

COVID-19 EMPLOYEE SURVEY FINAL REPORT

Brandon School Division

April 2020



Acknowledgements

This report is in response to the unprecedented closure of schools in BSD due to Covid-19. The author wishes to thank Dr. Marc Casavant, Superintendent/CEO of BSD, and Mathew Gustafson, Assistant Superintendent of BSD, for their leadership and guidance. Thank-you also to the nearly 900 teachers, EAs, bus drivers, custodians, administrative support staff, division-based and school-based support staff, substitute teachers, librarians, and others who filled out the survey.

Covid-19 Teacher Survey

Final Report

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Executive Summary

Covid-19 and the resulting closure of schools have impacted teachers and other school workers in unprecedented ways. Having accurate information about how teachers and school workers are responding and what their needs and challenges may be, will help Brandon School Division (BSD) plan and implement targeted supports to address those challenges.

The focus of this survey was to learn more about how teachers and other employees in BSD are responding to the closure of schools due to Covid-19. The objectives of this survey were to (1) identify the current challenges and concerns faced by teachers and other employees due to school closures; (2) learn teachers' and other employees' plans for their students during this time; (3) learn how much time can be reasonably expected for students to spend on learning from home; and (4) identify ways that teachers and other employees can be supported while working remotely.

To answer these questions, a survey of 12 questions was sent to all employees of BSD; 888 responses were collected.

Major findings from this survey include:

- Many respondents are concerned about what to do if they can't connect with students and families (40.19%) or what to do if families don't have internet access (31.65%). Respondents are also concerned about how to conduct summative assessments remotely (27.56%) and how often they should be in contact with students and families (25.39%).
- Email is the primary mode of communication being used (85.99%), followed by phone (56.89%) and Microsoft TEAMS (36.37%). However, expectations around communication were mentioned often. One teacher writes, *"Not sure if we're contacting students yet."* Many employees, particularly EAs, mention a desire for clear expectations.
- Most respondents expect students to spend approximately two hours on schoolwork per day (42.24%), although many selected one hour per day (28.94%) or 3-4 hours per day (27.64%).
- 23.7% of respondents feel they cannot assess student learning. For those who can, most are assessing learning by having students send in

assignments, then marking them and providing feedback (42.71%) or meeting individually by video (23.83%). Others are having students send assignments, but marking them complete or incomplete (19.01%).

- The survey shows that 33.42% of respondents feel they do not have a plan to create a routine for and connection with their students.
- A wide range of professional development supports is desired, from help with assessment (39.94%), working with students digitally (39.25%), using TEAMS (38.97%), creating digital assignments (34.92%), video conferencing (32.4%), recording video lessons (31.98%) and others.
- Many teachers mention receiving and providing support from colleagues or their own school's staff.

There are several recommendations included in this report based on the feedback provided by BSD employees. These include providing clear expectations around time and connections with students, increasing professional development support for a wide range of topics, and providing direction around assessments and what to do if families cannot be contacted. One creative solution mentioned in the survey was to set aside a designated room in the division office or elsewhere that could be used for assessments (i.e., school psychologist, others) and would be sanitized in between assessments.

This report is organized into a short introduction, followed by the main findings and recommendations. Appendix A includes the complete findings from the survey.

Introduction

Background

On April 1, 2020, BSD agreed to collaborate with Michelle Lam, Director of Brandon University's Centre for Aboriginal and Rural Education Studies (CARES), to accurately identify the needs of BSD employees due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The objective of the *Covid-19 BSD Employee Survey* project was to assess the current needs and opportunities facing BSD employees due to the closure of schools in the division. This information will be used to provide increased clarity and understanding of the reality facing teachers and other employees and to strengthen supports offered by the BSD.

The focus of this project was to explore instructional challenges, goals, time expectations, and potential supports. The objectives were to:

1. Identify the current challenges faced by teachers and other BSD employees due to school closures;
2. Learn teachers' and other employees' plans for their students during this time;
3. Learn how much time can be reasonably expected for students to spend on learning from home; and
4. Identify ways that the division can support employees while working remotely.

Methodology

Process

From April 2, 2020, to April 6, 2020, Dr. Marc Casavant, Superintendent/CEO of BSD, Matthew Gustafson, Assistant Superintendent of BSD, and Michelle Lam, Director of Brandon University's Centre for Aboriginal and Rural Education Studies, refined questions for a survey to be sent out by email to all employees of BSD.

On April 6, 2020, the survey was distributed via email to employees of BSD. When the survey closed on April 8, there were 888 responses.

Participants

The participants for this survey were employees of BSD. As this data collection was done solely for the BSD, ethics approval was not required.

For this research, SurveyMonkey forms were designed that could be filled out by clicking on a web-based link distributed by email.

All schools in Brandon School Division were represented, and participant roles included classroom teachers, music teachers, PE teachers, resource teachers, principals, vice-principals, liaisons, literacy coaches, counselors, clinicians, educational assistants, bus drivers, custodians and custodial assistants, admin support, division-based student support, school-based student support, librarians, and others.

Data Collection and Analysis

The SurveyMonkey link was distributed via email to employees of BSD. Their responses were entered directly into the SurveyMonkey form.

All survey responses are included in this report (see Appendix A), as well as an analysis of responses.

Limitations of this research

The results of this research are limited by several factors:

1. Technology – The survey was distributed solely by email. Employees who do not have access to email, or who do not have an email address on file were not included.
2. Multiple responses – The survey was limited to one response per IP address. However, if one respondent answered from different locations such as work and home, there may be multiple responses.
3. Current environment - At the time data was collected, Manitobans were responding to the stresses initiated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The virus left many feeling unsafe and uncertain. It is possible that the emotional responses to the rapid changes teachers and other employees have undergone in

response to the pandemic will have affected the positive/negative nature of the responses.

4. Language – Due to time pressures, it was not possible to provide translations of the survey in multiple languages. This may have excluded some employees from responding to the survey.

Major Findings

In Appendix A, all survey responses can be explored. The author of this report has summarized these findings in the following sections, including recommendations for further actions.

