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**Secondary School Teachers’
Experiences of Implementing Hybrid
Learning and Quadmester Schedules
in Peel, Ontario**

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The analyses, interpretation, and discussion contained in this report, including any errors or omissions, are the responsibility of the report's co-authors. Should you wish to contact the authors, please e-mail Carol Campbell at: Carol.Campbell@utoronto.ca

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Executive Summary:

Secondary School Teachers' Experience of Implementing Hybrid Learning and Quadmester Schedules in Peel, Ontario

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Introduction

Teaching is a very demanding and complicated profession during the best of times; during a pandemic, it has become even more complex and challenging for educators. While educators have done their very best to fully support their students through a continuing pandemic with a range of mental and physical health consequences for people dealing with uncertainty and unfamiliar protocols and responses; in the words of the recent Canadian Teachers' Federation (2022) report, "But at what cost?". While there was limited choice in the initial emergency response to the pandemic and resulting school closures affecting over 90% of the school-age population globally (UNESCO, 2020); over two years into a continuing pandemic, it is time to take stock of the impact of shifts in education and to make future decisions informed by the experiences and consequences so far and the priorities for future changes.

Methods

In Fall 2021, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) District 19 (Peel) circulated an email to members asking for their experiences with the combined implementation of the quadmester schedule and hybrid learning, and the overall impact of the pandemic for their work and for their students. Hybrid teaching involves a teacher simultaneously teaching students in-person, in-class and students online, at-home. Quadmester involves students being divided into two cohorts and each attends school for one week, taking two courses for one week and two other courses the next week, so four courses are completed by students over the span of nine weeks instead of five months as would be the case in a normal semester.

Responses were submitted in October 2021. OSSTF District 19 shared all written responses with us (totaling 87 respondent teachers). We then conducted a qualitative analysis of these written responses and a quantitative analysis of the frequency of responses on the same topic. In this report, we present our analyses and findings linked to the following research questions generated by the research team:

Question 1: How has the hybrid model impacted teaching?

Question 2: How has the hybrid model impacted students' learning?

Question 3: What impact did the quadmester model have on teachers?

Question 4: What impact did the quadmester model have on students?

Question 5: How has teachers' health been impacted by these measures?

Question 6: How has students' health been impacted by these measures?

Question 7: What other impacts of the response to the pandemic were identified by teachers?

Findings

The responses from 87 teachers identify the following impacts of the hybrid model for teaching and learning:

- It is an ineffective and inefficient approach to teaching and learning;
- It is challenging to conduct appropriate online student assessments;
- There has been increased workload and lack of adequate support to effectively implement the hybrid model;
- There were differences in student engagement between in-person and online learners (with online learners being more negatively impacted);
- There has been a loss of shared student community;
- There has been increasing inequities in students' experiences and in meeting their learning needs;
- There were inequities in students' access to, and use of, technology.

With regard to the impact of the quadmester schedule for teachers and students, respondents identified:

- Challenges of class time length and quadmester schedule for students' learning experiences;
- Difficulties of two and half hour classes for teachers' work;
- Difficulties of one-week on, one-week off schedule for teachers' relationships and support for students;
- It has exacerbated student inequities;
- The proposal that quadmesters protect students in cohorting is a myth and has had implications for health and safety.

As indicated above, respondents also noted health concerns resulting from the impact of changes to schooling including:

- Deteriorating mental health for students and educators;
- Negative physical health impacts for teachers' having to teach from front of class during hybrid learning and over two and half hour classes;
- Feeling unsafe at school;
- Increasing sick leave with implications for covering classes.

Other impacts noted by teacher respondents included significant and serious impacts on their own professional and personal lives, and an increasing number of teachers considering leaving the profession. Overall, respondents were concerned that the impact of these responses to the COVID-19 pandemic were undermining Ontario's publicly-funded public education system.

Discussion

Evidence globally and within Canada is clearly indicating that the consequences of the pandemic, including changes in schooling and increasing mental and physical health concerns, had a profound, and often substantially negative, impact for students and for educators (see for example: CTF/FCE, 2022; OECD, 2021; Thompson, 2021). Unfortunately, this holds true in Ontario too.

While education systems around the world have been challenged with rapidly designing and flexibly implementing emergency responses through the pandemic; the evidence from 87 teachers in Peel indicates that the combination of hybrid learning and the use of quadmester schedules appears to have been particularly problematic with negative consequences for teachers' work and for students' learning and equity. In combination, the impacts identified for students and for teachers are very troubling. The fact that these impacts were identified within a month of the start of the school year (October 2021) is even more troubling, as the likelihood is further consequences have been experienced over the continuing school year.

The Ontario government has now reduced the requirement for student cohorting, meaning quadmester schedules are no longer required. The government, however, has already confirmed that the option for parents to fully opt their child out of in-person schooling and into online schooling will remain in 2022-23 school year. In light of the experience on hybrid learning, and negative media, student and public reactions (for example: CBC News, 2021; Jalaluddin, 2021; Katawazi, 2021; Stewart, 2021; Wong, 2021a, 2021b), several Ontario school-boards, including Peel, have announced that hybrid learning will not continue in 2022-23, and instead a virtual school for fully online teaching and learning will be implemented. The short- and long-term consequences of these significant shifts for students individually and collectively, and for high quality publicly funded education must continue to be monitored and reported.

Of particular importance, as governments make future education decisions and budget allocations, and as school districts (or their equivalents in specific education systems) and school leaders respond within their local contexts, it is vital that the voices of education workers are listened to, heard, and acted on. A striking finding throughout the 87 responses was a feeling of being unheard. Teachers – and all who work in education systems – have been through tremendous changes during the pandemic; they have navigated and innovated changes and sought to implement improvements to support all students; they have also been on the receiving end of rapidly changing mandates, some of which – as detailed in this report – have had negative consequences. The highest quality education systems listen to, value, respect, and trust the education profession to inform policy decisions and for teachers' professional judgement in their day-to-day work (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Cordingley et al., 2019; Thompson, 2021). This must be central to any plans for COVID-19 recovery in education. We finish with the words of one of the teacher respondents:

“If anyone making decisions actually does want the education system to be a vehicle for social change, please invite us frontline workers to tell you what needs to be done and undone”.

Secondary School Teachers' Experience of Implementing Hybrid Learning and Quadmester Schedules in Peel, Ontario

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1. Introduction

Following the World Health Organization's announcement that COVID-19 was a global pandemic, over 195 countries implemented country-wide school closures resulting in over 1.6 billion students and over 63 million teachers rapidly shifting to emergency response remote learning approaches (UNESCO, 2020). The consequences of shifts to emergency response remote learning, school re-openings with new public health measures, and various shifts between in-person, online, and hybrid learning have had a profound impact for educators' work and for students' experiences of schooling, teaching, and learning globally (OECD, 2021; Thompson, 2021) and in Canada (CTF/FCE, 2022).

