

USA Today LTE—from Dr. Ross

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Dear Editor:

The problem with the federal government's supplemental educational services (SES) program isn't necessarily the performance of tutoring providers, or even the kids being tutored. The real problem – one I hope policymakers and educators alike address as Congress takes up the reauthorization of “No Child Left Behind” – is the way in which the program is being measured (“Our View on No Child Left Behind: Taxpayer-Funded Tutoring Fails Needy Students,” June 20).

No one should expect 30 to 40 hours of after-school tutoring during the course of a school year – the equivalent of one week of classes – to magically boost student scores on standardized state tests. Indeed, the states responsible for the selection and evaluation of tutoring organizations should also consider “customer satisfaction” levels (Are parents and students happy with their SES experience?) -- as well as service delivery and compliance measures (Are tutoring providers meeting their contractual obligations, and delivering the programs they told states they would?).

I know that implementing sound SES evaluation programs is extremely challenging, as my organization is currently under contract with nine states to do so. But because of my work, I also know that it would be a mistake for policymakers to judge SES a failure simply because we do not yet have a preponderance of evidence to the contrary. Eight in 10 parents highly value SES, believing it is helping their children do better in school. And the vast majority of SES providers are delivering good quality, results-oriented tutoring that is aligned to state learning standards.

The bottom line: before we judge or dismiss, we should tutor ourselves about all aspects of this new and very promising education program.

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