

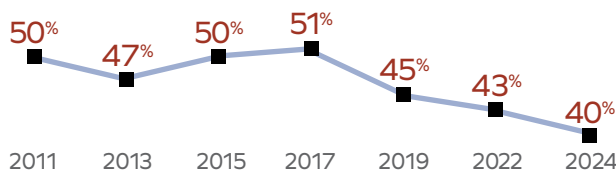
ADDRESSING OUR EARLY LITERACY CRISIS

Sustaining High-Dosage Tutoring for Massachusetts First Graders

Massachusetts has an early literacy crisis. Only 42% of our third graders were proficient in reading on the 2025 MCAS exams. Results for some student subgroups were even more startling: 77 percent of low-income students, 74 percent of Black students, 78 percent of Latino students, and 87 percent of children with disabilities didn't meet the state's proficiency bar. In Massachusetts, we have struggled to make major gains in literacy and now see students at lower levels of proficiency than 10 years ago.

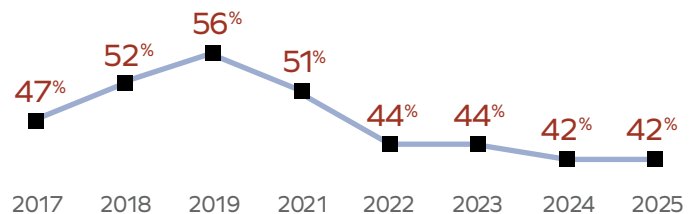
NAEP proficiency rates were stagnant between 2011 and 2017 and since then have plummeted

Percent of students at or above proficient, 4th grade NAEP Reading



While MCAS scores have shown more movement, the current picture shows the same degradation

Percent of students meeting or exceeding expectations, 3rd grade MCAS



State Policy Solutions

- **Requiring high-quality curriculum.** Only around half of Massachusetts districts embrace a “Science of Reading” approach to literacy instruction that prioritizes explicit, code-based reading instruction. Pending legislation commonly known as the Right to Read Act (*H.4683/S. 2924*), passed by both the House and Senate in February 2026, would mandate that districts use evidence-based literacy curriculum and instruction, an important step in improving reading proficiency across the state.
- **Supporting the transition to high-quality curriculum and instruction.** Governor Healey’s multi-year “Literacy Launch” initiative, created in 2024, is supporting districts in transitioning to evidence-based, high-quality curriculum through grants and professional development. The initiative is made possible through \$35M in state funding over two years, and a \$38.4M federal literacy grant to be distributed over 5 years.
- **Providing high-impact, high-dosage tutoring.** The state allocated \$25M in FY26 for an early literacy high-dosage tutoring initiative intended to serve 10,000 students in districts with high numbers of students from low-income households who enter first grade behind in their reading skills and are at risk of falling further behind.

High-Dosage Tutoring Model Provides a Literacy Safety Net for Low-Income Students

Across educational interventions, tutoring is confirmed by research to be one of the most effective; a recent analysis shows that, on average, tutoring gains equate to students attending an additional 3-15 months of school.¹

A high-impact, high-dosage tutoring model in MA funded by the One8 Foundation for two school years targeted skills that “crack the code” of reading. In SY2023-24, 2,200 students in 46 schools across 13 districts participated in the program. In SY2024-25, 2,599 students in 49 schools across 13 districts were enrolled.

To be eligible for One8 Foundation grant funding, districts had to be using well rated curriculum for K-2 ELA instruction or in a curriculum adoption process and had to have provided curriculum-specific professional learning to all K-2 teachers. Tutoring funds were provided for first-grade seats, drawing on evidence that this is where literacy tutoring is most effective.

