

Key Principles & Processes for Rebuilding, Renewing & Transforming School and Other Systems Advice from Global Organizations Representing Practicing Educators

Many countries¹, UN and global organizations² are engaged in fundamental discussions about improving or transforming school systems as they recover from the disruption in schooling caused by the Covid 19 pandemic. This joint statement describes several principles, processes, and other considerations which can inform these discussions. It has been prepared by representatives of several global organizations³ representing practicing educators, including teachers, support workers, school principals, school district administrators, senior school leaders, guidance counselors, school psychologists and deans of education. Representatives of these global organizations have agreed to jointly and individually promote the principles and processes suggested here with their respective members/constituencies, several global and regional initiatives, and organizations and, where deemed appropriate, within countries, states, and provinces.

Our essential message is that countries and global organizations/UN agencies should take the time necessary to truly consider the needs of the whole child, to find a better balance among the multiple purposes of schooling and to engage stakeholders and practicing educators in dialogues based on continuous improvement and incremental, systems change strategies to rebuild, renew and transform school and other systems which must contribute to schools related to their respective mandates. Please see the accompanying [position paper](#) citing the research evidence, reports and data underlying this statement. Also, we refer readers to an accompanying list of the [elements of school system and transformative steps](#) that should be considered and coherently connected in every significant transformation.

Significant Disruption, Ongoing Challenges and Future Needs

The disruption of schooling around the world caused by the Covid pandemic has coincided with increasing concern about several significant environmental, social, economic, technological challenges and opportunities. The potential changes to school systems to respond to these future possibilities, the immediate steps needed to recover from the Covid pandemic and the renewal of plans such as the commitments to the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals range in scale from transformational ideas about learning and education to more conventional debates about school reform and school improvement.

We suggest that school systems can be re-balanced to place **greater emphasis on the original purposes or functions of schooling** that led to the creation of public schools in many countries⁴, namely the **socialization** and safe **custody/caretaking** of children. This rebalancing with the other core purposes of intellectual/academic achievement, accreditation and vocational preparation accords with the landmark 1996 UNESCO commission⁵ and, more recently, with the vision proposed by the UN Secretary General⁶ to the 2022 Transforming Education Summit. The shift enables every child, including marginalized children, to reach their full potential. Including all children in school, providing an equitable set of learning opportunities and meeting the needs of the whole child are universal hallmarks of excellence for all school systems.

Our advice is neither a vision nor a blueprint for change, as these shared values and plans should be co-constructed through global, regional, and especially local discussions and consultations. In this statement we offer ideas and insights that could be considered as each jurisdiction charts its own course for systems change towards 2050.

This advice also suggests that **rebuilding** after the Covid pandemic and preparing for future outbreaks/pandemics of infectious diseases, the **renewing** the commitments towards the achievement the UN Sustainable Goals and a systems approach to **transforming** schools are different, over-lapping processes leading to changes that should be inter-sectoral, incremental, significant, and sustainable. They require significant investments, a whole of government approach, pathways built collaboratively by ministries, local authorities and agencies, educators, parents, and students.

The transformation of education systems is necessarily a **deliberative and gradual process** best built on **incremental change** and improvements facilitated by **empowered and accountable professionals** at every level. Moving towards 2050, we can be inspired by transformational ideas, re-imagined roles, and new understandings about cognition, teaching, and learning. However, we also need to propose practical steps towards solutions to complex problems that

are often rooted in social and economic realities outside of schools. Nevertheless, time is short. The parents of the children who will enter our schools in 2050 are already the students in our classrooms today.

We suggest these principles for consideration:

- The change in every jurisdiction should be **rooted in their cultural, social, economic, and political context**.
- **Engagement of all stakeholders** is key. Educator leadership and teacher agency must be inherent in all decisions.
- Improvement and transformational processes should be congruent with **proven models for systems change**⁷
- The reforms or improvements in each jurisdiction should be **balanced across the purposes, or functions of schooling**⁸. The original purposes of schooling, to provide safe custody & care and to socialize all students so that they live together in sustainable, cohesive communities, need to be strengthened to better balance them with the intellectual, vocational and accreditation functions
- School systems should work with other sectors to address the needs of the **whole child**⁹ and ensure that **every child**, especially those who have been marginalized, are provided multiple, coordinated supports, services and the essential physical conditions and resources for learning.
- **Public schools are the central place in all communities for students to learn**, develop, meet others from different backgrounds and be supported by trusted adults and various services. Other forms of informal, alternative, religious/cultural, private, community-based and online or digital learning can be affiliated and should be aligned with schools if they are accessible and equitable. For example, several principles to govern the connections between digital and school-based learning¹⁰ have been articulated and promoted.
- **Schools should also be a hub**¹¹ for providing such support. Experience-tested and evidence-based **intersectoral policy-program coordination frameworks**¹² should be selected and aligned within **whole of government**¹³ strategies on children & youth to coordinate multiple interventions, including the contributions of staffing and funding from other ministries and their local agencies to school-based and school-linked services.
- School systems should offer all students a **broad range of learning opportunities**¹⁴ through formal subjects/curricula and informal, extended learning activities and different routes to graduation.
- **Student competency frameworks**¹⁵ **should be more than generalizations or aspirations** and be used to meaningfully revise and guide curricula, pedagogy and teaching/learning methods, student assessment and teacher/educator development.
- The well-being, preparation, working conditions, beliefs, professional norms, capacities, and professional autonomy of teachers, school support staff, school principals, guidance counselors, school psychologists, school district administrators, ministry officials and teacher education institutions will ultimately determine success or failure of any educational plan or program. **Long-term workforce planning**¹⁶ for each category of personnel, **and sustained investments**¹⁷ **in initial education and on-going professional development** should replace piecemeal, sporadic, short-term, and problem/program specific activities. Similar investments should be made by other ministries for other professionals working in schools such as nurses, social workers, police and security officers, development/relief aid workers and others.

We also suggest several processes or pathways to address the three overlapping challenges of rebuilding after Covid, renewing commitments to the UN 2030 Goals and transforming school and other systems to meet the demands of 2050.

Rebuilding After Covid

Current rebuilding efforts have been focused on Covid-specific problems, such as closing/re-opening schools, communications with parents, remote learning, measuring academic “learning losses” and providing mental health services. Broader, longer-term, and coordinated responses to Covid and other infectious diseases are required. Multi-intervention programs to prevent infectious diseases should include greater investments in school feeding programs, improved health & life skills education, better social and emotional learning through increased extended educational

activities and classroom instruction, improved ventilation and adequate supplies for and maintenance of hygiene and safety precautions, increased use of school-based emergency, regular and pop-up vaccination campaigns and strengthened/enforced vaccine policies, better student health records coordinated with local public health clinics/physicians offices and staff health records, recruitment and retention programs for youth who are out or likely to drop out of school, ensuring that remediation and support for lost learning are available to all students. New and better strategies to recruit and retain educators into the workforce are urgently needed. The 2030 targets for expanding the education workforce were already not being met, and the pandemic has caused many more to leave.

Renewing Commitments to Inclusion & Equity (Achieving Goal 4 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals)

Excellence in schooling is not achieved unless and until disadvantaged or vulnerable students are included and are achieving at equitable rates. School systems monitoring, reporting and improvement efforts must begin with a focus on inclusion and equity. Therefore, achieving the targets of Goal 4 (Education) of the UN goals for 2030¹⁸ should remain as a priority to school improvement and reform in all jurisdictions.

Countries need to identify the barriers to inclusion and equity which are most significant in their context. There are several UN Declarations for specific barriers such as those impacting indigenous communities¹⁹, that describe these barriers and there are several well-developed UN strategies²⁰ that can provide guidance^{21, 22, 23}.

Then countries need to create and maintain sustainable intersectoral partnerships and coordinated sets of policies, services, and programs to address those barriers. Several proven intersectoral policy-program frameworks are available to coordinate the policies and programs but evidence and experience show these frameworks are not sustainable without resource commitments from all ministries and a whole of government approach led by a designated agency or first minister.

Transforming School Systems Through Incremental, Continuous Improvement

Values-based, purposeful change in large complex organizations such as school systems is never easy, nor should it be. Radical reforms that seek to re-organize or re-structure education systems often end up in controversy and counter-reforms. Consequently, jurisdictions should learn more about systems change and then select models of educational change that have proved to be effective in different contexts. Creating coherence and consensus across the system and all levels is essential. The evidence and experience gained through systems science/organizational development models show that significant changes in school systems are achieved through continuous improvements which are introduced, implemented, and sustained by engaged and empowered professionals at all levels and across schools & other systems.

The processes used to decide on the why, what, how and when of transforming school and other systems also important. National transformation efforts should include education reform commissions, advisory committees of stakeholders & employed professionals, reviews of data on child/youth safety, health & development as well as student retention & achievement, access & participation in early childhood, schooling, and post-secondary education, commissioned research, and system assessments, and strengthened programs to monitor, report, evaluate which feed directly into established school/agency improvement planning and budgeting processes.

