

REMOTELY READY: GLOBAL INSIGHTS INTO EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN A PANDEMIC

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Introduction

In early 2020, nearly 850 million students were suddenly removed from the familiarity of their classrooms due to the rapid global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic upended educators' jobs overnight—and the pivot from in-person to remote online instruction was understandably bumpy. In the U.S. alone, *Education Week* estimated that one-quarter of teachers were not able to offer any instruction at all as the pandemic closed schools and nearly one-third of students in low-income schools stopped attending classes.

At the same time, the transition wasn't perilous for everyone—take the experience, for example, of Florence 1 Schools in South Carolina, which didn't miss a single instructional day as it transitioned to remote learning. The district quickly identified any families without access to strong WiFi, and drove their WiFi-equipped buses into those neighborhoods and set up WiFi zones in their parking lots so students could complete assignments. It paired software solutions from SMART and Google to create live classroom experiences and group-based learning. As the district looks to the forthcoming semester, Kyle Jones, Chief Technology Officer, said, "at the end of the day, we're not going back to our old way of schooling."

In the months since the pandemic began, uncertainty about COVID-19's progression has forced schools across the globe to completely rethink how education is delivered.

Schools are grappling with what it means to be "remotely ready"—reexamining questions such as: Do all of my students have internet and devices at home? Are teachers properly trained? Do administrators have remote access to school management tools? What supports are in place for English language learners and students with special needs, for measuring student engagement and for social and emotional learning?

To better learn from schools' response in early 2020 and understand the state of schools' capabilities to navigate remote online learning, we surveyed approximately 250 teachers and administrators in July 2020, with about two-thirds of them in the U.S. The results provide a snapshot in time of educators' preparations and perspectives for what could be extended periods of remote online instruction and show how important those readiness requirements are when it comes to learning outcomes.

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Key Findings

The survey asked schools a series of questions to better understand ten capabilities—defined as readiness requirements that include organizational know-how, tools or professional learning—tied to enabling remote online and/or blended learning, and to get participants’ ratings of remote online instruction’s effectiveness.

Schools had to pivot lightning-fast to online instruction. Schools surveyed didn’t have a lot of time to transition to remote online instruction. If they did go remote, six in ten respondents (64%) said they took one week or less to make the shift and resume instruction; eight in ten (84%) took two weeks or less.

There is a student disconnect—both in involvement in decision-making for remote online instruction and in effectiveness of remote learning. Educators were four times more likely to say students were “not at all” involved in the planning or implementation decisions for remote online instruction, compared to involvement of parents or caregivers. More than twice as many teachers rated student learning by remote instruction as “not at all” or “slightly” effective (38%) compared to those who rated it “extremely” or “very” effective (16%).

Educators who rated their schools as most prepared across the readiness capabilities were far more likely to also report strong student outcomes in their schools.

The higher respondents rated their schools’ ten remote online instruction capabilities as a whole, the more effective the reported student learning—educators who said they had a high level of development in the ten readiness requirements were seven times as likely to report effective student learning. While this reported relationship is not cause-and-effect, it’s an impressive link. Nearly as strong as the tie to student learning were high self-ratings on the same ten tools, supports or skills and the reported effectiveness of those schools’ online teaching.

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 LIKELY TO REPORT
 EFFECTIVE STUDENT
 LEARNING

Defining School Capabilities: Readiness Requirements for Remote Online Instruction

Capabilities for remote online/blended instruction were grouped into two areas: *involvement and support* and *tools and training*. There are five of these readiness requirements in each of the two groups.

Involvement and support readiness needs include:

