WORLD'S BEST SCHOOL PRIZES

FRAMEWORK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The five World's Best School Prizes have been created on the basis of research, evidence and wide consultation, with teachers and education experts, grouped on our Review Panel. We believe that these five Prize categories reflect key strategies that will encourage schools to try different approaches to strengthen their institutions and ultimately, help accelerate the pace of change, starting with their own schools and communities.

World's Best School Prize for Community

Academic evidence has demonstrated the important role that schools play in the community from not just a teaching & learning perspective, but also from other perspectives such as resources and programmes for mental and physical health, social-emotional learning, social work, guidance, food security, and safety to try and meet the needs of the whole child – a "whole child approach to education"[1]. "Learning is social, emotional and academic". Children whose needs are met holistically tend to perform better at school and thrive in life. It also shows that the more involved they are in programmes the better they do academically and socially. Schools that are increasingly able to work with all key stakeholders such as families, parents, guardians, NGOs, community-based organisations, intermediaries and partners, sports/music programs, businesses, among others, are better situated to be inclusive and equitable for all students.

According to the Coalition of Community Schools in the U.S.[2] where community schools are well established, they define these as "the hub of its neighbourhood, uniting families, educators and community partners as an evidence-based strategy to promote equity and educational excellence for each and every child, and an approach that strengthens families and community.

We would argue that most SDG goals will be attained if we truly collaborated with each other and it starts with the school as the hub of the community. Schools are and can become a life-long learning institution for inter-generational growth that increases pride of place, community identification, and sense of self and ownership. Schools as the hub of community is where collective resiliency and sustainability will grow.

The schools that can bring all key stakeholders on-board and share in the students' learning truly honour that teaching & learning also happens outside of the schools' walls. Children don't start and stop learning only during the school day. They are always attuned to learning, at home, with friends, and through other influences and programmes. **The goal is to engage and challenge the student in all contexts and environments and support them along the way.** Therefore, communication with the members of the community is key whether it is being transparent in its vision, goals and purpose, to creating proper feedback loops, and promoting a sense of shared consciousness, leadership and empowerment as needed.

Parents and guardians play a fundamental role and are the school's first community partners. Several studies have proven the positive effects of parental engagement in their children's development: "Students with involved parents have more self-confidence, feel school is more important, earn higher grades, and are more likely to attend college"[3]. The foundational aspects of a solid relationship between the school and its parents are trust, respect, and collaboration in a shared mission.

Making the school a true learning institution that benefits all members of the community, becoming its hub, gives the opportunity for all stakeholders to take ownership in every child's education, truly honouring the proverb "it takes a village to raise a child." Thus, an integrated school approach that is community-informed will be more successful in modelling for student's the advantages and necessity for life-long learning. From teaching and learning with community mentors, character development initiatives, virtual co-op programs, experiential learning and much more to support programs for healthy living such as food programs, sports funding, psychologists, social workers, parenting programs, to infrastructure of the school and its ability to play a larger role within community program for all generations – such as intergenerational gardening, soup kitchens, seniors' programs, arts & craft programs, adult learning, among others. The

Therefore, we believe that a school that is rooted in partnering and collaborating with its community will ultimately become a force multiplier for all students to find themselves and flourish in all aspects of their lives - truly equity education - as well as the hub where other members of the community also take part in. The school is a place from and for all.
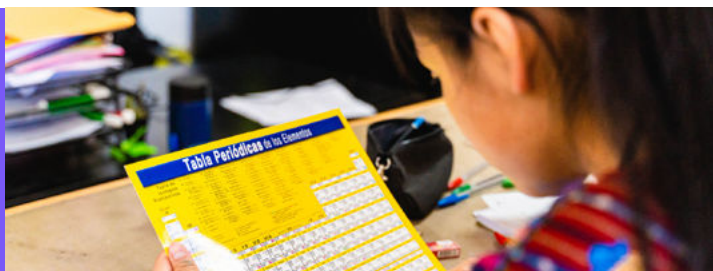
[1] Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018: https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/547/download?inline&file=Educating_Whole_Child_REPORT.pdf
[2] https://www.communityschools.org/about/
[3] https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/547/download?inline&file=Educating_Whole_Child_REPORT.pdf

