



Once

An Evaluation of the Effect of Paraprofessionals
Using the Once Early-Reading Program on
Fastbridge Scores

Efficacy Study Report: Kindergarten 2024-2025



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PROMISING

LXD Research Recognition for Once

Once

This product has been rigorously evaluated and is hereby acknowledged for meeting the educational impact criteria of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), warranting a **Level III** for "**Promising**." This recognition is based on its proven effectiveness in enhancing grade-level learning outcomes.

REVIEWED BY THE LXD RESEARCH EXPERT REVIEW PANEL

Rachel Schechter, Ph.D.
Founder of LXD Research

October 3, 2025

DATE

Educators search for high-quality research and evidence-based interventions to strengthen grant applications, to support comprehensive and targeted schools, or to implement new programming in their schools. Evidence requirements under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) are designed to ensure that states, districts, and schools can identify programs, practices, products, and policies that work across various populations.

Educational programs document their evidence of design, effectiveness, and impact in order to be eligible for federal funding. While there is no singular authority that determines a program's tier, the Department of Education's Office of Educational Technology provides standards to assess the varying levels of strength of research for education products.

The categories for ESSA Evidence are: strong (Tier 1), moderate (Tier 2), and promising (Tier 3) evidence of effectiveness, or demonstrates a rationale to be effective (Tier 4).

This product meets the requirements for Tier 3:

- ✓ In correlational design, students who used the program are compared to normed referenced samples or other group averages for comparison.
- ✓ Multiple studies with the proper design and implementation with at least two teachers and 30 students show statistically significant, positive findings.
- ✓ The study uses a program implementation that could be replicated.
- ★ A third-party research organization has reviewed the documentation for ESSA validation.



When product designers leverage learning sciences to design and evaluate their programs, educators can better target instruction, and students' skills soar. Through a correlational study design, a statistical evaluation shows that student growth is associated with student product use. This product meets the criteria for LXD Research's ESSA Tier 3 Evidence.

– Rachel Schechter, Ph.D., Founder of LXD Research



Introduction

Research indicates that high-impact tutoring can play a critical role in strengthening early literacy development among young learners (Cortes et al., 2025; Robinson et al., 2024). Through regular, relationship-centered, personalized instruction, tutoring supports measurable growth in reading. Providing targeted, skill-based instruction as early as possible can support closing school readiness gaps that children have when they enter kindergarten (Savage, Carless, & Stuart, 2003).

The What Works Clearinghouse has identified multiple studies that provide strong evidence for enabling paraprofessionals to provide daily tutoring to accelerate early literacy skill development quickly and effectively (e.g., Vadasy, Sanders, & Peyton, 2006; Vadasy & Sanders, 2010). Utilizing existing school staff members allows students to form close relationships with tutors who deeply understand the school context in which they operate. This model also allows participating districts to minimize human resource expenditures (beyond the staff they have already hired), which is otherwise a barrier to scale (White et al., 2021).

Founded in 2021, and serving 3,000 students across 10 of the largest 500 districts in the United States, Once is an early-reading program that upskills schools' support staff to deliver daily, evidence-based, one-on-one, in-person reading instruction to every targeted PreK, kindergarten, or 1st-grade student. Once aligns with the National Student Support Accelerator's design principles for high-impact tutoring.

I firmly believe that the Once program does exactly what it says it's going to do. Watching students gain confidence and the looks of excitement on their faces, each time something clicks, brings me such joy.

Once Tutor

- **Consistent Tutor and Coaching:** Once ensures students work with a consistent tutor for the entire year. Every instructional session is recorded, and tutors receive weekly coaching from a consistent coach who reviews the recordings.
- **Embedded in Schools and During the School Day:** Once tutoring sessions occur during the school day, and are integrated directly into the school environment.
- **Data-Informed:** School staff members delivering the Once program have real-time access to a data portal that displays various metrics on student participation and performance, as well as the instructor's proficiency. This data is reviewed weekly by instructors with their coaches.
- **Frequent and One-on-One Sessions:** Once provides one-on-one tutoring five days a week.
- **High-Quality, Standards-Aligned Materials:** Once materials are built on the Science of Reading and aligned to state standards. The scripted instructional content follows a structured trajectory with spiraled activities and engaging animal characters.