Overall findings

1. Most respondents have access to the internet at home. Most have smartphones/tablets with internet (73.62%) and/or computers/laptops (90.87%) with internet, 37.99% have a webcam, and 30.67% have a microphone/headset. A small percentage has a computer without internet (1.8%) or a phone without internet (1.58%).
2. Employees have many questions they feel they need answers to. What to do if **they cannot make contact** with families was the top question (40.19%), followed by what to do if families do not have the internet (31.65%). Assessment strategies was also a top question (27.56%) as well as how often to be in contact with families (25.39%). Further questions are explored in Appendix A.
3. Email is the primary mode of communication being used (85.99%), followed by phone (56.89%) and Microsoft TEAMS (36.37%). Employees are also using text (21.26%), ClassDojo (11.28%), and Social Media (8.08%) to connect with families. One of the common questions that came forward from the survey was **how to know whether apps or other methods of communication are safe, secure, and approved by the division.**
4. The majority of employees expect students to spend 1-4 hours per day learning from home. Two hours was the most common response (42.24%), followed by one hour per day (28.94%) and 3-4 hours per day (27.64%). Only 9 respondents (1.17%) expect students to spend 5+ hours per day on schoolwork.

5. Assessment was identified as a common question in both the survey and the open-ended responses, where **23.7% of respondents felt they are not able to assess student learning**. To assess student learning, 42.71% of respondents will have students send assignments which they will then mark and provide feedback, and 23.83% will meet with students individually by video conference. Also, 19.01% will have students send assignments which will be marked as complete/incomplete. Some other assessment methods mentioned are group discussions via video, online programs that automatically document progress, self-assessments, or providing families with answer keys and strategies for assessment. Given the province's baseline grade announcement, **clarity on assessment** seems to be a key question for many respondents. There were also concerns raised about the **validity** and **equity** of remote assessments as well as teachers with early years students who need hands-on, play-based assessments and teachers (music, PE, etc.) who have a large number of students.
6. The report shows that 33.42% of respondents feel they **do not have a plan** to create routine for and connect with students.
7. A **wide range of professional development supports** is desired, from help with assessment (39.94%), working with students digitally (39.25%), using TEAMS (38.97%), creating digital assignments (34.92%), video conferencing (32.4%), recording video lessons (31.98%) and others. Other supports mentioned were help with Office 365, Clevr, help with creating fillable forms, help with knowing how to support children with mental health needs, IEPs, youth at-risk, early years students, and how to provide tech support to families. Respondents also reported wanting to know whether apps are safe/approved, how to access files remotely, how to address privacy concerns, and how to access ongoing tech support. Some teachers do not have access to the physical equipment required (camera, software). Some also mentioned that their own internet is slow, and videos take a long time to upload.
8. Concerns that survey respondents mentioned were:

EAs: Many EAs mentioned a desire to help students, but were waiting on instruction, direction, or materials. This desire was echoed by clinical staff.

PE / Music / Others: A desire for clear instruction around how much time per week for music and PE was mentioned, as well as expectations on what assessments will be required, and how to complete them. Similar desires were

mentioned by vocational instructors, band, home ec, art, tech, drama, hairstyling, and courses with work experiences as part of the grade.

Mental Health and Balance: Employees mentioned their own stress levels, and many mentioned the challenge of balancing trying to teach their students while simultaneously taking care of their own children at home. Indigenous families who were separated from family members were raised as a point of concern. Loss of connection with colleagues was also mentioned. Student mental health was also a key concern raised by many.

Equity: Employees mentioned concerns about equitability, how to support children when parents/caregivers were not available or had chosen not to participate in distance learning, and how to instruct and assess students fairly when families all have different availability, comprehension, abilities, and access to technology/internet/printers. One teacher wrote: *“If I’m relying on online learning, using apps like Kahoot etc. for assessment, do I also need to create paper-based lessons/assessments for those students who cannot engage online?”* Concern about food security was also mentioned.

Flexibility: Employees mentioned working through evenings, weekends, and breaks to try to overcome the steep learning curve required. There were also questions about whether it was appropriate to contact families outside of regular work hours if that is the only time families are available.

Assessment and Accountability: Clear direction was requested for conducting assessments, final exams, and **completing June report cards**. Teachers wanted to know what the expectations would be for report card comments, and whether they are only assessing key areas. If families or students do not respond or communicate, teachers are unsure of how to proceed. Daily summaries were mentioned by some employees who reported feeling stressed about being required to fill them out and unsure how to proceed if parents/caregivers or students did not respond. Finally, employees mentioned worries over whether they were doing enough, and how they as teachers would be evaluated during this time.

Communication: Many employees were unable to contact families and were unsure of how to proceed. Employees were unclear what to do when multiple disciplines (Psych, SLP, SSW, RT, etc.) were involved with a student. There were also privacy concerns raised about giving out personal phone numbers or contacting students through social media, or whether they were violating copyright infringement by copying so much material. Many respondents

mentioned being unsure whether they were being **helpful or contributing to overwhelming** families.

Consistency: Respondents felt it was difficult to provide consistency when some families were requesting more work, and others were not responding. Consistency was also mentioned in methods of communication where families of multiple students are being required to access numerous learning systems, apps, and methods of communication. **Division-wide standards** around expectations and communication were desired. One participant wrote: *“It would be nice if there was just one online platform such as Moodle or Blackboard that all the teachers were using.”*

Forward Planning: There were concerns about how to process registrations by distance, and how to manage a large volume of paperwork without access to a photocopier. There were also concerns about how students returning from such a long period of remote learning would be assessed. Scholarship applications and job interviews were also mentioned. Finally, there were questions about how and when students could collect their belongings from school.

Costs: Employees are incurring costs for printing from home, digital access, or using personal phones to call/text. Some are on a data plan that is not unlimited. For employees who live outside of Brandon, costs associated with upgrading the internet are high. There were also questions about whether school-supplied resources could be sent home. Financial stressors were mentioned, as well as a desire to have the option to be paid bi-weekly.

Health, Safety, and Job Security: Employees were concerned that using paper copies may expose people to the virus, particularly if they or others in their household are immunocompromised. Maintenance staff raised concerns about safety as they are in multiple buildings. Division office employees raised concerns about the number of people in the building. There were also HR questions related to whether to use sick time if ill and/or in quarantine and whether employees will continue to have access to Blue Cross and their pension plans if they go on CERB. There were concerns from EAs, support staff, clinicians, transportation, custodial/maintenance, those on limited term contracts, and teachers about whether they would continue to be employed.

