



Case Study

Yelm Community Schools Seeks 24/7 Tutoring as a Strategy to Close Opportunity Gaps



Pre- and post-pandemic, my strong interest in Paper was to provide the targeted one-on-one support students need in real time, at the time they need it, and in exactly the subjects they needed.

— Dr. Lisa Cadero-Smith, Assistant Superintendent, Yelm Community Schools


About Yelm Community Schools

Located on the fertile plains of the Nisqually River Valley in western Washington State, the Yelm Community Schools (YCS) district spans two counties and almost two hundred miles. The size of the district is reflected in the diversity of its student population, which includes residents of the city of Yelm, the surrounding suburbs and towns and the Nisqually Indian Reservation.

“We have a number of students who may not have everything they need to be successful,” explains Lisa Cadero-Smith, Assistant Superintendent at YCS. “As a result, we seek to set up systems that enable us to meet the needs of all kids.”

YCS has addressed the digital divide by making Chromebooks as readily available as textbooks. Now, to address the achievement divide, YCS is offering individualized academic support.

Yelm School District at a glance

	Enrollment	English Learners	Socioeconomically Disadvantaged
	5,433	3%	47%

The Dilemma

Overburdened teachers, and difficulty serving students who needed help the most

YCS knew that individualized instruction was essential, but it faced two challenges:

- Teachers who were already overburdened
- Many students in need of individualized academic support could not access traditional, in-person services

According to Cadero-Smith, YCS faculty members were already stretched to their limits. “With one teacher responsible for 120 to 150 students, providing one-on-one support and tailored scaffolding is a tall order.”



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— Lisa Cadero-Smith

“Students do not have just their academic selves to manage,” explains Cadero-Smith. “Outside of school, they have sports and clubs. Many of them have childcare responsibilities in their families. And some are required to work.”

As Cadero-Smith points out, these students could not access traditional “place-based and time-bound” tutoring services.

The Solution

Integrated, multi-tier systems of support

Given the challenge of delivering extra help in a traditional format, YCS sought a flexible and adaptable solution that could serve all its students more equitably.

“At the district level, we use the term ‘multi-tiered systems of support.’ We want to provide all students with strong core instruction. We know that’s not enough for some students—they need tier two and tier three supports,” says Cadero-Smith.

In the district’s search for the right partner to provide those tier two and three supports, it evaluated Paper’s solution, which provides learners with unlimited 24/7 homework help, writing feedback and study support at a predictable, fixed cost. Paper’s specialized tutors could provide 1:1 help across more than 200 academic subject areas and in four languages, including English, Spanish, Mandarin and French.

Importantly, students could access Paper tutors whenever they needed it.

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Results

New tools bolster classroom teaching practices

YCS kicked off its rollout of Paper’s services by partnering with English teachers who immediately saw the benefits of Paper’s writing feedback offerings. Within a month of deployment, more than half of Yelm’s students were using Paper.

Cadero-Smith attributes that success to the fact that teachers made it “an embedded, aligned tool within their classroom practice.”

“They made it part of their assignment,” says Cadero-Smith. “They rostered students in. They had specific requirements for engaging with tutors and for the revision of their papers.” With that encouragement, students adopted the tool quickly, and their response so far has been “incredibly positive,” says Cadero-Smith.

“The students who are using it really feel that Paper provides the kind of support that they need,” she says.

Though they were not part of the initial rollout, math teachers have been independently integrating the tool into their teaching and are “really seeing the value of Paper as well,” says Cadero-Smith.

“

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Learning Moments

2,392

Learning Moments

876

Sessions

1,516

Essays

783

Students Active

According to Cadero-Smith, two features of Paper’s offerings have been particularly effective. First, the anytime-availability of tutors enables the district to serve students who can’t access services otherwise. Second, Paper’s commitment to the Socratic method encourages students to articulate the challenges they faced. Then, through back and forth dialogue with tutors, students are able to arrive at solutions themselves.

Results

What's Next: Deepening Relationships Among Students, Teachers and Tutoring

Now that the initial rollout is complete, the district wants to expand Paper's reach. To achieve this, the district plans to do more to include teachers in the process by providing them with "solid professional development, clear ongoing development plans and feedback loops," says Cadero-Smith.



The Paper team is not only asking what we need, but also listening and responding to our suggestions.

— Lisa Cadero-Smith

She believes school-wide professional development initiatives will even further increase adoption among students. It will also unleash creativity in encouraging engagement, as teachers see Paper as "really useful and aligned to their learning goals," she says.

Over the last year, teachers and administrators have also learned that it is not enough simply to make the service available to students. Rather, they are encouraging teachers to integrate Paper into specific assignments. The district wants to build on the success English teachers and students had using Paper's writing feedback capabilities. The fact that Paper became "an embedded and aligned tool within their classroom practice" made the difference, says Cadero-Smith.

So far, Paper has been a true partner in engaging both teachers and students.

"They have done an outstanding job, hiring quality people that are able to explain the program and build relationships," says Cadero-Smith.

"There is genuine interest in meeting the needs of schools," she concludes. "The Paper team is not only asking what we need but also listening and responding to our suggestions."

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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