

## **Text for Success: Innovative Tutoring Program Boosts Student Achievement**

### Moorpark College's Unique Approach Improves Math and English Completion Rates

When Moorpark College sat down to brainstorm strategies for improving completion rates in transfer level Math and English courses, they started with a likely subject: tutoring.

Data on the program's effectiveness revealed that individual students who regularly received tutoring for Math and English courses saw higher success rates. However, not enough students were attending tutoring for those results to make an impact on campus-wide success rates, and the students in greatest need of academic support were not among those who regularly attended.

While the challenge faced by Moorpark College is nothing new for [tutoring and learning centers in higher education](#), their response, and the increase in completion rates that followed, is nothing short of remarkable.

Through the implementation of various new practices, including the use of a program that makes reaching out for support as simple as sending a quick text, Moorpark College saw a 760% percent increase in tutoring attendance and a double-digit increase in completion rates over the course of just one semester.

## **Background**

The Moorpark College Tutoring and Learning Center (TLC) provides academic support to thousands of students each semester, operating in a three-branch system: The Math and Science Center, The Writing Center, and The Course Embedded Tutoring Program (CET).

The Course Embedded Tutoring model has been utilized by the Moorpark College TLC since the early 2000s, serving as the primary avenue for support in STEM classes across campus. Unlike a traditional tutoring model, an embedded tutor works directly in the classroom, assisting the instructor in efforts to enhance student learning and engagement. At Moorpark College, the CET program focuses primarily on courses with historically low success rates and/or large equity gaps, providing hands on, high-impact support in crucial general education and transfer level courses.

Our highly trained CETs work directly with faculty throughout the semester, attending lectures, assisting with group work, providing weekly break-out sessions and study-tips, all while offering individual and group tutoring sessions for the students in their assigned course. The tutors are often students themselves, an intentional practice inspired by [well documented research](#) that suggests students benefit from near peer mentorship and support. The faculty that partner with our TLC to participate in the CET program do so on a volunteer basis, crafting the meaningful integration of our tutors into their classroom as a means of bolstering support for their students.

The Math and Science Center at Moorpark College provides more traditional tutoring resources for students in non-CET equipped courses, with drop-in and appointment based individual or group tutoring available five days a week. The Writing Center operates similarly, with the added support of Writing Coaches, who operate as dedicated tutors for specific sections of transfer level English courses. Writing Coaches will occasionally attend class sessions to assist with writing assignments, but are primarily tasked with collaborating with the instructors of their assigned courses to provide supplemental support on course content and assignments.

## ***Post-Pandemic Challenges***

Prior to the pandemic, The Moorpark College TLC was the campus hub for academic and social support, with over 17,000 student visits throughout the 2017-2018 academic year. [Enrollment challenges](#) and [significant changes to the educational landscape](#) caused a devastating decline in TLC engagement, with only 3,869 student visits throughout the 2021-2022 academic year.

As Moorpark College began its [transition back to on campus instruction](#), the TLC struggled to restore pre-pandemic engagement rates. Given [the crucial impact high-dose tutoring can have on student success rates](#), particularly amid [post-pandemic achievement gaps](#), regenerating student engagement with tutoring and learning services became a top priority in supporting student success.

### ***Increased Need for Academic Support in Transfer Level Math and English***

In the midst of post-pandemic recovery, Governor Newsom signed AB1705 into law, which prescribed requirements for the implementation of Irwin's landmark AB705 legislation, a bill designed to support placement strategies proven to increase student completion rates and close achievement gaps. AB1705 aims maximize the probability a student will complete transfer-level coursework in English and Math within their first year of college, effectively prohibiting California Community Colleges from requiring students to complete remedial courses in Math and English prior to enrolling in transfer level courses.

The premise behind the legislation is that students with substandard proficiency in Math and English should not be required to prolong their community college education to complete mandatory remedial coursework; instead, the community colleges should provide these students with enhanced academic support resources to facilitate their achievement in transfer-level courses.