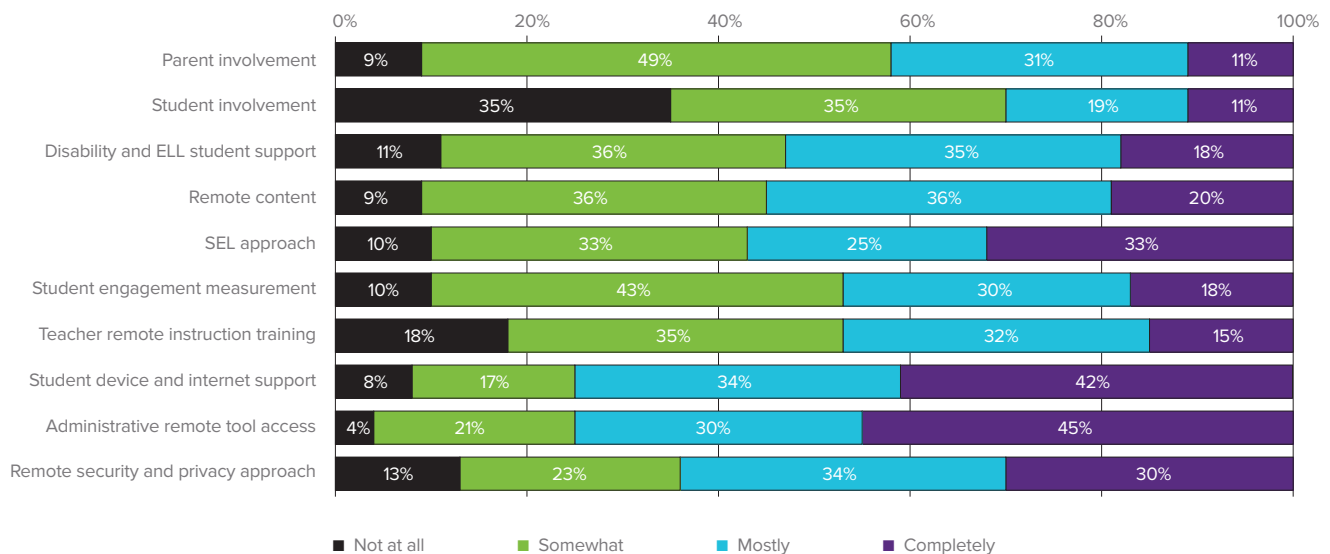
- ▶ Parent involvement
- ▶ Student involvement
- ▶ SEL approach
- ▶ Disability and ELL student support
- ▶ Student engagement measurement

Tools and training readiness needs include:

- ▶ Teacher remote instruction training
- ▶ Remote content
- ▶ Remote security and privacy approach
- ▶ Student device and internet support
- ▶ Administrative remote tool access

The survey asked respondents to rate themselves on a four-point scale for each—“not at all,” “somewhat,” “mostly” and “completely”—with brief definitions provided at both the “not at all” and “completely” ends of the scale.

School Remote Readiness



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Totals exceed 100% due to rounding

Parent and student involvement

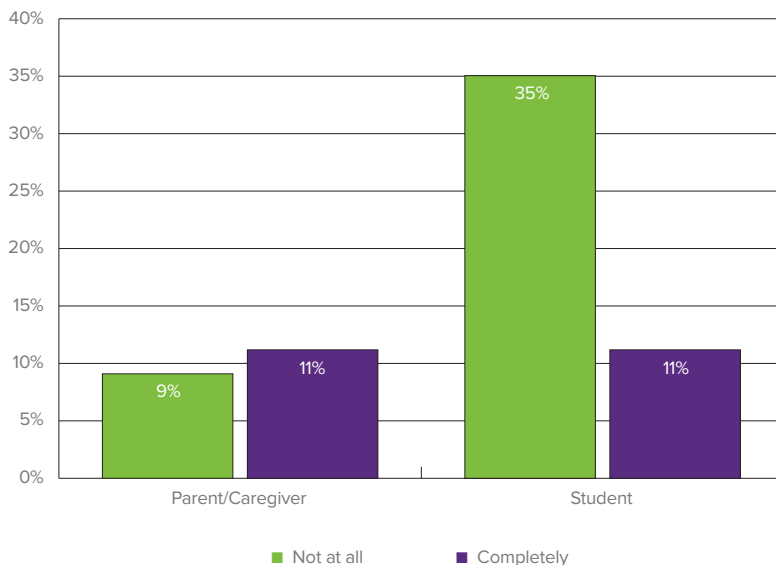
When looking ahead to the next school semester or term, survey respondents were asked a pair of parallel questions: “How involved are parents and caregivers in remote online instruction efforts in your school(s)” and, “How involved are students in remote online instruction decision-making in your schools?”

Students were nearly four times as likely to be reported as “not at all” involved in the planning or implementation decisions (35%) than their parents or caregivers (9%), yet both students and parents were reported equally as “completely” involved (11% each).

For students, “not at all” was defined as, “We have not involved students in the planning or implementation of remote online instruction,” and for parents as, “Parents/caregivers are not engaged and do not want us to go remote.” At the other extreme, for students, “completely” was described as, “We encourage students to own their remote online instruction schedule, process and outcomes,” and for parents as, “Parents/caregivers are completely supportive and have access to the training and tools needed to support their children.”

