

Winter 2022

TELL US HOW YOU REALLY FEEL

A Teacher Sentiment Survey

LEANLAB EDUCATION

Leanlab Education is a nonprofit organization that specializes in codesign research between education technology companies and schools. We listen to parents, educators, and students to help them pinpoint specific problems and highlight successes. Then, we match those schools with education entrepreneurs. Together, they develop the next generation classroom tools through research and direct, community feedback.

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

In the spring of 2020, the sudden shift to remote learning illuminated the digital divide in Kansas City public school students, it also transformed the way educators taught and engaged with students and families. During this time, Leanlab Education began the conversation with schools to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 and to gather targeted data on the digital divide ([Source](#)).

In the summer of 2020, we conducted a parent needs assessment at the end of the spring semester with the goal of understanding parent experiences with at-home learning. This assessment identified key successes and challenges and was used to inform school districts on how to support parents and students during the new school year with at-home learning ([Source](#)).

In the fall of 2020, we made it a priority to partner with Kansas City schools to re-assess the internet connectivity and technology needs in Kansas City. This assessment highlighted the progress made during the

preceding months and the gaps that were still outstanding. ([Source](#)).

In spring of 2021, we assessed connectivity and technology needs as for a third time and worked with community members to support the needs of the digital divide ([Source](#)).

During the months of November and December 2021, Leanlab staff conducted the following survey to assess the lingering challenges that teachers are facing nearly 18 months into the pandemic and to highlight the bright spots and successes that teachers are experiencing.

This data will help us provide additional support to our network schools as we work to codesign solutions for sustainable teaching and learning practices. Additionally, it can help further inform education technology companies in our network about areas where product improvements could have the greatest impact.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Teachers were surveyed with open-ended questions that asked them to identify the challenges and successes they are experiencing related to teaching in a pandemic. Teachers had the option to complete the survey either through one-on-one interviews during school visits, video conversations, phone calls, or online.

Responses were then coded and categorized accordingly to determine trends and common themes that teachers were experiencing at the time.

SURVEY RESPONDENTS

The survey yielded 242 responses from educators representing 14 different charter schools and public school districts across Missouri and Kansas in urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Schools / Districts	School Type
Blue Valley School District	Suburban Public
Brookside Charter	Urban Charter
Clinton County R-3	Rural Public
Citizens of the World	Urban Charter
Guadalupe Centers Charter Schools	Urban Charter
Kairos Middle School	Urban Charter
Kansas City Public Schools	Urban Public
Kansas City International Academy	Urban Charter
Lawrence School District	Suburban Public
Liberty School District	Rural Public
North Kansas City Schools	Suburban Public
Topeka Public School District	Urban Public
Raytown School District	Urban Public
Gordon Parks Elementary School	Urban Charter



