



Teacher Re-entry Survey 2020–21

Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

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Key Findings

- Most of the teachers responding to the survey reported that the transition from fully remote to onsite teaching was emotionally difficult. Also, many had difficulties adjusting their daily routine to make the transition.
- During the first two weeks of the transition, a large majority of the respondents had a difficult time adjusting their instructional delivery from a 100% remote to a hybrid teaching situation. By the end of the school year, the adjustment had gotten easier for some, though a slight majority still reported difficulties.
- Most of the teachers believed their in-person students to be doing better both socio-emotionally and academically after returning to onsite learning, while a substantial minority believed those students to be doing about the same as before.
- Many teachers considered their still-remote students to be doing about the same *socio-emotionally* after teachers returned to school buildings, though a substantial minority thought those students were worse off than before.
- Conversely, more teachers believed their still-remote students to be worse off *academically* after teachers' re-entry, with a substantial minority of teachers considering those students to be doing about the same as before.
- A sizeable majority of the teachers considered their schools to be doing a good job of implementing the District's COVID-19 prevention measures.
- Many teachers cited poor virtual attendance and difficulties with hybrid teaching as major obstacles to effective teaching. Internet connectivity issues and Microsoft Teams issues were also frequently cited as inhibiting teaching effectiveness.
- However, teachers said they were not substantially hampered by the following obstacles:
 - Managing students' fear or anxiety about COVID-19
 - Login/credentialing issues
 - Student conduct issues
 - Poor in-person attendance

Introduction

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Shelby County Schools (SCS) conducted all teaching and learning activities fully online for most of the 2020–21 school year. However, the District reopened schools at the beginning of March, with all teachers and staff returning to their buildings to perform their work onsite. Parents were allowed to choose whether their child would finish out the school year virtually or transition back to the classroom, with elementary students returning to onsite learning first, followed by middle- and high-school students a week later.

Having to teach fully virtually for the first part of the school year was a substantial challenge for the District's teaching force, most of whom had had little or no experience teaching online. Moreover, the challenge of mastering a novel instructional delivery method was compounded by a host of other difficulties. Some of these were technological in nature, such as persistent connectivity, software, and/or hardware problems, along with a lack of technological savvy on the part of many parents and some students (especially the very youngest students, for whom online schooling was not really



Teacher Re-entry Survey 2020–21

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developmentally appropriate). Others were situational: many teachers had to teach online while simultaneously caring for their own children who were at home attending school virtually, and many of their students were not in ideal learning situations (having caregiving responsibilities of their own or not having a quiet space in which to learn, for instance). All of this was set against a backdrop of a raging pandemic that took an emotional toll on everyone: teachers themselves, their loved ones, their students, and their students' loved ones.

However, as challenging as the fully virtual portion of the school year was, the return to onsite teaching brought its own set of complications, as it was hardly a return to business as usual. For one, the pandemic had not significantly abated and vaccines were not yet widely available. Thus, prior to reopening, SCS released an updated S.A.F.E. Re-entry Plan and held numerous parent and teacher community sessions. The re-entry plan stipulated that all teachers, staff, and students would be required to wear masks while indoors and that social distancing would be enforced to the extent possible. To help facilitate this, schools were to stagger lunch schedules and make use of classrooms and outdoor spaces for eating, when masks would be off. Schools were also required to check everyone's temperature before allowing them into the building, and they were to implement enhanced cleaning protocols for common spaces and bathrooms, as well as allow additional time in the school day for increased personal hygiene.

Besides the new COVID-prevention protocols, the return to buildings was different from regular in-person schooling in another substantial way: the hybrid classroom. Because some parents opted to have their child continue virtual schooling from home while others opted to send their child back to school in person, the transition back to school buildings required teachers to adjust to yet another novel instructional delivery method: teaching a mix of online and onsite students at the same time. This was accomplished by continuing online instruction for all students via the Microsoft Teams platform, regardless of their learning setting. All students thus learned the same curriculum at the same time; when onsite students had recess and classroom breaks, those learning remotely took corresponding breaks at home.

2020–21 was an unprecedented school year that brought unprecedented challenges for teachers, staff, students, and parents. To better understand the experiences and perspectives of families and teachers during and after the pivotal transition from fully remote schooling to hybrid schooling, as well as to gauge its impact on students' well-being and learning, the District administered two surveys: one to parents and one to teachers. The parent survey was the subject of a previous report, while the teacher survey is the focus of this report.



