



Specialist Market Report

The impact of COVID-19 on Education Technology in International Schools

August 2020



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Introduction

Faria Education Group is delighted to be supporting this independent report conducted by ISC Research, which surveyed the impact of COVID-19 on education technology in international schools around the world.

Over 15 years ago, Faria Education Group was founded to transition schools online from paper-based processes, saving schools time while providing a better experience for the whole school community. Today, Faria powers over 10,000 schools & districts and 3 million students with a suite of 6 services: ManageBac, Pamoja, OpenApply, SchoolsBuddy, AtlasNext, and CurriculumTrak.

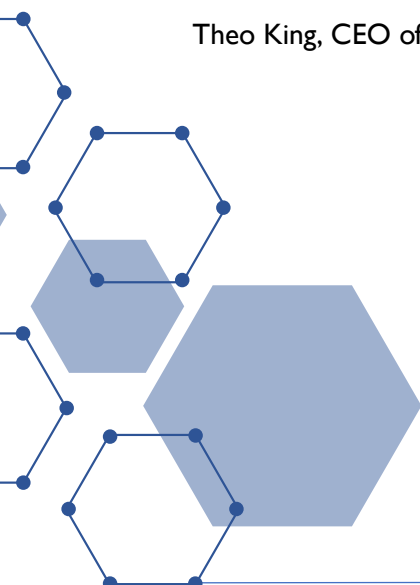
The international schools market has been setting standards for education innovation and resilience for many years and this was particularly evident throughout the COVID-19 crisis when schools were suddenly forced to close their campuses and deliver learning remotely to children of all ages. During this challenging time, we have maintained close contact with our schools and students, leveraging our expertise in online education to further develop our tools to support schools as they have flipped their brick-and-mortar schools into virtual learning environments.

We aim to support schools with this transition by providing an integrated technology suite spanning Admissions Management, Learning & Teaching, and Activities Management & Online Payments. We also now offer Virtual PD spanning School Leadership & Process, Curriculum Development, and Instructional Strategies.

Faria Education Group is very pleased to be supporting the publication of these results.

Theodore King

Theo King, CEO of Faria Education Group



This report is based on independent research conducted by ISC Research.
Faria Education Group was not involved in the production of the research or the report.

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Purpose of the survey

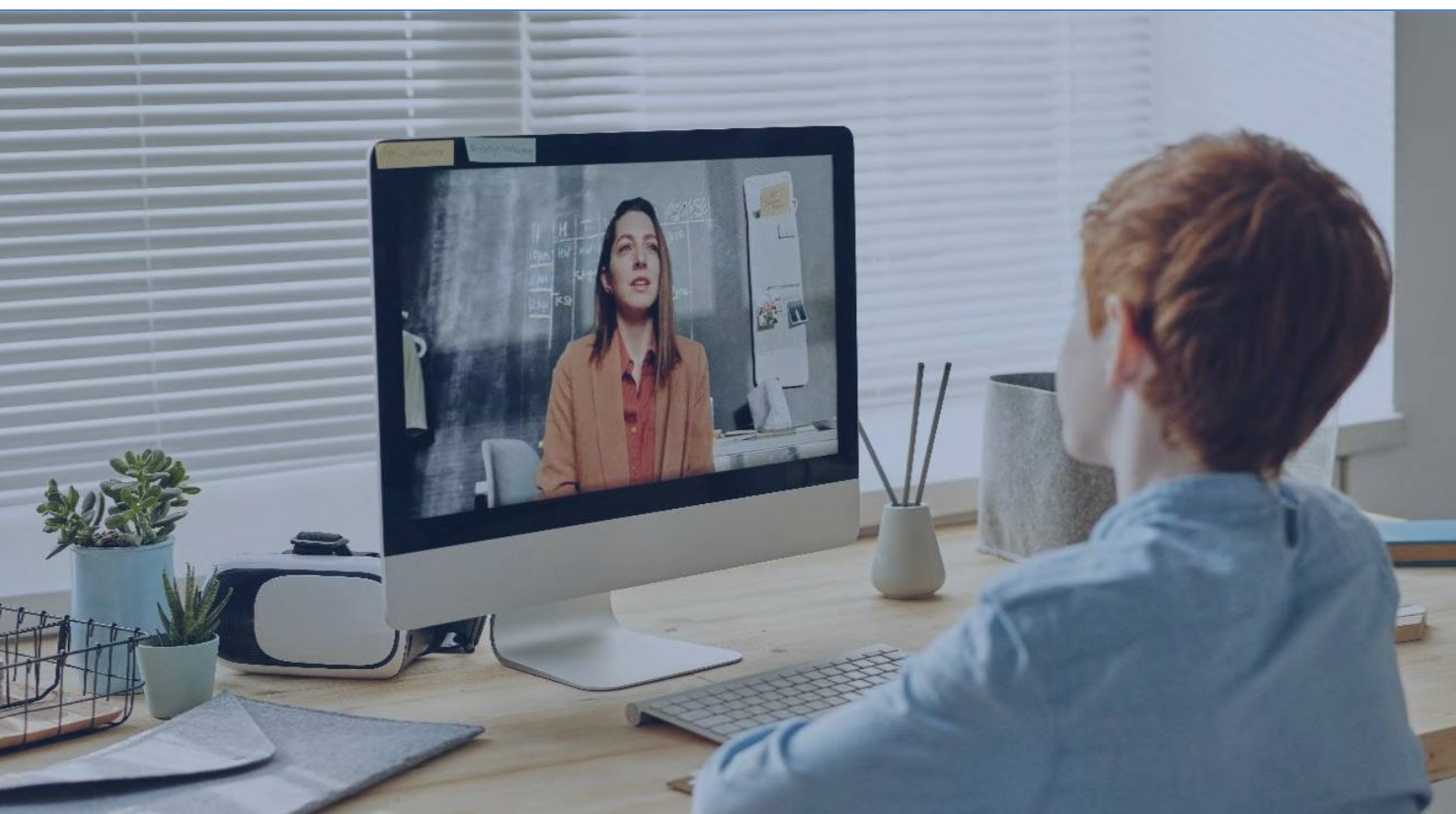
Education technology is a fundamental part of many international schools today. During campus closures throughout COVID-19 technology played a vital role in supporting the continuation of student learning.

This survey of international schools investigated learning platform access and effectiveness, the most significant challenges, solutions and support teachers experienced during distance learning, communicating with parents and assessing student progress during distance learning, and the impact of this on future plans for the school.

Research process and participants

School leaders and technology directors at a range of international schools were invited to participate in this study. The aim was to gather a breadth of research from international schools around the world.

