

Meet The New York City Agency Where Math And English Tutors Earn Up To \$1 Million Per Year

Feeding off parental anxieties and academic competition, Forum Education has turned tutoring into an elite talent agency for scholars.

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A few years into his finance career and working as an equities trader in New York City, Steven Menking was unfulfilled. He'd done everything he was supposed to do—he graduated cum laude with degrees in math and economics from Williams College, and had completed several internships, which he parlayed into a job in investment banking right out of college. But he quickly realized he wasn't willing to sacrifice his work-life balance for Wall Street's golden handcuffs. "If they have young kids, I don't know how much they're seeing them," says Menking, 36, about the executives he worked with. "Everybody makes the choices that they think is best for them. And for me, that wasn't a tradeoff that I was wanting to make."

Inspired by his time as a peer-to-peer tutor in high school, Menking left his finance gig to work as a self-employed tutor for students in mathematics. After bouncing from agency to agency, he found Forum Education, a company that positions itself as a talent agency for tutors and caters to wealthy families in the New York City private school system. Today, Menking is one of Forum's top five earners and grosses around \$500,000 a year. He makes more as a full-time tutor than he did in finance.

Tutoring has long been considered part-time work. A decade ago, *The Atlantic* deemed tutors "the new waiters" as Ivy League graduates in New York City turned to tutoring to make ends meet while chasing auditions or post-graduate programs. As online tutoring options have exploded—the global industry is now estimated to generate some \$10.42 billion in revenues 2024 according to [Grand Valley Research](#)—it's become fairly easy to get a remote, part-time tutoring gig. Edtech venture capitalists see the tutoring market as over-saturated, with competitors ranging from large operations like Princeton Review and Kaplan to startups like Wyzant and Studdy AI. If a tutoring company is going to be successful, they need to offer something unique. Forum does that.

Before starting Forum, cofounder and CEO Thomas Howell worked as a tutor himself. After graduating from Yale University in 2008 with a degree in comparative literature, he tutored New York City high schoolers in math, science, humanities and standardized test prep taking home \$45 per hour (the agency charged around \$200), while working on a post-baccalaureate degree in medicine. His cofounder and college roommate David Phelps was doing the same. Howell describes his tutoring experience as gig work that he was underprepared and underpaid for.

“At one point I was under contract with seven different agencies at the same time,” Howell says. “I remember feeling a little bit crazy. I was thrown into some very intense environments with students who had complex learning challenges—and high stakes academic careers, test prep and college admissions—with very little vetting.”

With \$8,000 in savings, Howell and Phelps set out in 2014 to build the tutoring agency they wished they had worked for when they first moved to New York City in 2010. “If you assume tutors are gig workers, you’ll design a business one way, and if you assume tutoring is a career, then you’ll design a business in a very different way. Forum was the latter,” Howell explains. “The model is much more like a talent agency than a staffing agency, and the tutors are the [asset]. They’re the talent.”

Self-employed tutors “hire” Forum to represent them and bring in clients, the same way a talent agent would an actor. Forum helps match clients with tutors who fit their needs, handles payments, negotiates rates for each tutor and markets them. For this, Forum gets a 15% cut—a smaller share of tutor earnings that many tutoring companies take, Howell claims. Reston, Virginia-based K12 Tutoring (formerly Stride Tutoring), for example, takes a 20%-25% cut which pays for the online platform, marketing, sales and operations, according to Jenn Moore, general manager at K12. Most K12 tutors work part-time, earning between \$38 and \$65 per hour for an average \$5,800 a year, with top earners grossing up to \$53,800. At Forum, the average tutor earns “well into six figures,” Howell says, with top earners surpassing \$500,000. Two of his tutors are “masters across the curricula” of top private schools, and are well-versed in helping neurodivergent students learn and improve critical organizational skills known as “executive functions.” These all-star tutors charge \$1,000 per hour and grossed over \$1 million last year in fees. Though Howell declined to comment about Forum’s revenues, Forbes estimates that it may be bringing in as much as \$10 million annually.

Five people work behind the scenes at Forum, including Howell as CEO. Phelps no longer works with the company, but sits on the board. After he left in February 2022, 21 Forum tutors bought a share of his stake in the company, and are now partial owners. “They actually have equity in the business and they receive profit share, similar to the law firm,” Howell says. The profit share is a bonus on top of their already high earnings.

Forum’s team of 35 tutors come from all backgrounds—some, like Menking, are former industry professionals, while others are academics or long-time professional tutors. Howell and his team are picky about who they bring on. Interested tutors must have at least three years of experience tutoring for New York City private school students before they can even apply, and then must pass several interview rounds and perform a mock lesson. More than 2,000 tutors have applied to work with Forum, and the agency has only accepted 35 since its founding ten years ago—an acceptance rate of less than 2%, lower than the acceptance rate at Harvard and Caltech.

One Forum parent, who lives in downtown Manhattan, and spends lavishly on Forum tutors, recently added a “sharp shooter,” to her college age son’s tutoring roster. “Our son is taking one of the hardest classes in the world at college with a very infamously famous professor, and Forum was able to sharp-shoot and get a [computer science] PhD—someone who has a job but who is also a brilliant mind in this field ... and has taken the class before,” she says.

This mother, who prefers to remain anonymous, has used Forum tutors since her twins were in elementary school. They are now sophomores at an Ivy League school. She pays between \$400 and \$1,000 per child per hourlong session, and her kids have received everything from math help, to test prep, to emotional support from their tutors, who are now like family. “For my husband and I, it’s priceless. I know them all personally, and I feel lucky to be able to pay them what we do for them to support our kids,” she says.

Forum’s 200-some tutees range from first grade to graduate school. “Most of our families are these students in the private schools in New York City and are parents who understand the value of investing in the best possible private support for their students,” says Howell. Many of Forum’s clients attend New York private schools, where tuition at secondary schools costs an average \$27,322 per year, according to educationdata.org. At some of New York City’s most prestigious private schools, tuition tops \$60,000. For example, at Horace Mann School, tuition is \$64,070 for the 2024-25 school year, and at the Dalton School, tuition costs \$64,300.

It may not be accessible to everyone, but for the parents who can afford it, Howell sees his tutors as a priceless investment. “I am allergic to that notion that you would be that casual about the mentors you put in place with young students,” he says.

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