

Reaching Benchmark with Project Read AI

How Weekly Tutor Use Relates to Early Reading Outcomes

For students who started the year behind, **how much** they used the Project Read Tutor, not simply whether they had access to it, predicted whether they caught up.

The Project Read Tutor

The Project Read Tutor is an AI-supported, digital reading tutor that listens to young students read aloud and gives them real-time, sound-by-sound feedback as they decode and encode. Built on the UFLI Foundations scope and sequence, it generates decodable stories matched to each child’s level, advances students as they demonstrate mastery, and sends teachers daily dashboards showing where each reader is struggling. It targets the foundational phonics and fluency skills of kindergarten through Grade 2 — the building blocks that determine whether a child is reading on grade level.

What we set out to learn

Perry Township Schools, a diverse school district in Indiana, deployed the tutor across four schools in 2025–26, its first year of use. We evaluated whether that use was associated with early reading growth on DIBELS, the district’s benchmark assessment. This brief focuses on the question districts care about most: among students who began the year behind, did using the tutor improve their odds of catching up? We focused on the 520 kindergarten through Grade 2 students in the four deployment schools who began the year below benchmark and used the tutor at all — asking not whether they had the tutor available, but whether the amount they used it predicted reaching benchmark by year’s end.

GRADES
Kindergarten-Grade 2

ASSESSMENT
DIBELS 8th Edition

PERIOD
2025-26 School Year

What we found

It did. Each additional 10 minutes of weekly tutor use was associated with more than twice the odds of a below-benchmark student reaching At or Above Benchmark by year’s end. In plain terms, a below-benchmark reader using the tutor at the typical observed level — about 6 to 7 minutes per week — had roughly a 1-in-3 chance of reaching benchmark, while a comparable student using it 30 minutes per week, near the intensity the program recommends, had roughly a 2-in-3 chance. Because most students used the tutor far less than recommended, much of the benefit the program can produce was left on the table.

Predicted probability of reaching benchmark, by weekly tutor use and starting level

Weekly tutor use	All below-benchmark	Started Well Below	Started Below
2 min/week (near-zero use)	31%	18%	67%
~7 min/week (typical observed use)	37%	25%	70%
15 min/week	48%	39%	75%
30 min/week (recommended intensity)	68%	68%	83%

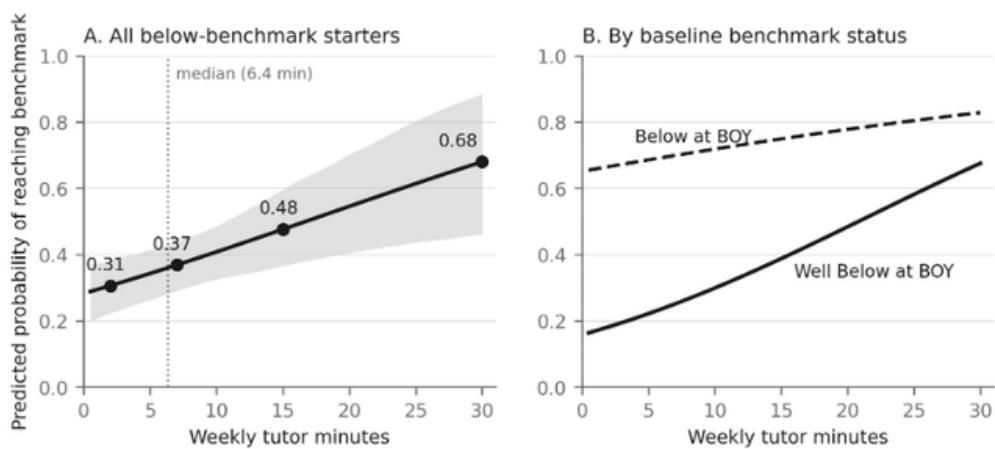


Figure 1. Predicted probability of reaching benchmark as weekly tutor minutes increase, for all below-benchmark starters (left) and split by how far behind students started (right).

Who benefited most

The benefit was concentrated among the students furthest behind, and the breakdown by starting level makes it vivid. A student who began Well Below Benchmark had only about an 18% chance of reaching benchmark at near-zero use, but roughly 68% at 30 minutes per week — the intensity the program recommends, nearly quadrupling the odds. Students who began only Below Benchmark, most of whom (about 71%) reached benchmark regardless of how much they used the tutor, showed a positive but statistically nonsignificant relationship. Put simply, additional tutor time did the most for the readers who needed it most.

How this connects to UFLI

The tutor is built on the UFLI Foundations scope and sequence — an explicit, systematic approach that teaches phonics in the order children learn to read, building letter sounds and decoding first and letting fluency follow. The evaluation results track that design. Across all kindergarten through Grade 2 users, weekly tutor use predicted end-of-year DIBELS growth after accounting for classroom and school differences, and those effects landed most clearly on the foundational decoding skills UFLI sequences first — the letter-sound and word-reading skills the tutor directly teaches. Effects on connected-text reading fluency were roughly half as large, exactly the pattern one would expect from a program that builds fluency on top of secure decoding rather than targeting it head-on. One further finding sharpens the point: how much of the UFLI-aligned content students actually completed predicted growth more strongly than raw minutes did, suggesting that moving through the sequence — not simply time in the app — is what drove results.

What it means for the district

The district’s opportunity lies in implementation, not in the tool itself. The tutor was associated with meaningfully better odds of reaching benchmark, but chiefly at levels of use most students did not reach. Supporting consistent, sufficient weekly use — especially for students who begin the year well below benchmark — is where the evidence points.

About the analysis

Findings come from 520 tutor users in kindergarten through Grade 2 across 43 classrooms in the four deployment schools, all of whom began 2025–26 below benchmark on the DIBELS composite. We estimated the odds of reaching benchmark as a function of average weekly tutor minutes using a logistic regression that adjusted for students’ starting achievement, demographic characteristics, and grade, with school fixed effects and adjustment for classroom clustering. Because tutor use was not randomly assigned, these results describe strong associations rather than proven causal effects, and they reflect one district in a single, first-time year of implementation.