

Cross-Age Tutoring Guide for Reading Achievement in Afterschool Care Programs



Start up a cross-age tutoring program in **7 simple steps!**



The Meadows Center
FOR PREVENTING EDUCATIONAL RISK

Introduction

Schools and afterschool care organizations are stretched thin in many ways. Given the lack of resources, large class sizes, and even the shift in some districts to a four-day school week, solutions are needed that provide all students with access to evidence-based instruction and individualized learning opportunities. One such approach is **cross-age tutoring**. This guide provides everything you need to get started!

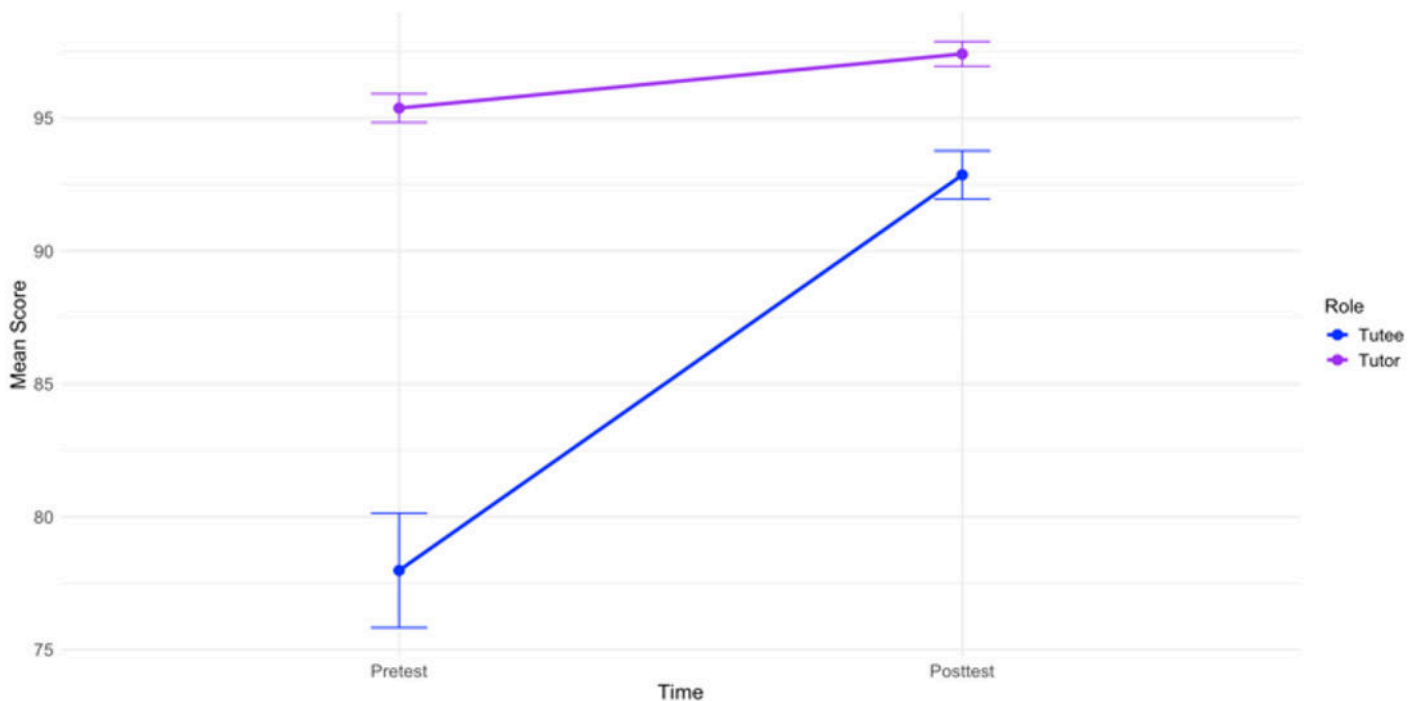
What Is Cross-Age Tutoring?

Cross-age tutoring is a model in which an older student tutor (who can be in high school, middle school, or even elementary!) works with a younger student tutee to support their learning and growth. This model has demonstrated itself to be an efficacious approach to drive student learning and engagement (Shenderovich et al., 2016; Leung, 2019).

How Can It Help My Students?

Cross-age tutoring provides benefits on the academic outcomes of both younger students (*tutees*) and older student (*tutors*). In fact, a recent study indicated that 4th and 5th grade tutors and 1st and 2nd grade tutees demonstrated growth in oral reading fluency after participating in cross-age tutoring lessons for 17 weeks (Swanson et al., 2023).