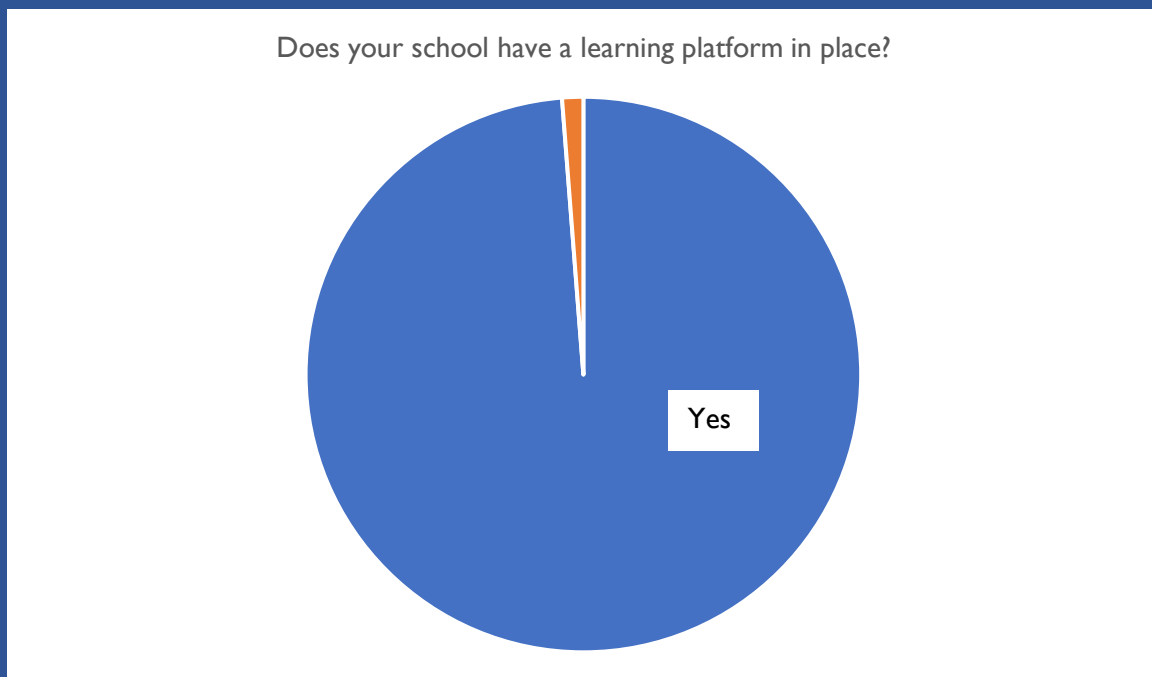
The survey was conducted in June 2020 and responses were received from 82 international schools located in 41 countries.



Survey results

Learning platforms

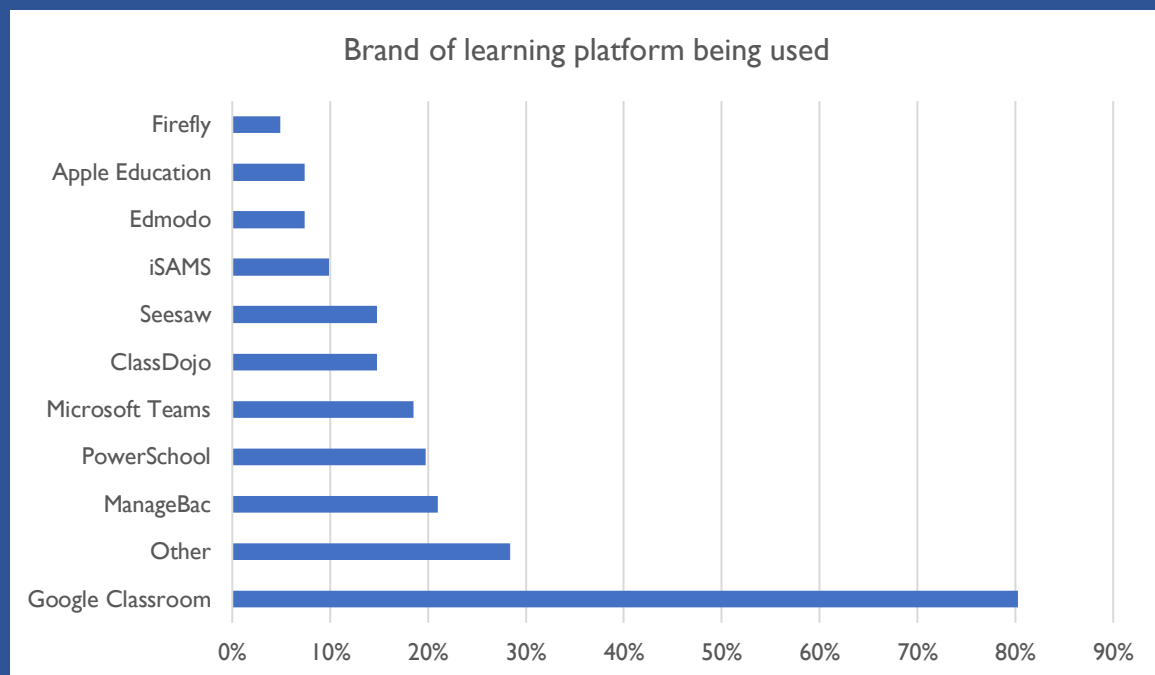
This question asked if the school already had a learning platform in place that the school was able to use to support remote learning.



99% of all international schools in the survey had a learning platform in place that they were able to use to support their distance learning during COVID-19.

Learning platform brands

The question asked what brand, or brands, of learning platform the school is using.



Google Classroom was the learning platform most used. It is being used by 80% of the international schools that responded to the survey

In addition to the brands listed above, other brands mentioned by survey respondents included Capita SIMS, Engage, Schoology, Veracross, Canvas, Clever SSO, Hapara, Formative, Teamie, and Brightspace.

Several schools use a combination of platforms.

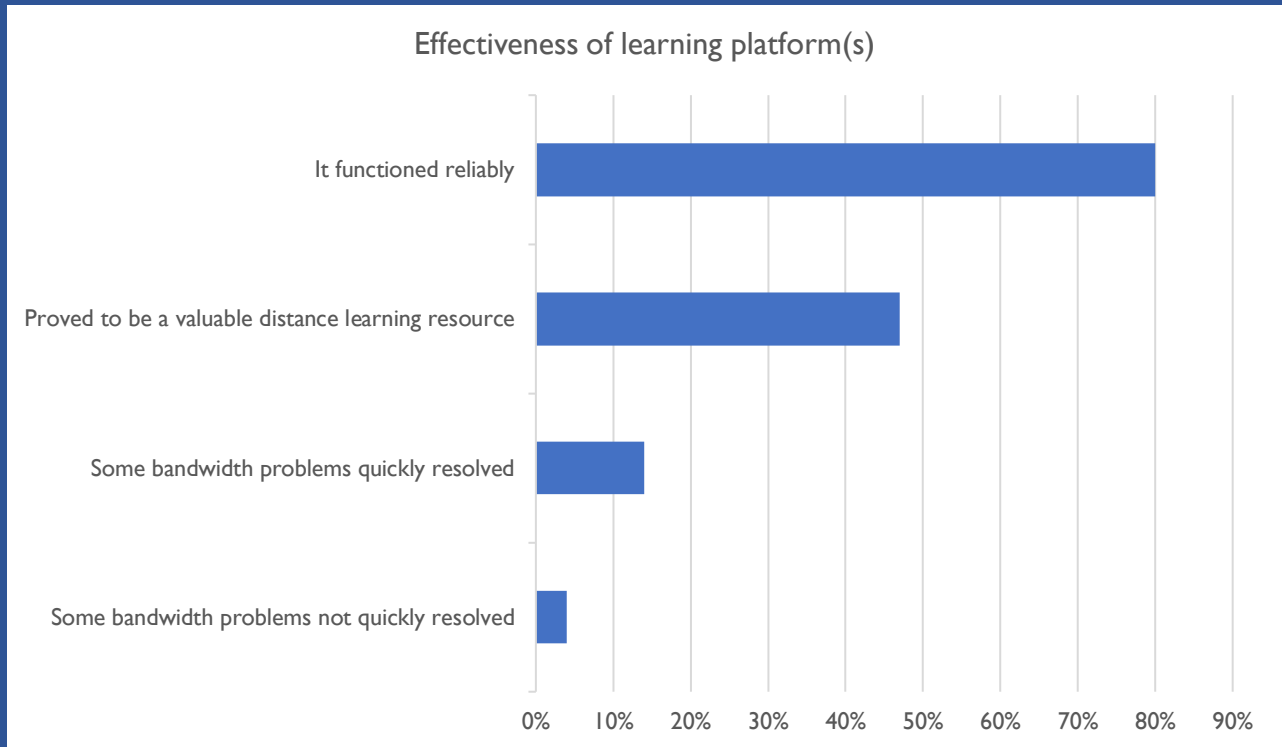
One school said it built an internal Google site with resources. Several schools used Zoom.