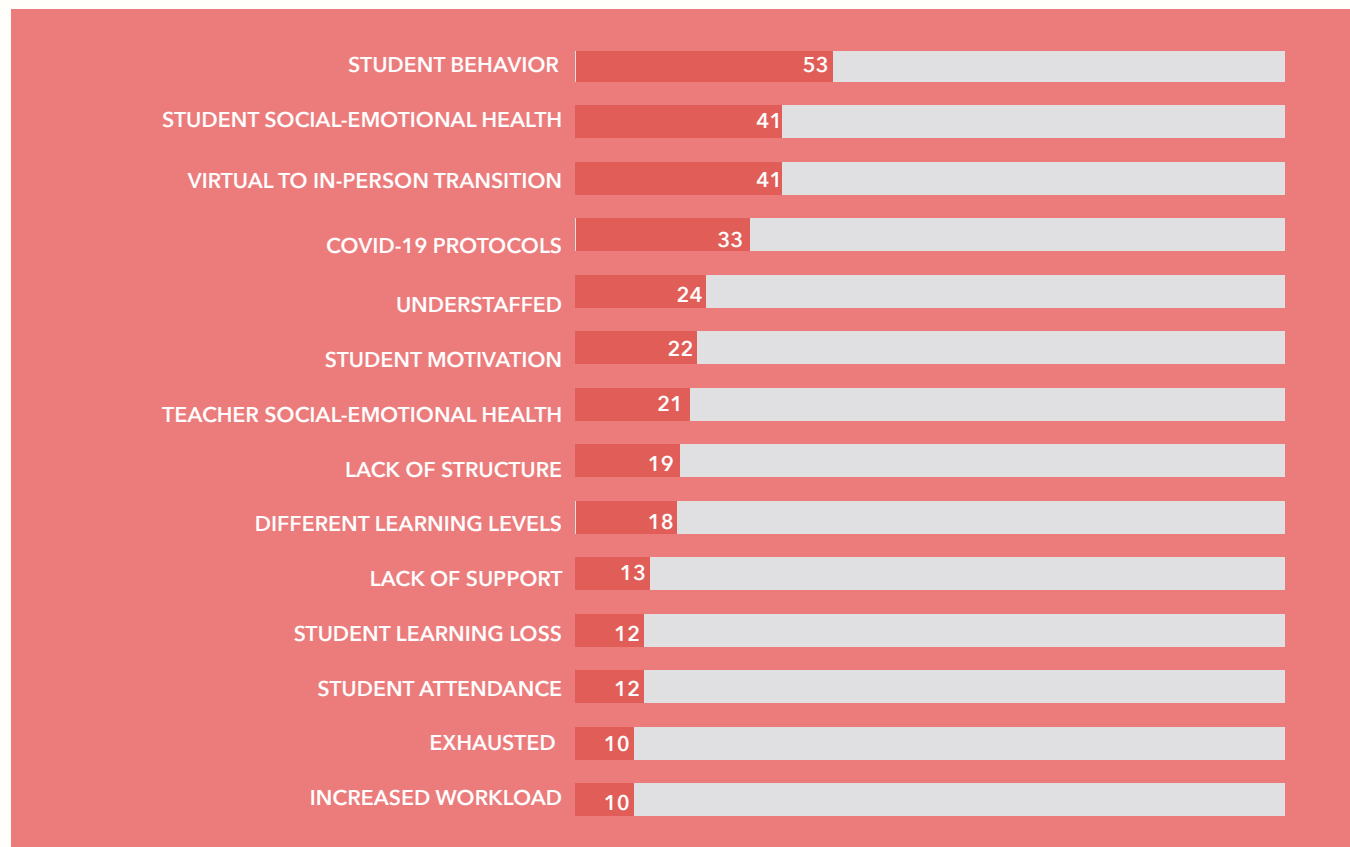


FINDINGS

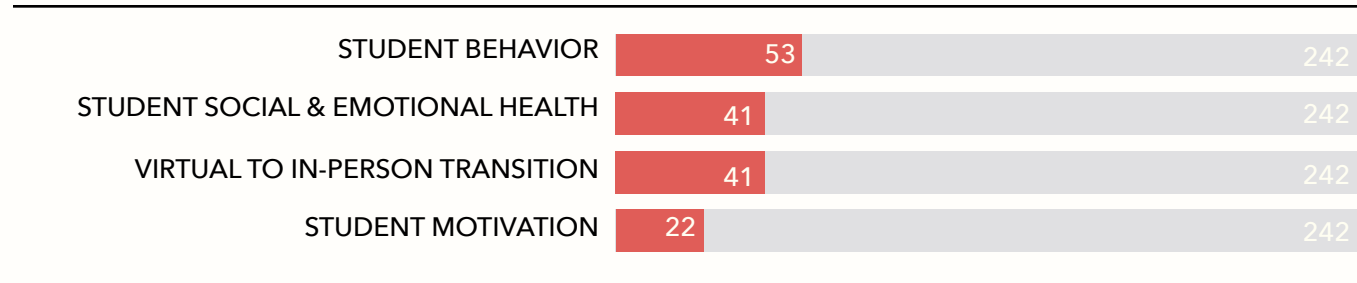
Challenges

As schools returned to in-person instruction for the 2021-2022 academic year, teachers continued to face multiple challenges amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. We have identified three major challenges that teachers reported they are currently facing based on the survey results which include the social and emotional well being of students and associated student behavior, teacher burnout, and gaps in student learning.