IEPs, EAL, and French: Employees mentioned a desire to help students through this difficult time, but were looking for direction on how to provide scaffolds/supports when the typical strategies (shoulder-to-shoulder, highlighting, etc.) do not work by distance or when translation is required.

Grade Level Comparisons

- **How to formatively assess students remotely is more of a concern in younger grades;** 35.51% of early years teachers considered this a priority question, while only 27.94% of middle years and 10.33% in high school.
- **What to do if making contact with families and students isn't possible was a top question for all,** although it was most common in middle years (59.56%).
- **How to calculate grades and how to motivate students** are more significant as grade levels increase. Given the province's recent direction on baseline grades, this makes sense.
- **Families without internet access** were a top concern across all grade levels.
- **Early years programming and exchanging instructional materials** are more of a concern in younger grades.
- **ClassDojo** is being used frequently by early years teachers (29.17%) compared to 3.6% of middle years and 0% of high school.
- **Surprisingly,** many high school teachers expect their students to spend only one hour per day on schoolwork (46.28%), while some expected two hours (25%) or 3-4 hours per day (27.13%).
- **Early years teachers are much more likely to feel they are not able to assess student learning** (21.7%), compared to middle years (12.5%) or high school (7.98%).
- **High school teachers are much more likely to feel they have a plan to create a routine for, and connection with their students** (81.91%), compared to middle years (65.22%) and early years (64.79%).
- There were **no statistically significant differences** in professional development supports needed by grade level. All supports mentioned were desired by all grades.

Recommendations

The information gathered through this survey provides clarity and an increased understanding of the needs of BSD employees due to the current Covid-19 pandemic. It may be useful in identifying and prioritizing goals and in planning effective supports for teachers and other employees. To assist BSD in this process, the following recommendations are offered.

Recommendations for BSD

- **Provide clear expectations for all.** Many survey respondents mentioned a desire for clear expectations. Many do not know if what they are currently doing is effective, and mentioned a desire for best practices or clear guidance on things like time spent working, amount of work sent to students, frequency of communication, which technology to use, and whether they are overwhelming families or providing effective supports. Teachers reported being unsure if they can delegate tasks to EAs, and many EAs were waiting on receiving direction. Guidelines on ways EAs can be utilized effectively during this time were requested by both teachers and EAs.
- **Increase professional development and on-call tech support.** Comments regarding current tech support and tech-related professional development were **very positive** and have been received well, yet there is a desire for more.
- **Set up methods for communicating within ‘clusters.’** Some respondents mentioned a desire to connect with others in their area of expertise. For example, setting up a cluster for counselors or Kindergarten teachers across schools may provide a way for sharing ideas, resources, and providing supports.
- **Set up a Q & A to address commonly raised questions.** *Communication* is a common theme in many questions: What to do when families or students do not respond, how to synchronize communication so that it is consistent in families with more than one child, whether interpreters are available for EAL families, and whether personal phones are to be used (privacy concerns). Another key theme is *equity*: How to assess when not all students have the same supports at home, how to support students with IEPs, EAL, or other needs. Another key theme was

assessment. There were many questions raised about June reporting, or how the division will be implementing the provincial directives. There were also many *technology*-related questions, such as whether certain websites, apps, or platforms are approved by the division. These themes could be organized into a Q & A so that common questions can be addressed simultaneously.

- **Provide care, mental health supports, and emotional encouragement.** Many teachers or other employees are unsure whether they are doing a good job. Many are struggling with balancing the demands of online instruction with their own families' needs. Some are struggling financially and cannot afford the necessary technology or upgrades. Some are worried about the virus and whether they or their loved ones are safe, or are experiencing physical problems related to the sudden change to sitting at a computer all day. Many are worried about the mental health of the students and families they are in communication with.

Recommendations for Future Research

How are the needs of BSD employees changing over time?

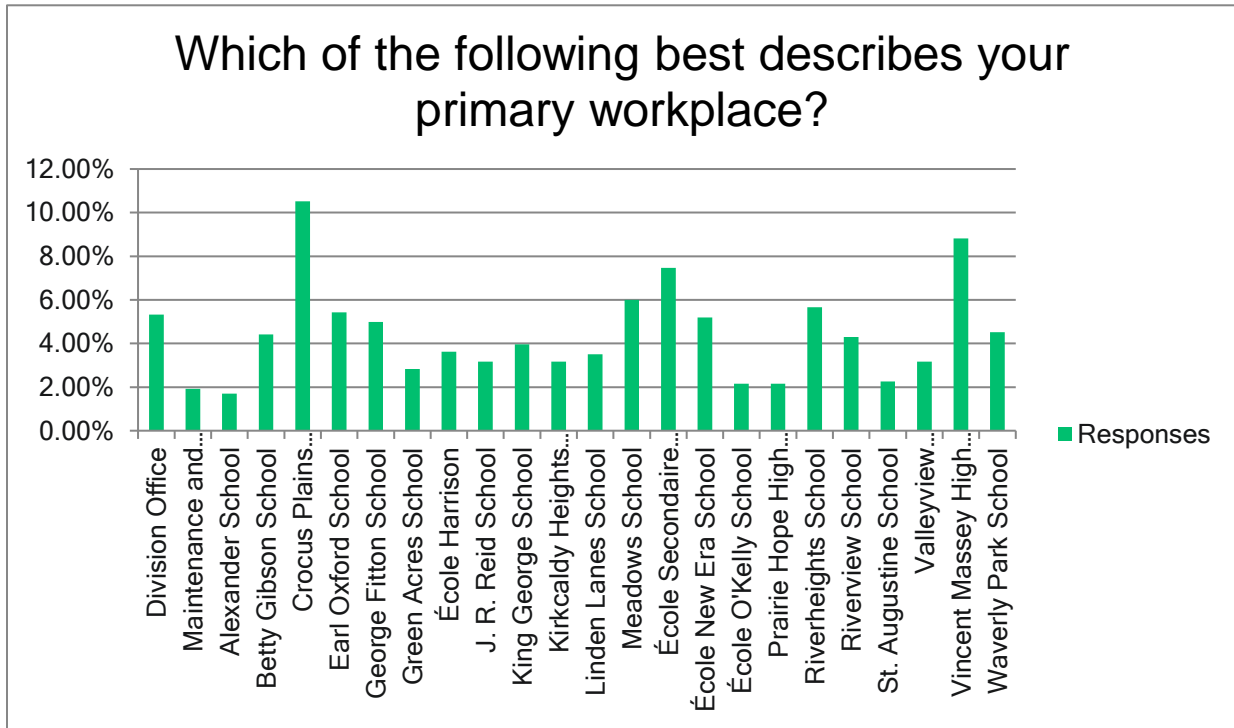
As the current pandemic is expected to require learning from home for several months, employees will have new needs and opportunities, or their experiences will change over time. Conducting a follow-up survey two months into the home learning may provide new insights. This was reflected in teacher comments such as: *"I don't even know what my questions/issues are yet!"*

How are other divisions implementing strategies to address equity?