Figure 1: Cross-Age Tutors and Tutees: Oral Reading Fluency Growth



Note. 4th and 5th grade oral reading fluency naturally grows at a slower rate because, on average, it starts higher. The fact that 4th and 5th grade oral reading fluency improved is very impressive.

Let's Get Started!

The following are seven steps to implement cross-age tutoring in your afterschool program.

1 Identify Program and Student Needs

Meet with the principal to ask if a systematic reading tutoring program for 1st and 2nd graders would be appropriate. Below is a conversation guide with a few topics to introduce this idea with other school stakeholders.

"I am interested in collaborating to implement cross-age tutoring in our afterschool care program . . ."

Cross-age tutoring has demonstrated benefits on the **academic outcomes for both tutors and tutees**.

Cross-age tutoring can be implemented with **students of all ages**.

Cross-age tutoring can serve as a **powerful boost** for student reading growth.

Cross-age tutoring is a **cost-effective approach** to increase student learning in our afterschool program.

This learning model will provide students with an **individualized learning experience** using evidence-based materials.

We can collaborate to support students' academic outcomes, even **beyond the school day**.

2 Identify Evidence-Based Materials

Below are two programs designed for peer tutoring. These programs are already backed by research and demonstrate growth in academic skills for both tutors and tutees.

Sound Partners

<https://www.voyagersopris.com/products/reading/sound-partners/overview>

Sound Partners is a research-based tutoring program that targets beginning reading skills for students in the early elementary grades. It is a 1-to-1 intervention that provides individualized instruction and feedback to help beginning readers develop decoding, phonemic awareness, spelling, and reading fluency. Sound Partners is an excellent program option for older elementary school

students to serve as tutors to 1st and 2nd graders (Swanson et al., 2023). It is also appropriate for middle- or high-school tutors who work with younger readers to develop their reading skills.

Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)

<https://frg.vkcsites.org/what-is-pals/>

PALS is a research-based tutoring program for both reading and mathematics. PALS has programs designed for students from elementary through high school. As such, it can be adapted for a variety of students to serve as both tutors and tutees. PALS is a 1-to-1 intervention designed to provide instruction and feedback to students in a way where both the tutor and tutee benefit. Although it can be used for cross-age tutoring, it can also be used when students are the same age or grade.

Additional Materials

If your afterschool program cannot purchase one of the programs above, below are two websites with tons of free resources that are appropriate for use with a wide range of grade levels.

- Florida Center for Reading Research
<https://fcrr.org/student-center-activities>
- The University of Florida Literacy Institute
<https://ufli.education.ufl.edu/foundations/printable-resources>

When Choosing a Resource, Consider the Following Questions

- ☐ Are lessons or activities **scripted** so tutors know what to say? Consider the reading level of the script. Is it appropriate for your students' grade level(s)?
- ☐ Are lessons or activities **simple** enough for student tutors to lead? Consider the training students might need to implement the lessons independently.
- ☐ Does the resource indicate **how long** will each lesson or activity take? Consider setting up a timer so students can manage their lesson time.
- ☐ Will this **fit** in our daily afterschool program schedule? Consider where this program will work best in your schedule so students will be focused (e.g., before or after playtime, right after snack).

How Can I Determine if a Resource is Evidence-Based?

Once you have found an appropriate resource, make sure that it is **evidence-based**. To easily check if a resource is evidence-based, use one of the following websites.

- **What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)**
<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>
WWC reviews all related research for different instructional programs or interventions and shares an effectiveness rating to indicate what works in education.
- **Best Evidence Encyclopedia (BEE)**
<https://bestevidence.org>
BEE provides helpful information about the strength of programs available for K-12 learning.

3 Create Tutoring Dyads

The success of your cross-age tutoring program will be influenced by how well students are paired. Take into account academic skill, student pick up time, and how well students get along with one another.

To pair students, consider the following:

General Level of Academic Skills

If you have access to students' academic skill levels, these may be a helpful guide to pairing students (Mauer & Swanson, 2024).

Make a list of your students from those who are strongest in that skill (top of the list) to those needing the most support (bottom of the list). Then, fold the list in half. Pair the student at the top of the bottom half of the page with the student at the very end of the page and pair the student at the top of the top half of the page with the student at the bottom of the top half. See Figure 3 for more information.