The chart below summarizes 14 common challenges that emerged from the survey.



Student Behavior & Emotional Well-Being



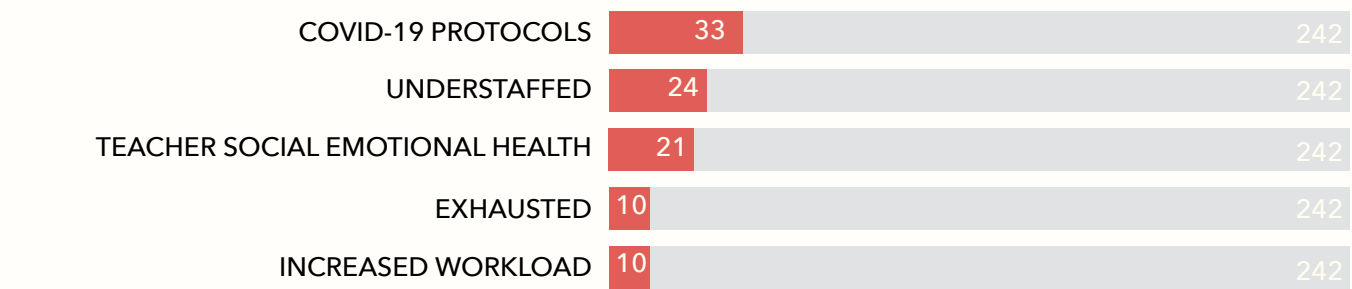
Teachers report that the **transition to in-person learning** (16.9 %) has been a challenge for students as they reestablish routines, schedules, and expectations after multiple months of virtual learning.

Survey responses indicate that teachers are currently trying to balance the **social and emotional needs of students** (14.5%) who need to improve their emotional regulation and social skills while keeping them on track for academic growth.

Responses indicate that there are multiple outside factors that are leading to **behavioral issues** (21.9%) and a **lack of motivation** as students experience fatigue (9.1%).

"I would say that the biggest thing that I have run into this year is behavioral issues. My students just do not know how to be in a class full of students. Their social skills are extremely lacking. At times I feel more like a social worker than a teacher."

Teacher Burnout



Survey responses indicate that teachers are also concerned about their own **mental health and social and emotional wellbeing** (8.7%).

Teachers reported that they are struggling to navigate the nuances of teaching amid an ongoing pandemic and the required **COVID-19 protocols** (13.6 %) for masking, tracking student interactions, quarantine processes, and concerns for their own health and safety.

Teachers also reported that their schools are **understaffed** (9.9%) and experiencing teacher and substitute shortages, as well as understaffing in support areas like paraeducators, bus drivers and cafeteria workers.

These shortages have caused many teachers to fill in for absences or accept additional responsibilities in their **workload** (4.1%) which has led to increased levels of **exhaustion** (4.1%).

“This year has been really tough on teacher’s mental health. There are many wonderful teachers stepping away from teaching because it’s draining them and with the shortage of staff, there isn’t much support. I feel so tired everyday, and I mean we have all felt “teacher tired” before, but not like this.”

Student Learning Challenges

Different Learning Levels	18	242
Student Learning Loss	12	242

Teachers also reported two different types of **student learning loss** (5%) as challenges that they are experiencing.

First, is the learning loss broadly attributable to virtual learning and the challenges associated with transforming in-person classrooms to completely remote environments. Additionally, many students experienced connectivity issues that prevented full participation.