This report discusses responses from 87 teachers in Peel District School Board in Ontario, Canada, about their experiences of the combination of the introduction of hybrid teaching and learning approaches and a shift to quadmester scheduling in secondary schools. Hybrid teaching involves a teacher simultaneously teaching students in-person, in-class and students online, at-home. Quadmester scheduling involves students studying a subject for two and half hours per day for one week, then switching to other subjects for one week, then returning to the original subject(s). The impacts of these changes are analyzed for teachers' work and students' learning, teachers' and students' health, and for the work of the education profession.

2. Pandemic Responses for Education in Ontario

School education in Canada is the responsibility of ten provinces and three territories. Ontario is the province with the largest population. The Ontario Government, through the Ministry of Education has overall responsibility for publicly-funded education, which is administered through 72 school boards, 10 school authorities, one provincial school authority, and one consortium. There are almost 5000 schools serving over two million school-aged students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2022). Peel District School Board (DSB) is part of the

English-language public education system with 259 schools (217 elementary, 42 secondary) serving over 153,000 students (Peel District School Board, 2022).

When the first cases of Covid-19 began to emerge in Canada in late January 2020, no major changes were initially announced by the provincial government in Ontario. On March 6, Peel DSB shared a letter with families sharing information about Covid-19, the measures the Board was taking at school and work sites to support the government's preventative approach (Peel District School Board, 2020a). Following the announcement by the World Health Organization of the global pandemic on March 11, Ontario Premier Doug Ford announced, on March 12, that publicly funded schools across Ontario would be closed for two weeks following the imminent March Break. Peel DSB shared the same information with families regarding closures until April 5 (Nielson, 2020; Ford, 2020). A provincial state of emergency was declared on March 17 by Premier Doug Ford including the closure of businesses such as daycares, bars, and indoor dining for restaurants (Government of Ontario, 2020a).

As the pandemic developed further, on March 23, provincial businesses labelled as non-essential were ordered to be closed by the Premier and, four days later, the provincial government sent out an emergency alert to the public's phones alerting international travelers to self-isolate for 14 days (Government of Ontario, 2020b). Peel DSB shared a letter with families regarding plans being made to explore other ways of curriculum delivery and continued student learning, as well as stating they were aware of issues that families may have regarding online learning including accessibility issues (Peel District School Board, 2020b). On March 30, Peel DSB announced plans to begin teacher-directed learning on April 6, confirming that online learning would be delivered to all students (Peel District School Board, 2020c). Public school closures were extended on March 31 to at least May by the government, and Peel DSB shared the announcement with students and families on April 1 (Government of Ontario, 2020c; Peel District School Board, 2020d). The provincial government continued to provide updates on closures and opening of various business and activities, as well as eased some restrictions on residents venturing outdoors between April and May. Then on May 19th, the government announced that public schools would remain closed until the end of school year and that online schooling would continue (Government of Ontario, 2020d). On May 19, Peel DSB shared a news release informing families about in-person school closures for the remainder of the school year and the continuation of remote, online learning (Peel District School Board, 2020e).

Towards the end of July 2020, the provincial government began to share news about school reopening plans, beginning with the suggestion that elementary students would be back in school for five days and secondary students would attend for 50% of the time in a cohort model intended to minimize mixing between students in different classes (Nielsen, 2020). While emphasis was placed on return to in-person schooling, the government continued to provide all parents/caregivers with the right to select full-time online learning for their child. As set out in Policy and Program Memorandum (PPM) 164, online schooling was required to provide 300 minutes of learning opportunities, including 180 minutes of synchronous learning for students in Kindergarten, and 225 minutes of synchronous learning for students in Grades 1-12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2020).

Peel DSB followed the Ontario Government guidelines and shared the procedures for coming to school with families. Quadmester schedules were to be introduced in secondary schools, as well as virtual classes for students opting to learn from home (Peel District School Board, 2020f). On August 26, the Ford Government published a 21-page document outlining how schools should respond to outbreaks as students and teachers began to return to the physical environment of schools (Rodrigues, 2020). New screening guidelines were shared by the province for schools and daycares including students being required to stay home for 24 hours for any symptoms on October 1, and on the following day, a masking policy was introduced for the whole province (Government of Ontario, 2020e). Peel DSB sent out a communique to families on October 16, sharing the changes in modes of delivery, the quadmester model was underway at this point and the Board introduced the hybrid learning model, beginning November 18 (Peel District School Board, 2020g). Quadmester is referred to as a Modified Semester Model, where students are divided into two cohorts and each attends school for one week, taking two courses for one week and two other courses the next week (Peel District School Board, 2021b; Jones, 2021). So, four courses are completed by students over the span of nine weeks instead of five months as would be the case in a normal semester (Jones, 2021). Peel DSB refers to hybrid learning as a Community Learning Model, which entails in-person students and online students attending a class together with one educator planning and supporting both groups simultaneously (Peel District School Board, 2021b).

On November 3, a new five-tiered, colour coded system was shared to regulate the different areas of Ontario during Covid-19, the layers included from least restrictive to most: Prevention (green), Protection (yellow), Restriction (orange), Control (red) and Lockdown (grey)

(Nielson, 2020). Peel region was placed in the red zone on November 6 (the only location to be placed in the red), and Toronto region joined Peel on November 10 (Fox, 2020). Consideration of a longer Winter break was nixed by the Education Minister Stephen Lecce due to the protocols in place already (DeClerq, 2020). Vaccination roll-out was announced on December 7 by Premier Ford in three phases with seniors, their caregivers and health care workers being the first ones eligible to receive the vaccine (Government of Ontario, 2020f). Two days later, the Pfizer vaccine was approved for usage in Canada. On December 21, a province wide lockdown was announced, and schools were still expected to open after the Winter Break (Government of Ontario, 2020g).

On January 12, 2021, Premier Ford announced that schools in hotspot areas would remain closed for in-person learning until February 10, this included Peel region schools (Government of Ontario, 2021a). Online learning was extended for schools in Peel region on February 3 by the Education Minister Stephen Lecce (Government of Ontario, 2021b). On February 11, a statement was made by Education Minister Lecce to delay March Break by a month intended to help curb the spread of the pandemic (Government of Ontario, 2021c). In April, the education minister announced the importance of schools staying open for students' mental health and well-being; however, orders from the medical health officers of several regions including Peel saw schools closed to in-person learning. A third state of emergency was declared by the province including a stay-at-home order that lasted four weeks (Westoll, 2021; Government of Ontario, 2021d). Peel DSB continued to share updates about school closures with families throughout the changes to in-person learning announced by the Ontario Government.