Symplice Oscar M. Athodjinou, IT Officer at Alrayan International School in Ghana said:

“ManageBac, Seesaw, Google Classroom were platforms we were already using before the lockdown of Covid-19. Yes, it was not easy from the first week of lockdown, but at the end everything went smoothly. Distance learning experience during this Covid-19 pandemic has been the most wonderful one. We were really prepared for that, despite challenges here and there, and I really give an applause to the entire ARIS community for that big success.”

Learning platform effectiveness

This question asked how effective the learning platform was to support distance learning during the campus closure.



80% of the international schools surveyed said their learning platform(s) functioned reliably throughout the period of distance learning. 47% said their learning platforms proved to be a valuable educational resource to support distance learning.

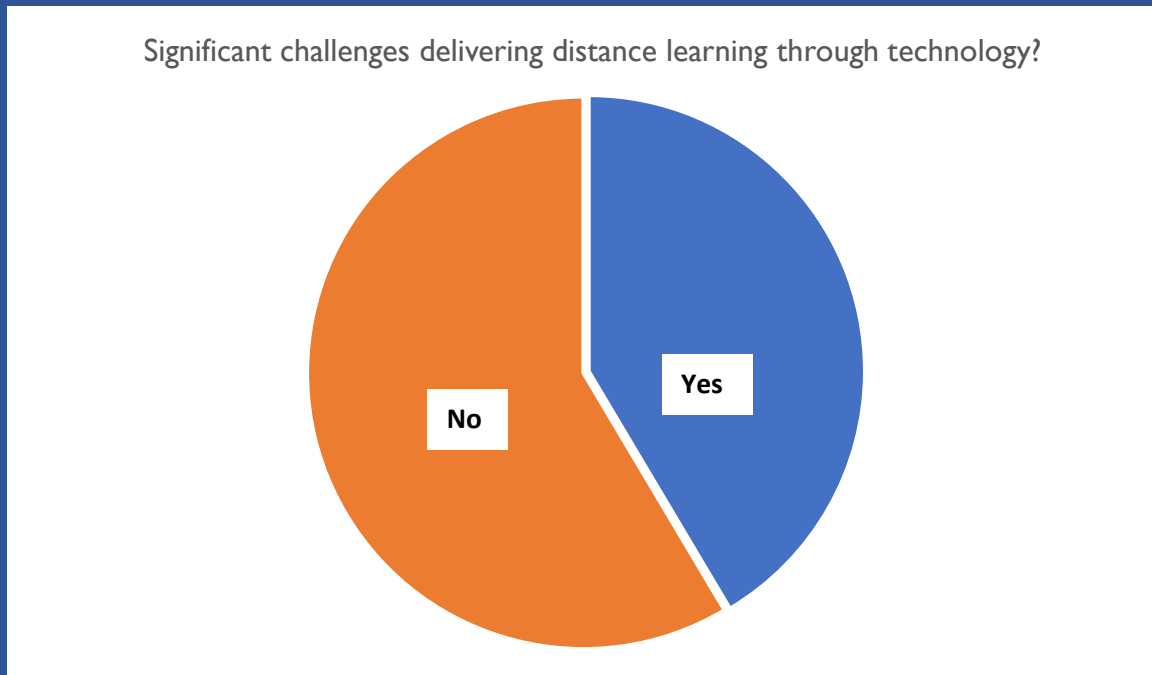
Although 17% of the international schools experienced some bandwidth challenges, most problems were related to local connections or server overloads. Only 4% of respondents said these problems were not quickly resolved.

Pamela Sephton, Director of Education at Asian Hope Schools, Cambodia said: *"Platforms were in place before we went to remote learning and functioned well, so moving over wasn't too much of a problem. We were able to adapt as we moved forward. I don't think there will be any major changes to how we use the technology once we are all back in school. Teachers may use video in advance more and follow up in the classroom."*

One school that had designed its own app, experienced technical issues with it and turned to brand solutions (iSAMS and Google Classroom) instead.

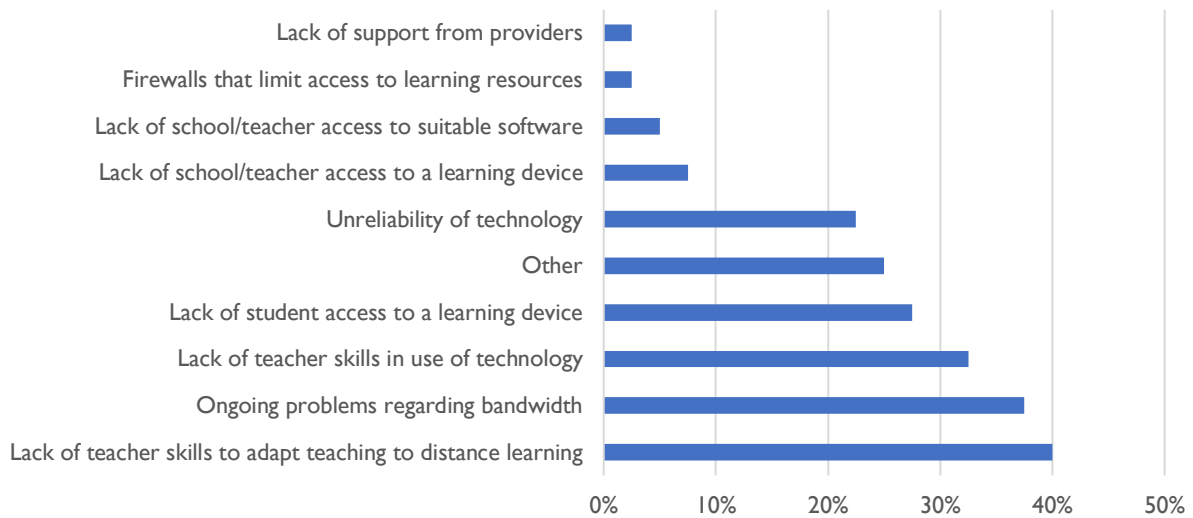
Distance learning through technology

International schools were asked if they experienced significant challenges delivering distance learning through technology during their campus closures. 58.5% said they had no significant challenges, but 41.5% said they did experience significant challenges.



