TUTORING NEEDS AND PERCEPTIONS IN CAREER EDUCATION:
SAN DIEGO-IMPERIAL
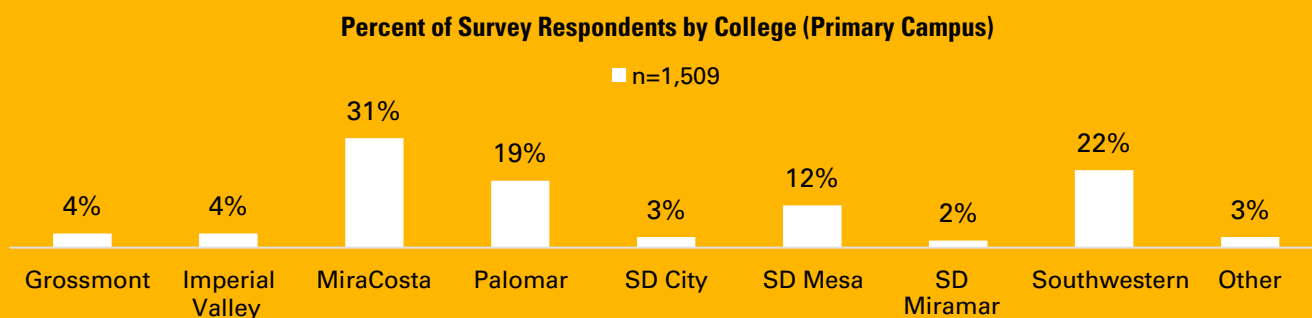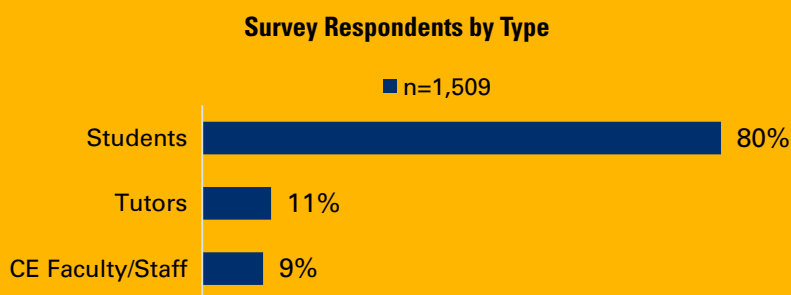
C·O·E CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE
FOR LABOR MARKET RESEARCH

SAN DIEGO & IMPERIAL COUNTIES COMMUNITY COLLEGES

California Community Colleges

STUDY OVERVIEW

As efforts in _Guided Pathways_ intensify, the San Diego-Imperial region requires a better understanding of the tutoring needs and perceptions of Career Technical Education or Career Education (CE) students. As a result, the San Diego and Imperial Counties Community Colleges commissioned the Nonprofit Institute at the University of San Diego to conduct research about tutoring perceptions and practices across the region. This study considers input from focus groups and interviews; examines survey responses from students, tutors, and CE faculty and staff; and makes recommendations as to how the region can integrate tutoring to support students as part of Guided Pathways.

The research team captured 1,509 survey responses (1,204 students, 163 tutors, and 142 CE faculty and staff) from eight of the 10 community colleges in the region.[1] Additionally, participants elaborated on their perceptions, providing 1,800 substantive[2] qualitative comments through open-ended questions.

Survey Respondents by Type

■ n=1,509

Students	80%
Tutors	11%
CE Faculty/Staff	9%

Percent of Survey Respondents by College (Primary Campus)

□ n=1,509

Grossmont	Imperial Valley	MiraCosta	Palomar	SD City	SD Mesa	SD Miramar	Southwestern	Other
4%	4%	31%	19%	3%	12%	2%	22%	3%

🔑 KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The voices of students, tutors and CE faculty and staff underscore the importance of clarifying and promoting tutoring to support student retention and success. As a result, this study proposes that the San Diego and Imperial Counties Community Colleges develop and implement a regionwide strategic plan for Career Education tutoring, and include the following recommendations constructed from the research's key findings.
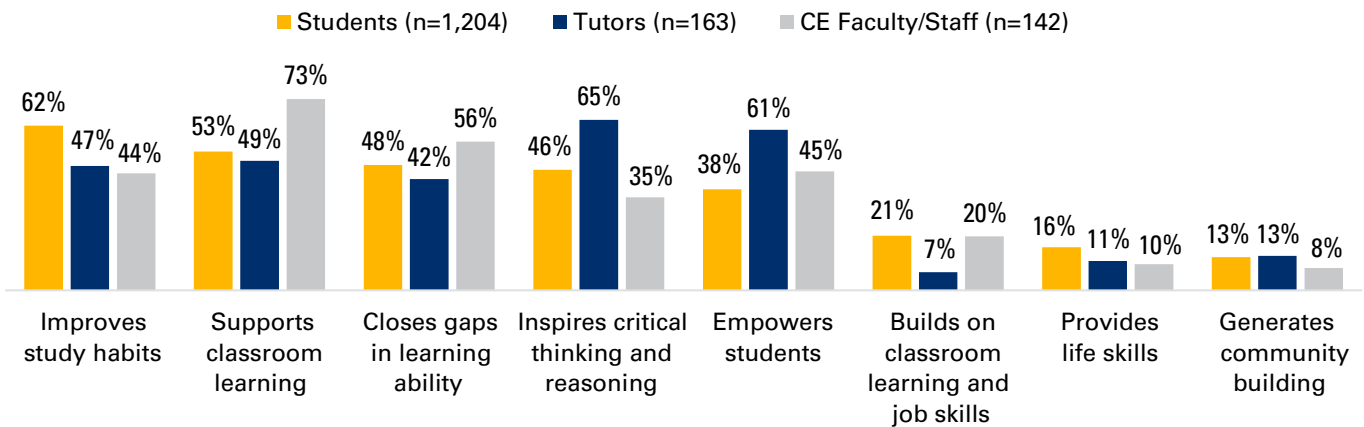
1. Establish a regionwide vision and culture of "tutoring for all" instead of "tutoring for remediation"

