

Perceptions, Challenges and Coping Strategies of Mathematics Teachers in the Implementation of Limited Face-To-Face Classes

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how mathematics teachers at Ozamiz City School of Arts and Trades perceived the implementation of limited face-to-face classes. The researcher purposively identified ten (10) secondary mathematics teachers, parents, and students who have participated in the implementation of limited face-toface classes. A semi-structured interview was utilized to interview the Mathematics teachers, parents, and students at OCSAT. All online and offline interviews were recorded and verified because the researcher sought to capture the data precisely and comprehensively. Using Merriam Case Study Model, particularly a three-component triangulation, the outcome is supported by the feedback from parents and students to have an authenticity of results from the main respondents. This model helps identify the perceptions, challenges encountered, coping strategies, and suggestions and recommendations by the mathematics teachers in implementing limited face-to-face classes. Results showed that mathematics teachers acquire a sense of positivity because, with almost two (2) years of modular distance learning, teachers become excited to teach again. However, disadvantages occur using this modality that make teachers drained physically and mentally. With inconsistent findings using dissonance theory, the need to resume full in-person instruction was concluded.

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 epidemic has significantly impacted education, making schools, universities, and other institutions temporarily suspend or close. This closure has affected millions of learners since the outbreak and the threat of the virus. In addressing the problem, many governments worldwide have decided to adopt distance learning to handle the situation and ensure that all learners continue to learn despite the crisis. However, most learners suffer from education, mainly in technical disciplines. Thus, every government's responsibility is to securely develop measures for reopening face-to-face classes so that students have more opportunities for authentic learning (Giannini, Jenkins, & Saavedra, 2020, Sarmiento et al., 2021 & Sevy-Biloon, 2021).

Some schools have started reopening in-person classes last September 2021 (UNICEF, 2021). According to UNICEF, around 27% of countries worldwide have fully or partially closed schools. These countries kept schools closed for the longest Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Panama. The Philippines is considered the last country to reopen schools since the government of Bangladesh commenced reopening primary, secondary, and tertiary educational institutions in the country as of September 12, 2021. In the same



year, the government of Panama began the reopening in hybrid mode with reduced face-to-face classes and distance learning last June 2021.

After nearly two (2) years of modular learning and online classes, the Department of Education (DepEd) has recently opened for restricted face-to-face learning. It follows the approval of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte in the request of DepEd to establish limited face-to-face classes beginning in January 2021. However, due to the threat of another variant, it was canceled and recalled. Furthermore, the President has declared that face-to-face engagement will be feasible unless vaccinating students (Lalu, 2021). Thus, DepEd chooses to implement modular distance learning, which is parents' most preferred mode of education since it is adaptable and accessible to all students, particularly those in rural areas (Bernardo, 2020 & Anzaldo, 2021). Since the parent fills in the teacher in this learning method, parent-teacher partnerships are the most beneficial for students' learning. Parents' attitudes regarding remote learning made it challenging to balance working and raising their children (Agaton & Cueto, 2021). So, if pilot studies in COVID-free areas are approved, DepEd Secretary Leonor Briones noted that the agency is also looking forward to potential face-to-face interactions. However, DepEd has not yet received the President's permission to reopen face-to-face classes. So, students will likely be under the modular and online distance learning setup in the school year 2021-2022.

Until Memorandum No. 071, s 2021 was issued on September 20, 2021. The President approved the joint proposal of the Department of Education (DepEd) and Department of Health (DOH) with the selected 100 public schools satisfying the given conditions for pilot face-to-face classes. The pilot of limited face-toface classes runs for over two months, from November 15, 2021, to January 31, 2022. Implementing the school health protocols in face-to-face sessions must be planned carefully, following national and international guidelines. These guidelines are contained in the Joint Memorandum Circular No. 1, s 2021, to ensure that students will be kept safe for the pilot study. The Department of Education (DepEd) stated that the pilot run of face-to-face classes has been highly successful (Yang, 2022). Through Office Order (OO-OSEC-2022-003), the DepEd has recommended expanding limited face-to-face classes to its regional offices. Thus, Secretary Briones stated that the decisions to enable limited localized face-to-face classes would be determined in collaboration with DepEd, the LGUs involved, and the local health authorities (Garcia, 2022). Furthermore, it can only be considered in low-risk locations. Despite the President's consent, some parents are hesitant to direct their children back to school for face-to-face classes. Parents stated that if the virus is not eradicated or the entire population has not been vaccinated, they would prefer their children to stay at home for blended learning. Others would argue that rather than staying home for almost a year, they wanted their children to have more regular lives and develop skills holistically through interaction with others (Moaje, 2021).

