Turning Low Proficiency Schools Into High-Growth Schools

What is the challenge

U.S. school districts are not only struggling with low proficiencies in numerous subject matters and across grade levels, but 2024 marked some of the lowest scores in decades—or, by some metrics, ever. In reading, NAEP, or the National Assessment of Educational Progress, reported that 40% of fourth graders fell below the Basic benchmark at the largest share since 2002.[1] Math results showed a similar slide, with NAEP recognizing the highest proportion ever recorded for 12th graders performing below Basic at 45%.[2] Meanwhile, 38% of 8th-grade students also scored below NAEP Basic in science—the highest percentage below that threshold since 2009.[3]

These numbers indicate that too many K-12 students are not mastering even fundamental academic skills, which underscores the seriousness and prevalence of the "low-proficiency" problem.

Why is there a challenge

Many schools attempt improvement through interventions—new programs, short-term professional development, or external consultants—but these frequently fail to achieve sustained gains, usually by not matching the specific conditions of schools set by districts. While certain interventions might be evidence-based in general, the school context lacks the capacity, staffing stability, or culture to implement them deeply and consistently.[4]

Beyond the interventions themselves, other factors account for persistent low proficiency scores. According to research in the peer-reviewed academic journal *Advances in Educational Research and Evaluation (AERE)*, these include high student-to-teacher ratio, less experienced teachers, and limited instructional time or less access to enriched curricular opportunities correlating with lower outcomes.[5]

Schools therefore require **consistent, targeted support embedded within a district's overarching goals and infrastructure**. According to a RAND research report, coherent instructional systems — in which curriculum, assessment, professional learning, teacher evaluation, and school goals are all aligned — are strongly associated with greater student achievement.[6]

Tutoring can meet these requirements, but only if it aligns with the district's current curriculum and strategies. This support must be parallel with the district's primary education, not siloed.

How high-dosage tutoring solves the challenge

High-dosage tutoring is an effective solution that differs from traditional models in its frequency, consistency, data-driven instruction, and alignment with the school's core curriculum. **A 2025 study** shows how high-dosage tutoring provided by K12 Tutoring, an online service powered by Stride, effectively addresses the low proficiency dilemma. A third-party edtech research company initially conducted the study at two districts across two states to validate whether K12 Tutoring met Level II standards (Moderate Evidence) of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In addition to satisfying these requirements, the results showcase K12 Tutoring addresses the challenges as noted by *AERE* by following RAND's guidelines.

Success was achieved by following a specific model that provided:

- Small group sessions of less than four students per tutor that **lowered the student-to-teach ratio** and provided **target instructional support** by tutors adjusting instruction to meet individual learning needs
- **More consistency** by conducting, on average, three sessions per week for at least 30 minutes
- **Additional instructional time** by supplementing typical classroom hours with 60 minutes each per session, totaling around 729 minutes over the year
- State-certified tutors who were **experienced teachers** with tailored learning plans to ensure that tutoring **aligned with district curricular goals and instructional frameworks**

More importantly, students who received tutoring achieved 3.5 times more improvement in their math scores compared to the control group — and those who maintained a high-dosage tutoring schedule saw gains that were five times greater.

This level of impact strongly suggests that the tutoring is not superficial — it's meaningfully contributing to **proficiency growth**, reinforcing that structured, aligned support works.

To learn more, visit **schools.tutoring.k12.com**.

K12™ Tutoring FOR SCHOOLS

[1]National Assessment Governing Board, ***2024 NAEP Press Release***.

[2]NAGB, ***Nation's Report Card: Declines in 8th-Grade Science and 12th-Grade Math & Reading***.

[3]NAGB, ***NAEP Science Trends***.

[4]The Wing Institute, ***Why Education Practices Fail***.

[5]ResearchGate, ***Drivers of School Performance Over Time***.

[6]RAND, ***How Are District Leaders Thinking About Mathematics?***