2. Reinforce the "tutoring for all" message across the region by conducting a communications and marketing campaign that promotes the overall benefits of tutoring

3. Provide professional learning for tutors, faculty, and staff, emphasizing that the objective of tutoring is to empower students and develop their critical thinking and reasoning skills

4. Develop and maintain a formal process and/or tool (e.g., virtual repository) for tutoring stakeholders to share and communicate effective and impactful resources and practices

5. Prioritize and dedicate local and/or state resources to the professionalization and expansion of tutoring across colleges to increase equity and access for students

6. Track outcomes of the regionwide strategic plan for CE tutoring (after implementation) and continue to study tutoring in concept and practice

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[1] Although represented in the advisory group for the research project, responses from Cuyamaca and San Diego Continuing Education were minimal and included in the "Other" category in the graph.

[2] Substantive was defined as remarks that elaborate responses to closed-ended questions or identified new issues not captured in the closed-ended questions.

Interviews, focus groups, and survey responses indicate that there are differing opinions regarding the objective of tutoring: Students (62%) primarily defined tutoring as a service that "improves study habits" and CE faculty and staff defined it as a service that "supports classroom learning." Conversely, tutors believed that tutoring develops skills **beyond the course material** and defined tutoring as a service that **"inspires critical thinking and reasoning"** and **"empowers students."** Students, faculty, and staff's primary belief that tutoring supports study habits and classroom learning may help explain why 484 student respondents reported that they did not seek tutoring services; they simply did not need additional classroom support.

Definition of "Tutoring" by Survey Respondent Group

■ Students (n=1,204)   ■ Tutors (n=163)   ■ CE Faculty/Staff (n=142)

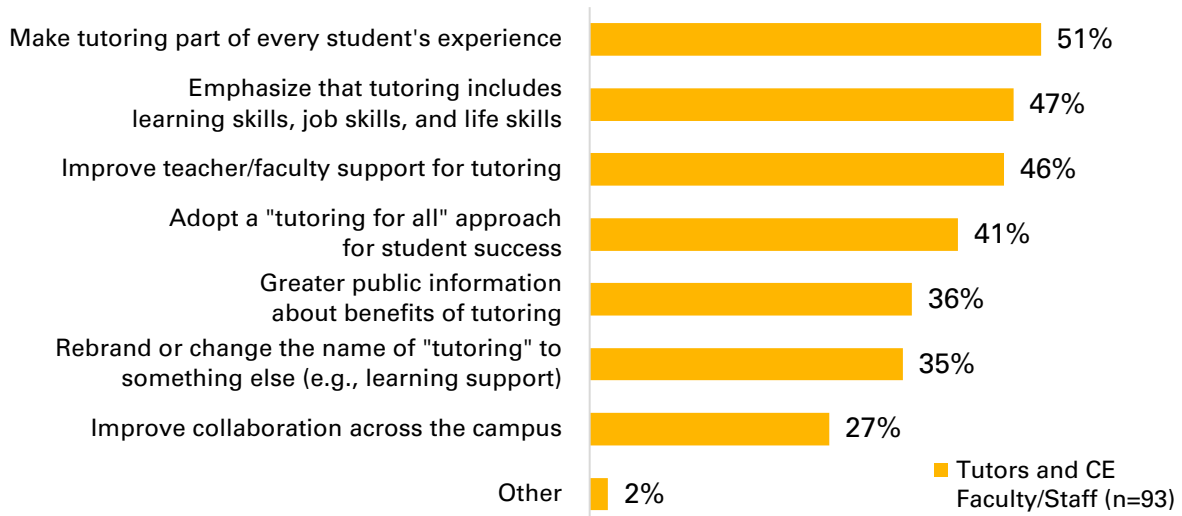| Category	Students	Tutors	CE Faculty/Staff
Improves study habits	62%	47%	44%
Supports classroom learning	53%	49%	73%
Closes gaps in learning ability	48%	42%	56%
Inspires critical thinking and reasoning	46%	65%	35%
Empowers students	38%	61%	45%
Builds on classroom learning and job skills	21%	7%	20%
Provides life skills	16%	11%	10%
Generates community building	13%	13%	8%

(Percentages exceed 100 percent because respondents were asked to rank their top 3 responses. Survey responses were randomized for each respondent.)

Additionally, while the majority of tutors and CE faculty and staff believe that students have a generally positive perception of tutoring, when asked about ways to reduce negative perceptions of tutoring, they suggested making "tutoring part of every student's experience" and emphasizing "that tutoring includes learning skills, job skills, and life skills."

