

**Catholic School Parents Australia (CSPA)** is recognised as the national body representing and advocating for the parents\* and carers of 793,897 children and young people who attend the 1,759 Catholic schools across Australia. CSPA works in collaboration and consultation with the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) and is recognised by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference through the Bishops Commission for Catholic Education. (\*Parent includes natural, adopted or foster parents, guardians or caregivers of children and young people attending Catholic Schools).

The following comments on the impact of COVID-19 on student wellbeing and learning are taken from Section 4 of the *CSPA Parent Perspectives on Student Wellbeing and Learning Report* (June 2023) (pp. 8-12). Overall, the survey yielded 6,286 responses from Catholic school parents across Australia.

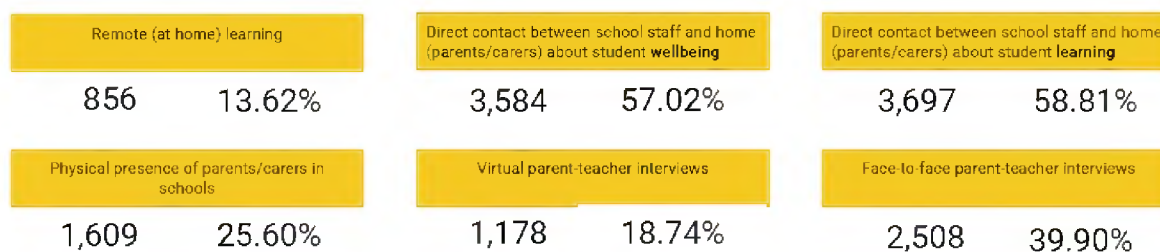
**[PLEASE NOTE: All quotes in this submission are by Parents who completed the 2022 CSPA Survey].**

## Impacts of COVID-19.

A specific section addressing the impacts of the pandemic was included in the survey. This was seen as highly important given the diverse experiences of education systems across the different States and Territories during the pandemic, and because in 2022 many schools were hoping to operate in relatively 'back to normal' conditions for the first time since early Term 1, 2020.

Parents were asked to reflect on some of the changes that may have been introduced to the organisation and operation of their child's school, and then in relation to the wellbeing and learning of their child indicate a range of activities they would like to see more of/less of.

The results clearly highlighted the impact of school restrictions on **parent and family engagement**, with a strong desire for greater access to schools and educators emerging from the data. Parents reported wanting more **direct contact between school staff and home** about student wellbeing (57.0%) and learning (58.8%), followed by **face-to-face parent-teacher interviews** (39.9%) and the **physical presence of parents/carers in schools** (25.6%). Perhaps not surprisingly, just 13.6% wanted to see more **remote (at home) learning** (at home) learning. (See Figure 1).



**Figure 1: What parents would like to see more of in relation to wellbeing and learning (%)**

In addition to question responses, 700 parents provided further commentary regarding what they would like to see more of in relation to wellbeing and learning. In the main, analysis of these comments reflects the findings above, with parents and families seeking greater opportunity to **connect with their child's school**, particularly around **communication on learning topics**, issues with **learning and behaviour**, and **timely feedback**.

*"Parent and family engagement is key and has disappeared almost entirely from this school."*

*"More feedback & involvement in what the children are doing/learning."*

*"Increased awareness on what the students are doing or focusing on for their lessons so I can assist and talk about with them while at home."*

*"What's my child learning about in the coming term? A brief summary to parents/carers as a group by email/zoom meeting/seesaw. Or send current workbooks home - parents/children/teachers can all engage in current learning."*

*"There is a lot of assumed knowledge that parents should have which makes things tricky. More open communication between parents & teachers or school & teachers would be helpful."*

Given the Covid restrictions limiting parents and family access to schools, it is perhaps not surprising that comments also included the desire for **greater physical presence in schools**, including opportunities for parents to come into class.

*"I understand Covid is still active but it would be good to have better face to face contact with teachers during meetings or interviews etc."*

*"Parents presence at schools is to facilitate a strong community. This organically happens at smaller schools."*

*"I loved the carers breakfast. It was a great opportunity for us to visit the school and be part of the community."*

*"More interactions at school to be involved in their learning. For example, parents/carers to come in and read."*

School communities indicated a strong desire for opportunities to interact and socialise, to help students emerging from remote (at home) learning to **build a sense of belonging**, to their school and with other peers.

*"I would like to see teaching staff making an effort to get to know children's families. Children do not exist in isolation. Relationships with children themselves, and with parent. When children witness relationships between educators and parents and families it is far more likely to support children's social emotional wellbeing and learning."*

*"More opportunities to build connection between students of their own age."*

*"More school community activities to encourage a sense of belonging. In a way if there were more activities where we got to know more about curriculum, whole school might learn a dance via zoom during lockdown."*

Families also indicated a sense of wanting to feel part of a **strong school community**, particularly after several years of feeling removed from their child's school, given Covid restrictions. This was particularly the case for newer families in a school.

