

# HYBRID LEARNING

Exploring the experience of, and possibilities for, hybrid learning in schools.



## | Foreword

This is the fourth report by Independent Schools Victoria (ISV) examining the impact of COVID-19 on our Member Schools and their diverse communities. It was drafted when some of those schools were emerging from extended periods of remote learning, imposed as a result of six government-mandated lockdowns. It's published early in the 2022 school year, at a time of cautious optimism that, perhaps, lockdowns are behind us, even if the pandemic isn't.

Earlier reports by ISV's research team looked at how the pandemic affected the health and wellbeing of students and staff; how school leaders had responded to the challenges of COVID; and at how school communities had assessed the effectiveness of that response.

This latest report looks at how school staff delivered their core function – teaching their students – at a time when they were often physically remote from one another, forcing them to adopt a hybrid model of learning and teaching.

Naturally, many found this difficult, as the speed of the pandemic forced them to suddenly shift from familiar classroom routines to digital teaching, with little planning. They had to apply sometimes unfamiliar technology, adapting content and the way they delivered it.

The report has lessons for school leaders, teachers and everyone with an interest in school education. These lessons include the need to ensure teachers are trained to work in hybrid models and provided with the necessary technology and support.

Amid the challenges, the past two years' experience with hybrid learning suggests there are opportunities for teachers to reimagine how education is delivered in ways that better reflect the emerging and changing needs of their students.



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## Introduction

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools have taken many measures to respond to the unparalleled disruption to education. At the time of publication, Victorian schools have entered a new school year after two years of restrictions, including, in Melbourne, six lockdowns. Victorian schools were most significantly impacted by school closures compared with other states. The pandemic has resulted in a distinct rise in online learning and it is clear that technology is a crucial part of the solution to such disruption. Consequently, blended and hybrid learning models have gained increasing attention in schools.

During the pandemic, ISV embarked on various research projects to understand how schools navigated the disruption in education. These included exploring how principals confronted the challenges of leading their schools through COVID-19 and understanding remote learning experiences among school staff, parents and students. These studies were conducted during what Fullan et. al. (2020) defined as the 'unsettled zone', where schools navigate the disruption and shift to remote learning, or the 'learning zone', where schools consider multiple factors to shift from surviving to navigating new remote environments.<sup>1</sup> Once the environment stabilises, schools typically move to the 'growth zone', where they recognise they are no longer working on a temporary or expedient solution and take the opportunity to develop new learning models.<sup>2</sup>

This research aims to explore how schools might move within and beyond the 'growth zone'. It provides insights on how blended and hybrid learning models are perceived among educators in Victorian Independent schools. These include their perception of the efficacy of hybrid learning, concerns and challenges in delivering hybrid teaching, and key drivers and features of effective hybrid learning environments. Over the last two decades, some innovative schools have already begun to adopt blended learning methods; as such, this research has a greater focus on hybrid learning as it is a relatively new educational approach that became more prevalent during the pandemic. The report also captures educators' appetite for a blended and hybrid model in the future.

We conducted a quantitative survey as well as a literature scan to investigate the adoption and implementation of blended and hybrid learning approaches in Australia and abroad. As hybrid learning may not be a familiar concept to some educators, the questionnaire included many open-ended questions to collect rich data on existing knowledge, feelings and perceptions of hybrid learning. We invited school leaders and teachers in the secondary sector to complete the survey from August to September 2021. Data analysed in this report is based on 124 participants from 83 Victorian Independent schools; 101 participants are from metropolitan schools and 23 from regional schools.

The analysis is organised into three parts. Part 1 defines participants' understanding, perceptions and experiences of blended and hybrid learning. Part 2 lists the skills, practices and resources teachers say they need to enable hybrid learning. Part 3 describes participants' perception of the future of school and hybrid learning possibilities.

## Key findings

1. Most participants have a broad understanding of blended and hybrid learning, however they were not able to detail the nuanced difference in both models. Participants showed a greater understanding of blended learning than hybrid learning models.
2. Participants felt more confident in implementing blended learning than hybrid learning (81% vs. 50% net confidence).
3. More than half (57%) have considered a hybrid model pre-pandemic, whether or not they end up implementing it. Principals were more likely to consider this than teaching staff (79% vs. 51%).
4. Only around half (53%) had implemented hybrid learning in contrast to 81% who had implemented blended learning. The flipped classroom rotation model in blended learning was mentioned the most.
5. Pandemic-related logistical restrictions was the main consideration when deciding whether to implement a hybrid model (63%), followed by teacher capacity (27%) and student readiness (25%).
6. Across all hybrid learning models presented, more than half implemented the differentiated model (55%) in hybrid learning where students at home and in-person engage synchronously on the same lesson. This is considered the easiest hybrid model to plug into conventional schedules and instructions.
7. Main changes in teaching practice include re-designing the course content and adapting instructions to ensure effective learning for both on-site and online cohorts. Most teachers used existing technology infrastructure in school and added new ones for hybrid teaching.
8. Most teachers experienced considerable difficulty in implementing a hybrid model (58% not easy vs. 34% 'extremely', 'somewhat' or 'very easy'). The biggest challenge in running a hybrid model was teacher competency (30%), followed by quality student learning and engagement (27%) and technological issues (24%).
9. Apart from concerns around capacity and resources in implementing a hybrid model, teachers were generally less motivated to pursue this as they regarded hybrid teaching as a temporary solution during lockdown. Many found it difficult to juggle the extra workload such as training on-the-job, preparing for a hybrid classroom and teaching in a hybrid classroom.
10. Teachers rated 7.0 out of 10 in their overall experience implementing hybrid models. Most generally received support from their school but not necessarily the tools required for hybrid teaching and wellbeing support. Teachers' perceived capability in using a variety of techniques for hybrid teaching and their sense of belonging to their school/school community were directly related to their overall experience.
11. The underlying needs for implementing a successful hybrid model include: confidence in running a hybrid model using the right digital and technological tools; deep understanding of the hybrid pedagogy; functional and emotional support; and high student engagement and learning outcomes using a hybrid approach.
12. Key factors for enabling each of these needs include: training for hybrid pedagogy and digital literacy skills; resources and administrative support; evidence of best practice and working hybrid models; supportive leadership; promoting student agency, digital literacy skills and wellbeing; and building strong relationships with students and parents.
13. Participants recognised the need to have flexible schooling options and incorporation of digital technology in learning. The majority of participants (61%) described a blended learning model as an ideal situation for the future, and about a third (30%) nominated a hybrid model.
14. Participants rated digital and data literacy, independent thinking, time management/personal organisation and resilience as the top education outcomes for students using a hybrid learning model. These skills and competencies align with future skills needs. Given that both physical and digital learning environments can lead to the development of different skillsets, hybrid learning could become the new norm for schools.

# PART 1: Hybrid teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic

## Defining blended and hybrid learning: The terms are commonly used interchangeably

Across the globe, blended and hybrid learning have become a common strategy and policy response during the pandemic, but they can be defined differently by different people.

## Defining blended learning

Blended learning is a flexible, context-dependent system that usually combines (or blends) components of online learning alongside traditional place-based classroom methods. Many blended learning models still require students to attend physical classes that are complemented by computer-mediated activities. However, these learning experiences offer students some element of control over the time, place, path or pace of learning to encourage flexibility and personalisation.<sup>4</sup>

The first part of our survey explored participants' understanding of blended learning. Our analysis found that most participants (66%) indicated that their understanding of blended learning was somewhat associated with multiple delivery modalities that integrate online and face-to-face learning.<sup>i</sup> A minority of participants (16%) considered blended learning to be primarily face-to-face, with opportunities to incorporate technology and online resources/activities. For example, one participant commented that blended learning is "where teachers utilise face-to-face instruction alongside digital/online teaching and learning options." A handful of participants simply defined blended learning to be learning enabled by technology.

Participants were also asked to provide examples of how blended learning was implemented in their school. The most common examples provided resembled the rotation model of blended learning. In this model, students generally learn face-to-face but rotate on a fixed schedule or at the teacher's discretion between learning modalities, of which at least one is online.<sup>5</sup> Participants indicated that students worked through self-paced activities regularly, using a variety of online platforms to complement their in-class learning.