- **Grounded in Equity, Safety, and Cohesion:** Schools prioritize students with the greatest needs for Once, and the existing school support staff (who serve as tutors) often reflect the communities they work in. Once works closely with a designated point person at each school to ensure student safety, program alignment, and effective implementation.

Once partnered with LXD Research to help educators understand the impact of Once tutoring in their schools. This end-of-year (EOY) report summarizes the implementation and presents outcomes from 35 schools that Once served in two school districts in the southern United States in 2024-25 that used the Fastbridge[®] literacy assessment (Fastbridge) and provided beginning-of-year (BOY) and end-of-year (EOY) literacy data.

Method

Implementation Description

Once partnered with two districts to provide intervention to kindergartners in 35 schools. Once employees worked with school administration to train and coach existing school-based support staff.

In the Once program, each day a designated school support staff member sits down with a student in front of an open laptop computer. The evidence-based reading curriculum and instructor script are on the screen. The entire 15 minute session is recorded. Once a week a Once coach reviews the videos and meets on video with the school support staff member to give tactical suggestions on improving instruction.

Analytic Sample Description

There were 551 kindergarten students from 35 schools in two school districts in the Southeast that implemented Once and provided both BOY and EOY data (279 students from District A and 272 students from District B). Students who completed less than 10 sessions were filtered out from the analysis (total of four).

For both school districts, demographic data was available for 3rd grade students and is likely similar for Kindergarten students. In District A, 66% of students were economically disadvantaged, 9% were English language learners, 14% were students with disabilities, and 51% were non-white. In District B, 49% were economically disadvantaged, 38% were English language learners, 14% were students with disabilities, and 88% were non-white.

“Once allowed us to serve more students in Intervention than ever before.”
Principal



On average, students received 85 tutoring sessions (a maximum of 136 and a minimum of 10) and completed 48 lessons or units within the Once curriculum (range between 2 - 189).

Study Results - Both Districts

National Percentile Gain by Usage

On average, students improved in terms of the national percentile from BOY to EOY on the Fastbridge Early Literacy composite score when receiving Once. As a group, students started the year in the 19th percentile, and, after Once tutoring, they ended the year in the 29th percentile. For the most part, the more sessions students completed, the higher their average percentile gains were (*Figure 1a*). The steep percentile decrease among students who completed fewer than 20 sessions is likely due to the small sample size. The highest improvements in percentiles were from students who completed at least 80 sessions. The impact was more pronounced when focusing on students who started the year below the 50th percentile (*Figure 1b*). As a group, these students started the year in the 14th percentile, and, after Once tutoring, they ended the year in the 26th percentile.

Figure 1a

National Percentile Change by Sessions Received

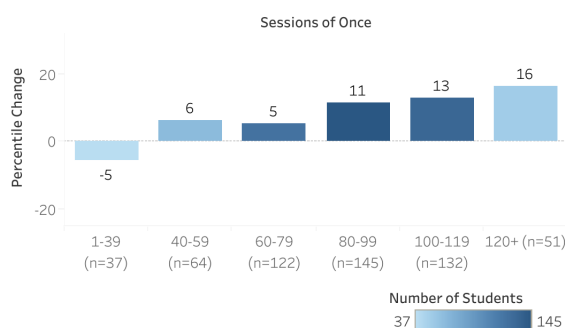
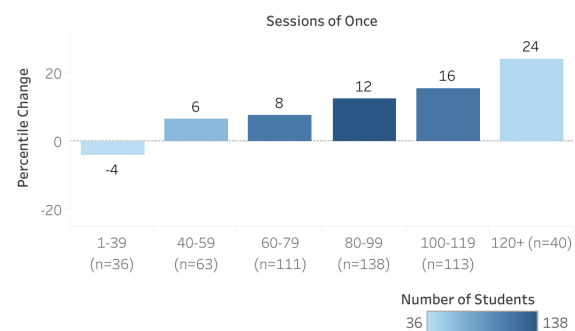


Figure 1b

National Percentile Change by Sessions Received (Students Starting Below 50th Percentile)