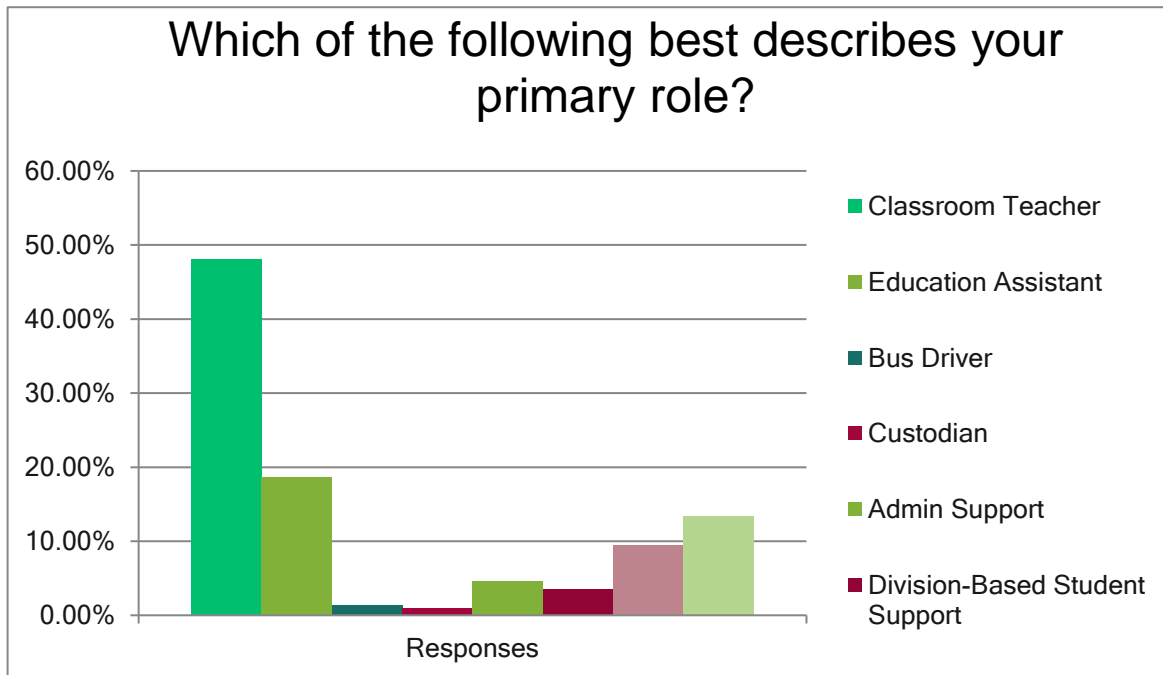
Employees mentioned equity as a key concern. It may be worthwhile to conduct a broad survey of other divisions to consider strategies that could be implemented to ensure that student gaps do not increase during this time.

Appendix A: Survey Results

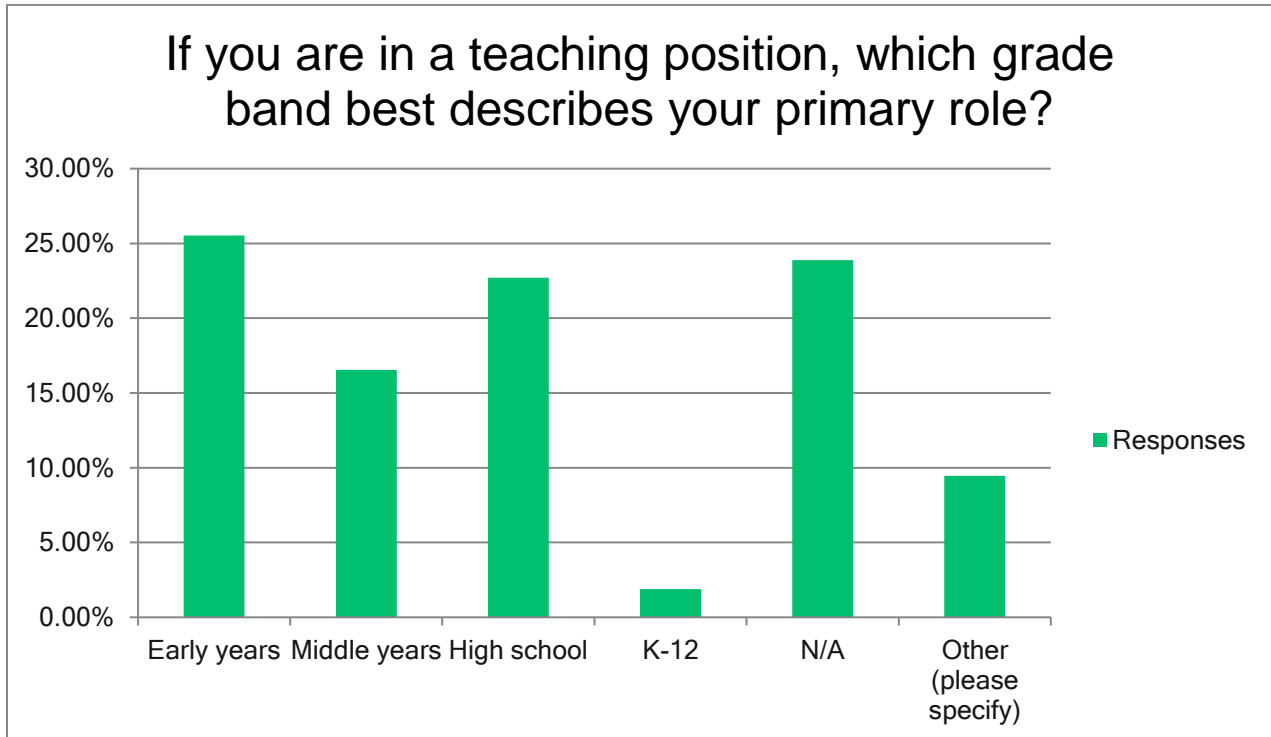
Q1. Which of the following best describes your primary workplace?



