, LMS tutors will complete a Professional Development (PD) evaluation survey after the initial two-week PD and at the end of each school year during Y1 – Y4. This anonymous survey will capture tutors' perceptions of the degree to which the initial PD and quarterly support addressed tutor confidence and skills as well as student/tutor relationships and program logistics. Results will provide formative feedback for LMS and address Evaluation Question 4 (**Table 7**).

Finally, CREP will conduct annual voluntary Tutor Focus Groups with a subset of participants across all treatment schools. These focus groups will give tutors – the stakeholders who interact most directly with students – an opportunity to provide detailed feedback on the intervention and will address all four evaluation questions (**Table 7**).

(3) The extent to which the evaluation plan clearly articulates the key project components, mediators, and outcomes, as well as a measurable threshold for acceptable implementation.

The evaluation questions are presented in **Table 7**, along with the key project components, mediators and expected outcomes associated with each question. The LMS and CREP teams will collaboratively determine measurable and acceptable thresholds for implementation for professional development, tutoring activities, and student tutoring dosage based on available programmatic data. An abbreviated timeline for program evaluation, as it aligns with implementation activities, is presented in **Appendix J**.

Table 7: Evaluation questions, data sources, and analyses

Evaluation Question	Data source(s)	Analyses
<p>1. Does the intervention improve student achievement, particularly achievement of high needs students, in reading to a statistically significant and/or educationally meaningful extent, relative to comparison students?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● iReady reading and TCAP ELA (treatment + control schools) ● Tutor, classroom teacher and administrator surveys ● Tutor focus groups 	<p>Main: 2nd - 4th grade TCAP ELA test scores in treatment vs. control schools (overall sample)</p> <p>Supplemental: 2nd - 4th grade iReady for all students, iReady and TCAP for subgroups in treatment vs. control schools; 5th and 6th grade study cohort iReady and TCAP test score comparison for all students and student subgroups of interest.</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative analysis of items reported by tutors, teachers, and administrators on surveys</p> <p>Qualitative analysis of tutor focus groups</p>

<i>If the Tutor901 program is effective, then high-needs student subgroups in the study will show improved academic outcomes in reading, relative to high-needs students in schools without LMS Tutors supporting students.</i>		
2. To what extent do tutors feel the intervention has supported students' SEL competencies? To what extent do students show progress in SEL outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SEL Panorama survey ● Tutor, classroom teacher and administrator surveys ● Tutor focus groups 	<p>Supplemental: Quantitative pre/post analysis of 2nd - 4th grade SEL measure</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative analysis of items reported by tutors, teachers, and administrators on surveys</p> <p>Qualitative analysis of results from tutor focus groups in Project Years 1-4</p>
<i>If the Tutor901 program is effective, then high-needs students in the study will show improved social-emotional outcomes through having personal relationships established with tutors (e.g., increased self-awareness, self-regulation, social and relationship skills).</i>		
3. To what extent are tutors implementing Tutor901 program components with fidelity? To what extent does the level of fidelity impact student outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tutor observations (treatment + control) ● Tutor, classroom teacher and administrator surveys ● Tutor focus groups ● Fidelity Thresholds 	<p>Quantitative analysis of pre/post observations during tutor lessons</p> <p>Quantitative and qualitative analysis of items reported by tutors, teachers, and administrators on surveys</p> <p>Qualitative analysis of results from tutor focus groups in Project Years 1-4</p> <p>Thresholds for acceptable implementation TBD</p>
<i>The extent to which tutors implement the Tutor901 program with fidelity may mediate observed student achievement and SEL outcomes.</i>		
4. To what extent do tutors participating in the Tutor 901 program feel it has been effective at building their confidence and skills as well as supporting their student/tutor relationship?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tutor survey ● Tutor focus groups 	<p>Quantitative and qualitative analysis of items reported by tutors on surveys</p> <p>Qualitative analysis of results from tutor focus groups in Project Years 1-4</p>
<i>The underlying variation in school environments may mediate the extent to which tutors feel the overall intervention has been effective, and their training has supported them.</i>		