



TRANSFORMING VIRTUAL LEARNING IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

NEW RESEARCH REVEALS HOW K-12 SCHOOLS CAN MAXIMIZE THE BENEFITS OF TELESERVICES

In 2022, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that nearly half (44%) of K-12 public schools had vacancies. The report specifically highlighted special education, with 45% of schools needing to fill positions. The shortage is expected to persist, with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimating 38,600 openings for special education teachers each year during the next decade.

School districts are adopting teleservices to address this shortage and better serve students with special needs. In fact, providing virtual special education services is one of the fastest-growing specialties for the teleservices industry and for VocoVision, a teleservices provider.

“SPED positions have some of the highest number of vacancies in school districts across the U.S.”

With the goal of continually enhancing its teleservices, VocoVision conducted research on the factors impacting the success of virtual special education. Based on these insights from surveys, focus groups and secondary research, this paper offers guidance on delivering personalized special education services by:

- Understanding the unique needs of your student population
- Implementing the right technology, tools and training
- Cultivating a collaboration approach to virtual special education



“Providing virtual special education services is one of the fastest growing fields for telepractice and teletherapy provider VocoVision.”

About the research: The primary research in this white paper is both quantitative and qualitative. VocoVision surveyed 122 telepractitioners who deliver special education services to schools in the U.S. Following the survey, VocoVision conducted a series of focus groups consisting of 17 survey participants.

¹ National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Continuation of Education 2022 report.
² Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, Special Education Teachers.

UNDERSTANDING THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF YOUR STUDENT POPULATION

In recent years, VocoVision has seen adoption rates for teleservices increase significantly across the United States. School administrators, teachers and parents now realize that it's a viable option to provide access to much-needed services across multiple disciplines to students with disabilities in schools.

According to the NCES, 33% of all students receiving special education services have a specific learning disability, 19% have speech or language impairments, and 15% have other health impairments. With the number of students requiring special services increasing — and the corresponding need to manage both rising and diverse caseloads — school administrators need a reliable partner to help assess and manage telepractioners and virtual teachers who specialize in a wide range of teaching and intervention practices.