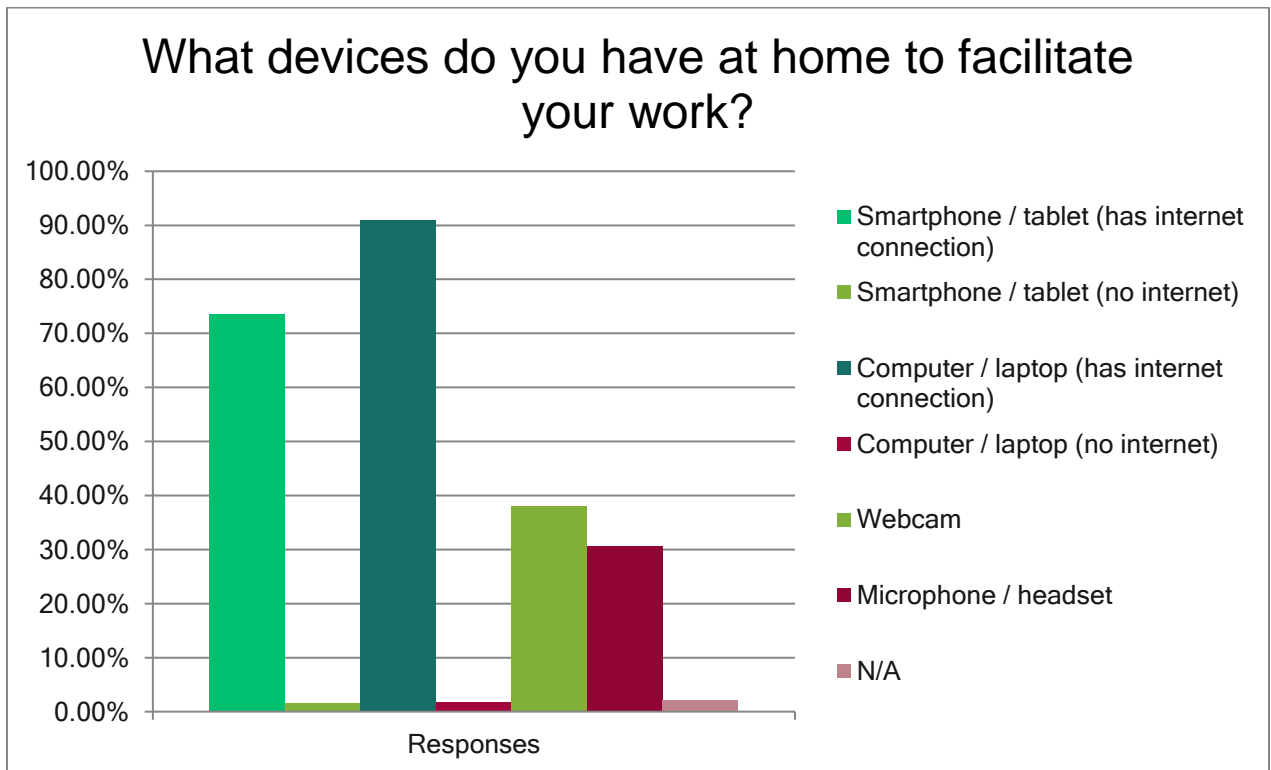
Q2. Which of the following best describes your primary role?



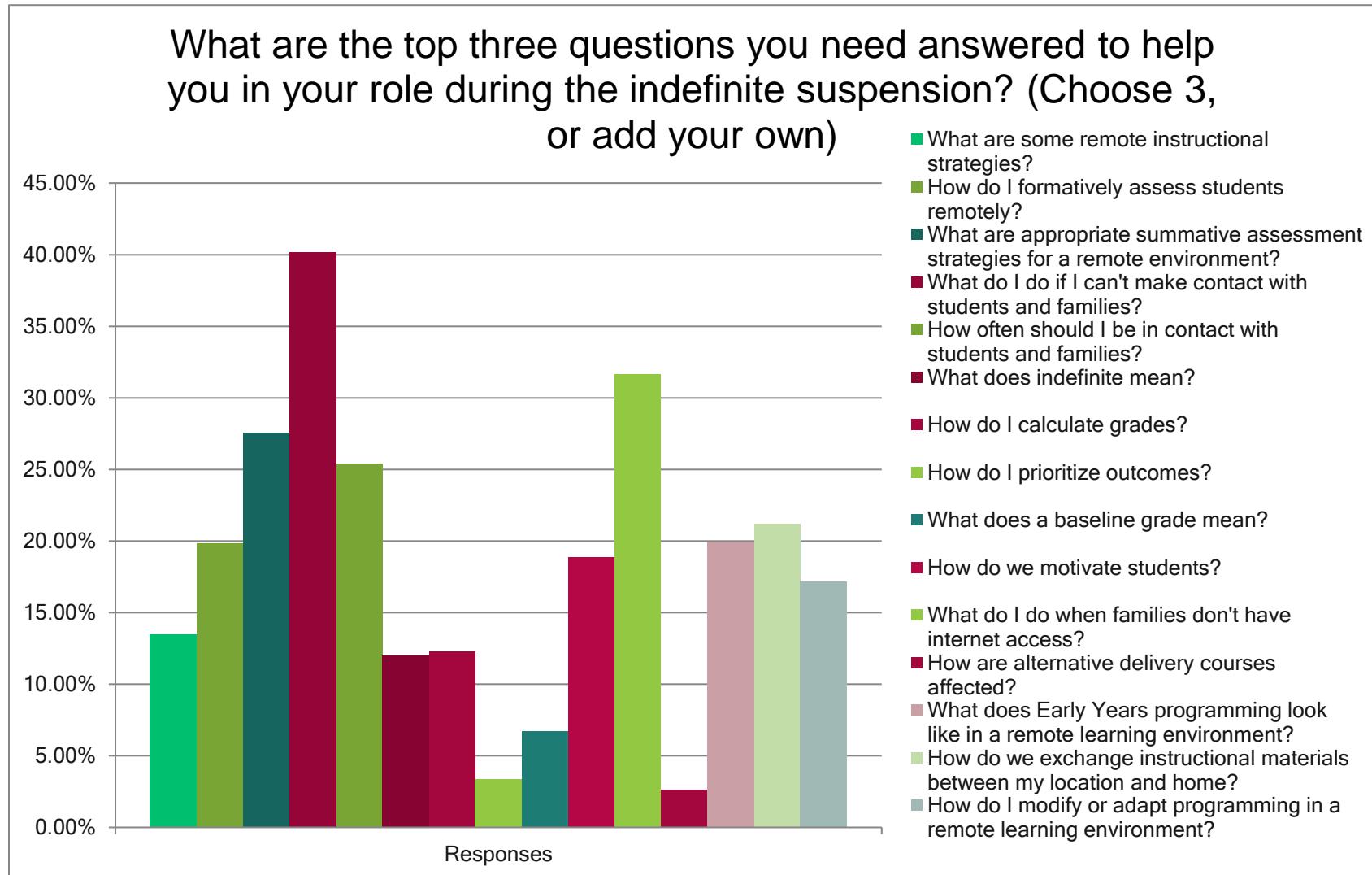
Q3. If you are in a teaching position, which grade band describes your primary role?