Of all the rotation models (station rotation, lab rotation, flipped classroom and individual rotation)<sup>6</sup>, the flipped classroom model was implemented the most. This was the only model that participants named across all blended learning models. In flipped classrooms, the primary delivery of content and instruction is done through online materials outside of class. Students then attend class in person to apply what they learned using learning activities such as discussions and practice problems.<sup>7</sup> More than half of our participants also provided specific technology and digital tools they used to enhance students' classroom experience.

*"Using apps such as Education Perfect, 'flip learning' with videos / online resources, using strategies such as collaborative documents etc... whilst collaborating in person, using Google Meets during lockdown periods."*

Our analysis found that, in general, participants have a fundamental understanding of what blended learning involves, although they may not be fully aware of the nuances between different blended learning models.

<sup>i</sup>Coded open-ended responses for participants' definition of blended learning can be found in the Appendix.



## Defining hybrid learning

We also investigated how participants defined hybrid learning. Similar to their perceptions of blended learning, almost half the participants (45%) defined hybrid learning to be an approach that incorporates both face-to-face and online teaching and learning elements.<sup>ii</sup>

*“Learning taking place across time and space, in both virtual and physical spaces which may include synchronous and asynchronous elements, often with a higher element of student choice in terms of engagement.”*

While most defined hybrid learning as a having multiple modes of delivery, only about a quarter of participants (26%) specified it as a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning. In the context of hybrid learning, these participants emphasised the flexibility in relation to where and when the learning takes place between two cohorts of students.

According to Spencer (2021), common hybrid learning models can be categorised in five different ways: the differentiated model, the multi-track model, the split A/B model, the virtual accommodation model and the independent project model. Image 1 details examples of these hybrid learning models for students at home and in-person.<sup>8</sup>



<sup>ii</sup>Coded open-ended responses for participants' definition of hybrid learning can be found in the Appendix.

# Image 1: Five ways to structure hybrid learning



Source: John Spencer (2021)



Among participants who defined hybrid learning as involving two separate cohorts of students, the majority described a model similar to what Spencer (2021) identified as the differentiated model or the virtual accommodation model. Examples commonly described by participants involved teaching one group of students in-person while another group of students join in remotely at the same time.

*“Teacher-directed learning that is delivered as a hybrid of online and onsite learning usually simultaneously with web-camera/microphone tracking the teacher in real time/face-to-face setting to enable online students to hear and see the lesson.”*

Most participants had a broad understanding of both blended and hybrid learning terms, however they were not able to detail the nuanced difference in both models. While both blended learning and hybrid learning approaches adopt a mixture of face-to-face and technologically enhanced learning activities, the two concepts should not be used interchangeably as a pedagogical approach.

The key difference between both approaches is the relationship between in-person and online learning. Blended learning describes a process or practice often referring to the place where learning happens (a combination of the classroom and online) and directed at the same students, whereas hybrid learning tends to create a flexible learning environment for instructor and learners, regardless of where they are located (online or onsite).<sup>9</sup>

To help bring clarity to participants, the definitions of blended and hybrid learning were provided in the survey which guided the remaining set of questions.<sup>10</sup>



### **Blended learning**

Teachers combine in-person instruction with online learning activities. The same learners complete some components online and some in person.



### **Hybrid learning**

Refers to an educational approach where some individuals participate in person, and some participate online. Instructors and facilitators teach remote and in-person learners synchronously or asynchronously using technology like video conferencing.

## Hybrid learning considerations:

Only around half of teachers surveyed considered implementing a hybrid approach pre-pandemic, but most teachers implemented it to accommodate lockdown arrangements.

The survey also explored participants' perceptions of blended and hybrid learning models. Comparing both models, the proportion of participants who rated themselves 'extremely confident' or 'fairly confident' in implementing blended learning was significantly higher than hybrid learning (81% vs. 50%), see Figure 1. Participants' higher level of confidence in implementing a blended learning approach could be attributed to having better knowledge and experience of blended learning compared to hybrid learning as highlighted earlier.

One survey question asked whether participants had previously considered implementing hybrid learning (pre-pandemic). Slightly more than half of participants (57%) reported that they had considered it regardless of whether they implemented it. Analysis by leadership roles found that principals were significantly more likely to consider implementing a hybrid learning approach compared with teaching staff (79% vs. 51%).

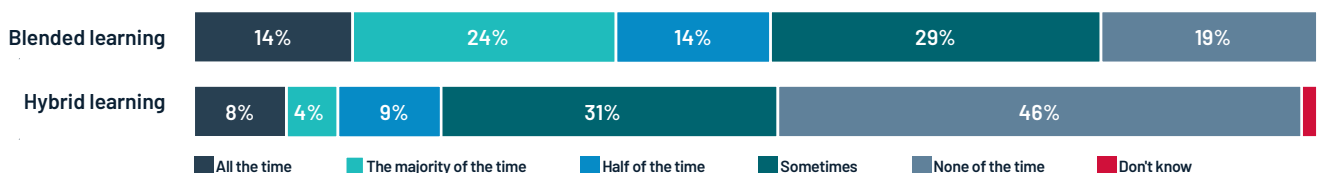
In relation to implementing both blended or hybrid models prior to the lockdown (when remote learning was not mandatory), the survey findings show that most participants (81%) had implemented blended learning in contrast to only around half (53%) who had implemented hybrid learning (see Figure 2).

**Figure 1: How would you rate your level of confidence in implementing a blended and hybrid learning approach in the work that you do?**



Source: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 121

**Figure 2: To what extent do you implement a blended learning and hybrid learning approach in the work that you do?**



Source: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 121

Note: Participants were asked to think about their school's situation prior to the current lockdown to answer this question.

Participants were then asked what guided their decision to pursue a hybrid learning model. The majority noted that hybrid learning arrangements were made to accommodate circumstances brought about by the pandemic, such as supporting students or teachers who were unable to attend school on-site for reasons including disability, travel restrictions or the need to isolate at home. Table 1 below details participants' considerations when deciding whether to implement a hybrid model.

Pandemic-related logistical restrictions aside, teachers' capability to plan and execute a hybrid model and students' readiness to learn were also key considerations when deciding whether to pursue a hybrid model. Some concerns include lack of time, online resources, technological competency, student learning outcomes, student wellbeing and engagement.

While most considered hybrid learning because of COVID-19, about a tenth highlighted the need to accommodate for students who thrive in an online environment and for schools to increase their subject offerings and partner with other schools.

The majority of participants implemented hybrid learning out of necessity brought about by the pandemic. The decision to pursue a hybrid learning model was made on a case-by-case basis mainly to accommodate students' logistical and learning needs during the pandemic. Most schools were prepared to be flexible during uncertain times and remained mindful that they would need to balance the benefits and challenges that come with implementing a hybrid model.

**Table 1: What was part of your/your school's consideration when deciding whether to implement a hybrid learning model?**

Coded open-ended responses	%	n
Student or teachers unable to attend school physically (i.e. travel restrictions, physical or mental health issues, isolate)	36%	23
International students or those stuck interstate/overseas	27%	17
Net Teachers capability and competence to run a hybrid model	27%	17
• Teachers' capability to manage and plan for both groups	17%	11
• Teachers' competence in technology	11%	7
Net Student readiness, needs, learning outcomes and wellbeing	25%	16
• Student learning outcomes and wellbeing needs	13%	8
• Student engagement and attendance rates	9%	6
• Students' lack of readiness, anxiety	5%	3
• To accommodate students who thrive in online learning	3%	2
IT infrastructure, technology resources and online safety	16%	10
Increase subject offerings/work with other schools	8%	5
Others	11%	7

Source: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 64

Note: % does not add up to 100% as participant's response may be coded into one or more codes/categories.