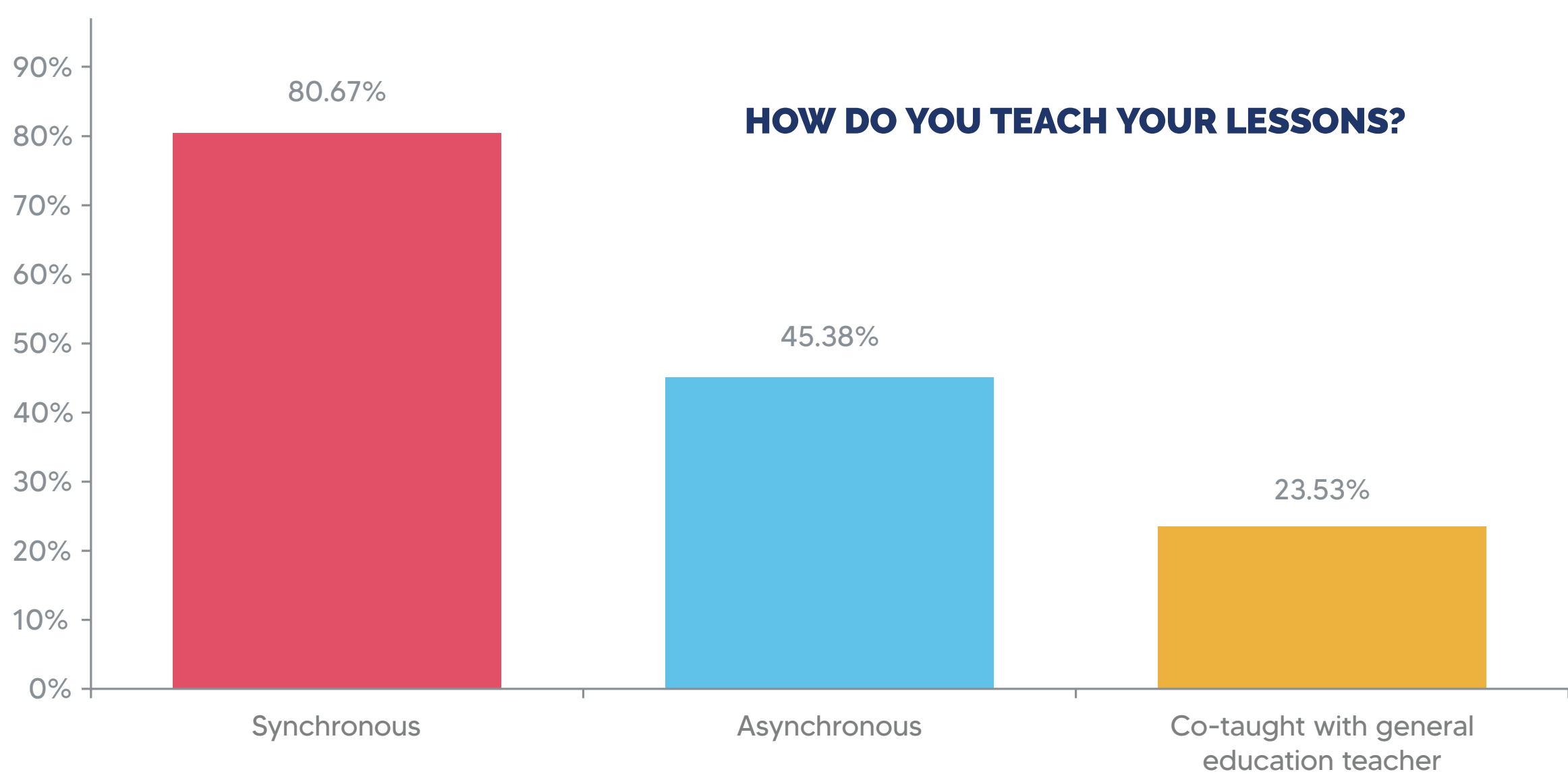


Before engaging teleprofessionals, it is important to understand the:

- Students who might benefit the most from teleservices
- Languages of the students needing services
- Educational settings where students will receive services

At VocoVision, we work with schools and school districts to conduct an initial consultation to gain a better understanding of the unique needs of their students and the learning environment.

As noted in our survey, VocoVision practitioners work in a variety of education settings. When it comes to virtual special education teachers, many work on more than one assignment, and in multiple settings. Of the educators surveyed, nearly **81% work in synchronous settings** while **45% work in asynchronous environments** and **24% co-taught with a general education teacher**.



By leveraging their national network of clinicians and teachers, VocoVision can support schools by providing highly qualified teleprofessionals regardless of location, language, educational settings or unique needs. We remove the time-consuming burden shouldered by school administrators of having to hire qualified therapists and instructors by vetting and placing teleprofessionals.

A key differentiator of working with VocoVision is that schools are not assigned multiple telepractioners or

virtual teachers to work with a particular student. We provide a dedicated teleprofessional who will work with your student one-on-one or in small groups throughout the entire assignment to ensure Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals are being met in a measurable, attainable and timely manner. In addition to building a strong relationship with your student, their parent(s) and school staff, having a consistent teleprofessional helps reduce the time spent on caseload management.

³ NCES, Continuation of Education 2022 report

IMPLEMENTING THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY, TOOLS AND TRAINING

U.S. schools have successfully used telepractice solutions for years, and recent events have further accelerated adoption. However, the experience can vary greatly for school districts, educators and students. Effective special education teleservices begin with the right technology, trusted tools, qualifications, and training for teleprofessionals.



TECHNOLOGY

In a recent survey conducted by VocoVision, **77% of virtual special education teachers stated that technology is essential to student success**, ranking slightly above student attendance. While all technology must be compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), not all platforms for delivering teletherapy services are created equally. Furthermore, with exacerbating infrastructure and budgetary concerns, some teleservice providers require school systems to invest further in specialized technology or pricy setups, taxing already constrained special education budgets.