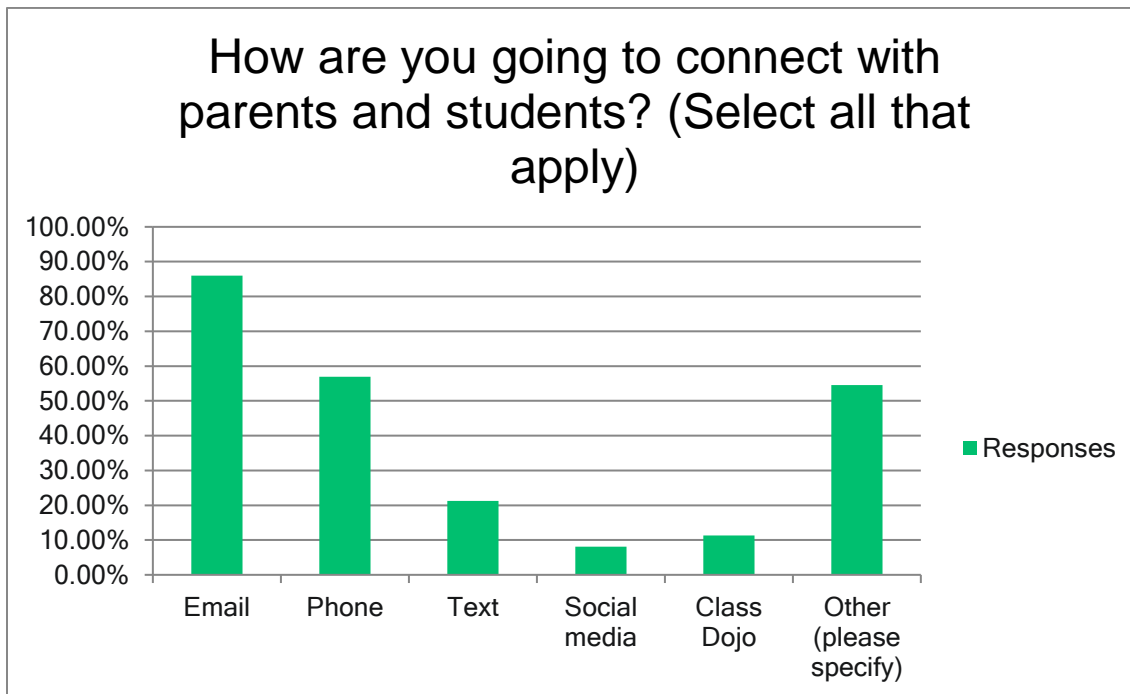
Q4. What devices do you have at home to facilitate your work?



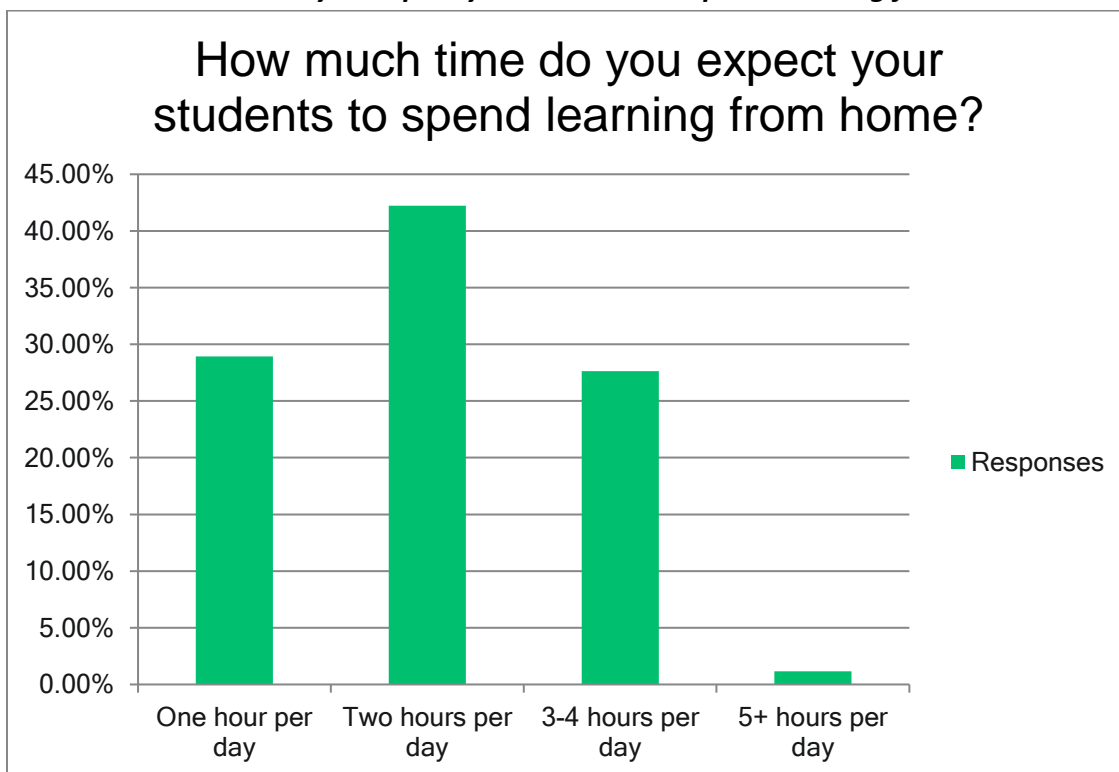
Q5. What are the top three questions you need answered to help you in your role during the indefinite suspension?