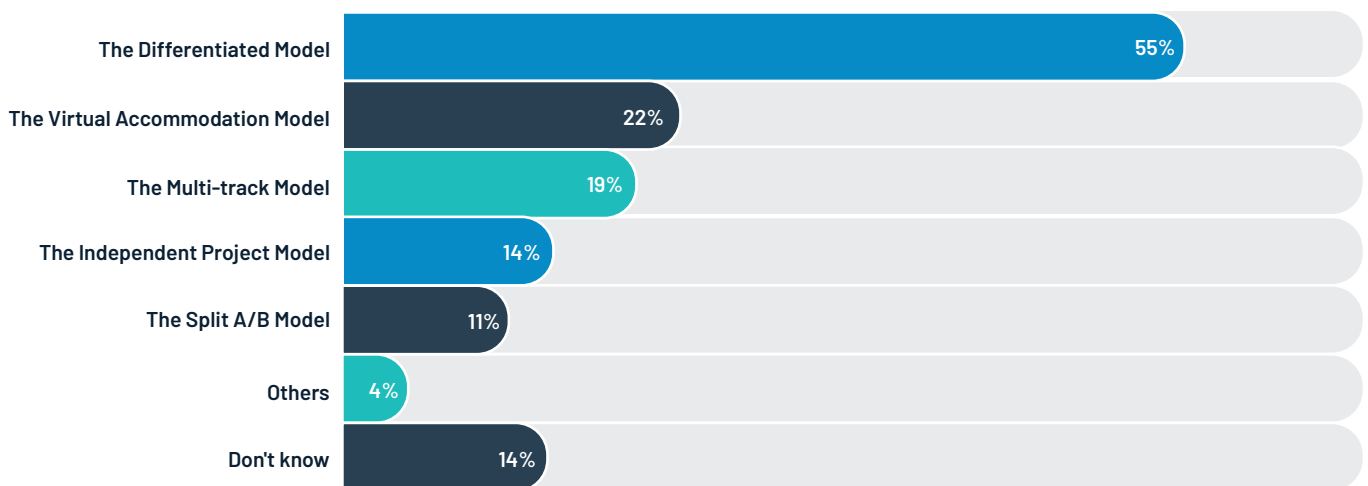
## Hybrid teaching:

Most teachers taught students using a differentiated hybrid model, where students at home and in-person engage synchronously on the same lesson.

Among those who have implemented a hybrid learning model, more than half used the differentiated model (55%), where students at home and in-person engage synchronously on the same lesson (the two groups frequently interact with one another).

Around a quarter (22%) of participants implemented the virtual accommodation model where a small group virtually join the in-person classroom, followed by one in five (19%) who implemented the multi-track model where students work on the same lessons but they are divided into cohorts in separate tracks (the cohorts rarely interact).

Figure 3: Please select the hybrid learning model(s) that you have trialed.



Source: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 73

## Changes in practice posed by hybrid learning<sup>iii</sup>

When asked what changes were made in their teaching practice to accommodate a hybrid learning model, the majority of participants indicated they have created more digital content and used more online platforms in their teaching to leverage the benefits of technology to sustain engagement and collaboration for both cohorts.

*"Inevitably, lesson plans need to be adapted, depending upon the topic being covered and whether there is a practical element in the class, to ensure that the students online are included in the discussions and can engage with practical work."*

Most teachers specified that they modified their instruction to ensure it was tailored to on-site and virtual cohorts. Generally, instruction using a hybrid learning model was adapted to be more concise and direct to reduce cognitive load especially for students learning online, and to allow opportunities for questions. Some teachers also indicated that they changed their pace of delivery when employing hybrid learning and adapted learning activities and tasks for students. For example, one teacher commented on how she has converted classroom activities to an online setting.

*"Converting paper worksheets into interactive digital activities...I created some Google Slide activities where students had to move objects to grid references or create paths. I used Mario characters and it meant that I could see every child work as they progressed and was able to give them feedback while they were working online."*

<sup>iii</sup>Coded analysis for changes in practice posed by hybrid learning can be found in the Appendix.

Most teachers indicated that learning activities were more individualised and designed to be completed in a shorter time when employing hybrid learning. A variety of individual projects were created to allow students to choose one that aligned with their interests. Some teachers provided tasks that required self-directed learning, checklists and shorter interval deadlines to monitor students' learning progress. Teachers also reported conducting more check-ins to ensure students understood what was taught.

*"Allowing more time - needed to change the amount of content delivered and allow for students to have more choice in how to be creative and self-directed."*

*"Extra focus on targeted feedback. Increasing the use of online collaboration tools to enable students to interact with each other wherever they were learning."*

When implementing a hybrid learning model, teachers reported spending more time planning in setting up classroom and virtual environments, more time re-designing course content and more time adapting instructions to ensure effective learning for both cohorts. Despite this, some felt that if good teaching practices are applied, a hybrid model should work well.

*"Lessons require rethinking for delivery so the "magic" that happens in the classroom can be captured for those online."*

*"...Trying to have more of a "story" woven in the teaching to impart more of a sense of continuity. Basically, apply all the techniques of good teaching all the time."*

## **Changes in technology set-up to incorporate a hybrid learning model**

The survey also explored what kind of changes teachers made in the technology they used and how they were set-up to incorporate a hybrid learning model. The most common technology used was Microsoft (Teams, OneNote, OneDrive, SharePoint), followed by Zoom, Google (Classroom, Meet, Docs), and learning management systems such as SETQA and CANVAS, and classroom apps like Seesaw. Other less common technological software and apps mentioned included Compass, Edrolo, Showbie, Firefly and Blackboard.

*"Google suite, particularly meets + classroom. Also SETQA and the occasional video tutorial."*

*"Class OneNote notebooks with individual notebooks (easy for teacher to track progress, provide feedback and differentiate learning) and collaborative notebooks for collaborative tasks."*

Most teachers were constructing their hybrid classrooms around existing set-ups in their school. They continued to use technological tools and learning management systems that they already had access to but added new ones to accommodate hybrid learning. Some reported using other technological accessories such as projectors, microphones and Swivl to facilitate teaching.

*"...Using the school's current LMS to provide information about lesson sequence, resources, videoconferencing links. Use of projectors, ProWise boards and individual laptops/iPads for interactions between students/teacher."*

Teachers reported combining technological and digital tools to provide effective instruction and most established a specific set-up after several trials. However, some reported that they still struggled with audio – particularly listening to remote learners and teaching concurrently.

*"...Audio from the online student came through the TV and face to face students could interact with them. At one point I trialled (using) my AirPods to hear the online student but found that lesson was stilted by me listening to them and relayed what they had said to the other students."*

Overall, across the hybrid learning models, the differentiated model was mainly adopted as it was considered the easiest to 'plug into' the conventional classrooms and instructions in a short period of time. Most teachers pivoted as needed in their instruction and made use of various technology platforms and digital tools to ensure learning continued.



## Hybrid teaching experience:

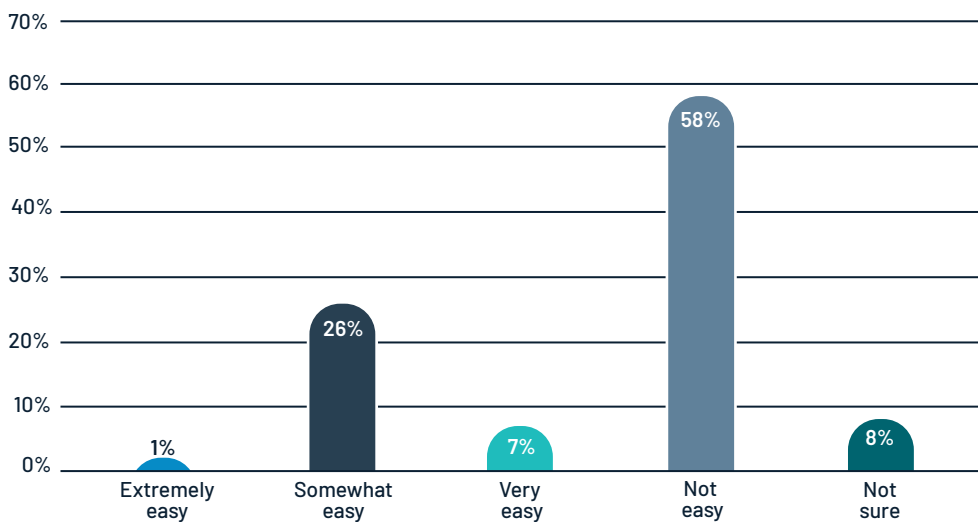
Most teachers found it difficult to implement a hybrid model.  
Teacher competency and student learning were the main barriers.