At VocoVision, we find teleservices works best when the platform is easy to use and familiar to students and in-school facilitators. Our platform is based on a simple video conference program and does not require any special training on the part of in-school facilitators. There is no need to spend time onboarding or money on unexpected line items.



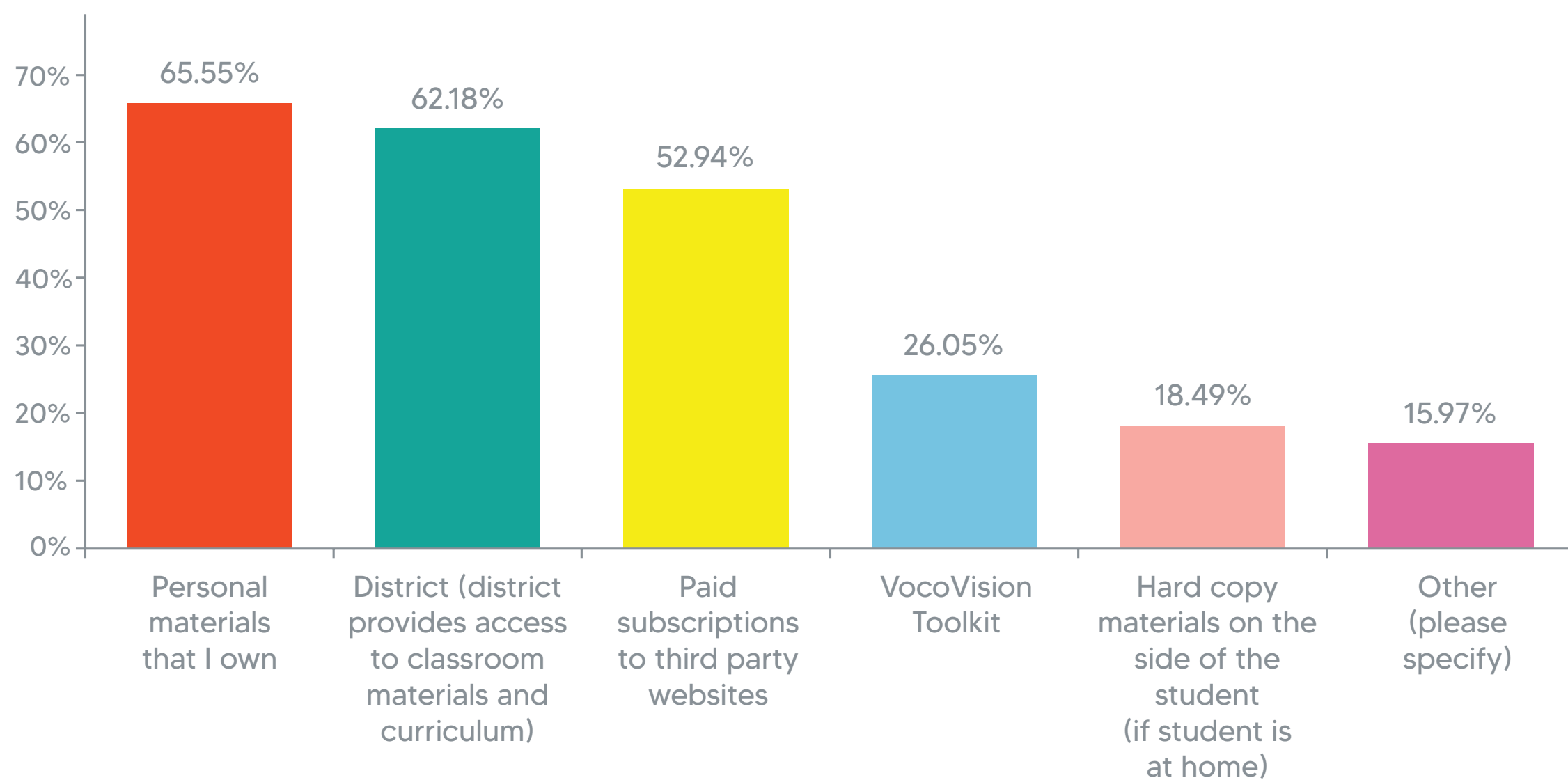
TOOLS

While technology plays a big part in teleservices, we believe remote special education services should be a personal, high-quality learning experience. Remote teachers delivering special education services must be able to manage the range of abilities and needs of the students they serve. A robust bank of regularly updated materials that school professionals can access and customize based on students' needs can be extremely beneficial.

As one VocoVision virtual teacher shared, **"Having digital materials tailored to my students' needs is extremely important for their success and engagement in the sessions."** Based upon our survey, special educators are using lesson materials from a variety of sources.

