

**Developing a Peer Tutoring Program for Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School**

by

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Field Project

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### **Abstract**

Overwhelmed with challenging content, pressure for good grades, and busy schedules, high school students can have a difficult time finding time to ask for help in order to be successful in the classroom. Add to this a growing number of students with special academic plans, a teacher could spend a whole day just helping students who are struggling with understanding the content of their class. The purpose of this field project was to develop and implement a peer tutoring program and collect qualitative data to help improve the program to better fit the needs of the students. This data was collected through interview questions of those students involved and demonstrated the benefits of peers being able to help peers and the need for consistent reflection and re-evaluation of the program to always be meeting the needs of the students utilizing the program.

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

### **Identify the Issue**

The enrollment for the 2021-22 school year at Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School (MVL) is currently at 222. Six of these students have an Individual Student Plan (ISP) and twenty-two have a Student Action Plan (SAP). These are used at MVL in place of the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) and 504 plans from the public school. They serve the same purpose, just are notated differently. Twenty students were given a letter requesting a 'staffing'. A staffing is a meeting with the parents of a student, which the student can attend as well, the learning coordinator, and the teachers of that student to discuss concerns for the student in the classroom, methods the teacher will be using in the classroom, and ways the teacher and parents can work together to help the student succeed. These students do not necessarily have a learning disability, but they have a learning difficulty and/or social concerns that need to be addressed. This means that about 10% of the student body is beginning the school year with learning challenges and either already have a plan for accommodations or anticipated needing extra help in order to be successful.

These disabilities or learning issues the students have range from autism to ADHD to dyslexia to issues related to fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). Some of these students suffer from medical conditions that do not affect their cognitive thinking, but do affect their social interactions which could end up affecting their academics. Some of these students are fine socially and do not have a learning disability, but suffer from test

and/or learning anxiety which does end up affecting their academics and could affect their social interactions with their peers. Each of our faculty members has their own way of helping in the classroom and MVL has recently added a Learning Coordinator to the faculty as well who can better equip the teachers with resources and suggestions for accommodations and modifications in the classroom.

With the growing number of students with academic plans and the number of students who just need extra help every now and then, there is a need for more academic support. Students do not need to have an ISP or SAP to need extra support with homework, projects, understanding concepts, or learning a language. Some students may struggle with understanding content in one or more subjects. This struggle may be for a particular unit or chapter or may be present the entire semester/year. Add to this that many students have part-time jobs and/or participate in one or more extracurricular activities, time for studying and homework is limited. In the 2020-21 school year, MVL had 194 out of 231 students participate in at least one extracurricular activity. Having the opportunity to receive extra help during the day is an important part of being successful both in academics and the extracurriculars. As much as the teachers would love to be able to assist each student that needs extra academic support, more assistance is necessary. This qualitative field project will be exploring whether peer tutoring is an efficient and effective solution to this problem.

### **Importance of the Project**

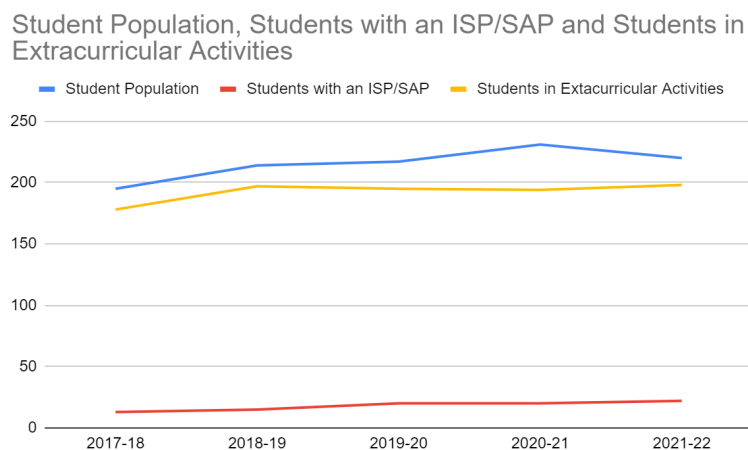
As with most, if not all high schools and high school students, the pressure to do well in school in order to get into a good college and get a good job is high. Students who

have learning disabilities and/or other learning or social difficulties have even more pressure as they try to keep up with their classmates who are (or at least appear to be) more successful academically.

Some students who struggle are too shy or too embarrassed to ask for help in class or directly from the teacher. As stated above, MVL has added a Learning Coordinator to the staff who recently began his work this school year (2021-22). He will be a great asset as he will be able to help intercede for the students who struggle and provide the extra help they need to be successful. The teachers will benefit from having someone who can provide them resources for use in the classroom or at least to provide suggestions for things to try in the classroom.

While this will truly be a blessing to both the students and the faculty, one person cannot solve all the problems. The Learning Coordinator at MVL, is teaching three remedial classes and has three directed study halls in which he will be able to provide more individualized help one-on-one or in small groups in the areas of organizational skills, study skills, and academics in general. Based on the number of students who have ISPs and SAPS(see Table 1 and 2) , the other students who may need extra help in one or two subjects, but do not have a plan, may struggle with finding extra support.