Ontario students stayed in online learning following April Break as per the announcement by Education Minister Lecce (Government of Ontario, 2021e). Peel DSB shared a news release with families on August 27, to inform them about measures and protocols being put in place for the start of school in September 2021 (Peel District School Board, 2021a). Schools were to return to in-person learning in September 2021. However, the Ontario Government continued to provide the right for parents to opt out of in-person learning and continue with full-time online learning for their child, which was to be provided by school boards within existing resources. Peel DSB's plan for the school year included having elementary students in school for five days a week, continuing with the quadmester model for secondary

school students, and the use of a hybrid learning model for secondary students (Peel District School Board, 2021b).

3. Methods

In Fall 2021, the OSSTF District 19 circulated an email to members asking for their experiences with the combined implementation of the quadmester schedule and hybrid learning, and the overall impact of the pandemic for their work and for their students. Specifically, OSSTF District 19 explained that they were seeking teachers' first-hand accounts of how this school year is going, with a particular focus on:

- Hybrid teaching and learning;
- Semester model;
- Impact on student learning/school experience;
- Impact on teacher well-being.

Respondents were requested to submit a maximum of a one-page response. Responses were submitted in October 2021. OSSTF D19 shared all written responses with us (totaling 87 respondent teachers). We then conducted a qualitative analysis of these written responses and a quantitative analysis of the frequency of responses on the same topic. We began by each member of the research team analyzing 87 responses, we then met to discuss and moderate our approaches to coding the data and to agree on the approach for analyzing all of the data. All 87 responses were analyzed using an agreed coding approach and then further analyzed into thematic categories addressing the central research questions as presented below.

In this report, we present our analyses and findings linked to the following research questions generated by the research team:

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Question 4: What impact did the quadmester model have on students?

Question 5: How has teachers' health been impacted by these measures?

Question 6: How has students' health been impacted by these measures?

Question 7: What other impacts of the response to the pandemic were identified by teachers?

4. Findings

Below we discuss findings related to each of the research questions.

4.1 How has the hybrid model impacted teaching? Three main themes were identified concerning the impact of the hybrid model for teaching: it is an ineffective and inefficient approach to teaching; challenges of conducting online student assessments appropriately; and increased workload and lack of adequate support to effectively deliver the hybrid model.

4.1.1 An ineffective and inefficient approach to teaching

While no respondent expressed having positive experiences with the hybrid model, the vast majority (about 90%) explicitly stated that they found this system ineffective and detrimental to students' learning. Teachers often felt they had to teach several classes in one as content delivery and teaching methods for online, hybrid, and in-person classes differ greatly. Finding ways to engage both online and in-person students was challenging and stressful for most teachers in this study. "Neither the students in front of me nor the students online are getting my full attention as a teacher because the attention is split" said one teacher. In the words of another teacher: "Materials and equipment we use in person cannot always be replicated at home. [...]. It's expected that we teach two types of lessons in one class." This was especially challenging for subjects where hands-on and practical activities are necessary. This also raised safety concerns in subjects like Physical Education where a teacher was simultaneously supervising in-person and online students.

The hybrid system was perceived as highly inefficient and time-consuming. Many respondents complained about frequent technical issues with devices at school or Wi-Fi connections. Sorting out technology-related issues, in addition to respecting safety protocol and monitoring in-person and online students simultaneously, often led to the loss of valuable learning time on a daily basis. "The rate at which the class is able to move through the curriculum is about 50% the rate at which it would be if we just taught in person" explained one teacher; while another felt that "juggling the needs of both online and in person students wastes a lot of instructional time."

As a result of the need to be on camera for online students, the hybrid system caused many teachers to adopt more teacher-centered approaches in order to deliver content to all students through various channels. Respondents were concerned that teaching and learning

quality was being diminished, for example a teacher explained: “Coming up with a lesson plan that will work remotely AND in person results in degraded quality”. Another teacher lamented: “this hybrid/online model is not workable and goes a long way to explain the significant gaps in knowledge and skills that are painfully evident”.

While respondents recognized that the pandemic has caused such an unprecedented crisis that school boards and educators were forced to implement emergency responses with limited time, some teachers were concerned that an emergency response had become a long-term solution which was not appropriate.

4.1.2 Challenges of conducting appropriate online student assessments

As well as concerns about teaching and learning overall, several respondents specifically expressed concerns in relation to student assessment. For example, respondents reported that technology issues often either prevented students from submitting their work or prevented teachers from being able to open or read the documents uploaded by their students. In addition, the reliability of the work submitted by online students was a concern as the teacher could not fully monitor the conditions under which the assessments were being undertaken. For example, a teacher commented: “Assessments at home cannot be monitored for academic dishonesty - students are complaining about the integrity of exams if students are at home”. As a result, respondents felt unable to evaluate their students adequately and fairly. As one participant stated: “It is quite impossible to be TRULY fair in assessing in a hybrid model”.

4.1.3. Increased workload and lack of adequate support to effectively provide the hybrid model

Overall, the respondent teachers felt that their workload significantly increased with the hybrid system. Respondents complained that they had not received training on how to design and implement hybrid teaching approaches, and students had not received adequate supports on how to navigate participating in a hybrid learning classroom, especially the students who were online at home. As one respondent explained: “I have not been trained on how to manage this teaching method so finding an effective balance is very difficult.” Furthermore, the necessity to monitor online and in-person students simultaneously while handling administrative duties (taking attendance, creating different modes of assessment, online follow-ups and feedback, etc.) caused many teachers to feel overwhelmed.

Participants also pointed to technology challenges as the equipment provided was either inadequate or not functional, which was further complicated by a shortage of information technology support staff:

I have not been supplied with the proper materials to run hybrid. There have been equipment failures in the classroom that have taken days to be repaired. There aren't enough tech people to help with the many issues and replacing ancient tech in the classroom (Teacher respondent).

Respondents also struggled with the lack of consistency and visibility caused by students randomly choosing to attend class in-person or online. As one participant explained: "Students who are in our "attending" cohort can, at any time, decide to join the class remotely instead of in person which presents some issues." The hybrid system made it more difficult for teachers to adequately track students' attendance and progress, and accurately update parents. This issue was further exacerbated by the limited participation of online students in class discussions (for example, cameras off, muted, not participating orally or through the chat).

