



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Analysis Shows High-Dosage Early Literacy Tutoring Program for MA First Graders Led to Significant Gains in Grade Level Reading Proficiency

Citing new outcomes data, MBAE calls for major expansion of the one-to-one tutoring model to finally make gains in early literacy

BOSTON, Dec. 12, 2024 – A new Johns Hopkins University evaluation of a one-to-one virtual high-dosage tutoring intervention that serves Massachusetts first graders who started the 2023/2024 school year behind in their reading skills shows tutored students grew substantially more than expected as compared to national norms, achieving 5.4 months of additional learning over the course of the year.

In a [paper released today](#) citing this new evidence, the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE) calls for the state to make a substantial annual investment in early literacy high-dosage tutoring for first graders with an emphasis on communities serving high numbers of students from low-income families. The paper, [High-Dosage Tutoring, a High-Impact Early Literacy Strategy](#), concludes that this research-backed tutoring model is the intervention we need in Massachusetts to finally make significant progress on early literacy.

Just 42% of the Commonwealth's third graders were proficient in reading on the 2024 MCAS exams and 76% of low-income students didn't meet the state's proficiency bar. Not all of this can be attributed to setbacks from the pandemic. Massachusetts reading proficiency rates on the National Assessment of Educational Progress were stagnant, hovering around 50% between 2011 and 2017, and since then have plummeted.

“Ensuring all students learn to read by third grade is our state's most urgent educational challenge,” said Ed Lambert, MBAE's Executive Director. “High-dosage tutoring can help us dramatically improve third grade reading proficiency setting students up for greater success in their learning journey.”

During the 2023-24 school year, the Massachusetts-based One8 Foundation funded the Ignite Reading program in 13 public school districts across the state, each serving high-concentrations of students from low-income families. The program is a one-to-one virtual tutoring model whereby students receive 15 minutes of virtual tutoring every day during the school day from the same, highly trained tutor. The 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 and beyond.

The Center for Research and Reform in Education (CRRE) at Johns Hopkins University [conducted a comprehensive mixed-methods evaluation](#) of the Ignite Reading program in Massachusetts. The study examines the impact of Ignite Reading on 1,872 first grade students receiving the tutoring as compared to national norms and 518 first grade students receiving tutoring in four of the 13 school districts using a two-group quasi-experimental design.

At the start of first grade, 16% of students in the program scored at or above the grade-level composite benchmark on DIBELS, an assessment of basic literacy skills, compared to 50% by the end of the school year. These results are remarkable, particularly given that the program intentionally serves students who have gaps in their learning and are often furthest behind.

Reading by third grade is a pivotal benchmark. Students who don't learn to read by third grade can't read to learn compromising their learning in future grades and creating an unmeetable set of demands for educators across all content areas.

To receive One8 Foundation grants, districts had to be using a proven core curriculum based in the science of reading or be in the process of adopting one. This is necessary to ensure that the high dosage tutoring program complements the literacy instruction that students are receiving in their classroom. All the districts participating in this program offered professional development that was aligned with science of reading standards.

MBAE is calling on the legislature to pass a law requiring that districts use science-based literacy curricula to ensure that all students have access to a high-quality curriculum – and also to ensure that the state is able to scale effective strategies such as early literacy high-dosage tutoring across all systems.

In addition, MBAE recommends that the Healey administration, in partnership with state legislators, commit to an annual state investment of at least \$25 million for early literacy high-dosage tutoring for first grade students in communities with low income rates over 50%. In theory, over time, schools with strong classroom instruction and curricula who use high-dosage tutoring interventions to support students who have fallen behind could expect to see reading proficiency rates reach 70-80% compared to current third grade proficiency rates of just 42%.

About MBAE

The Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that, together with our members, promotes and supports continuous improvement in our schools and innovation that is needed to ensure that EVERY student receives a high-quality education that prepares them for success in college, career, and citizenship.

The MBAE Affiliate Network, made up of 43 chambers of commerce and business and industry associations from around the state, work together to present a unified voice of business on education policy issues. Network members share MBAE's commitment to ensuring every student gets the education they need to be successful.