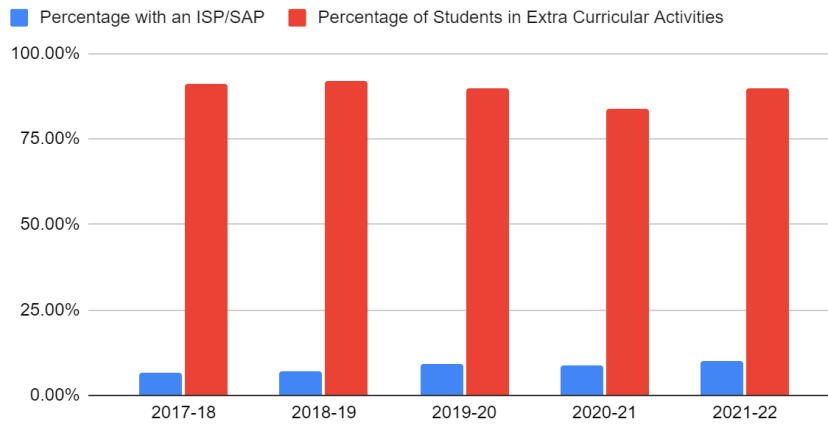
**Table 1**





**Table 2**

Percentage with an ISP/SAP and Percentage of Students in Extracurricular Activities



As stated above, 194 students were involved in extracurricular activities last year.

This number can be expected to be similar this coming year. These practices and events often take place before and/or after school and occasionally on the weekend. Several students also have part time jobs after school and on weekends. Time for homework is limited, but necessary if the students want to keep participating in their extracurriculars. Spending time on homework can take even longer when one struggles with the content or even understanding directions. Having someone who can help them during their Study Hall or before or after school can allow the students more time at home for friends, family, and homework they can more easily accomplish on their own.

**Project Purpose**

Teachers do not always have available time that matches up with the students’ available time to work through areas of challenge. Students are busy with other classes, work, extra-curriculars, and family. Some students live 30-50 minutes away and so trying

to find time before and/or after school for extra help is not feasible. The purpose of developing a peer tutoring program is to answer the question “How can we more effectively and efficiently help our students academically when both our time and theirs is limited?” It is the author’s goal to develop a peer-tutoring program that will allow the high school students to get the academic support they need, even when a teacher is not available. The program will allow students to efficiently and effectively get matched up with another student who will be able to provide extra academic support. The goal is that the peer tutoring program will provide students with the extra help they need from capable peers at a time more convenient for them and when the help is more easily accessible. Before they begin tutoring, the course instructor and/or learning coordinator will make sure the tutor is someone who has a good grasp of the course content. The course instructor and learning coordinator will also look at the grade the potential tutor had when they were in the class they are helping tutor so the tutee can be more confident in the help they are receiving.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

### Introduction

Peer tutoring takes on many forms. It could take place in the classroom with teacher guidance/supervision. It could occur simultaneously with or in place of the teacher-led lesson. This is most easily done at the elementary and middle school level. The studies on this kind of peer tutoring collected data showing the benefits and improvements of such interventions (Bowman-Perrot, Davis, Vannest, Williams, Greenwood, & Parker, 2013; Morano & Riccomini, 2016; Zeneli, Tymms, & Bolden, 2016). Peer tutoring can also take place outside of the classroom, without teacher guidance/supervision. The articles addressing this kind of peer tutoring, often in the high school and university level, understand that this is not as easily accomplished as time is more limited and students have more obligations outside of the school day. This results in data being difficult to acquire that show positive results from peer tutoring. These articles do make knowledgeable assumptions that can be gathered from the observations, limited data, and comparisons to other related studies and articles done on the subject matter (Ullah, Tabassum, & Kaleem, 2018; Pugatch & Wilson, 2018; Munley, Garvey, & McConnell, 2010; Moumoulidou, Karadimitriou, & Pliogou, 2020). This field project will glean key elements from these studies and create a program that adapts to the environment at MVL.

### Definition

Tutoring is a process in which expert and trained individuals aid and support others who are less skilled and have lower levels of knowledge (Clarence, 2016).

Successful tutoring is done in an interactive, meaningful, and organized way (Ullah, Tabassum, & Kaleem, 2018). Peer tutoring is a type of tutoring in which people of equal, or near equal, status help each other (Alemu, 2020). Nonprofessional teachers act as support providers and teachers to their peers in whole class teaching, large group learning, small group, or one-on-one. When students are in need of help outside of the teacher's lecture or lesson, peer tutors can be of the same grade level or higher grade level who have had previous experience and success with the content. These tutors can provide one-on-one attention that is not possible in a crowded classroom (Roberts & Spangenberg, 2020). Peer tutors can offer support in a variety of ways, including clarifying directions, breaking down concepts into smaller pieces, and providing scaffolding support while they work (Bond & Castagnera, 2021).

Research has shown that there are several important elements that make peer tutoring successful. One element is active participation of both the tutor and the tutee. Being one-on-one, both should be naturally engaged in the learning process. Another element is that it develops communication skills. The similarity or closeness of the peer naturally provides effective communication (language and gesture repertoire). It also invokes conflict and challenge which results in support and scaffolding to overcome these conflicts. Social and academic reinforcements can provide motivation to work hard and work together (Moumoulidou, Karadimitriou, & Pliogou, 2020; Ullah, Tabassum, & Kaleem, 2018; Alemu, 2020). A study entitled "The Effectiveness of Peer Tutoring on Student Achievement at the University Level" finds that in order to see academic improvement, it is necessary to participate in peer tutoring for ten to twenty hours over

the course of a fourteen-week semester. This works out to be about an hour per week (Munley, Garvey, & McConnell, 2010). The next section will expand on the academic benefits of peer tutoring.

