



Lanterna  
Education



# TEACHER ABSENTEEISM IN IB SCHOOLS

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HOW IB SCHOOLS ARE DEALING WITH  
TEACHER ABSENTEEISM POST-COVID, AND  
EXPLORING POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

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# INTRODUCTION TO THE CHALLENGE



Over recent years, teacher recruitment and retention has become a significant challenge for schools, more so than ever before.

Although there are regional variances, and between private and state schools to some extent, many of the underlying factors are common.

Of those currently in teaching positions, there is more frequent absenteeism due to burnout, wellness and changes of careers.

Added to this, the supply pool of talent entering the profession has diminished iteratively over the past few years, with a significant step-change during the COVID years.

Another key factor is the lure of lucrative teaching contracts in regions such as China and the UAE, drawing talent away from other IB regions.

The **result** is that there are more frequent **teacher absences** in IB schools than ever before, with schools struggling to find adequate solutions, and the issue propagates.

Surprisingly, despite these challenges, very few schools have turned to digital solutions to plug the supply gap.

## IN THIS REPORT WE:

- ✓ Summarise the findings of our survey which uncovers the reasons behind teacher absenteeism,
- ✓ Explore how schools are dealing with these challenges,
- ✓ Propose solutions that schools can adopt to lessen the burden on themselves and their team.



# SURVEY RESULTS

“ OVERALL, RECRUITMENT HAS BECOME MORE CHALLENGING, AND TEACHERS ARE SUFFERING BURNOUT AND TAKING MORE FREQUENT SICK LEAVES ”

1

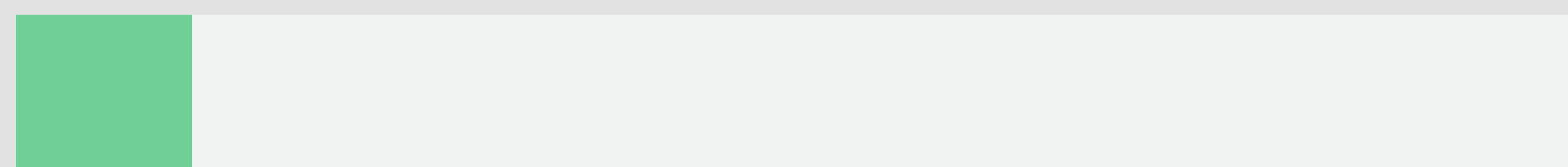
Has recruitment become more challenging for your school in the past 5 years?

45 respondents

Yes 39 resp. 88.6%



No 5 resp. 11.4%



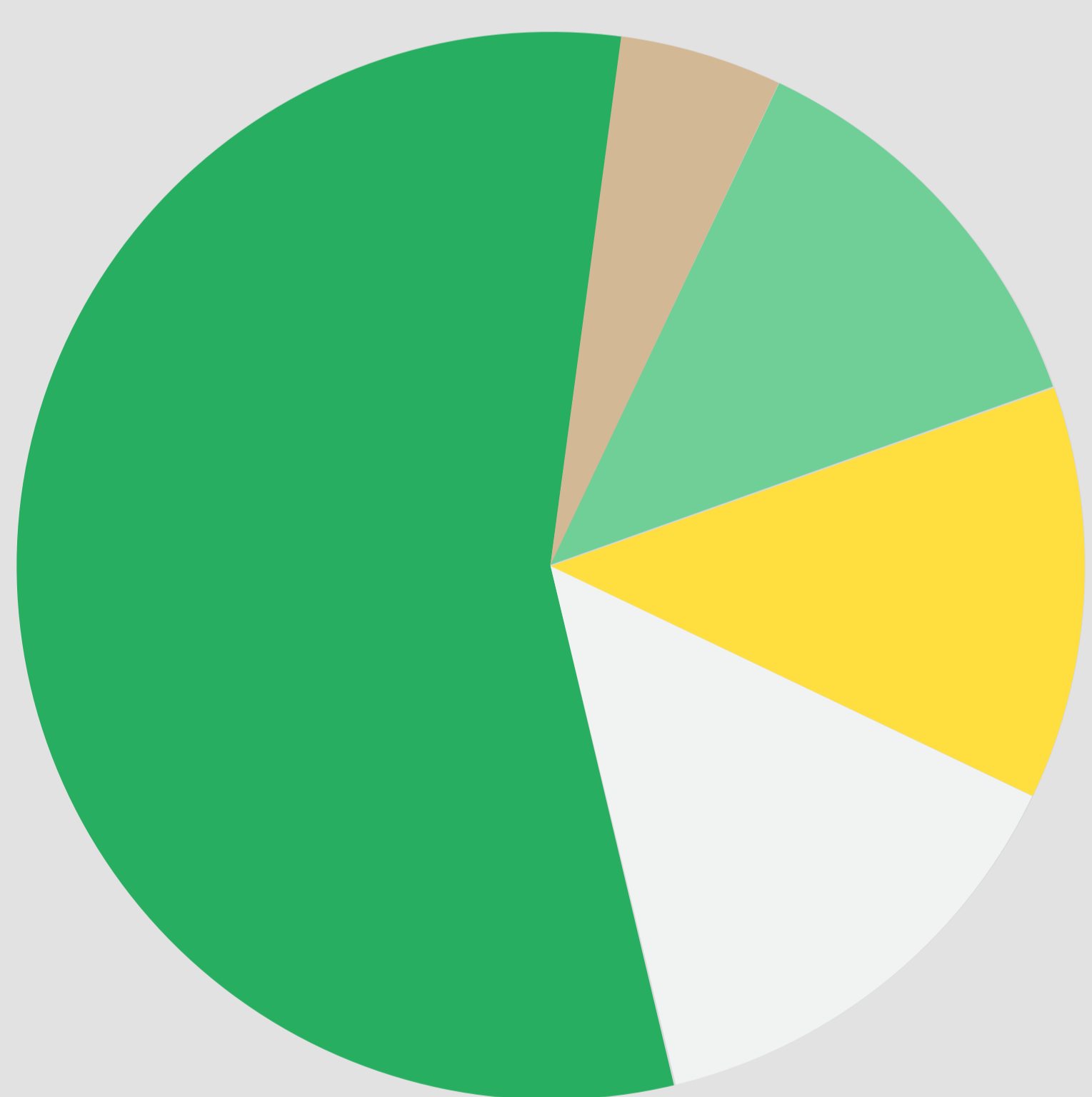
“Teachers are taking all their sick days on a regular basis”

“More medical leaves - makes it difficult when we don't know how long the leave will be for”

“Teachers are burnt out and younger teachers are leaving the profession for better paying jobs”

2

Which subject do you find it most difficult to hire for?