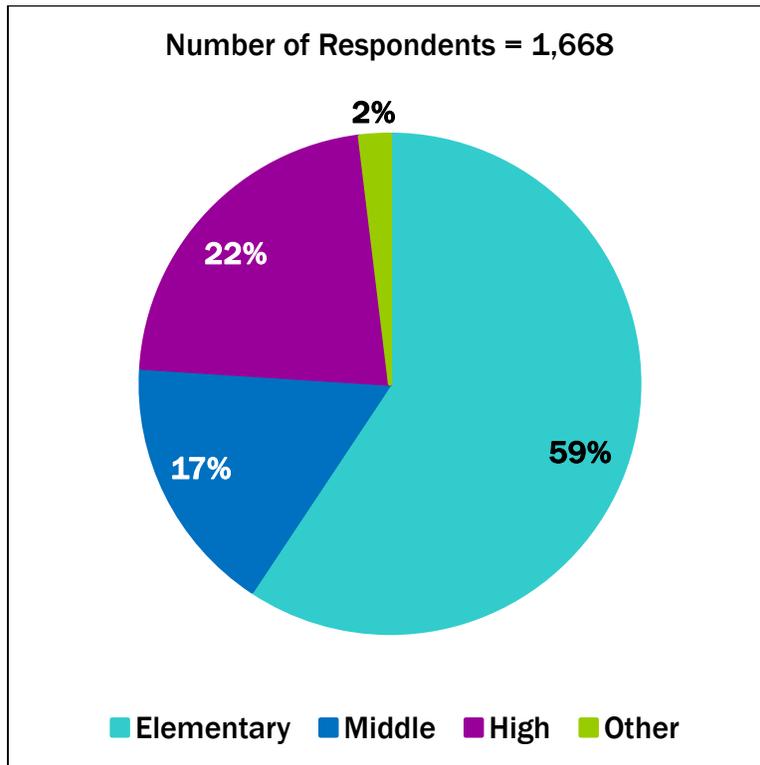
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Results

The teacher re-entry survey was administered online during the first half of June, 2021. It was publicized in the June 2 and June 9 editions of the *Teacher Weekly*, an email newsletter that goes out to District employees every Wednesday during the school year. The number of teachers who completed the survey was 1,668, the majority (59%) of whom were elementary teachers, followed by high school (22%) and middle school (17%) teachers, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Breakdown of respondents by grade band



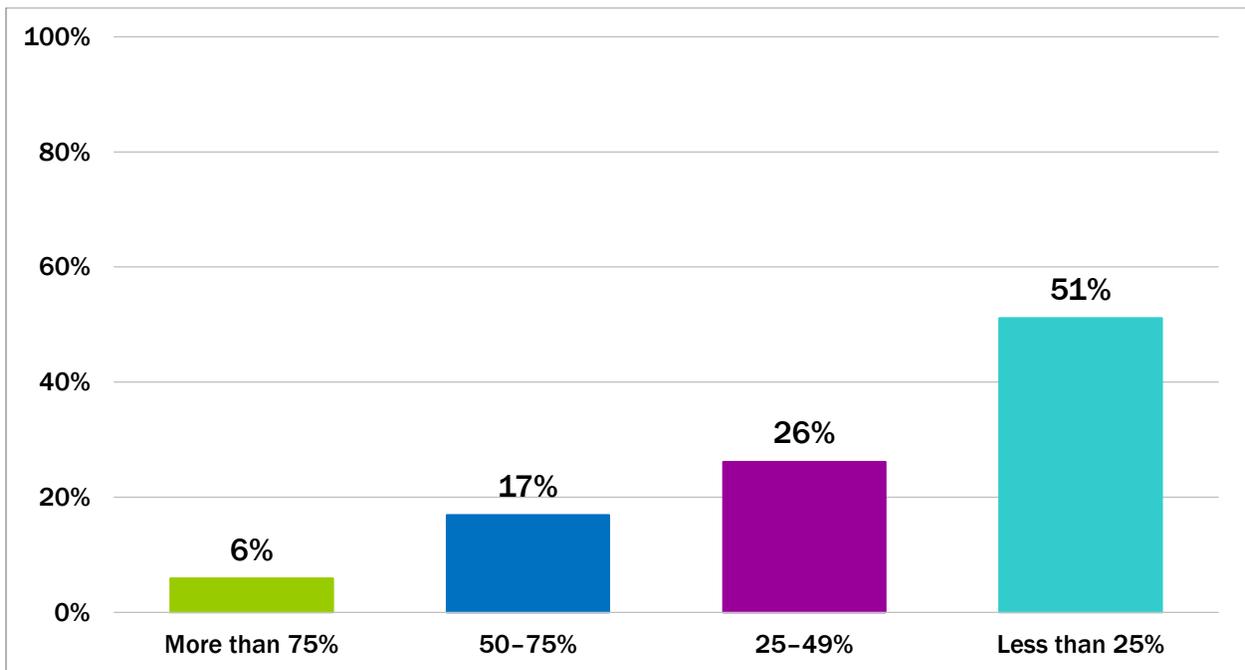


Teacher Re-entry Survey 2020–21

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Teachers' estimate of the proportion of their students who had transitioned back to the classroom is displayed in Figure 2. As the figure shows, the distribution of the teachers' students was weighted heavily toward remote learners. Over half (51%) of the teachers reported having fewer than 25% of their students attending school in person, and over a quarter (26%) estimated having 25–49% of their students onsite. Thus, more than three-quarters (77%) of the respondents had the majority of their students still attending school from home.

Figure 2. What proportion of your students have transitioned to in-person learning?