Figure 2: Student Pairing Based on Academic Skill in Reading

Example

Ms. Roberts has created a rank-ordered list of students in her class based on reading scores and her observation of students' classroom performance. She has divided the list in half, creating pairs, with partner 1 being a more capable reader than partner 2.

Rank-Ordered List		Initial Pairings	
Josh Evelyn Andrew Benjamin Cory Angela Jack Devin Chloe Martin Max Taryn Lucy Maria Dexter Will Jose Leanne Sammy Christina John Ellen			
Partner 1	Partner 2		
Josh	Taryn		
Evelyn	Lucy		
Andrew	Maria		
Benjamin	Dexter		
Cory	Will		
Angela	Jose		
Jack	Leanne		
Devin	Sammy		
Chloe	Christina		
Martin	John		
Max	Ellen		

Swanson et al. (2018).

If your afterschool program does not have access to academic data, don't worry. You can match dyads using the next three suggestions:

Student Pick-Up Time

In a prior study (Swanson et al., 2023), researchers found that student pick-up time from afterschool care programs posed a barrier to participation. Try pairing students with similar pick-up times and prompt them to start early to ensure they have time to complete lessons prior to being picked up.

Students' Language Background

Young children who are learning English as a second language and concurrently learning to read in English may need some extra support. One way to support learning for emergent bilingual students is to pair them with an older buddy who speaks the same home language.

General Cooperation

This is perhaps the most important component of all. Do the students in the dyad get along? You may think so until they're actually working together! Don't be afraid to switch partners so that everyone enjoys their time together.

Adjusting Student Dyads

If a dyad is having trouble working together, don't be afraid to switch partners. It may take a few weeks and a few changes to get the dyads just right.

By taking time to carefully create cross-age tutoring dyads, you are likely to see greater enjoyment—for the students and yourself—as well as strong academic benefits for both tutors and tutees.

4 Provide Training

Access our **free online module** that includes video tutorials for afterschool leaders and student trainings at the following address: <https://meadowscenter.org/resource/cross-age-tutoring-tool-kit/>

All the training components referenced below are covered in-depth in our trainings. Both traditional PowerPoint presentations and a RISE module (videos and interactive modules) are available.

Please refer the speaker notes in the PowerPoint files when conducting trainings with your students. If you choose to use the online modules, additional videos will explain the program to students, so your main role will be to facilitate and click through the presentations.

Below are components that will set up your students and site for success.

All Students

Highly Structured Training. When students participate in structured trainings, they (a) are more successful in implementing the program and (b) demonstrate larger academic gains (Leung, 2019). All trainings for cross-age tutoring should be structured, clear, and occur in advance of lessons beginning. A structured training is key to the success of your cross-age tutoring program.

Setting High Expectations. Set and maintain high expectations for tutoring time. Discuss the expectations for voice level, behavior, transition time, materials, and teamwork during lessons.

Tutors

Please see our interactive and free Tutor Training Presentation.

Training Components for Cross-Age Tutors (i.e., the older buddy) should include:

- Introduction, modeling, and practice time for all lesson components in your cross-age tutoring program
- Behavioral expectations for tutor leadership
- Tips for supporting buddy (tutee) behavior
- Training on delivering specific feedback
- Opportunity to practice with paired tutee