Physics, Chemistry, Biology

Economics, Business Studies

Maths

Language

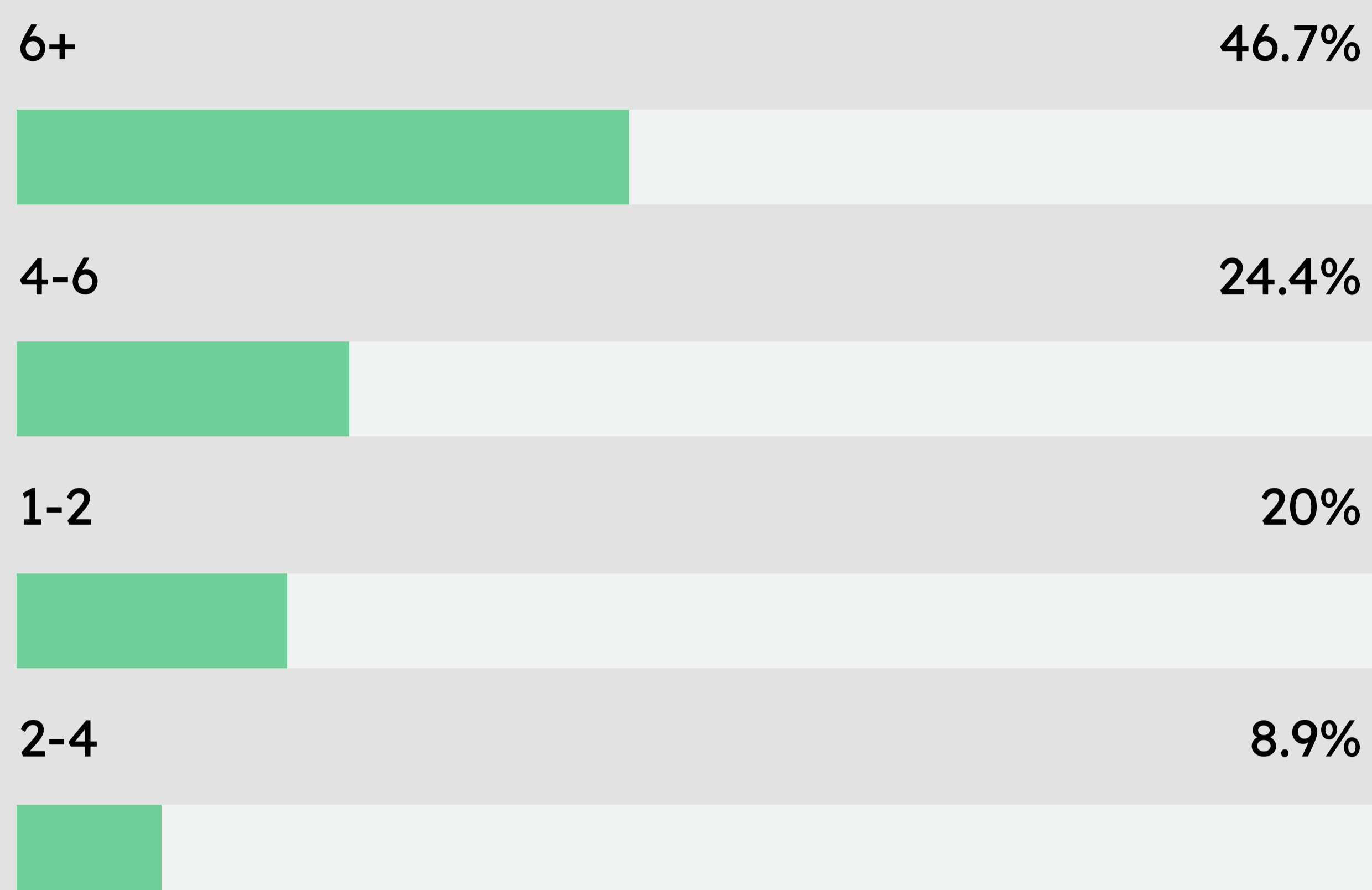
Computer Science, ITGS

Recruitment has become a larger challenge in 89% of respondents' cases, which represents IB DP coordinators in over 30 countries.

On a subject level, it is evident that Group 4 Sciences is the biggest recruitment headache for schools at the moment, though the drivers behind this are less obvious. As a required offering, we have seen many schools limit the number of DP subjects offered to ensure they have adequate coverage, with many schools combining HL & SL classes and running accelerated curricula for SL subjects.

3

In an average month, how many absences are you experiencing at the moment?



On average, IBDP schools we surveyed had 6 teacher absences in any given week, lasting anything from 1 to 5 days. Considering the average number of teachers in an IBDP school is approximately 50, this represents almost 12% absence in any given week.

4

What is the average length of any given absence?



100% of respondents confirmed 1 or more absences in any given week, with 80% of respondents confirming 2 or more absences in an average month. Almost 19% of applicants confirmed that the average length of absence was more than 2 weeks.

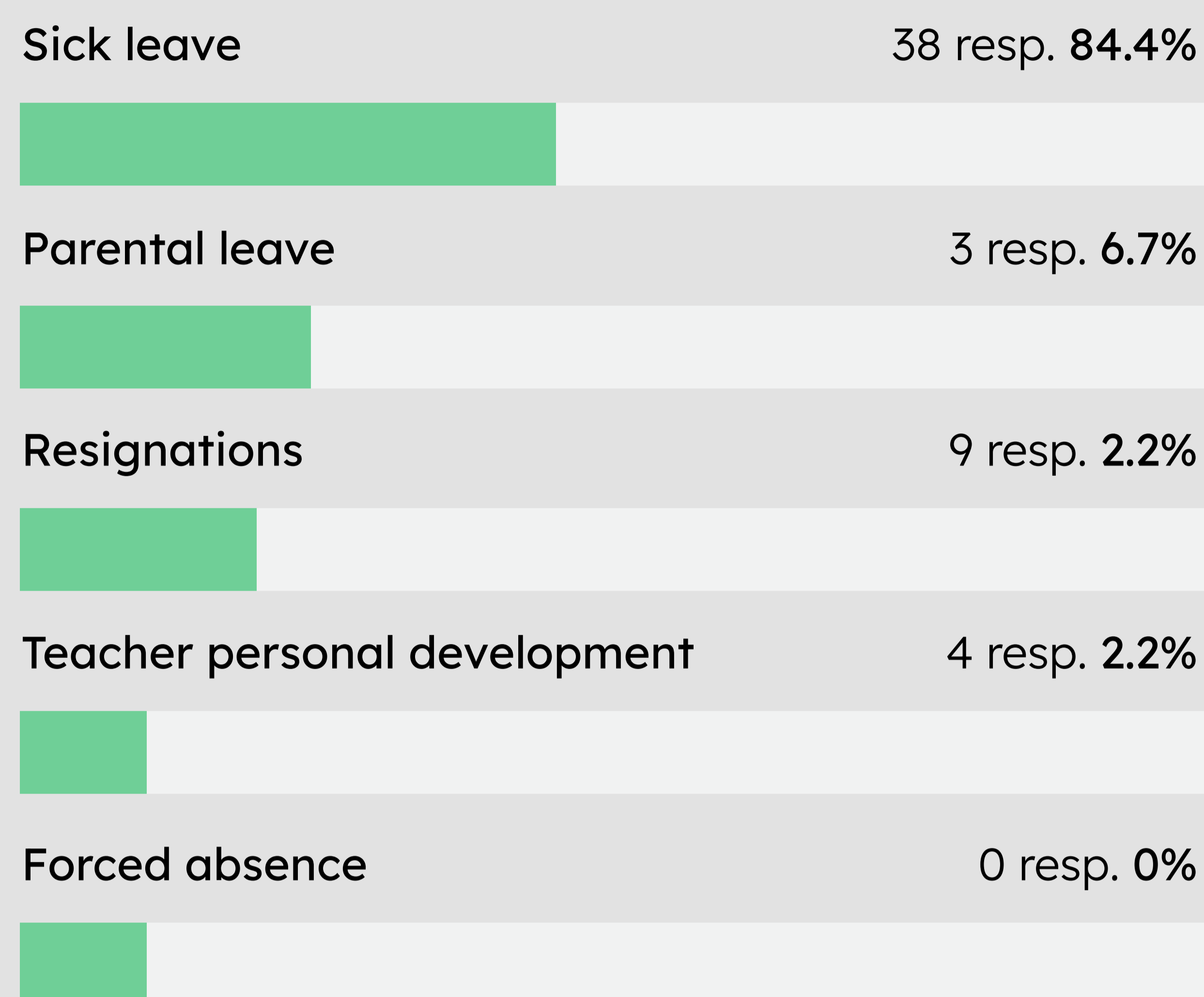
Given many schools may not have any insurance policy in certain subjects, with perhaps only one teacher for a subject such as Geography, this is a worryingly high level. In these instances, schools have confirmed that they typically either set asynchronous work for students, or try to fill short term gaps with teachers either from MYP, or in dual-code schools, from other similar curricula.