Teaching Mathematics in Different Modalities

One of the findings from Ecuador shows that more students prefer face-to-face classes rather than online learning because students cannot focus on learning virtually (Sevy-Biloon, 2021). For many reasons, most students want to return to face-to-face classes as soon as possible because many uncontrollable factors affect students' interest and learning in an online setting. Technology and interface characteristics, content-area experiences, student roles and tasks, and information overload are the factors that affect students' learning online (Vonderwell & Zachariah, 2005). Also, a study in Ozamiz City suggests that teachers should devise a backup plan if internet access is disrupted or power is lost unexpectedly (Clarin & Baluyos, 2022). Learning is possible if teachers are flexible in establishing a goal in a sudden situation using online learning.

Moreover, online education can help students to learn differently. It can teach them to think outside the box, become independent in learning, and truly take responsibility for their education (Plas, 2016). Even though there is no significant difference between an online and face-to-face course in student grades (Cottrell, 2020). Still, face-to-face shows credibility in validating and authenticating students' comprehension.

A survey conducted in Indonesia showed that most students were enthusiastic and pleased with the new open limited face-to-face learning policy because students can better understand the material when they communicate face-to-face rather than through chat (Soesanto & Dirgantoro, 2021). Even before teachers integrate technology into classroom discussions, being away while discussing a lesson via a virtual environment is radically different from being present physically. When students are physically present in the classroom, teachers can reprimand disobedient students and clarify any topics that are unclear directly. In a study conducted in Jolo, Sulu, Philippines, students agreed that face-to-face learning contributes more to understanding than modular learning. It boosts students' self-confidence and develops higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) which can eventually help them maximize academic performance (Salamuddin, 2021).

Besides, this kind of modality made the students feel motivated and at ease while learning because they could collaborate with teachers physically (Sevy-Biloon, 2021). Most of the students disagreed with the modular distance learning approach because they experienced being left behind as they learned through self-learning modules (SLMS) and could not focus due to the absence of face-to-face instruction (Guimalon et al., 2021). Also, with modular distance learning, students become phony of their outputs because they copy and paste the answer from a web browser. Thus, face-to-face classes must reopen so that all students will attain authentic learning, especially in the Division of Ozamiz City.

In teaching mathematics, it is evident that the modalities employed by each country unmotivate more students. Online learning is not new. However, certain studies reveal that online mathematics learning is ineffective (Yohannes et al., 2021). Some disadvantages are that teachers need much time to write mathematical equations for online learning. Furthermore, learners struggled to comprehend the information because mathematics is an abstract subject requiring high-level analytical thinking. As a result of the difficulties, teachers and learners become less enthusiastic. Mathematics is more effective and increases participation if there is a two-way interaction between teacher and student and vice versa. From a study in Malaysia six (6) years ago, students and teachers preferred the face-to-face learning mode to online learning because it is more comfortable interacting with and enables them to learn mathematics as a complex and challenging subject, even when taught face-to-face (Malik, 2012 & Fleming, 2019).

Mathematics becomes more difficult for the learners when schools transition to distance learning, particularly in modular modality, because no one can assist and explain the material more thoroughly than in the classroom. Reading and practicing the module is not enough for learners who are not mathematically inclined. Therefore, these students require the support of a knowledgeable and trained professional to grasp the lesson well. Without the assistance and support of their parents or family members, the students might not be able to develop the needed skill since this subject should explain in greater depth (Anzaldo, 2021). Thus, face-to-face must be restored for the students to comprehend essential mathematics concepts they may apply daily. The government of the Philippines has permitted their gradual expansion on limited face-to-face recently. Furthermore, last March 2, 2022, the Division of Ozamiz City issued Divisional Memorandum No. 0071, s 2022 in response to Regional Memorandum No. 102, directing the twenty-three (23) public schools to begin conducting restricted face-to-face classes on March 7, 2022. These schools were qualified to run the limited face-to-face because they were given the safety seal, indicating that they met the minimum face-to-face class requirements. Teachers must prepare the documentation for the progressive expansion of the limited face-to-face before each classroom reopens. The vaccination status of students and parents is one of the most significant documents to prepare.