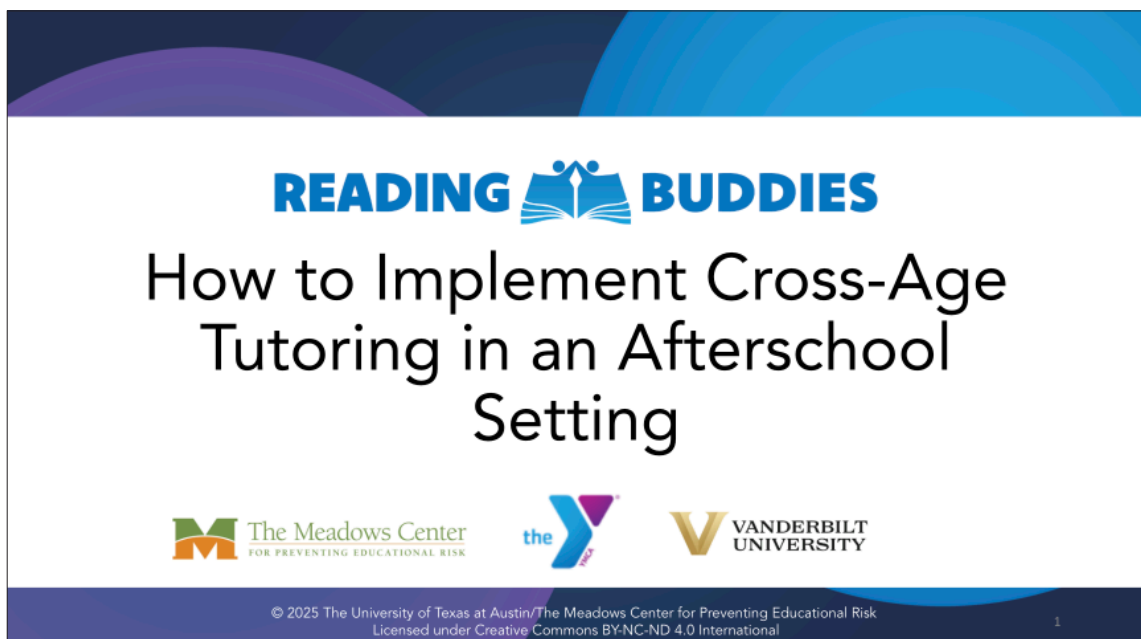
Tutees

Please see our interactive and free Tutee Training Presentation.

Training Components for Cross-Age Tutees (i.e., the younger buddy) should include:

- Introduction to the Cross-Age Tutoring Program
- Discussion on and expectations for buddy behavior
- Opportunity to practice with paired tutor

Figure 3: Training Materials



5 Student Participation

Now you are ready to begin cross-age tutoring! Below are a few tips to ensure you have an engaging daily tutoring routine where students can be as independent as possible.

Set and Maintain High Expectations

Remind tutors that they are leaders in your afterschool care site. For all students, praise dyads that show strong teamwork and demonstrate positive attitudes. Make corrections for those who are not demonstrating the expected behavior during tutoring time. Do not let disruptive behaviors slide. Address student behavior quickly and consistently.

Choose Tutor Leaders

Choose two or three tutor leaders to guide the other tutors and remind peers of tutoring time, materials handling, and implementation procedures. In a prior study, tutor leaders were a key component in student buy-in and engagement (Swanson et al., 2023).

I was a tutor leader and I loved it! I announced when it was Reading Buddies time every day. I started the timer for the whole group and announced when time was up. It was fun!

–Caroline, 5th-grade tutor leader

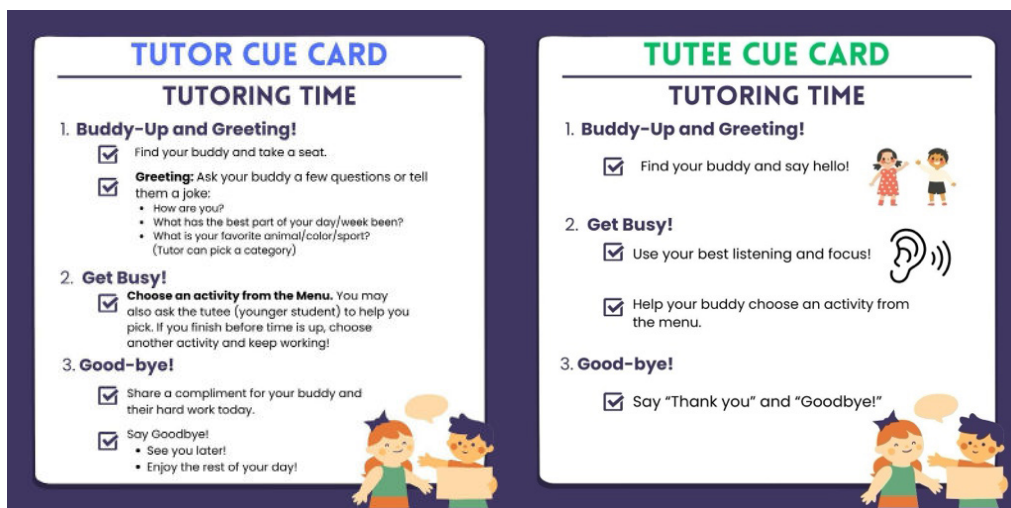
I was a tutor leader with Caroline. I was in charge of materials. I rolled the materials cart out and made sure everyone cleaned up when we were done.

–Cameron, 4th-grade tutor leader

Provide Tutor and Tutee Cue Cards

Clear, simple, and visual directions are helpful reminders for all students. By providing tutors a tutees with their very own cue card, they can reference and remind themselves of the expectations and daily procedures.

