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Communities over hierarchies: Changing the paradigm to improve education for all

Every child is born with enormous potential. But around the world, children in disadvantaged communities face a multitude of extra challenges—from lack of adequate nutrition and healthcare to the stresses of poverty to discrimination and racism—which the political, social and technological uncertainties that we all face in today's world only compound.

These children are then often sent to schools that were never designed to provide the key supports they need to thrive. The environments in which they learn were largely built to cater to the mythical "average" learner and to ensure ideal outcomes for children from privileged backgrounds. Our current systems are too frequently doing a poor job of teaching the most disadvantaged kids a set of knowledge, skills and beliefs that have not kept pace with what it takes to succeed in today's world.

Teach For All is working to radically change this paradigm so that education places all learners—no matter their background or learner profile—at the center. Our global network is striving to develop the collective leadership needed to improve the quality of education for all children, bridging the divide between policy, theory and practice and embracing communities over hierarchies.

This work begins collaboratively, at the community level. Moving beyond a traditional understanding that learning is a product only of the education system and its hierarchies, we strive to collaborate with educators, students, their families and communities to engage in a collective process to develop contextualized visions for their students and break down the barriers standing in the way of their ability to learn and thrive.

We now see communities, teachers and schools already working with this shared sense of purpose. No matter the context, the most transformational classrooms enable progress toward these visions for students by working towards a broad set of outcomes, which our evolving framework presents according to four key areas: proficiencies, awareness, dispositions, and agency.

It is necessary that all kids can read, write and calculate well in the future—but it is not sufficient. We must be more ambitious. Students' learning should be oriented to a broad, locally-rooted set of outcomes that is informed by the best global insights, but owned by communities.