Additionally, parental consent must be requested and filed to allow their child/children to engage in the limited face-to-face. Moreover, students cannot participate in the limited face-to-face sessions unless they have these essential documents. Thus, this paper aims to study the perceptions among teachers, students, and parents in preparing the pertinent documents needed to implement limited face-to-face. The

teachers who will be questioned are the mathematics teachers, who are the primary respondents in this study. Since utilizing modular distance learning, mathematics teachers have experienced numerous hurdles and difficulties in presenting lessons and providing meaningful education for students (Roman, 2021). Thus, this study was created to determine the perceptions of mathematics teachers in implementing limited face-to-face classes as this modality is new to them.

METHODS

Research Design

A case study design and a qualitative research methodology are both used. This case study design details each procedure component, such as conducting interviews, observing, and contrasting the outcomes with those of the earlier studies (Yazan, 2015). Thus, using the Merriam's approach to categorical classification would lead the researcher to look for designs, give meanings to the participants' words, and even develop themes. Using the Merriam Case Study Model, particularly the triangulation principle, the researcher will conduct interviews with mathematics teachers, parents and students regarding the required data in the participation of limited face-to-face classes. This will enhance the educational value and raise knowledge of how research participants feel and perceive the prerequisites of implementing restricted face-to-face classes in the part of the Philippines.



*The triangulation Principle shows the Perceptions of Mathematics Teachers with the support of the data gathered from parents and students in the Implementation of Limited Face-to-Face Classes

Subject of the Research

The researcher purposively classifies ten (10) mathematics teachers, parents, and students at Ozamiz City School of Arts and Trades (OCSAT). These participants have significant involvement in the preparation of limited face-to-face classes. Thus, it is essential to focus on these participants so that school administrators can consider the necessary steps to implement face-to-face classes.

The researcher uses a homogeneous purposive sampling technique to decide whether the participants shares a characteristics or a set of elements (Sibona, Walczak & Baker, 2020). It concentrates on a single subgroup in which all sample members have certain traits. The sampling technique is applied as the researcher chooses mathematics teachers in the support of the parents and students in gathering data.

Research Instrument

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with Mathematics teachers, parents, and students at OCSAT. Both online and offline interviews were recorded and verified to ensure accurate and comprehensive data collection. Acting as the primary data collection instrument, the researcher was supported by an interview guide. The participants' interview responses serve as initial data, which will be thoroughly analyzed and interpreted. The interview tool was designed to gather insights into the participants' perceptions of limited face-to-face classes.

Data Gathering Procedure

Since cases are increasing in rate, the researcher observes the steps in acquiring data while adhering to the health protocols. First, the researcher writes a formal letter to the respective School Division Superintendent with the approval of the school principal in Ozamiz City School of Arts and Trades. Second, the questionnaire will be presented digitally, including the researcher and the participants' health safety. Also, follow-up questions will be necessary for authentic results. This way, it will collect the appropriate data for the study concerning the problem.

Data Analysis

As defined by Gibbs (2007), a theme coding method is used to examine the data obtained from the semi-structured interview with the carefully chosen participants. It requires disassembling all the data into its tiniest constituent elements (codes), then rearranging and classifying them into themes. Once the data has been coded, the researcher will rapidly ascertain which responses to the research questions are most frequently given. Additionally, the findings will be presented in accurate and thorough detail.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mathematics teachers' perceptions of implementing limited face-to-face classes have been gathered based on the triangulation principle. The teachers' responses, with the support of the gathered data by the parents and students were grouped into four specific categories: perceptions, challenges, coping strategies, and suggestions and recommendations of mathematics teachers in the implementation of limited face-to-face classes.

Perception on the Implementation of Limited Face-to-Face Classes

The best modality during that time was that limited face-to-face classes would be implemented for all grade levels to have authentic learning. Here are the joint statements made by the teachers.