### **Benefits**

Many students who are in need of extra academic support have a learning disability, a learning difficulty, and/or have a disorder that may prevent them from being able to learn efficiently and effectively in the classroom. Some learning challenges may simply come from a teacher who teaches at a pace the student cannot keep up with or large class sizes that prevent the teacher from providing individualized support. Working with a peer tutor, the struggling student receives one-on-one assistance that is engaging, allows the student to work at his/her own pace, and the student receives instant feedback allowing a problem to be fixed right away (Roberts & Spangenberg, 2020). Because peer tutoring is interactive, both the tutor and tutee develop and grow their creativity and problem-solving skills (Ullah, Tabassum, & Kaleem, 2018). The tutee learns to take ownership of their work and their successes with the support of their tutor. The tutor enables this by guiding and prompting them as they work (Clarence, 2016). Peer tutoring also can result in positive changes in study habits that may carry over into other classes and/or the next level of learning (Pugatch & Wilson, 2018)

Gathering empirical evidence on the effectiveness of peer tutoring presents a challenge as it is impossible to compare how an individual fared or progressed with a peer tutor as opposed to not having a peer tutor for that same amount of time in that same subject for the same type of work. Studies have still been able to collect data and

compare as best they are able and have come to conclusions about the benefits of peer tutoring. One such study analyzed data from twenty-six single-case research experiments and concluded that greater academic gains were achieved by students engaged in peer tutoring interventions than non peer tutoring instructional arrangements (Bowman-Perrot, et al, 2013).

Outside of academic benefits, peer tutoring also offers support in other areas. The case study conducted by Moumoulidou, Karadimitriou, and Pliogou (2020) looked at thirty studies from thirteen countries summarized the findings and states that benefits of peer tutoring include critical thinking development, self-regulation, time management, organizational skills and other related general skills. The students also work on their social and communication skills. These skills benefit tutor and tutee both in the present time and in their future endeavors.

### **Challenges**

While there are many social and academic benefits for both tutor and tutee, there are challenges that could make peer tutoring less effective. As Ullah and Kaleem state in their definition, peer tutors are nonprofessionals with little to no training on effective teaching strategies. They may come into a session without proper planning which will have a negative effect on the outcome of the peer tutoring session (Ullah & Kaleem, 2018). Another challenge may be caused by a perceived status difference between the tutor and tutee which can result in negative relationships outside of the classroom (Roberts & Spangenberg, 2020). If a student feels belittled or looked down on because they are not as “smart” as their peers, this may cause emotional and psychological issues

to arise. This may lead to a lack of ambition and capable students may take longer than necessary to graduate (Pugatch & Wilson, 2018).

With the recent pandemic related to Covid-19 which resulted in several schools shutting down for several months, some for longer, students had to learn to rely fully on technology for their academic learning. While there are several setbacks beyond just academic setbacks, the focus will be on the fact that students lost face-to-face interaction with their teachers and their peers and lost the opportunity for immediate feedback on challenges or questions. Less than two months after schools all around the world shut down and went to virtual learning, the *Journal of Education and Practice* provided research on the impact of the pandemic on academic learning . The article showed many ways that technology helped students continue their academic learning when not able to be in school, but the authors also recognized the technology cannot replace the valuable effects of being face-to-face (Onyema, Alysayed, Sharma, Atonye, Sen, Obafemi, & Eucheria, 2020). Coming back in person, many students struggle with asking for face-to-face help after having relied on internet sources for homework help and conceptual understanding.

## Chapter III: Implementation

### Introduction

High school is a busy time for students. Between a full day of classes, extra-curricular activities, part time jobs, and spending time with friends and family, time for homework is minimal. Add in a challenging subject or more and the amount of time needed for homework increases. Teachers have two, maybe three, prep periods and are often involved in at least two extracurricular activities. Finding time that matches up with a student to offer additional support with their class is challenging. This is where peer tutoring comes into play. Having someone before or after school or in their study hall to help them with homework, quiz/test prep, and/or general review of understanding can allow the struggling student more time to be involved in other activities and reduce the student's stress about school work.

This qualitative field project developed a peer tutoring program to allow students to more easily find other students to work with in an efficient and timely manner. This section will discuss the instruments used to create the program, the implementation of the program, and the participants involved. It will also look at the responses of the students who participated in the program and discuss the value of the feedback provided.

### Participants

**Students.** The entire student body (222) was informed about the program and invited to participate. The students attend a parochial school in rural/suburban Minnesota. The students travel anywhere from five minutes to one hour to attend school. Several students signed up to be tutors, however, only one student signed up to be tutored and her



needs were not able to be met by those who signed up to be tutors. Three students were recommended to be tutored by teachers. One student dropped the course before tutoring began and one student participated for approximately three weeks and then dropped the course, so only one pair of students participated through the end of the semester. A total of four students participated in the program and were interviewed, including the pair that began but did not finish the semester as their information was still useful in gathering feedback on the program. A fifth student who was to tutor the student who dropped the course before tutoring began, was given an initial interview and her responses were used to gather feedback on the tutoring process.

One tutee was a sophomore girl in Algebra 2. She was recommended to the program by her Algebra 2 teacher. At the time of recommendation her overall grade was 73% (D) with her homework grade 89% (B) and her quiz and tests grades were both 68.9% (F). She was tutored by a junior girl who had successfully completed Algebra 2 and was taking PreCalculus at the time of tutoring. This tutor had signed up to be part of the program and was matched with this student based on her application and teacher recommendation.

The other tutee was a junior girl in Chemistry. She was recommended to the program by her Chemistry teacher. At the time of recommendation her overall grade was a 74% (D) with her homework grade 72% (D), quiz grade 93% (A-), and test grade 61% (F). She was tutored by a senior girl who had successfully completed Chemistry and was currently taking Advanced Chemistry. This tutor did not sign up for the program but was

suggested by the Chemistry teacher and was asked by the lead teacher of the Peer Tutoring program.