For this year's cohort of DP students, who have seen IBDP exam standards returning to pre-COVID standards and syllabus changes to key subjects including Group 4, the overall teacher level of absenteeism is quite alarming compared with previous years.

5

### What is the most common cause of teacher absence?



The most common cause of absenteeism was sick leave. The follow up responses uncovered the alarming rate at which this is taking place for mental well-being purposes.

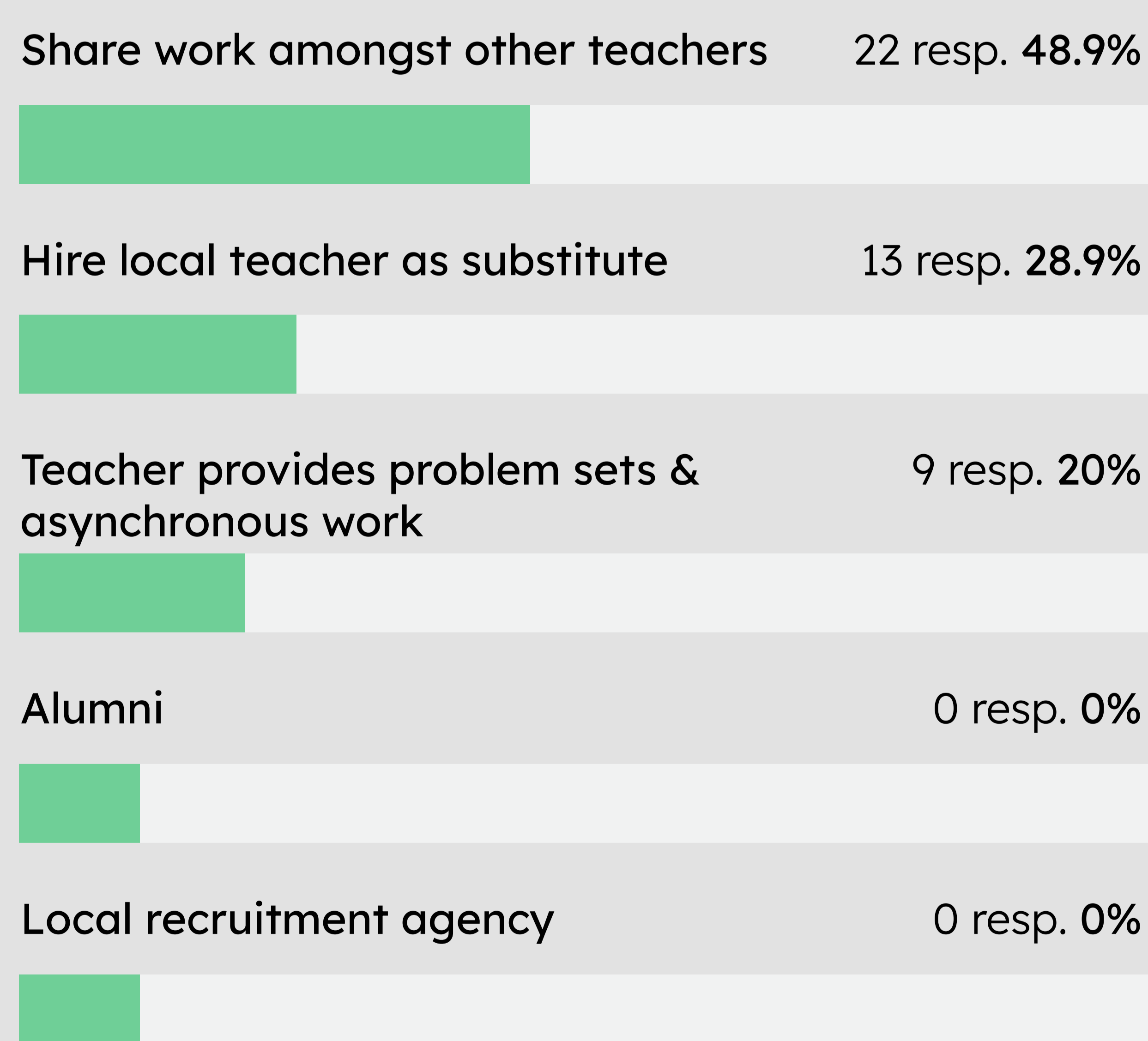


While many absences are listed as illness, often this is due to a lack of support of teacher wellness and balance. So, the teacher is ill, but not physically.



6

### When you backfill a short-term absence (less than 1 month), what is your most common solution?

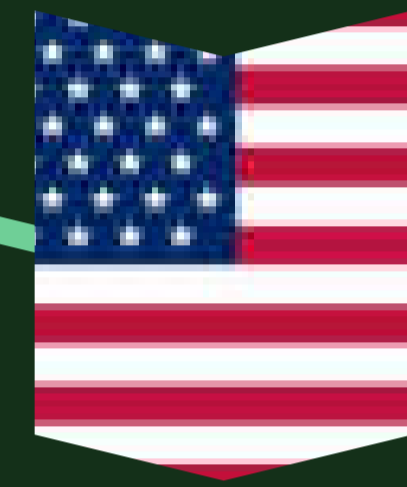


Compounding this issue, most schools' solution to this problem is to share the work amongst the existing teaching pool. A sensible and efficient way to solve a problem which is frequent and short-term, but which if not dealt with soon, will only increase the severity of teacher burnout.

# TEACHER SUPPLY INVESTIGATION: US CASE STUDY

Much has been written about teacher absenteeism, and a particular focus in the press recently focuses on US public schools, where access to qualified teachers has been at endemic proportions since around 2015.

US public schools have suffered with teacher shortages for particular subjects (e.g. Advanced Maths and Latin) and for certain demographics and states perennially, so although this is not a new problem, it is one which is sadly compounding each year.



## SOME STATISTICS WHICH BRING THIS TO LIGHT

- ✓ 52% of schools report feeling understaffed
- ✓ In US public schools there are currently 49,000 vacancies at the moment, up 10% year over year
- ✓ Teacher turnover reached its peak in 2021 at 14%
- ✓ Overall absences are at an all time high, with more regular absences reported than ever before



We have systematically underpaid ... educators for years, and we have been tolerating a climate that is demonizing teachers and public schools [[link to article](#)].