Therefore, while teachers were doing their best to provide high quality teaching for each student (both in person and online), the nature of the hybrid model was having substantial negative consequences for teachers' professional work and workload, and for how they could effectively teach all of their students.

4.2 How has the hybrid model impacted students' learning?

We discuss our findings in relation to two main themes: the social impact of the hybrid model for students' learning conditions and experiences; and the impact for student inequities.

4.2.1 Social Impact for Students

Within the theme of social impact, respondents commented on concerns about differences in students' engagement in learning, and a loss of shared community.

4.2.1.1 Differences in engagement between in-person and online students. As discussed previously, there are challenges in teaching students who are in-person in-class and online at-home simultaneously. Respondents commented on different forms of engagement in learning between in-person and online students. For example, students who were virtual could choose to not have their cameras on or to respond to the teacher or in-person classmates. One

teacher shared “Students won't turn their cameras on. Students often only want to write their comment in the chat, which cannot be properly monitored as I am dealing with the 25 other students in the room with me.” Another teacher shared a similar concern:

How to engage students who log in and do not participate at all - teachers cannot mark them absent even though there is no way to know if they are actually at their computer. These students work through posted material and submit work asynchronously.

There were concerns that because the majority of students were in-person in class, online students may not have been as engaged. It was challenging for teachers to ensure their engagement as their work was split between engaging both in-person and on-line students. One respondent described this struggle as:

It's not possible to do personal demos for the students at home (anywhere from 4 to 10 students on any given day) as I have to supervise the rest of the classroom full of students who have never done proper labs in person before. So, I have online students join my in-person students as they take turns doing parts of the labs as they cannot work together in a group or share equipment. A few of my online students do not respond or show me anything.

There were also concerns about engaging in-person students in ways that teachers had previously done, as the teachers' movement around the class was limited due to having to be close to the computer for virtual students. One teacher described this as: “My students aren't as engaged because I can't move around the room the same way”.

4.2.1.2 Loss of shared student community. Several respondents expressed concerns about difficulties in creating a coherent student community involving both in-person and online learners. For example, one teacher explained:

The students aren't building relationships with their peers either. The two groups are fragmented and separated from each other. And students in both groups are afraid to be brave, or have difficult conversations, or try out new ideas because they simply don't know who is watching them. "No way am I showing that to the kids in class," or "Miss, I'm not doing that on screen - I don't know who is watching at home."

While teachers tried to create a shared community, by using virtual apps to try and create groups of in person and virtual students, there were concerns that this was proving ineffective. A teacher explained how they had become the translator between in-person and online students, rather than there being a collective student community: “Any time I do try to build connections between the two groups, I spend much of my time artificially ‘translating’ between them. “You can't see at home, but Jayden is laughing,” or “Sophie is clapping in the chat.”

For in-person learners there could also be disadvantages, for example missed opportunities to connect with community outreach programs due to the online at-home students not being able to participate. Due to the limitations of the virtual learning model, some respondents essentially created a separate learning program for virtual students because online students could not complete the same activities as the in-person students.

4.2.2. Student inequities

Issues of inequities were identified in relation to students’ learning needs and experiences, and students’ access to and use of technology.

4.2.2.1 Increasing inequities in students’ experiences and in meeting their learning needs. As indicated above, there were concerns about differences in teaching and learning experiences for students participating in-person in-class and students participating online at-home. While respondents commented that that hybrid learning did not serve students well (both in-person and online students); there was a general agreement that the most underserved students were ones attending virtually. For example, respondents stated concerns regarding not being able to support the online students as much as in person. As one teacher explained: “Students online are often just listening in to the class; they sometimes are left “hanging” when teachers respond to issues in the physical classroom.” Split attention as well as the limitations of the hybrid environment (for example, having to quiet down in-person students to be able to hear virtual students) were noted as reason for online students feeling left behind. For example, one teacher commented: “These students (online students) do not get my full attention as I have to prioritize the students in front of me for safety reasons.”

Respondents noted particular concerns about increasing inequities for students who were English Language Learners and/or identified as having Special Education Needs: “Students who need the most support such as ELL/LD are underserved. Teachers are not able

to devote extra time in class to support the students as they are splitting their attention between in class and online students” (teacher respondent).

4.2.2.2 Inequities in students’ access to and use of technology. Over 40% of respondents mentioned technology issues which hindered students’ ability to learn and teachers’ ability to provide support. Respondents shared that students had issues with accessing virtual learning platforms, using the devices provided, and connectivity issues (Wi-Fi). One of the teachers shared that: “The building I work in isn’t built for that many students to have Wi-Fi. It glitches or is slow or doesn’t load without rebooting the computer.” And another described the connectivity issues as “some kids have spotty Wi-Fi and struggle to attend classes because of the costs of using their phone data when their home internet quality is poor”.

Teachers had to use class time to help students with technology access, for example as one respondent commented: “During class time there are often tech issues that have to be addressed that take away time from the students as well as interrupt the flow of the lesson”. Teacher had to regularly make sure that online students were not on mute and were sharing their screen when required, also requiring class time to attend to these matters:

So much of my time is spent figuring out which of my microphones to mute or unmute, which sound to share on which tab, and making sure that both the online and in-person students have access to the same resources or can see the same thing on their respective screens. (Teacher respondent).

Several respondents commented that the technology provided to teachers was a hindrance to being able to provide high quality teaching online; for example, cameras with low resolution, laptops that could not be connected to a projector, and not being able to share audio/video with in-person and virtual students simultaneously. There was also mention of Wi-Fi not being available outside therefore the online students could not join if the teacher took the learning outside. As one teacher commented: “Is there Wi-Fi outside? Absolutely not! So, we leave our online students to work independently while we go outside as much as possible as directed by the re-opening procedures”. In addition, teachers had to look carefully for applications that were free and compatible with the students’ varied learning devices. Commenting on the technology challenges of hybrid learning, a teacher explained:

Having to find software applications for all students to use (either free or at a reasonable fee) to be able to deliver an engaging a21st century curriculum...students at home often do not have adequate devices to run such powerful and demanding applications. Extremely inadequate internet in our building has also caused a great deal of anxiety and frustration as we cannot rely on being able to access our curriculum materials and/or students online - now that we are using a hybrid model the internet is an absolute necessity even more than it ever was before. (Teacher respondent).

Overall, two major themes emerged concerning the impact of hybrid learning for students – first, the social impact for students’ learning including differences in engagement between in-person and online students, and loss of shared community; secondly, the hybrid model exacerbated student inequities between in-person and online learners, especially for students with specific needs including English Language Learners and Special Education Needs, and resulted in inequities linked to variable access to and capacity for using technology effectively.