Figure 4: Tutor and Tutee Cue Cards



Mauer & Swanson (2024)

6 Provide Support, Motivation, and Encouragement

When students are engaged in challenging academic tasks, support, motivation, and encouragement play a critical role in their success. Younger students may struggle with feelings of self-doubt, frustration, or mental fatigue when they encounter new or challenging material. Without encouragement, they may be more likely to give up or disengage from the work.

During cross-age tutoring lessons, a tutor can create a supportive environment for their tutee by


- providing positive reinforcement,
- delivering specific feedback,
- breaking tasks into manageable steps, and
- helping their tutee recognize their own progress.

Motivation can help students stay invested in the learning process, especially when the task feels hard.

To support, motivate, and encourage students, we provide the following two tools in this toolkit.

First, a **lesson log** where students get to monitor their progress, which is a research-based method to encourage motivation. After 10 lessons, students can be rewarded with a prize.


Figure 5: Sample Lesson Log



Lesson Log

Name _____

Name _____

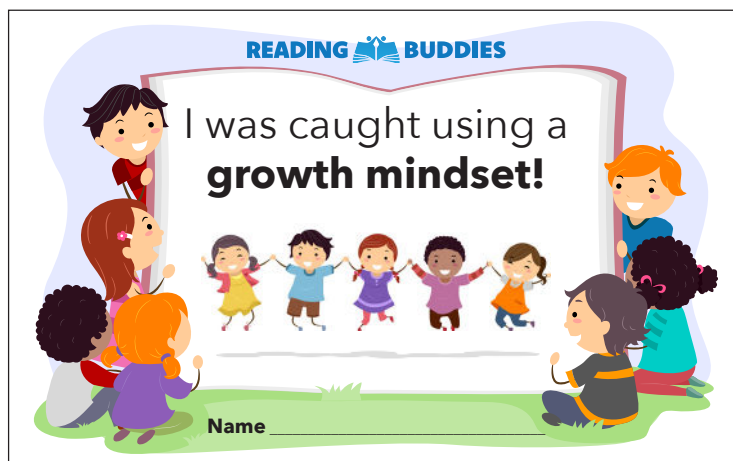


Fill in the ☆ when you complete each lesson. Then, circle how you feel about it.

Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4	Lesson 5	Lesson 6	Lesson 7	Lesson 8	Lesson 9	Lesson 10
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆
Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:
I feel... 😊 😐 😞	I feel... 😊 😐 😞	I feel... 😊 😐 😞	I feel... 😊 😐 😞	I feel... 😊 😐 😞	I feel... 😊 😐 😞	I feel... 😊 😐 😞	I feel... 😊 😐 😞	I feel... 😊 😐 😞	I feel... 😊 😐 😞

Lesson 11	Lesson 12	Lesson 13	Lesson 14	Lesson 15	Lesson 16	Lesson 17	Lesson 18	Lesson 19	Lesson 20
☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆
Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:
I feel... 😊 😐 😞	I feel... 😊 😐 😞	I feel... 😊 😐 😞	I feel... 😊 😐 😞	I feel... 😊 😐 😞	I feel... 😊 😐 😞	I feel... 😊 😐 😞	I feel... 😊 😐 😞	I feel... 😊 😐 😞	I feel... 😊 😐 😞

Second, **certificates** that recognize students' behavior. Certificates congratulate students on behaviors such as demonstrating good teamwork or a growth mindset. Certificates can be printed on cardstock or made into stickers. Hand these out as often as possible to recognize deserving students' hard work.

Figure 6: Sample Certificate

7 Additional Considerations for Success in the Afterschool Care Setting

Licensure and Ratio Requirements

Licensed childcare programs are generally bound to state requirements, including staff-to-student ratio, utilization of licensed space(s), and background checks of external visitors/volunteers. Be mindful of these requirements as you plan for your peer tutoring program.

Budget Considerations

As the budget is often a major consideration in school and afterschool settings, share the benefits of cross-age tutoring programs when discussing with your afterschool leadership team or utilize the no/low cost resources described in this module.

Connect with Parents

Communicate the benefits of your afterschool site's cross-age tutoring program with parents and caregivers. Work together to coordinate scheduling to maximize consistency in student attendance and share experiences so that they feel connected to the program.

With these simple steps, you are on your way to implementing a successful and engaging cross-age tutoring program that supports all learners.

Additional Resources

Visit our Teachers Pay Teachers page at <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/store/the-meadows-center-for-preventing-educational-risk>

Check out our social media for more information!

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MCPER.EDU>
- X: https://x.com/MCPER_EDU

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