

PAPER



Combs
J.O. Combs Unified School District
Learning Today. Leading Tomorrow

Case Study

Arizona's J.O. Combs USD advances career and college readiness with 24/7 educational support

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Paper makes me feel relieved... It's much easier than just worrying about not finishing your homework and having to ask your teacher.

—Tryohn, 8th-grader, Combs Middle School

Key takeaways and results

To support its commitments to both student-centered learning and college and career readiness, J.O. Combs Unified School District wanted to provide more individual support to students without increasing the workload of its teachers.

However, the district knew that for a number of reasons, a more traditional in-person tutoring model would not reach many of the students who needed help the most. In addition, hiring qualified in-person tutors in the area was a challenge.

After learning about Paper's 24/7 on-demand tutoring platform, the district decided it would be an ideal fit for the district. J.O. Combs students quickly embraced Paper, and since its adoption, they have:

- ✓ **Engaged in 7,836 learning activities**
- ✓ **Submitted 2,038 essays for review**
- ✓ **Sought help most often in basic arithmetic, essay writing, basic geometry, and American history**

About J.O. Combs Unified School District

Surrounded by dry, rugged hills, the J.O. Combs Unified School District serves the San Tan Valley, an unincorporated area at the southeastern edge of the greater Phoenix region. Largely an agricultural region just a few decades ago, the suburban district has undergone tremendous population growth since 2000. Today, it serves more than 4,100 students across five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school.

The district prides itself on its diversity. Around 45% of J.O. Combs USD students identify as minorities, 49% are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 2% are English-language learners. “We believe that every child deserves the very best education every day, and that’s our district calling card,” says Laura Ridge, Principal, Combs Middle School.

The district is also a member of the Modern Teacher organization, which supports innovative teaching practices that have shown demonstrable results and can be implemented across districts and regions. In particular, J.O. Combs USD is committed to student-centered



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—Dr. Greg Wyman,
Superintendent, J.O. Combs USD

learning, student voice and choice, and making learning available anytime and anywhere, explains Dr. Greg Wyman, Superintendent, J.O. Combs USD.

“We work to foster a 21st-century educational experience that meets the needs of students, whether that’s in the traditional setting, a blended classroom, or a fully online classroom,” says Dr. Wyman.

J.O. Combs USD at a glance

|  | Enrollment | English-language learners | Socioeconomically disadvantaged students |
|---|------------|---------------------------|--|
| | 4,153 | 1.9% | 49.2% |

The dilemma

Staffing shortages and faltering student engagement

Like many schools across the country, J.O. Combs USD wanted to increase student engagement and provide more support to students' individualized needs as part of its commitment to both student-centered learning and college and career readiness.

The district's leaders knew that parents and guardians tended to have long working hours and long commutes, so they were often not available to help children with their homework. And because most families are new to the region, they often lacked extended family close by to fill the gap, explains Dr. Wyman.

"We were looking for a way to build connecting points and create a sense of community," says Dr. Wyman.

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—Laura Ridge,
Principal, Combs Middle School

However, traditional after-school tutoring programs were not a great fit either. First of all, teachers already had large classes and were stretched thin. In addition, the district faced a shortage of qualified tutoring candidates.

In any case, many of the district's students could not take advantage of traditional in-person tutorial programs. Some worked or had adult responsibilities at home, which meant they could not stay after school to take advantage of such a program. Others were committed to sports or other extra-curricular activities during that time.

"One of the things that we've struggled with, even before the pandemic, was finding a time and a place that students could get the extra support that they needed," explains Ridge.

The solution

Comprehensive educational support available anywhere, anytime

As a member of Modern Teacher, the district was naturally disposed to adopt an online solution, particularly one that gave students the choice of where and when to connect, explains Dr. Wyman. So, when the district discovered Paper—which provides 24/7 access to homework help, writing feedback, and study support—they could see it was a good fit.

“We felt that Paper was most aligned with exactly what we were trying to do within the structure of Modern Teachers,” Dr. Wyman says. “The 24/7 component is critical in giving the ability to get students the help they need, when they need it.”

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Students always know where to go for help, and I love that.

—Diane Ouellette,
English and Language Arts Teacher,
Combs High School

Two other factors made Paper stand out.

First, it offered tutoring in Spanish and other languages. While the district has a relatively small number of ELL students, Spanish is the language spoken in many homes, explains Diane Ouellette, English and Language Arts Teacher, Combs High School. By offering tutoring in Spanish, parents have the opportunity to understand the help Paper is providing for their kids.