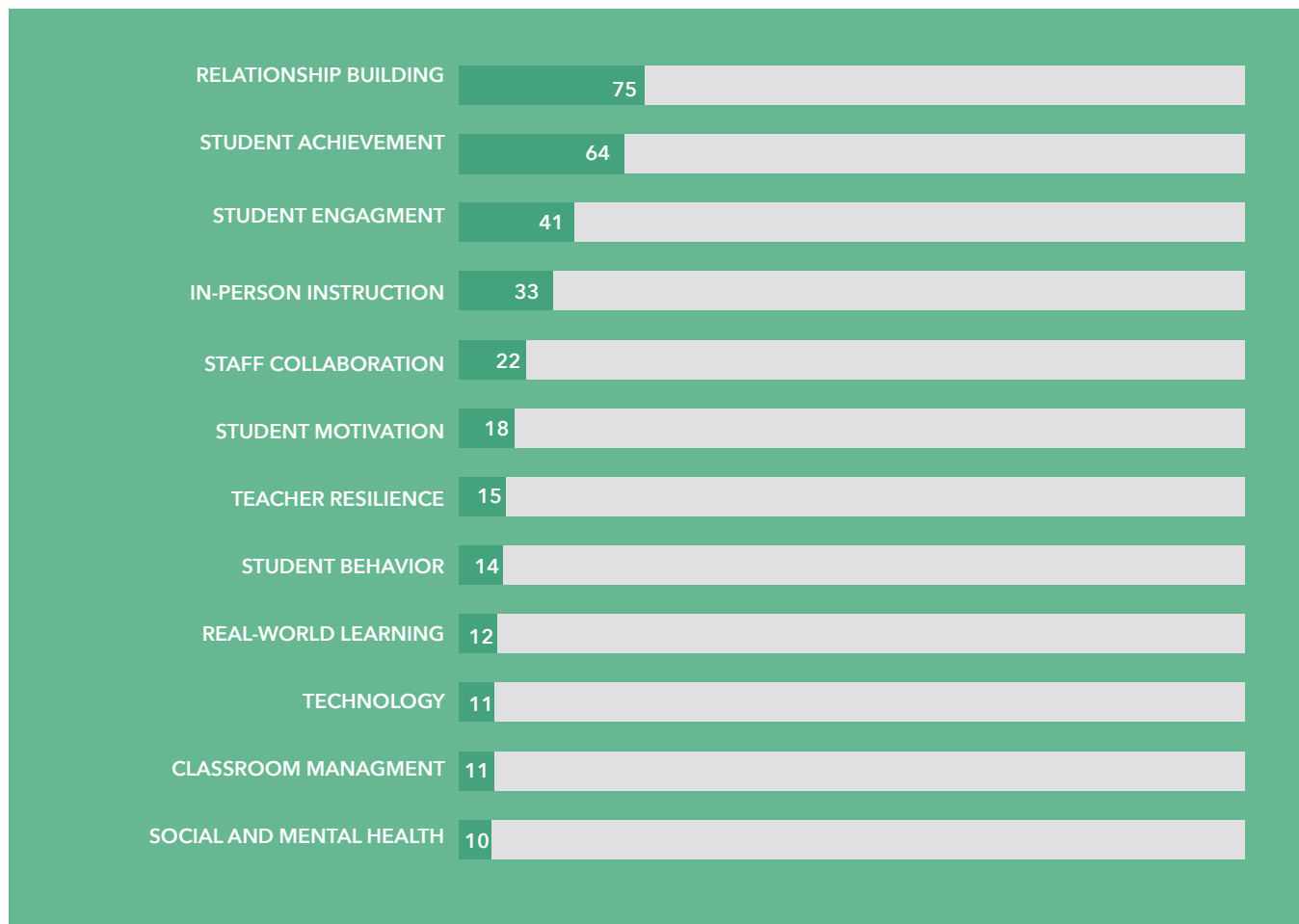
The second cause for gaps in student learning is a more immediate effect and occurs when students are required to quarantine based on school pandemic protocols and transition to remote learning for short periods of time.

Both of these scenarios contribute to the **different learning levels** (7.4%) of students within a classroom requiring teachers to instruct across a spectrum of students who are learning above and below grade level.

