**VicSRC** VictorianStudent RepresentativeCouncil

Returning to Remote Learning: recommendations and advice direct from students

As students in Melbourne metropolitan and Mitchell Shire councils begin another round of remote learning, VicSRC analysed the results from our Learning from Remote Learning report to identify some of the things that worked well and those that didn't first time around.

> *The information and advice in this report should be considered alongside more localised data as each school community is unique and has different needs.*

What worked for students during remote learning in term two

1. Students enjoyed being able to work at their own pace.
   Access to weekly and/or daily lesson plans, clear instructions on learning tasks and clearly communicated due dates helped students have agency over their workload and the way they worked.

2. Feeling more comfortable at home made a positive impact on their learning.
   Students enjoyed being warm, being able to eat and drink when they wanted to, ability to play music, wear comfortable clothes and use comfortable furniture.

3. Students enjoyed spending more time with their families.
   Students in primary school and earlier secondary school year levels in particular enjoyed the extra time with their families. Their families were more involved in their learning and they also had more time for just "hanging out" with their families instead of doing homework.

4. Remote learning was quieter for many students which allowed them to focus and improved their learning.
   Students enjoyed having quiet spaces to be able to learn without distractions.

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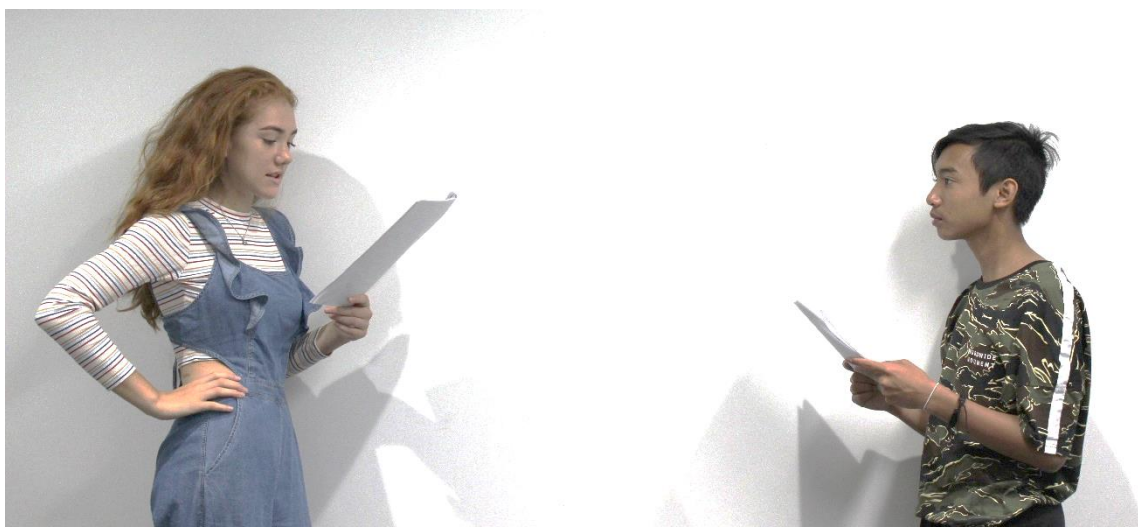
What didn't work for students during remote learning in term two

46% of students who completed VicSRC's survey felt that they had fallen behind at school.
The students who felt they had fallen behind reported feelings of stress, isolation, depression and being overwhelmed by the workload provided by their schools. They also identified feeling demotivated without classmates and teachers physically around and that technology proved to be a barrier to successful learning at times.

> *At school, I was up to date with almost everything. Now learning from home, I'm behind. I've received my worst ever interim report during secondary school. The reasoning why I've fallen behind is because of the environment, the feeling is much different here at home. At school, I'm ordered to do things, but at home, I'm not ordered. I'm too comfortable at home to the point I don't really want to do my classwork, I'm too relaxed. There's also so many distractions here at home compared to school. Myself and I believe a majority of students are mentally not stable because we've been inside our houses for 2 months and that's really bad, I've never been so stressed out in my entire life until now. I honestly feel like I should drop out, I don't want to drop out, but I asked myself many times in this circumstance, "Is dropping out the best option for me?" I'm at risk of failure, however I'm not gonna fail. I'm going to complete everything before school starts. I just know for a fact, if this pandemic was never around, I personally wouldn't be so stressed. I'd be happy for the work I've completed and I'd be up to date with almost everything – Year 11, Government, metro*

> *The teachers give us way more work and don't spend much/any time explaining the content to us. it is harder to know what work needs to be done and where to find the work because there is so many platforms. it is also way harder to concentrate at home because there is no motivation to do the work and so many distractions and i really need that school classroom environment to concentrate – Year 10, Government, metro*

1. **The biggest challenge for students was being isolated from friends and peers.**
    This impacted their motivation to learn, their mental health and their self-esteem.

    my mental health gets so bad at home and so it takes a huge toll on me on my education. my depression comes from feeling isolated all the time and to be physically isolated by force was a huge trigger – Year 12, Government, metro.

    Due to the lack of motivation, working at home has caused me to fall behind. Being at home is not always the best place to be – Year 12, Government, metro.

    Lack of motivation caused by isolated learning. – Year 12, Independent, metro.

    I am feeling very much disconnected from my school community which to me is a massive part of my school experience and ability to learn. – Year 12, Independent, metro.

2. **The amount of work given to students.**
    Students felt overwhelmed by the amount of work and combined with anxieties about COVID-19 related concerns and lack of motivation, this led to a decrease in mental health for several students.

    its just been a lot more work load, and of course it has been more difficult to communicate with teachers about the work load, so i am falling behind. But this is not because i am slacking,

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it is because i am trying my absolute best, but are still being crushed by workload – Year 9, Government, metro.