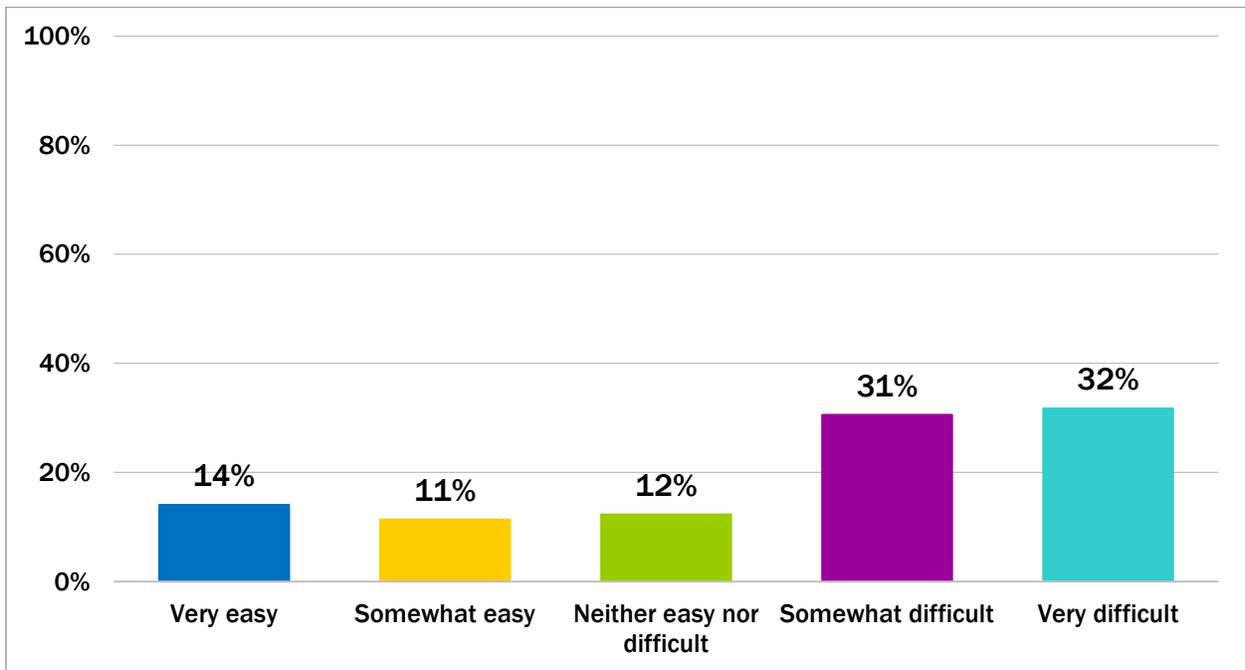


Teacher Re-entry Survey 2020–21

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Teachers were asked how emotionally easy or difficult returning to the school building was for them, the results of which are shown in Figure 3. Most (63%) reported that it was either somewhat or very emotionally difficult, with 32% saying it was very difficult. A quarter of the teachers reported the transition to be either somewhat or very emotionally easy, with 14% saying it was very easy.

Figure 3. How emotionally easy or difficult was it for you to return to the school building this semester?



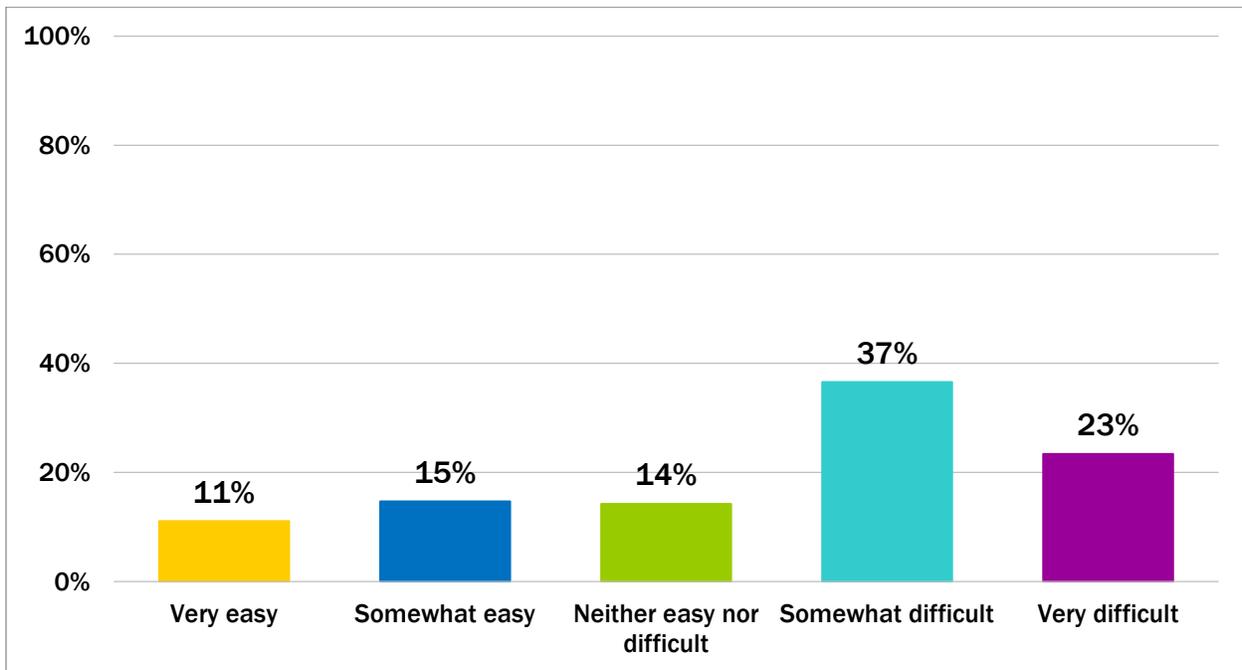


Teacher Re-entry Survey 2020–21

Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

Teachers were then asked how easy or difficult it was to adjust their daily routine to return to in-person instruction (see Figure 4). The majority (60%) of the teachers surveyed reported that it was either somewhat difficult or very difficult to adjust their daily routine, while just over a quarter (26%) found the task to be somewhat easy or very easy.