ARE YOU  
A US SCHOOL  
SUFFERING  
WITH TEACHER  
SUPPLY?

We would love to speak with you and learn more about this problem.



**Different states have taken novel approaches to battling this problem to ensure continuity in learning for students.**

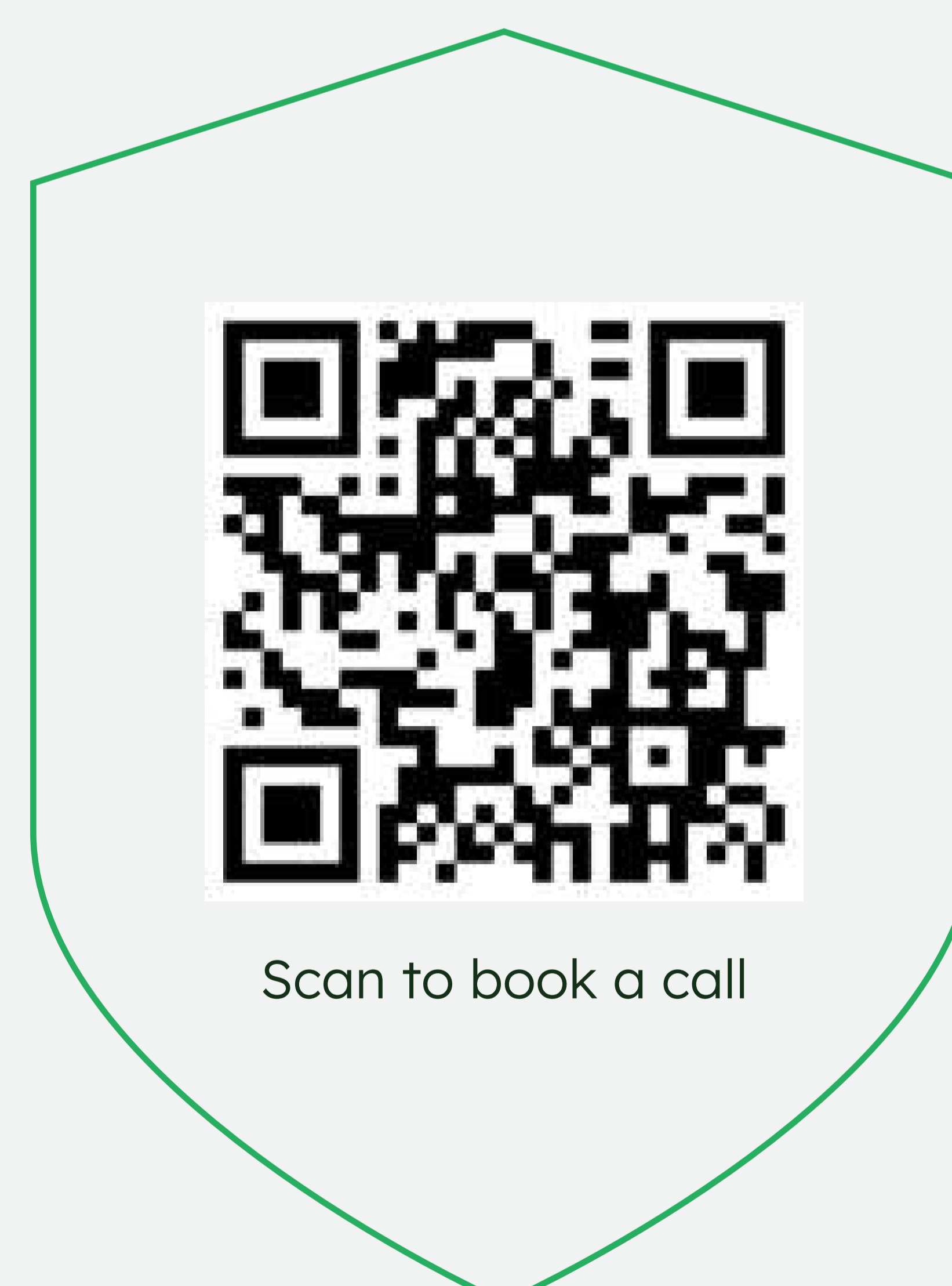
**THESE INCLUDE:**

- ✓ Lowering qualifications standards and requirements
- ✓ Offering short term bonuses to ensure retention
- ✓ One state provided 100+ Filipino teachers with visas to tackle certain teacher shortages
- ✓ Across the board, schools are levying local government to attract new talent by increasing wages for new teachers
- ✓ One school in Washington tried to balance the pressures of teaching by introducing a 4 day school week [[link to article](#) ].

In 2021, **30%** of US state school teachers suggested they would be leaving the profession within the year. However, the actual result has only seen a marginal increase from 11 to 14% turnover rate over recent years.

Instead, it appears that teachers are staying put, and suffering burnout, with higher absence rates reported than at any point previously on record.