I feel like this due to: 1. Not knowing certain details of the work assigned because my teacher has too many emails to handle at once. 2. There is so much work to be done! The cause of this led to having a list of catch-up work that i have to do otherwise i will not have an improvement on my learning.   3. Staying at home has had a big effect on my mental health. The longer I stay at home, the bigger my worries and anxieties have grown. In the past i have had a few worries, but i am just overwhelmed at this stage.   4. The more work is given, the more hours i have to spend on screens! Throughout the day, if i want to relax and watch my favourite tv show, i can't because by the end of the day i cannot handle the light shining in my face! 5. I miss my friends SO much! Online learning makes it extremely hard to connect with friends, and teachers have only recently been allowing a google catch up once a week.   I'm sure you now understand why I, as a student, am so eager to get back to face to face learning. I hope you approve – Year 5, Government, metro.

the work load has increased so much, teachers are becoming stricter with checking homework completion via the easy use of google classroom submission. they check things that are not exactly important compared to other subjects/assignments. this increases the work load a lot. - Year 10, Government, metro.

There are more learning tasks at school and they're harder. There's not all the things we're supposed to do at home. – Grade 1, Government, metro

The teachers don't know how fast pace to move the class so they set more work and then combined with distractions and lack of motivation I feel like it was easy for me to fall behind. – Year 10, Government, metro.

The teachers are giving us more work during sessions, and a lot more homework than usual, and it's hard to keep up with all the set tasks. – Year 9, Government, metro.

i feel like its just too much to do at once – Year 8, Government, metro.

3. **Not enough communication with teachers.**
   Students felt they didn't have enough opportunities to clarify learning tasks, or to individually check in with teachers about challenges they were experiencing. Students that were impacted by unreliable devices or internet reported that this lack of communication led to feelings of stress, anxiety and demotivation.

It's hard me to find motivation and understand some of the content as communication has been hard. – Year 12, Government, regional/rural.

Just the sheer work load and unrealistic due dates as well as no contact from the school on whether exams will commence in weeks 9 and 10. – Year 9, Government, metro.

It's different sort of work and hard to comprehend it – Year 9, Government, metro.

There is no one to supervise be as i work by myself in the study room. I feel a bit trapped inside and i sometimes lost control of myself. I use my phone during class time and I'm not paying full attention in class – Year 9, Government, metro.

It can be harder to access help from teacher – Year 7, Government, metro.

Just a little harder since no one can really help you when your stuck – Year 8, Government, metro.

The teachers don't know how fast pace to move the class so they set more work and then combined with distractions and lack of motivation I feel like it was easy for me to fall behind – Year 10, Government, metro.

How did not having a device or reliable internet impact learning?

Students who did not have access to a device or reliable internet reported major impacts to their ability to engage in learning. The frustrations with internet or devices also led to demotivation and feeling further isolated as they were unable to interact with friends, classmates or teachers. Students also said that they were reprimanded for not having cameras on in class and were marked absent when they were unable to "check in" online.

Unable to access classes and class materials, unable to ask for help when needed. – Year 12, Government, regional/rural

My learning was impacted by my unreliable internet as there were many cases where when participating in online classes it would cut off and I would miss vital parts of the lesson. – Year 12, Government, regional/rural

I have been glitched our of the sessions multiple times, and my work would not save most of the time. – Year 7, Government, regional/rural.

most of the time i would not be able to complete the work or submit the work on time. – Year 8, Government, metro.

When the internet was slow or not working properly you would miss valuable information the teachers where saying over google classroom meets meaning you missed out on a lot of learning and needed to ask classmates a lot. – Year 10, Government, metro.

My learning has been disrupted by my wifi as it pops out and in so I have to joins zooms multiple times and refresh the work page. – Year 8, Independent, metro.

I have to share a device and that made me take longer doing work. – Grade 6, Government, metro.

Sometimes my internet would just randomly shut off. Which made it hard to stay in calls or do online tests. – Year 11, Government, metro.

Fluctuating internet connection: Some work was handed in late, which may have affected marks. Also made schoolwork more stressful, and remote learning as well. – Year 11, Independent, metro.

Recommendations for remote learning term three

1. All students are provided easily accessible access to mental health support. Currently the support is focused on secondary school students and it is crucial to provide easily accessible support for primary school students also. These students are less likely to be able to access online support so VicSRC recommends every teacher clearly communicate how primary school students can contact support at school if their mental health is suffering.

2. Schools should ensure the wellbeing of students, staff, leadership and families is the number one priority over workload and academic outcomes. Victoria is in the midst of a health crisis and schools must acknowledge and be aware of the anxieties and challenges the whole school community is facing. VicSRC recommends that all students learning remotely are given no more than the minimum work suggested by the DET and that their wellbeing needs are the main focus.

3. Students must have agency over their data, bodies and learning environments during remote learning. This includes having the option of not turning their cameras on during video calls, being able to work in spaces that are best for them (encouraging but not insisting they work in public spaces at home), explaining the data and privacy policies of online programs required by schools clearly and in plain English.

4. Schools should prioritise student voice and agency during remote learning to ensure students remain empowered and motivated in their learning. This includes regular opportunities to provide feedback, invitations and opportunities for students to be actively included in decisions during this period, specific support for SRCs and other student governance bodies at school to ensure all students have a voice.

5. VicSRC recommend the DET and Victorian Government prioritise education focused communications via appropriate platforms direct to students in a clear, accessible and timely way. Schools should also ensure students are directly involved in the whole of school communications strategy, especially during remote learning period, to ensure communications are appropriate and accessible for all students.

6. Teachers and school leadership are understanding of the technology challenges faced by students and guarantee that no disciplinary measures will be taken in response to problems with internet and devices. This includes schools finding alternative ways to identify if students are present or absent for learning.

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