While complete involvement for both students and parents was reported by one in ten respondents, results showing a lack of involvement were highly lopsided, leaving out far more students than parents in remote online instruction decision-making—perhaps affecting student buy-in.

Involvement in remote online instruction efforts



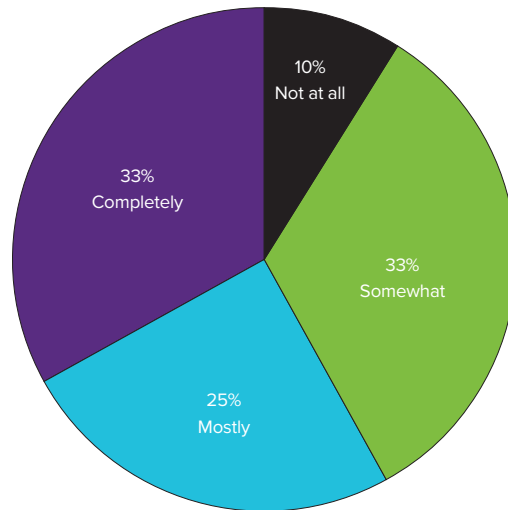
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Social and emotional learning approach

Social and emotional learning needs—as well as the need for direct support of students’ well-being—are widely reported to have increased during emergency remote instruction prompted by the pandemic. Respondents were asked, “Has your approach to social and emotional learning changed in your school(s)?”

Some 58% said their approach had changed “mostly” or “completely,” with “completely” described as, “We recognize that remote online instruction will put additional stress on students and teachers and have provided additional student resources and teacher training.” Just 10% said their approach had changed, “Not at all: We have not changed our focus or approach to social and emotional learning to support remote online instruction.”



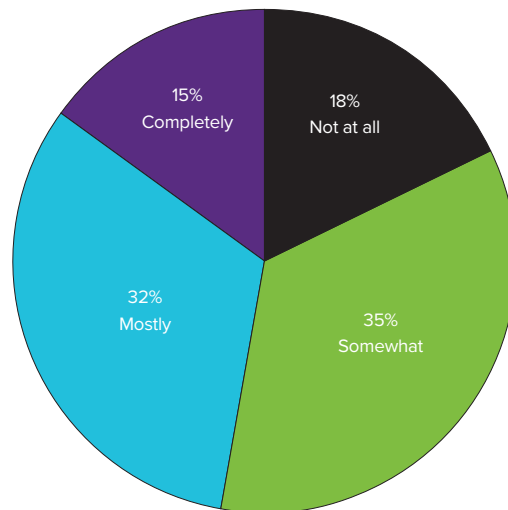
Totals exceed 100% due to rounding

Teacher remote instruction training

At the start of the 2020 pandemic, many teachers were thrust into the role of online instructor with little time to prepare. By July, educators had more time to improve their skill set. So the survey asked, “How significantly have you supported teacher training and expertise in blended learning or remote online instruction in your school(s)?”

In response, 47% said they “mostly” or “completely” agreed that, “Teachers are well acquainted with the concept of blended learning or remote online instruction and have a good understanding of how to conduct classes, communicate and collaborate in a virtual environment.” But 18% responded, “Not at all: Teachers have limited experience and minimal formal training with blended learning or remote online instruction.”

Despite the fact that slightly more than half responded “not at all” or “somewhat,” this result seems to indicate that progress is being made in increasing teacher confidence with blended and remote online learning environments.



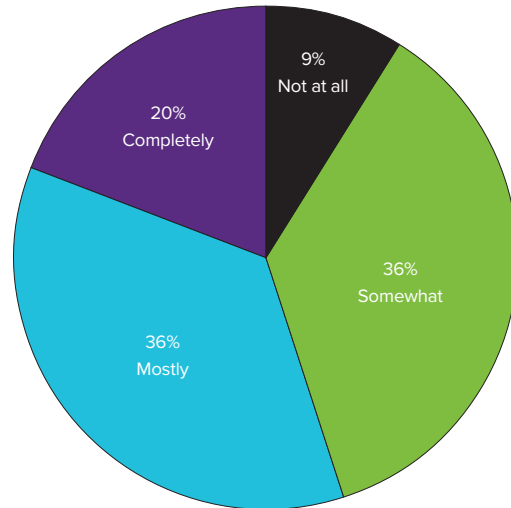
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Remote instructional content

Teachers can't do much remotely without appropriate content that supports blended or remote online instruction.