## ARE YOU AN IB SCHOOL CONFRONTING THIS PROBLEM?



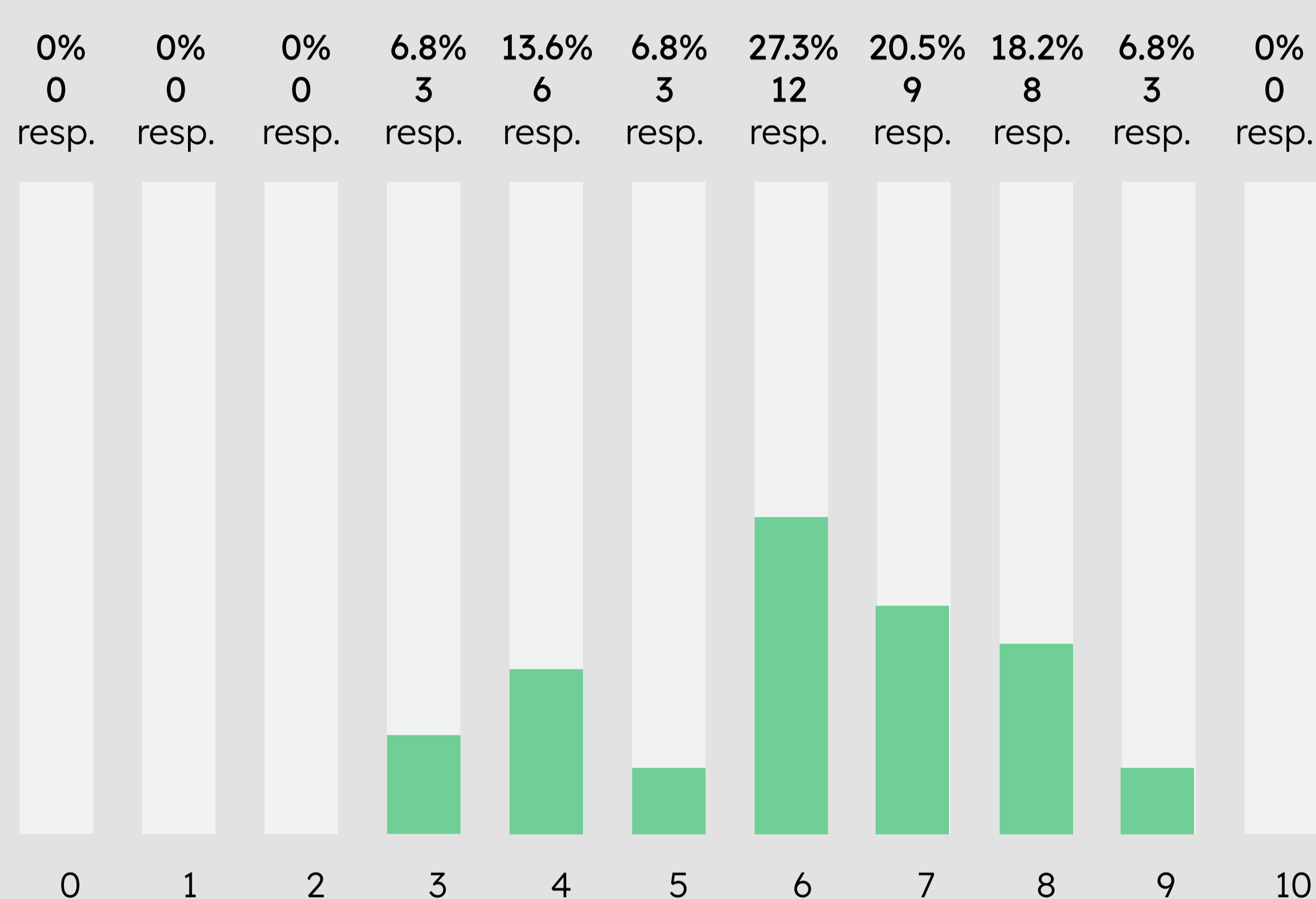


# THE POTENTIAL OF DIGITAL SOLUTIONS FOR IB SCHOOLS WORLDWIDE

**Schools are not yet turning to digital solutions to solve this issue.** Given the above, and the clear issues schools are experiencing to fill ongoing supply gaps, we wanted to understand which other solutions schools were exploring, and particularly how responsive IBDP schools have been to exploring digital solutions, either exploring outsourced teaching solutions, or investing more into upskilling their existing teaching team.

7

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest rating for an in-person lesson you've observed, please rate the best digital lesson you have observed

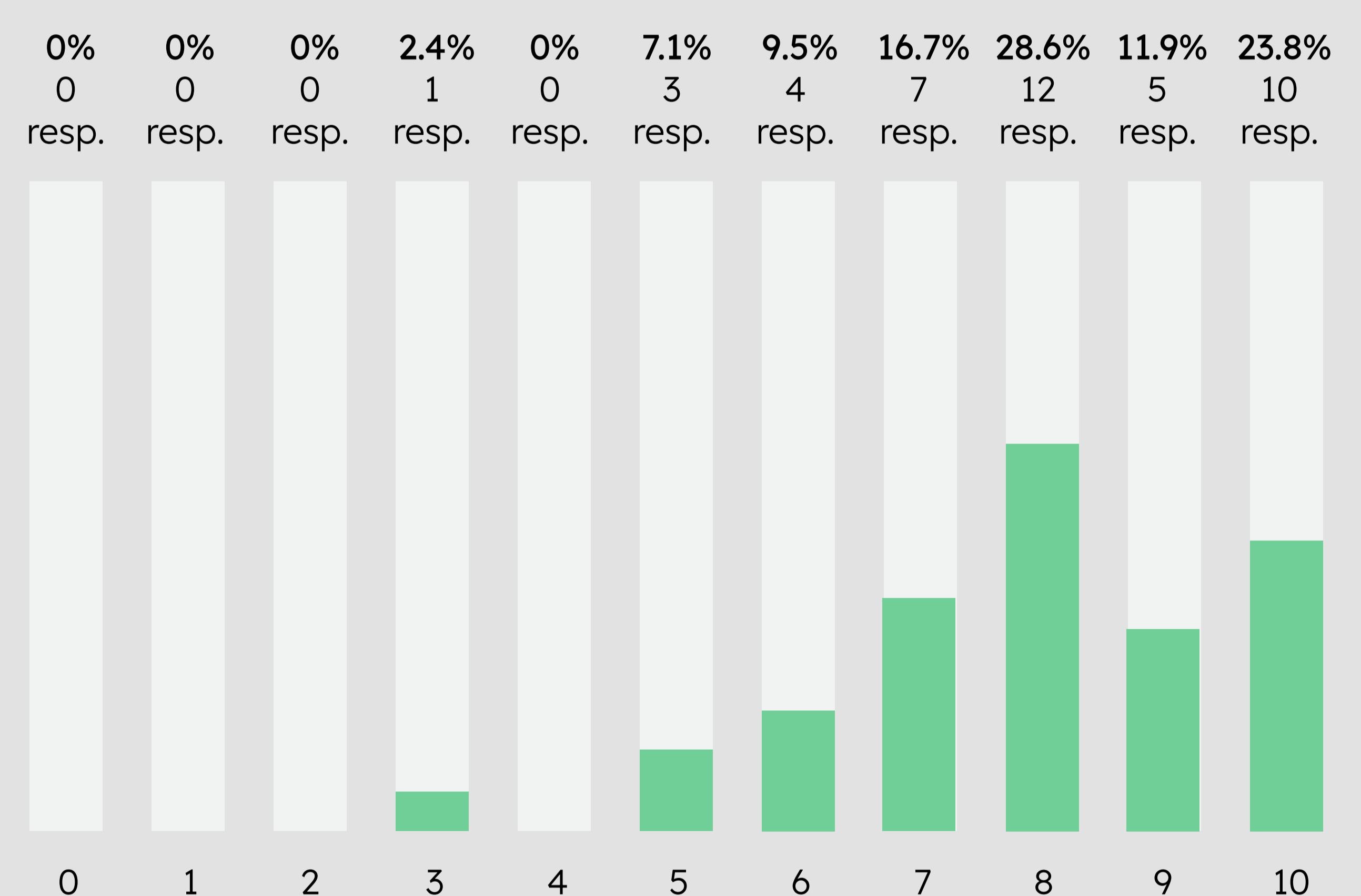


On average, respondents said that the best digital lesson they had witnessed would rate as **6.2** versus the equivalent in-person lesson.

Simultaneously, respondents said they would require a **7.9** rating for a digital lesson to make this a realistic solution to short-term absenteeism.

8

What level of quality must a virtual lesson have (compared to an in-person lesson) to be a valid solution for short-term absences?



This is a striking figure when considering the scale of the problem schools are experiencing, and the chicken and egg issue of distributing work amongst their existing teaching team, only to see this be the root cause of them taking sick leave, and the pattern continuing.

# WHAT ARE THE REASONS SCHOOL'S AREN'T EXPLORING DIGITAL SOLUTIONS?

So, why do schools feel that a digital lesson has to be so strong to be a truly valid solution to the problem, considering the impact of the alternative solutions (or lack thereof)?