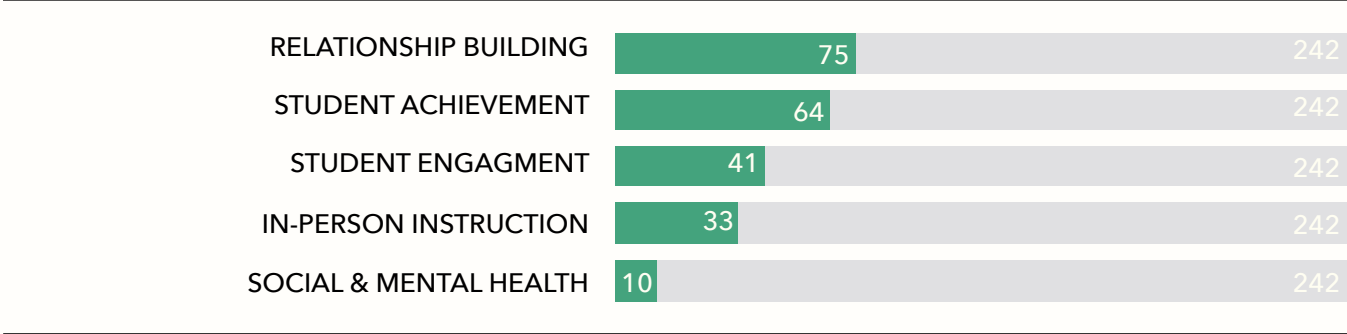
“The greatest challenge this school year has been keeping students engaged and motivated. One component of this is figuring out exactly where the students are individually and collectively to help drive coursework. This means recreating a lot of lessons and materials.”

Successes

While education currently faces many ongoing challenges, there are still many bright spots. The survey results indicate that many teachers remain optimistic and have found areas of success; including the increased ability to build relationships with students during in-person learning and positive student growth. The figure below shows 12 common areas of success that emerged from the survey responses. From these, we identified two larger themes that are discussed below in detail.



Relationships and Engagement with Students



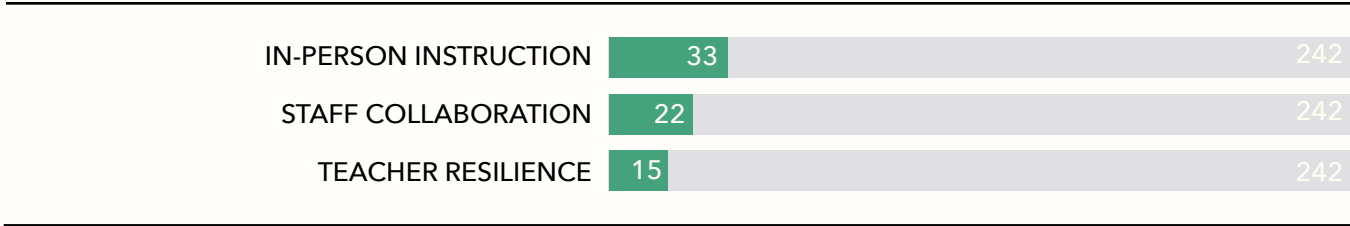
Teacher survey responses indicate that they have a greater ability to **build relationships** (23.7%) and support students and parents with the return to **in-person instruction** (12%).

These relationships appear to contribute to the positive growth that teachers reported in the areas of **student achievement** (20.9%) and **student engagement** (14.5%).

Additionally, survey responses indicate teachers are better able to respond to the **academic, social, and mental health** (4.1%) needs of students while providing them support and accommodations.

“I have formed some great relationships with my students, some of my best yet. I think it is because I am open and honest with them about how I am feeling, whereas in the past I was afraid to really be myself.”

Teacher Collaboration



Survey responses also indicate that one of the benefits of returning to **in-person instruction** (13.6%) is the increased ability to collaborate with other teachers and staff members.

According to the survey responses, **staff collaboration** (9.1%) has increased their capacity for collective problem solving and solidarity among colleagues.

Survey responses indicate that collaboration and a network of supportive colleagues can help contribute to **teacher resilience** (6.2%) where simply returning to school for another day is considered a success by several who were surveyed.