In addition to exploring what hybrid learning looked like for participants, we also gauged their experience implementing it. In line with the findings reported in this paper so far, most participants (58%) who had implemented hybrid learning rated it as 'not easy', whereas only a third reported otherwise (34% net easy). See Figure 4 for a detailed breakdown. As hybrid learning was conducted hastily in many schools, and mainly to accommodate lockdown arrangements, it is possible that some may have associated it with negative emotions experienced during the pandemic.

Normally, online learning requires intentional and considerable planning, development and implementation to be effective.<sup>11</sup> A minority of participants felt that implementation became easier over time. As one teacher commented: "initially it was all so new, now it is a lot easier."

Diving deeper into the underlying reasons behind the difficulty in implementing hybrid models, we asked participants to detail the challenges they faced. We also asked participants who had not implemented a hybrid learning model to detail their concerns. For both groups, the biggest challenge or concern was teacher competency (30%), followed by quality student learning and engagement (27%) and technological issues (24%).

Figure 4: How would you rate the ease of implementing a hybrid learning model?



Source: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 100

Analysis by experience found that those who have not implemented a hybrid model were significantly more likely to perceive teacher competency as a barrier compared to those who have implemented one (55% vs. 18%). While no significant difference was found, they were also more likely to perceive that adequate technology, lack of time and workload as well as students' lack of skill and readiness a barrier.

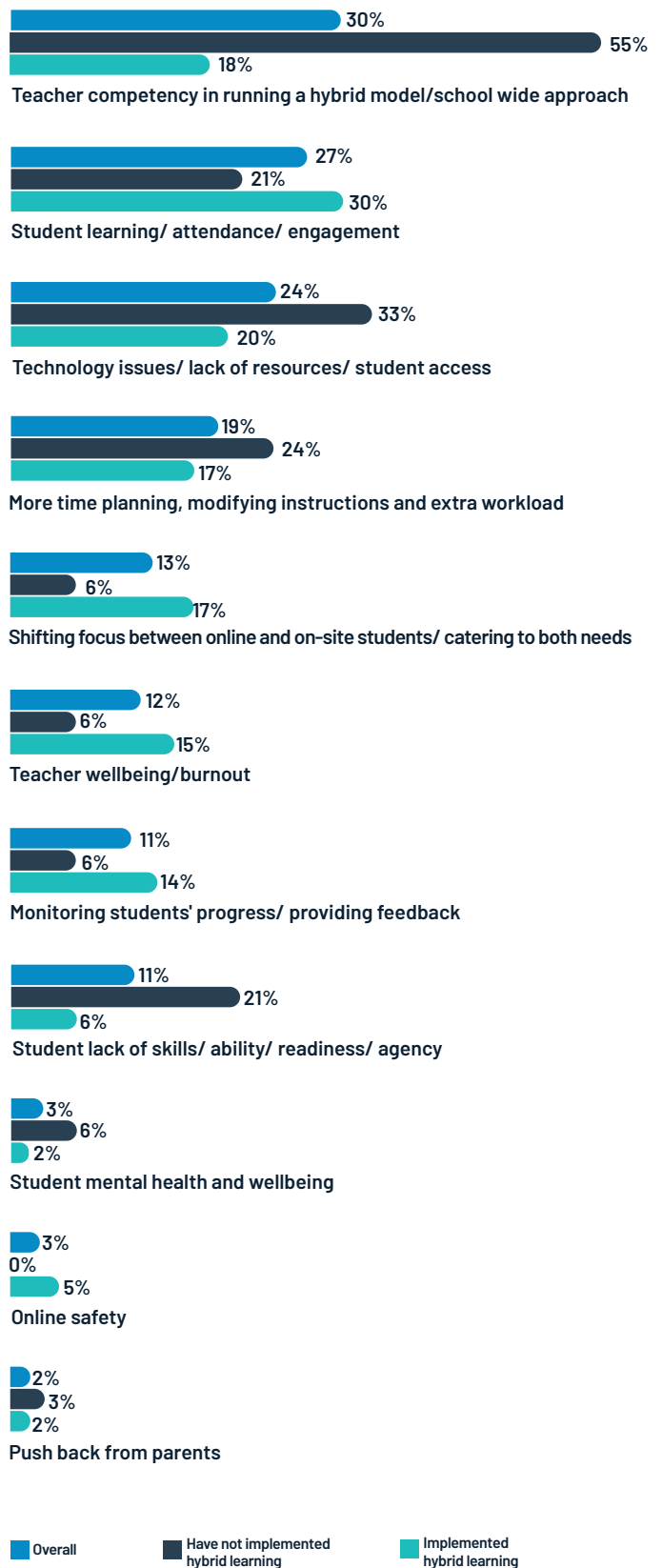
On the other hand, those who have implemented a hybrid model found it more difficult to cater to both online and on-site students, sustain students' engagement, monitor student learning and provide effective feedback – basically, challenges that are more prevalent having gone through the experience (see Figure 5).

Most participants voiced concerns in teachers' ability to run a hybrid model successfully. They acknowledged a different pedagogy is needed for hybrid learning that requires an understanding in using fit-for-purpose technology platforms and digital tools. This is unsurprising as many teachers have had little opportunity for professional development, training or support to do so, as elaborated below.

*“Lack of instruction/support for staff who are implementing this model. Limited understanding of what the model actually is, the benefits and the guidelines.”*

Teachers generally found it challenging to shift their attention between both online and on-site students to monitor their learning and to ensure all students remain engaged throughout a lesson. They perceived inclusion of all learners to be a barrier to hybrid teaching.

**Figure 5: Concerns and challenges in implementing hybrid learning**



Source: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 99  
 Q. What are your main concerns of the hybrid learning model in teaching and learning? (n=33, have not implemented hybrid learning) Q. What were some of your concerns or barriers when running a hybrid learning model? (n=66, have implemented hybrid learning)

*“...difficult to ensure that the students at home are learning in the same way as the students in the classroom who have the opportunity for one-on-one feedback. Plus, I have known that during my time teaching online in lockdowns, students have been wary of speaking over Zoom. Therefore, the students in the classroom would be happy to have discussion, but the students online might miss out.”*

Apart from the perceived lack of competency, some participants mentioned a resistance to employing hybrid teaching and only implementing it as a temporary solution to accommodate learning arrangements during lockdown, rather than a long-term strategy.

*“Teacher capacity and training would be the next hurdle, as resistance to change is rife in schools.”*

*“I think also that we were not ready for the difficulty of the hybrid, making it effective was harder than we had thought it would be, maybe we stepped back from it without trying to make it work because we realized it was temporary.”*

There was an understandable degree of frustration among teachers who had to spend additional time planning their lessons due to the steep learning curve required for hybrid teaching. The increase in workload to teach online and in-person students simultaneously left them feeling exhausted.

*“That teacher workloads will be doubled or tripled by having to reproduce lessons in multiple formats in unrealistic timeframes and that classroom management will be next to impossible as students move from mode to mode.”*

*“It's a lot more work, and schools have to be prepared to offer more planning hours if they want to do it.”*

Participants also questioned the essence of education itself using a hybrid approach. Many showed concern over their students' learning experience. As one teacher commented “...my belief is that education is more than just content delivery and the 'other bits' are often less impactful online.” Additionally, student agency and skills in learning online, and equity and access to learn online were perceived as barriers. This finding was also highlighted in a recent study by the Victorian Government. It found that students already at risk of disengaging from school, and those without educational and wellbeing support from home, were confronted with extra difficulties learning in an online environment.<sup>12</sup>

*“Student skills - definitely this was problematic, our school is in a very low SES area, and there was disinclination to engage, that is simply habitual/ cultural staff expectations.”*

*“The haves and have nots created by personal at home circumstance.”*

Overall, our survey findings highlight that most teachers experienced considerable difficulty in implementing a hybrid model. Their main concerns and challenges in implementation were around the lack of understanding of the hybrid model and teacher capacity in using the right hybrid learning pedagogy and technology to generate student-centred learning. Concerns over a potential drop in the quality of the learning was also evident.

## The overall experience with hybrid teaching:

Most received the appropriate support needed from school, but not necessarily the tools required for hybrid teaching and wellbeing support.

