



# DRIVING STUDENT SUCCESS

## Implementing Outcomes-Based Contracting in Virtual Tutoring

“Outcomes-based contracting directly links expenditure of school district resources to improving student outcomes. This work addresses pervasive equity gaps and supports collaborative partnerships between districts and vendors that will better meet student needs and achieve better results.”

- Southern Education Foundation



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# Executive Summary

Outcomes-based contracting (OBC) offers a promising approach to enhancing educational services by linking payment to student outcomes. This white paper explores the benefits of OBC, particularly in the context of virtual tutoring, and highlights Cognition's successful implementation of this model with Denver Public Schools. Key findings and recommendations are provided to guide districts in adopting OBC for high-impact tutoring.

## Glossary of Key Terms and Concepts

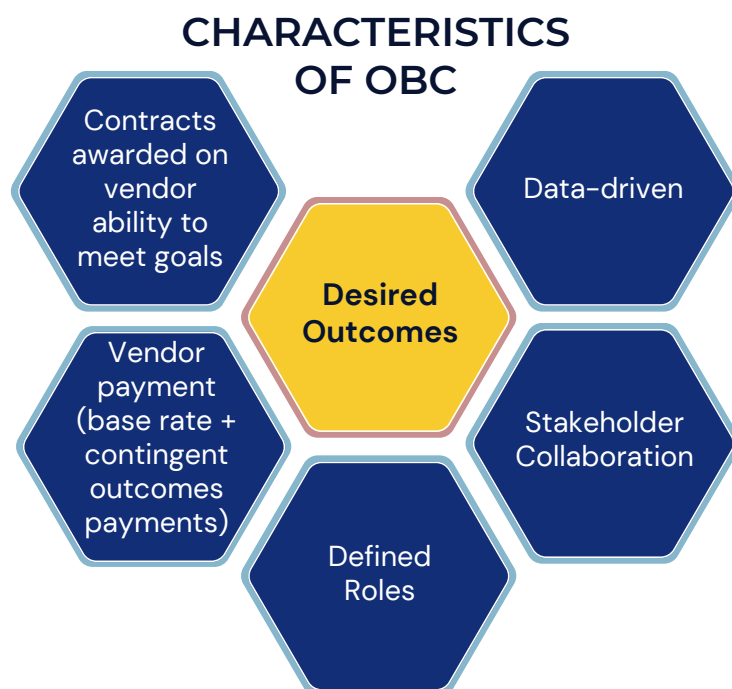
- **Outcomes-Based Contracting (OBC):** A model of contracting where payment is tied to the achievement of predefined outcomes.
- **High-Impact Tutoring:** Typically defined as one-on-one or small-group instruction that occurs several times a week. Other characteristics include:
  - Sustained and strong relationships between students and their tutors
  - Close monitoring of student knowledge and skills
  - Alignment with school curriculum
  - Oversight of tutors to ensure quality interactions
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Using student data (attendance, progress, engagement, etc.) to inform and guide instructional practices and program adjustments.
- **Inquiry-Based Learning:** An instructional method where students learn by being asked open-ended questions and/or partake in group activities that facilitate quality peer-to-peer interaction.

# Introduction

The educational landscape is rapidly evolving, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic. Traditional fee-for-service contracts often fail to ensure accountability and effective resource use. As ESSER funding phases out, school districts face the challenge of maintaining and improving student performance with limited budgets. Outcomes-based contracting (OBC) emerges as a viable solution, linking payments to measurable student outcomes and fostering a shared commitment to educational success **(Southern Education Foundation, 2024)**.

OBC emphasizes mutual accountability, requiring both districts and service providers to meet predefined performance metrics. This model ensures that public funds are spent effectively, driving continuous improvement and innovation in educational services. By focusing on tangible results, OBC aligns the interests of all stakeholders, fostering a collaborative environment aimed at achieving specific educational goals **(Government Outcomes Lab, 2023)**.