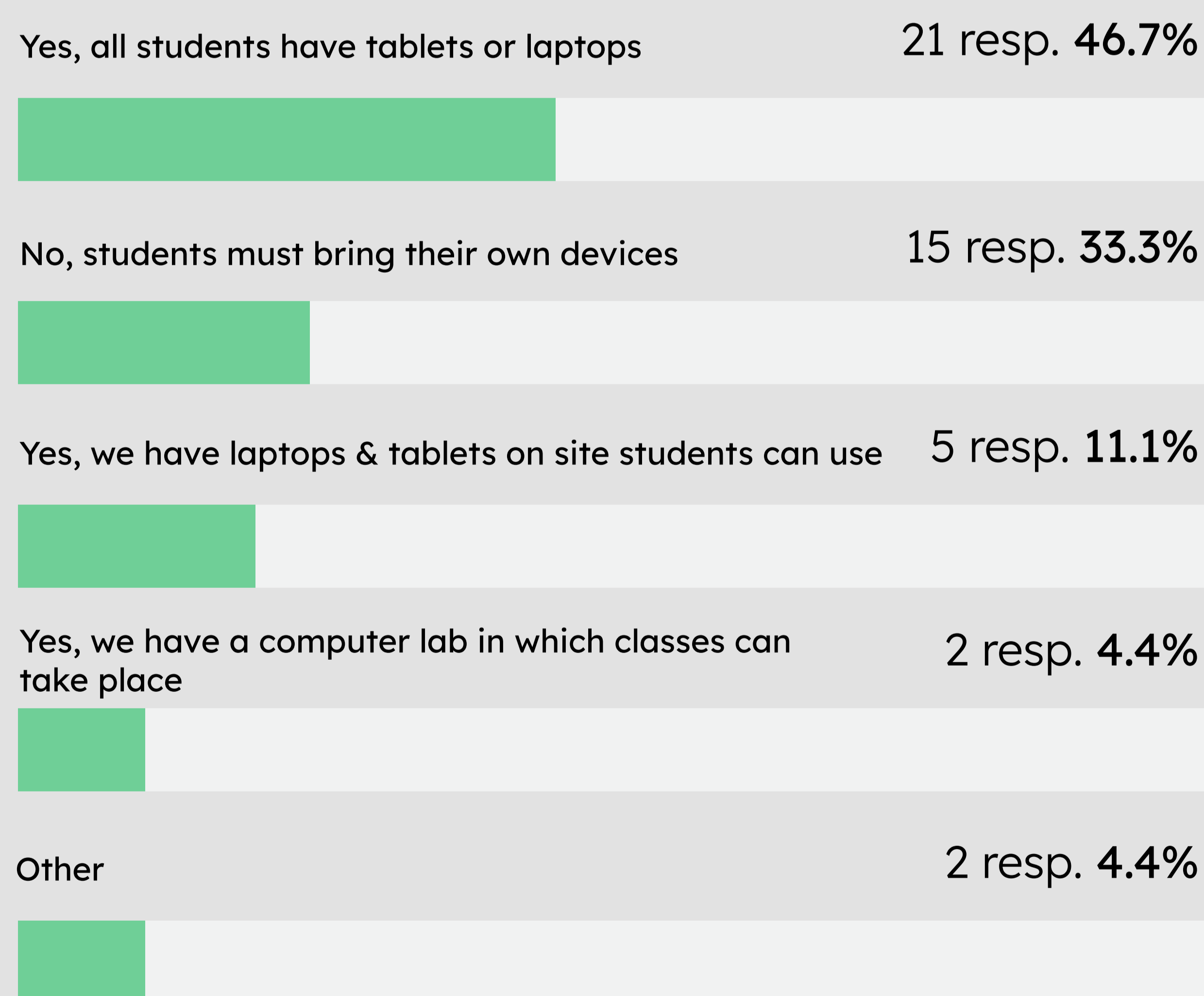
Are there post-COVID memories of when educators were not fully equipped, and students were not willing to be engaged in digital learning?

Or are schools simply unaware of advancements in the digital space which can facilitate increasingly better online learning?

## DO STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS NOT HAVE THE REQUIRED HARDWARE TO FACILITATE THIS?

9

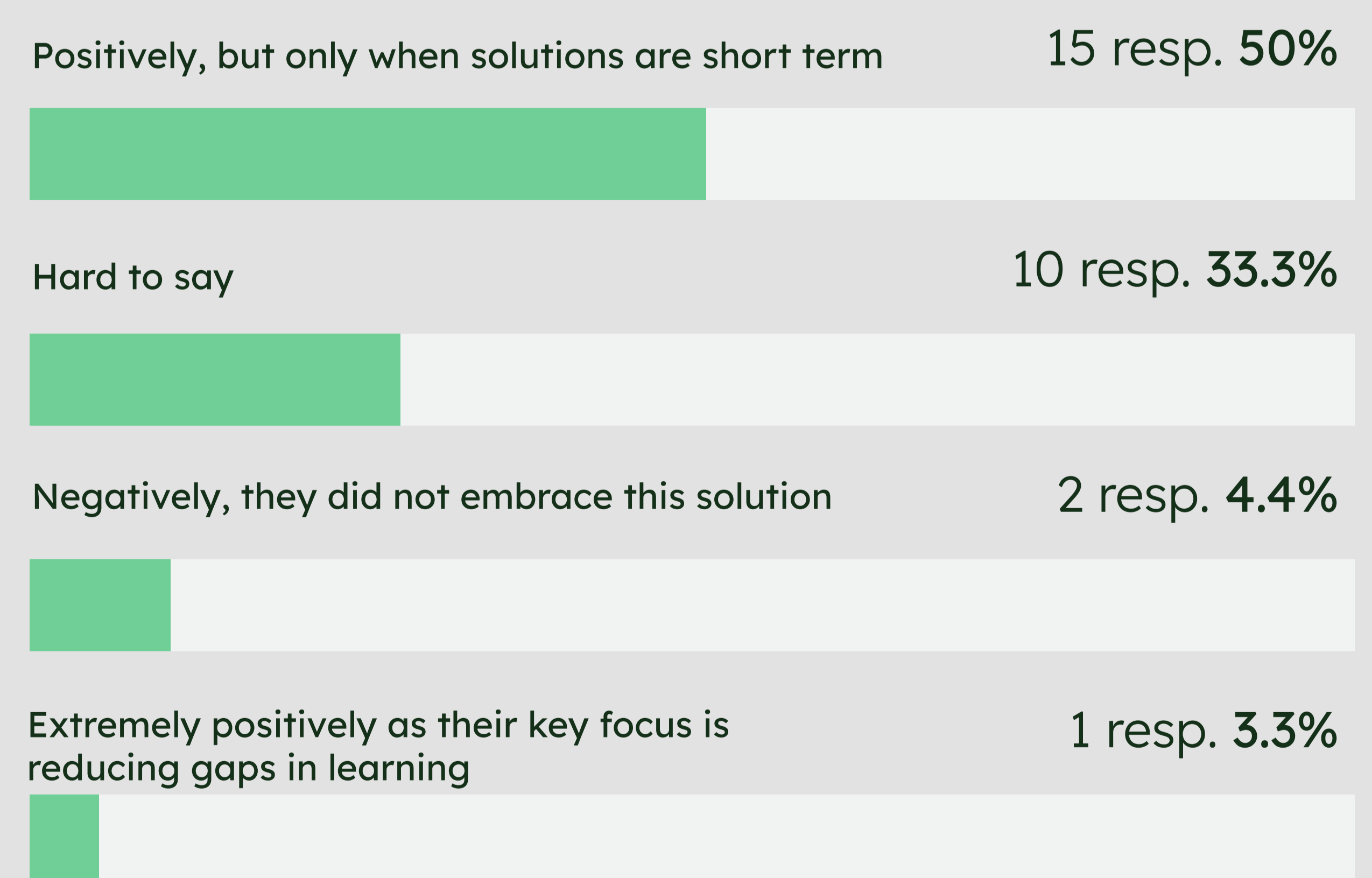
### Does your school provide devices to students in MYP4/5 and/or DP1/DP2?