**Teacher.** The teacher conducting this field project has been teaching high school for eight years. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary and Secondary Education and is licensed for Elementary K-6 and Mathematics 5-12. She is often mentioned as the lead teacher in this field project. Other teachers were occasionally consulted throughout the process.

### **Instruments**

**Applications.** Before the program could be introduced to the students, several items had to be developed. First, an easy application system for students to sign up for being a tutor and/or a student to be tutored was created. On the application, students can sign up for as many classes as they need help/can offer help in as well as when and how often they are available for help (see Appendix A & B).

**Tips for Successful Tutoring.** Because students are not professionally trained in teaching or tutoring, resources with advice and tips for tutoring were solicited from teachers and staff. They were asked to submit methods that would be beneficial for supporting student learning. These methods were all compiled into one document for convenience (Appendix C). Before beginning, students who signed up to be tutors were given this sheet and instructed to read through it and ask for any clarification on any of the tips.

**Goal Sheet.** Students were given a weekly goal sheet that could be used while they tutor to provide focus during their sessions (Appendix D). An example sheet

showing how they can use the goal sheet will be available for them to use as a guide to get started (Appendix E).

**Interview.** In order to collect qualitative data to determine the effectiveness of the program, interviews with the students were conducted. Both tutors and students to be tutored were interviewed before beginning (Appendix F), every 2-3 weeks after beginning (Appendix G), and at the end of the semester (Appendix H). The purpose of the interview prior to beginning is to set a baseline for where the students are academically and if they have been tutored/been a tutor before. The 2-3 times before the end of the semester had the purpose to follow-up on what is working and not working and offer guidance to be more successful. The final interview determined final thoughts on how it went and got feedback on how to improve the program for future use.

### **Procedures**

**Introducing the program.** Once the paperwork was developed, the students needed to be introduced to the program and the steps required to join. The lead teacher on the program gave a three minute introduction to the purpose of the program and the application process to the entire student body. After-school announcements were made to remind students of the availability of the program. Applications were made available in Study Hall, the Learning Coordinator's classroom, and the field project leader's classroom. Applications could be returned to these same locations.

**Pairing the students.** As stated above, several students signed up to be tutors; however, only one student signed up to be tutored and her needs were not able to be met by those who signed up to be tutors. Three students were recommended to be tutored by

teachers. As the need came in for a tutor, the lead teacher looked at the applications and found a tutor that had indicated interest in the same subject area and whose availability matched the student in need of a tutor. This student was then approached by the lead teacher and asked if they were officially interested in accepting the tutor role. The lead teacher then met with both students so they could officially meet, share contact information, and set up a start date.

It was understood that if a student was in need of a tutor but no tutor had applied that was available, the learning coordinator or that specific class's teacher would be asked for suggestions for students who could help even if they had not officially signed up for the program. This method was used to find the Chemistry tutor. This student was not required to fill out an application but was given the Tips for Successful Tutoring sheet.

Before getting set up with a tutee, the teacher of the course in which the student will be tutoring was consulted for his/her opinion on the capabilities of the student being a successful tutor in this class. In the case of the Algebra 2 student, that teacher is the lead on the project so she could skip this step as she knew both students well enough already.

After a week of working together, both students were checked in on and given the option to opt out of peer tutoring, switch peer tutors, or gather more resources/receive training to improve their tutoring skills. This was an informal check-in and was not part of the interview process that will be discussed in the next section. All students involved were satisfied with the pairing and did not request to switch out.

**Interviews.** Before beginning working together, both the tutor and student being tutored were interviewed (see Appendix F for initial interview questions). This allowed

the lead teacher to offer any additional advice before tutoring began. As the students were busy and did not have time that matched with the lead teacher, they were given a copy of the interview questions and asked to fill out the information and hand it back to the teacher as soon as possible.

The first pairing (Chemistry) began tutoring in the middle of October and the student dropped the class before an intermittent interview could be conducted so the pair was given the exit interview as the data would still be valuable for improving the program. The second pairing (Algebra 2) began tutoring in the beginning of November. With Thanksgiving break and Semester Exam prep, they also were just given an initial and exit formal interview. Both pairings were often informally asked how the tutoring sessions were going and if they needed any help or suggestions.

## **Results**

**Grade checks.** The goal was to check the grades of each student prior to beginning being tutored, weekly as they are tutored and then at the end of the semester to see if any improvement was made and if so, to what degree. The grades were informally checked by the classroom teacher throughout the tutoring period and final results were compared at the end of the semester. As the Chemistry student dropped the class before the end of the semester, no formal final grades were noted. The Algebra 2 student's final grade was a 76% (D+) with her homework grade 90.8% (B+), quiz grade 72.75% ((D), test grade 74.9% (D+), and semester test grade 61.7% (F). Before the semester test grade was entered, the student had an overall grade of 77.7% (C-). This is an improvement of

+3% for the overall grade, +1.8% for the homework grade, +3.85% for the quiz grade, and +6% for the test grade.

**Interview answers.** Grade checks and teacher input can be useful for checking individual progress. The interview questions were designed to check individual progress and make ongoing improvements for a specific tutor pairing, but they were also designed to gather general feedback to make improvements on the whole program. The students were given a letter of identification to keep their identities anonymous. Student B was supposed to tutor Chemistry, but student A dropped the course before they could begin; Student C tutored in Chemistry; Student D was tutored in Chemistry; Student E was tutored in Algebra 2; student F tutored in Algebra 2. The following are the responses to some of the key questions in the interviews.