We found that nearly 65% of remote special education teachers rely on lesson materials they own themselves. About 62% of respondents cited using materials and curriculum provided by the school district, and 53% said they use materials from paid, third-party subscriptions. More than a quarter of respondents said they use the proprietary VocoVision Toolkit for their lessons.

WHERE ARE YOU SOURCING YOUR MATERIALS FOR YOUR LESSONS?



⁴ VocoVision focus group and survey results. Summer 2022.



TRAININGS

When researching teleservice options, school districts should consider companies' qualifications and training requirements. At VocoVision, we value in-school experience and require practitioners to have two years to be considered for remote positions. Once expertise and experience have been verified, we train special education professionals on best practices for virtual delivery of services.

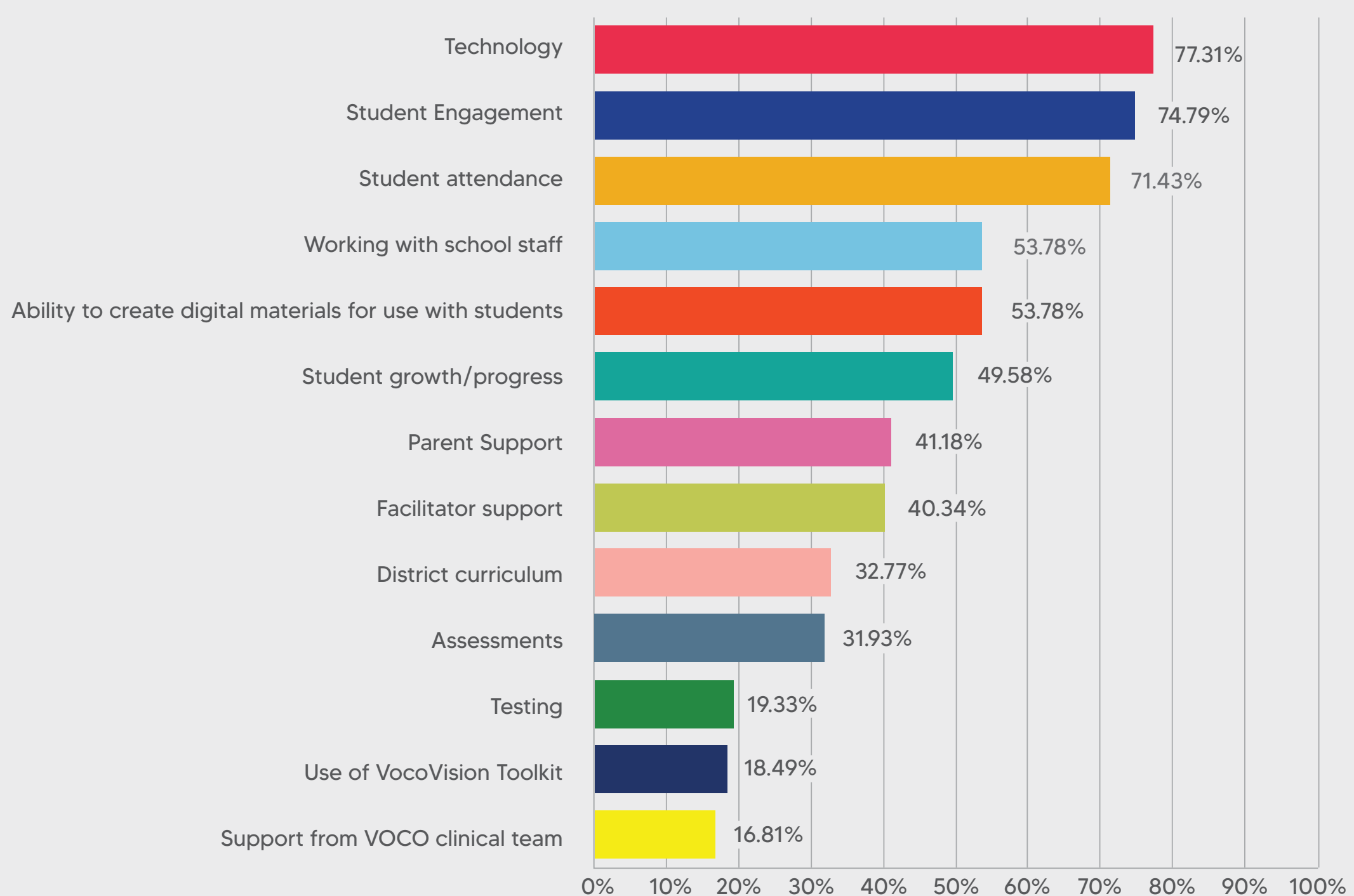
It is important to provide ongoing support both on the clinical side and in the technical aspects of teletherapy. This type of support is attractive to the rising number of special educators looking to transition from in-school to virtual service delivery. While the increase in qualified teleprofessionals continues to rise, so does the demand for remote work. In fact, most focus group participants stated they “enjoy having more job flexibility and freedom.”