4.3 What impact did the quadmester model have on teachers?

Time was a considerable issue with the quadmester schedule involving a two and half hour class per day on a specific subject for one week, then students participating a week on other subjects and then returning to the original subject(s).

4.3.1 Difficulties of two and half hour classes for teachers’ work

Several respondents indicated concerns about the two and half hour length of quadmester classes. Preparation time and planning for a two and half hour class was challenging. One respondent described this as: “I only have prep every other week. During the week that I have prep I need to plan for 2 weeks times three classes and as a result, changing my lessons to react to students’ needs is not possible.”

Teaching for two and half hours continuously was also challenging for maintaining student’ engagement. For example, one teacher explained:

2.5-hour classes are not an effective way to learn. Learning is difficult. Learning takes focus and concentration. Learning is demanding. Asking students to learn for 2.5 hours twice a day is dismissive of their needs. Even the oldest, most motivated students struggle with this.

Teaching a two and half hour class was also physical challenging, for example if a teacher needed a health break:

The 2.5 hours with no real way of getting washroom breaks. In Phys Ed, we are trying to be outside when we can to ensure safety and mental health of our students. However, this creates big problems for washroom breaks for our staff.

Almost a quarter of respondents explicitly stated issues with insufficient time to complete all of their teaching and related tasks within the quadmester schedule. For example, respondents were concerned that they had less time to provide feedback or contact parents regarding students due to the overwhelming amount of work involved in preparing for, and teaching, quadmester classes. Teachers were having to use personal time to complete tasks they considered necessary and were unable to complete during work hours. For example, one teacher responded:

During the week with no prep time, there is no time to contact parents, provide students with feedback on their work, respond to emails, think, eat, or go to the bathroom. I have nothing left to give when the school day ends. During the week with prep time, there isn't enough recovery time before facing another week with no prep time.

Another teacher shared:

I find myself taking an abundance of time at home away from my family to ensure my classes are properly equipped for my lessons because I don't have a prep every other week. Not to mention it's programming for two weeks at a time because there is no prep in one week.

4.3.2 Difficulties of one-week on, one-week off schedule for teachers' relationships and support for students

There were also challenges of teaching students for one week, the students having other subjects and teachers for the next week, then the students returning to the first week teachers' subjects. With the quadmester model, teachers struggled to maintain continuity during the week off. "The week on/week off model makes it hard to stay connected to students" explained one teacher. Several respondents voiced their concerns that the lack of monitoring and support available during the week off often led to a review of the material covered once students came

back, for example a teacher commented: “Any momentum made is seemingly lost when they have to switch to the next week of classes”. Teachers had to review content with students after the week off and did not feel it fair to have them complete homework in the ‘off’ week because students were focusing on two other classes. As a teacher commented:

Additionally, any momentum that might be developed over the week is immediately lost as a full nine (9!!! as we must include two weekends) days pass before I would see those students again. In the intervening week they are under equally intense pressure from their other two classes.

Respondents shared that students must review the concepts at the beginning of each week, meaning there was learning loss in the week they did not have a specific class. As a result, several respondents felt that they could not fully cover the required curriculum and were unable to adequately provide continuous support to struggling students. For example, a teacher commented: “After a week off any momentum that was built up is lost. Concepts have to be re-taught. In the end, we will be lucky to cover 60% of the normal curriculum”. Respondents also felt that this system made it more difficult to ensure that students did the homework due the week they returned.

4.4 What impact did the quadmester model have on students?

Consistent with the findings concerning the impact of the quadmester model for teachers, the nature and impact of class time and scheduling were major concerns for students’ learning experiences. There were also concerns about exacerbating student inequities, and undermining the quality of publicly funded education. In addition, an argument for the quadmester model was to ensure student cohorts were maintained; however, concerns about the reality of health and safety for students during the pandemic were also raised.

4.4.1 Challenges of class time length and quadmester schedule for students’ learning experiences

Almost half of respondents specifically mentioned the class length of two and a half hours in quadmesters had a negative impact on students. Respondents commented that students were becoming less engaged and interested after the first hour or so of class, and it was difficult to maintain motivation. A teacher shared: “Students cannot focus for 2.5 hours on the same thing. It's impacting their academic performance negatively.” For example, respondents noted that asking teenagers to sit through university length classes does not help

with engagement or retaining information. Several respondents described this issue, for example:

After the first hour they pretty much tune out and this includes the motivated kids as well as those who struggle with focus. It is beyond me why any adult thinks a teenager is capable of sitting in a room for the entire morning and then the entire afternoon without losing focus. (Teacher respondent).

The 2.5 hours of teaching time is exhausting...another teacher in Peel Tweeted out the other day something about how even movie producers don't generally make films longer than 2.5 hours, because even they know that it's too long to maintain focus. (Teacher respondent).

A course running for the duration of 2.5 hours must have been drafted by those who do not comprehend how student learning works. Evidence shows that students can barely retain new concepts in a traditional 75-minute sitting, let alone double that amount of time. (Teacher respondent).

Physical education, drama, and dance teachers indicated that two and half hours is just too long for students to do physical activities, especially if it repeats every day for a week. While respondents used strategies to support students' learning and engagement, such as providing a break during class; it remained difficult to engage students to focus on a single subject for hours. Respondents seemed to generally agree on the fact that they lost students' attention in the afternoon even more so than the morning session. Examples of teachers comments include: "The students are not learning much in their afternoon classes because they are at the end of their rope"; "Afternoon classes-students and teachers are exhausted, limited learning happens"; and "Students are tired burning out early too tired to actively participate in the afternoon classes." There were also concerns that students may be more tempted to skip classes because they could not focus on the same subject for hours every single day, "2.5-hour classes: - way too long; students don't want to attend classes because they are too long and want to skip" (teacher respondent).

There was a general concern that the two and half hour classes within a compressed period over a week created an immense amount of work for students, and students were having difficulty managing this workload. Some respondents expressed concerns about brain overload for students who are still going through growth and developing and that the information to

process time ratio is high (too much information in a short amount of time to process); for example, one teacher commented: “The young still forming teenage brain needs time to process and the ‘learning dump.’ It is too much”. Some respondents compared the students’ amount of work to having a fulltime job in which the pace is too fast: “The students are not employees working a job. Longer hours are not welcome. Being productive is not in most of their mindset” (teacher respondent), and another shared that students do not have the time for practice and application: “The pace of learning is too quick. Content is being shoved down their throats with no time for practice, absorption and reflection. Higher order thinking is being sacrificed” (teacher respondent).