**Initial Interview Answers:** None of the students had ever been tutors or been officially tutored before. Student B had unofficially been tutored for three years in study hall. A friend would help her understand the math lessons each day. When asked what is your goal for being a tutor/being tutored, Student B said “having someone help me through my homework was really helpful for me and I want others to have that help as well.” Student B also wants to be a teacher and knew that tutoring would be a good learning experience. The other students replied that as tutors they wanted to help their tutee better understand their subject area. Student F wants her tutee to feel less stressed about math. As tutees, they wanted their peer to help them understand their subject better and do better on tests. Student E also said she wants to be able to remember the correct steps “rather than guess

and hope it is right because I forgot the steps.” She also wants to “not get a sort of anxiety when I look at certain problems.”

When asked about what concerns they have about being a tutor/being tutored, the common theme to the answers was that they were worried they would tell the tutee the wrong information or not be able to answer the questions the tutee has on the spot. The concern of the tutees was not having enough time for other homework and wasting the tutor’s time because the tutee will not understand or remember what the tutor taught them.

**Exit Interview Answers:** Students C and D met twice a week and Students E and F met three times a week. Student C and D did not tutor long before D dropped Chemistry, but when asked what benefits have you noticed from your sessions, Student D stated that having someone explain it in a different way really helped. Student C noticed that Student D was able to understand the topics more and for her personally, it got “progressively easier to explain things.” Student E responded to the same question with “not only has my grade improved, but so has my problem-solving skills increased.” Student F noticed Student E “becoming more confident in the abilities we work on.” She was also able to review the math concepts herself which helped in her current math class.

When asked about the challenges and if they talked with their tutor/tutee about these challenges, it was clear from the answers that when the problem concerned the other person, the tutee/tutor did not hesitate to discuss the issue. For example, Student D said Student C would not always understand what she was asking so she would talk to her about it and they would work through the misunderstanding. Student F expressed

concern that they did not have adequate time to get through all the material effectively and encouraged her tutee to send her a text message outside of school if she ever had any questions. When the problem concerned only one person, they would not bring it up. For example, Student F was concerned about keeping up with the material in preparation for the next tutoring session but did not talk to Student E because “I thought me keeping up with her material is my responsibility and not something she needed to worry about.”

All students said they would continue to be a tutor/tutee in the future. The students being tutored both appreciated and recognized the benefit of having someone else help them. Student E added the extra bonus of having a closer friendship along with the help. Both tutors appreciated being able to help others and to get extra review with material they have not seen in awhile. Student F loved being able to use her gifts and abilities to help her current tutee. “It makes me very happy when she’s able to say ‘Wait, that makes so much sense now!’ after a session.”

### **Conclusion**

The quantitative and qualitative data demonstrated that peer tutoring does have a positive effect on student learning for both the tutor and the tutee. Growth was demonstrated through the improvement in all grading categories for the one student who was tutored through the end of the semester. The interview answers for the tutors showed that the review of the material they tutored in was helpful for their own purposes. The qualitative data showed that the biggest concerns for the tutee prior to being tutored is wasting the tutors time or not having enough time to work on other homework. For the tutors, it was not remembering the material well enough or being able to explain it well



enough to their tutee. Based on the exit interview, these initial concerns were not relevant in the tutoring sessions and more time with either longer sessions or more sessions during the week may have been beneficial for even more effective learning experiences. It can also be concluded that communication was a key element to working through challenges and aided in a positive learning experience as well as creating positive relationships between students.

## Chapter IV Reflective Essay

### Introduction

Watching students learn, understand, and apply new concepts is a very rewarding part of being a teacher. No teacher likes to watch a student struggle, so we do whatever we can to create a positive learning experience for our students where each one can be successful. Sometimes our best efforts just aren't enough. Especially at the high school level, a teacher only gets a short amount of time each day with his/her students and often, that entire time is dedicated to teaching the lesson or helping as many students as possible before the bell rings and your time is up. Sometimes, the way we teachers explain something just does not make sense to some of our students and no matter how much we try and help, we are not successful. Sometimes all it takes in this situation is for someone else to explain it and all of a sudden the light bulb comes on and now it makes sense. Other times, it just takes more repetition than we have time for in class and so hearing it again outside of class can be the solution to helping the struggling student. How can we provide the opportunity for our students to be successful if we don't have the time outside of the classroom to help or our time doesn't match up with the students' time? The results of this field project explored the possibilities that peer tutoring provides.

The field project showed the possibilities of growing student relationships and the value of time and of asking for help. While there was only a small number of participants, the students that did participate found value in the program, each one stating that they would continue in the program and found benefits such as grades, understanding, and problem-solving skills all improving.

The field project also provides for a foundation for other schools interested in starting up a peer tutoring program. The small number of participants may not have provided many results that prove the effectiveness of the program, but the value in the small amount of data they provided shows potential for success and provides areas for improvement that could encourage more students to participate.

### **Conclusions**

**Asking for help.** As I reflect on the results of this field project, one thing I have learned is that based on the number of students that requested and turned in applications, it seems as if students are much more willing to offer help than to ask for help. After making the initial announcement introducing the program, several students applied right away to be tutors. The students who were tutored came from either parent or teacher recommendations for a peer tutor. In my 8 years of teaching, a common theme at every single parent-teacher conference of a student who is struggling has been that their child is afraid to ask for help because they don't want to look "dumb" in front of their classmates. This stigma has been around forever and seems impossible to overcome. What students don't realize is that even the bravest, smartest-looking students all feel the same way and are looking for someone to help them as well.

Being able to ask for help and receive help from others is a valuable life skill that will benefit them way beyond high school. This is something that cannot be taught by saying it, it can only be taught by example and by experiencing it for yourself. It is my goal that the students involved in this program can inspire more students to be willing to ask for help.