For those schools that experienced significant challenges, the biggest problems were caused by internet restrictions, lack of teacher skills in both adapting their teaching and using the technology, and lack of student access to devices:

Why distance learning through technology has been most challenging

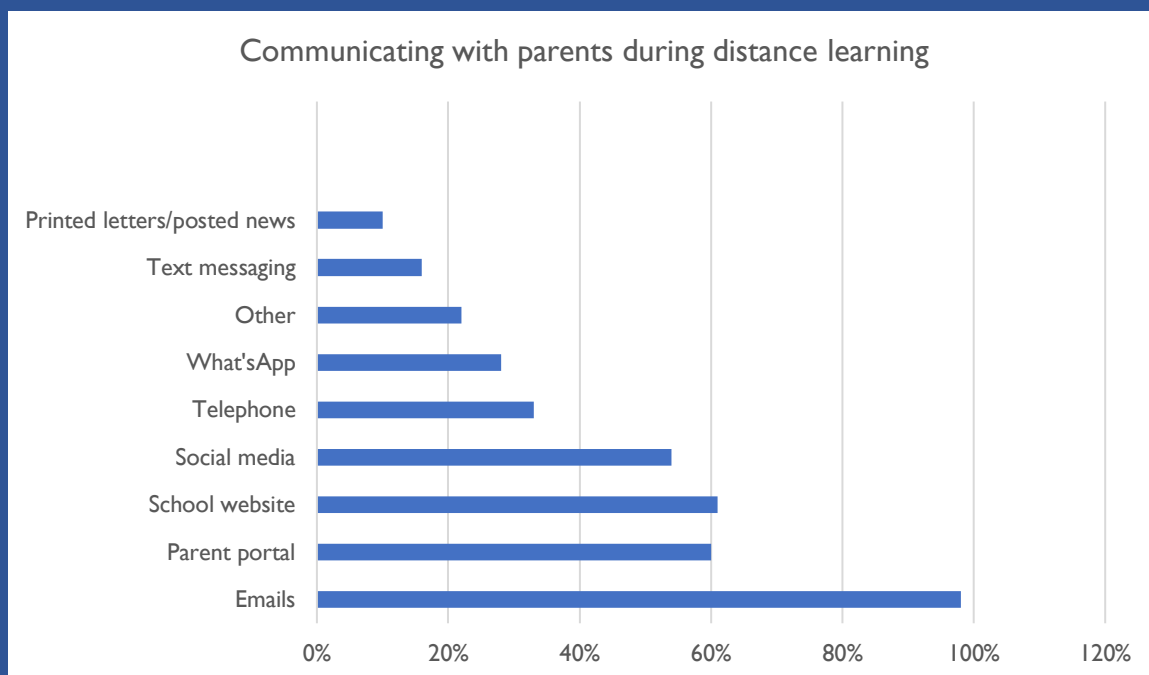


Peter Astbury, IT Director at Transylvania College in Romania summed up the comments of several schools: “*Younger students struggle to access it [distance learning] independently and it is difficult for parents to provide the required support, particularly when they have multiple children or also have to work from home themselves.*”

Other challenges that were provided by respondents included: new expectations for teachers with no time to prepare, a lot of change which occurred very quickly, longevity of campus closures putting extended pressure on technology, use of different devices by students with different connectivity plans causing connectivity issues, lack of student engagement, lack of authenticity of student assessment and teacher feedback, and leadership inexperience of distance learning resulting in inadequate school policy.

Parent communication and distance learning

This question asked international schools how they communicated with parents to inform, guide and support them during campus closures and the forced period of distance learning. Emails, the school website, the school’s parent portal and social media were the most used routes:



Other solutions included Seesaw, Facebook, a school-based communications app, Zoom and Microsoft Teams.

Fairgreen International School in the UAE said it hosted weekly video messages, as well as using emails and social media, to connect with parents.

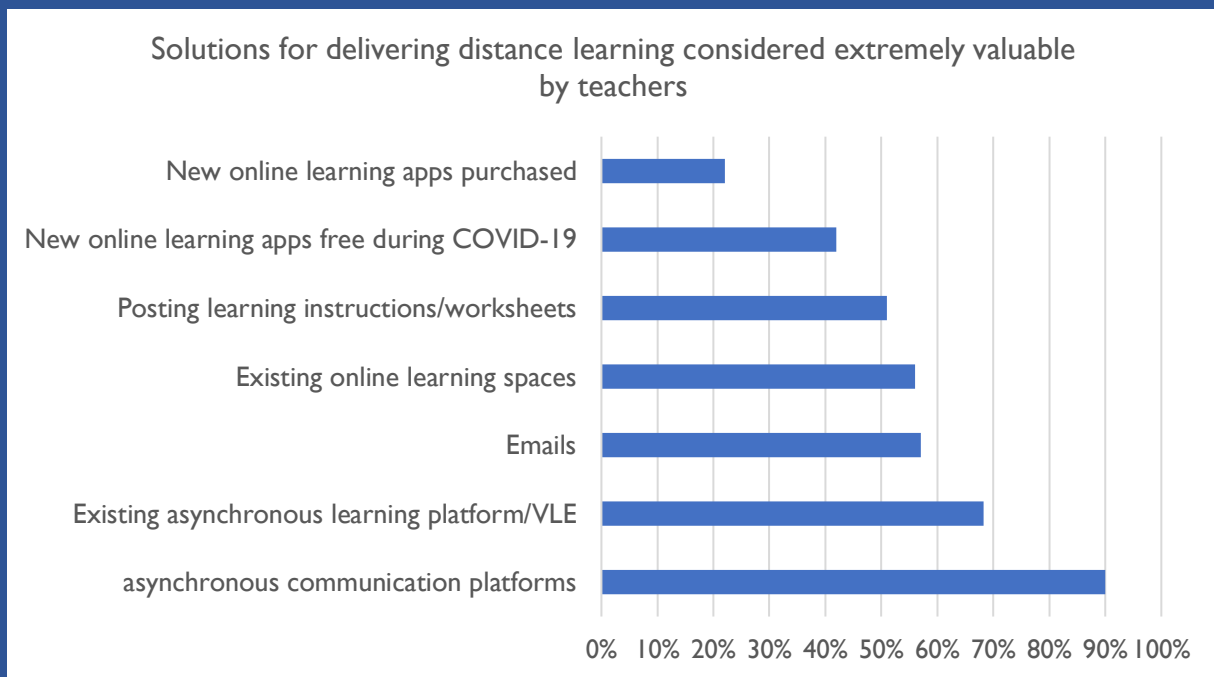
Ryan Persaud, Director of IT at International School of Curitiba in Brazil said: *“The role of parents cannot be understated. They became teachers instantly and the partnership was incredible. Our success with virtual learning would not have been possible without a strong partnership with them and our PTO [parent teacher organisation]. We used a variety of tools to communicate with parents: PowerSchool and Unified Classroom, Mailchimp, our website, Instagram and Facebook, WhatsApp, as well as Zoom webinars.”*

Best distance learning solutions for teachers

This question asked international schools what their teachers considered were the most valuable solutions for delivering distance learning to the children in their classes.

The solution considered extremely valuable to most teachers in the research was access to synchronous communication platforms. This was considered extremely valuable by 90% of the international schools that were surveyed.

