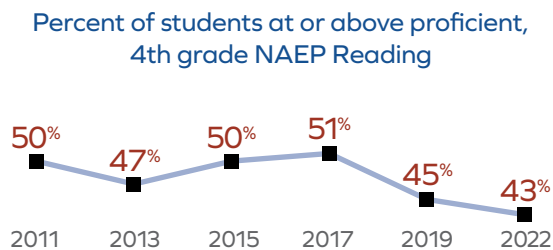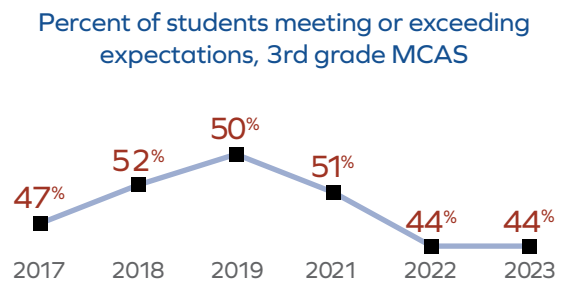# ADDRESSING OUR EARLY LITERACY CRISIS

A High Dosage Tutoring Initiative for Massachusetts First Graders

Massachusetts has an early literacy crisis. Less than half of our third-graders were proficient in reading on the 2023 MCAS exams. Results for some student subgroups were even more startling: 75 percent of low-income students, 70 percent of Black students, 80 percent of Latino students, and 85 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

2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2022
50%	47%	50%	51%	45%	43%

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

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

2017	2018	2019	2021	2022	2023
47%	52%	50%	51%	44%	44%

Only around half of Massachusetts districts embrace a "Science of Reading" approach to literacy instruction that prioritizes explicit, code-based reading instruction. Massachusetts is one of sixteen states that haven't passed science of reading legislation.

State Policy Solutions

There are steps state policymakers can take to address this crisis and dramatically improve literacy in Massachusetts:

- Require all districts to use evidence-based literacy instructional materials and curricula (H.4423)
- Allocate state funding for a statewide literacy initiative for:
  - District adoption of evidence-based curricula, technical support, coaching, and professional development for educators
  - Literacy coaches in the highest need schools
  - High dosage tutoring for first grade reading in districts with low-income rates over 50% that have adopted high quality curricula and have trained K–2 teachers in science of reading aligned instruction

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-quality high dosage tutoring model in MA targets skills that "crack the code" of reading. The One8 Foundation funded program currently serves first graders in 46 schools across 13 districts, with around 2,200 students being tutored.

> **The first grade high dosage tutoring program targets first graders who have not mastered Kindergarten reading skills and therefore have gaps in their learning. If these gaps are left unaddressed, these students cannot access first grade curricula and will likely fall further behind over the course of the school year. This decreases their chances of emerging from first grade as a reader ready for the next level.**

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 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

SY2023–24 outcomes data shows that students of all backgrounds are benefitting

- On average, students are making two weeks of progress per week of instruction.

- With an average of 18 hours of instruction, 71% of students who started 1st grade without mastery of critical K reading skills have now closed gaps and progressed to focusing on 1st grade reading skills.

- At this point in the school year, the data is showing benefits across all student subgroups.

Support Statewide Scale

In theory, over time, schools with strong Tier 1 instruction and safety net tutoring could expect to see reading proficiency rates of 80% for their second graders compared to 3rd grade MCAS results that show just 44% of students are proficient in third grade.

A statewide first-grade literacy safety net for students from low-income backgrounds could be put in place for ~$25M annually.

ESTIMATES		ASSUMPTION NOTES
1st graders in Massachusetts districts with low-income rates over 50%	26,519	Based on 2022-23 state data
x % behind grade level	72%	Student-weighted average based on 2023 3rd grade MCAS
Total eligible population	**19,159**	
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	**$25.4M**	

* 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 $47.9M. 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.

Learn more

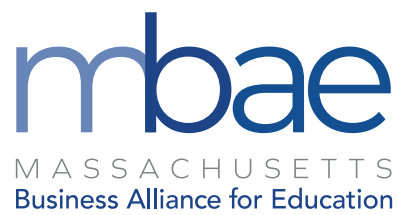**Check out a** live tutoring session.

Hear students' perspectives on high dosage tutoring.

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

mbae

M A S S A C H U S E T T S
Business Alliance for Education

mbae.org

For more information, contact:

Ed Lambert
Executive Director
elambert@mbae.org
617-416-7245

James Mikolowsky
Director of Policy
jmikolowsky@mbae.org
860-874-9598