10

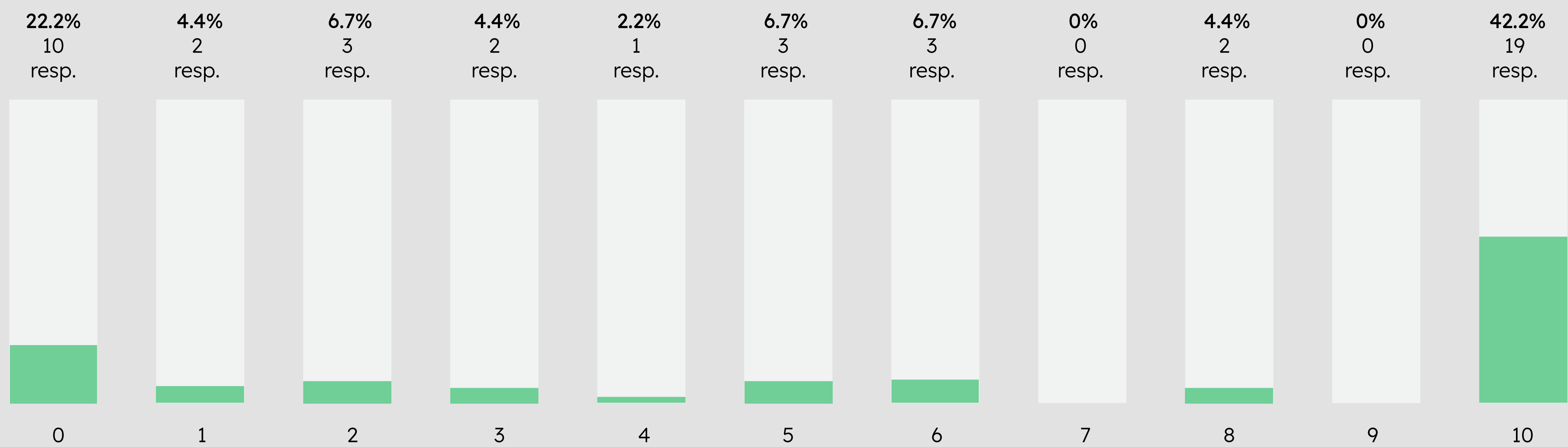
### Is parent adoption a key blocker?

If you have used virtual solutions for teacher absence before, how did parents react?





## How many smart whiteboards do you have in your school?

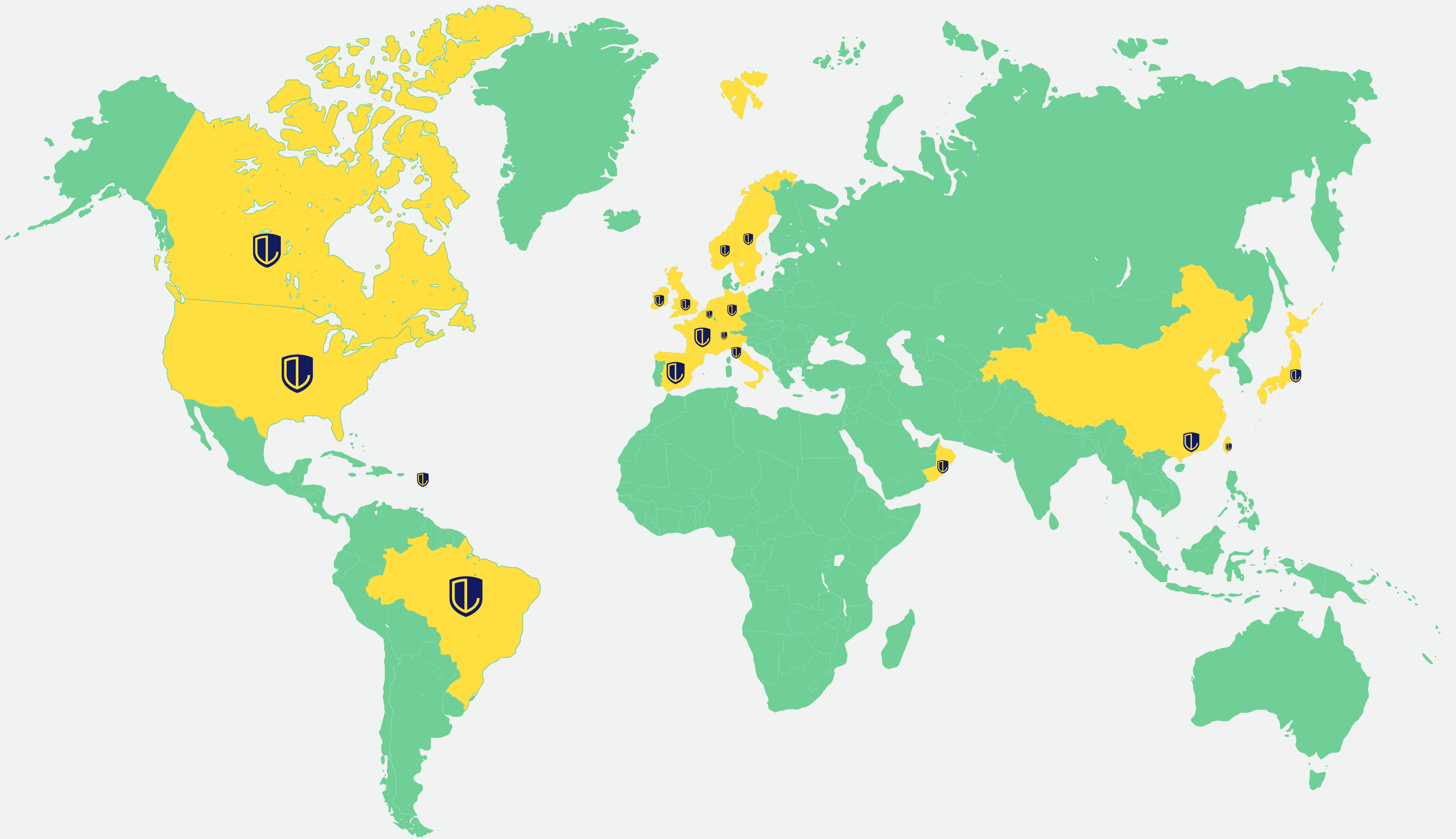


Given the above, respondents are clear that parents are open to short term coverage of online solutions, presumably to ensure continuity in their childrens' learning, and students are generally well equipped with the relevant hardware, not to mention extremely digitally literate.

This might suggest that school decision makers are the ones who are not comfortable with utilising digital solutions. It is probable that many schools had bad experiences in certain subjects during COVID, and are fearful of a return to the communication and quality issues experienced during that time.

With such rapid advancements in both the hardware and software space (AI and truly bespoke learning journeys, online assessment tools, automated lesson planning and so much more), perhaps it is time for schools to reconsider this optic, and rather than seeing these solutions as short-term fixes, invest into a truly hybrid pedagogical approach?