We asked participants to rate their hybrid teaching experience in various areas using a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means “strongly disagree” and 10 means “strongly agree” (see Figure 6). Generally, participants agreed that they received the support from their school and colleagues to conduct hybrid teaching (8.6 out of 10). However, they were less likely to agree that they had the tools necessary (7.4 out of 10). Participants rated lowest statements concerning their wellbeing and connection to the school and their students. Considering all statements presented, participants then rated 7.0 out of 10 in their overall experience in implementing a hybrid model.

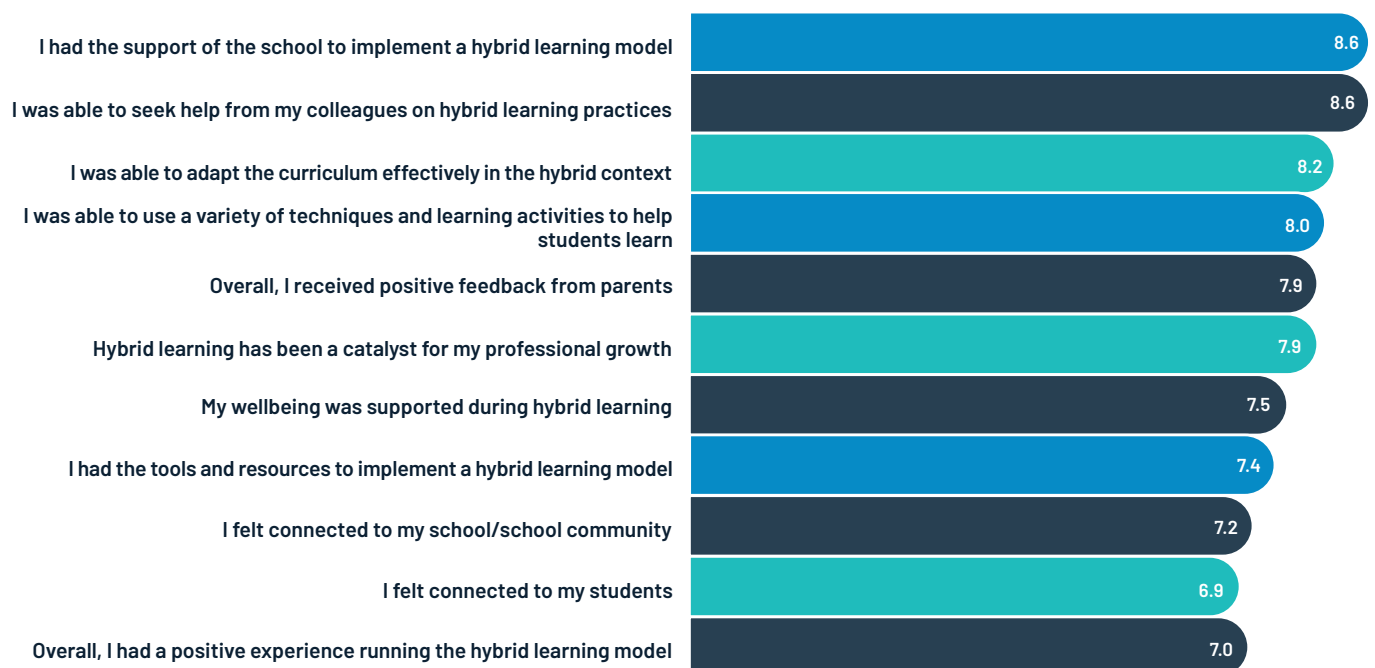
To further scrutinise the data, correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between the statements, or variables above, and to measure the degree to which variables were more strongly related to participants’ overall experience (‘Overall, I had a positive experience running the hybrid learning model’). A correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) ranges from -1 to +1. Generally, values between 0.1-0.3 indicate a weak (positive) relationship, 0.3-0.5 indicate a medium (positive) relationship while 0.5-1.0 indicate a strong (positive) relationship.

The correlation analysis found a strong positive relationship for the following statements and participants’ overall experience in implementing a hybrid model:

- ‘I was able to use a variety of techniques and learning activities to help students learn’ ( $r=0.74$ );
- ‘I felt connected to my school/ school community’ ( $r=0.70$ ); and
- ‘I felt connected to my students’ ( $r= 0.68$ ).

In other words, if participants’ experience for these statements increases, so does their overall experience in running a hybrid model and vice versa. Participants’ overall experience was seen to be directly related to their perception of how well they can implement hybrid teaching to support students’ learning (i.e. professional autonomy), their feeling of belonging to the school/school community and their relationship with students. This is a telling sign that these factors need to be at the forefront when planning to implement a hybrid learning model.

**Figure 6: How likely are you to agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to your experience in implementing hybrid learning?**



Source: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 60

## PART 2: Drivers for a successful hybrid model

As part 1 demonstrated, teachers had a varied experience of hybrid teaching. This was influenced by their school's adoption of online learning pre-pandemic, the rationale for adopting a hybrid model, and the resources and support given to implement it. As hybrid learning is relatively new in most schools, teachers may struggle to articulate or conceptualise what resources and support they require to deliver it effectively. Therefore, we asked participants the following questions:

1. What is important in driving an effective hybrid learning model?
2. What information and resources should be made available to consider implementing a hybrid approach?
3. What skills, focus areas, or best practices are necessary in preparing teachers for the hybrid context?

These open-ended questions were analysed on a participant level, focusing on the underlying needs deemed important from direct experience, rather than the perceived solutions required to execute hybrid teaching effectively.

The following section details participants' underlying needs in implementing a hybrid model successfully and the drivers or requirements that support each need.

### Confidence delivering a hybrid model using the right technology and digital tools

Most teachers found it difficult to run a hybrid classroom that involved collaborative tasks between online and face-to-face modalities. Unsurprisingly, the majority suggested that professional learning and ongoing training is important to improve teachers' digital literacy skills. Some mentioned that this is needed to boost confidence in teachers' technical competency in running a hybrid model, particularly in anticipating potential technical glitches and planning lesson contingency.

*"Training is foremost: teachers who don't feel they do it well, aren't motivated to try very hard".*

There was a strong desire among participants to explore the best technology and digital platforms for interaction and collaboration between learners in real time, and to create a good face-to-face and online experience. Therefore, providing a range digital and technology platform options will be beneficial for teachers to consider and trial.

*"To find recommended platforms for online collaboration - what are the best tools for mind mapping when some are present and others are online? To ensure that staff had the tools to manage online questions - for example, having a student monitor the chat for incoming questions or to try to answer them."*

Those who have implemented hybrid learning were more likely to suggest that its delivery requires an automated, streamlined approach to technology and digital tools across the school for seamless teaching and learning. Most of this group have encountered issues running a hybrid model and felt that careful consideration is needed to choose the right technology that is user friendly and fit for purpose.

*"For this to be managed successfully we would need a fully automated system of filming classroom presentations/ workshops and activities that did not disrupt the learning of the individuals in the classroom..."*

*"...how to use a variety of resources and how to have consistency for the students' sake (particularly in high school).*





Lastly, improvements in technology infrastructure within a school were considered necessary if teachers are expected to create more dynamic tasks and provide effective instruction in a hybrid setting.

*“Technological provisions would need to be ramped up in hybrid classrooms; one cannot expect the teacher to connect with remote students using their own device as teachers were already using that device to teach.”*

*“I think that we could probably manage the hybrid learning model relatively easily, but it would require some upgrade to technology in classrooms...”*

While most participants expressed a desire to be more technologically proficient, assessment of digital skills should be measured along a continuum to provide training that is targeted at different proficiency levels. While there are a variety of digital skills assessment frameworks that have recently been developed, they generally follow three steps:<sup>13</sup>

1. Assessing the digital skills levels of education and training system stakeholders,
2. Building a framework to identify skills that are key to hybrid learning, and related skills shortages, and
3. Adopting policies and guidelines for digital skills development that takes hybrid learning requirements into account.

Overall, our findings reveal that it will be useful for school leaders to constantly re-evaluate their technological choices to invest in infrastructure that is fit for purpose based on their budget, expertise and digital maturity. This will help ensure they end up with tools and technologies that align with the school's educational goals.

