

Backgrounder on Open Letters to the UN, UNESCO, OECD and Education Workforce Initiatives  
**Global Agencies Should Help Countries to Focus on Basic Steps in  
Rebuilding, Renewing & Transforming School & Other Systems**

There is a popular French expression “sauver les meubles” (save the furniture) which is used when confronted with impending disasters. Several international organizations representing practicing educators are using that phrase as they call for the UN, UNESCO and OECD to help countries to focus on basic steps to salvage some progress in rebuilding, renewing and transforming schools before 2030 and beyond.

Using their [Joint Statement](#) prepared for the UN Transforming Education Summit in 2022 as a base, the organizations representing support workers, teachers, principals, counsellors, nurses, psychologists, district administrators, senior officials and deans of education are sending open letters in response to three global agency meetings and their current efforts on the status of teachers. These events are:

- [UN Summit of the Future](#) (September 2024) which included a [Pact for the Future /Declaration for Future Generations](#) and its predecessor UN [Transforming Education Summit](#) (2022) both of which have several related global and country implementation initiatives, notably a 2024 UN [report on “alarmingly insufficient” progress](#) in achieving SDG targets
- The renewal of the [OECD Future of Education & Skills 2030 Program](#) (October 2024) and [OECD policy statement](#) on achieving equity through schooling (2022)
- [UNESCO/G20 Education Ministers Meeting](#) (November 2024) which included its [Survey on Progress](#) in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal 4 and Transforming Education
- The UN Secretary-General’s [Panel commission on the teaching profession](#), UNESCO’s 2024/25 [report on education leadership](#), the current & planned [International Teacher Task Force \(TTF\)](#) campaign/activities and [2024 report on teacher shortages & transformation](#) and OECD’s [report](#) (2024) and work on its [teaching compass](#) of its [2030 Learning Compass](#) reflect the urgency of world-wide teacher/employee shortages and significant challenges in recruiting, preparing and developing workforces in several sectors

These global meetings and initiatives could be inflection points in our efforts to reform schools and other systems. Rather than continuing the tradition of serial global meetings producing visions, action and monitoring plans on endless lists of the latest issues, the educators are calling on global agencies to help countries to construct whole of government policies, structures and strategies to take these steps to reach these basic milestones:

1. Complete the urgent changes needed to build back better after the Covid 19 pandemic. The rebuilding process in and across sectors has largely been abandoned<sup>1, 2</sup>, leaving many, especially the vulnerable, at risk from the next, inevitable major outbreak, pandemic or epidemic. As noted in the vision statement<sup>3</sup> prepared for the Transforming Education Summit by the UN Secretary General stated: “Our first task is swift and targeted action to recover the learning losses inflicted by the pandemic...”.
2. Enable countries to achieve at least some of the targets in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by selecting the most urgent needs of their populations, defining a realistic but balanced set of SDG indicators, creating & sustaining inter-ministry partnerships to achieve these objectives and engaging with their stakeholders to benchmark progress based on their own experiences and data
3. Use systems science, organizational development knowledge and proven systems change strategies to guide, manage and align the follow-up actions suggested the various UN summits and other global meetings so that effective reform commissions and intersectoral planning in countries can reduce competition, overlap and distractions from transformational change.
4. Develop long-term workforce development plans for all categories of personnel that include broad scopes of practice, attractive career & reward systems and diversified, aligned interprofessional assignments and training.

To reach these milestones, the vague, aspirational references to “whole of government” and “whole of society” efforts will need to be defined, implemented and sustained by new policies, practices, structures and multi-year, inter-ministry action plans led and supported by Heads of State and designated, mandated and equipped intersectoral mechanisms.

This background paper has been developed to help explain the open letters being sent by the educator organizations to the three global agencies. The letters and this paper will also be used to support related submissions to journals, newsletters and conferences.

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<sup>1</sup> Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response (2024) [No Time to Gamble. Leaders Must Unite to Prevent Pandemics](#), Author

<sup>2</sup> Meier BM, Finch A, Schwalbe N. (2023) [Shaping Global Health Law through United Nations Governance: The UN High-Level Meeting on Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response](#). *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*. 2023;51(4):972-978. doi:10.1017/jme.2024.14

<sup>3</sup> UN Secretary General (2022) [Transforming Education: An urgent political imperative for our collective future. Vision Statement of the Secretary-General on Transforming Education](#), New York, United Nations

This paper will first review recent reports documenting how the rebuilding after Covid has been largely abandoned, how countries will not be achieving most of the targets under Goal 4<sup>4,5,6</sup> and the other SDGs<sup>7</sup> and how ongoing, valiant efforts by the UN to transform systems might be seen as re-arranging the proverbial deck chairs. This session takes a more practical approach, encouraging countries to select a limited number of salvage operations<sup>8</sup>.