Other team members who don't typically do support roles have really stepped up to support the social emotional needs of all students.



DISCUSSION

RECOMMENDATIONS

In-person learning coupled with clear safety protocols

Teachers overwhelmingly reported relationship building and student achievement as their top successes this school year.

Instructional models that support in-person learning and safety protocols that help students remain in school can create a learning environment where teachers are able to strengthen their relationships with students and increase student engagement through consistent learning activities.

These two areas will be critical to meet the needs of students during the remainder of the 2021-2022 academic year.

Innovative approaches to staffing shortages

As schools navigate staffing shortages, innovative solutions should be explored to help recruit and retain high quality teachers and education staff.

This could possibly include reimagining traditional school models, rethinking instructional delivery methods, barriers to licensure, and competitive compensation.

Innovative solutions that are codesigned with teachers will be required to address these challenges and meet the needs of all students in the future.

CONCLUSION

The results from this emergency needs survey provide a deeper understanding and additional context to the challenges that teachers face and areas where they have found success during this academic year.

While teachers are experiencing behavioral issues with students and their struggles to transition back into the classroom after months of remote learning, they remain optimistic that the relationships they are able to build and reestablish are leading to improved academic achievement and engagement. Additionally, teachers are reporting higher levels of stress and burnout so, continued support in the areas of mental and emotional health are critical for sustaining adequate school staffing.

This data will help Leanlab provide additional support to our network schools as we work to codesign solutions for sustainable teaching and learning practices. Additionally, it can help further inform education technology companies in our network about areas where product improvements could have the greatest impact.

However, there are several limitations to this survey data. The sample size disproportionately skews towards charter schools which does not accurately represent the composition of schools across the country. Additionally, the number of questions and their open-ended nature limited the kinds of responses we could collect.

Recommendations for further research could include additional data points such as the grade levels taught and/or years of service. This could help determine specific challenges or areas of success that various grade levels are experiencing, and could provide additional insight on support that could be provided to early or mid-career teachers.

Additionally, the survey respondents could be expanded to include school support staff who work directly with students to provide a broader understanding of what does and does not work. Additional research could also incorporate a mixed-methods approach which combines survey data with focus groups and individual interviews.



QUOTES

QUOTES - CHALLENGES

- "Two huge challenges: First, wild student behavior. Kids are returning after having not been in school for 1.5 years. 5th graders who behave like 3rd graders. And, for our kids, that time was spent in a traumatic environment, often where violence or disruptive behavior was modeled. Second, the "Great Resignation." Teachers seeing their peers changing careers and following suit. We've had far more staff than usual quit mid-year, and it's been a constant challenge to find replacements."
- "The most challenging part of this year is the high amounts of at-risk and high language needs students that are enrolled into each classroom. Our classrooms are overflowing and the demographic of our school NEEDS lower numbers in order to best support each student."
- "The most challenging part of this school year has been meeting the social-emotional needs of my students. Many of them seem much more emotionally immature than typical 3rd graders. Trying to meet their emotional needs as well as their educational needs has been a challenge."
- "The effects of students not having "normal" school since March 2020 - students don't seem to remember how to interact in a school setting at the high school level. Needing extra reminders of school etiquette."
- "Contracted services, like staff shortages in busing, cafeteria services and substitutes. Teacher burnout is very real, and we are asking too much of a staff already feeling challenged to chip in and fill these support roles."
- "The balance between making academic gains and meeting SEL needs has been difficult. Also being asked to put resources towards test taking grades and not all students."

