



# WORLD'S BEST SCHOOL PRIZES

## FRAMEWORK & JUDGING CRITERIA

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# ABOUT THE PRIZES

## The Why and How

We believe that schools should be celebrated.

The role they play in, not just, the development of learners, but also their contribution to wider societal progress should be recognised and showcased.

Education is the bedrock for human development.

Under the auspices of the United Nations, we have widespread agreement to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which span 17 broad goals that if we achieve will result in the equitable development of our world. One of these goals, specifically relates to education, and, alarmingly, pre-pandemic, it was reported that progress has slowed significantly. The effect of which is catastrophic for so many and results in real world challenges such as girls being disenfranchised, the rise of hate and intolerance, or our inability to focus on tackling climate change.

To compound matters further, once we add the effects of pandemic related school closures to the unprecedented challenges the world was already facing socially, economically, politically, and environmentally in this era characterised as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which, further, widen the existing equity gap, we realise the need to act urgently and think differently in order to ensure a better quality of education for all.

We need to seriously consider how we can leapfrog existing ways of doing things in education so that we can live up to the promises we have made that strengthen society so all people can achieve their potential and live prosperous and meaningful lives.

Leapfrogging is a powerful concept that empowers us to go beyond incremental approaches to accelerate the achievement of the SDG's.

Our contribution, specifically, is in creating The World's Best School Prizes, which as a mechanism seeks to democratise school-based expertise by providing schools with an opportunity to share and celebrate their achievements and by doing so make a sizable contribution to attaining the SDGs.

# OUR FIVE CATEGORIES

On the basis of research, evidence and wide consultation we believe that our chosen five categories reflect key strategies that will help us accelerate the pace of change and encourage schools to try different approaches to strengthen their institutions. In a joint work with teachers and education experts, we have built a framework for the Prizes for applicants to understand the approach in each category and the judging criteria, that you will find in this document.

## OUR FIVE PRIZE CATEGORIES



## COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

The pandemic has demonstrated the important role that schools play in the community from not just a teaching & learning perspective, but also from resources and programs for mental health, social-emotional learning, social work, guidance, food security, physical health, and safety to try and meet the needs of the whole child (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

What is also clear is that schools cannot do it alone. The schools that are truly reaching each and everyone of their students collaborate, partner and share with their key stakeholders in their development, which is foundational for true equity.

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. Goal 11, which is sustainable cities and communities, is about making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. 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.

We believe that children whose needs are met (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018) tend to perform better at school. 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 parents/guardians/families, NGOs, community-based organisations, intermediaries and partners, sports/music programs, businesses etc., are better situated to be inclusive and equitable for all students.

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. Communication is key whether it is being transparent in its goals and purpose, to creating proper feedback loops, shared consciousness and empowerment as needed. 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 programs. The goal is to engage and challenge the student in all contexts and environments and support them along the way as they engage with the SDGs.

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 includes all members of the community, will model for student's the advantages and necessity for life-long learning. From teaching & 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,

psychologist, social workers, parenting programs etc. 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 etc. The school as life-long learning institutions and the hub for the whole community will benefit all its members.

Like the Brookings Institution report Addressing education inequality with a next generation of community schools: A blueprint for mayors, states, and the federal government says "Community schools integrate, rather than silo, the services that children and families need, thus ensuring that funding for health, mental health, expanded learning time, and social services is well spent and effective."

**Therefore, we believe that a school that is rooted in partnering and collaborating with its community can become a force multiplier for ALL students to find themselves and flourish in all aspects of their lives.**

### CRITERIA FOR THE COMMUNITY COLLABORATION CATEGORY

This category recognises schools that have collaborated and developed partnerships with their community to have an integrated approach in helping each of their students striving for a whole child approach based on equity and inclusivity. It should be practice that is integrated into the fabric of the school and community.

Please find below the criteria that we will apply for judging and rating this Prize category. Therefore, read it carefully and use the guiding questions included on the Application Guidance Document for your school's self-assessment.

**Home, School, & Community Engagement** – linking the school to the broader community, enhancing the range of support and opportunities available to students, families, and the community. It is the connection between school and all the education stakeholders with proactive consultation, collaboration and shared leadership with these stakeholders which enhances the school and the community.

**Collaborative Leadership & Practice** – shared leadership & management practices, decision-making processes, use of data and data systems, rules, pedagogy, culture, procedures, and policies at all levels that are a foundational sustainable part of the school prioritising shared ownership of education in the community.

**Enhances the Community** – school becomes the hub of the community and a life-long learning institution that will enhance the community through developing key strategies, programs, projects such as parent and family learning and literacy programs, food growing programs, infrastructure investments, improving quality of life with physical activity or mental health programs, economic development etc.