The paper is focused on several basic milestones that were identified in the [joint statement](#) developed by the educator organizations for schools but also apply to other systems. These include:

1. **Rebuilding after Covid** in and across several sectors<sup>9</sup> to ensure that countries are prepared for the next pandemic and can manage the increasing number of disease outbreaks. In education, this includes building a [multi-intervention program](#) on infectious diseases<sup>10</sup> that includes strengthening school vaccine policies/campaigns, requiring health and life skills curricula to build health/vaccine literacy & support for public health

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<sup>4</sup> UN Sustainable Development Goals (2024) [Goal 4 Quality Education. Where we are](#) April 2024

<sup>5</sup> Stacy B (2023) [Rebuilding education systems after COVID-19: How the pandemic has impacted schooling and learning](#), Data Blog, World Bank

<sup>6</sup> D. Brent Edwards Jr, M. Niaz Asadullah, Amber Webb (2024) [Critical perspectives at the mid-point of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality education for all—progress, persistent gaps, problematic paradigms, and the path to 2030](#), International Journal of Education Development, Vol 107, May 2024, 103031

<sup>7</sup> UN Secretary General (2023) [Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: towards a rescue plan for people and planet](#), New York, NY, United Nations General Assembly,

<sup>8</sup> Manos Antoninis, Director of the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report program, has suggested that while it is clear that Goal 4 targets will not be achieved quantitatively by 2030, we can take heart (or solace) in that “From a qualitative perspective, concepts such as equity and inclusion, learning, sustainable development, lifelong learning and cross-sectoral as well as cross-national collaboration are being mainstreamed (nationalized) into education policies.” through a benchmarking process now being tracked by the UN. Antoninis also suggests a variety of qualitative and localized methods for analyzing local survey data. (See [SDG 4 baselines, midpoints and targets: Faraway, so close?](#), IJED, Vol 103, doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2023.102924. However, these new Benchmarks are a far cry the broad scope of targets of the original Goal 4 and UNESCO Framework for Action (See [UNESCO \(nd\) SDG 4 Indicators](#). Indeed they measure only student participation in schooling, percentages of students graduating from primary and junior secondary schooling, basic qualifications of teachers, school connectivity, and only one (climate change) of the many defined social curriculum goals in Goal 4. See UNESCO (2024) [SDG 4 scorecard progress report on national benchmark focus on teachers](#), UNESCO Institute for Education Statistics .

<sup>9</sup> UN General Assembly (2023) [Declaration on Pandemic Preparedness, Response & Recovery](#), New York, NY, United Nations

<sup>10</sup> Jami Neufeld & Joel Kettner (2014) [The Settings Approach in Public Health: Thinking about Schools in Infectious Disease Prevention and Control](#), Winnipeg, MB, National Collaborating Centre on Infectious Diseases

measures<sup>11</sup> and expanding extra-curricular & after school programs to promote social & emotional development

2. **Renewing commitments to SDGs** by enabling countries to identify/document the targets most relevant to their population's current and future needs. In education, countries should focus their resources on barriers to learning most relevant to their students<sup>12</sup> and then select, strengthen & sustain a limited number of inter-ministry partnerships from among the many evidence-based [Intersectoral Policy-Program Coordination Frameworks](#). Countries should be encouraged self-assess progress on these selected barriers in multi-stakeholder dialogues engaging local practitioners, researchers & officials rather than responding to the plethora of global surveys & UN agency monitoring a wide variety of initiatives which are often analyzed only in global reports. To facilitate local, regional and international comparisons, countries could publish and periodically update comparable lists of their policies, guidance documents and action plans.
  
3. **Transforming school & other systems** through systematic continuous improvement schemes and, when timely and appropriate, engaging in formal reforms which will take several years in development and implementation to be successful. In education, this includes continuing with the immediate, improvement steps suggested by the [guidance note](#) from UN Transforming Education Summit<sup>13</sup> and UN Secretary-General [Vision Statement](#). However, effective system transformation will require using systems thinking/science, organizational development strategies and proven education system transformative change/coherence models<sup>14, 15</sup> to initiate or implement proper [education reform commissions](#).

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<sup>11</sup> The UN statement on [Pandemic Preparedness](#) has called for public education on vaccines and public health measures.

<sup>12</sup> Catherine Porter (2024) [Reprioritising inclusion and equity to meet SDG4: Action is needed beyond the education sector – and must begin before school entry](#), International Journal of Education Development, Volume 104, January 2024, 10296

<sup>13</sup> High Level Steering Committee (2022) [From commitment to action: A guidance note for translating national commitments into action in follow-up to the Transforming Education Summit](#), Global Education Cooperation Mechanism. UN

<sup>14</sup> Fullan, M., & Quinn, J. (2016). [Coherence: the right drivers in action for schools, districts, and systems](#). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin

<sup>15</sup> Kaffenberger, M. and Spivack, M. (2022) [System Coherence for Learning: Applications of the RISE Education Systems Framework](#). RISE Working Paper Series. 22/086. doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISEWP\_2022/086

4. **Governments requiring each ministry to publish formal multi-year workforce development plans<sup>16, 17</sup> for each category of employee.** In consultation with their respective professions and unions, these plans can stabilize, help to predict labour needs and strengthen the professional competencies within sectors. In education, the previous work done by the Education Commission<sup>18</sup> on a diversified workforce, the existing knowledge about interprofessional training<sup>19</sup> and the current UN, UNESCO, OECD and other initiatives can be used by countries to recognize the leadership and service roles of all types of educators, correct for immediate problems in conditions and short-cuts taken due to severe staffing shortages while improving career reward/renewal possibilities and re-aligning job assignments to facilitate intersectoral coordination.