Other solutions that teachers considered extremely valuable were existing asynchronous learning platforms or VLE, emails, existing online learning spaces, and 51% of schools said posting learning instructions and worksheets was extremely valuable:



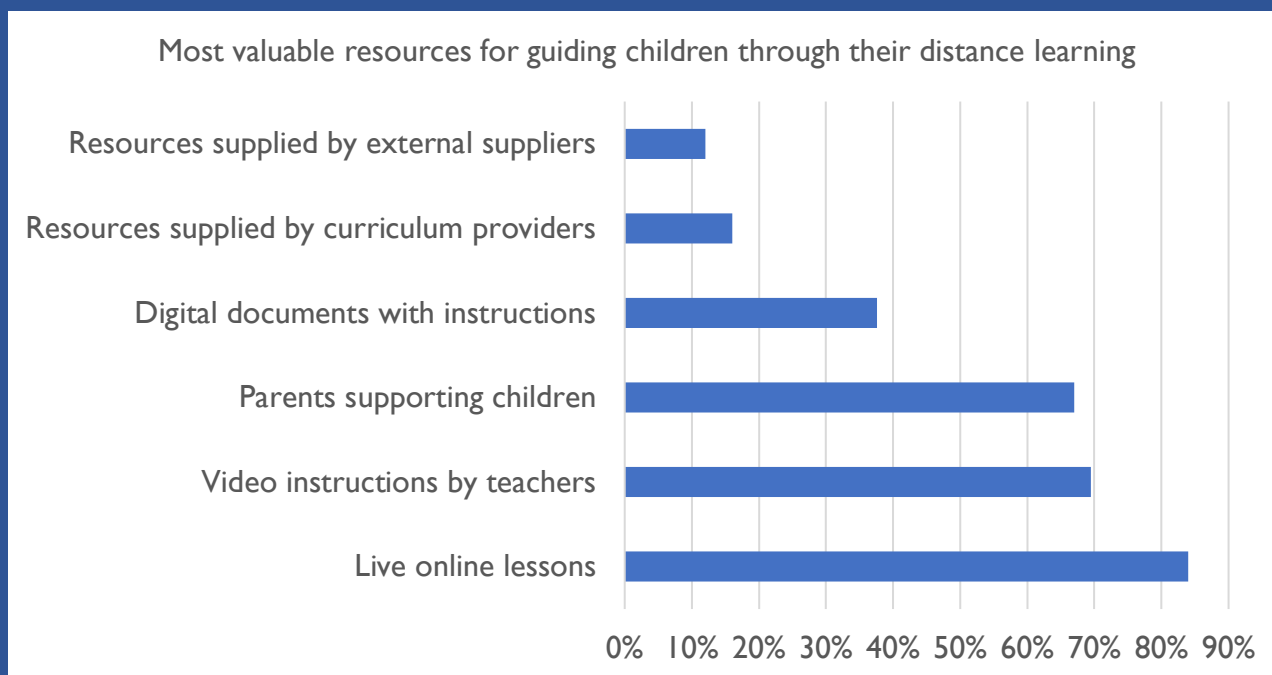
Note: Examples of synchronous communication platforms include Skype, Zoom, and Google Meet. Examples of online learning spaces include school website or portal.

At Green Shoots International School in Vietnam where challenges with distance learning included a lack of student access to a learning device, and lack of teachers skills in use of technology, posting learning instructions was considered extremely valuable along with synchronous communication platforms. *“We delivered, or had available for collection, resources for families which changed twice per week,”* said Head of School, Dave Porter.

For most schools, a combination of solutions was considered essential for delivering the learning to students during campus closures. The International School Manila in the Philippines said: *“For our ES [elementary school] students and teachers, the combination of Zoom, Seesaw, Google Slides and Clever SSO has been core to delivering teaching and learning. For MS [middle school] and HS [high school], Zoom, Google Classroom and Clever SSO were our core systems.”*

Best resources for guiding students through their learning during campus closures

The question asked schools about the most valuable resources considered by their teachers for guiding their students through the learning. Live online lessons were the most popular, identified as extremely valuable by 84% of schools in the survey:



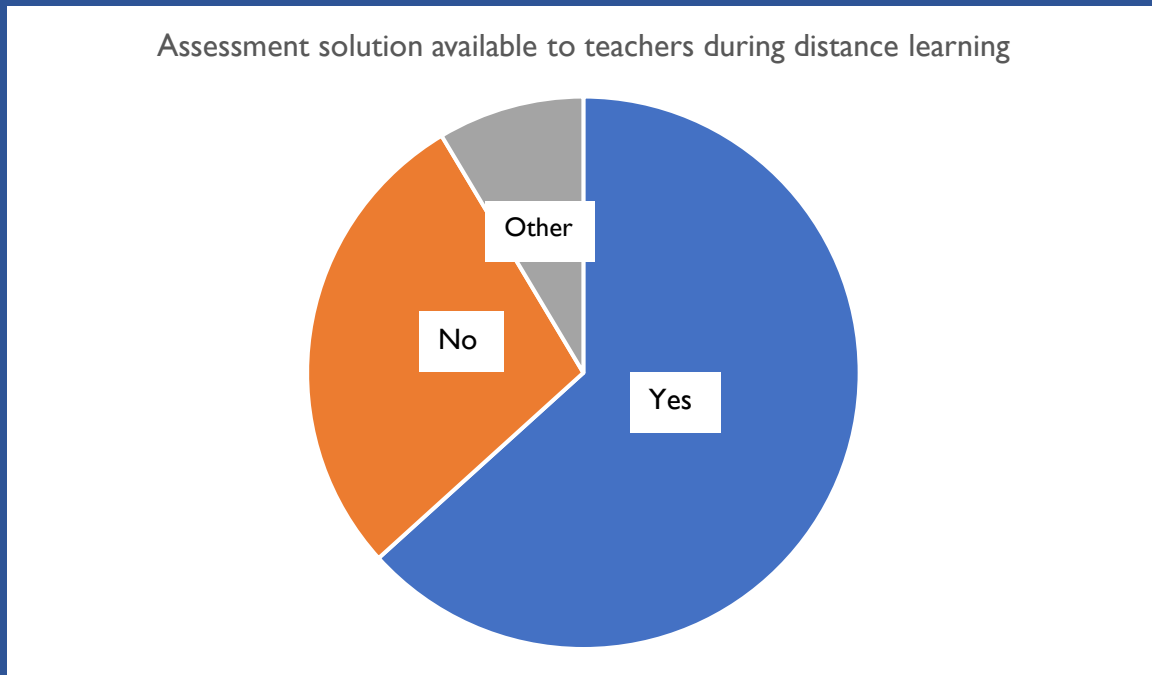
The resources for guiding children during distance learning that were considered extremely valuable by over 65% of all international schools in the survey were live online lessons, video instructions by teachers, and parents supporting children at home.

The majority of international schools did utilise live online lessons and video instructions from teachers. Only 2% of schools in the survey did not use live online lessons, and only 1% did not use teacher videos to guide children. 11% did not use resources supplied by curriculum providers, and 12% did not use resources supplied by external suppliers.