- "Teacher burnout due to large learning gaps in students brought on by Covid and various other factors. Teachers are also burned out due to worse behaviors than in previous years and more extreme behaviors, probably due to some trauma from Covid and a lack of consistent schooling in the past 18ish months."
- "I'm immunocompromised, every day is a threat to my life."
- "The most challenging thing has been to make up what was lost last year to virtual this year. Motivating them to write and read letter sounds was like asking them to break their own leg. It was TOUGH but we got through it!"
- "The most difficult or challenging thing this school year and is trying to teach backwards and forwards at the same time. Making sure that we get students to grade-level work. Also, their social-emotional skills with peers and teachers have been challenging."
- "The think the most challenging has been Covid. Not having a mask mandate for students that were too young to get vaccinated has weighed heavily on me as an educator."
- "Our students were virtual last school year, so there have been challenges adjusting to being in person again, mainly with emotional regulation and coping skills. We do our best to incorporate SEL curriculum into our days, which helps build safety and community."
- "Student behaviors have been much more severe this year. I think it stems from trauma of the pandemic, the lack of social skills being practiced during that time, and possibly academic delays. It has also been challenging being expected to pretend like it's a "normal" school year when it definitely is not."
- The most challenging thing this school year has been finding a balance between my mental "health and the mental health of my students."
- "Students behind academically from the year before with COVID, and attendance continues to be a struggle causing more issues with students being below grade level-lots of stress and pressure of teachers."

- "Pretending like everything is back to normal and expecting teachers to operate normally while most of the pandemic issues still linger."
- The most challenging in the beginning of the year was adjusting to the schedule and the constant being with other people (lots of people) all day, but as that routine has been more adjusted to with time, the biggest challenge would be the pressure for state assessments with students who are on so many varying levels."
- "The most challenging this year has been all of the extra administrative tasks placed on teachers in addition to routine tasks and teaching."
- "Due to Covid, hybrid schedules, and fully virtual learning, a number of our students have forgotten/never learned the expectations of high school level courses. It has been a struggle to redirect students successfully, and there have been more behaviors/outbursts/inappropriate actions this year than I've seen previously."
- "I'm a referee this year, not a teacher. Definitely going from 4 days a week and less kids to a full classroom and 5 days a week. The students are all over the place academically and behaviorally now more than ever. Another comment here, nothing changed from the perspective of Covid when we did the 4 days a week to now when we are doing the full 5 days."

QUOTES - *SUCSESSES*

- "The students have been incredibly resilient. They are working hard and trying their very best. Seeing them learn a concept and feel proud of themselves is great to see."
- "Students have been collaborative, shown empathy, and worked hard to overcome the challenges of the last two years. They love the consistency."
- "It has been great to be back in person and continue to build on and establish relationships with students and families again."
- "Identifying the challenges so we can begin working on them. Returning to in-school person and keeping our community safe."
- "Bonding with kids. bonding with parents. in-person learning. in-person conferences."
- "Getting to know all students in my school and spreading creativity with various lesson plans."
- "I've witness students that had connectivity issues in the previous school year be able to engage with academia, that's a priceless relief."
- "My kids are kinder than they have ever been. They are so eager to help and engage positively with others."
- "It has been so rewarding to see students back at school, excited to learn. We have added more technology to our school, and students are able to engage with it in meaningful, creative ways."

- "Most of the children appear to be learning. They're showing social-emotional growth."
- "Kids are here every day!!! Getting to know kids and celebrate a more "normal" learning environment where group collaboration is the norm. Being able to cheer kids on at their extra curricular events. Watching kids be successful as they are able to engage every day... an environment where all kids are seen and heard!"
- "My students are a great class altogether. They are excited to be in class and they are happy to be together. They seem happy to be here and that has helped tremendously."
- "Students are doing well at navigating online platform to find videos, resources, when the miss class."
- "Teachers are dedicated to doing what is best for students. They continue to expend great effort in spite of difficulties."
- "I still care about the kids. I try my best each day. It's just been a lot this year."
- "I keep showing up... even though I feel as if it doesn't matter."
- "I have seen so many student grow in different ways. Many of them have challenged themselves to become better communicators, to become more proactive, and to become more organized as they are thinking about heading off to college. I am really proud of them!"
- "It has been so great to be back in person this school year. Students seem happy to be at school, and we have done a great job of keeping everyone safe. Kids are "supposed to be significantly behind" on standards and although there are some gaps in learning, they are doing a great job with grade level material."