Figure 4. How easy or difficult was it for you to adjust your daily routine to return to in-person instruction?



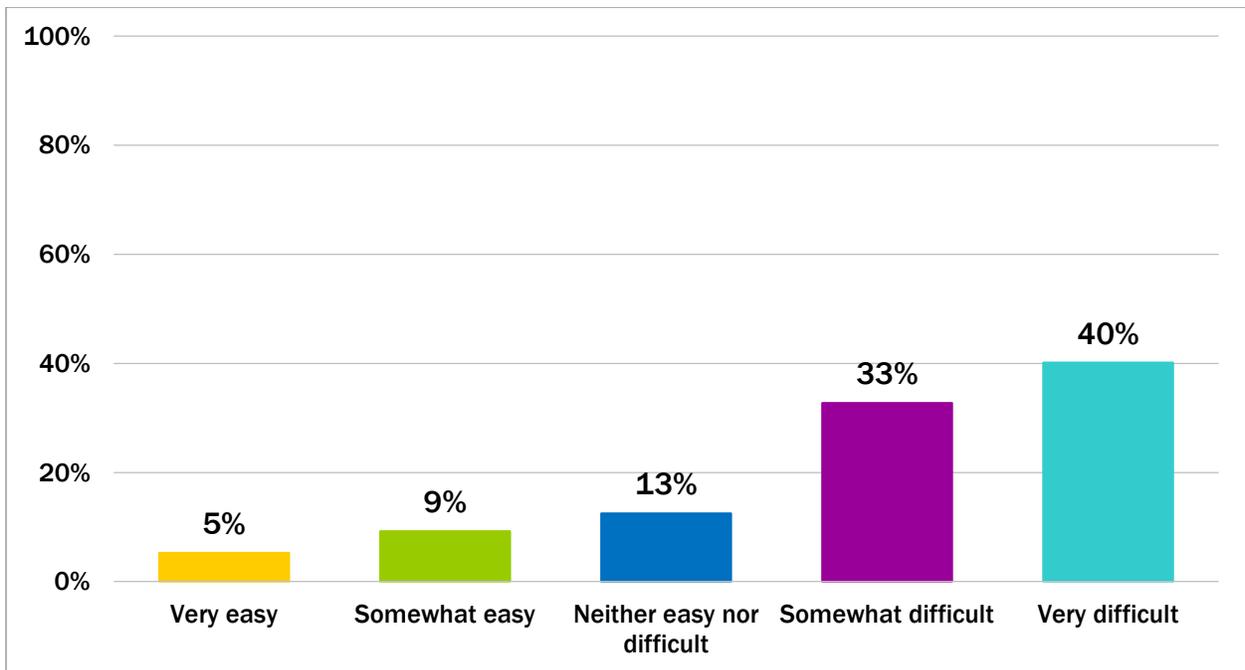


Teacher Re-entry Survey 2020–21

Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

Teachers were asked how easy or difficult it was, during the first two weeks of re-entry, to transition their instructional delivery from a fully remote to a hybrid situation (see Figure 5). Even more than the emotional or daily-routine aspects, the change from remote to hybrid instructional delivery appears to have been the most difficult aspect of the transition back to onsite teaching. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of the respondents found the adjustment to be somewhat or very difficult, with 40% characterizing it as very difficult. Only a small portion (14%) found the adjustment to hybrid instructional delivery to be somewhat or very easy.

Figure 5. During the first two weeks of re-entry, how easy or difficult did you find transitioning your instructional delivery from a 100% remote teaching situation to a hybrid teaching situation?