Many schools commented about parental involvement and how valuable that was to children's success during distance learning. *"Our parents are our biggest supporters and through their constructive criticism, were able to guide the school with how the online tuition was going for them at home. Along with the teachers, they are the driving force for our improvement. One minute the school was open, the next it was closed. Like the rest of the world, we went from being classroom practitioners to online lecturers and deliverers overnight. We had no idea if we were doing this correctly or not and needed feedback from our community to drive us in the direction [they] thought we should be going. Mistakes were made along the way, but we will learn from this... We surveyed the parents bi-weekly asking questions regarding [their] satisfaction [of] distance learning, quality, quantity, etc. We then had weekly Zoom meetings for parents by invitation to discuss results and room for improvements... When this is over, we are going to record everything that went well and everything that did not so that when this happens again (and it will happen again) we are better prepared,"* said Graeme Lazell, Head of Tech at Nexus International School Malaysia

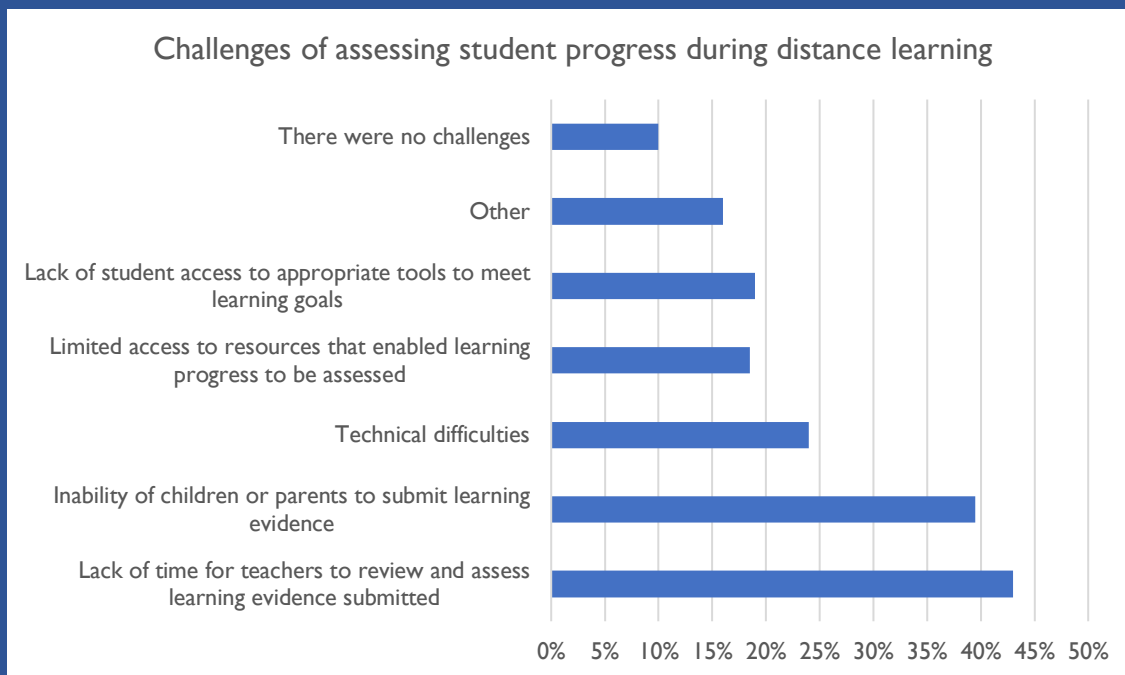
Assessment solutions during distance learning

This question asked international schools if they had an online testing system or assessment app that teachers were able to use to track student progress (formative or summative) during distance learning.



63% of international schools that responded to the survey have a solution for teachers to track student progress during distance learning.

Several schools created a solution through Google Classroom. Some schools used a variety of solutions including self and peer assessment, as well as teacher feedback. Several schools commented that success with assessment during distance learning has been limited and cited a number of challenges:



The most common challenge for schools was teachers having insufficient time to support students with their distance learning and also review and assess the learning evidence that was submitted. This challenge was experienced by 43% of schools that responded to the survey. Terry McAdams, Director of Learning Technology at Branksome Hall Asia in South Korea said: *“There was more planning required for online learning so marking was more work too.”*

Another common challenge was the inability of children or parents to submit learning evidence for assessment.

Many schools commented on the challenge of authenticity of learning evidence and clarity regarding the extent of parental involvement in the submissions of some students. Chrissie Sorenson, Head of School at Bavarian International School in Germany summed up the feedback from many schools in the survey. It was *“unclear whether some work was done purely by students or with parental ‘support’,”* she said.

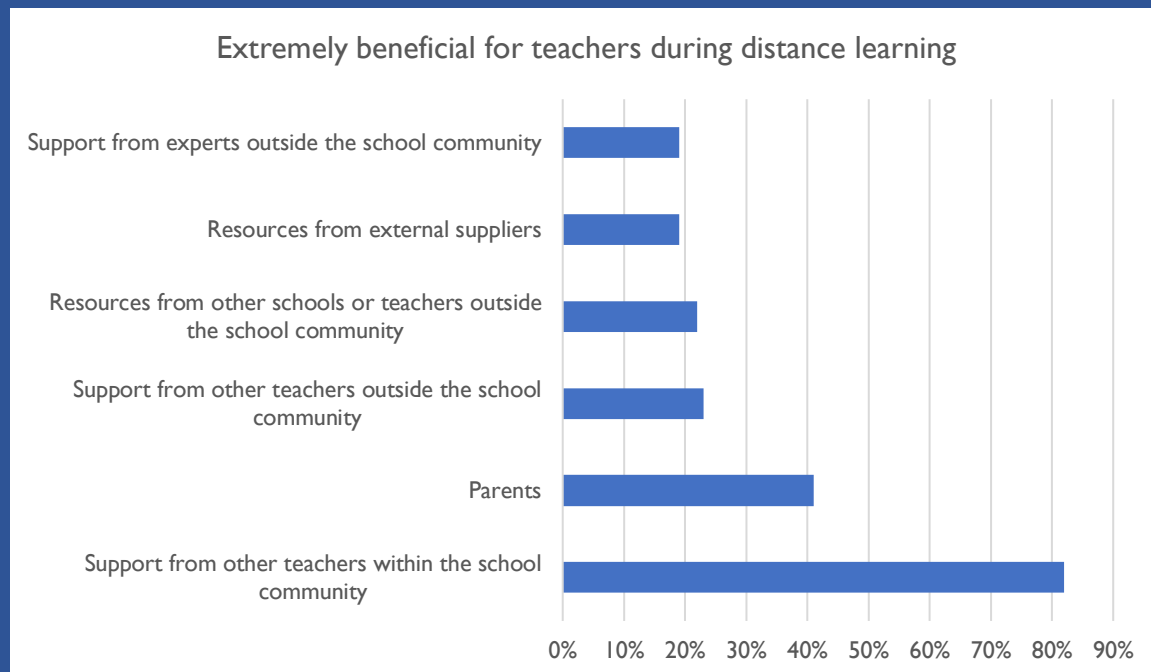
For Ben Morgan, Director of IT at United World College of South East Asia in Singapore, resourcing wasn't the issue. *“The shift in paradigm and therefore inexperience by teachers, students and parents are the main issue. Both to execution, but also to accepting the veracity of assessment performed remotely,”* he said.

Barrie McCliggott, Principal of Columbia International School in Japan said that *“assessment online can be done for some learning goals but is more difficult for others.”*

Only 10% of the schools said they experienced no challenges with assessment during distance learning.

Benefits to teachers during distance learning

This question asked schools what their teachers had considered to be extremely beneficial during the period of distance learning. Collegial support and parents were highly valued by teachers in most schools.



Colleague support was the most valued benefit for teachers during distance learning. All international schools in the survey said they benefited from this. 82% of schools said the support from colleagues was extremely beneficial. 18% of schools said it was somewhat or occasionally beneficial.