The most important action, one which underpins reaching these milestones, is the use of [whole of government strategies](#) as recommended by several authoritative reports and agencies<sup>20</sup>. All these milestones (and any other significant changes for schooling) **will not be reached or sustainable unless governments implement a whole of government (WoG) policies, practices and structures that engage the whole school and whole community to serve the whole child.** These include comprehensive inter-ministry agreements, designated mechanisms or first minister offices to coordinate ministry programs, joint sector reviews and over-arching policies and procedures.

The Secretary General as well as several recent statements, summits and reports<sup>21</sup> have recommended such WoG approaches. However, an early analysis of country commitment statements<sup>22</sup> from TES found that very few countries were making progress on such WofG approaches. As well, the recent survey of country actions to Transform Education Towards

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<sup>16</sup> National Institutes of Health (nd) [Workforce Planning Model](#) (Online) Bethesda, MD, Author

<sup>17</sup> World Bank (2013) [What Matters Most for Workforce Development: A Framework and Tool for Analysis](#), Washington DC, World Bank

<sup>18</sup> Education Commission (2018) [Transforming the Education Workforce: Learning Teams for a Learning Generation](#), (this report is now being promoted by the Education Development Center

<sup>19</sup> UBC Health (nd) [Interprofessional Education & Collaborative Practice Frameworks](#), Vancouver, UBC

<sup>20</sup> The 2022 [UN Transforming Education Summit \(TES\)](#) and the accompanying [vision statement](#) by the UN Secretary-General, the revised UNESCO "[Recommendation](#)" (policy framework for education systems), the [OECD Declaration on Building Equitable Societies Through Education](#) and the report [Rewiring Education](#) from the Education Commission and the Dubai Foundation all called for integrated strategic planning and mutual accountability frameworks in intersectoral coordination based on embrace multisectoral financing.

<sup>21</sup> The 2022 [UN Transforming Education Summit \(TES\)](#) and the accompanying [vision statement](#) by the UN Secretary-General, the revised UNESCO "[Recommendation](#)" (policy framework for education systems), the [OECD Declaration on Building Equitable Societies Through Education](#) and the report [Rewiring Education](#) from the Education Commission and the Dubai Foundation all called for integrated strategic planning and mutual accountability frameworks in intersectoral coordination based on embrace multisectoral financing.

<sup>22</sup> UN (2022) [Analysis of National Statements of Commitment](#), p6

SDG4<sup>23</sup>, has watered down the recommendation for specific WoG policies, practices and structures to a “whole of government dialogue on education”.

Even using that watered-down definition, only half (57%) of the 91 respondents (which represent only 46.7% of the 195 UNESCO Member States) have had such vaguely defined inter-ministerial discussions. Further, the report’s detailed discussion of whole of government and whole of society approaches veers away from examining inter-ministry coordination towards broader and less accountable processes that engage the whole society. This avoidance of substance and detail is also reflected in the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights, International Cooperation & Sustainable Development<sup>24</sup> which examines only “whole institution” and “whole of society” approaches.

The UN and its agencies need to delve deeper in the research and practice on whole of government (WoG) policies, practices, structures and mechanisms so that countries can sustain national strategies embedded in several ministries. Using schools as a hub for such WoG strategies is one obvious choice for future generations but there are other settings that can be used for other populations. We offer our support for any efforts related to building knowledge for countries about systemic intersectoral capacity-building and whole of government practices<sup>25</sup>.

End Notes

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<sup>23</sup> UNESCO (2024) [Transforming Education Towards SDG 4. Report of a global survey on country actions to transform education](#), Paris, UNESCO, p21 and p53

<sup>24</sup> UNESCO (2024) [Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights, International Cooperation & Sustainable Development](#), Paris, UNESCO Note: Section 10 and 66 refer only to whole institution and whole society (i.e. multi-stakeholder involvement) and does not even discuss whole of government (ie inter-ministry) approaches

<sup>25</sup> The [Education Development Centre](#), a leading global NGO, has been assigned the lead for follow up to the [report](#) from the Education Commission and Dubai Cares Foundation which called for a “re-wiring” of education and other systems to and the implement whole of government strategies. EDC is working with the ten educator organizations involved in this open letter [FRESH Partnership](#), a coalition of UN agencies, donors and NGOs, to draft lists of good practices in [intersectoral capacity-building](#) and [whole of government strategies](#).