## Developing a deep understanding of the hybrid pedagogy for effective teaching

Implementing a hybrid model is not as easy as simply moving a traditional classroom into the digital realm. Participants who have implemented a hybrid learning model suggested that teaching using a hybrid pedagogy needs a fundamental rethink. Those who have not implemented a hybrid model were also significantly more likely to indicate teacher capacity as their main concern in hybrid teaching.

As such, most teachers surveyed wanted professional learning on how to teach a hybrid model. This would help teachers better understand and further differentiate hybrid models to improve pedagogical effectiveness. For instance, some outlined the importance of having a clear understanding of how the number of students at home and in-person and their interactions could impact their learning.

*“Classroom management would change in its dynamic as it would involve managing in-class and online students, so some professional learning for staff would be useful.”*

The required training and professional development can be classified into two categories:

- how to teach online and use technology to maximise online learning experience
- how to teach a hybrid model focusing on integration and group dynamics.

One participant also suggested that pre-service teachers should learn how to implement hybrid learning as part of their initial teacher training. This would give emerging teachers an opportunity to practise and experiment with hybrid teaching from the beginning of their careers. Similar to the digital assessment suggested earlier, schools may benefit from using a framework to help assess teachers' readiness in delivering hybrid models. This could support targeted initial and ongoing training based on teachers' level of expertise.

*“More ICT PD and also a better understanding of the SAMR (Substitution & Augmentation, Modification & Redefinition) and TPACK (Technological, Pedagogical and Content Knowledge) approaches.”*

Some participants also felt that training from experts such as learning designers or those who have been teaching in a hybrid setting would make online learning more effective. When asked whether their school appointed an external consultant to guide the implementation of online, blended or hybrid learning, less than a tenth (8%) of participants indicated they had external support. Close to half (43%) reported their school appointed someone internal. These responses may be the reason behind a perceived need for expert training from many participants.

*“Not all staff have the ICT skills to be able to produce units of work with the necessary resources that would dovetail into their delivery. They would need to be underpinned with course writers/developers who can do this for them as they have done in university settings.”*

To gain a thorough understanding of hybrid models, teachers require case studies, working examples and best practice evidence. Participants deemed this as important to understanding how hybrid learning works in various contexts, such as different subjects and year levels. Experimenting with various school settings can be encouraged to help build models of best practice and eventually a systematic approach in hybrid teaching.

*“How successful these modes are, what are the circumstances for successful implementation, evidence relating to prior occurrences or case studies of successful hybrid learning models in schools.”*

Collaboration and networking between schools was most commonly suggested as ways to build a library of best practice models. Schools can learn from other ‘like schools’ who have applied hybrid models successfully. This would help increase teachers’ capacity for running a hybrid model and to evaluate what can or cannot be achieved in different conditions. Strong network support and collaboration with other schools, and plenty of examples of working hybrid models, will allow teachers the freedom to choose from a toolkit of experiences and employ teaching approaches that best suit their (and their students’) needs.

*“Discussion and collaboration on challenges, successes, barriers and impact on student learning...Stories from other schools and flexible learning centres.”*

Overall, quality teaching and effective learning design contribute to the success of hybrid learning strategies. Continued support and training is important to equip teachers with the competencies and skills and to boost capability and motivation for hybrid teaching. This is necessary as teachers play an important role in the successful implementation of hybrid learning. Equally important is the continual reflection and implementation of observations and ideas to refine and improve.

*“(I also have concerns about) going back to a very old-fashioned style of teaching. This is something that I am already observing in some of the teachers in my faculty and I think it actually goes against everything we have been trying to develop in our students since I have been a teacher. So if a hybrid model were to be successful – resources/ training would be essential to ensure that we are not creating passive learners.”*

## Functional and emotional support to apply hybrid models

In addition to improving teachers' capability for running hybrid models, supportive external environments are equally vital. Most teachers enter the profession to make a positive impact in their community. While they find their job rewarding, a recent study revealed that 75 percent of Victorian teachers reported feeling stressed by their work during the pandemic and 84 percent had considered leaving their profession.<sup>14</sup> Due to the extra workload required to prepare for hybrid lessons, participants expressed a desire to receive more administration and staffing support to implement and deliver hybrid learning. Survey participants mentioned the additional time required when planning and preparing materials to adapt for both types of learners. When offering hybrid learning, schools also need to consider effective programs and resources that support mental health and wellbeing to encourage belonging and connection.

As most schools were running a hybrid learning model as a quick fix solution for lockdown restrictions, there was often insufficient time to conduct a thorough re-evaluation of educational purposes, hybrid pedagogy and technological choices. Many participants who observed a rushed implementation in their school suggested that positive modelling is required and school leaders should model and cultivate this. As such, a clear vision from school leaders is important when delivering a hybrid learning model as it sets the direction and purpose. Participants also pointed to the need for clear guidelines and policy, and expectations of their role and student outcomes, when using a hybrid model.

*"Teachers need to be prepared to embrace this model - we found that whilst some were, there were others who found it too demanding or difficult to implement. Such teachers would need a lot of positive modelling if they were to embrace the hybrid model."*

*"...But more than that I think it is mindsets. When we did it, we just wanted to survive it and get it over with; so we were not approaching it in any other mindset context."*

Participants were keen to continue experimenting with different approaches to their teaching, with the caveat that they are given permission to fail. Psychological protection during uncertain times is important to avoid teachers reverting to old methods of teaching.

*"A big piece is also permission to fail...We need to have a safe space for teachers to try new things and learn. Just like students."*

Supporting teachers at both the functional and emotional level is equally important. Effective leadership is needed to establish a strong, unified culture and community that embraces hybrid learning.

## Student engagement and learning outcomes

Some of the concern participants expressed when implementing a hybrid model were related to students' engagement, learning and wellbeing. Just as teachers are required to change their teaching methods for a hybrid approach, students are required to play a more active role in their education. Both teachers and students need to have the skills and capacity to effectively engage with and benefit from hybrid learning.

Most participants emphasised a need for students to be able to direct their own learning and to use technologies for hybrid learning. For example, teachers can provide authentic, personalised real-world learning experiences that are student-centred to increase student agency and motivation.<sup>15</sup>

*“Teaching students to be independent learners and responsible for managing their learning timetable.”*

*“Students must have familiarity with the mode of learning and be flexible to switch between independent and online learning as well as learning on demand when ready to do so outside of regular learning schedules.”*

In addition to students' readiness to learn online, proficiency with technology and digital tools could impact their learning. Teachers also need to consider students' access to appropriate devices and the internet. As one teacher commented “to do this, suitable internet access needs to be available to all students regardless of where they live.” When students feel confident and competent in using technologies, they are likely to be more at ease in hybrid models of delivery.<sup>16</sup>

Student wellbeing also needs to be supported to keep students connected, motivated and engaged. Schools are encouraged to support students by setting out expectations for learning and supporting their transition to a hybrid classroom. It is important to encourage prevention and early intervention by tracking student mental health, and to promote mental health and wellbeing as a shared responsibility of the whole-school community.<sup>17</sup>

Effective communication between teachers and students, and between students, was also perceived as important for successful learning outcomes. As hybrid learning requires a fundamental change in classroom dynamics, building strong relationships with students is vital. As elaborated by a teacher surveyed, “there is a very strong human element needed to be considered here for the student, teacher and administrator.” This finding was also evident in a 2020 study on attitudes and preferences for hybrid courses, which revealed that students appear to thrive when they feel connected to their instructor in distance learning environments.<sup>18</sup>

Participants felt there is also a need to build relationships with parents to facilitate cooperation in student learning. For instance, schools may need to develop strategies to “break assumptions” and counter negative perceptions to demystify what works (and what does not) when adopting hybrid learning.<sup>19</sup> Policies, protocols and guidelines could assist in setting clear expectations around the implementation process and outcomes of hybrid learning.

*“The family values and the lifestyles at home will determine the outcome of the learning with this style for secondary students.”*

Overall, our analysis suggests that a combination of authentic, deep learning experiences, autonomy and belonging are factors that assist to inspire and motivate students to succeed in hybrid learning. Schools may need to consider students' learning needs, wellbeing, optimal student-teacher interactions, supply of appropriate tools and resources, and opportunities for collaboration whenever they embark on hybrid learning, regardless of the model they employ.