Tutors and CE Faculty and Staff Suggestions for Reducing the Negative Perception of Tutoring

Suggestion	Percentage
Make tutoring part of every student's experience	51%
Emphasize that tutoring includes learning skills, job skills, and life skills	47%
Improve teacher/faculty support for tutoring	46%
Adopt a "tutoring for all" approach for student success	41%
Greater public information about benefits of tutoring	36%
Rebrand or change the name of "tutoring" to something else (e.g., learning support)	35%
Improve collaboration across the campus	27%
Other	2%

■ Tutors and CE Faculty/Staff (n=93)

(Percentages exceed 100 percent because respondents were asked to rank their top 3 responses. Survey responses were randomized for each respondent.)

Recommendation:

Establish a regionwide vision and culture of "tutoring for all" instead of "tutoring for remediation"

The workgroup for this study should convene key stakeholders across the San Diego and Imperial Counties Community Colleges to develop a unified vision and confirm that the objectives of tutoring are to:
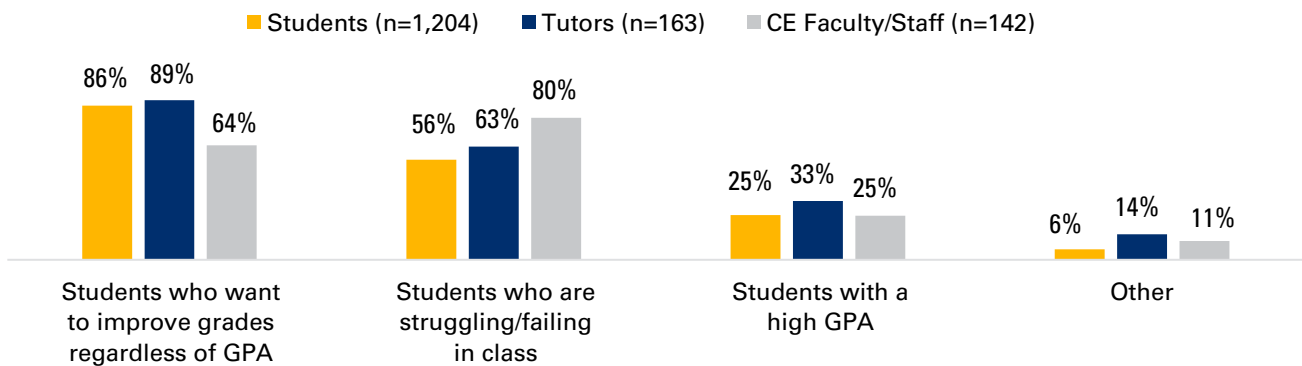
- Empower students
- Inspire critical thinking and reasoning
- Be a part of every student's experience
- Include learning skills, job skills, and life skills

This unified vision will define how the region promotes and communicates the benefits of tutoring, as well as provide a framework for professional learning opportunities for tutors, faculty, and staff.

CE faculty and staff (80 percent) believe that students seek or use tutoring services when they are struggling or failing in class. Correspondingly, the majority of tutors and CE faculty and staff reported that for them to be more successful in their roles, the colleges should promote the "belief that tutoring is for all students (not just low-performing students)." This suggests that CE faculty and staff do not believe that tutoring is encouraged to be part of every student's college experience.

Type of Students Seek Tutoring Services by Survey Respondent Group

■ Students (n=1,204)   ■ Tutors (n=163)   ■ CE Faculty/Staff (n=142)

	Students who want to improve grades regardless of GPA	Students who are struggling/failing in class	Students with a high GPA	Other
Students	86%	56%	25%	6%
Tutors	89%	63%	33%	14%
CE Faculty/Staff	64%	80%	25%	11%

Students indicated that the type of students who seek tutoring services are those who "want to improve grades, regardless of GPA." Again, students believe that the objective of tutoring is to improve grades.[3] Focus groups and open-ended survey responses further support this finding as students expressed that they did not seek tutoring because they were ashamed, shy, embarrassed, or too proud to ask for assistance.

Recommendation:

Reinforce the "tutoring for all" message across the region by conducting a communications and marketing campaign that promotes the overall benefits of tutoring

Once a unified vision for tutoring has been established, the region should conduct a marketing campaign that promotes 1) the unified vision and culture; 2) tutoring centers and tutoring as part of Guided Pathways; 3) benefits of tutoring; and 4) academic support available to CE students outside of the classroom. Ideally, the region could leverage the existing marketing consultants hired by the Regional Consortium[4] and this study's workgroup members to provide direction for the marketing campaign, outlining specific regional and campus actions.

Marketing materials should address perceived stigmas (e.g., negative perceptions); include available dates, times, and resources for tutoring; and stress that tutoring is free. Engagement in the process of creating the marketing plan and materials will also help synchronize the vision of tutoring among students, tutors, and CE faculty and staff across the region.