Developing a sense of Positivity

Teachers feel positive when limited face-to-face lessons are implemented since they can observe students' learning. Students can learn, and teachers can also practice what it is like to educate students in a classroom. The teachers shared:

"I am glad to see my learners learning again..." - P3

"It is good that face-to-face class is back again. Tiring but fulfilling knowing students are now really learning especially in Mathematics..." – P4

"As a teacher, I am happy that at last, I am a teacher again who teaches students in physical environment..." – P6

"I felt very happy and hopeful during the implementation of the limited in-person classes. It was a great opportunity to be with the students and guide them to grasp what they had to learn during the school year..." – P8

Learning mathematics requires a skill since this subject should be explained in greater depth (Anzaldo, 2021). Without physical teaching, students would have difficulty attaining quality education because this is also the students' opportunity to show how they learned during modular distance learning. One of the studies stated that the outcome of modular distance learning was ineffective because the academic performance of the students decreased (Dargo&Dimas, 2021). Thus, teachers feel optimistic about implementing limited face-to-face classes.

Additionally, parents have a satisfied view in implementing limited face-to-face classes because their children can learn again compared to remote learning, which gives unsatisfactorily outcomes (Agaton, 2021).

Obtaining Effective Outcome

Most teachers find limited face-to-face implementation essential and effective to use. It is effective for those students who have joined the limited face-to-face classes but not for those who are not included in this modality. They said:

"It is effective in a sense that learners are now encouraged to perform better compared to the modular distance learning wherein they will just simply copy the answers from the answer key..." – P1

"Effective kaayo to some students kay naa nay makat-on kaysa module. But to those who were not able to join dili gihapon..." [Very effective to some students because they can learn more compare to modular but not to those who could not join...] – P2

"Effective because learners get the chance to participate in a well-designed lesson and confusion with regards to the lesson are easily addressed..." – P3

"... effective because the students would clearly understand the lesson through face-to-face discussion and teachers can explain and answer well those questions from the students regarding the lesson..." – P6

"... effective because lesson will be discussed thoroughly to students wherein everyone can participate the class..." – P9

Having a limited number of students in a classroom helped teachers cater to all the students' learning needs, especially mathematics. The teacher can identify and address students with difficulty in a particular lesson. This is one of the advantages of having limited in-person classes.

Covering Limited Learning

From the word itself, "limited", limited students, lessons, and learning. Since students are divided into two (2) groups, the same lesson will be taught every two weeks. Teachers complained:

"...with this modality I will repeat my subject matter every session and since the class is only half-day this leads the students to get a little learning..." – P1

"Limited lang sya and one quarter ra jud. Kulang sa days to cover all the lessons..." [Just limited and only one quarter to cover. The days are not enough to cover all the lessons...] – P2

"... the word itself limited means limited learning..." - P10

One of the disadvantages of using this modality is that it covers few learnings. Having this modality will not cover all the competencies for each quarter. Thus, deciding which appropriate modality is essential to have good quality education simultaneously promotes health safety for all. "Learning for all students" (Lozette, 1996b, Chambers et. al., 2016) is the aim of all schools. Deped mandates that every student's right to a high-quality education at every level is protected and promoted by the school, and it is its responsibility to take the necessary actions to ensure that everyone can access it.

Students are essential to the educative process. Thus, students preferred limited face-to-face classes over modular learning but favored more on full in-person classes.

Challenges Encountered in the Implementation of Limited Face-to-Face Classes

Mathematics teachers inevitably encountered challenges in the implementation of limited face-to-face classes. It includes complying with document's difficulty, struggling to teach the lesson, draining physically and mentally, and overlapping schedules.

Complying with Document's Difficulty

Reaching out to parents or guardians is essential to comply with the requirements in implementing the limited face-to-face classes. One of the essential documents to be compiled is the vaccination status of both the parents or guardians and students. This challenging experience of mathematics teachers is reflected:

"...gathering and communicating the students' and parents' vaccination status is difficult to get because some parents and students do not have gadgets..." – P6

"... I struggled in contacting parents/guardian on their vaccination status since this is one of the requirements for the students to be included in the LF2F." – P9

Reaching out to parents is one of the problems during modular distance learning, much more in getting the data needed to implement the LF2F classes.