Image 2 provides a summary of underlying needs and requirements that support each need when considering or leveraging a hybrid model in schools.

## Image 2: Summary of needs and drivers for a successful hybrid model in schools





## PART 3: The future of school and learning

### Future schooling options

There was little or no call for hybrid learning prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. While schools have now re-opened their doors, the possibility of new COVID variants, vaccine hesitancy for children and mandatory isolation for those who test positive could mean that schooling will continue to be disrupted in the years to come. UNESCO suggests that hybrid learning will continue to play an important role during the pandemic as it “combines both remote learning and in-person learning to improve student experience and ensure learning continuity – it is of particular relevance during school partial reopening and in preparation for potential virus resurgence.”<sup>20</sup>

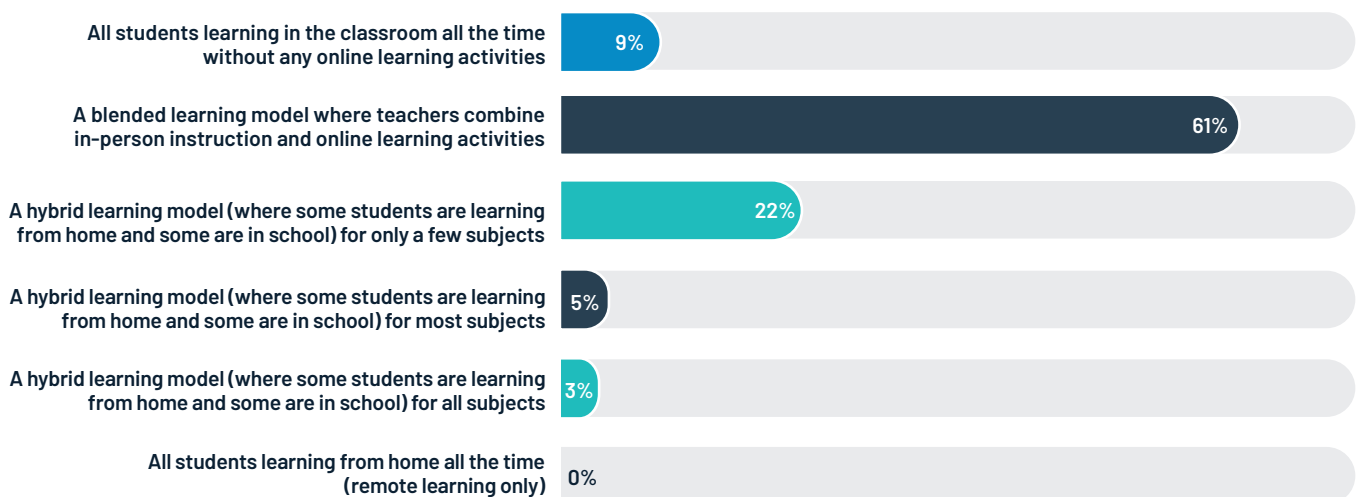
A national survey among educators conducted in December 2020 found that about three quarters (77%) were in support of “rethinking the way we ‘do’ schooling into the future by creating a more flexible model where students attend school but have the option to take some classes online”.<sup>21</sup> This was also recognised in a **joint research by ISV and Monash University** conducted in November 2020 where 76 percent of Victorian Independent school principals suggested there is an opportunity to review aspects of current school models and pedagogical approaches. Some principals also expressed interest in exploring hybrid learning to leverage the benefits observed during the height of the pandemic last year.<sup>22</sup>

Recognition for new schooling options and incorporation of digital technology were also evident in our research. We found that the majority of participants (61%) preferred a blended learning model where teachers combine in-person instruction and online learning activities. About a third preferred a hybrid learning model, although the preference was to have hybrid learning only for a few subjects. Only a tenth of participants preferred to teach in the classroom all the time without online learning activities and none expressed interest in full time remote learning (see Figure 7).

The adoption of hybrid learning in many participating schools was rushed as a result of the pandemic. Given that it may not have had the same degree of deliberate delivery, and the lack of experience of participating teachers, it is unsurprising to see a preference towards blended learning. However, our analysis shows a more positive picture for schools already implementing a hybrid model. The following verbatim reveals participants’ interest in adopting a hybrid model.

*“The very basis of education is “the classroom”, this will need to be completely re-imagined. How teacher time is allocated is based on: a) a classroom space b) a timetable aligned to that physical space c) teacher knowledge and pedagogical skills within that space in that time. All of these are subverted by a hybrid model where access by students is flexible, so flexibility in staffing and timetables etc. would need to be so too.”*

Figure 7: What would be an ideal learning situation for you/your school in the future?



Source: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 87

“...As we moved in and out of lockdowns, we also realised that many of our students thrived in the virtual space, so it is important to investigate how this can be leveraged. Ongoing, we know that there are likely to be students (as well as teachers) who are isolating due to their family circumstances and that this is likely to continue for the next year or so. These students need to not only stay connected with their peers, but also with school and their learning pathway.”

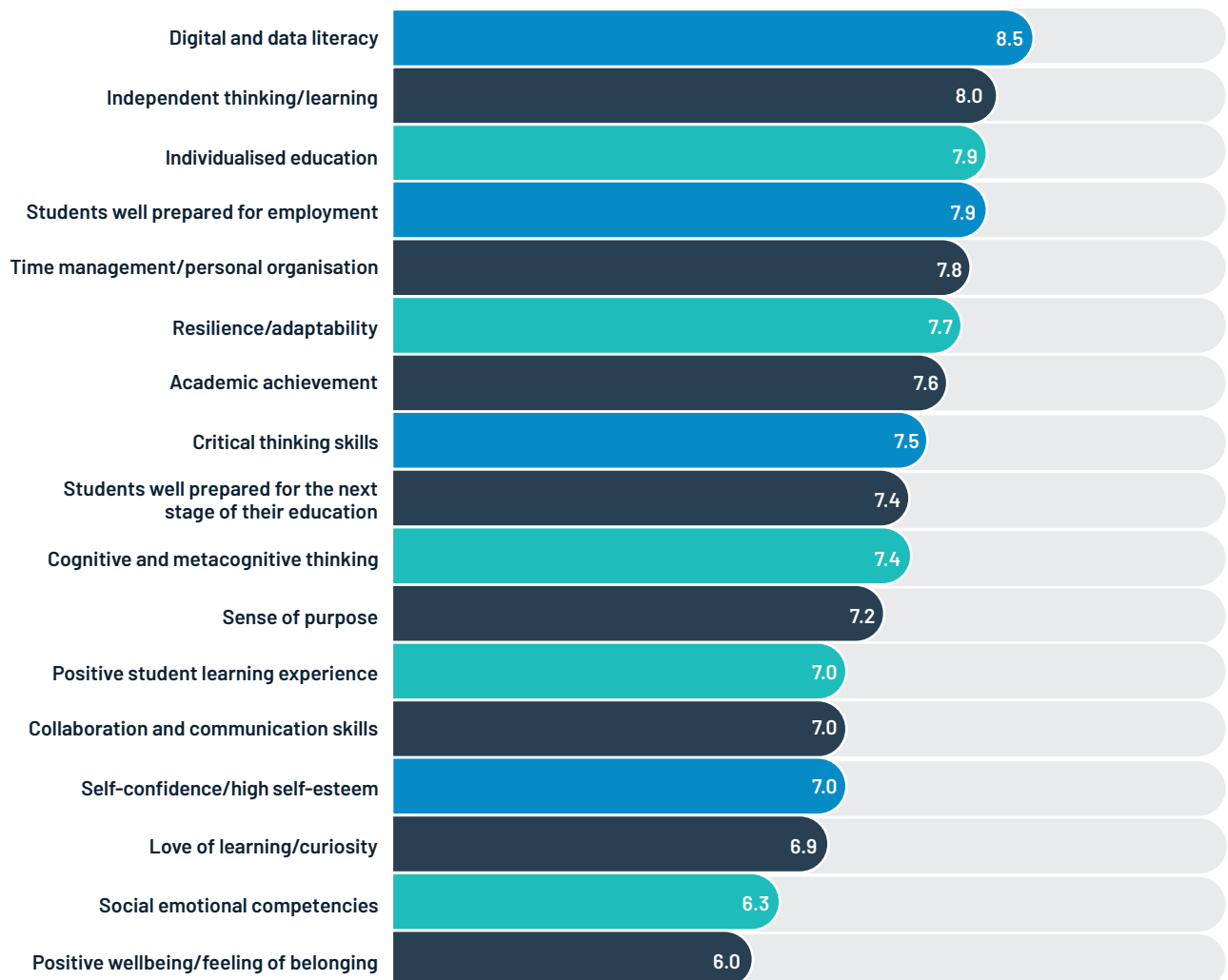
## Possibilities for hybrid education

Existing literature suggests that hybrid learning should be considered not only to accommodate pandemic restrictions, but for education outcomes that may not be achieved in the classroom setting alone. A joint report by UNESCO and ITU (International Communication Union) regards hybrid learning as a “promising solution for a pedagogy that leverages technology to ensure equitable, quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.”<sup>23</sup>