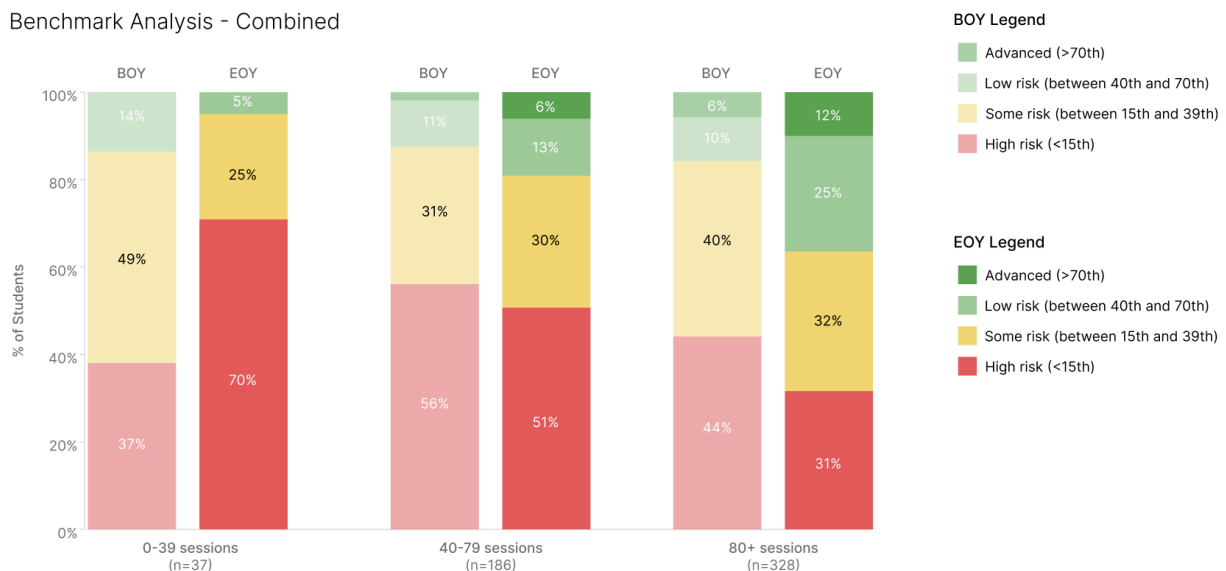


Grade Level Performance

Among students who completed 40 sessions or more, roughly a third were at low or no risk (31%) by the end of the school year. Among students who completed 80 sessions or more, 37% were at low or no risk by the end of the school year. On the other hand, among students who completed fewer than 40 sessions, only 5% were at low or no risk by the end of the school year. Put another way, students who completed 40 sessions or more were six times more likely to be at low or no risk by spring than those who completed fewer than 40 sessions¹. Students who completed 80 sessions or more were roughly seven times more likely to be at low or no risk by spring than those who completed fewer than 40 sessions, as seen in *Figure 2*.

Figure 2

Benchmark Analysis - Combined



Progress on Once program

There was a significant positive correlation between the number of Once sessions a Kindergartener completed and their scale-score growth from the beginning of the year to the end of the year². Students who completed more Once sessions showed higher increases in their scale-scores than students who completed fewer sessions. When only considering students who started the year below the 50th percentile, there was a significant positive correlation between the number of Once sessions a student

¹ $n(<40) = 37$; $n(40+) = 514$

² $r(551) = .290$, $p < .001$

“Once tutoring helps teachers fill foundational gaps to ensure all students are ready for first grade.”

Principal



completed and their scale-score from the beginning of the year to the end of the year³.

As evident in the previous sections, the number of sessions completed was positively related to students' growth on Fastbridge from BOY to EOY. By completing a step-wise regression, we confirmed that the number of sessions a student completed accounted for 7% of the variance in EOY Fastbridge scores when accounting for BOY.⁴ We found that curriculum progress accounted for 3% of the variance in EOY Fastbridge scores when accounting for BOY.⁵ On average, students who completed 30 additional lessons beyond their peers showed approximately 10 points higher performance on end-of-year assessments, even after accounting for their starting performance levels.

³ $r(501) = .271, p < .001$

⁴ $(F(2, 498) = 42.83, p < .001)$

⁵ $(F(2, 498) = 146.2, p < .001)$



Study Results - School District A

Study Participants

There were 279 kindergarten students from 21 schools in one school district in the Southeast that implemented Once and provided both BOY and EOY data.

On average, students received 82 tutoring sessions (a maximum of 128 and a minimum of 10) and completed 44 lessons within the Once curriculum (range between 2 - 98). Students had a tutoring session 3-4 days per week, on average. While designed to be daily (5 days per week), this average is a sustainable and realistic expectation for ongoing tutoring throughout the school year.