Consequently, the implementation of this legislation created a drastic exigence for comprehensive academic support resources, namely tutoring and learning services, to ensure the preservation of academic success rates in transfer-level Math and English courses. Combined with post-pandemic learning and engagement challenges, The Moorpark College Tutoring and Learning Center was committed to devising comprehensive enhancements to meet the needs of Math and English students.

## **Support Interventions**

Support interventions to improve tutorial resources for transfer level Math and English students were facilitated via a two-pronged approach: increasing engagement and enhancing support.

### **Increasing Engagement through Text Message Communication**

#### ***Tutor Text Message Hotline for Transfer Level Math & English Courses***

Moorpark College leverages text-message communication to provide high-impact, on-demand support in a variety of student services departments, an innovative practice adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic to meet the needs of our students. Following the success of this resource as a means of [improving persistence outcomes](#), the Moorpark College Department of Institutional Effectiveness was eager to explore academic applications of the resource.

The premise was simple: increase student engagement with tutorial services by making contacting a tutor as painless and convenient as possible. There is a significant body of research supporting the idea that text message is one of the most [accessible](#), [immediate](#), and [student-friendly](#) modes of communication available to colleges for outreach and support.

Instead of having to come to campus to visit our tutoring center or await an email reply to access support, Moorpark College sought to put academic support in the palm of our students' hands, with the hope of increasing student engagement with tutorial resources and improving academic outcomes.

During the first week of their Math or English course, students were introduced to the tutor assigned to their class and provided with the tutor's personal text-line phone number. Students were instructed to reach out via text message whenever they would like to set up a tutoring appointment, receive clarification on an assignment, or ask any quick questions related to the course. Tutors would reach out a couple times a month to invite students to group study sessions, send reminders or important tips for assignments, and extend messages of encouragement at key points in the semester. Some faculty-tutor teams developed outreach campaigns in which the instructor would provide the tutor with a list of students in the class that may benefit from tutoring outreach. Students were free to opt-out of the texting service at any time by replying "STOP" to one of the tutor's texts, and traditional communication channels (email, etc.) were still available throughout the course of the semester.

### ***Tutor Initiated Support Interventions in Transfer Level Math & English Courses***

In addition to facilitating fast and easy tutoring support, the tutor text-lines also provided a unique opportunity for near-peer support interventions. Every professor is familiar with the tradition of encouraging a struggling student to take advantage of tutoring, including the troublesome reality that many students are [hesitant or resistant](#) to tutoring.

Given the well-documented ability near-peer tutoring has [neutralize this stigma](#), faculty participating in this program were encouraged to collaborate with their tutors to identify which students were in need of extra support. At crucial points in the semester, such as the following the first exam, tutors reached out these struggling students to offer emotional support, guidance, and encouragement to set up an appointment for tutoring.

### **Enhancing the CET Program to Bolster Student Success**

While two-way text message was employed to increase engagement, the Tutoring and Learning Center implemented several enhancements to tutorial curriculum and services as a means of increasing the efficacy and impact of their support.

#### ***Revitalizing Pedagogy***

A redesigned joint faculty/CET training program was employed to support the implementation of pedagogical techniques and best practices to maximize the impact of course embedded tutors on student success and engagement in the classroom.

#### ***Increasing Collaboration***

Faculty and their assigned tutor were required to meet regularly for lesson planning and co-strategization for best practices to meet the needs of students in their courses. The Tutoring and Learning Center provided scaffolding resources to help guide these collaborations and encourage standardized progress.

#### ***Facilitating Praxis***

Tutors attended monthly training sessions lead by our tutoring support specialists and faculty coordinators. These sessions, structured as a guided Community of Practice, provided the tutors with ongoing education, mentorship, and support in their development as educational support specialists. Additionally, CETs underwent performance assessments through observations conducted by our CET coordinator each semester, allowing them to receive individualized feedback on ways in which they could enhance their performance in the classroom.

### ***Eliminating Components of the Hidden Curriculum***

Eliminating equity gaps in academic achievement involves supporting the holistic development of disproportionately impacted students, including the elimination of barriers related to the [hidden curriculum](#) of managing student life and academic success. Math CETs provided multiple micro-lessons on study skills, time-management, best practices for note taking, test preparation, and other learning strategies to help support the development of [academic resilience](#) and ensure student success.