In response to the question, "How comprehensive are your efforts for content created and delivered to support remote online instruction in your school(s)?" 9% answered, "Not at all: We have minimal content specifically designed for remote online instruction." Another 20% were at the ideal, "Completely: We have a significant body of content that has been developed for remote delivery."

The balance was evenly split at the in-progress stages, "somewhat" and "mostly," implying there still is a large need for instructional content that works well in remote learning settings.



Totals exceed 100% due to rounding

Other capabilities

The other five school readiness requirements for blended/remote online instruction included two under the tools and training group for which combined "mostly" and "completely" responses exceeded 75%, and one exceeded 60%.

- ▶ **Student device and internet support** ("How have you ensured students have devices and internet access available at home or other locations outside of classrooms?") came in at 34% "mostly" and 42%, "Completely: We supply devices to all students, and provide internet hotspots or alternative connectivity options for students without suitable home broadband access."
- ▶ **Administrative remote tool access** ("How available is remote access to administrative and teaching tools used by administrators and teachers in your school(s)?") had 30% "mostly" and 45%, "Completely: Teachers and administrators have access to cloud-based instructional and administrative tools (e.g., SIS, LMS,CMS) to support blended or remote online instruction."

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Other capabilities *continued*

- ▶ **Remote security and privacy approach** (“How extensive is your approach to cybersecurity and data privacy for remote access for students, parents, teachers and administrators?”) led to 34% “mostly” and 30%, “Completely: We fully understand the implications of a multi-device / multi-connection environment and have adjusted our security policies, platforms and practices accordingly.”

In the involvement and support readiness group, the remaining two capabilities had a “mostly/ completely” combination around 50%.

- ▶ **Disability and ELL student support** (“How well do you support students with disabilities and English Language Learners in your school(s)?”) had 35% “mostly” and 18%, “Completely: We have a specific remote online instruction policy for special needs and ELL students that has been communicated and is being monitored.”
- ▶ **Student engagement measurement** (“Has your approach to measuring student engagement changed in your school(s)?”) responses were 30% “mostly” and 18%, “Completely: We have implemented remote online learning analytics and tools to encourage engagement and measure outcomes.”

Teaching and Learning Effectiveness of Remote Online Instruction

On the whole, schools taking part in the survey didn’t have a lot of transition time for remote online instruction. If they did go remote, six in ten respondents (64%) said they took one week or less to make the shift and resume instruction; eight in ten (84%), two weeks or less.



Teaching and Learning Effectiveness of Remote Online Instruction *continued*

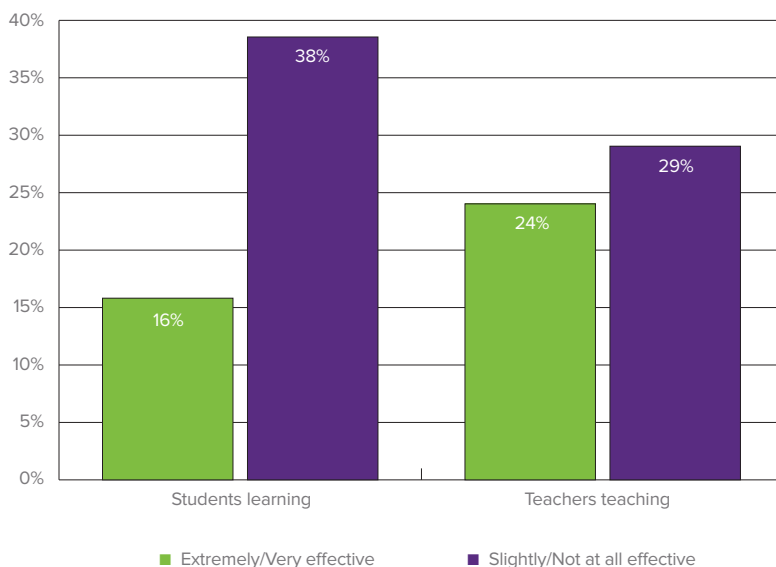
Clearly, learning and teaching outcomes are important. Educators were asked to provide their impression of both the effectiveness of teacher teaching and student learning through remote online instruction, using a five-point scale of “extremely,” “very,” “moderately,” “slightly” or “not at all” effective.