As well, each of the inter-connected elements of school and other systems need to be considered. These have been identified in this accompanying [summary list of the key school/system elements](#) These include items such as a shared vision, mission statements and mandates for education, other ministries and their agencies or professionals, whole of government action plans, inter-ministry agreements, directives & supports for inclusive, equitable, holistic and whole child education strategies, student competency frameworks, curriculum frameworks listing core, required subjects and electives, policies on student assessment, placement and alternative pathways to graduation, adapted instruction and supports for disabled, disadvantaged, minority, displaced and isolated students and communities, defined minimum set & requirements for comprehensive school-based & school-linked, coordinated student services for guidance & counselling, psychological & mental health, immigrant and refugees students, health promotion and primary health

care, child protection, disadvantaged students & communities, food services, delinquency/crime prevention, public security and personal safety, standards for the construction, maintenance, accessibility, environmental sustainability of schools, facilities and student transportation systems, clearly defined governance structures promoting local, community and professional autonomy within national or sub-national requirements, transparent and ethical financial and management practices, ensuring minimum qualifications for teachers, school leaders, counsellors, psychologists and others, accreditation requirements for education faculties, basic and categorical funding directives, workforce development plans for all categories of personnel, guidelines and policies on parental involvement and rights, policies and programs on student rights, conduct, engagement and participation in decision-making, programs to encourage teacher and school leadership and more.

The most fundamental element of any public service system is the financing provided to it. The UN Transforming Education Summit has addressed this element as an “action track”²⁴ and as a Call to Action²⁵. We support these proposals calling for more investments, equity, and efficiency. We also underline the urgency of reform in financing, as commitments post the pandemic are already declining. We further suggest that the transforming of education financing include support for school-based and school-linked programs and services within other ministries of government. Examples include, health ministries investing in school nursing and vaccinations, social protection ministries in school social work, public safety, law and justice ministries in school resource officers and security/civil protection workers and more. This would increase the “ownership” of other ministries as well as address the normal and inevitable inter-ministry competition for funds rather than education appealing to finance ministries for special consideration²⁶.

The organizations that have developed this joint statement stand ready to facilitate and encourage their members involvement in local change and improvement efforts. Our first step will be to disseminate the ideas in this statement as widely as possible. **We invite others to endorse, comment and add their voice to these ideas and insights.** We hope that the next step will be to encourage and assist school systems to chart their own course, hopefully with this advice from educators being useful and timely to them.

This statement has been developed and endorsed by these organizations representing educators. Other local, national and global organizations are invited to endorse this statement by so indicating on this web page:

- *American School Superintendents Association (AASA)*
- *Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development (ASCD)*
- *Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA)*
- *International Association for Counselling (IAC)*
- *International Confederation of Principals (ICP)*
- *International School Psychology Association (ISPA)*
- *Global Network of Deans of Education (GNDE)*

For more information contact any of the above organizations or write to coordinator@education-deans.org

End Notes

¹ There are many countries currently engaged in school renewal and reform discussions. Examples of this include [South Africa](#), [Manitoba \(Canada\)](#), [England](#), among many others. Enabling these jurisdictions to learn directly from each other in different ways would be a significant contribution to their work. The [UN Transforming Education Summit](#) in September 2022 highlighted the [written commitments](#) made by almost all countries to transforming school systems. This position paper and joint statement have been prepared to inform and support this critical national and sub-national discussions from which real change can emerge and be supported.

² The [UN Transforming Education Summit](#) in September 2022, and the preceding [Pre-Summit](#) in June brought together several initiatives and launched new ones. Included among the current list of global discussions of school renewal and reform are (1) the [UNESCO Commission on the Futures of Education](#) which has presented an inclusive vision and overview of many of the challenges and opportunities, (2) This Commission report will be part of the [UN Transforming Education Summit](#) in September (3) the [OECD Initiative on the Future of Education in 2030](#) which is building on its traditions of monitoring student learning and promoting student competencies, (4) the Qatar Foundation [World Innovation Summit for Education](#), (5) the [5th Forum on Transformative Education](#) (co-hosted by UNESCO, APCEIU and Korea) called for the mainstreaming of transformative education emphasizing the social role of schooling, including education for sustainable development, global citizenship and health & well-being, (6) the [Salzburg Global Seminar](#) web-based programs and publications focus on inter-sectoral creative & healthy societies, long-term & sustainable development, rule of law & social trust. (7) The [International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030](#) regularly holds forums on teacher education and development which includes a background paper on the [Futures of Teaching](#). (8) The Education Commission has published a [report on transforming the education workforce](#) through differentiated staffing & including professionals from other sectors who work with schools in school-based teams. (9) The IIEP-UNESCO, Education Development Trust and the Education Commission have launched an initiative that focuses on the [leadership/change agent roles of educators working in the “middle tiers”](#) of school systems. (10) UNESCO is currently consulting widely on how its [statutory consultation and survey](#) on human rights done every four years can be revised to better reflect the needs of education and countries. Any revisions to this UNESCO survey/consultation should match up with any transformations of school systems.