## The Impact

### *Effect on Student Engagement*

The combined interventions resulted in a 337% increase in unduplicated attendance of group review sessions, with 162 individual students attending a review session during the Fall 2023 semester. In total, there was a 760% increase in attendance (including duplicate attendance), with 585 students attending review sessions during the Fall 2023 semester.

Effect of Support Interventions on Student Engagement			
	Fall 2022	Fall 2023	Percentage Difference
CET Review Session Attendance Unduplicated	37	162	+337% ↑
CET Review Session Attendance Total	68	585	+760% ↑

### *Effect on English Completion Rates*

Difference in Difference analysis of completion rates for students in English courses in the Fall 2022 semester and the Fall 2023 semester indicate students enrolled in treatment group English classes passed the course at a rate 16.4 percentage points higher than those in the control group.

When comparing Fall 2022 and Fall 2023 completion rates, completion rates for students enrolled in treatment group classes increased by 13.8 percentage points during Fall 2023, whereas completion rates of those enrolled in control classes decreased by 2.6 percentage points.

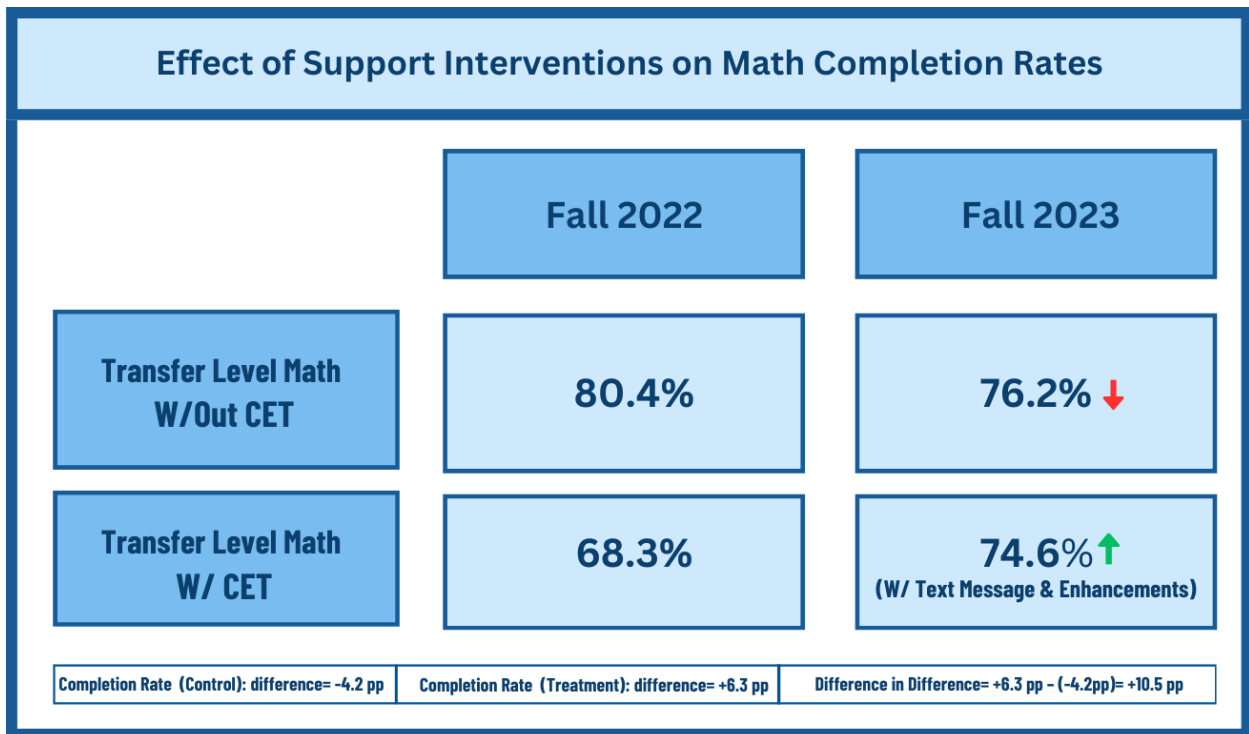
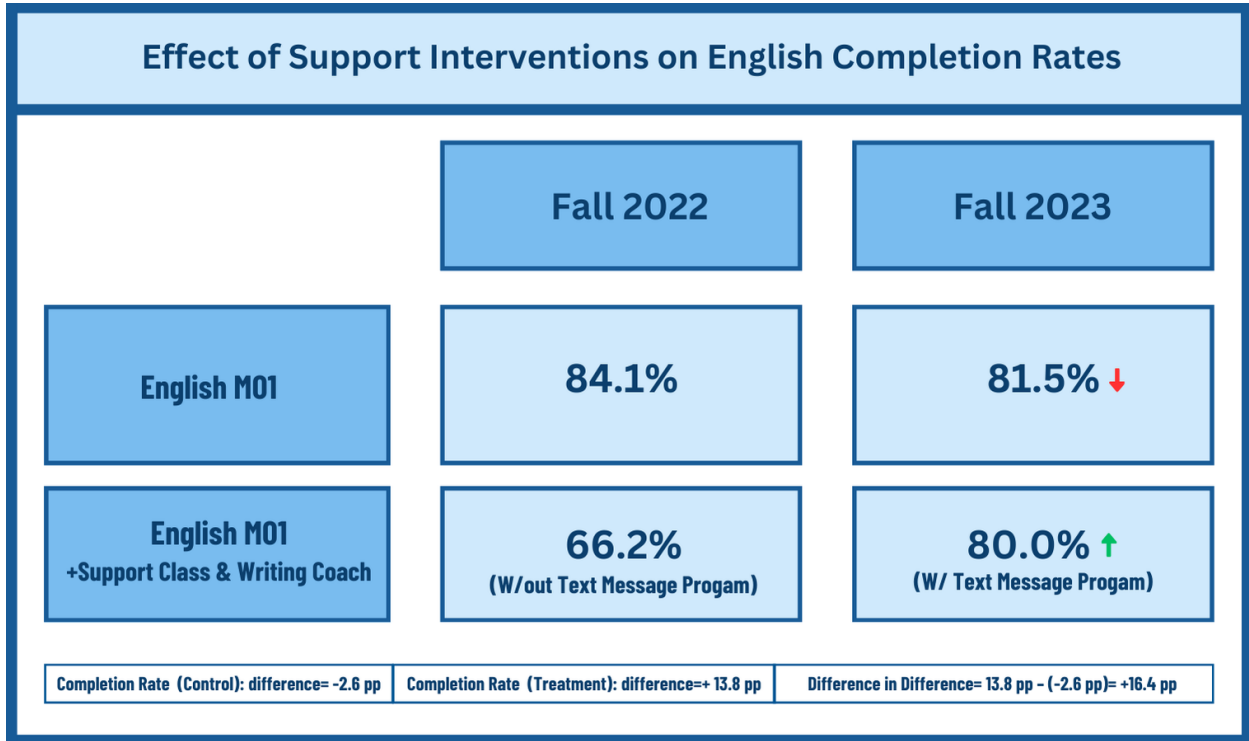
### *Effect on Math Completion Rates*

Difference in Difference analysis of completion rates for students in Math courses in the Fall 2022 semester and the Fall 2023 semester indicate students enrolled in the treatment group Math classes passed the course at a rate 10.5 percentage points higher than those in the control group.

When comparing Fall 2022 and Fall 2023 completion rates, completion rates for students enrolled in treatment group classes increased by 6.3 percentage points during Fall 2023, whereas completion rates of those enrolled in control classes decreased by 4.2 percentage points.

Additionally, difference in difference analysis of completion rates among White and Hispanic students revealed strong evidence to suggest these interventions narrowed the achievement gap between these student groups. Among students in the treatment group, the achievement gap among Hispanic students

decreased by 7.8 percentage points, narrowing from 16.2% in Fall 2022 to 8.4% in Fall 2023. Among students in the control group, the achievement gap increased by 2.4 percentage points, widening the gap from 12% to 14.4%.