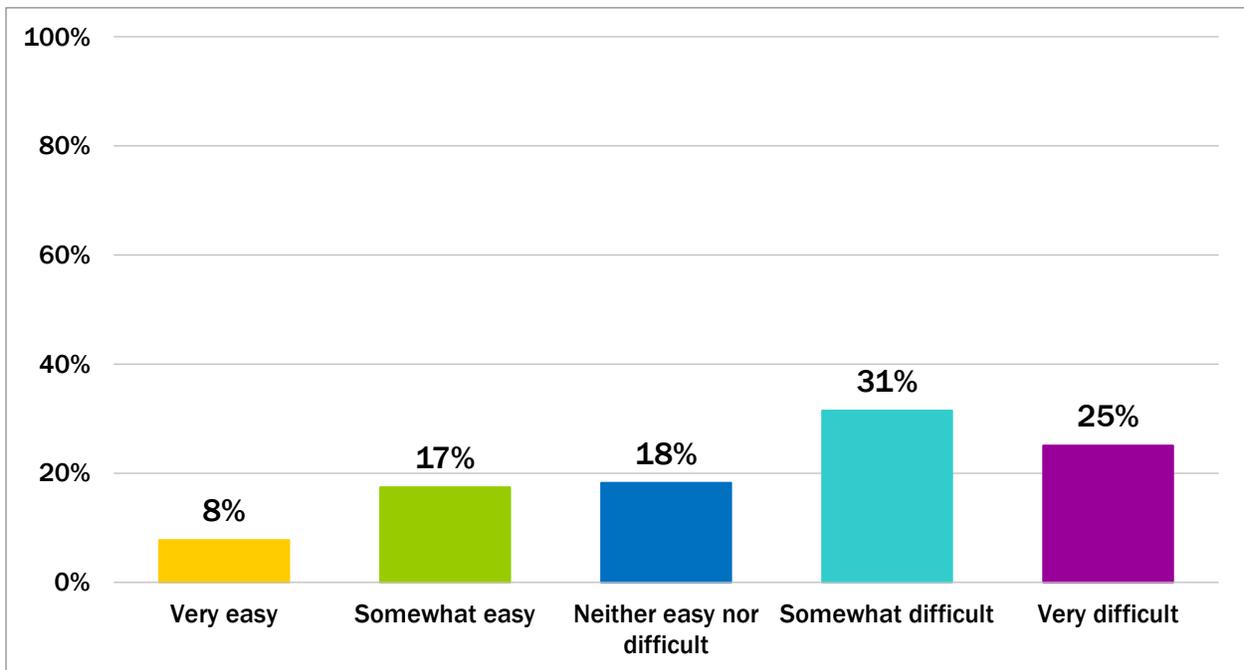


Teacher Re-entry Survey 2020–21

Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

Fortunately, the task appears to have gotten somewhat easier for teachers over time. Teachers were asked how difficult or easy they found hybrid teaching after having done it for a while. (The survey was administered about three months after the return to buildings.) While a majority (56%) still found it either somewhat or very difficult (as shown in Figure 6), the numbers are much lower than those who reported having had difficulties during the first two weeks of the transition. Moreover, a quarter found hybrid teaching to be somewhat or very easy after three months of doing it, up from 14% who found it easy during the first two weeks. That the task became more manageable over time for some teachers is encouraging, but it nonetheless remained challenging for most.

Figure 6. Now that you have been teaching in the school building for a while, how easy or difficult is hybrid teaching for you?



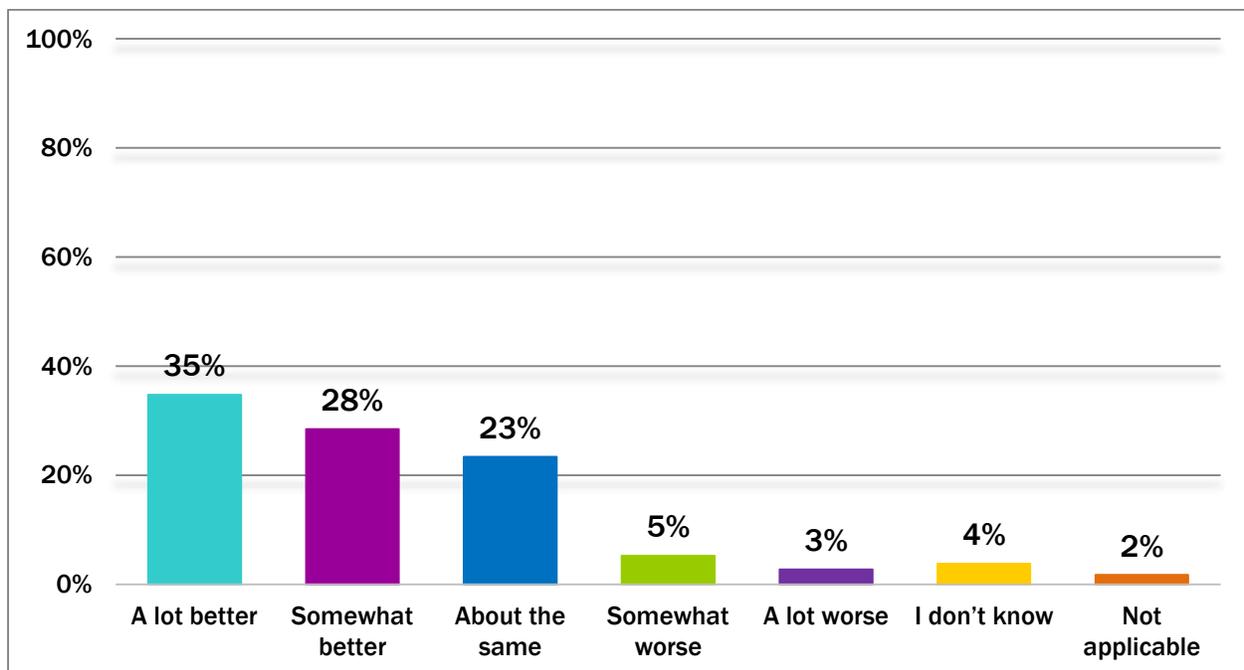


Teacher Re-entry Survey 2020–21

Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

Though the transition from remote to hybrid teaching was difficult for many teachers, most thought their in-person students were faring better from a socio-emotional standpoint than they had done while learning from home (see Figure 7). Sixty-three percent of teachers surveyed said their onsite students were doing either somewhat or a lot better socio-emotionally than they had when learning remotely, with most (35%) characterizing it as a lot better. Under a quarter (23%) thought their in-person students were doing about the same socio-emotionally as they had done remotely. Only a very few teachers (8%) believed their in-person students to be worse off socio-emotionally as compared to when they were learning from home.

Figure 7. From a socio-emotional standpoint, how much better or worse do you think the majority of your in-person students are doing since transitioning from remote to onsite learning?