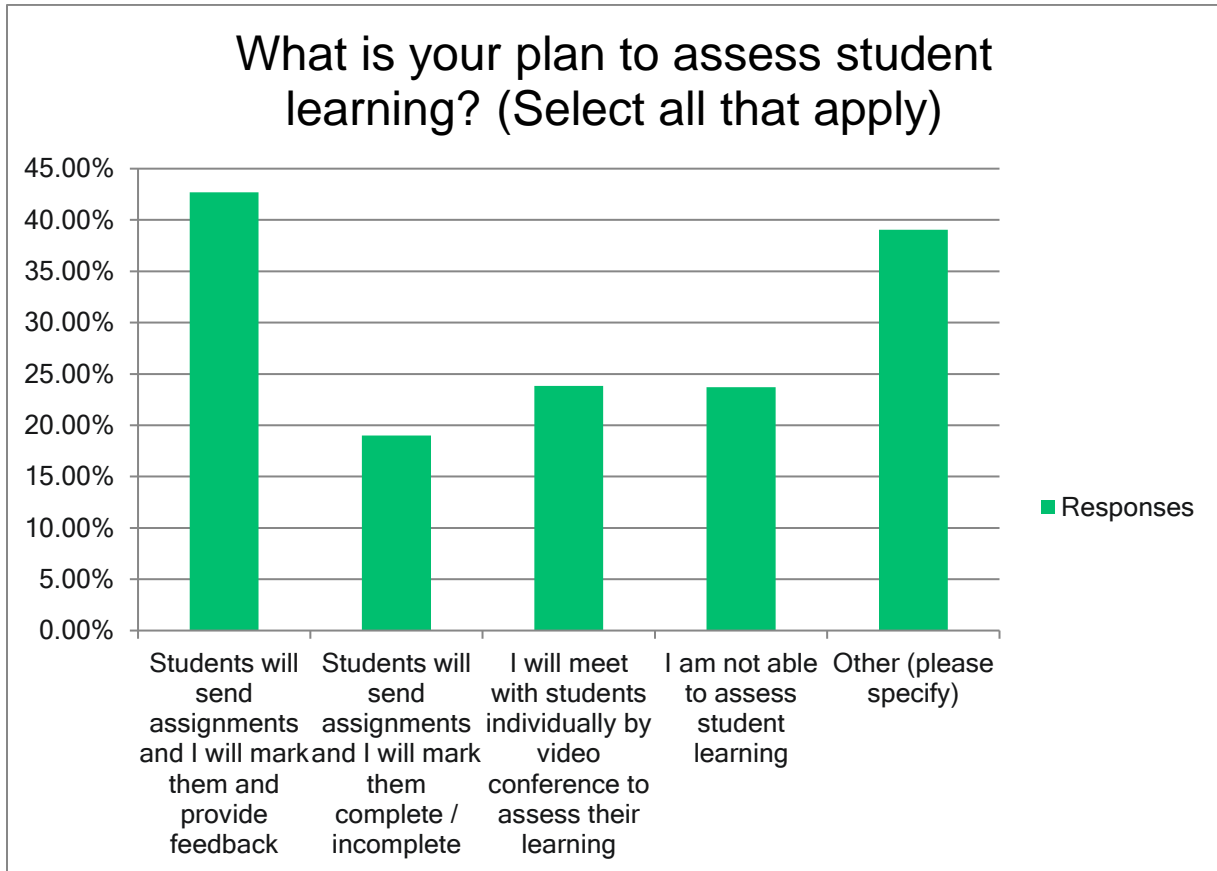
Q6. How are you going to connect with parents and students? (Select all that apply)



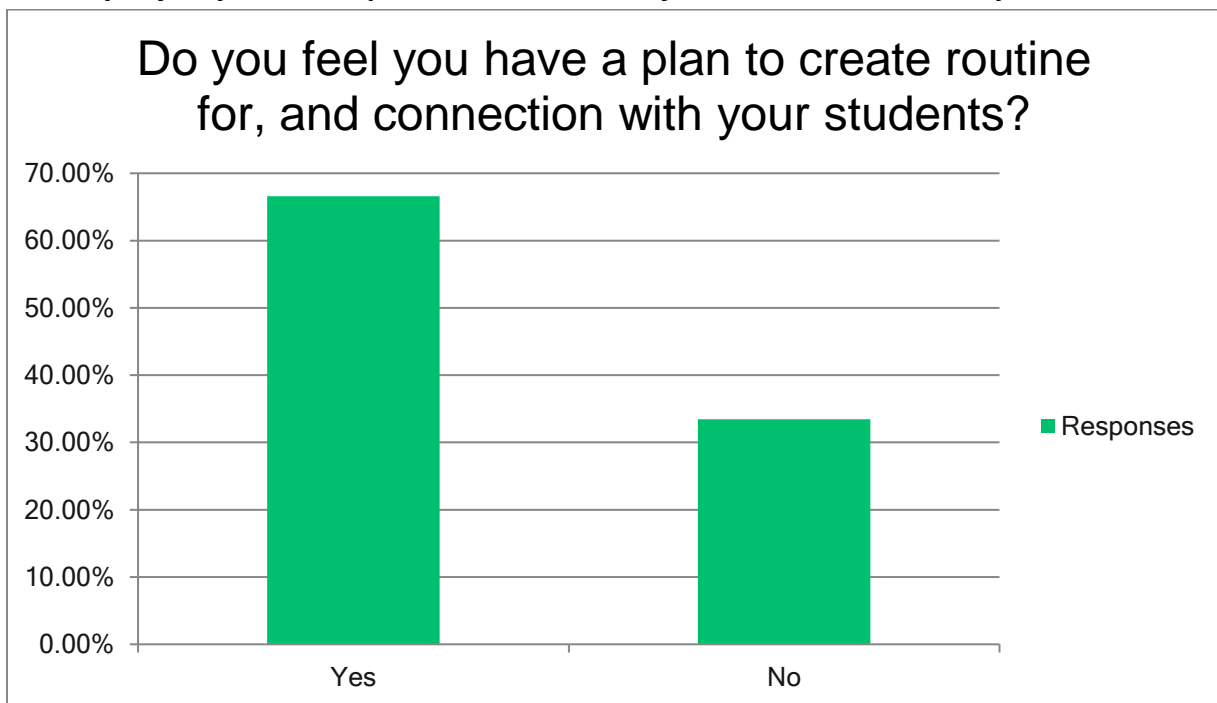
Q7. How much time do you expect your students to spend learning from home?