Along these same lines, once this program gains some traction, it could help remove the stigma of asking for help and create a more positive learning environment for the entire school. Students that struggle will see that the students who are more academically gifted want to share their gifts with their classmates and see them succeed as well. Looking at the interview answers from those students who signed up to be tutors, you can see that MVL has willing and eager students who want to help their fellow peers be successful, who have the gifts and the desire to help. All they need is someone willing to accept that help.

**Time.** Students are willing to take the time to help/be helped when they see the benefit of it. In the formal interview answers and in the informal conversations had with the students, you could hear the excitement of working together and seeing results. Student E would often respond that “things are going really good! [Student F] is making things a lot easier to remember the steps.” Student F would often respond similarly, saying that she could see progress being made and enjoyed the times when Student E would say “Wait, that makes so much sense now!” Time was never brought up as an issue beyond the initial interview concerns or wishing that they had more time to work together.

**Relationships.** While this was never part of the original purpose of the project, I now see the value of peer tutoring with relationships among students. I do not expect new friendships to develop in every single tutoring pair that goes through the peer-tutoring program. I realize that not everyone has personalities that will mesh with whoever they interact with, however, hopefully, by working through this program, students will develop

a sense of respect for each other. The tutors, if they don't have it already, will hopefully develop a sense of empathy towards their peers who struggle with academics. They will learn to look at material they know well from a different perspective. The students being tutored, if they do feel this way, hopefully will feel less intimidated by those who are more academically gifted than themselves. I hope that they will be able to use the experience to find common ground and learn from each other. They will learn how to communicate, how to work through challenges together, and how to celebrate successes, no matter how small or large that may be.

The relationship between the teacher and the students may also change. As the Algebra 2 teacher, I checked in with that tutoring pair more frequently as I saw them more regularly in my math classes. Hearing their stories of challenges and successes and talking through those challenges and celebrating with them created a more positive relationship between them and me. The struggling student has been more willing to come and ask me for help when there is time. Student F often comments on how what we are going through in PreCalc is much easier now that "I am reviewing similar content with [Student E] in Algebra 2." She and I talk strategies but then the conversation also transitions to other aspects of the student's life.

**Results.** The small participation size made it difficult to really get a feel for the success of the program. While the four that did participate showed from their responses in the interviews that they could see progress in understanding, problem-solving, and grades, this does not mean that every student that would join the program would also see the same success. Having more students participate would have allowed for stronger

claims in the effectiveness of the program and would have also provided more areas in which the program could improve.

The comparisons of the actual grades from the beginning of the program to the end also have to be considered with some subjectivity as there is no way of knowing whether the students would have done worse without a tutor. Because of this, it was understood that the teachers would be asked for their input on whether that grade would possibly be different without the support of a tutor. As the Algebra 2 teacher, I can say that the student most likely would have failed the semester without the help of the tutor and saw noticeable improvement in general understanding as the semester progressed.

**Program Start-up.** This field project also provides a foundation for other schools to use if they would also like to set up a peer-tutoring program but don't know where to start or don't have the time to put it all together. The paperwork can easily be adapted for their specific educational setting. This project also provides helpful guidelines for getting the program started and keeping track of student progress.

### **Recommendations**

Initially, I had made the interview questions for the sole purpose of gathering data for this project. However, after sharing this project with another teacher at a different school and discussing the program with him, I have realized that these questions are useful for gathering constant feedback that can help the growth of the peer-tutoring program as a whole and can help the individual tutoring sessions become more effective. I would recommend keeping these interviews as part of the process. They are short enough and easy enough that the students can fill them out in 5-10 minutes.

I would also recommend making a more visible reminder of the program's existence, especially when the program is first started. Not all students struggle academically the whole year and at the beginning of the year, may not need a peer tutor. As the semester progresses or as new content is taught, perhaps something becomes more challenging and extra help would be beneficial. Having a bulletin board or blog post advertisement for the program could be a helpful reminder for where they can go to find the needed help.

Because the stigma of looking “dumb” in front of their peers is ever present, perhaps even the thought of going up and asking for an application to be tutored is too much pressure on the students. Having an online application process through Google Forms or another internet based platform could entice more students to sign up for the program. It is my recommendation to explore these online options and make them available on the school’s website and student blog.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Application to be a Tutor

#### Application for Tutor

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: 9 10 11 12

**Class able to tutor in (circle as many as applicable):**

- **MATH:** Pre Algebra   Algebra 1   Geometry   Algebra 2   Pre Calculus  
AP Calculus   Statistics   Consumer Math
  
- **SCIENCE:** Physical Science   Biology   Chemistry   Adv. Chemistry   Geology  
Astronomy   Scientific Inquiry   Robotics   Anatomy & Phys   AP Physics
  
- **ENGLISH:** Foundations of English   Language Arts 1   Language Arts 2   ALC  
Speech   Novel   AP English
  
- **SPANISH:** Level- 1   2   3   4
  
- **SOCIAL STUDIES:** World Geography   World History   US History   Government  
Economics
  
- **RELIGION:** Christian Basics   Living Christianity   Christian Doctrine  
Practical Christianity   Introduction to Christianity
  
- **OTHER:** Computer Apps   Parenting   Personal Finance   Accounting   Art: \_\_\_\_\_

**Frequency of being able to help:**

\_\_\_ Daily   \_\_\_ 2-3 times a week   \_\_\_ once a week   \_\_\_ as needed (depends on content)  
 \_\_\_ 20 minutes a study hall   \_\_\_ entire study hall

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**Times available (Check as many as applicable):**

\_\_\_ Before school on M T W Th F starting at \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_ After school on M T W Th F until \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_ Study Hall 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**Other:**