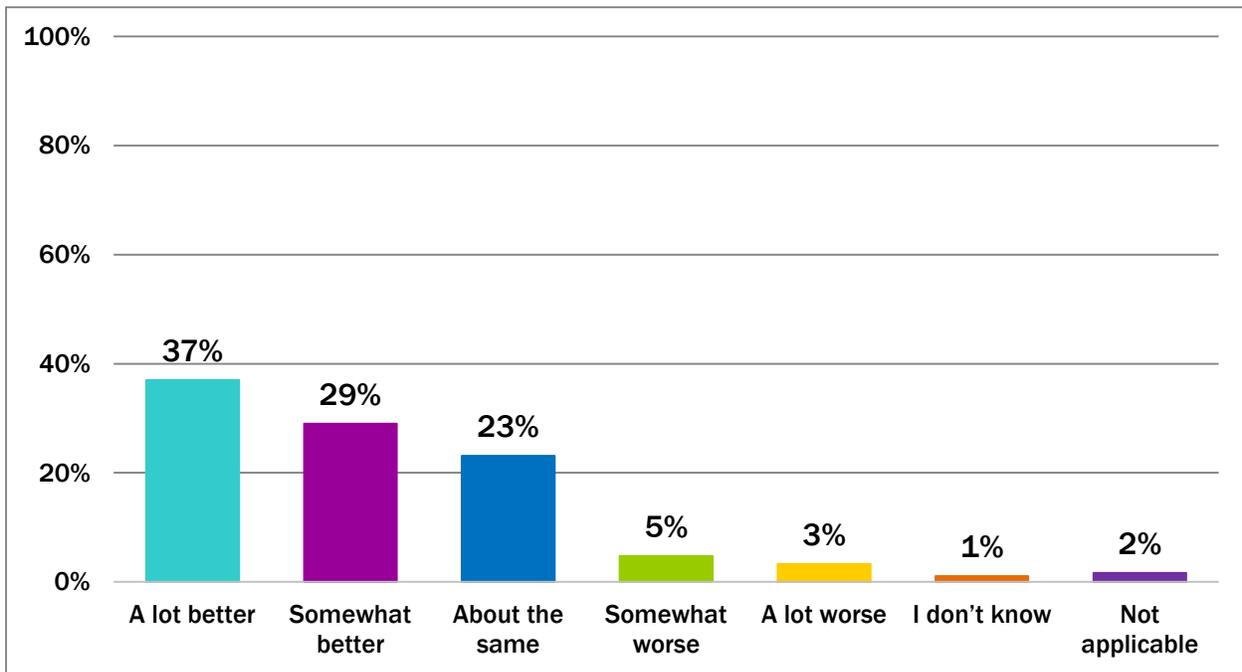


Teacher Re-entry Survey 2020–21

Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

As Figure 8 shows, teachers responded very similarly as above when asked how their in-person students were faring from an academic/learning standpoint. Sixty-six percent of the teachers believed their in-person students were doing either somewhat or a lot better academically than they had in a remote setting, while 23% believed their onsite students were doing about the same academically as they had from home. Only 8% believed their in-person students were academically worse off learning onsite as opposed to learning from home.

Figure 8. From an academic/learning standpoint, how much better or worse do you think the majority of your in-person students are doing since transitioning from remote to onsite learning?



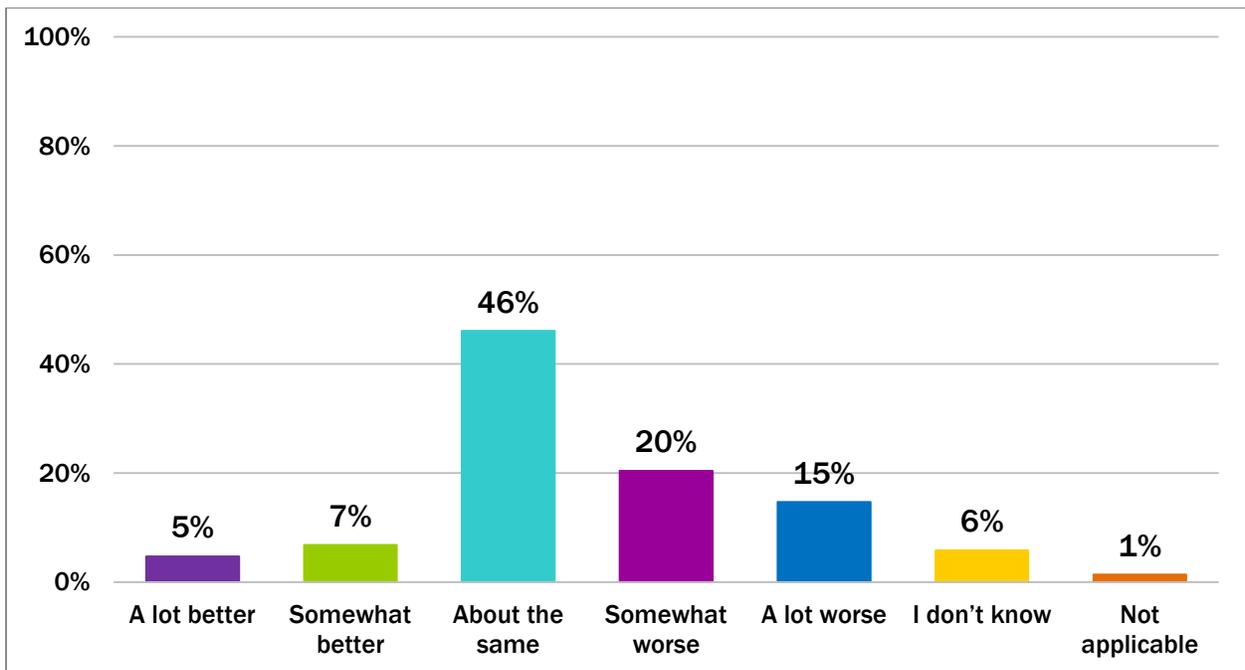


Teacher Re-entry Survey 2020–21

Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

Teachers were also asked about how they believed their remote students were doing from a socio-emotional standpoint, now that teachers were having to split their time between in-person teaching and remote teaching (see Figure 9). Forty-six percent believed their still-remote students to be doing about the same as before, while 35% thought they were doing worse, and 12% thought they were doing better, socio-emotionally speaking.