This white paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of OBC, its benefits, and practical implementation strategies. We will delve into the principles of OBC, examine its impact through a case study of Denver Public Schools, and offer recommendations for districts considering this innovative contracting approach. By highlighting the potential of OBC to transform educational outcomes, we aim to inspire districts to explore and adopt this model for their tutoring programs.





# Understanding Outcomes-Based Contracting

Outcomes-based contracting (OBC) represents a significant shift from traditional fee-for-service models, emphasizing accountability and data-driven decision-making. In OBC, a portion of the payment is contingent on achieving specific, measurable outcomes. This model has been successfully applied in various sectors, including social services and healthcare, and is now gaining traction in K-12 education.

## Definition and Historical Context

OBC focuses on achieving predefined outcomes rather than merely delivering services. Traditionally, contracts between school districts and service providers are based on the quantity of services provided. In contrast, OBC emphasizes quality and effectiveness, ensuring both parties are committed to achieving specific educational goals. This approach has been increasingly adopted in sectors like workforce development and healthcare, demonstrating its potential to drive significant improvements in service delivery and outcomes (**Hechinger Report, 2023**).

## Key Principles

1

**Mutual Accountability:** OBC contracts foster a collaborative relationship between school districts and service providers, ensuring that both parties are equally invested in achieving the desired outcomes. This mutual accountability is crucial for the success of OBC initiatives.

2

**Performance Metrics:** Contracts include specific, measurable outcomes that provide clear benchmarks for success. These metrics are typically based on student performance data, such as standardized test scores or other relevant assessments.

3

**Data-Driven Decision Making:** Continuous monitoring and analysis of data are integral to OBC. This ensures that both districts and providers can make informed decisions and adjustments to improve program effectiveness and achieve the desired outcomes.

## Benefits of OBC

- **Enhanced Accountability:** OBC ensures that service providers are accountable for delivering tangible results, leading to improved student outcomes and more efficient use of public funds.
- **Increased Transparency:** By tying payments to specific outcomes, OBC provides greater transparency in how educational services are delivered and evaluated.
- **Encouragement of Innovation:** The need to meet defined outcomes can drive service providers to develop innovative approaches and solutions to improve student performance.

## The Role of High-Impact Tutoring

High-impact tutoring has proven to be a critical intervention for improving student outcomes, particularly in addressing learning losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtual tutoring expands the reach of these services, offering flexibility and accessibility to students across diverse geographic locations (**Sparkrock, 2023**).

### Importance and Impact

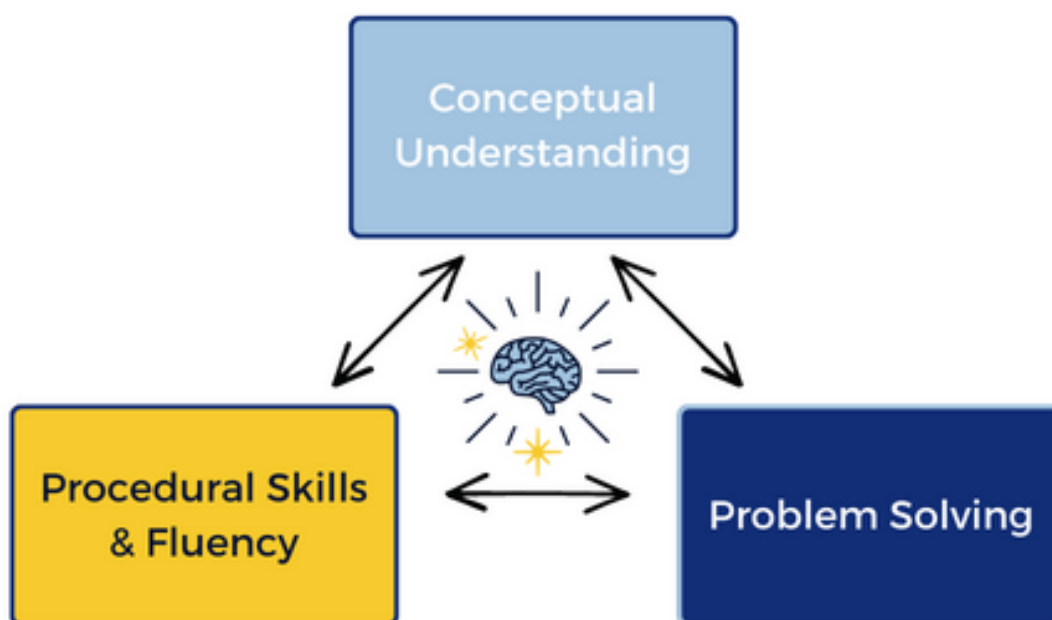
High-impact tutoring involves frequent, consistent sessions that provide individualized support to students. Research has shown that this approach can significantly improve academic performance, especially for students who are struggling or have fallen behind. Virtual tutoring, delivered through online platforms, enhances accessibility and allows for more flexible scheduling, making reaching a larger number of students easier. By providing targeted support, high-impact virtual tutoring can help close achievement gaps and bolster overall student performance.