Features of the High-Dosage Tutoring Model

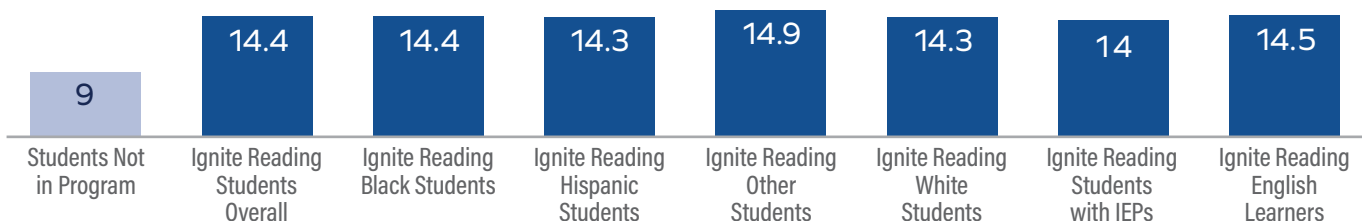
- 15 minutes a day of 1:1 virtual tutoring, five days a week, with the same highly-trained tutor, using an evidence-based curriculum
- Each student is placed in a specific skills-based protocol using a baseline diagnostic assessment with routine progress monitoring every 14 lessons
- Schools are provided with actionable data on each student in monthly data meetings

Two Years of Rigorous Evaluation Shows Large Gains for Participating Students²

A new evaluation of 2024-25 program outcomes and of how students from the 2023-24 program fared in second grade shows remarkable and sustainable gains. Findings from the Center for Research and Reform in Education at Johns Hopkins University’s evaluation show:

- Participating students gained an additional 5.4 months of learning beyond typical national growth, with consistent benefits across student subgroups.
 - These results reinforce Johns Hopkins’ earlier evaluation from the 2023-24 school year, underscoring the reliability and effectiveness of the model.
- Students from a subset of districts where data from all first graders were available grew at rates that were statistically significantly greater than academically similar peers in their districts.
- 85 percent of students who exited first grade at grade-level proficiency after participating in the program stayed at or above grade level by the end of second grade.

Additional Months of Learning



Support Statewide Scale

Governor Healey’s FY27 supplemental budget proposal includes another \$25M to continue the early literacy high-dosage tutoring initiative that could lead to significant gains in reading achievement across the state. State leaders should direct funds to high impact programs that closely adhere to the results-supported characteristics described above.

In theory, over time, schools with strong Tier 1 instruction and high impact high-dosage tutoring could expect to see reading proficiency rates of 80% for their second graders, compared to 3rd grade MCAS results that show just 42% of students are proficient in third grade.

In addition, the gains second-grade students sustained in the Year 2 evaluation demonstrate that high-dosage tutoring intervention could reduce the need for intensive literacy intervention in later years—freeing up state/district resources and setting more students on a durable path to long-term academic success.

ESTIMATES		ASSUMPTION NOTES
1st graders in Massachusetts districts with low-income rates over 50%	25,550	Based on 2025–26 state data
x % behind grade level	73%	Student-weighted average based on 2025 3rd grade MCAS
Total eligible population	18,562	
x % using strong Tier 1 curriculum	53%*	Based on October 2023 Boston Globe data collecting and reporting
Cost per tutoring seat	\$2,500	Based on One8 Foundation funding of 1:1 tutoring seats
Total 1st Grade Literacy Safety Net Cost	\$25M	

*Note that if in the future 100% of districts shifted to using high-quality Tier 1 curriculum such that the 53% assumption rose to 100%, the total cost of tutoring could rise to \$46.4M. In this scenario, however, it is also likely that the percent of students with need would drop, decreasing the total eligible population and corresponding cost.

ENDNOTES

- 1 National Student Support Accelerator, [Research Overview](#). National Student Support Accelerator, [Policy Considerations for Tutoring](#). EdResearch for Action Project, [Design Principles for Accelerating Student Learning With High-Impact Tutoring](#)
- 2 Neitzel, A.J. (2025). *Evaluation of Ignite Reading virtual literacy tutoring in Massachusetts: Year 2 quantitative findings, School Year 2024–25*. Center for Research and Reform in Education, The Johns Hopkins University.

Learn more

Check out a live
tutoring session.



Hear students' perspectives
on high-dosage tutoring.



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