Struggling to Teach the Lesson

After almost two years of distance learning, students' learning becomes stagnant. Most of them forget the basic concepts in math, and it is hard for the teachers to adjust the lesson that was supposed to be learned in previous years. They shared:

"I really struggle teaching students who forgot the basic operations and concepts because they cannot understand the lesson well. They do not have knowledge on competencies from the previous grade level..." – P2

"It is hard to teach the lessons that they are expected to learn at their level, because they didn't learn the previous knowledge they supposed to learn for the last 2 years..." – P5

Building up the basic concepts is necessary so that students will find it easy to connect to the new topic, which is a little complex. Since the lessons in mathematics are spiral, it is like the idea of Jerome Bruner's spiral curriculum, where topics are revisited to consolidate understanding and increase complexity (Gifford, 2020). Learning the previous year's competency is a need to make the lesson easy for the students to understand.

Draining Physically and Mentally

Most students do not know the basic concepts of Math; therefore, at the end of the day, teachers are exhausted. Also, teachers do additional daily tasks aside from teaching because limited face-to-face classes include in-person classes and modular distance learning. They said:

"...I am exhausted and drained everyday since students do not know the basic concepts. Tiring but fulfilling knowing that students are now really learning especially Mathematics..." – P4

"My energy drained because more work to accomplish every day since I have to monitor students' performance during the limited ftf and follow-up students who are doing distance learning and modular learning..." – P2

A teacher's role is to deliver lessons to help students learn more (Cox, 2020). This modality gives the teachers additional tasks to work on rather than teaching. Planning, preparing, and checking for in-person classes and modular learning makes the teachers physically and mentally drained.

Overlapping Schedules

There are many tasks to accomplish every day. Sometimes duties overlap, so the teacher cannot focus on work one at a time. They revealed:

"...there are times wherein the tasks are overlapping, and we have classes to attend to while we are having deadlines of the reports or paper works." – P1

"The schedule was one of the challenges I have encountered. It was time-consuming on my part, checking the outputs of those having the modules and at the same time preparing for my limited face-to-face classes..." – P8

Teachers do a lot of multitasking, especially in the limited face-to-face classes. Thus, the teaching focus was compromised because they felt tired at the end of the day.

Coping Strategies during the Implementation of Limited Face-to-Face Classes

Teachers find appropriate coping strategies to overcome the challenges they experienced. These coping strategies include: taking the initiative, determining student's level of understanding, collaborating with teachers, and managing time.

Taking the Initiative

Being exposed to technology helped gather the updated vaccination status of the students and parents to compile the needed requirements. Some of the teachers said:

"...I can search the vaccination certificate of my students through the vaxcert site to have the updated vaccination status..." – P6

"... I called their neighbor for those who do nott have contacts." - P9

Building a strong relationship between parents and teachers is communication (De Jong et al., 2017). Taking the initiative to complete the necessary documents to implement limited face-to-face classes is a good way rather than waiting for the parents or students to respond to the updated vaccination status.

Determining Student's Level of Understanding

Teachers and students must meet halfway so that students may master the lesson well. The speed of the discussion must be determined by the students' capacity or level of understanding. They said:

"I looked for strategies in teaching Mathematics, and I went for more important competencies instead of focusing on other competencies. Also, math is complicated for those students who do not understand the nature and the basics of math. So hinay-hinay lang". [Do it slowly.] – P2

"Let them read and teach math lessons according to students' pace. Do not exhaust them, so as not to exhaust myself as their teacher..." – P4

This is why some students have difficulty understanding the lesson well because maybe the teacher delivered the lesson quickly. Knowing the students' level of understanding may help teachers slow down on

the discussion. As students are still in the adjustment process. One way to manage the changes is by allowing the self to embrace them (Sharman, 2016).

Collaborating with Teachers

Collaboration with other teachers would be a great help to make things at ease. Teachers shared:

"... seeking the advice from my colleagues and by motivating myself not to get stressed on my job..." – P1

"... collaboration with teachers who were teaching the same subjects help me handle the situation easily." \neg – P8

In achieving goals, working together helps a lot. The support of other colleagues, either technical support or inspirational words, could lessen the problem faced by the teacher. Teamwork is essential to personal, academic, and professional achievement (Prada et al., 2022).