### Integration with OBC

Virtual tutoring aligns well with OBC models by providing measurable student progress and engagement data. This allows clear performance metrics to be set and tracked, ensuring that providers and districts are accountable for student success. Integrating virtual tutoring into OBC frameworks can further enhance the effectiveness of these programs by ensuring that tutoring services are delivered consistently and with high fidelity.

## Cignition's Approach

Cignition leverages data-driven and certified expert tutors to deliver personalized virtual tutoring sessions. By integrating mastery checks and inquiry-based learning strategies, Cignition ensures that tutoring is not only engaging but also effective in achieving desired student outcomes. The company's approach to virtual tutoring aligns with the principles of OBC, providing a robust framework for measuring and achieving educational success. Cignition's focus on data-driven decision-making and continuous improvement makes it a valuable partner for school districts seeking to implement OBC in their tutoring programs.



Cignition regularly consults with district/school leaders and teachers to evaluate the efficacy of our program. In these meetings, student data is analyzed to determine the effectiveness of implementation and discuss action steps and the status of deliverables. With direct input on the program's design, district and school partners help maximize the benefits and align the program to their goals and priorities.

Program Managers also meet with teachers or school coordinators weekly or bi-monthly to look for patterns of student absences/tardies and to discuss student engagement with the tutor and progression toward mastery. Tutors are required to view daily or weekly feedback from their students and complete a bi-annual self-reflection.

# Practical Implementation of OBC in Virtual Tutoring

Implementing outcomes-based contracting (OBC) in virtual tutoring requires careful planning and collaboration between school districts and service providers. The following steps outline a framework for developing successful OBC agreements:

## Developing Successful OBC Agreements

- 1. Setting Clear, Measurable Goals:** Define specific student outcomes and performance metrics, such as improvements in standardized test scores or progress in specific subject areas. Establishing baseline data is crucial for accurate progress measurement, involving the collection of initial data on student performance to set realistic and achievable targets.
- 2. Mutual Accountability Agreements:** Outline both districts' and providers' roles and responsibilities, ensuring that both parties are committed to achieving the defined outcomes. Provisions for regular communication and data sharing facilitate continuous improvement and problem-solving.
- 3. Data Tracking and Reporting Mechanisms:** Implement systems for continuous data collection and analysis, such as online dashboards and regular progress reports. Data should be used to inform instructional adjustments and improvements, ensuring that the tutoring program remains responsive to student needs and performance trends.

## Key Principles

**Consistency and Fidelity:** Ensure tutoring sessions are delivered consistently and adhere to established best practices. This includes maintaining regular session schedules and using evidence-based instructional strategies. Providers should establish clear guidelines for tutors and regularly monitor adherence to these guidelines to ensure fidelity of implementation.

**Ongoing Support:** Provide ongoing support and professional development for tutors to ensure they are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to deliver high-quality instruction. This includes training on effective tutoring strategies, using data to inform instruction and ways to engage students in a virtual environment. Regular professional development opportunities help tutors stay current with best practices and continuously improve their instructional skills.