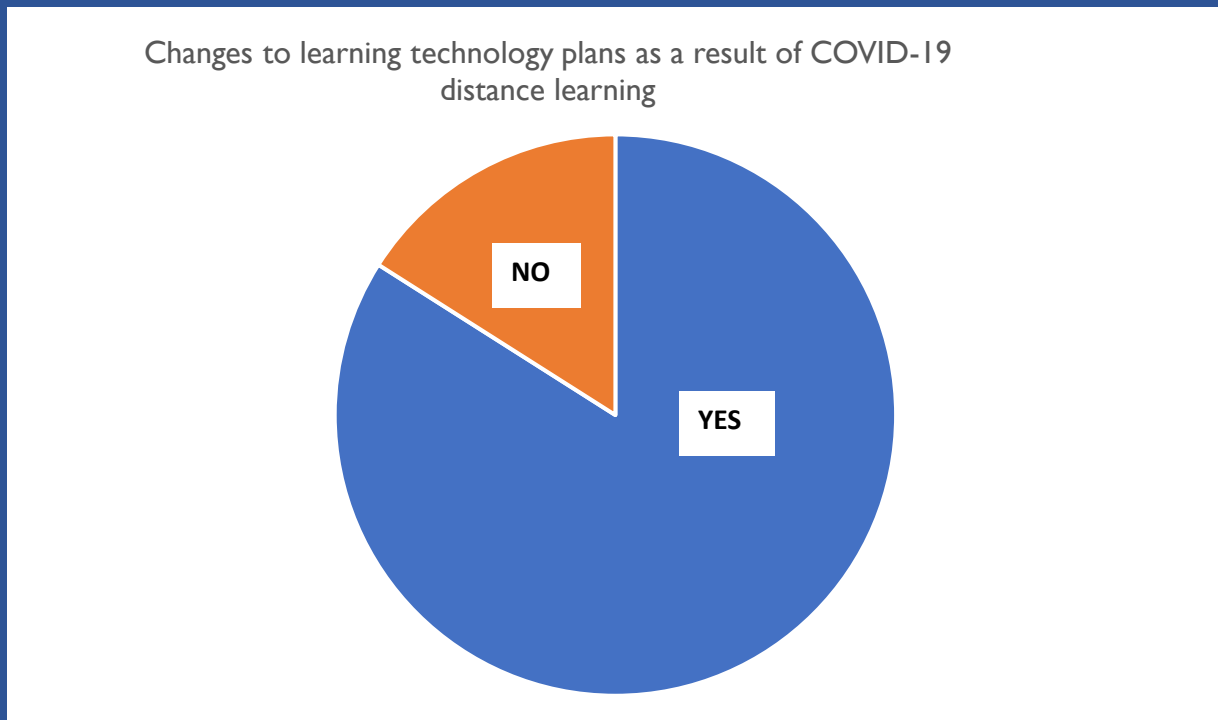
41% of schools said teachers considered parents to be extremely beneficial during distance learning. 6% of schools said teachers did not benefit from parents.

Support from other teachers outside the school community was found to be extremely beneficial by 23% of international schools. Other external support solutions that were highly valued were resources from other schools (considered extremely beneficial by 22% of the schools), resources from external suppliers (considered extremely beneficial by 19% of the schools), and support from experts outside the school community (also considered extremely beneficial by 19% of the schools). The International School of Manila commented that “everyone was learning from each other within school and from schools in the region”.

Nicola Singleton, Principal of Modern English School Cairo in Egypt said clear and decisive leadership was extremely beneficial during this period: “Policies and parameters that made expectations clear to all stakeholders and clarified approach, accessibility and responsibility,” she said.

A change for the future

This final question asked international schools if their future plans regarding the use of learning technologies have changed as a result of adapting to distance learning caused by COVID-19 campus closures. 84% of the schools responding to the survey said their plans have changed.



Rod Narayan, Technology Director at The American International School Vienna in Austria reflected the response of several schools: *“We have proposed an infrastructure upgrade,”* he said.

Amy Dugre, Director of Curriculum Innovation and Technology at the International School of Düsseldorf in Germany said: *“We’ve learned many lessons and plan to keep tools and some practices that made learning and communication better.”* Similar comments were made by a number of other schools.

Peter Astbury, IT Director at Transylvania College in Romania also echoed the comments of other schools. *“Despite the challenges, the situation has been beneficial in forcing all of us to upskill. I anticipate greater use of these skills when we return to the classroom, and we are planning further CPD on blended learning for September,”* he said.

Nicola Singleton, Principal of Modern English School Cairo in Egypt said there is now *“a higher level of competency and confidence amongst staff and students in how technology can benefit teaching and learning outcomes.”* She said that future plans will include *“greater integration of instructional technology to support/enhance learning.”*

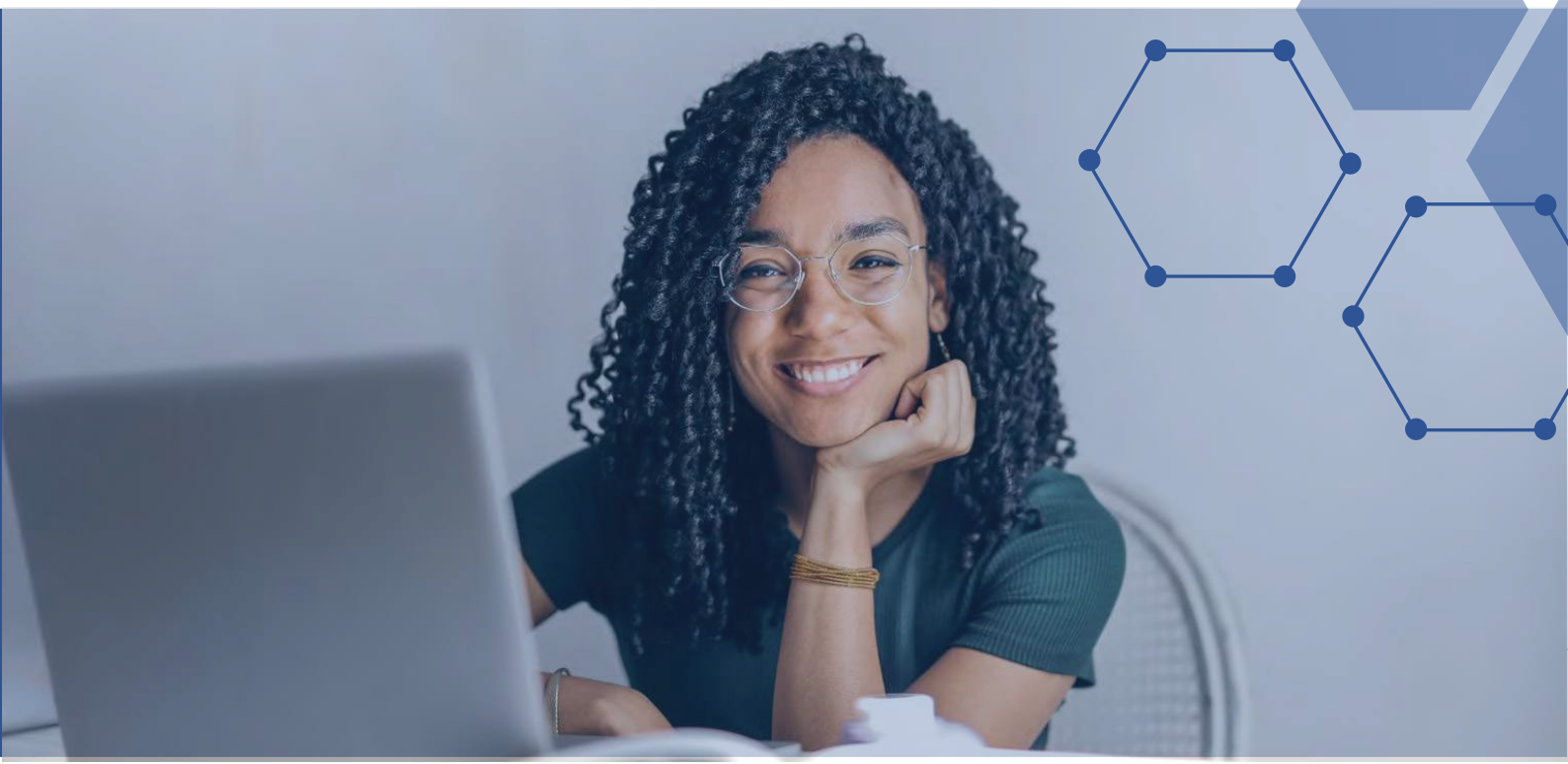
Sandra Ospina, STEAM coordinator at Misk Schools in Saudi Arabia said: *“We are moving to a more blended learning approach to make sure we are ready in case closures occur again, but also to help with personalisation of learning.”*