Educators were far more positive about their schools’ teaching efforts than student learning results: 24% rated teaching as “very” or “extremely” effective, yet only 16% considered student learning “very” or “extremely” effective.

A wider—and potentially more concerning—gap was shown in the responses at the ineffective end of the spectrum. While 29% thought teaching was “not at all” or “slightly” effective, 38% tagged student learning as “not at all” or “slightly” effective.

Put another way: More than twice as many educators thought student learning wasn’t really working as those who thought it worked well.

Remote instruction effectiveness



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Conclusions

In mapping outcomes to capabilities—the tools, supports or skills required for remote online instruction readiness—it turns out all ten school capabilities in combination are important when it comes to effective teaching and student learning.

The strongest link between capabilities and outcomes is in student learning. Survey respondents who consistently rated themselves highly on the ten readiness requirements also reported greater effectiveness of remote online student learning. Educators who said they had a high level of development in the ten capabilities were seven times as likely to report effective student learning. While this reported relationship is not cause-and-effect, it provides an important benchmark during the pandemic as schools continue with blended/hybrid or fully remote online instruction.

Nearly as strong is the relationship between overall high ratings on the ten and the effectiveness of remote online teacher instruction. Again—while not cause-and-effect—this could provide a useful tool for schools in their planning, or in seeing where they could improve over time.

Schools are doing better on remote technology and training needs than in the softer areas of involving and supporting parents and students. Schools are more well-developed in the five readiness requirements for tools and training (remote tool access, digital content, teacher training, student device/internet access, cybersecurity) than they are in the five types related to involvement and support (social and emotional learning, measuring engagement, disability and English language learner support, parent and student planning roles), though progress apparently is being made.

While this is a global survey, breaking out U.S. respondents from other countries does show significantly higher reported capabilities compared to the rest of the world in three of the tools and training group readiness requirements: student device and internet support, administrative remote tool access and remote security and privacy. However, the U.S. lags in student involvement, SEL approach, student engagement measurement and teacher remote instruction training.

The pandemic has highlighted where there are gaps in both remote online instruction technology and human approaches. But by identifying and highlighting areas where tools, supports or skills can be improved—and where they are tied to positive teaching and learning outcomes—the effectiveness of blended/hybrid and remote online instruction can be improved for all educators and learners.

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About the Survey

In July 2020, SMART Technologies fielded a global survey asking primarily K-12 educators and administrators to self-assess their schools on ten capabilities (readiness requirements that involve tools, supports or skills) thought to be important for blended or remote online instruction. Broad secondary research was conducted into key planning considerations that led to defining the capabilities. In addition, respondents were asked to gauge how effective they thought their efforts have been, so far, in remote teaching and learning.

For purposes of the survey, blended or hybrid learning was defined as “a student alternating between in-person and remote online instruction, or a teacher’s class in which some students receive remote online instruction while others in the same class receive in-person instruction.”

Survey responses were gathered online from July 13 through August 5, 2020. Approximately 250 administrators and teachers participated, responding to four classification questions, ten capabilities questions and three self-rating and transition questions.

Because the survey used an opportunity sample (that is, asking educators if they’d take part) the results may not be fully representative. But they do serve as good directional indicators, a taking of the school pulse in pandemic times. The survey was drafted and implemented by Filigree Consulting, contributor to SMART’s comprehensive school technology capabilities and outcomes self assessment launched in 2018, and completed by more than 1,500 schools and districts to date.

Overall, 65% of respondents in the July survey were from the U.S., with additional participation from Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom, Australia and many other countries. Seven in ten of the respondents were teachers, with the balance having administrator or other school- or district-level roles.

About SMART Technologies

SMART is a world leader in classroom technology, providing interactive solutions to help every student, teacher and leader discover and develop the greatness within them. A consistent innovator for more than 30 years, SMART is the inventor of the SMART Board® and the developer of SMART Notebook®, the world's most popular collaborative learning software and part of the SMART Learning Suite. With their full range of interconnected displays, software and accessories, used in more than 3 million classrooms, SMART helps students and teachers around the world achieve better learning outcomes. To learn more, visit smarttech.com.

Schools and districts interested in discovering their stage of edtech development—and how they can prioritize work and investment for better learning outcomes—can take a more extensive self-evaluation of education technology capabilities tied to best practices. Upon completion of the survey, participants receive a free profile with useful recommendations for benchmarking and planning. Access the survey at www.smarttech.com/profile.