## **Key Take-Aways**

### ***High-Access Spurs Continued Engagement***

When taking a challenging course, students often delay the use of tutorial support until their performance drops or they're struggling to keep up with course concepts. The implementation of these interventions expedited student engagement with tutorial services, encouraging students to adopt a more proactive approach to academic support.

By facilitating high-dose communication and accessibility of tutorial services from the start of the semester, students were more likely to utilize tutoring services prior to significant performance issues, maximizing the impact of tutorial support on academic outcomes. Additionally, student engagement rates remained mostly consistent during Fall 2023, suggesting these interventions not only helped to recruit students to tutoring, but also incentivized the continued use of tutoring throughout the duration of the semester.

### ***Tutor-Faculty Collaboration Maximizes Benefits and Impact***

Increased collaboration between tutors and faculty yielded several benefits, including more customized, timely, and impactful support. Tutors gained greater insight into the pedagogical style and practices of the instructor, allowing them to provide more tailored academic support to students in their courses. When faculty identified to tutors which students or concepts required greater academic support, tutors could not only initiate support interventions sooner, but with a more targeted focus on high-need concepts. With CETs regularly in the classroom reviewing concepts and providing live assistance, faculty and tutors can employ these dual support approaches, maximizing student comprehension and support.

### ***Text Message Communication Enhances Social and Emotional Support***

One of the many benefits of near-peer tutoring is the social and emotional support a near-peer tutor can provide to their students. Students often report feeling more comfortable approaching a near-peer tutor for help or feeling more receptive to receiving guidance and support.

Qualitative analysis of the text message communication between Moorpark College tutors and their students revealed that tutor messages of encouragement and support during stressful periods in the semester often received the highest engagement rates among students, with many expressing gratitude and appreciation for the messages.

Additionally, [ongoing research into the benefits of text message communication in higher education](#) suggests communicating via a familiar medium may make asking for support less intimidating, creating an easier way to “open the door for a conversation” surrounding support resources.

### ***High-Dosage Tutoring is the key to Improving Student Outcomes***

[High-dosage tutoring](#) is one of the few academic interventions with demonstrated significant positive effects on math and reading achievement. However, creating the conditions to

incentivize or facilitate high dosage tutoring is often a significant challenge for higher education tutoring centers. For tutorial services to be considered high dose, they must include:

- One-on-one or small group sessions
- Materials/strategies that are aligned with classroom content/expectations
- Weekly tutoring sessions with at least 30 minutes per session
- Flexible and accessible tutoring services (hours, location, communication medium, etc.)
- The ability for students to meet regularly with the same tutor to form a strong relationship
- The ongoing training and education of tutors to meet the needs of faculty and students

The support interventions implemented at Moorpark College were designed to create an atmosphere and culture that facilitates and incentivizes high dosage tutoring.

Text message communication supported the increase and maintenance of more frequent engagement, while also enhancing the flexibility and accessibility of tutoring services. These improvements in communication supported the development of strong relationships between students and their tutors and the likelihood of more frequent tutoring attendance.

Enhancements made to tutorial services at Moorpark College facilitated greater alignment of tutoring curriculum with classroom curriculum, increased the availability of tutoring through the implementation of review/group sessions, increased the frequency of student and tutor contact through more substantial classroom involvement, and increased effectiveness of tutorial support through the implementation of ongoing evaluation and training of tutors.

In the years prior to the implementation of these support initiatives, Moorpark College Institutional Effectiveness research data failed to capture a statistically significant impact of tutorial support on student success outcomes. This data was difficult to conceive given the sheer volume of student success stories and the essentially irrefutable benefits to tutoring. Contrastingly, the impressive results of this project illuminate a crucial reality: without high-impact recruiting, engagement, and support strategies, the students who independently seek out high dosage tutoring are often not the students who would most greatly benefit from high dosage tutoring.

The stigma and accessibility challenges often associated with tutoring create significant barriers to ensuring tutorial support is available to every student, particularly to those who may be hesitant or resistant to tutoring. By implementing high-impact practices and resources designed to bring the benefits of tutoring directly to large groups of students, tutoring programs have the ability to extend their impact, extending a hand not just to the students who want tutoring, but also to those desperately in need of their support.