Mark Steed, Principal and CEO of Kellett School, the British International School in Hong Kong said the school is introducing *“educational continuity plans and scheduled annual distance learning days (like fire drills).”*

Pamela Sephton, Director of Education at Asian Hope Schools in Cambodia said: *“Teachers may use video in advance more and follow up in the classroom.”*

Ben Morgan, Director of IT at United World College South East Asia in Singapore said: *“Having seen how successful asynchronous learning can be for older students we are accelerating plans for changing how older students access the timetable/courses.”*

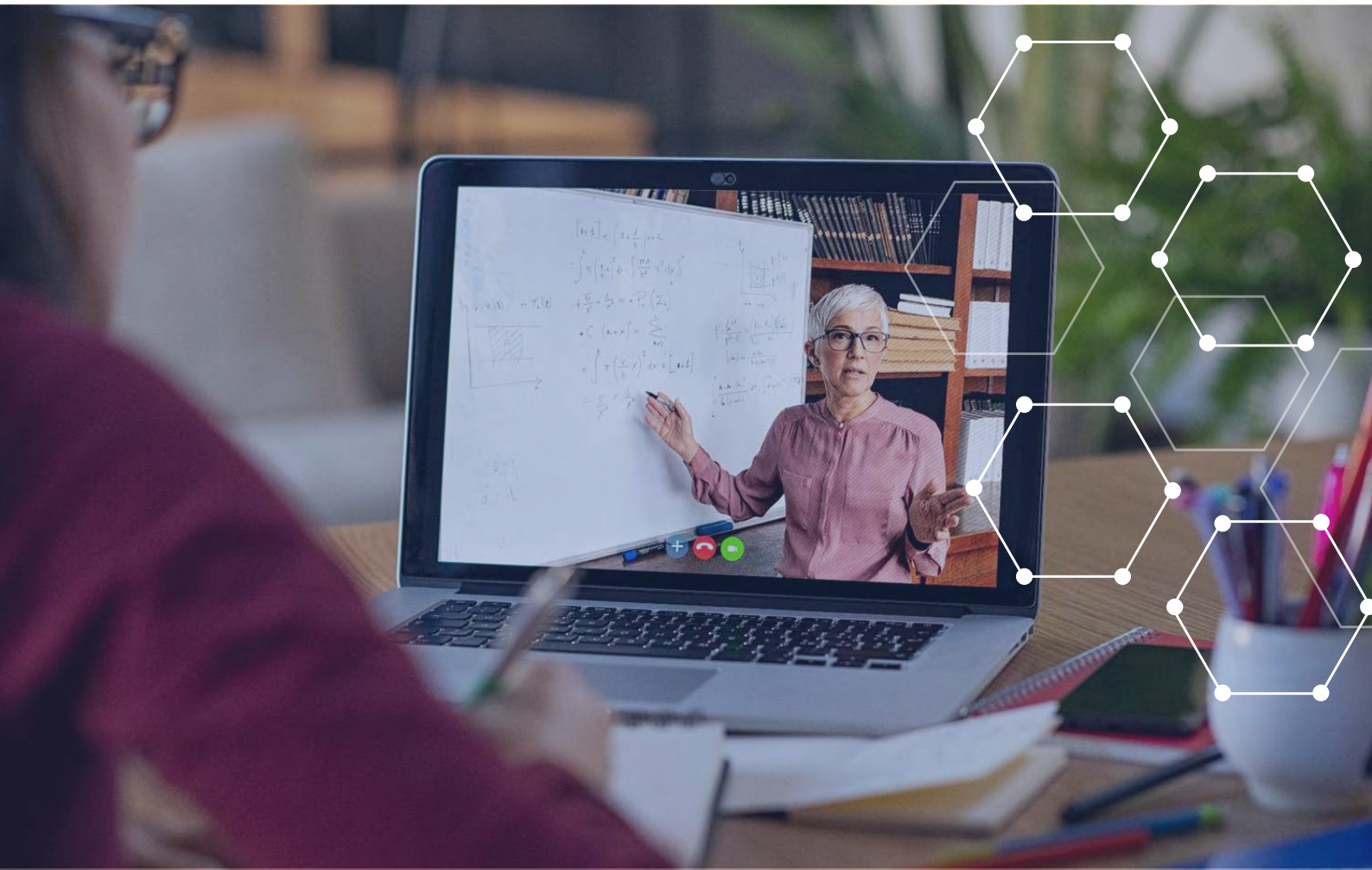
Ryan Persaud, Director of IT and Innovation at The International School of Curitiba in Brazil said: *“Students and teachers have all become more comfortable with technology, so we see this as a progression as we move forward. For example, we held a weekly webinar with parents during the Virtual Learning Program, this was immensely valuable in terms of communication and keeping parents informed. As we move forward, and possibly return to the physical campus, we see this as a potential tool for engaging parents, besides inviting them onto campus.”*



Conclusions

Education technology played a significant role during COVID-19 campus closures. Some international schools that participated in this research were well prepared with technology infrastructure before the pandemic, others were reasonably prepared. As a result, many international schools were capable of delivering effective distance learning.

Schools faced many challenges during COVID-19; most teachers learning to deliver distance learning as it happened. However, this study highlights technology progress during and, as a result of, campus closures. All international schools appear to recognise technology as an essential part of their infrastructure supporting many aspects of school life on campus as well as for distance learning. Some international schools see their experiences with technology during the campus closures as a catalyst to significant change for their future school development.



Acknowledgments

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- Joyce Whitby, President, Innovations4Education



This research was independently conducted and produced by ISC Research

ISC Research tracks the world's international schools market. It gathers and supplies intelligence and data on developments, challenges and opportunities within the international schools market. ISC Research sells in-depth reports, datasets and data solutions to schools and all types of organisations supporting international schools to inform strategic and development planning, market positioning, and market engagement. More information is available at www.iscresearch.com



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