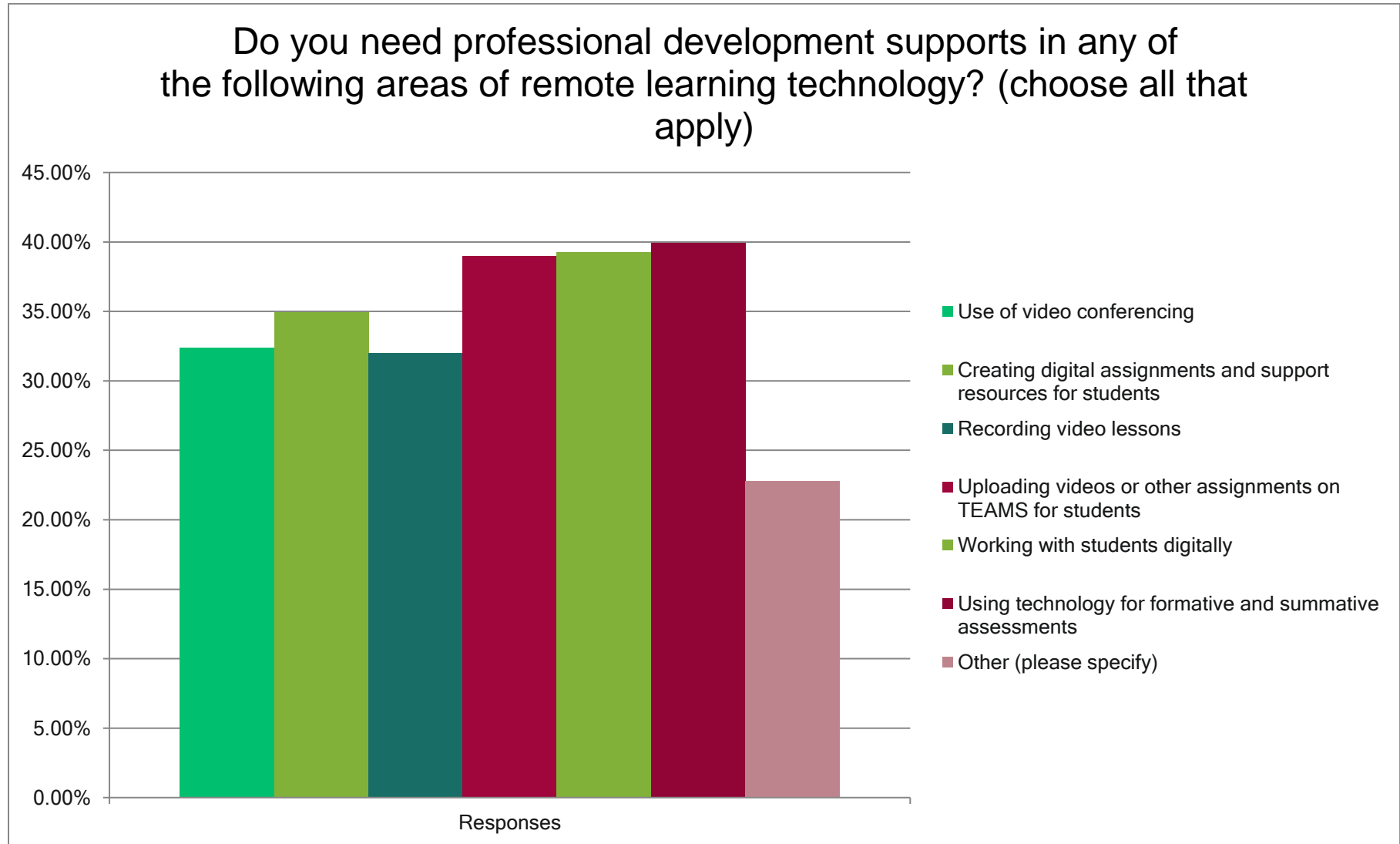
Q8. What is your plan to assess student learning? (Select all that apply)



Q9. Do you feel you have a plan to create routine for, and connection with your students?



Q10. Do you need professional development supports in any of the following areas of remote learning technology? (Choose all that apply)



Q11. What concerns do you have during this time that weren't reflected in this survey?

Q11 What concerns do you have during this time that weren't reflected in this survey?

materials activities even report cards access remotely continue us division role
many assess students make communication still see best engaged
students parents trying None resources kids biggest concern
expectations communicate able report card know marks help
reading EA required going completed provide difficult
families lot support reach need assess home
students families time one work assignments
students keep will work home teachers contact
learning think concerned expected parents
distance learning school well feel support students children
use want may teach programming grade sent Teams support staff
assessment take also much plan understand give staff etc online
look already email back way now receiving course connect available worry
everyone technology class

Q12. What specific supports not already mentioned would be helpful for you during this time?

Q12 What specific supports not already mentioned would be helpful for you during this time?

information assignments connect create program role way assessment also packages
help questions etc BSD teaching see N come EA computer plan classroom teachers
provide early years expected na make supporting students sure divisional
best finding online appreciate know children resources lot
school want home communicate teams distance learning
need something teachers able support day
students specific time overwhelming work technology
None available access communication families contact
expectations meetings use schedule parents ask learning
areas going reading think many feel sent home staff instruction one kids will
online learning division Nothing direction materials US tech much set helpful great
students parents clear grade take continue week look well