A witness to resilience:

I started working for Tutoring Chicago in August 2001, known then as the Cabrini Green Tutoring Program. Having taught fifth grade for six years, I was excited and full of optimism for this new challenge to meet the needs of Chicago’s children. I led my first orientation for new tutors on Monday, September 10th. Everything changed the next morning.

In the aftermath of 9/11, and still new to nonprofit management, I recall conversations of hope and promise, but juxtaposed with uncertainty and fear. These conflicting thoughts resonated with this young, newly married, 28-year-old Program Director, but the mission continued.

The following week began the 2001-02 school year, we opened our doors and arms to many economically disadvantaged children in need of human connection, supported by the incredible volunteer tutors who knew the value of grace and consistency in the face of so much worry and uncertainty.

Almost 20 years later, with a reach expanded beyond one neighborhood and across the city to nearly 1000 children, our doors cannot physically open. We cannot embrace our students with the same care and open arms we did in 2001 – but our commitment to our students, families, and volunteers is stronger than ever.

Tutoring Chicago is rooted in a resilience that’s been cultivated over several decades through passionate leadership, conservative financial management, thoughtful preparation – and a steadfast dedication to the individual needs of thousands of Chicago’s children.

But resilience is not ours to own. Tutoring Chicago is witness to grit and determination every day. Through wind, rain, and snow, our students and volunteers attended tutoring in person each week – driven by the need to connect and learn. Today that same drive fuels our students despite overwhelming obstacles like distance and technology – in addition to being hardest hit by the economic impact, and experiencing higher rates of food insecurity, family instability, and other shocks from this disruption.

Human connection is an essential need. While necessary for now, social distancing can promote social isolation. During this time it is essential to prioritize relationships, especially with trustworthy and compassionate individuals. Connecting our students...
with empathetic and understanding people can remind them they’re not alone in the midst of challenging times, fostering positive mindsets that are more prepared for learning, growth, and development – and yes, resilience.

While no one was prepared for a challenge of this magnitude, Tutoring Chicago’s strategic plan calls for flexibility and adaptability in response to the needs of our students, volunteers, and community. Never did we think their needs would so rapidly change. But our cohesive mindset, recent pilot programs, and a solid foundation prepared the groundwork for a rapid response and shift to e-learning for hundreds of children.

Our adaptable program delivery was aided by our strong relationships with families, tutors, and the community – gauging and meeting their interests and needs. We are incredibly grateful for the determination of our parents, the commitment of our volunteers, and the generosity of our donors.

The 20-21 school year will likely present significant challenges. Missing school for prolonged periods of time will have major impacts on student achievement, especially those facing additional adversity. Learning loss for many of Chicago’s neediest children is estimated to be as much as 50% from this current year.

Tutoring Chicago is preparing for both in-person and continued digital tutoring services. We expect to serve the academic needs of 1000 economically disadvantaged children through means that work best for them, their families, and our dedicated volunteers.

I am honored to bear witness to such incredible resiliency each day over the last 19 years. Please join me in recognizing the value of human connection and the need for significant academic support to Chicago’s most deserving population. Your gift today helps reduce the digital divide, provides free one-to-one tutoring, and fosters growth that will be needed well beyond this crisis.

Sincerely,

Erin McPartlin
Executive Director
Tutoring Chicago