*"The more we connect face to face the more humanity will come back."*

*"Opportunities for parents to connect as those that started school in Covid times weren't able to naturally connect."*

*"Informal networking with year cohort and community."*

*"Community needs to start from the beginning of their school lives. Get the families in early on. Everyone feels so disconnected."*

In terms of student learning, there were calls for more diversity in teaching with less emphasis on technology-based learning and assessments, particularly after long periods of technology-reliant remote (at home) learning. Not surprisingly were also calls for a greater focus on **face-to-face teaching**, and more **classroom supports**, to help students catch up on perceived lost learning during periods of remote (at home) learning.

*"A return to physical art classes to improve dexterity, imagination, creating and planning."*

*"Having the option of small group tutoring in specific subjects to make sure kids can keep up in the main subjects."*

*"More support for teachers during crucial learning time. Classes with more than 18 kids should have an assistant or some sort of basic Ed help."*

Finally, optional commentary often raised the need for staff and students to have education in vital **life skills**, particularly in relation to **student mental health**. This issue was often coupled with concerns about **staff/teacher wellbeing**, highlighting the heightened awareness of teacher workloads and shortages.

*"Mental Health First Aid Training for Teachers & Parents."*

*"Learning how to manage risk instead of running away and getting someone else to solve their problems."*

*"More support before and after school with staff and students relating to wellbeing."*

*"Increased understanding and agility to respond to the needs of students experiencing mental health issues."*

*"Tools for life, learning skills now told improve their mental health throughout their lives."*

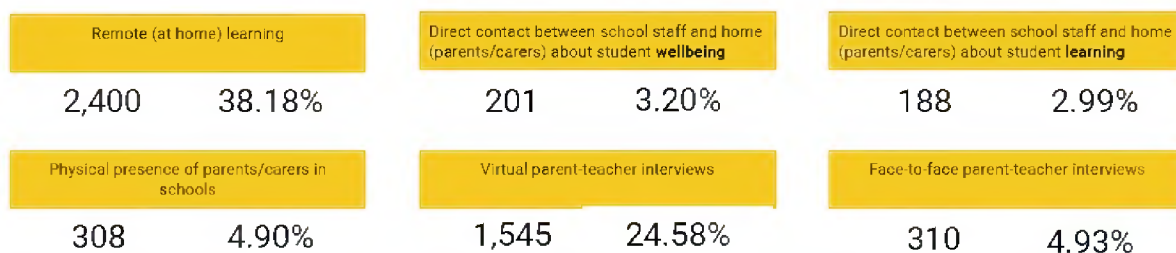
*"I am concerned about teachers' wellbeing, especially being affected by the quality of teachers that were dismissed due to the mandates. If teachers' wellbeing is affected, I can't imagine how they would project that on my child's learning."*

*"Some of these things place unfair and extra stress on teachers, we need to look after teachers."*

*"Let teachers spend more time in the classroom!"*

The reverse question ('select those things you would like to see less of') emphasised that parents would like to see less of the initiatives introduced during the lockdowns – e.g., remote (at home) learning (38.2%) and virtual parent-teacher interviews (25.0%) – and more in person contact with schools and teachers.

Fewer than 5% of respondents wanted to see **less**: face-to-face parent-teacher interviews (4.9%), physical presence of parents/carers in schools (4.9%), direct contact between school staff and home (parents/carers) about student wellbeing (3.2%), and direct contact between school staff and home (parents/carers) about student learning (3.0%). Almost half of the total responses (44.0%) wanted none of the initiatives listed, illustrating a keen desire to get back to 'the way things were', pre-COVID. (See **Figure 2**).



**Figure 2: What parents would like to see less of in relation to wellbeing and learning (%)**

In addition to question responses, almost 350 parents provided further commentary regarding what they would like to see less of in relation to wellbeing and learning. Analysis of these comments again reflect a **desire for connection**, either through less remote learning, or through **opportunities on school grounds** for families to connect with their child's learning.

*"[Less/fewer] unnecessary COVID restrictions on the children and their excursions and on restricting parents' access into the school."*

*"Would like to see less of parents being excluded from their child's education and unwelcome in the classroom. Especially in early years when the link between home and school is of great importance in their development."*

*"Less restricting of parents in schools, let us in, to a point. Even if it's only 2 days a term, especially in lower primary grades. I'm a teacher and a parent. And I just find it sad, that I haven't even been able to see my own child's work or what they get up to. I know more about my students than my own child, and that to me is not right. That needs to change."*

A hot topic for many is the emphasis on **ICT in education**, with many of the additional commentary from parents and families calling for **less reliance/over-reliance on technology** and online learning. This was particularly the case for younger primary school students.

*"Less reliance on technology. More paper, pens and textbooks."*

*"Less reliance on laptops. More use of creative and outdoor ways of learning."*

*"Less time spent with students behind a screen during learning/class time."*

*"Less apps/ more writing – go back to older learning styles because they actually worked, and children had more imagination and focusing abilities."*

*"Less emphasis on ICT especially if it comes at the expense of learning provided by human-to-human contact."*

(Barker, B. (2023). Catholic School Parent Perspectives on Student Wellbeing and Learning in 2022. Canberra: ARACY (pp. 8-12)).