# LANTERNA'S PARTNER SCHOOLS



40+ SCHOOLS  
AROUND THE WORLD

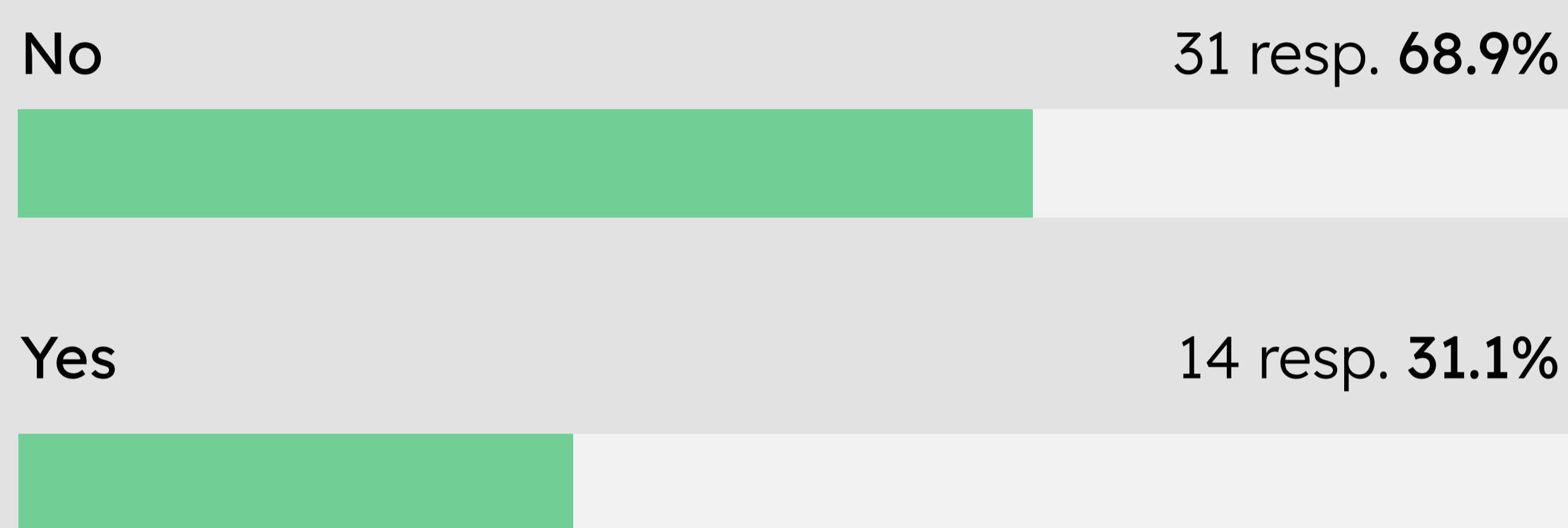




# ARE SCHOOLS TRAINING THEIR EXISTING TEACHING TEAM TO BECOME BETTER DIGITAL EDUCATORS?

12

Have your teachers undergone any further training since returning to schools post-COVID to deliver remote learning?



Given the frequency of short term absences, perhaps there is an opportunity to allow teachers to work remotely more often, where teachers stay home from school to ensure they can recover and return swiftly.

It is therefore surprising that more schools have not invested in their existing teaching team, to ensure they are adequately skilled in providing quality remote learning and to ensure continuity of support for their students.

Although it is clear over the past few years that brick-and-mortar schools are thankfully here to stay, it is an interesting thought experiment to imagine what school could look like if teachers had more autonomy over how and when they worked.

For example, if teachers had the option to **work from home** one day per week, and their scheduling permitted for this, would their overall wellness improve, and their digital skills increase?

Perhaps this would result in better retention, faster adoption of digital tools, and overall better teacher satisfaction and student outcomes.

**SO, HOW CAN SCHOOLS SOLVE THIS PROBLEM?**

# WHAT CAN THE RESULTS OF ONLINE SCHOOL TEACH US ABOUT THIS?



At one extreme, we must also consider the recently approved fully online pilot school programmes being run by the IBDP.

In a recent study by ISC, research showed that online schools perform as well as, if not better than traditional brick-and-mortar schools when viewed from the lens of exam results.

No matter your view on the importance of final exam results in a students' overall education, it is currently one of the clearest markers we have as educators. Harrow School Online saw its founding cohort experiencing 98% A-level grades at A\* to B; one of the highest among the entire group of schools.

The IB's online pilot schools will sit their first exams in May 2024, and from here we will be able to adequately assess how well IB schools are able to adopt a fully online methodology to teaching and learning.



# HOW YOU CAN INVEST IN YOUR CURRENT TEACHING TEAM

In our work with schools, we have seen huge variance in both the hardware setups, and digital knowledge of the teaching population, with variance both between schools but also within each school themselves.

## SOME IDEAS SCHOOLS MAY WANT TO CONSIDER

to upskill their existing teaching team and give them an opportunity to reduce absenteeism include:

- ✔ Providing teaching staff with a high quality webcam and headset, a decent drawing tablet and stylus, and enrolling them in a simple and cost effective online course can remove barriers to teachers being willing and able to teach remotely.
- ✔ To facilitate peer-to-peer learning in a digital space, schools can introduce a communication tool such as Slack amongst the teaching team, where educators can share best practice and ideas that may help with overall technical adoption.
- ✔ There are some excellent free courses on LinkedIn Learning, Coursera and Udemy which many educators have turned to over recent years to increase their own knowledge. Encouraging teachers to undertake this as part of their personal development is likely to have long term benefits.
- ✔ As a form of understanding the challenges students face, we would encourage schools to facilitate a digital learning environment where you yourselves are the students sitting in the classroom, being taught by one of your staff. This is a great way to build morale and mutual understanding amongst the team, but also to ascertain, and build solutions to avoiding, the pitfalls of a digital lesson.

In our research, we have uncovered many examples of schools who used COVID as a launchpad to promote a hybrid approach to learning, and it is clear that this has reaped benefits and is likely to continue in the years to come.


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With more global adoption of digital solutions to learning in K12 and through corporate environments...

**...IT IS INCREASINGLY EVIDENT THAT ENSURING TEACHERS HAVE ADEQUATE PROVISION IN THEIR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT TO BECOME GREAT DIGITAL EDUCATORS IS KEY...**

...not to replace their core abilities in a live classroom, but rather to complement these skills on a needs must basis.

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LANTERNA'S  
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OF JANUARY 2024.**

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to enable IBDP teachers to teach  
remotely.



# CONCLUSIONS AND ADVICE



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TEACHER SUPPLY CHALLENGES ARE AT THEIR HIGHEST LEVELS AND TEACHERS ARE EXPERIENCING **HIGH LEVELS OF BURNOUT**, RESULTING IN MORE FREQUENT ABSENCES THAN EVER BEFORE.

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However, schools are clearly hesitant to adopt digital solutions to this problem, expecting an individual lesson to be at an extremely high standard to even be considered.

Perhaps we all need to disassociate COVID online learning (reactive, short-term, without any planning) with the potential for online learning when done well, and integrated as part of a suite of educational solutions that a school adopts.

The first steps appear to be investing in our teachers, training them in digital teaching.

As a means of avoiding teacher burn-out, schools may want to explore filling short- and mid-term supply gaps with quality online solutions. It may lessen the burden on the existing teaching team, lead to overall improvements in staff satisfaction, and thereby result in a better overall experience for teachers and ultimately, students.