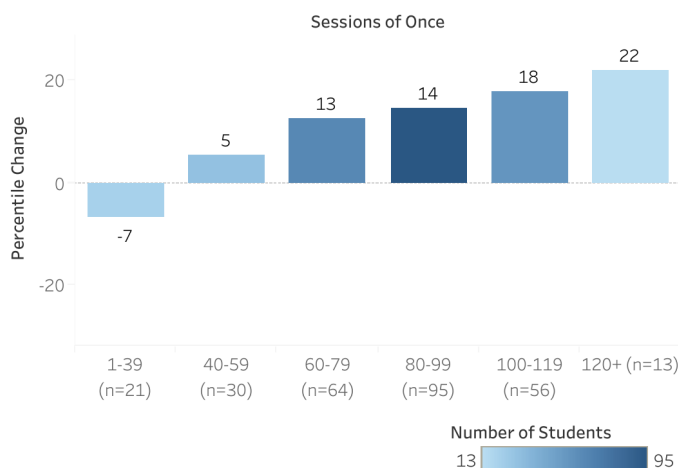
National Percentile Change by Usage

On average, students improved in terms of the national percentile from BOY to EOY on the Fastbridge Early Literacy composite score when receiving Once. As a group, students started the year in the 13th percentile, and, after Once tutoring, they ended the year in the 25th percentile. The more sessions students completed the higher their percentile gains were (*Figure 3*). The highest improvements in percentiles were from students who completed at least 100 sessions. The steep percentile decrease among students who completed fewer than 20 sessions is likely due to the small sample size.

The average percentile from BOY to EOY increased in 19 of the 21 schools studied.

Figure 3

National Percentile Change by Sessions Received

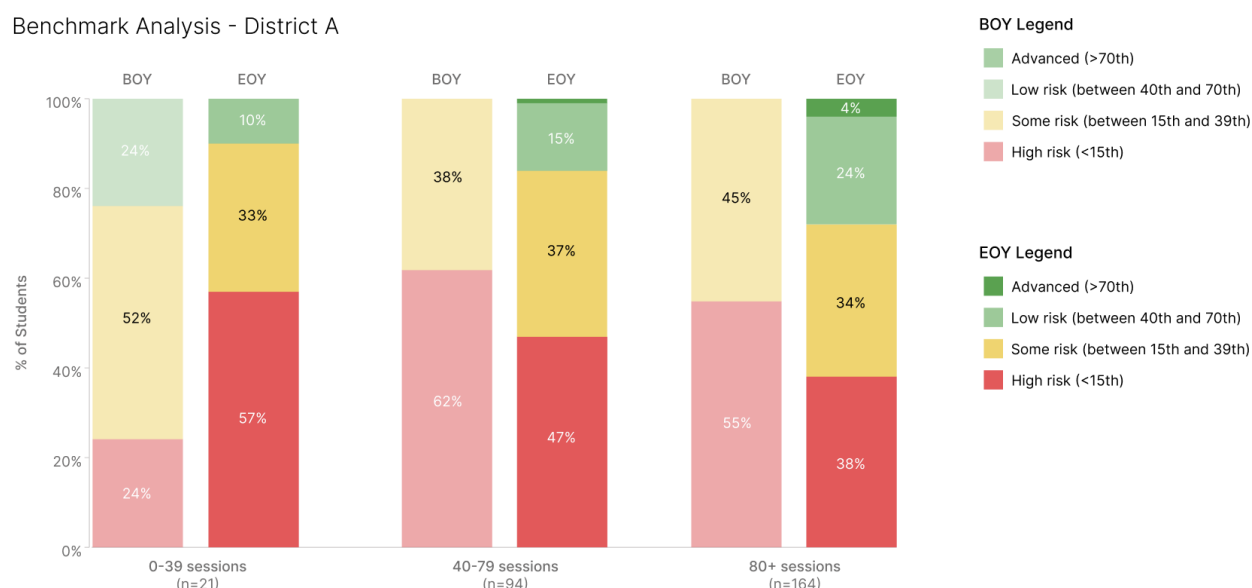




Grade Level Performance

Among students who completed 40 sessions or more, almost a quarter were at low or no risk (24%) by the end of the school year. Among students who completed 80 sessions or more, 28% were at low or no risk by the end of the school year. On the other hand, among students who completed fewer than 40 sessions, 10% of students were at low or no risk by the end of the school year. Put another way, students who completed 40 sessions or more were twice as likely to be at low or no risk by spring than those who completed fewer than 40 sessions⁶. Students who completed 80 sessions or more were almost three times more likely to be at low or no risk by spring than those who completed fewer than 40 sessions, as seen in *Figure 4*.