Blended and hybrid teaching and learning practices using technologies such as virtual and augmented realities, simulations and immersive environments, and cloud computing are also purported to have pedagogical benefits.<sup>24</sup> Further, some students have reportedly developed better adaptability, personal organisation and time management skills in online learning environments.<sup>25</sup>

These findings also aligned with our survey findings. As identified in Figure 8, participants perceived hybrid learning to be more effective in the following outcomes – digital and data literacy (8.5), independent thinking and learning (8.0), individualised education (7.9), students well prepared for employment (7.9), time management/personal organisation (7.8) and resilience/adaptability (7.7). These are some of the important skills needed for tomorrow’s digitally enabled workforce, where employers will increasingly seek job applicants who can think for themselves, are intrinsically motivated and team-oriented, and exhibit resilience and determination.<sup>26</sup>

**Figure 8: How would you rate the effectiveness of the hybrid learning model in achieving the following education outcomes for students?**



Source: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 87

Given that both physical and digital learning environments can lead to the development of different skillsets, hybrid learning could perhaps become the new norm for schools in COVID-normal times. Students may become more flexible and capable of switching between learning modes as they become familiar with online and onsite learning. A 2020 research study conducted among Gen Z Australians (aged 16-24) also found that the majority of school (63%) and tertiary (77%) students saw their ideal learning situation as a hybrid one (mix of learning from home and on-site).<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, from parents' perspective, **ISV's remote learning research** conducted in 2020 found that although learning during the pandemic presented its own challenges, the shift in responsibility in learning encouraged parents to be flexible to new approaches in education.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, a national survey conducted in 2021 showed that what parents want from their child(ren)'s education remains largely unchanged over the last five years. Parents across all education sectors wanted their child(ren) to leave school happy and well rounded, prepared for employment and able to think for themselves.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, the key trends and challenges highlighted in **ISV's navigating the future of education research** conducted in 2019 also remain largely unchanged despite the pandemic. The paper emphasised the need for schools to:

- encourage learning for the global future (such as fostering authentic student-centred learning and student agency),
- embrace digital challenges and technological revolution (by encouraging digital resilience and competency, incorporating the right technology in the school, using evidence-based data to enable an adaptive system), and
- enable educators of tomorrow (using technology to enhance learning, reskill and upskill teachers such as on digital literacy).<sup>30</sup>

The pandemic has not changed this, but it has accelerated the urgency of these areas, particularly concerning the rise of education technology.

While the objectives of education and schooling today remain largely unchanged, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic highlights a significant shift. How education is delivered may need to be re-imagined to adapt to the volatility in school operations and to better reflect emerging and changing needs of learners. It is important for schools to continue to reflect and evaluate their learning model to ensure it aligns with the school's educational philosophies and student needs.

*"It would need to serve a purpose, it would need to align with our educational philosophy. We would need to ponder how can we deliver a hybrid educational model that has integrity for students both online and in class."*





When deciding whether to implement a hybrid model, schools should consider hybrid teaching at the learning activity level, where participants collectively engage the digital, interpersonal and experiential strengths of everyone in the room, wherever the room, with an emphasis on student centred approaches to meet diverse learning needs. As highlighted by Hybrid Pedagogy Inc., *“the word “hybrid” has deeper resonances, suggesting not just that the place of learning is changed but that a hybrid pedagogy fundamentally rethinks our conception of place...it is about bringing the sorts of learning that happen in a physical place and the sorts of learning that happen in a virtual place into a more engaged and dynamic conversation.”*<sup>31</sup>

Schools could assess the opportunities/benefits and the potential risks associated with hybrid learning approaches in their school context. This could include the roles of teachers and educators, teachers' support and training, pedagogical and learning environments, curriculum alignment, content creation and customisation, flexibility of delivery and equitable access. While hybrid learning may not work for all students, a flexible and open mindset to meet individual needs and circumstances would be a positive first step.

Many families may still expect conventional classroom education and there are other drivers within the school system that support traditional teaching methods. The role of a school principal is therefore pivotal in driving the strategic agenda as the sector adapts to change. School leaders will need to communicate the purpose and benefits behind implementing a hybrid model with school staff, families and the wider community if and when they decide to transition to a hybrid learning approach.

There is no one-size-fits-all hybrid learning model. An effective model should be contextually developed and implemented depending on various factors such as teacher capacity, teaching and learning tools and resources, technological infrastructure, school culture and shared goals, as well as students' different learning styles and needs. Given the realities of today's world, the hybrid learning trend may continue to shape the education landscape. Education has never been a static process and schools will have to continue to navigate the shifting landscape to equip students with the skills for life and work.



## Conclusion

The survey findings in this report demonstrate that for many teachers and school leaders, there are concerns and challenges in implementing a hybrid model.

However, many of these concerns relate to the shift to emergency hybrid learning arrangements as a result of the pandemic without advanced planning, teacher training or models of best practice. However, early adopters of hybrid learning recognised that it is not a quick fix. The challenges in implementing hybrid learning can be mitigated when teachers' needs are better considered.

Hybrid learning may be a way to scale innovation and move beyond a blend of teaching and online instructions. There are opportunities for forward thinking educators to experiment with different learning approaches based on hybrid learning models, particularly if the COVID-19 pandemic and associated school closures or self-isolation continue in coming years.

COVID-19 has super-charged a shift in thinking, attitudes and behaviours at every level regarding the place of digital skills in our lives. It has provided a good opportunity for education bodies to make significant progress in relation to student learning. The majority of teachers in our research showed an appetite to use digital technologies to facilitate deep learning and to rethink learning and how it takes place, recognising that it can and does occur within and outside the classroom walls. It is therefore important that school leaders continue to reflect deeply on the lessons observed during the pandemic and to persist in reimagining the role of education and how students may learn into the future.





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## Appendix

In your opinion, what is the definition of blended learning?

Coded open-ended responses	%	n
Multiple learning delivery modalities that incorporate online learning and face-to-face learning	66%	82
Primarily face-to-face learning delivery with opportunities to incorporate technology and online resources/ activities	16%	20
Learning enabled by technology	7%	8
An adaptation to remote learning	4%	5
Synchronous learning	1%	1
N/A or don't know	7%	8

Source: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 124

In your opinion, what is the definition of hybrid learning?

Coded open-ended responses	%	n
Multiple learning delivery modalities that incorporate online learning and face-to-face learning	45%	56
Two cohorts of students learning synchronously or asynchronously (a hybrid model)	26%	32
Similar to blended learning	9%	11
Online learning	5%	6
Primarily face-to-face learning delivery with opportunities to incorporate technology and online resources/ activities	4%	5
Synchronous learning	2%	2
Asynchronous learning	1%	1
N/A or don't know	9%	11

Source: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 124

## I Appendix

What changes did you make in your teaching practice to accommodate a hybrid learning model?

Coded open-ended responses	%	n
Created/utilised more digital content and platforms	35%	24
Used shorter/more precise/tailored instruction	19%	13
Modified learning tasks/ lesson plans/ more individualised learning	19%	13
More communication, check-ins, opportunity to ask questions	13%	9
More purposeful/time planning for both cohorts	13%	9
Offshore/out of class support	4%	3
Other	12%	8
Minimal/none	18%	12

Source: Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 68

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