Second, Paper offers tutoring not just for writing and math, but also for a wide range of subjects, like science, history, computer science, and other electives. “Paper is not only about core subjects. Elective teachers have access to Paper as well,” explains Ridge.

“Students always know where to go for help, and I love that,” adds Ouellette.

The solution

Driving adoption through teacher engagement—and leveraging a new Google Chrome extension

During roll-out, the district and Paper partnered to ensure that adoption was as large and broad as possible. As part of their efforts, the district leveraged the marketing resources that Paper offers, from flyers to pre-packaged social media campaigns.

“Paper has been super-supportive of our district and our teachers,” says Ridge. “We took advantage of Paper resources for a pep rally, and we did it up big. If I could give other principals just one piece of advice, I would say, ‘Take advantage of all the support that Paper offers.’”

In their commitment to ubiquitous access, J.O. Combs USD was also among the first to adopt access to Paper via a Google Chrome extension. Because Chrome is so widely available and adapted to many kinds of devices, the extension makes access to the Paper platform even easier to incorporate into students’ daily academic routines. So far, more than one in six learning activities on the Paper platform are initiated through the Chrome extension.

Results

Increasing college and career readiness, and fostering student-centered learning

Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Wyman and his team, the district was able to achieve a high level of adoption quite quickly—including using Paper within the classroom itself. When teachers are busy working with individual students, other members of the classroom are encouraged to access Paper and get the exact help they need, when they need it.

One big fan of Paper is Tryohn, an eighth-grader at Combs Middle School. “It’s much easier than just worrying about not finishing your homework and having to ask your teacher,” he explains. “Paper makes me feel relieved.”

He particularly likes Paper’s Review Center, which offers writing feedback on a wide variety of written assignments and projects, from short-answer questions and book reports to resumes

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—Laura Ridge

and college application essays. “They actually make me feel more motivated,” says Tryohn. “One of them said that this should be an actual story, and I was happy the rest of the day!”

“What we really like about [Paper] is that it makes students use their critical thinking skills instead of just giving them the answer and moving them along,” says Jenna Brophy, Math Teacher, Combs Middle School. “They are using it to be more independent and find clarification on their own.”

Much-needed relief for teachers

As an English teacher with many written assignments to grade, Ouellette is also grateful for the Review Center. Not only does it relieve much of the burden of grading papers, but it also enables her to focus on improving the overall level of writing, rather than correcting lots of small errors. The Review Center “is probably the biggest time saver,” says Ouellette. “And it allows me more time to sit with students and say, ‘Okay, the next process is fixing it to make it better.’”

The district is also using the Review Center as a tool to advance college and career readiness, which students can use as they are writing a resume and cover letter, or completing the

Results

types of research projects that they're going to have to tackle in college, according to Ouellette.

"I want my students to be able to walk out of here and know what they want to do in their life," Ouellette says.

"I absolutely see Paper on the forefront," adds Ridge. "The days of brick and mortar are going away, more people are working from home, and Paper helps them adapt to being able to work anywhere."

What's next: expanding usage

After a successful launch, Dr. Wyman and his team are looking for ways both to increase overall usage and to expand the ways in which students benefit from Paper.

For example, they want to take greater advantage of sample lessons provided by Paper that get students onto the Paper platform and start engaging with it. They will also continue to push messaging about the platform in their weekly newsletters across all its schools. The district plans to send weekly reminders about Paper via social media posts. And finally, the district will take full advantage of quarterly meetings with the Paper team.

"The Paper team is always looking at our data and sharing new ideas," says Dr. Wyman.

"I want to continue to make sure Paper is not one more thing that teachers have to do," adds Ridge. "It is a true necessity to our campus, and I want them to see it as a great partnership and opportunity."

Learning Moments

7,836

Learning Activities

5,798

Sessions

2,038

Essays

Top subjects: 1. Basic arithmetic. 2. Essay writing. 3. Basic geometry. 4. American history.

PAPER

Paper partners with school systems to help every student reach their potential through an unlimited on-demand Educational Support System (ESS) that offers 1:1 high-impact tutoring, coaching on writing skills, college and career support, gamified learning, and after-school enrichment.

Paper is powered by highly qualified tutors who offer multilingual support across all K-12 subject areas. Our tutors also employ the Paper Method, a student-centered instructional framework that fosters 21st-century skills and lifelong learning.

Paper's equitable, scalable, and cost-effective solution meets Level IV evidence requirements under the Every Student Succeeds Act, and we currently serve approximately 3 million students at hundreds of school districts across 30+ U.S. states and Canada.

Learn more at

paper.co