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[1] The survey limited the students' options/responses to focus primarily grades, which may have exacerbated the prevailing perception that tutoring is meant to simply improve study habits and classroom learning in the survey responses.
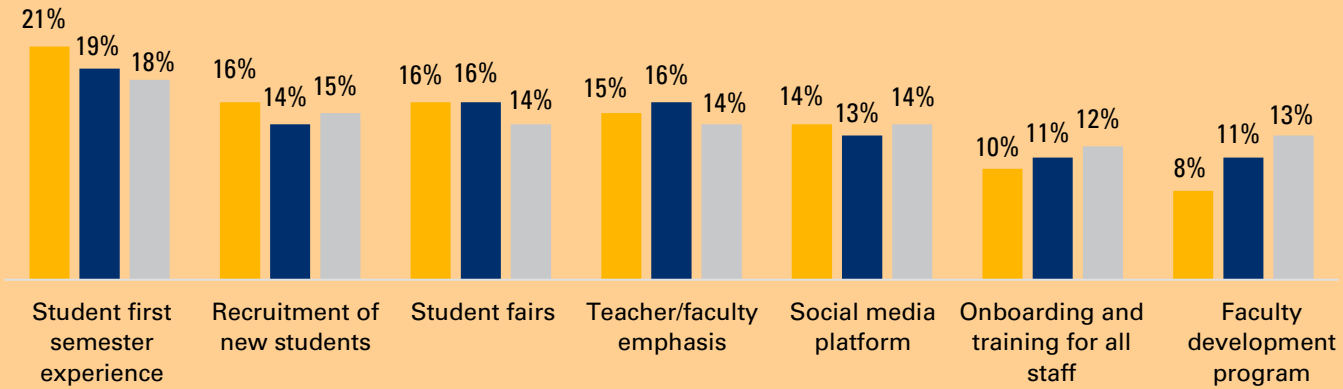
[2] gcccd.edu/sdic-regional-consortium

Recommendation (continued)**:**

According to survey responses from students, tutors, and CE faculty and staff, the best time to promote the benefits of tutoring is during the students' first semester experience.

Where the Benefits of Tutoring Should be Promoted by Respondents

■ Students (n=1,204)   ■ Tutors (n=163)   ■ CE Faculty/Staff (n=142)

	Student first semester experience	Recruitment of new students	Student fairs	Teacher/faculty emphasis	Social media platform	Onboarding and training for all staff	Faculty development program
Students	21%	16%	16%	15%	14%	10%	8%
Tutors	19%	14%	16%	16%	13%	11%	11%
CE Faculty/Staff	18%	15%	14%	14%	14%	12%	13%

(Percentages exceed 100 percent because respondents were asked to rank their top 3 responses. Survey responses were randomized for each respondent.)
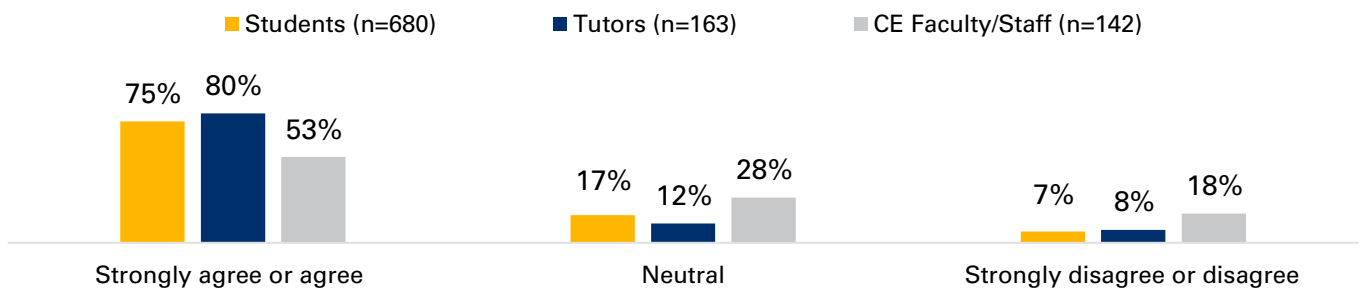
Finding: There is a need for coordinated, collaborative, and sustained professional learning for tutors and CE faculty and staff with regard to tutoring.
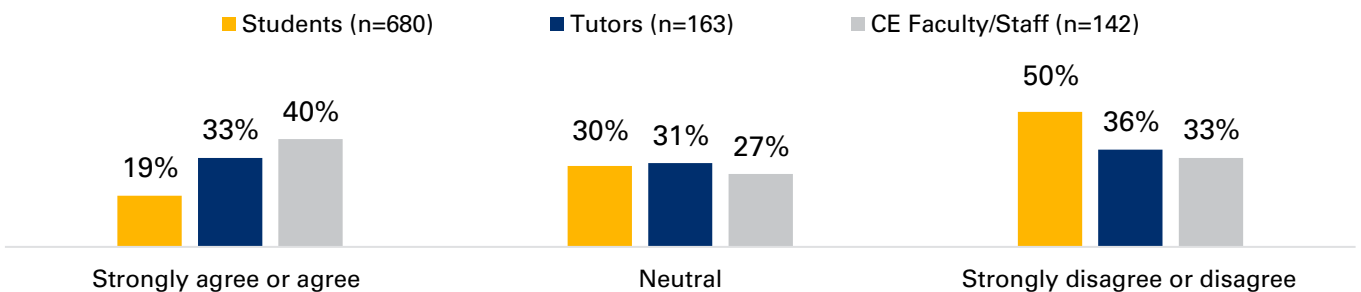
Tutors and CE faculty and staff do not have an aligned understanding (or vision) of tutoring. In comparing their perceptions and experiences, tutors and CE faculty and staff generally agree that tutoring is positive, but had differing opinions about how tutoring is operationalized:

