

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING AUTHORITY

COVID-19 PANDEMIC impact

How parents view and assess their
child's performance



acara

Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on how parents view and assess their child's performance

- The COVID-19 pandemic has (not unexpectedly) had a significant impact on education, with those parents in Victoria feeling the most significant impacts, while parents in WA and QLD feeling the least disrupted. In NSW, parents also experienced a sense of disruption and frustration with home schooling in particular, although sentiments weren't as strong as in Victoria
- Irrespective of the length of time families have been exposed to home schooling, all parents who participated in this research report they have far greater insight now into their children's education, learning styles and where they struggle and thrive
- Parents generally rely on conversations with teachers to determine how their child is progressing, with school exams and standardised testing such as NAPLAN playing a lower order role in this regard –as a result of the pandemic, some parents feel more empowered to use their own observations of their child as a higher order influencer

In a challenging environment, COVID-19 has given parents new perspectives on their children's education

Many parents found 2020 to be a challenging year for their family and school community. While experiences differed from school to school and family to family, the experiences of remote learning gave many parents a unique (and often frustrating) insight into the mechanics of schooling and education, with many finding a new appreciation for teachers and their skills.

Broadly, most parents indicate that they generally had a greater involvement with their child's learning because of remote learning but had to do so amidst uncertainty and increased stress more generally.



Renewed appreciation for teaching, what is taught, curriculum requirements. This insight may mean tests like NAPLAN may be viewed through a different lens in the future

Methodology

The qualitative methodology consisted of a sample of parents participating in two research activities...

- **Online forum...** 1 x 2-day forum covering the impact of COVID
- **Virtual focus group...** 9 x 90-minute virtual video focus groups were conducted with parents to explore their reactions to stimulus material

Research was conducted using the VisionsLive qualitative platform between Wednesday 25 November and Tuesday 1 December 2020.

A forum topic guide and focus group discussion guide was developed by EY Sweeney in collaboration with ACARA.

Sample structure			
	Parents of primary school children	Parents of secondary school children	Total
Metro NSW	6	5	11
Metro QLD	6	6	12
Metro VIC	6	-	6
Metro SA	6	-	6
Metro WA	5	-	5
Regional VIC	6	4	10
Total	35	15	50

“I now appreciate how much hard work it is to teach children. I have a renewed understanding and appreciation of my children's’ teachers.”

(Primary school Parent, Metro WA)

“I’ve realised I’m not cut out to be mum and teacher. I’m not trained for that!”

(Primary school Parent, Metro NSW)

Challenges of remote learning

The disproportionate economic impacts of the pandemic affected families in very different ways. This in turn impacted a parent's capacity to actively engage in their child's education during periods of remote learning.

Many parents reduced their work hours or lost their employment altogether, others transitioned quickly to working from home, while essential workers extended their hours out in the community.

Full-time working parents found the experience of supporting remote learning to be much more challenging than those in situations where a parent was not working full time.

Full-time working parents

- **Competing demands...** the competition between work, family and learning needs, resulted in some parents working long hours to accommodate the needs of remote learning, or providing less support to their child as they would have liked
- **Frustrations...** working parents appear to feel more frustrated by aspects of remote learning, some citing a lack of face-to-face contact and a perception that the coursework was 'dumbed down'

Non-FT working parents

- **Increased bandwidth for engagement...** many parents in positions where employment was reduced appeared to enjoy the opportunity to spend more time supporting their children learn
- **Insights into learning methods...** some parents were able to gain greater insight into learning methods that best suit their children. Some explored alternative learning methods with their children, and saw benefit to one-on-one attention or adjusting specific approaches

"I just didn't have the time – I'm an essential worker. I'd tell them to ask their teacher, and if they didn't have an answer, well that just had to go through to the keeper."

(Secondary school Parent,
Regional VIC)

"The concern for every parent was *would he be behind?* I'm a nurse, not a teacher, I wasn't good at it and you worry the entire time if you're doing the right thing."

(Primary school Parent, Metro QLD)

Student experiences of remote learning during lockdown varied

“My girl has realised she is definitely a ‘face to face’ learner. She didn’t handle the online situation well – the motivation was just not there”

(Secondary school Parent, Metro QLD)

“My son definitely didn’t adjust well at home. He gets ok marks generally, but at home he couldn’t focus and wasn’t doing much at home when we checked on him. He needs the structure of lunch breaks and periods”

(Secondary school Parent, Metro NSW)

“It really varied. Some subjects it worked well, particularly the ones she wanted to do well in –but for other subjects she didn’t do a single thing”

(Secondary school Parent, Metro NSW)

Social distancing impacted on how parents assess performance

While the social aspects of learning were significantly missed during lockdowns, continued social distancing measures have also reduced the formal and informal touchpoints for parents to gain informal and first-hand feedback of their child's progression.

Among parents who had the capacity to spend time with their children on their learning, during times of remote learning there emerged a stronger understanding of the benefit of that one-to-one homework/tuition support for their child.

There was a greater understanding that, particularly for the first years of primary school, children who are struggling need more support and contact from educators.

The implication of this is positive that parents have had the opportunity to become more engaged with their child's development, but also that in communications about performance they appreciate that if their child performs poorly, that action can be taken



Parents

Fewer opportunities to participate in-class and on-school grounds

- Feelings of having a transactional and limited personal relationship with teachers means parents find it harder to understand what teachers were expecting of their child and how to work with them to overcome any barriers
- Parents lament having fewer opportunities to participate in the classroom as a result of strict social distancing and biosecurity measures. Parents with primary school aged children particularly missed activities such as volunteering in the classroom

Concern and confusion



Students

Lacking social interaction

- Social contact with friends and classmates was substantially affected, impacting their educational and social wellbeing
- Sports and extracurricular activities have been constrained – meaning students are missing out on a rounded educational experience
- Peer learning opportunities and a general sense of competitiveness, comradery and belonging has also diminished during lockdown periods

Anxiety and sense of disconnection

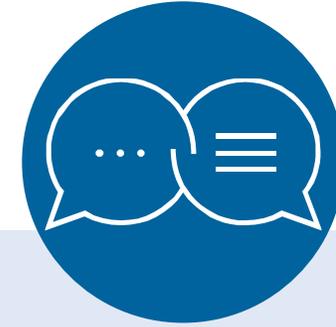
In the aftermath of COVID-19 lockdowns, parents have had time to consider what is most important to them and their children

Particularly following the 2020 lockdowns faced during the pandemic, there has been evidence of a sharpened focus on the needs of families –what matters and how can experiences across the board be improved to reflect what most matters. Importance of social learning and broader educational outcomes beyond simply reports and rankings has been a consistent example of this refocus among parents.



Importance of social elements

Many parents feel they now have more insight than ever in what were previously implicit benefits of the importance of social aspects of class learning, such as regular feedback on classwork, providing students with structure, a sense of competitiveness and engagement with other students to motivate progress as well as a general sense of belonging.



Valuable sources of feedback

The pandemic has assisted parents to consider what types of feedback parents and students consider to be most valuable.

Many parents noted that the most valuable forms of feedback were face to face channels such as parent-teacher evenings which provide vital information for understanding their child's performance at school.