World's Best School Prize for Environmental Action

Youth and students around the world have made it clear that the health of the planet and the role that they play in its wellbeing is the priority of their generation. Environmental Action, reflected on SDG 13 (Climate Action) is key and urgent, in a context in which climate change is real and its impact has intensified. The consequences of climate change can already be felt and include, among others, intense droughts, water scarcity, severe fires, rising sea levels, flooding, melting polar ice, catastrophic storms and declining biodiversity.[4]

Furthermore, climate change has also directly impacted students and schools through school disruptions caused by extreme heat, extreme air pollution, and economic shock from weather-related crop failure; by environmental hazards like wildfires and flooding; and by damage or destruction to school buildings and roads caused by extreme storms, and so much more.

Students and schools are already experiencing the effects of global warming, which can disrupt learning by causing school closures and other challenges. Students recognize that they have a crucial role to play as the current generation in addressing climate change and working towards a sustainable, inclusive, and equitable world for all.

We believe that schools should amplify their voices to protect the future of our planet by modelling best practices, educating, helping them find and prototype solutions, facilitating connection with their communities and providing them with a platform to advocate for their rights, and ultimately, take action.

According to the United Nations (UN) World Commission on Environment and Development, "environmental sustainability is about acting in a way that ensures future generations have the natural resources available to live an equal, if not better, way of life as current generations." (2007).

This means that schools must play an active part in environmental action. Schools should be the catalysing force behind environmental action because it is tied to the health of our communities and world. They must create a sustainable culture within each school community, "one in which students, staff and parents hold shared values and beliefs about the importance of taking action for a healthier, fairer and more environmentally sustainable society", as UNESCO states.[5]

Not only should schools teach environmental education through outdoor sustainability programs, but they should also **be looking at developing behaviours, habits, practices and green skills[6] for each student through an environment centred curriculum.** This goes beyond teaching and learning to also encompass eco-friendly practice, leadership and governance, sustainable development of their campus and infrastructure, creating healthy collaboration and partnerships with their distinct communities.

Civic engagement is key to building a sustainable future. Schools cannot shy away from empowering students to take action and use their voices to find solutions to the SDGS including Climate Action.

The school should be developing together with students, their families and the community solutions and taking action to combat climate change and its underlying drivers today and for a sustainable future. It should be hands-on learning that is transformative by thinking global and acting local. It will empower them to take individual and collective action to be the change they want to see.

We believe that Environmental Action should be a school priority everywhere that is helping students take action to protect their future.

[4] https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/key-findings
[5] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246740
[6] https://www.brookings.edu/articles/a-new-green-learning-agenda-approaches-to-quality-education-for-climate-action/

World's Best School Prize for Innovation

Many schools have already been innovating to address the ever-increasing demands of today's education systems. From challenges such as developing future-ready students, preparing for standardised testing, shifting from teacher-led to student-centred approaches, communicating in the digital age, coping with students' physical and mental health issues, and much more, schools were already facing the need to innovate in order to help develop holistically every student to their full potential.

The pandemic amplified this need to pivot as well as demonstrated the impact of equity issues on communities, schools, classrooms and students. Furthermore, the international community recognises that we are further away from reaching the sustainable development goals: "If no additional measures are taken, only one in six countries will meet SDG4 and achieve universal access to quality education by 2030."[7] **It is not a surprise to anyone working in schools or education that things need to change.**

Innovation will give schools and education an opportunity to leapfrog, which as mentioned above, is a powerful concept that empowers us to go beyond incremental approaches to accelerate the achievement of the SDG's and **make education better, accessible, and relevant.**

Dr. Rebecca Winthrop, leading education expert and Co-Director of Education at the Brookings Institution, has defined innovation as "an idea or technology that is a break from previous practice, often new in a particular context even if not new to the world".[8]

By adopting this definition, we concur with Dr. Winthrop that "To thrive in a changing world, young people will need skills and competencies that include information literacy, flexibility, critical thinking and collaboration in addition to academic knowledge."

