

Online tutoring study shows cause for optimism

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A recent pilot program measuring the results of online tutoring for K-12

students has shown positive, promising results, according to a new study from the University of California San Diego's Rady School of Management.

Disruptions to in-person learning during the COVID-19 pandemic have increased interests in expanding online tutoring to K-12 students. However, expanding virtual academic support across [public schools](#) is constrained by high program costs and limited local supplies of tutors.

"Our program explores the possibilities of a low-cost model with volunteer tutors which has the potential to reach more students in need," said Sally Sadoff, associate professor of economics and strategic management at the Rady School and one of the study's coauthors.

The pilot program, conducted in partnership with the volunteer mentorship program CovEducation (CovEd), matched K-12 students with volunteer tutors from top-tier research universities. The CovEd non-profit organization was established to support students in need of academic and socio-[emotional support](#) during the pandemic.

"The pandemic has been a seismic and on-going disruption to K-12 schooling," said Sadoff. "We find the tutoring offered during our study helped participants close about a quarter to a third of the learning loss during COVID."

Findings from the study are slated for publication in the journal *American Economic Association Papers and Proceedings*. Consistent with previous research, the online-learning model didn't match the impact of in-person tutoring, which has long-shown efficacy in promoting K-12 student achievement. In line with "dosage" expectations, students who got more hours of online tutoring experienced better results.

"Our results show consistently positive effects," Sadoff said. "They're

promising enough to suggest that online tutoring should be tested at a larger scale so the impact can be estimated with more confidence."

The CovEd college students worked one-on-one with predominantly underserved students twice a week for 30 minutes during the school day for 12 weeks. Tutoring focused on building personal relationships with students and supplementing their learning in math and reading. About 230 tutors participated in the [pilot program](#) from across forty-seven different U.S. colleges and universities. They mentored 264 students.

With recent shocks to the education system, students and educators have been forced to adjust to online learning models for long stretches of time with mixed results. Thus, the demand for new and effective online learning solutions that can meet the needs of large numbers of students is high.

"Our study also serves as proof of concept that low-cost online support with volunteer tutors can be integrated into the regular school day during both remote and in-person learning," Sadoff said. "We think there's reason to be optimistic about the prospect of online tutoring, given the positive results we achieved with a significantly lower-cost program that was delivered within the challenging context of the COVID-19 pandemic."

Sadoff's research is in applied microeconomics and is focused on behavioral economics, experimental economics, labor and human capital. She has a particular research interest in education and improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged [student](#) populations.

Provided by University of California - San Diego

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