Figure 4



Progress on Once program

There was a significant positive correlation between the number of Once sessions a Kindergarten completed and their scale-score growth from the beginning of the year to the end of the year⁷. Students who completed more Once sessions showed higher increases in their scale-scores than students who completed fewer sessions. As evident in the previous sections, the number of sessions completed was positively related to students' growth on Fastbridge from BOY to EOY. By completing a step-wise regression, we confirmed that the number of sessions a

⁶ $n(<40) = 21$; $n(40+) = 258$

⁷ $r(279) = .189$, $p = .002$



student completed accounted for 3% of the variance in EOY Fastbridge scores when accounting for BOY.⁸ We found that curriculum progress also accounted for 2% of the variance in EOY Fastbridge scores when accounting for BOY.⁹ On average, students who completed 30 additional lessons beyond their peers showed approximately 10 points higher performance on end-of-year assessments, even after accounting for their starting performance levels.

⁸ ($F(2, 276) = 9.149, p < .001$)

⁹ ($F(2, 276) = 65.03, p < .001$)



Study Results - School District B

Study Participants

There were 272 kindergarten students from 14 schools in one school district in the Southeast that implemented Once and provided both BOY and EOY data.

On average, students received 88 tutoring sessions (a maximum of 136 and a minimum of 10) and completed 51 lessons within the Once curriculum (range between 6 - 189).

National Percentile Gain by Usage

On average, students improved in terms of the national percentile from BOY to EOY on the Fastbridge Early Literacy composite score when receiving Once. As a group, students started the year in the 26th percentile, and, after Once tutoring, they ended the year in the 32th percentile. For the most part, the more sessions students completed the higher their percentile gains were (*Figure 5a*). The highest improvements in percentiles were from students who completed at least 100 sessions. The impact was more pronounced when focusing on students who started the year below the 50th percentile (*Figure 5b*). As a group, these students started the year in the 17th percentile, and, after Once tutoring, they ended the year in the 26th percentile.

The average percentile from BOY to EOY increased in 11 of the 14 schools studied.

Figure 5a

National Percentile Change by Sessions Received

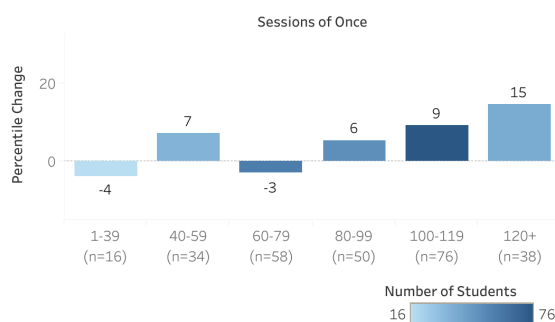
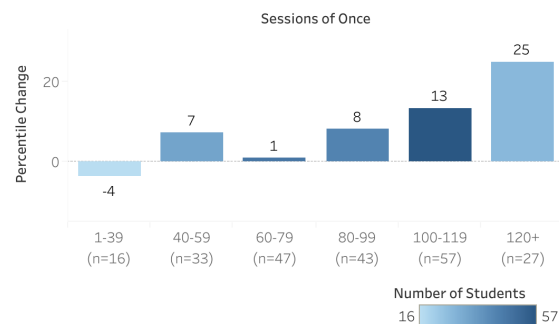


Figure 5b

National Percentile Change by Sessions Received (Students Starting Below 50th Percentile)