CULTIVATING A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO VIRTUAL SPECIAL EDUCATION

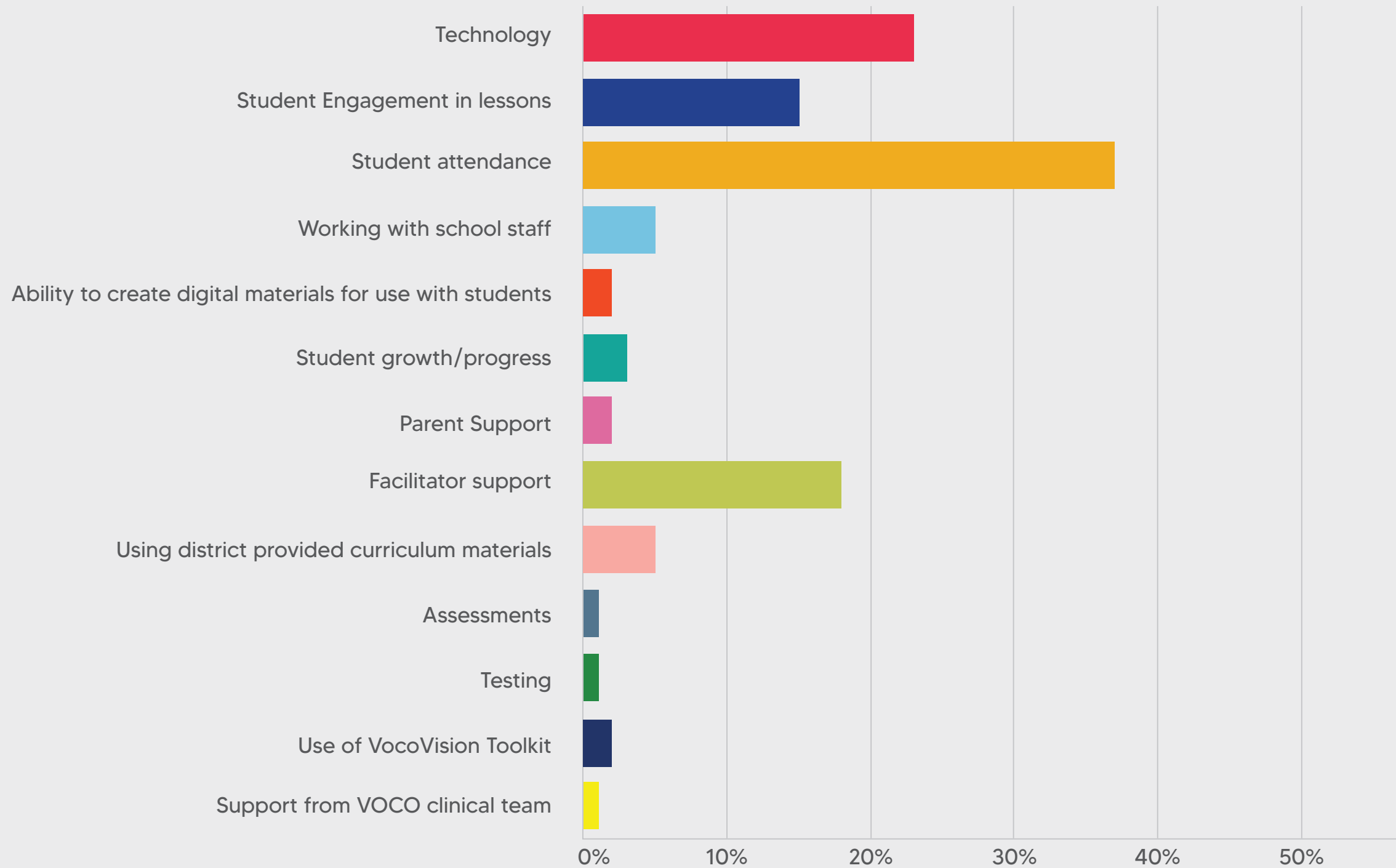
According to the virtual special education teachers who participated in the survey, **“Insight and collaboration with school staff is crucial”** to enabling students to be successful in a virtual environment. One survey participant stated that **“facilitator support and good classroom management is essential.”** Across all respondents, “facilitator support” ranked as the third most important factor contributing to student success.



WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS OF YOUR SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHING ASSIGNMENT ENABLE YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS TO SUCCEED IN A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT?



PLEASE RANK THE AREAS YOU SELECTED (1 BEING THE BEST)



More broadly, 54% of respondents cited “working with school staff” as impacting student success in a virtual environment, with 41% citing “parent support.” The survey found that collaboration among remote special education teachers, in-school facilitators, therapists and school administrators has a far-reaching impact on other factors, particularly attendance, assessments and lesson planning.

As one survey respondent noted, attendance — the most important contributor to success — requires collaboration among all stakeholders. They stated, **“Attendance is huge for students to make any progress (whether in person or online). This requires the support of the school and facilitators.”**

During a focus group, one participant said, **“Access to a collaborative team to discuss student performance [enables success]. The ability to create authentic assessments as well as individualized lessons and assessments also supports improved student outcomes. Additionally, if the student attends consistently, then there is a wider ability to gauge how they learn to better create and facilitate learning opportunities.”**

In addition to our survey, other studies have also revealed that collaboration among teachers improves student academic outcomes. Moreover, collaboration positively impacts job satisfaction in education — a key contributor to teacher retention.



At VocoVision, our virtual special education teachers work closely with other educators to ensure sessions are consistent – and complementary to – the school’s curriculum. In doing so, we are supporting a comprehensive, collaborative strategy that achieves better outcomes for special needs students as well as the school systems entrusted with their development.

At VocoVision, we believe that special education is not a journey to be taken alone. If you would like a free teleservice consultation or to learn more about collaborating with VocoVision, please call us at (888) 946-8626, or email us at info@vocovision.com.