Figure 9. From a socio-emotional standpoint, how much better or worse do you think the majority of your remote students are doing since re-entry?



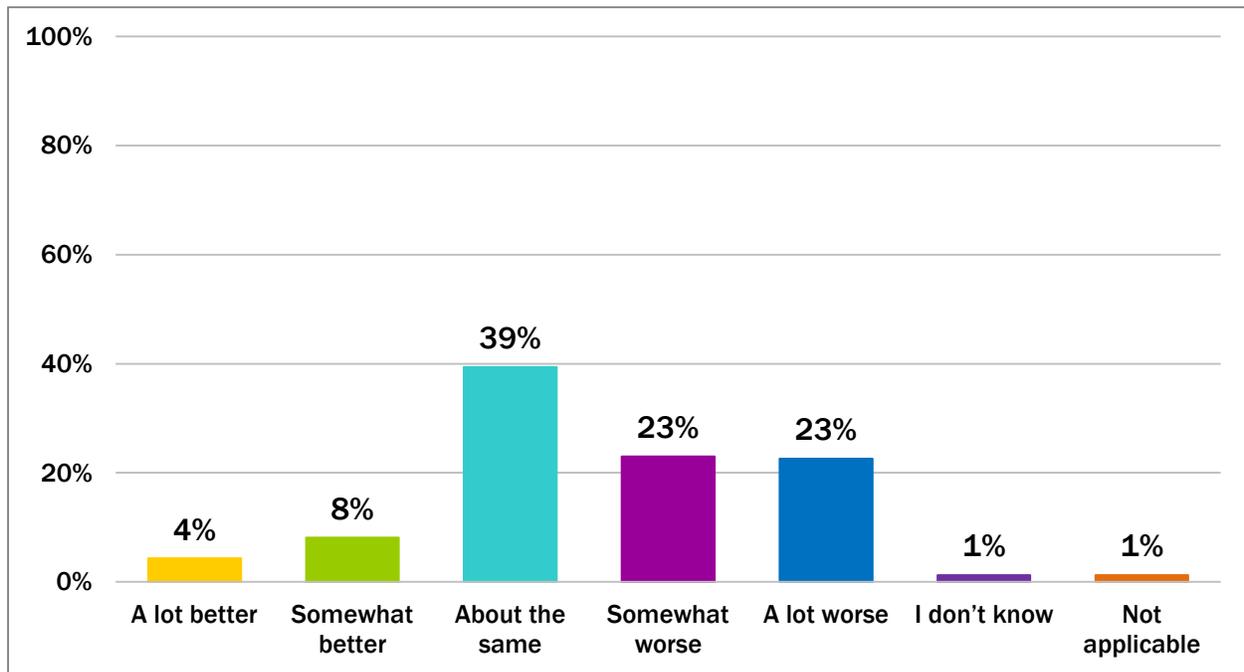


Teacher Re-entry Survey 2020–21

Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

When asked how their still-remote students were faring from an academic/learning standpoint after teachers started managing hybrid classrooms, the results were slightly less favorable, as shown in Figure 10. Thirty-nine percent of the teachers considered their remote students to be doing about the same academically as they had before the reopening of schools, while 46% believed their remote students to be worse off academically. By contrast, only 12% thought their remote students were better off academically after the reopening.

Figure 10. From an academic/learning standpoint, how much better or worse do you think the majority of your remote students are doing since re-entry?