"Most of the literature defines innovation as the implementation not just of new ideas, knowledge and practices but also of improved ideas, knowledge and practices"[9] Therefore, reframing an existing idea or practice can also be defined as an innovation. The fundamental aspect of an innovation to work is that it is contextualised: it aims at solving a problem with a solution that suits the school and its context, and as a result, creates a more equitable and inclusive learning environment. According to Brookings,

innovations are effective when they create new and sustainable ways to solve problems.[10]
UNICEF's approach to innovation is described as follows: "Innovation in education comes in many forms. Programmes, services, processes, products and partnerships can all enhance education outcomes in innovative ways." Importantly, innovation in education is about more than just new technology. When it comes to the implementation of a new technology, it should be assessed based on its impact on the three main challenges that our education system faces today, which are: equity and inclusivity, quality and efficiency.[12]

The innovation that is needed comes in all shapes and forms for schools from innovation to teaching & learning to engage students improving access, relevance and quality while making it student-centred to give students autonomy, voice and choice, to innovation in the learning space, to utilising technology to personalise formative assessment and create stronger shared consciousness with all the key stakeholders in a student's education.

Technology can be an important tool in education innovation but we should look at what the implementation of technology does to accelerate progress rather than the technology itself. In the centre of a framework based on rights. The focus should be on learning outcomes, not digital inputs."[13]

Every context is different, from resources, infrastructure, quality workforce and, fundamentally, the way that idea, practice, tool is implemented.

> Therefore, we believe that by embracing innovation, schools will be empowered and better able to meet the challenges they face in their respective contexts to ensure each and all of their students thrive, in a truly equitable and inclusive learning environment that is sustainable throughout time.
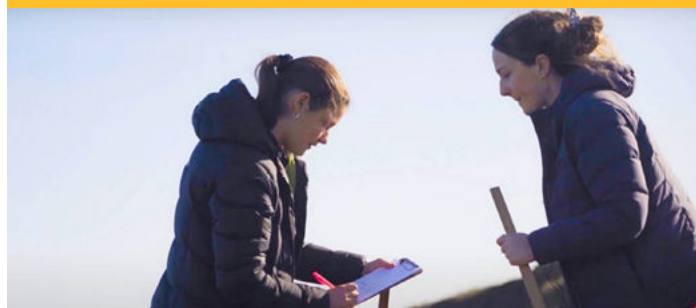
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[12] https://www.unesco.org/gem-report/en
[13] UNESCO. 2023. Global Education Monitoring Report Summary 2023: Technology in education: A tool on whose terms? Paris, UNESCO.

World's Best School Prize for Overcoming Adversity

Across the globe, adversity in all its forms affects schools in profound ways. But far from damaging the students' aspirations, self-belief, and determination to succeed, in many schools, students demonstrate a capability or 'capacity to learn' in an adverse context. The capabilities approach, pioneered by Amartya Sen and developed by Martha Nussbaum, is a framework for evaluating human well-being and flourishing with the focus being on what people are able to 'do' and 'be' (their capabilities), as opposed to their achieved outcomes or 'functioning'. In all of the examples of adversity in literature, the message is clear: **schools cannot overcome the fundamental causes of adversity, but they can use adversity as a backdrop towards aspiration and the will to succeed.** A number of concepts such as **resilience** and **grit** have risen to prominence in the wider literature on adversity and learning.