Managing the Time

Taking one at a time yields a higher productivity of tasks to accomplish every day. It also lowers stress and makes things easy to attain. Teachers shared:

"Making a time table of the tasks at hand makes everything easy to handle..." - P3

"By having time management keeps things bearable..." - P7

This strategy will efficiently accomplish tasks and produce good outcomes (Bishop, 2023). Prioritizing based on the task's level of importance and urgency is a good practice. A saying states that "do not settle for anything less than your best" by Brian Tracy. This helps the teachers manage the situation efficiently without being stressed.

Suggestions and recommendations for the Implementation of Limited Face-to-Face Classes

Reinforcing good practices is essential to effectively implement the limited face-to-face classes, including reducing the task, disseminating a clear plan, and strengthening teacher's wellness.

Reducing the Task

To focus on teaching, teachers' workload should be reduced according to the DepEd mission. Participant 1 said:

"Lessen the paper works of the teachers so that teachers can teach the learners well..." - P1

Teachers are the center of the educative process. Therefore, it is vital to eliminate data duplication, resources, and time teachers spend on work preparation so that teachers can give more emphasis on teaching (Molina, 2018).

Disseminating a clear Plan

Sharing information on the implementation of LF2F should be transparent and explicit. Participant 8 revealed:

"...there may be clearer plans to deliver this modality..." - P8 effectively

Clarity using a specific modality should be presented to every institution. Planning should manifest in such transitions so that confusion between both parties will be addressed directly.

Strengthening Teacher's Wellness

Mental, physical, and health aspects need to consider. Bringing back in-person classes provides an understanding of the lesson with less distraction rather than learning at home is quite distressing. The participants disclosed:

"... As much as we want more learnings and gains by our students, it would not be that full if teachers are not given the welfare that they need: mental and physical, especially when the source of knowledge in academics in the comeback of F2F is the teachers..." – P1

"Limited face-to-face classes make my life as a teacher worthwhile since I now give them real-time instructions on activities related to the lesson. This modality keeps me safe ..." – P4

Limited face-to-face is a combination of modular and face-to-face learning. Students who are not vaccinated will be purely modular. For this reason, teachers find this modality physically challenging because there are many things to prepare weekly for those students in modular and face-to-face classes. Thus, a mathematics teacher would not be in favor of limited face-to-face to be expanded. This is also supported by the fact that students prefer full in-person classes because they can learn more rather than in modular or limited face-to-face classes (Singh et al, 2021; Summers et al., 2005).

The findings of this study indicate that the increased workload associated with limited face-to-face classes is resulting in fatigue and reduced focus among mathematics teachers. While the actual implementation of limited face-to-face classes does not present major challenges for the teachers, the exhaustive preparation required for this teaching approach has negatively impacted their mental and physical well-being. The dual responsibility of managing both in-person and distance learning modes, along with monitoring student performance in each setting, has placed significant demands on the teachers.

Interestingly, parents express satisfaction with the limited face-to-face modality, but students do not support its expansion. This disparity in perceptions between teachers and students can be linked to the theory of cognitive dissonance, as explained by Kedraka & Kaltsidis (2020). According to this theory, individuals experiencing conflicting thoughts or emotions seek to resolve the discomfort and return to a state of equilibrium or normalcy.

In conclusion, the drawbacks associated with the limited face-to-face modality, combined with insights from the theory of cognitive dissonance, suggest that a return to full in-person instruction would be a more favorable option. This approach would not only alleviate the burden on mathematics teachers but also provide students with their preferred learning environment, potentially leading to more effective teaching and learning experiences overall.

CONCLUSION

The results point to increased tasks leading to mathematics teachers becoming tired and unable to focus on teaching. Implementation of limited face-to-face classes was not a problem for the teachers; the preparation affected them exhaustively. Mastering two at a time for this modality drained the mathematics teachers mentally and physically. The preparation for this modality includes monitoring students' performance during in-person classes and follow-up students doing distance learning.

Though parents are satisfied with this modality, students will not recommend limited face-to-face to be expanded because they like to have full in-person classes. The perceptions between teachers and students are likely comparable. The idea relates to the theory of cognitive dissonance. This theory occurs when people

feel uneasy and are eager to return to a normal state. In conclusion, the drawback of this modality and the theory used to explain the results indicate to resume of full in-person instruction.

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