**Regular Assessments:** Conduct regular assessments to monitor student progress and identify areas for improvement. This data-driven approach allows for timely interventions and adjustments to enhance program effectiveness. Assessments should be aligned with the performance metrics defined in the OBC agreement and provide actionable insights to inform instructional decisions. Regular feedback to students and parents also helps maintain engagement and support student learning.

# Case Study - Denver Public Schools

Denver Public Schools (DPS) adopted outcomes-based contracting (OBC) for virtual tutoring with Cognition, aiming to improve student performance through high-impact tutoring. This section provides an integrated analysis of the implementation and outcomes of these contracts over two academic years, highlighting the most pertinent pieces related to OBC and the strong data results directly in the text.

## Implementation and Strategies

In the 2021-2022 academic year, DPS partnered with Cognition to deliver high-dosage virtual tutoring in math. The primary goal was to enhance math proficiency among students in grades 4-12 through consistent, individualized instruction tailored to each student's needs. Tutoring sessions were scheduled multiple times a week and integrated with the district's curriculum to reinforce classroom learning and address specific knowledge gaps.

The following year, the program expanded to include more students, including those with special instructional needs, building on the successes and lessons learned from the previous year. This demonstrated the scalability of the OBC model and refined implementation strategies to improve program effectiveness (**Cognition, 2022; Cognition, 2023**).

## Targets and Success Metrics

The primary target for both academic years was to increase the percentage of students achieving proficiency in math, as measured by standardized tests. Additional success metrics included improvements in student engagement and attendance in tutoring sessions.

- **2021-2022 Academic Year:**

- Significant improvements in student math scores, with a notable increase in the percentage of students achieving proficiency.
- Positive feedback from students and teachers highlights the tutoring sessions' effectiveness and impact on student confidence and motivation.
- Data showed a **15% increase in proficiency rates among students who participated in the tutoring sessions.**



- **2022-2023 Academic Year:**

- Further improvements in student academic growth, with increased proficiency rates in math.
- Enhanced collaboration between tutors and district staff facilitated more effective problem-solving and instructional adjustments.
- Data indicated a **13% growth in diagnostic scores and a Standards Mastery score of 67.5%.**

Denver Student Engagement and Outcomes	2021-2022	2022-2023
Attendance	64.2%	77.5% (+13.3%)
Engagement	74.2%	82.3% (+8.1%)
% students improving on 10+ standards	31.0%	47.0% (+16.0%)
Growth on Diagnostic Series	64.6%	72.7% (+8.1%)

## Challenges and Solutions

One of the main challenges faced during both academic years was ensuring consistent student attendance and engagement. Cognition implemented reminder systems to address this and engaged parents to support their children's participation in tutoring sessions. Regular data tracking and feedback loops allowed for timely adjustments to tutoring strategies, ensuring that interventions were effective and aligned with student needs.

## Insights and Testimonials

Brittany Miller, former Senior Director of Expanded Academic Learning at Denver Public Schools and now Managing Director for Souther Education Foundation's strategic initiative on Outcomes Based Contracting, highlighted OBC's benefits and the program's positive impact on student outcomes. She noted that the mutual accountability fostered by OBC encouraged both the district and Cognition to strive for continuous improvement and better results. Testimonials from other educators and administrators further underscored the value of this innovative approach to contracting and service delivery.

# Broader Implications and Future Directions

## Innovation in Virtual Tutoring

Outcomes-based contracting (OBC) can potentially drive significant innovation in virtual tutoring by incentivizing providers to continuously improve their services. By linking payments to measurable student outcomes, OBC ensures that both districts and service providers are committed to achieving high standards of educational success. This model encourages the development of more effective and engaging tutoring practices, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and accountability.

## Expansion to Other Educational Interventions

While this white paper focuses on virtual tutoring, the principles of OBC can be applied to other educational interventions, such as professional development and curriculum development. This broader application can enhance educational outcomes by promoting accountability and data-driven decision-making across various educational services (**Government Outcomes Lab, 2023**).