- **53 percent** of CE faculty and staff vs. **80 percent** of tutors agree that tutoring is offered at convenient times

- **40 percent** of CE faculty and staff vs. **33 percent** of tutors agree that students do not have access or time to practice on equipment or software learned in the classroom

- **50 percent** of CE faculty and staff vs. **38 percent** of tutors agree that there are not enough tutors to meet students' needs at the tutoring center

- **36 percent** of CE faculty and staff vs. **53 percent** of tutors agree that there is a sufficient number of Math and English tutors

- **54 percent** of CE faculty and staff vs. **25 percent** of tutors disagree that there is a sufficient number of tutors who specialize in CE programs
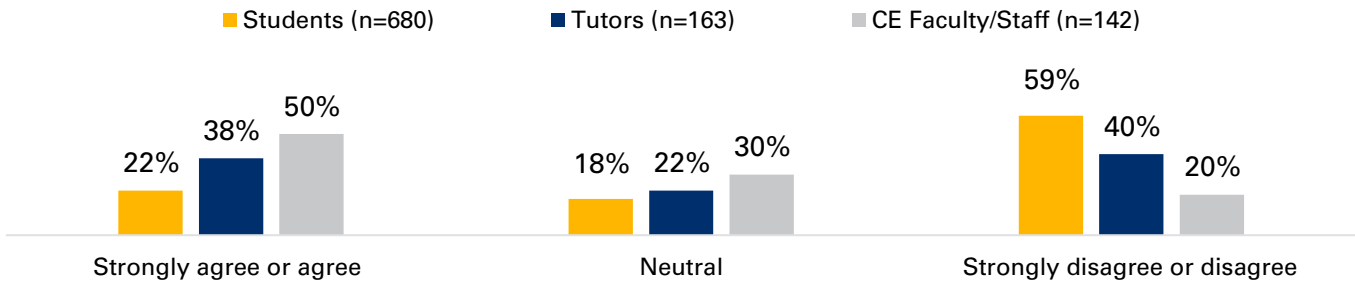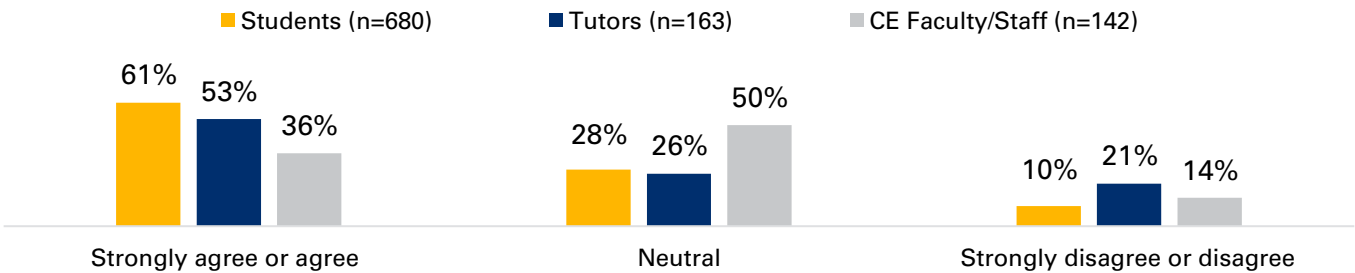
"Tutoring Services are Offered at Convenient Times"

Legend: ■ Students (n=680)   ■ Tutors (n=163)   ■ CE Faculty/Staff (n=142)

	Strongly agree or agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree or disagree
Students	75%	17%	7%
Tutors	80%	12%	8%
CE Faculty/Staff	53%	28%	18%

"Students Do Not Have Access or Time to Practice on Equipment or Software Learned in the Classroom"

Legend: ■ Students (n=680)   ■ Tutors (n=163)   ■ CE Faculty/Staff (n=142)

	Strongly agree or agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree or disagree
Students	19%	30%	50%
Tutors	33%	31%	36%
CE Faculty/Staff	40%	27%	33%

"There are Not Enough Tutors to Meet Students' Needs at the Tutoring Center"

■ Students (n=680)　　■ Tutors (n=163)　　■ CE Faculty/Staff (n=142)

Strongly agree or agree
- 22%
- 38%
- 50%

Neutral
- 18%
- 22%
- 30%

Strongly disagree or disagree
- 59%
- 40%
- 20%

"There is a Sufficient Number of Math/English Tutors"

■ Students (n=680)　　■ Tutors (n=163)　　■ CE Faculty/Staff (n=142)

Strongly agree or agree
- 61%
- 53%
- 36%

Neutral
- 28%
- 26%
- 50%

Strongly disagree or disagree
- 10%
- 21%
- 14%

"There is a Sufficient Number of Tutors who Specialize in CE Programs"

■ Students (n=680)　　■ Tutors (n=163)　　■ CE Faculty/Staff (n=142)

