

TUTORING CASE STUDY

Orange County Public Schools

Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) is the fourth largest public school district in Florida and the eighth largest in the United States. In fall 2021, it piloted a math focused, online peer tutoring program, the Minority Achievement Office (MAO) Peer Tutoring Initiative for students participating in the district's Calculus Project, an effort to increase the number of students who successfully complete AP Calculus AB before graduating from high school. MAO Peer Tutoring is one of several opportunities offered to students in the district's suite of academic supports, and is a component of the Project Serve Initiative that enables academically gifted students to earn community service hours while helping their peers gain mastery of academic content. Since its launch, MAO Peer Tutoring has more than doubled the number of students receiving support and has expanded to include all academic subjects, producing positive learning outcomes for students. We spoke to **Jennifer Bellinger**, Minority Achievement Officer, and **Kate Demory**, MAO Resource Teacher, about the program's unique structure and approach to tutoring. Below, we summarize key insights about the district's progress and journey with peer tutoring.

OCPS by the Numbers

TOTAL POPULATION



208,788
students



210
schools

% OF WITH FREE & REDUCED MEALS



76%

% OF STUDENTS WHO ARE ENGLISH LEARNERS



14%

FUNDING PER STUDENT



\$9,154

RACIAL & ETHNIC MAKEUP



- 44% Hispanic
- 24% White
- 24% Black
- 5% Asian
- 3% Other

Tutoring Program Overview

The Vitals



Model

Peer tutoring; students are tutored through the MAO Peer Tutoring Initiative by peers with a strong academic background in math.



Program Type

The MAO Peer Tutoring Initiative is **internal**: as part of it's MAO Project Serve Initiative, the district trains and selects its own tutors from a pool of high achieving juniors and seniors who complete an application and undergo a background check prior to participating.



Student Group(s) Prioritized

The program primarily targets **middle and high school students who are struggling with math**, with a particular focus on participants in the district's Calculus Project, an initiative that seeks to help more students complete calculus in high school.



Grades Served & Subjects Covered

MAO Peer Tutoring focuses on **math homework assistance for middle and high school students**, but elementary students can also register. Students can also request help in other subjects.



Session Timing

MAO Peer Tutoring is available **Monday - Thursday between the hours of 3 and 9 PM, and Saturday and Sunday, between 12 and 5 PM. Students may request tutoring one to seven days a week.** Students who request tutoring receive **at least one session per week** during the school week. Sessions are scheduled for an hour but may end early or extend longer if needed.



Delivery Method

MAO Peer Tutoring is primarily offered **online**, with other delivery methods being offered to students on a case-by-case basis.

Program Journey

From Decision-Making to Outcomes-Monitoring



Deciding on Tutoring

The MAO Peer Tutoring Initiative was launched after site visits to district schools revealed an immediate need to help struggling middle and high school math students, particularly those participating in the district's Calculus Project. The program, through which participants complete calculus during high school, is geared towards underrepresented students in STEM, many of whom need extra support to overcome earlier gaps in their learning. Demory realized that peer tutoring could help solve this problem while simultaneously solving another: giving students a new way to fulfill community service hours, which are required by a number of district programs, including for the National Honor Society, the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program, and the IB Diploma Programme. "The students are so passionate about helping," Demory shared. "There's a lot of heart to it."



Setting Requirements

Empowering students to take control of their academic experience has been an essential part of OCPS' approach from day one. While many tutoring programs identify specific target students for interventions, OCPS decided on a different design for its MAO Peer Tutoring support. Students request tutoring themselves via an online application, and can even ask for a specific tutor or for help in a subject beyond mathematics. Similarly, MAO Project Serve identifies students who meet the requirements to volunteer as MAO peer tutors and invites them to apply, thus meeting the needs of student tutees and tutors alike. A growing request from students is for support in another language. To date, the district has been able to meet all language requests for tutors who speak Spanish, Russian, Creole, and Chinese.



Implementing

Making real-time adjustments based on feedback is at the heart of the district's success with MAO Peer Tutoring. Students, student tutors, and parents are regularly asked to share their opinions of the program, and program leaders implement changes accordingly, often in the moment. MAO also constantly monitors systems and outcomes, looking for ways to improve and making those improvements immediately. Demory praised Bellinger for her flexible but strategic approach to leadership and her understanding that what works for one district might not for another. The end result, Demory noted, is a program that feels like it was built by and for students.



Monitoring Outcomes

MAO tracks student attendance data and grades to assess the program's effectiveness, and Demory monitors the program's impact in real time. Early results have been encouraging: all students being tutored have experienced an improvement in math, with many increasing their math performance by as much as two letter grades (i.e. from a D to a B). The preliminary analysis by MAO indicates an increasingly positive outcome with each additional quarter of implementation, including a noted impact on student GPA (see below).

	SUBJECTS/FORMAT	STUDENTS	OUTCOME
2021-2022	Algebra 1 - AP Calculus BC; added middle school math in spring 2022 (paired, weekly meetings online)	72 students served by 35 tutors	All participating students improved their math grades
2022-2023	K-12 Math - AP Calculus BC (paired, weekly meetings online); K-12 Math, K-12 ELA, K-12 Science, K-12 History (drop-in, on-demand tutoring online)	2,219 hours of tutoring provided to 265 1st-12th-grade students by 152 tutors	All participating students improved their math grades and began to note improvement on their overall GPA

As word spreads about the program, demand for MAO Peer Tutoring has increased and the program has more than doubled in size from 72 to 265 students. In the coming years, program leaders hope to further expand the initiative, with a focus on tutors supporting teachers during the school day.

“What would you do differently?”: Top Tips from OCPS



BE FLEXIBLE AND LISTEN TO STUDENTS AND FAMILIES.

MAO's recommendation for districts implementing tutoring programs is to be adaptive to student and family needs and not take feedback personally. It is particularly important, MAO believes, to be able to make changes in the moment to prevent districts from losing opportunities to make their programs effective in a short timeframe. For example, MAO adjusted its communications strategy after learning that reminder emails were often missed or overlooked. This led program leaders to implement a text message reminder system, with messages going out on the morning of tutoring.



AUTOMATE PROGRAM MANAGEMENT.

When MAO first started its tutoring initiative, on average it was taking a week to ten days for students to begin their tutoring sessions from the time they registered. However, as the program grew, program leaders made use of technology such as formulas in Google Sheets, Microsoft Power Automate, and other free resources to systematize onboarding. Through these adjustments, MAO has moved to automate as much of the process as possible, and is now able to get a student up and running the next day. These successful changes have led MAO program leaders to reflect on other ways to increase the efficiency of their systems and structures. Beginning next school year, MAO will be tapping into the OCPS School Messenger System to take program communications to the next level.



REMEMBER THAT STUDENT TUTORS ARE STILL STUDENTS.

MAO emphasizes the importance of giving student tutors “the space and grace to still be students” and having systems in place to ensure that when student tutors have other commitments, tutoring is not disrupted. MAO has a teacher available on call to cover student tutors who may not be able to attend their session at the last minute, as well as additional peer tutors that are available on a drop in basis. MAO also trained student tutors on the importance of communication and how to work with their student tutees to adjust meeting times as needed.



TURN CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES.

MAO was not initially prepared for the overwhelming response from students wishing to participate in MAO Project Serve as peer tutors, many of whom had long been interested in mentoring and teacher preparation, but did not have an outlet for their interests. While it can be difficult to keep pace with demand, OCPS leaders are exploring creative ways to further utilize peer tutors, particularly as the district faces teacher shortages. Through MAO, OCPS has even hired students who have graduated to serve as college aged tutors employed by the district.