



Case Study

At Val Verde USD, 24/7 Tutoring Engages Disadvantaged Students, Boosts Graduation Rates



Paper really provides the opportunity to help students take ownership of their learning.

— Aimee Garcia, Director of K-12 Education, Val Verde Unified School District

Key takeaways and results

Administrators in the Val Verde Unified School District (CA) sought an academic support solution that would be available for students anytime teachers weren't. And with the additional challenges brought on by distance learning, no teacher had enough hours in the day (or night) to serve all students in need. To best support their students, Val Verde USD chose Paper's unlimited, multilingual 24/7 tutoring platform.

Day and night, students used Paper to help them grasp new concepts, solve homework problems and provide expert review and feedback on their writing work — including more than 1,200 essays reviewed by Paper tutors. Teachers were encouraged by Paper's Socratic approach which reinforced classroom lessons and set students up for success. Administrators gleaned insights from new data that helped them understand which types of students were seeking help, when and in which subject areas.

After just two months in use:

- ✔ Val Verde students engaged in **more than 2,700 learning moments**
- ✔ **78% of usage** was attributed to socioeconomically disadvantaged students
- ✔ Month-over-month student usage of Paper **increased by 150%**

About Val Verde USD

Tucked up against the San Jacinto mountains at the south end of southern California’s Inland Empire, the city of Moreno Valley has undergone explosive growth in the last few decades. As a result, Moreno Valley’s Val Verde Unified School District now serves more than 20,000 students, of whom 81% are socio-economically disadvantaged and 19% are English language learners (ELLs).

Despite these challenges, Val Verde’s high school graduation rates remain remarkably high. Each year, an average of 95% of Val Verde seniors earn their degree, which is significantly higher than California’s average of 84%. “We are a district that beats the odds,” says Aimee Garcia, director of K-12 Education at Val Verde.


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To achieve these remarkable results, Val Verde invests a great deal in providing extra services to its students. “We do a lot of handholding, because we want to keep those graduation rates high,” says Garcia. “We’ve had a lot of success in really making sure our students have all the support that they need to succeed.”

In addition to a highly dedicated roster of teachers and administrators, Garcia credits this success to the fact that the district is “very forward-thinking when it comes to technology.” For example, students have worked with one-to-one mobile technologies for more than five years.

“I am passionate about educational technology,” says Michael R. McCormick, the district’s superintendent.

Val Verde USD at a glance

	Enrollment	English Learners	Socioeconomically Disadvantaged
	21,258	19.1%	81.1%

The Dilemma

Traditional tutoring modalities fail to reach students in need

Technology has long played a big part in giving Val Verde's students a leg up, and that made it easier for the district to pivot to distance learning when COVID hit. Still, distance learning posed major challenges.

Because teaching to a whole class was less effective in an online environment than in person, the school turned to what it called "campfire groups." Smaller groups of students took turns working with teachers, who could then provide more individualized attention.

While this was a successful teaching strategy, it meant students were on their own for more hours in the day. And many of Val Verde's students could not look to their parents for extra academic support, either because they were working or did not have the language or education skills to offer help.

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— Aimee Garcia

In response, the district tried to bridge the gap by asking teachers to stay after school hours to work with students 1:1. However, teachers did not have enough hours in the day to serve all the students in need. "As a result, there were discrepancies across the district in terms of who was getting the extra help and who was not," says Garcia.

To ensure that all students were served equitably, the district began a search for online tutoring resources that could help fulfill this unmet need.

The Solution

Individualized academic help when students need it, how they need it

The district's search ultimately led them to Paper, which delivers unlimited, 24/7 high-dosage tutoring, including homework help, writing feedback, and study support on demand. The fact that Paper could provide tutors who were fluent in Spanish was also a big plus in a district where 4 in 5 students are Hispanic or Latino, and 1 in 5 are English learners.

The fact that Paper made help available 24/7 was also a big selling point for Val Verde's students. According to Garcia, many students have after-school jobs or other responsibilities, such as caring for siblings while their parents work.

"Some of our kids have challenging schedules," says Garcia. "We felt 24/7 access was something that would really help our students."

While COVID was the impetus to adopt Paper, Val Verde is committing to investing in the program for the longer term. Garcia believes Paper will be particularly valuable when schools return to normal, because students will need extra help to fill any learning gaps caused by the disruptions of COVID.

"Teachers are going to do their best to meet those needs during class time, but we know that there's going to be more need than the time allotted will allow," says Garcia.



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Results

A resource that supports both students and teachers

In just two months of usage, Val Verde students engaged in 2,725 learning moments across 2,024 on demand tutoring sessions and 1,201 essays submitted for expert writing feedback. From one month to the next, students' usage of Paper increased by 150%.

Val Verde was most concerned about students in need, and so far the data shows that Paper is reaching them. "About 80% of our students are from low-income households, and they made up around 78% of the sessions with Paper tutors," says Owen Garrick, director of research at Val Verde.

In addition, the district believes that its support of student agency is a big reason it achieves such high graduation rates, says Garcia. Paper is helping the district achieve this key goal, thanks to its commitment to the Socratic Method. "Paper tutors don't just give students the answer. It is a thought process and they're continuing the work that happens in the classroom."

Paper has also provided much-needed support to hard-working teachers. "Our teachers have been very encouraged," says Garcia. "They feel that they are partners with the tutors and share the same goal."

Finally, Garcia has been pleased with the support that she has gotten from Paper to ensure the program's success. "I really appreciated the partnership," she says. "We have standing meetings during which Paper always comes with useful data and ideas."



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Learning Moments

2,725

Learning Moments

2,024

Sessions

1,201

Essays Submitted

Results

What's Next: Increase Adoption Post-COVID

In the coming year, Garcia and her team are focused on increasing students' adoption of Paper. She is already reaching out to principals to ensure they have a plan in place to make the most of Paper's resources.

However, she believes outreach to teachers is likely to deliver the best results.

"It's great to have the principals and leadership onboard, but it's the teachers who are face-to-face with kids," she says. "They need to promote it to students directly, if we really want to increase usage."

The district is also considering ways to reach students who are most likely to fall through the cracks, for example sixth graders and ninth graders. They are new to middle school and high school respectively. "Those transition years can be challenging," says Garcia.

"Ultimately, we want to ensure that the students who most need it are the ones using it," says Garcia. "Paper gives them another place to build relationships with folks who can support them with their education."

PAPER

Paper partners with K-12 schools throughout the U.S. and Canada to give every student an equal opportunity to excel academically. Our educational support system (ESS) provides learners with unlimited 24/7 homework help, writing feedback, and study support at a predictable fixed cost. Paper's specialized tutors deliver on-demand, 1:1 academic support in four languages across more than 200 academic subject areas—so students always have access to expert extra help exactly when, where, and how they need it.

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