Resilience is best defined as: "A conscious effort to move forward in an insightful and integrated positive manner as a result of lessons learned from an adverse experience; the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten the viability, function, and development of that system; and a process to harness resources in order to sustain well being"[14]. Therefore, "resilience matters because not only is learning and school success possible in
spite of adversity, education can also be the vehicle to overcome that adversity".[15]

This is not new for schools, as with the examples above, every day schools around the world face some form of adversity, challenge, and/or have obstacles to overcome to be inclusive and equitable for all their students, which mirrors our communities, whether that's in relation to race, education, socioeconomic status, language, gender, sexual orientation, age, disabilities, religions, nationality, indigeneity, refugee status, and more. **Schools can and should play a role in disrupting this hegemony versus reproducing it.** Therefore, developing a strong foundation to reach the SDGs by helping all flourish to their full potential is important.

We believe that every school can learn from its peers around the world on how they have overcome their adversity, challenges, and/or obstacles and that this community of school learning needs to continue for education to thrive around the world. It can be adversity such as war, pandemic, extreme storms, but oftentimes it is adversity that has been normalised such as teaching with insufficient resources, lack of support for the students, lack of proper infrastructure, etc. While adversity is assumed to hinder students' capacities to aspire and engage in learning, resilience strengthens the capacity to aspire and promotes student engagement. Shared trauma, experiences, and challenges, might not have been responded to in the same way depending on the schools'

[14]SM Southwick et al., https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4185134/
[15]https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/470291468327352887/pdf/Transforming-adversity-into-opportunity-how-resilience-can-promote-quality-   education-amidst-conflict-and-violence.pdf

A school that faces adversity by being proactive in creating a culture of respect, collaboration, empathy, shared consciousness, transparent and open communication will not only survive but thrive in the face of it. A World Bank's Education Notes article provides a framework to help **transform crisis into opportunities** in education[16]: (1) making sense of the situation they are experiencing and finding purpose (cognitive engagement); (2) seeking identity and well-being – managing and regulating emotions through the development of new socio-emotional skills (emotional development); (3) taking control over the adverse situation (proactive engagement); (4) connecting with others to seek support (connected engagement), and (5) committing and being accountable: perseverance, a sense of accountability and self-responsibility help move towards adaptive outcomes (committed engagement).

Crucial to this are the social and ecological resources (including, good leadership, strong links with the community and religious bodies, etc.) that schools draw on in the face of adversity. How and what schools do to enable students and teachers and the wider community to reach their full potential. Whether it is by using strength-based approaches, trauma induced practices, restorative practices, positive collaborative leadership, creating a stable, safe environment with clear behaviour and expectations for all involved, focused on the purpose of the school, will empower all stakeholders to take action and thrive.

School leadership develops all stakeholders to deliver empowered decision-making which will energise their people to be problem-solvers and take ownership while facing adversity in their context. The development of resilience for the school and all its stakeholders matters because many succeed in spite of all the challenges and obstacles they face. The threats can be wide-ranging, with some being ongoing and chronic and others more acute one-off by nature, both can have lasting effects.

While facing adversity, obstacles and/or challenges, oftentimes schools are dealing with trauma which means that forgiveness can be extremely important. Forgiveness has been scientifically proven to be a pillar of restorative practices and a foundational area of focus for students who have suffered traumatic experiences to build healthy relationships, mindfulness, self-reflection, open communication, self-regulation, and so much more. Schools that can model forgiveness practices in the face of adversity, challenges, and/ or obstacles through healthy relationships, self-reflection and open collaborative communication are not only overcoming, but educating all their stakeholders on resiliency with purpose. **Modelling how to overcome adversity is vital to a student's growth, behaviour, skills, and ability to become resilient in**

> We believe that the ability for a school to see adversity, challenges, and/or obstacles as an opportunity to learn and grow will give students a chance to see themselves in this positive manner and become more resilient.