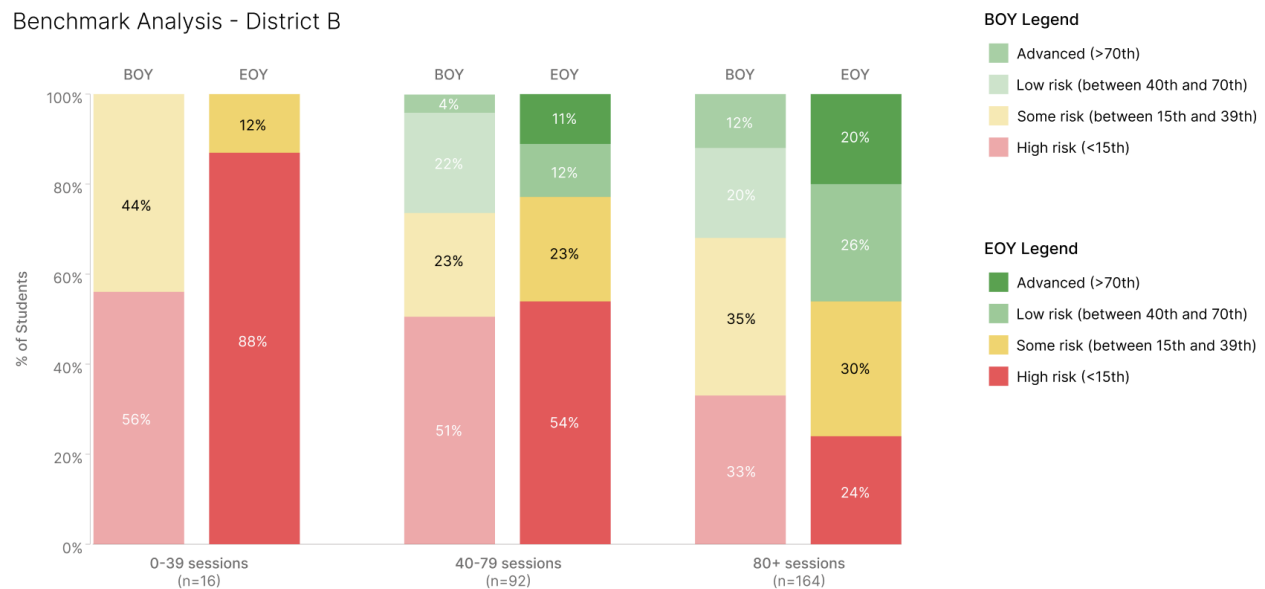


Grade Level Performance

Among students who completed 40 sessions or more, more than a third were at low or no risk (37%) by the end of the school year. Among students who completed 80 sessions or more, 46% were at low or no risk by the end of the school year, as seen in *Figure 6*. On the other hand, among students who completed fewer than 40 sessions, no students were at low or no risk by the end of the school year¹⁰. Put another way, students who completed 40 sessions or more were more likely to be at low or no risk by spring than those who completed fewer than 40 sessions. Students who completed 80 sessions or more were even more likely to be at low or no risk by spring than those who completed fewer than 40 sessions, as seen in *Figure 6*.

Figure 6

Benchmark Analysis - District B



Progress on Once program

There was a significant positive correlation between the number of Once sessions a Kindergarten completed and their scale-score growth from the beginning of the year to the end of the year¹¹. Students who completed more Once sessions showed higher increases in their scale-scores than students who completed fewer sessions. When only considering students who started the year below the 50th percentile, there was a significant positive correlation between

¹⁰ $n(<40) = 16$; $n(40+) = 256$

¹¹ $r(272) = .385$, $p < .001$



the number of Once sessions a student completed and their scale-score from the beginning of the year to the end of the year¹².

As evident in the previous sections, the number of sessions completed was positively related to students' growth on Fastbridge from BOY to EOY. By completing a step-wise regression, we confirmed that the number of sessions a student completed accounted for 8% of the variance in EOY Fastbridge scores when accounting for BOY.¹³ We found that curriculum progress accounted for 6% of the variance in EOY Fastbridge scores when accounting for BOY.¹⁴ On average, students who completed 30 additional lessons beyond their peers showed approximately 10 points higher performance on end-of-year assessments, even after accounting for their starting performance levels.

Conclusion

Each of the two school districts had a similar average number of sessions and lessons completed. They were also similar in terms of the number of students and number of schools within each district (specific numbers are outlined in each section).

Across both school districts, the more sessions students completed the higher their average percentile change was (except for one bin in one district), and the more likely they were to be advanced or low risk for their grade level. Also, in both districts the number of lessons a student completed had a significant and positive correlation with their scale-score change by the end of the year. Using the same step-wise regression in both districts, we were able to see that for every additional 30 lessons students completed, their scale-score change increased by roughly 10 points. The use of Once in these school districts was overall a positive intervention.

¹² $r(223) = .368, p < .001$

¹³ $(F(2, 269) = 95.02, p < .001)$

¹⁴ $(F(2, 269) = 164.3, p < .001)$



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