



# Discovering and Closing Student Learning Gaps Anytime, Anywhere

A case study of the Antelope Valley Union High School District and Tutor.com from an interview conducted with Dr. Joe Kelly, Director of School Improvement | Dec. 2019

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Located in the northern part of Los Angeles County, the Antelope Valley Union High School District (AVUHSD) serves a total of 23,000 students in a geographic area roughly the size of the state of Rhode Island. The district includes eight traditional and three alternative high schools; SOAR, an early college high school on the Antelope Valley College campus; the no-cost, charter Academy Prep Junior High; an online education program; and Antelope Valley Adult Education. Approximately 60-65% of the district's students are Hispanic and a majority of all students come primarily from lower socio-economic households.

## MEETING THE STUDENTS WHERE THEY ARE

AVUHSD is a high school district separate from the primary and middle schools and without oversight of their curricula. According to Dr. Joe Kelly, Director School Improvement, many of the kids come to AVUHSD with gaps in their education. The challenge, he says, is that the district needs to close those gaps, but often kids don't know where their gaps are. "Services like Khan Academy provide high quality materials but are not as helpful for kids who don't even know where to begin to close their learning gaps. We need a service that meets kids where they are individually. Kids need to know where their gaps are so they can work toward filling them."

AVUHSD maintains an in-person tutoring center, but it is limited in the service it can offer. Students need to be proactive in scheduling time with a tutor, generally after school. Many students work or have other after school commitments so transportation can be a problem and staffing can be difficult. "Tutoring is a mix of subject expertise as well as communication skills," Dr. Kelly says. "Our kids need help primarily with math and essay writing. The person in the tutoring center might not have the specific subject knowledge or be skilled at communicating their knowledge in a way that meets the needs of the student."

"Most people have access to the internet and today's technology allows us to personalize help for each kid. With Tutor.com we can meet every student where he or she is individually. We can work around the kids' real lives, providing access to tutoring 24/7 and help in the subjects they need the most."

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## ACCOUNTABILITY AND SCALABILITY IMPORTANT MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Dr. Kelly says that prior to adopting Tutor.com for online tutoring the school district had a relationship with The Princeton Review for test prep. In fact, he says, talking with The Princeton Review representative about the challenges the district was facing with closing the learning gap for students is what led AVUHSD to Tutor.com, a service of The Princeton Review. "We have a great relationship with The Princeton Review and appreciate the quality of their ACT® and SAT® test prep services. When we learned about Tutor.com and how it could provide what we need to meet students where they are, it was clear this was the right direction for us."

Dr. Kelly points to the post-session surveys as an excellent way to ensure students are getting what they need from the service. "Those surveys tell the story in the kids' own words—bad grammar, misspellings and all. I think the surveys hold everyone accountable. The kids know whether they got what they needed, we know it, and Tutor.com knows it." In addition, he says, every session is recorded so kids can return to the transcript to review something they weren't sure of, and we can review the transcripts to ensure every interaction is appropriate and on track for what the student needs. "We know the tutors are put through a background check and rigorous training program, but reviewing the transcripts is one way for us to keep on top of where students need help and the quality of the help they are receiving."

Another key benefit of Tutor.com is the ability of the program to keep up with the growing demand. Dr. Kelly says he is impressed that the availability of tutors can scale to what the district needs.

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“On a low month we might have 700-1,000 sessions, but some months we are at almost 3,000 sessions. That’s a lot of staffing hours. Tutor.com knows how to manage demand with its high quality tutors so that we have not experienced any difficulty in their ability to match our capacity.” Dr. Kelly points especially to Tutor.com’s drop-off essay turnaround time which he says is now generally 12 hours. “It’s great for kids to get that immediate feedback on their essays. Tutor.com’s stated standard is 24 hours, but they seem to beat that on a regular basis.”

In describing Tutor.com’s responsiveness, Dr. Kelly says it’s sort of like the best of a ride-sharing service. “Tutor.com provides a service with vetted and trained tutors who are available on demand in a safe learning environment with the subject expertise and communication skills needed to really help our kids. It’s easy for our students to sign on with a single login through PowerSchool, where they immediately can click on a tab to connect to a tutor. This is a great way to keep in front of the students to let them know what resources are readily available to them.”

## POSITIVE FEEDBACK AND USAGE DATA KEY TO CONTINUED SUPPORT

Dr. Kelly points to the reports available from Tutor.com as being a critical driver of why AVUHSD has been able to garner ongoing support for its program. “Tutor.com is highly data-centered. The reports they provide allow us to demonstrate who is using the service and for what. This level of accountability, coupled with the authentic feedback from the student surveys, helps us continue to grow our program.”

According to Dr. Kelly, AVUHSD can show the benefit year in and year out with positive feedback from anyone who has used it. He says that a

lot of students access Tutor.com during their school hours. Especially in the district’s rural schools, Tutor.com has been used instead of in-person tutoring to meet the AVID standard of offering tutors twice a week. But, he adds, the growth is not just from students who are performing at a lower academic level. “Our AP® scores have grown every year for five years. Tutor.com helps our AP students on the high end to access more challenging content and get the support they need.”

In assessing the service AVUHSD gets through Tutor.com, Dr. Kelly comments that education is all about the integrity of the resources. Tutor.com meets kids where they are in terms of time, space, and content. He says that kids will turn to the resources that are easy to access and that deliver for them. In one recent month, 44% of their usage was for drop-off essays and 35% for math. “Kids understand the challenge of writing well and that math is challenging, and they reach out to get better in the areas where they need to improve. Tutor.com gives them access to quality tutors 24/7 regardless of their ability to pay, leveling the playing field for all students.”

The proof of the benefit derived is what the kids themselves say about the service because students’ satisfaction is the greatest indicator. “Basically, our district will pay for as many sessions as the kids use. We want kids to use it and benefit from it. With 75% of our kids at the poverty level, we want every kid to know that this resource is there for them so they can be proactive in helping themselves succeed. We continue to be very happy with the partnership we have with The Princeton Review and Tutor.com. Their success is our success and vice versa.”



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