Respondents shared that the work students are being asked to complete in one week is unrealistic; as one teacher commented: “In 5 days of class, students are covering 10 days of material”. There were concerns that certain topics can only be effectively explored over a full semester rather than in condensed form over fewer weeks. Due to learning being confined to a single week for two subjects, teachers noticed that students were unable to learn deeply due to the fast pace of material coverage. If students ended up missing a day or a week “due to illness or family circumstances [they] would then have missed the equivalent of two weeks of instructions in two courses” (teacher respondent). Another teacher emphasized: “There is [sic] learning loss over the week that they don’t have each subject, particularly in cumulative courses like Math.”

4.4.2 Exacerbating student inequities and undermining high quality publicly funded education

As with the hybrid model, some respondents stated that the quadmester model exacerbated student inequities. An example provided by a teacher was that students that excelled in a specific subject were able to retain more information in the two and a half hours than students who were already struggling or found the subject to be uninteresting: “The excelling students consume a large amount of material in 2.5 hrs. The struggling students experience a greater sense of information overload and tend to shut down even more”. There were concerns that learning gaps could widen between students who did not need continued support and students who did require support or found the subject challenging: “This learning model creates a greater learning gap between the students that are excelling in a subject and those students that are struggling” (teacher respondent). Respondents specifically pointed out

that this model added to “the marginalization of an already marginalized group” (teacher respondent).

One teacher compared the public-school model to private schools which had the luxury of smaller classes and did not need to use the quadmester (cohort separation) model. They explained: “I fear that the poor working and learning conditions seem to be an effort to erode the quality of public education and the erosion of public education impacts systemically [sic] marginalized communities’ individuals the most”.

Another teacher mentioned that the school board’s emphasis on reducing discrimination and inequality was being undermined by the quadmester schedule:

Consider roles such as Spec Ed monitors, ELL monitors etc. Staff only hold these roles every other week. So, what happens in the “off” week? Students are not monitored? Students do not receive support? Our most vulnerable students suffer the most.

In combination, hybrid learning and the quadmester schedules were creating significant concerns about undermining quality publicly funded education and increasing student inequities.

4.4.3 The myth of cohorts and implications for health and safety

The Ontario government required the use of cohorts with the intention of reducing the number of students each student would come into contact with during the school day. However, the majority of respondents expressed safety concerns related to the quadmester model and linked cohorts. They shared concerns regarding student contact not being limited to cohorts because they were not maintained outside of the classroom – for example, students were mixing in hallways, during recess, and at lunchtime. Therefore, the quadmester schedule did not adequately mitigate the risk of contracting Covid-19. As one teacher commented:

There is no real cohorting happening. All the students are in the school each day and as soon as lunch starts or they walk out the door, masks are off and students are draped all over each other. Thus the whole point of the modified semester is lost.

Another teacher shared:

If it is to keep students in their cohorts, I would suggest you send someone to observe lunches. There are not enough supervisors to watch these students and prevent them

from mingling with cohorts, it is an absolute free-for-all during this time. If they go outside, any control we thought we had disappears [sic]. I feel that all this model is doing is exhausting staff and students alike.

As well as concerns about what was happening outside of classrooms, there were concerns about the safety of large class sizes. As a teacher explained: “Each one of my classes is stacked with 30 kids, there is no room for social distancing”. There was a general concern that the proposed safety of cohorting was used to enforce quadmester schedules, but in reality, true cohorts and social distancing could not be implemented.

4.5 How has teachers’ health been impacted by these measures?

Three main findings are discussed in this section: deteriorating mental health, negative physical health impacts, and sick leave issues.

4.5.1 Deteriorating mental health

The vast majority of respondents (over 80%) explicitly stated they were extremely tired, stressed, anxious, and feeling their mental health was deteriorating. Other respondents expressed how overwhelmed and burnt out they were by stating they did not have the time or energy to send a full response. Many teachers responding expressed feeling as tired as they usually are at the end of the school year, although they had only been teaching for a month at the time of sending their responses (October 2021). In the words of one teacher: “The mental fatigue that we are experiencing as a result of hybrid teaching is indescribable”. Another teacher declared:

The reality of the situation is teachers are having breakdowns; breakdowns are taking the form of locking themselves in the bathroom and crying, closing the classroom and putting the blinds down and crying or laying on the desk with their head down.

Respondents expressed concern about the exceptional and unprecedented impact of the response to the pandemic for educators: “Never before have I seen staff so tired. Never before have I seen staff so defeated”, said one teacher.

Many respondents felt that they simply did not have enough time to complete all the necessary duties and tasks at work, which in turn did not allow them to focus on their own

mental health. Supposed solutions to support teachers' mental health were not perceived as useful:

We keep being told to "take a mental health webinar", as if we are the problem ourselves. We are NOT the problem; the problem is the model. We do not even have the TIME to take a mental health webinar. (Teacher respondent).

There were concerns that commitments to well-being were hollow promises when teacher workload was increasing and intensifying. In the words of one respondent:

This board advocates for mental health on paper but fails to deliver practically. There is no equality for teachers and students, nor empathy - mental health seems to be just Google slides. I would ask the board to please hear what their teachers and students are going through. I would also ask the board to meet with teachers and students in person to "listen" and "hear" what their teachers and students are experiencing.

Teachers also lamented the lack of time to collaborate and connect with peers was resulting in feelings of isolation. Some teachers mentioned being worried about the long-term effects that the anxiety and stress caused by these models would have on their mental health.

Nevertheless, a minority of respondents (less than 10%) explicitly affirmed that they tried to remain positive for the sake of their students despite their own deteriorating mental health:

The only thing that is keeping me going is knowing that my students see my struggles and how I am rising to meet the challenges as best I can. It is inspiring them to try to do the same, and while on the inside I am crying, I put on a happy face and make the best of it. (Teacher respondent).

A few respondents recognized the shared difficulty of adapting to the situation caused by the pandemic and appreciated the efforts of all educators, including senior leaders, to find solutions to keep students in schools.

4.5.2 Negative physical health impacts

The mental health tolls of teaching during the pandemic were also manifesting in physical health issues for teachers. For example, respondents shared that they are unable to sleep well, having eczema break out from stress, having nosebleeds, panic attacks, and feeling

“physically exhausted”. One teacher explained: “I have not slept a full night since August due to my anxiety about the classes I teach. My energy in the classroom has noticeably changed.”

In addition to the impact of the overall anxiety and stress induced by teaching during the pandemic, the hybrid model was also specifically mentioned by about 15% of respondents as having a negative impact on their physical health. Teachers mentioned not being able to use the washroom or to take a sip of water when needed:

Not to mention how hard it is to manage to get a bathroom break, it is embarrassing at times when you are phoning and getting no answers when you can't hold it any longer. I have prostate issues as many my age do (Teacher respondent).