## Future Trends and Opportunities

The adoption of OBC is expected to increase as districts seek greater accountability and effectiveness in educational spending. As more districts recognize the benefits of linking payments to student outcomes, OBC could become a standard practice in contracting educational services. This shift will likely lead to greater collaboration between districts and providers and the development of innovative approaches to meeting the defined outcomes.

In addition to its potential for driving innovation and improving outcomes, OBC presents opportunities for research and evaluation. Ongoing studies can help refine OBC practices, identify best practices, and provide valuable insights into the most effective strategies for achieving educational goals (**Southern Education Foundation, 2024**).

# Recommendations and Best Practices

## Key Takeaways for Districts

For districts considering outcomes-based contracting (OBC) for their virtual tutoring programs, several key takeaways can help ensure successful implementation:

1

**Prioritize Clear, Measurable Outcomes:** Define specific student outcomes and performance metrics from the outset. Establishing clear goals helps align the efforts of districts and service providers to achieve tangible educational improvements.

2

**Build Strong Partnerships:** Foster a collaborative relationship between districts and service providers. Regular communication and mutual accountability are crucial for addressing challenges and making necessary adjustments to achieve desired outcomes.

3

**Utilize Data Effectively:** Implement robust data tracking and reporting systems to monitor progress and inform decision-making. Continuous data analysis allows for timely interventions and ensures the program remains responsive to student needs.

## Developing Successful OBC Agreements

**1. Setting Clear, Measurable Goals:** Define specific student outcomes and performance metrics, such as improvements in standardized test scores or progress in specific subject areas. Establishing baseline data is crucial for accurate progress measurement, involving the collection of initial data on student performance to set realistic and achievable targets.

**2. Mutual Accountability Agreements:** Outline both districts' and providers' roles and responsibilities, ensuring that both parties are committed to achieving the defined outcomes. Provisions for regular communication and data sharing facilitate continuous improvement and problem-solving.

**3. Utilize Data Effectively:** Implement robust data tracking and reporting systems to monitor progress and inform decision-making. Continuous data analysis allows for timely interventions and ensures the program remains responsive to student needs.

## Recommendations for Policymakers and Educational Leaders

1

**Encourage Adoption of OBC Models:** Promote outcomes-based contracting to improve accountability and effectiveness in educational spending. Policymakers can provide guidance and support to districts in adopting OBC models.

2

**Support Infrastructure Development:** Assist districts in developing the necessary infrastructure for effective OBC implementation. This includes investing in data tracking systems, training programs, and other resources supporting OBC initiatives.

3

**Promote Research and Evaluation:** Encourage ongoing research and evaluation to refine OBC practices and identify best practices. Policymakers and educational leaders can support studies that provide valuable insights into the most effective strategies for achieving educational goals.

## Conclusion

Outcomes-based contracting (OBC) offers a powerful approach to enhancing the effectiveness of virtual tutoring and other educational services. By linking payment to student outcomes, OBC ensures accountability and promotes continuous improvement. The Denver Public Schools case study demonstrates the potential of OBC to drive significant improvements in student performance through high-dosage virtual tutoring.

Districts considering OBC can benefit from this white paper's insights and best practices. By setting clear, measurable goals, fostering strong partnerships, and effectively utilizing data, districts can implement OBC and achieve better student educational outcomes. Policymakers and educational leaders play a crucial role in supporting the adoption and refinement of OBC practices, ensuring that public funds are used effectively to improve student learning and development.

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## Who is Cognition?

Cognition delivers high-impact K-12 tutoring, led by experienced educators who produce **proven, repeatable results** in student success. Our research-based approach focuses on data-informed instruction and collaborative learning, encouraging **student-to-student interaction** to **build deep conceptual understanding**.

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For more information, visit our website ([www.cognition.com](http://www.cognition.com)) or email us at [info@cognition.com](mailto:info@cognition.com).