[16]https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/470291468327352887/pdf/Transforming-adversity-into-opportunity-how-resilience-can-promote-quality-   education-amidst-conflict-and-violence.pdf

World's Best School Prize for Supporting Healthy

The link between education in schools and the health of students and their communities has never been clearer. **Healthy students are better prepared to learn, grow, and thrive.** Healthy students and schools are resilient students and schools.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, UNESCO and WHO have urged countries to make every school a health-promoting school, and it made clear the role schools play in the mental, physical, social and emotional health of students.[17] Food insecurity, physical inactivity, struggling relationships, stress, anxiety, and other mental health issues, came to the surface and spoke about the vital role schools and their partners play in developing healthy habits, behaviours, values, skills and knowledge for each and every student and their community.

Developing healthy lifestyles is key to ensuring that students thrive and that communities become more sustainable. Throughout the Sustainable Development Goals, most of them are linked to helping students and their community be healthy, starting fundamentally with Good Health and Well-Being (SDG 3), and followed by No Poverty (SDG 1), Zero Hunger (SDG 2), Gender Equality (SDG 5), Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6), Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7), Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11). All these goals foundationally start with healthy communities and schools play a key role in developing healthy conditions for all, in all different aspects of the school's and community's life.

Health is the most basic human right. In the words of UNESCO Director General, Audrey Azouley, "education and health are interdependent basic human rights for all, at the core of any human right, and essential to social and economic development. A school that is not health-promoting is no longer justifiable and acceptable".[18]

We also understand that **schools should have an integrated whole approach to health.** Students, teachers, school leadership and staff, community, businesses, government and NGOs work together on shared priorities to improve the lives of everyone. It must be inclusive and equitable. **For all children to thrive, they need to feel safe, loved and capable of expressing their authentic selves. It not only focuses on academic success, but understands that the whole child development is key.** They focus on interdependent growth from all aspects of development including cognitive, emotional, social, physical, and academic.

It is important that schools have a **culture**, procedures, systems, policies, that use a coordinated approach with integrated student services to develop, implement and teach a whole child health education that amplifies healthy living and its positive effects.

Creating a culture that prioritises health and well-being is foundational to fostering an environment where both students and staff can thrive. Schools that integrate health-promoting practices into their culture not only enhance student outcomes but also become more attractive to educators who are seeking supportive and fulfilling workplaces. When a school commits to the holistic well-being of its community, it reflects in its policies, recruitment strategies, and day-to-day interactions. Teachers are more likely to stay and contribute when they feel valued, supported, and part of a community that prioritises their physical, mental, and emotional health. This, in turn, leads to a more stable and engaged teaching staff, which is essential for sustaining a positive school culture and driving continuous improvement.

These schools establish a safe and caring environment creating community collaborations and partnerships that encourage, promote and develop healthy choices. They tackle food insecurity and nutrition with community kitchen and garden programs as well as breakfast and lunch programs with good quality food. They promote physical activity, play and recess time making sure that kids have the opportunity to be active and play together. They provide psychological support, programmes and networks for students to overcome mental health issues. They have comprehensive health education programs giving students, their families and the community a chance to get the right knowledge, develop the right attitude and build skills needed for healthy eating, sex education, healthy relationships, interpersonal belief and love and more.

This will look different depending on the schools' contexts. They could be as wide-ranging as creating a safe space from war, poverty, food insecurity, to developing healthy eating habits or sanitary habits with parents, or even physical, mental, social or emotional programs/pedagogy. Each context will dictate what kind of programmes, policies, systems and/or procedures the school needs to implement.

What is clear to all of us is that we must develop the whole child with the community to attain the SDGs.

We believe that a Supporting Healthy Lives school develops the learner's skills, knowledge, abilities and habits to live healthy lives and fulfil their potential.

[17]https://www.who.int/news/item/22-06-2021-unesco-and-who-urge-countries-to-make-every-school-a-health-promoting-school
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Contributors

The World's Best School Prizes framework, which encompasses the five categories and their judging criteria, has been designed and developed in collaboration with teachers and education experts, grouped on our Review Panel. We are grateful for their contributions and support to create a roadmap to school transformation. This framework and the chosen Prize categories reflect key strategies that we believe help us accelerate the pace of change and encourage schools to try different approaches to strengthen their institutions.