For some people with existing health conditions, this was worsening their health and their professional life. The nature of teaching to online and in-person students also changed how teachers could physically move and interact. One teacher described this as:

Since our classrooms are not set up with monitors in front of us while we look at the students in class, I am constantly spinning around in the room to view what I am sharing on the screen to make sure it is not confidential, turning to look at the online meeting, and rotating to adequately supervise students in the classroom. Trying to do all of this from a seated position so that I can reply to students messaging in the chat and write on a digital whiteboard is very hard on my back and joints in general.

Another teacher commented: “It is impacting my physical health as well as I cannot walk around as much due to having to be on camera at my desk”.

4.5.3 Feeling unsafe at school

There were also general concerns about feeling unsafe at school. Several respondents explained that they were dissatisfied with the Covid-19 safety protocols at school and worried about their health and that of their family. Despite the use of Plexiglas and masks, they commented that social distancing was not always possible. Some teachers felt forced into an environment where rules were not necessarily enforced and respected (hallways and other common areas):

If you go to a school during lunch, you don't see social distancing and there really is no social distancing as they sit knee to knee in hallways throughout the school with masks

off for the hour while they eat. There's no social distancing as they parade into the front foyer at the beginning of the day or while they congregate after the bell rings at the end of the school day (Teacher respondent).

Some respondents preferred to limit their interactions with others altogether. For example, one teacher observed: "Myself and students I teach do not feel safe at school as students are walking through hallways without masks and not following the directional signs " .

4.5.4 Sick leave issues

There was a series of issues related to sick leave. Respondents indicated that colleagues are having to take more sick days due to the amount of "unmanageable and overwhelming stress of this ridiculous learning model." When teachers needed to plan for being absent, they needed to prepare plans for two courses with work to be completed over five hours. When teachers required sick days, they also had to spend time preparing work for occasional teachers and sometimes there were no occasional teachers available to cover classes so they could not take days off entirely. For example, a teacher explained:

I took the one bereavement day I'm entitled to and it took me almost 2 hours to plan for it. Our school was short supply teachers by the end of the week last week... The board hasn't opened the supply teacher list.

For teachers in school, there was additional workload as they were asked to cover for colleagues that were away on sick leave and lost their own preparation time due to having to provide cover. Several respondents also indicated that they had considered taking leaves of absence due to the stress they are feeling, which was something they had not contemplated in the previous years: "I have considered taking a stress related leave and have NEVER EVER considered this in my career" (Teacher respondent).

4.6 How has students' health been impacted by these measures?

Although this study did not gather responses directly from students, several teachers reported concerns about their students' mental health.

4.6.1 Deteriorating mental health

Like teachers, respondents commented that students appeared to be extremely tired, stressed, and anxious. Respondents were very concerned about their students' current and long-term mental health. "Students have expressed mental health is going down, increased anxiety and depression; they dread going to school because of the model", lamented one

teacher. Respondents indicated that most students seemed demotivated and showed no enthusiasm and excitement for learning. In particular, respondents were concerned that students in need of greater academic support or those who missed classes appeared to be overwhelmed and lost. As indicated in the discussion about hybrid learning for students, respondents commented that online students ended up being those who suffered the most, as the isolation they experienced by not being able to work in groups or interact with in-person students negatively impacted their mental health.

There were also concerns about loss of supports for struggling students. One teacher pointed out that guidance counselors in their school were not seeing students, thereby some students were left without much needed support: “Why is guidance still closed to students and guidance counsellors are not seeing students?”. The exhaustion experienced by teachers caused many to stop volunteering for extra-curricular activities which were already reduced due to Covid-19 safety protocols: “I have no energy or time to volunteer for any extracurricular activities or even enhancing curricular activities” (teacher respondent). As a result, the school experience was greatly diminished for students who relied on such opportunities to find a support network.

4.7 What other impacts of the pandemic were identified by teachers?

Respondents reported considerable challenges related to their professional lives and working conditions, negative impacts on their professional lives, and considering leaving the profession.

4.7.1 Changing professional lives and working conditions

The amount of work and stress levels experienced by teachers led many to feel demotivated and unable to perform their duties with the same passion and dedication as before. One teacher commented:

It is the first time in a 20-year career, which I love, where I'm strongly considering a stress leave. I've started to become angry for no apparent reason and am concerned these feelings will spill out into my practice despite having excellent and kind students.

This is extremely troubling and I've noticed this trend in several of my fellow colleagues.

Over a fifth of respondents expressed concerns about not being fully able to meet their students' needs and frustrations about not being able to perform their job as well as they normally would.

For example, one teacher commented: “I love my job, but I feel ill-equipped to do it in this environment”. Another teacher lamented: “I am frustrated that I can’t meet the needs of my students as I am stretched too thin”. Teachers who were highly experienced and capable felt ill-equipped to support students with the combination of hybrid learning and quadmester schedules. Of deep concern for teachers’ professional lives and identifies, and for their work to support all students, some respondents expressed they generally felt “*like a failure*” no matter how hard they tried.

Many respondents expressed feelings of dissatisfaction at being unheard, unsupported, and under-valued by their employers (school board and Ministry):

They are not listening to highly experienced teachers. Any feedback that we try to give is seen as negative or critical, we are told to go to HR and take a leave of absence when we are just asking for our concerns to be listened to, or for some support (Teacher respondent).

Respondents also felt there was a gap between their experience on the ground and the senior leaders’/officials’ perceptions of the situation. For example, one teacher commented: “We’re being “directed” by people who not only have not taught in a classroom for a long time, and also have never used tech to teach a hybrid model during a pandemic before”. Respondents expressed that the quadmester and hybrid models made them feel “*disrespected*”, “*undervalued*”, “*unappreciated*”, and even “*abused*”, “*betrayed*”, and “*mistreated*” by their employer. The exasperation experienced by teachers and their feeling of being repeatedly ignored led many to no longer “*trust the bureaucracy*”. Overall, respondents urged their employer to reopen communication channels by meeting with them and truly listening to their concerns and suggestions for improvements. A few respondents specifically mentioned appreciating the opportunity to submit their responses to OSSTF District 19 as an opportunity to share their voices and experiences in the hopes of influencing changes.