³ Representatives from the following organizations participated in the development of this statement; American Association of School Administrators (AASA), ASCD, Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA), Education International (EI), International Council of Principals (ICP), International School Psychology Association (ISPA), International Association for Counselling (IAC), Global Network of Deans of Education (GNDE). Updates on the campaign to promote this effective transformation practices as well as a list of other organizations and individuals endorsing this statement will be published on this [web page](#).

⁴ Carl J. (2009) [Industrialization and Public Education: Social Cohesion and Social Stratification](#). In: Cowen R., Kazamias A.M. (eds) International Handbook of Comparative Education. Springer International Handbooks of Education, vol 22. Springer, Dordrecht. doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6403-6_32

⁵ Delors, Jacques (1996) [Learning: the treasure within; report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century \(highlights\)](#), Paris, UNESCO

⁶ António Guterres (2022) [Transforming Education: An urgent political imperative for our collective future](#). New York, NY, United Nations

⁷ There are models and paradigms for educational change such as Fullan & Quinn (2015) [Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems](#), Corwin Press; the [Concerns-Based Adoption Model](#) originally described by Hord, Rutherford, Huling & Hall (2006) [Taking Charge of Change](#), SEDL; W E Deming (nd) [Total Quality Management](#), Demings Institute. The key point is not necessarily the model selected but rather that the organization and its governors/employees have explicitly selected/developed a framework.

⁸ Delors, Jacques (1996) [Learning: the treasure within; report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century \(highlights\)](#), Paris, UNESCO

⁹ ASCD (2021) [The Learning Compact Renewed: Whole Child for the Whole World](#), Alexandria, VA , ASCD

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- ¹⁰ UNESCO, Dubai Care Foundation (2021) [Rewired Global Declaration on Connectivity for Education](#), Paris, UNESCO. See also the multi-year [operational plan](#) to support country implementation.
- ¹¹ FRESH Partners (nd) [The FRESH Framework and Partnership](#), Surrey, BC, Author
- ¹² There are many [intersectoral policy-program coordination frameworks](#) that have been developed by education and other sectors to address the barriers to learning through multi-component approaches and multi-intervention programs. Over 40 such frameworks have been developed and proved to be effective. However, a recent [systematic review](#) has shown that these approaches and programs are not sustainable without systems-focused actions and whole of government strategies on children and youth to align and sustain these programs and approaches.
- ¹³ Tom Christensen, Per Lægreid (2007) [The Whole-of-Government Approach to Public Sector Reform](#), Public Administration Review, Volume 67, Issue 6, November-December 2007 Pages 1059-1066doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2007.00797.x
- ¹⁴ Kate Anderson, Helyn Kim, Seamus Hegarty, Martin Henry, Esther Care, Rachel Hatch, Joyce Kinyanjui, Francisco Cabrera-Hernández (2018) [Breadth of Learning Opportunities](#), Center for Universal Education at Brookings, Education International
- ¹⁵ OECD (2020), "[Types of cross-curricular competencies reported by countries/jurisdictions](#)", in *Curriculum Overload: A Way Forward*, OECD Publishing, Paris, doi.org/10.1787/27fd58cc-en.
- ¹⁶ World Bank (nd) [Workforce Development-Tools & Resources](#), Washington, DC, World Bank
- ¹⁷ UNESCO, ILO (1966) [Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers](#), Paris, UNESCO & ILO and UNESCO, ILO (2008) [Users Guide to the ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers \(1966\) and The UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel \(1997\)](#), Paris, Authors
- ¹⁸ UN (2016) [SDG 4: Ensure by 2030 inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all](#), New York, UN
- ¹⁹ UN (2007) [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), New York, NY, United Nations
- ²⁰ UN (2019) [United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy](#), New York, NY, United Nations
- ²¹ Global Education Monitoring Report (2020) [Inclusion and education: All Means All](#), Paris UNESCO 2020
- ²² UNESCO (2017) [A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education](#). Paris, UNESCO
- ²³ Global Partnership for Education (2019) [Leaving No One Behind. A Knowledge and Innovation Exchange \(KIX\) Discussion Paper](#), Washington, DC, GPE
- ²⁴ UN (2022) [Thematic Action Track 5: Financing of education Discussion Paper](#) (Final draft – 15 July 2022), New York, NY, United Nations Transforming Education Summit
- ²⁵ UN (2022) [Calls to Action: Financing education. Investing more, more equitably and more efficiently in education](#), New York, NY, UN Transforming Education Summit
- ²⁶ This cross-ministry financing strategy is highlighted as the first strategy for mobilizing funding for school-based and school-linked programs in a recent report Education Commission & Dubai Cares (2022) [Rewiring Education for People & the Planet](#), New York, NY, Authors, p 61