Strongly agree or agree
- 48%
- 23%
- 19%

Neutral
- 36%
- 52%
- 27%

Strongly disagree or disagree
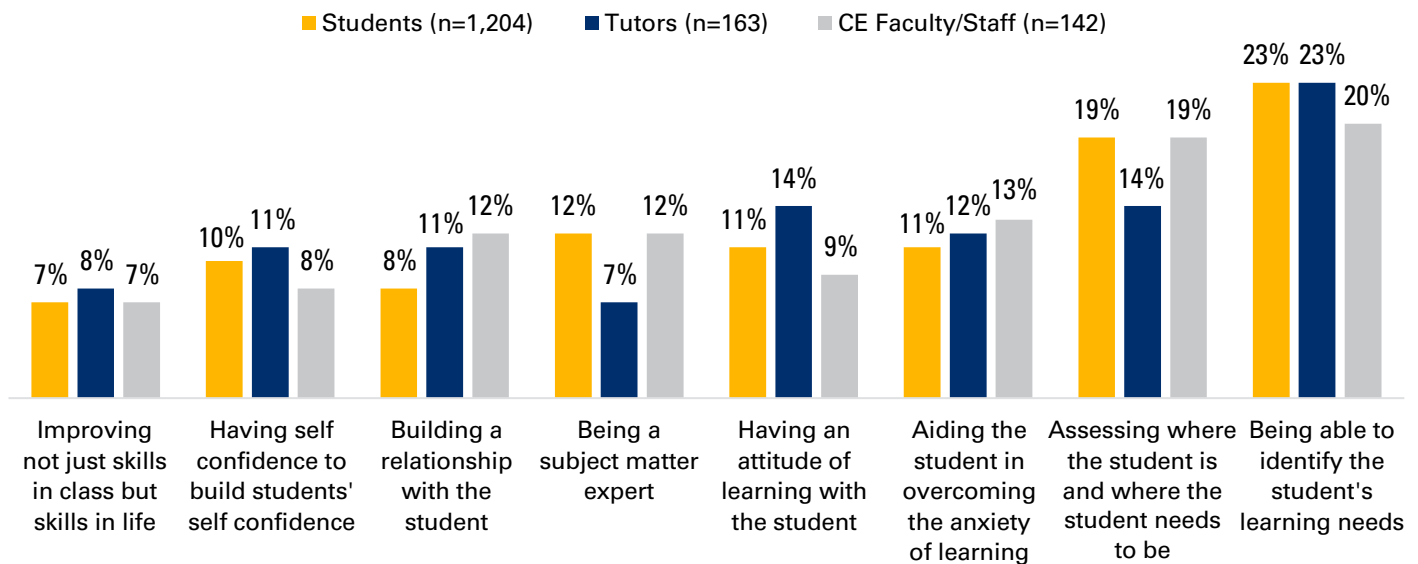- 14%
- 25%
- 54%
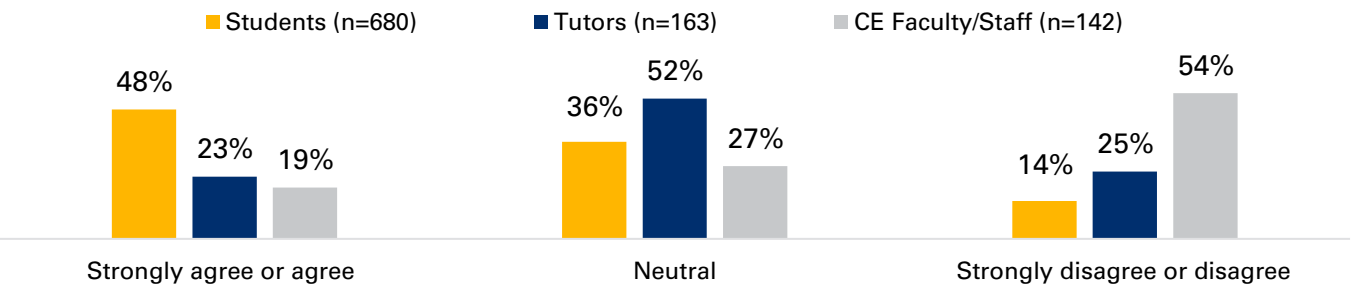
Unaligned perspectives hamper the campus and student's understanding of tutoring, particularly when students rely on CE faculty and staff for guidance on the objectives of tutoring.

As previously mentioned, tutoring is perceived as a remediation service, suggesting that the relationship between tutors and students are commonly transactional—simply interacting to complete a task at hand. However, based on qualitative responses in this study, tutoring creates a welcoming and trusting environment for instructors, tutors, and students to work collaboratively within and outside of the classroom. The relationship between tutors and students can be transformational: All survey respondents agreed that for tutors to be effective, they need to be able to identify a student's learning needs and assess gaps.

Desired Skills Tutors Must Possess by Survey Respondent Group

■ Students (n=1,204) ■ Tutors (n=163) ■ CE Faculty/Staff (n=142)

Skill	Students	Tutors	CE Faculty/Staff
Improving not just skills in class but skills in life	7%	8%	7%
Having self confidence to build students' self confidence	10%	11%	8%
Building a relationship with the student	8%	11%	12%
Being a subject matter expert	12%	7%	12%
Having an attitude of learning with the student	11%	14%	9%
Aiding the student in overcoming the anxiety of learning	11%	12%	13%
Assessing where the student is and where the student needs to be	19%	14%	19%
Being able to identify the student's learning needs	23%	23%	20%

(Percentages exceed 100 percent because respondents were asked to rank their top 3 responses. Survey responses were randomized for each respondent.)

Rather than "giving" students the answers, effective tutors are described as guides who show versus tell. As one faculty member would describe it, "View the student as the content expert and the 'tutor' as the process expert. Give the students ownership of all decisions during the process without evaluating."