4.7.2 Negative impacts on personal life

A few teachers explicitly mentioned struggling to maintain a healthy work-life balance. For example, one teacher explained: “I am a single dad and find it almost impossible to have a quality, balanced life with my students, kids, social life, and myself”. As discussed above, some teachers were feeling “like a failure” in their professional lives and, unfortunately, this spilled over and was compounded in their personal lives. As one teacher said: “I am failing in all the

non-educator roles that make up my life”. Work-related struggles made several teachers unable to disconnect from work on weekdays and too exhausted to relax, spend time with their family, and focus on their personal life on weekends. “Weeknights, I can’t sleep. Weekends, I can’t get up”, stated one teacher.

4.7.3 Considering leaving the teaching profession

Perhaps unsurprisingly the combination of all of the above experiences was resulting in some teachers considering leaving the teaching profession. Almost a fifth of respondents explicitly commented that they thought the current situation was not sustainable professionally and that they had a desire to leave the profession. In the words of one teacher: “What has been thrust upon us is unsustainable, and many are talking about leaving the board or the teaching profession altogether.” About 10% of the respondents stated that school board’s measures had caused them to “no longer love teaching” and some said they, instead, focused on “counting down the days to the end of each week”. Respondents stated that because of how arduous the beginning of the semester had been they were considering retiring years before they had previously planned. One teacher reported: “Others mention leaving the profession entirely, because if things don’t change, they know they cannot survive, or simply do not want to do this any longer”. Another teacher shared: “I am close to retiring, but not close enough, so I am counting down. I never wanted to be that teacher, the one who is impatient to leave. I am now that teacher. If I could go tomorrow, I could [sic]”.

Of serious concern, some respondents shared that they thought about ‘quitting’ everyday due to the unhappy and unhealthy teaching environment they were facing. For example, one teacher explained: “My sense of fulfilment has diminished. I often consider leaving teaching.” Respondents shared thoughts of not being able to survive under the current conditions and colleagues mentioning leaving the profession completely and looking for other opportunities outside of education: “To be honest, it’s making me not want to be a teacher anymore as it takes the soul out of teaching and learning. And for me to say that is pretty huge because normally I love my job.” (Teacher respondent).

5. Conclusions

Teaching is a very demanding and complicated profession during the best of times; during a pandemic, it has become even more complex and challenging for educators. While educators have done their very best to fully support their students through a continuing

pandemic with a range of mental and physical health consequences for people dealing with uncertainty and unfamiliar protocols and responses; in the words of the recent Canadian Teachers' Federation (2022) report, "But at what cost?". While there was limited choice in the initial emergency response to the pandemic and resulting school closures affecting over 90% of the school-age population globally (UNESCO, 2020); over two years into a continuing pandemic, it is time to take stock of the impact of shifts in education and to make future decisions informed by the experiences and consequences so far and the priorities for future changes.

Evidence globally and within Canada is clearly indicating that the consequences of the pandemic, including changes in schooling and increasing mental and physical health concerns, had a profound, and often substantially negative, impact for students and for educators (see for example: CTF/FCE, 2022; OECD, 2021; Thompson, 2021). Unfortunately, this holds true in Ontario too. The responses of 87 Peel DSB teachers to an OSSTF District 19 email requesting teachers to share their experiences with the start of the 2021-22 school year are deeply concerning. While education systems around the world have been challenged with rapidly designing and flexibly implementing emergency responses through the pandemic; the combination of hybrid learning and the use of quadmester schedules appears to have been particularly problematic with negative consequences for teachers' work and for students' learning and equity.

The responses from 87 teachers identify the following impacts of the hybrid model for teaching and learning:

- It is an ineffective and inefficient approach to teaching and learning;
- It is challenging to conduct appropriate online student assessments;
- There has been increased workload and lack of adequate support to effectively implement the hybrid model;
- There were differences in student engagement between in-person and online learners (with online learners being more negatively impacted);
- There has been a loss of shared student community;
- There has been increasing inequities in students' experiences and in meeting their learning needs;
- There were inequities in students' access to, and use of, technology.

With regard to the impact of the quadmester schedule for teachers and students, respondents identified:

- Challenges of class time length and quadmester schedule for students' learning experiences;
- Difficulties of two and half hour classes for teachers' work;
- Difficulties of one-week on, one-week off schedule for teachers' relationships and support for students;
- It has exacerbated student inequities;
- The proposal that quadmesters protect students in cohorting is a myth and has had implications for health and safety.

As indicated above, respondents also noted health concerns resulting from the impact of changes to schooling including:

- Deteriorating mental health for students and educators;
- Negative physical health impacts for teachers' having to teach from front of class during hybrid learning and over two and half hour classes;
- Feeling unsafe at school;
- Increasing sick leave and implications for covering classes.

Other impacts noted by teacher respondents included significant and serious impacts on their own professional and personal lives, and an increasing number of teachers considering leaving the profession. Overall, respondents were concerned that the impact of these responses to the COVID-19 pandemic were undermining Ontario's publicly-funded public education system.

In combination, the impacts identified for students and for teachers are very troubling. The fact that these impacts were identified within a month of the start of the school year (October 2021) is even more troubling, as the likelihood is further consequences have been experienced over the continuing school year. The Ontario Government has now reduced the requirement for student cohorting, meaning quadmester schedules can change. The Ontario Government, however, has already confirmed that the option for parents to fully opt their child out of in-person schooling and into online schooling will remain in 2022-23 school year. In light of the experience regarding hybrid learning, and negative media, student and public reactions (for example: CBC News, 2021; Jalaluddin, 2021; Katawazi, 2021; Stewart, 2021; Wong, 2021a, 2021b), several Ontario school-boards, including Peel, have announced that hybrid learning will not continue in 2022-23 and instead a virtual school for fully online teaching and learning will be

implemented. The short- and long-term consequences of these significant shifts for students individually and collectively, and for high quality publicly funded education must continue to be monitored and reported.

Of particular importance, as governments make future education decisions and budget allocations, and as school districts (or their equivalents in specific education systems) and school leaders respond within their local contexts, it is vital that the voices of education workers are listened to, heard and acted on. A striking finding throughout the 87 responses was a feeling of being unheard. Teachers – and all in education systems – have been through tremendous change during the pandemic; they have navigated and innovated changes and sought to implement improvements to support all students; they have also been on the receiving end of rapidly changing mandates, some of which – as detailed in this report – have had negative consequences. The highest quality education systems listen to, value, respect, and trust the education profession to inform policy decisions and for teachers’ professional judgement in their day-to-day work (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Cordingley et al., 2019; Thompson, 2021). This must be central to any plans for COVID-19 recovery in education. We finish with the words of one of the teacher respondents:

“If anyone making decisions actually does want the education system to be a vehicle for social change, please invite us frontline workers to tell you what needs to be done and undone.”

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