Willing to tutor student in same/upper grade: Yes No Possibly

Willing to tutor in a small group (3-4 students): Yes No Possibly

**Appendix B: Application to be Tutored**

**Application for Student to be Tutored**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: 9 10 11 12

**Class in need of extra help (circle as many as applicable):**

- **MATH:** Pre Algebra   Algebra 1   Geometry   Algebra 2   Pre Calculus  
AP Calculus   Statistics   Consumer Math
- **SCIENCE:** Physical Science   Biology   Chemistry   Adv. Chemistry   Geology  
Astronomy   Scientific Inquiry   Robotics   Anatomy & Phys   AP Physics
- **ENGLISH:** Foundations of English   Language Arts 1   Language Arts 2   ALC  
Speech   Novel   AP English
- **SPANISH:** Level- 1   2   3   4
- **SOCIAL STUDIES:** World Geography   World History   US History   Government  
Economics
- **RELIGION:** Christian Basics   Living Christianity   Christian Doctrine  
Practical Christianity   Introduction to Christianity
- **OTHER:** Computer Apps   Parenting   Personal Finance   Accounting   Art: \_\_\_\_\_

**Frequency of needing help:**

\_\_\_ Daily   \_\_\_ 2-3 times a week   \_\_\_ once a week   \_\_\_ as needed (depends on content)  
\_\_\_ 20 minutes a study hall   \_\_\_ entire study hall

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**Times available (Check as many as applicable):**

\_\_\_ Before school on M T W Th F starting at \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ After school on M T W Th F until \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ Study Hall 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**Other:**

Willing to be tutored by student in same/lower grade: Yes No Possibly

Willing to be tutored in a small group (3-4 students): Yes No Possibly

## Appendix C: Tips for Successful Tutoring

Note: Formatting has been changed to fit the formatting of this paper.

### Tips for Successful Tutoring

#### General Tips

- Don't do the homework/study guide/project for them
- Be patient as they work through a problem or think through how to answer a question
- Show them how to find the answer (using notes, examples from the book, context clues when reading, etc.)
- Ask open ended questions whenever possible. (Questions that aren't yes/no)
- Chunk material: don't overload the information. Break a concept into distinct, smaller parts. (See additional handouts)

#### Math

- Have the person being tutored explain to the tutor their rationale/talk out their steps out loud
- Chunk the material
- Have math formulas in front of student, ie. vertex of a parabola is  $-b/2a$ , min., max, A o S, limits, etc
- Connect past lessons/concepts to current lessons/concepts

#### Religion

- Flash cards
- Quizlet/Kahoot
- Word/phrase association
- Create graphic organizer

#### Science

- Similar to Math and Religion

#### Social Studies

- [Chunking](#) information(memory)
- Proper [paragraph](#) writing (see end of this document)
- [2 Chunk paragraphs](#)

#### Spanish/Foreign Language

- Flashcards (handmade or digital)
- Use YouTube videos or SpanishDict.com for grammar topics explained in English
- Write using different colors for different parts of speech within a sentence or paragraph
- Chunking
- Reference back to vocab packet, notes, homework and textbook
- Create manipulatives for verb chart endings for students to move around and organize by subject pronoun

## English

- diagrams to brainstorm topics
- Student tutoring should know how to do helpful peer editing and give clear feedback and examples without writing the essay for the other student.
- explanation and examples of: opening paragraph, thesis statement, body of paper with points from thesis, closing (restate thesis)
- Prewriting assistance
- Talk through as much of the writing in advance as possible. What is your main point? Why do you say that? What evidence is there, etc. If the tutor takes notes as the student talks, the student may be better able to see how the writing can be organized.
- For writing assignments, use the rubric the teacher has provided. Focus on one area at a time and guide the student through the rubric-based assessment process. (This would likely be after a rough draft, minimally, has been written.)
- Encourage the student to self-assess - use lots of questions. “What do you think is strong in your writing?” “What do you see that you know must be improved?” Or, “Highlight examples of strong word choice, descriptive language, etc. Now find where you could do that in other areas.”
- Focus on small chunks, few criteria, to avoid overwhelming.

### On Paragraphs

#### What is a paragraph?

A paragraph is a collection of related sentences dealing with a single topic. Learning to write good paragraphs will help you as a writer stay on track during your drafting and revision stages. Good paragraphing also greatly assists your readers in following a piece of writing. You can have fantastic ideas, but if those ideas aren't presented in an organized fashion, you will lose your readers (and fail to achieve your goals in writing).

#### The Basic Rule: Keep one idea to one paragraph

The basic rule of thumb with paragraphing is to keep one idea to one paragraph. If you begin to transition into a new idea, it belongs in a new paragraph. There are some simple ways to tell if you are on the same topic or a new one. You can have one idea and several bits of supporting evidence within a single paragraph. You can also have several points in a single paragraph as long as they relate to the overall topic of the paragraph. If the single points start to get long, then perhaps elaborating on each of them and placing them in their own paragraphs is the route to go.

#### Elements of a paragraph

To be as effective as possible, a paragraph should contain each of the following: **Unity, Coherence, A Topic Sentence, and Adequate Development.** As you will see, all of these traits overlap. Using and adapting them to your individual purposes will help you construct effective paragraphs.

#### UNITY

The entire paragraph should concern itself with a single focus. If it begins with one focus or major point of discussion, it should not end with another or wander within different ideas.

#### COHERENCE

Coherence is the trait that makes the paragraph easily understandable to a reader. You can help create coherence in your paragraphs by creating logical bridges and verbal bridges.