Recommendation:

Provide professional learning for tutors, faculty, and staff, emphasizing that the objective of tutoring is to empower students and develop their critical thinking and reasoning skills

The region could provide professional development for tutors, faculty, and staff that reflects the regionwide, unified vision for tutoring.

For faculty and staff, the Regional Consortium is developing a Strong Workforce Program (SWP) Institute that targets a paradigm shift[5] at the classroom level (i.e., redesigning the student experience in the classroom to focus on student retention and success). Tutoring practices that 1) emphasize critical thinking and reasoning beyond learning the course material and 2) have demonstrated an impact of improving student success outcomes (e.g., retention, persistence, completion) should be highlighted as promising practices at the SWP Institute. Highlighting impactful tutoring practices as part of the SWP Institute adds clarity to the connection between the two different, but interconnected initiatives, Guided Pathways and Strong Workforce Program.

For tutors, a standardize training model that recognizes the transactional relationship between tutors and students, but primarily focuses on the transformational relationship can develop tutors into "change agents" that promote equity in higher education. Tutors should have patience, empathy, and the ability to nurture a culture of learning. Because many colleges employ students as tutors, training them to be able to identify students' learning needs and assess gaps develops them not only as tutors, but also as professional mentors to their peers.

Additionally, the professional learning efforts should leverage existing training platforms and organizations, including the Tutor Expo, College Reading & Learning Association (CRLA) Certification, and Professional CE Tutoring Organization. A new CE Teaching and Tutoring Conference for CE faculty and tutors can also promote professional learning. Efforts can be linked to external accreditation, Performance Review File (PRF) for tenure, and Continuing Education Units.

[5] According to prior research, community colleges often have a culture of focusing on "the perceived deficits of the student rather than looking at the institutional processes, policies and procedures that are barriers to students' successful completion." Cooper, Donna. "Exploring Embedded Remediation for Community College Career Technical Education Pathways: Promising Practices." 2014. (Similar findings cited in the study from Bailey et al., 2009; Boylan et al., 2005; Fowler & Boylan, 2010, Shulock & Moore, 2007.)

4 **Finding:** Formalizing and communicating tutoring practices across campuses can increase the impact that tutoring has on student retention and success.

In addition to a lack of a unified vision, there is no unified process of sharing best/promising practices across colleges in the region. Although tutors were enthusiastic about sharing helpful tips and resources in interviews and focus groups, there is currently no formal mechanism for distributing information about practices that tutors, faculty, and staff implement within and outside of the classroom that are impactful and supportive of student success and retention.

Tutors, and CE faculty and staff stressed the importance of ongoing communication among faculty, tutors, institutions, and students for them to have a common understanding of tutoring and shared tutoring objectives across colleges. Tutors and CE faculty and staff develop CE tutoring practices and tools at their respective campuses, but those resources are often unknown to other colleges.

Recommendation:

Develop and maintain a formal process and/or tool (e.g., virtual repository) for tutoring stakeholders to share and communicate effective and impactful resources and practices
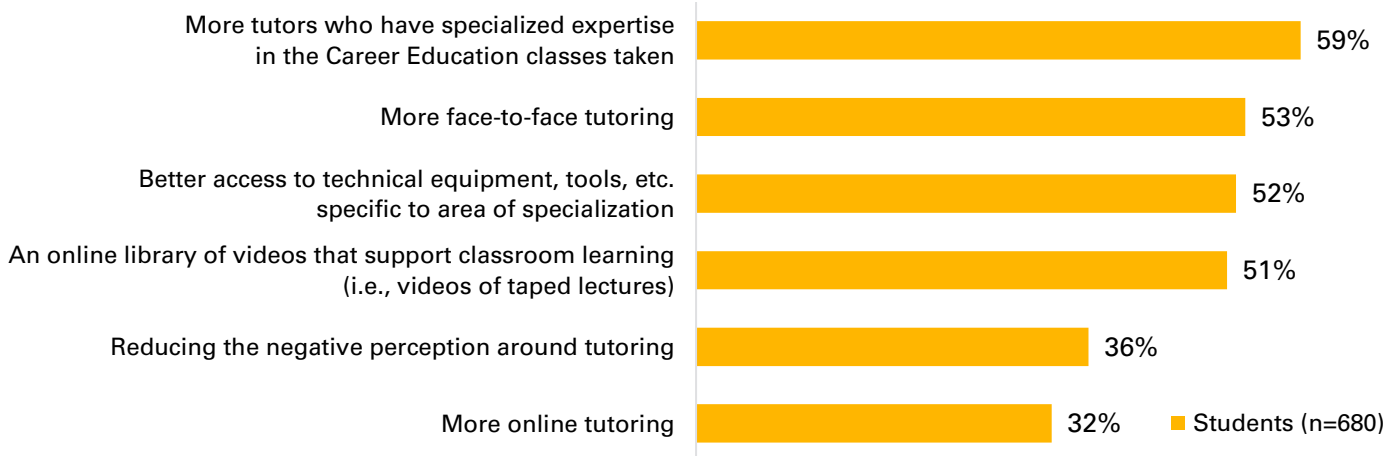
Access to shared resources and practices allows colleges to provide consistent and effective tutoring services at each campus. A digital repository, for example, complements the coordinated professional learning (professional development) for tutors and CE faculty and staff. The repository would include effective and ineffective strategies and promote tutor and CE faculty and staff interaction, partnering, and joint professional learning. These tutoring stakeholders could build on and expand on each other's innovative tutoring approaches and modalities.