The Review Panel of the World's Best School Prizes plays an advisory role on the creation and implementation of the Prizes mechanism. They participate through two committees, according to their professions and expertise:

The Educator Committee:
Integrated by renowned and award-winning teachers from different schools across the globe. Their role is to advise and assess the Prizes mechanism from the perspective of a school, providing feedback to ensure that these Prizes meet schools where they are and also engage their communities.

- Andria Zafirakou, winner of the Global Teacher Prize in 2018, UK
- Maggie MacDonnell, winner of the Global Teacher Prize in 2017, Canada
- Hiba Balout, teacher at St. George's School, Lebanon
- Vandana Goyal, COO at Avanti Fellows & former CEO of Akanksha Foundation Schools, India
- Armand Doucet, teacher at Riverview High School, Canada

The Expert Committee:
Integrated by education experts from global organisations and think tanks oriented to education, representing different expertises within the sector. Their role is to ensure a solid background for our Prizes' criteria, especially from their own respective areas of specialism. They provide evidence, references and well grounded sources to create a robust and integral set of criteria for the Prizes.

- Rebecca Winthrop, Co-Director of the Centre for Universal Education, Brookings, USA
- Stuart MacAlpine, Initiative Lead, Playful Schools Initiative, LEGO Foundation, Denmark
- Christine Kwauk, Climate Education consultant, USA
- James Toop, CEO, Bite Back 2030, UK
- Azad Oomen, CEO, Global School Leaders, India
- Camila Pereira, Director of Impact, Lemann Foundation, Brazil
- Eric Jamieson, former Director of High Performance, New South Wales Department of Education, Australia
- Fiona Gatty, Professor & Researcher, University of Oxford, UK
- Sarah Peterson, NYC Department of Education
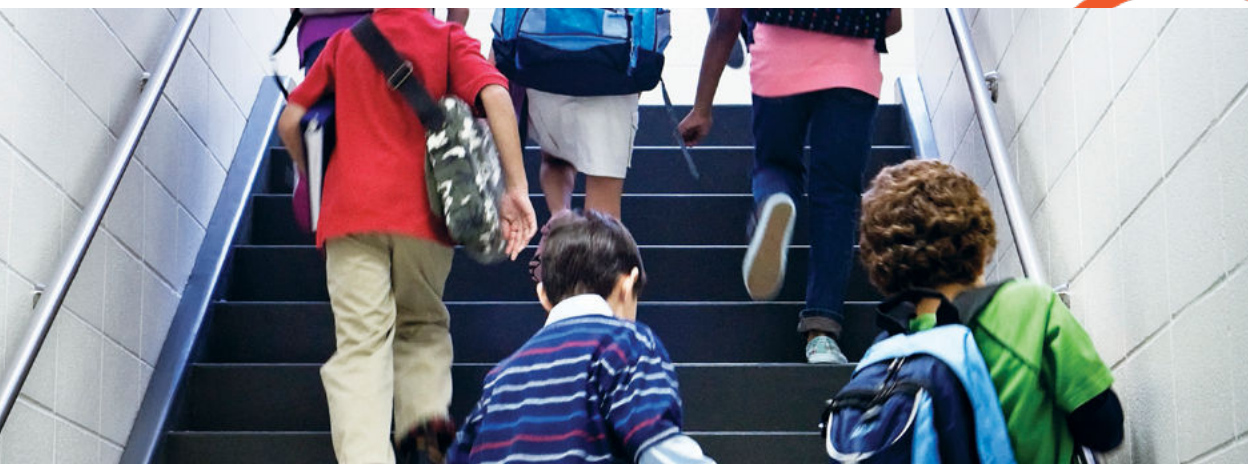
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13