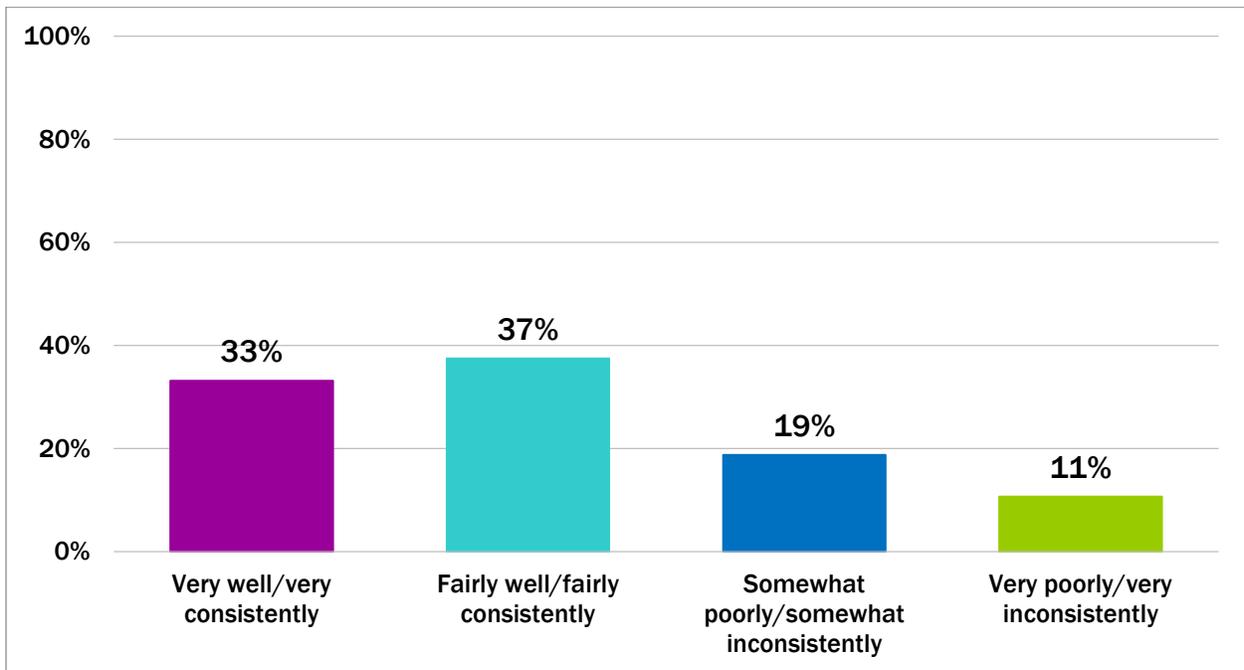


Teacher Re-entry Survey 2020–21

Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

Teachers were then asked how well they thought their school was implementing safety and cleaning protocols (see Figure 11). Thirty-three percent and 37% believed their school was implementing the protocols very well/very consistently or fairly well/fairly consistently, respectively—meaning that a large majority (70%) of the teachers considered their schools to be doing a good job of implementing the COVID-19 prevention measures.

Figure 11. How well do you feel your school is implementing safety and cleaning protocols?





Teacher Re-entry Survey 2020–21

Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

Teachers were then asked to assess the extent to which a variety of factors interfered with their ability to teach effectively since returning to site-based teaching, the results of which are in Table 1. The factors are ordered from the most to least cited as interfering to a *major extent*. Two of the biggest barriers to effective teaching were about the hybrid teaching situation, with 49% and 45% of teachers reporting that *teaching in-person and virtually at the same time* and *allocating the right balance of time between virtual and in-person teaching*, respectively, interfered to a major extent. *Poor virtual attendance* was also cited as a major barrier by 49% of the teachers.

As for technological factors, *internet connectivity issues* and *Microsoft Teams issues* were cited as major obstacles by 36% and 34% of teachers, respectively, whereas *other technological issues* and *login/credentialing issues* were major barriers for 20% and just 8% of the teachers, respectively.

In terms of COVID-19-specific factors, *enforcing mask-wearing, social-distancing, and other COVID-19-related guidelines* interfered with effective teaching to a major extent for just under a quarter (24%) of the respondents, but half (50%) of the teachers found this to be a minor or nonexistent obstacle to their teaching. *Managing students' fear or anxiety about COVID-19* was the least-cited barrier overall, with over three-quarters (78%) of teachers reporting this as a minor or nonexistent obstacle to effective teaching and only 6% saying it interfered with their teaching to a major extent.

Finally, two other factors, *poor in-person attendance* and *student conduct issues* did not impact teaching to a great extent, as 60% and 71% of teachers, respectively, reported those factors to be minor or nonexistent.



Teacher Re-entry Survey 2020–21
Prepared by the Department of Research & Performance Management

Table 1. To what extent has each of the following factors interfered with your ability to teach effectively since returning to site-based teaching?

Listed in order of most-to-least cited as interfering <i>To a major extent</i>	Not at all	To a minor extent	To a moderate extent	To a major extent	N/A
Teaching in-person and virtually at the same time	7%	16%	24%	49%	3%
Poor virtual attendance	10%	17%	23%	49%	1%
Allocating the right balance of time between virtual and in-person teaching	9%	17%	24%	45%	4%
Internet connectivity issues	3%	24%	36%	36%	0%
Microsoft Teams issues	4%	25%	37%	34%	0%
Enforcing mask-wearing, social-distancing, and other COVID-19-related guidelines	19%	31%	24%	24%	2%
Other technological issues	13%	36%	30%	20%	1%
Poor in-person attendance	31%	29%	20%	17%	2%
Student conduct issues	37%	34%	16%	12%	1%
Login/credentialing issues	37%	35%	19%	8%	1%
Managing students' fear or anxiety about COVID-19	44%	34%	13%	6%	3%

Conclusion

The 2020–21 school year was historic in many ways, and it required a large measure of adaptability on the part of all SCS stakeholders. Much was required of teachers in particular, from learning how to teach effectively online for the first part of the year to managing a hybrid classroom in the latter part of the year. As this report indicates, the transition to the hybrid style of teaching was difficult for most teachers, especially at first. After a few months in that format, teachers reported that it was still difficult, but less so than during the first two weeks. Most teachers surveyed believed that their in-person students were doing both socio-emotionally and academically better than they had when learning remotely. The upcoming school year is set to be fully in-person, which will likely be easier for all stakeholders involved—especially teachers, who will once again be able to see all of their students in one place and teach them in the face-to-face manner with which they are accustomed.