5 **Finding:** Students, tutors, and CE faculty and staff all agreed that the professionalization and expansion of tutoring would contribute to their success.

According to survey responses, students suggested that "more tutors who have specialized expertise in Career Education classes [that they take]," "more face-to-face tutoring," and "better access to equipment, tools, etc. specific to [their] area of specialization" would help them successfully complete courses. Additionally, students' qualitative responses to the survey stress that there is a gap in tutors for foreign-born, ESL, and first-generation students.

Students' Suggestions on What Learnings Experiences They Need to be Successful

Category	Percentage
More tutors who have specialized expertise in the Career Education classes taken	59%
More face-to-face tutoring	53%
Better access to technical equipment, tools, etc. specific to area of specialization	52%
An online library of videos that support classroom learning (i.e., videos of taped lectures)	51%
Reducing the negative perception around tutoring	36%
More online tutoring	32%

Students (n=680)

(Percentages exceed 100 percent because respondents were asked to rank their top 3 responses. Survey responses were randomized for each respondent.)

When asked what they need in order to be more successful in their roles, tutors and CE faculty and staff selected "prioritize professionalizing tutors as part of the college faculty learning team" and "more institutional support for tutors (e.g., resources, funding)" as two of the top three suggestions. Additionally, the majority of CE faculty and staff believe that there is not "a sufficient number of tutors who specialize in CE programs."

Suggestions on What Tutors and CE Faculty/Staff Need to be More Successful

Category	Percentage
A belief that tutoring is for all students (not just for low-performing students)	54%
Professionalizing tutors as part of the college faculty learning team	50%
More institutional support for tutors (e.g., resources, funding)	48%
Better salary for tutors to compete with the market place	36%
More face-to-face tutoring	23%
A solidarity approach to student learning vs. isolated approach where tutoring happens in a vacuum	22%
More technical equipment, tools, etc. specific to Career Education programs	21%
The negative perception around tutoring to be reduced	20%
An online library of videos that support classroom learning (i.e., videos of taped lectures)	14%
More online tutoring	11%

Tutors and CE Faculty/Staff (n=305)

(Percentages exceed 100 percent because respondents were asked to rank their top 3 responses. Survey responses were randomized for each respondent.)

Investments in tutoring are not equal across campuses. Some—not all—colleges in the region have already committed to prioritizing and funding the expansion and integration of professional tutors in the campus learning culture. For example, tutors are seen as professional mentors at some colleges; some CE programs have embedded tutors, exploring a new type of position that combines the role of a CE instructional labor assistant and a tutor; and some colleges treat them as classified employees with benefits instead of hourly employees.

Recommendation:

Prioritize and dedicate local and/or state resources to the professionalization and expansion of tutoring across colleges to increase equity and access for students

Because CE tutoring does not have a uniform model and is not synchronized across the region, CE students do not receive the same level or quality of tutoring support at each campus. The region should develop models of CE tutoring that campuses can implement. Professionalizing tutoring involves standardizing key aspects of tutoring (e.g., dedicated facilities or spaces, pay schedules, training for tutors), and maintaining an institutional culture of "tutoring for all" (i.e., integrating tutoring as part of every student's experience).

This will require a sustained investment at the local and/or state level. A sustained investment in tutoring could also maintain 1) the coordinated professional development across the region and at individual colleges and 2) the formal process of sharing information among tutoring stakeholders, as mentioned above. Supporters of Career Education and Guided Pathways (e.g., statewide associations) can also advocate for a sustained funding or allocation model specifically for tutoring.

6 **Finding:** Additional research will help the region measure the effectiveness of a unified tutoring model, measure the success of innovative practices, and better understand barriers to CE tutoring.

The scope of this study was not exhaustive; it does not measure the impact of that tutoring has on student success and retention on campuses that invested in integrating tutoring as part of the overall student learning experience, nor does it compare those outcomes with outcomes at colleges that have not invested in an integrated tutoring model. Colleges that invest in tutoring have conducted campus-specific studies, but that type of data collection and analysis have not been done in aggregate at the regional level.

Additionally, students reported that one of the barriers that prevented them from seeking tutoring was their lack of time; they have difficult schedules (e.g., working and attending school full-time). They recommended more online tutoring for Career Education; however, this suggestion is based on survey responses, and the region cannot know the effectiveness of implementing a new intervention without conducting a pre- and post-implementation study.

Recommendation:

Track outcomes of the regionwide strategic plan for CE tutoring (after implementation) and continue to study tutoring in concept and practice

As previously mentioned, this study proposes that the region develop and implement a strategic plan for CE tutoring; however, the implementation of the strategic plan must be measured to confirm, to what extent, does the professionalization of tutoring across campuses actually impact student retention and success. The region should develop a standardized data collection process that 1) measures and documents the effectiveness of the strategic plan at the institutional and regional level and 2) makes recommendations for future improvements.

A workgroup (built upon the one convened for this study) can formulate and prioritize relevant and timely research questions for future study. Likewise, the workgroup can serve as a hub for sharing findings from ongoing and future studies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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