#### Logical bridges

- The same idea of a topic is carried over from sentence to sentence
- Successive sentences can be constructed in parallel form

#### Verbal bridges

- Key words can be repeated in several sentences
- Synonymous words can be repeated in several sentences
- Pronouns can refer to nouns in previous sentences
- Transition words can be used to link ideas from different sentences

### A TOPIC SENTENCE

A topic sentence is a sentence that indicates in a general way what idea or thesis the paragraph is going to deal with. Although not all paragraphs have clear-cut topic sentences, and despite the fact that topic sentences can occur anywhere in the paragraph (as the first sentence, the last sentence, or somewhere in the middle), an easy way to make sure your reader understands the topic of the paragraph is to put your topic sentence near the beginning of the paragraph. (This is a good general rule for less experienced writers, although it is not the only way to do it). Regardless of whether you include an explicit topic sentence or not, you should be able to easily summarize what the paragraph is about.

### ADEQUATE DEVELOPMENT

The topic (which is introduced by the topic sentence) should be discussed fully and adequately. Again, this varies from paragraph to paragraph, depending on the author's purpose, but writers should be wary of paragraphs that only have two or three sentences. It's a pretty good bet that the paragraph is not fully developed if it is that short.

#### **Some methods to make sure your paragraph is well-developed:**

- Use examples and illustrations
- Cite data (facts, statistics, evidence, details, and others)
- Examine testimony (what other people say such as quotes and paraphrases)
- Use an anecdote or story
- Define terms in the paragraph
- Compare and contrast
- Evaluate causes and reasons
- Examine effects and consequences
- Analyze the topic
- Describe the topic
- Offer a chronology of an event (time segments)

#### **How do I know when to start a new paragraph?**

You should start a new paragraph when:

- **When you begin a new idea or point.** New ideas should always start in new paragraphs. If you have an extended idea that spans multiple paragraphs, each new point within that idea should have its own paragraph.
- **To contrast information or ideas.** Separate paragraphs can serve to contrast sides in a debate, different points in an argument, or any other difference.
- **When your readers need a pause.** Breaks between paragraphs function as a short "break" for your readers—adding these in will help your writing be more readable. You would create a break if the paragraph becomes too long or the material is complex.
- **When you are ending your introduction or starting your conclusion.** Your introductory and concluding material should always be in a new paragraph. Many introductions and conclusions have multiple paragraphs depending on their content, length, and the writer's purpose.

#### **Transitions and signposts**

Two very important elements of paragraphing are signposts and transitions. Signposts are internal aids to assist readers; they usually consist of several sentences or a paragraph outlining what the article has covered and where the article will be going.

Transitions are usually one or several sentences that "transition" from one idea to the next. Transitions can be used at the end of most paragraphs to help the paragraphs flow one into the next.

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/academic\\_writing/paragraphs\\_and\\_paragraphing/index.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/paragraphs_and_paragraphing/index.html)

**Appendix D: Goal Sheet**

Weekly Tutoring Goal Sheet

Name:

Tutor:

Date	Subject-Assignment /Project/ Content review	Goal to be accomplished	Progress towards goal	Work that still needs to be done

**Appendix E: Goal Sheet Sample**

Weekly Tutoring Goal Sheet

Name: Student A

Tutor: Student B

Date	Subject-Assignment /Project/ Content review	Goal to be accomplished	Progress towards goal	Work that still needs to be done
Mon 9-13	-Alg 2- 2.3 homework - Spanish 1	- work through 2.3 questions # 7,8, 23 & 31 - review vocabulary words for quiz Wednesday	- completed  - B gave English definition and I gave the Spanish word. I got 10 out of 25 words correct	- More time reviewing Spanish vocab
Tues 9-14	-Alg 2- 2.4 homework - Spanish 1 -LA II	- work through 2.4 #25 & 28 - review vocab - edit essay	- finished #25 - 13/25 vocab correct - B read through essay and highlighted and explained areas to be revised	- #28- will ask teacher - will continue review at home - will fix mistakes at home



**Appendix F: Initial Interview**

Tutor-Tutee Initial Interview Questions

Student ID: \_\_\_\_\_ Tutor or Tutee or Both Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you been a peer tutor before? Y N

Have you ever had a peer tutor before? Y N

If so when/for how long? \_\_\_\_\_

Describe the experience: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What are you going to be tutoring/tutored in? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How many times a week are you going to be tutored/tutor? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is your goal for being a tutor/being tutored? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What concerns do you have being a tutor/being tutored? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix G: Intermittent Interview**

Tutor-Tutee Interview Questions

Student ID: \_\_\_\_\_ Tutor or Tutee or Both \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been a tutor/been tutored? \_\_\_\_\_

How often do you meet with your tutor/tutee? \_\_\_\_\_

What benefits have you noticed from your sessions? \_\_\_\_\_

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What challenges have you noticed from your sessions? \_\_\_\_\_

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Have you talked with your tutee/tutor about these challenges? \_\_\_\_\_

If no, are you planning on talking? Or what is holding you back? \_\_\_\_\_

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If yes, what changes have been made to adapt or changes do you plan on making to adapt?

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**Appendix H: Exit Interview**

Tutor-Tutee Exit Interview Questions

Student ID: \_\_\_\_\_ Tutor or Tutee or Both Date: \_\_\_\_\_

What subjects did you tutor/be tutored in? \_\_\_\_\_

How often did you meet with your tutor/tutee? \_\_\_\_\_

What benefits have you noticed from your sessions? \_\_\_\_\_

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What challenges have you noticed from your sessions? \_\_\_\_\_

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Did you talk with your tutee/tutor about these challenges? \_\_\_\_\_

If no, what held you back?

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If yes, what changes were made as a result? Did they help improve the tutoring session?

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Will you continue to be a tutor/tutee? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

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