**Integrated Student Services** - securing and coordinating support that targets academic and non-academic barriers to achievement in order to promote improved outcomes for students, families, and communities.

**Teaching & Learning** - enhances access, relevance and opportunities for all within the community, making the school the hub and learning institution for the community while connecting students' lived experiences to what they are learning in the classroom.

## 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 is key.

Climate change is real and its impact has intensified. (SDG 13 - Climate Action)

“Human activities like industrialisation, deforestation, and overexploitation of natural resources by exploding population, depriving agricultural practices, and much more have led the environment to the brink of collapse driving world nations to arms to prevent further deterioration of the environment and restore its stability.”<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, climate change has 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 witnessing the effects of global warming with refugee and displaced people, food inflation, famine, floods, heat waves, excessive rainfalls and so much more. And, it will inevitably impact student learning by keeping them out of school. Students understand that they are the last generation that can end climate change and develop a sustainable world that is inclusive and equitable for all species on earth.

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

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.”

This means that schools must play an active part in environmental action. Schools should be the catalyzing force behind environmental action because it is tied to the health of our communities and world. They must create a culture like UNESCO says “sustainability is 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.”

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<sup>1</sup> Hopwood et al., 2005; Tilman and Clark, 2014



Not only should schools teach environmental education and have outdoor sustainability programs, but they should also be looking at developing behaviours, practices and skills toward climate action for each student through an environment centered 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 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.

**Therefore, we believe that Environmental Action should be a school priority that is helping students take action to protect their future.**

### **CRITERIA FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION CATEGORY**

This category recognises the importance of youth, students and schools in climate action and who engage with solutions for global warming and climate crisis. Seeking to mitigate and reverse the adverse impact of climate change on the planet, and all species, and the issues of uncertainty, inequity and poverty that results from it, taking individual and collective responsibility for the environment and a focus on the importance of sustainability is key for all schools and their communities.

**Teaching & Learning** – teaching and learning opportunities and pedagogy both inside the classroom and out, that helps to build knowledge, habits, engagement, advocacy and skills to empower sustainable living for all.

**Home, School, & Community Engagement** - links between the school to the broader community, enhancing the range of supports and opportunities available to students, parents, educators and the community to find solutions towards local environmental challenges. A shared responsibility for sustainable living that empowers all involved.

**Collaborative Leadership & Practice** – leadership & management practices, decision-making processes, systems, school norms, pedagogy, procurement, practices, culture, procedures and policies at all levels is a foundational piece of the school prioritising environmental sustainability that is inclusive and equitable.

**Campus/Infrastructure** – school infrastructure, school grounds, equipment, and systems that are designed, created, developed, produced, and implemented with the goal of environmental sustainability from end to end, including economic, pedagogical, financial, social and institution. All stakeholders are empowered to learn and look for areas to improve based on all-round sustainable principles.

## INNOVATION

Pre-pandemic, many schools were already innovating to try and meet 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-centered approaches, communicating in the digital age, dealing with food scarcity and insecurity and much more, schools were already facing the need to innovate in order to help develop every student to their 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. 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".

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 (Kostoff, 2003; Mitchell, 2003)."

UNICEF's approach for innovation is well described in the framework of the program Strengthening education systems and innovation. It says that "Innovation in education comes in many forms. Programmes, services, processes, products and partnerships can all enhance education outcomes in innovative ways." And also that "Innovation in education is about more than new technology. It's about solving a real problem in a fresh, simple way to promote equity and improve learning."<sup>2</sup>

The innovation that is needed comes in all shapes and forms for schools from innovation to teaching & learning to engage students improving access, relevance

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<sup>2</sup> [Strengthening education systems and innovation, UNICEF](#)

and quality while making it student-centered to give students autonomy, voice and choice, to innovation in the learning space to become inclusive and equitable, to utilising technology to personalise formative assessment and create stronger shared consciousness with all the key stakeholders in a student's education.

Every context is different, from resources, infrastructure, quality workforce and so much more.

**Therefore, we believe that by embracing innovation, schools will be empowered and better able to meet the challenges they face in their respective contexts.**

### CRITERIA FOR THE INNOVATION CATEGORY

This category recognises “leapfrog” innovation in schools that help improve access, quality, and relevance, especially for the most marginalized children, all at the same time. We are looking for any idea, tool, or practice that breaks from tradition in your context as we realise that innovation in schools can come in many forms to impact teaching & learning such as pedagogy, approaches, systems, procedures, collaboration, infrastructure and much more. Technology can be an important tool in education innovation but we are more interested in what it is that the technology does to accelerate progress than the technology itself.

**Home, School, & Community Engagement** – increasingly diverse people and places are involved in educating children, an approach that is inclusive, equitable. A wide range of stakeholders including teachers can or are, in fact, playing a part in the innovation whether within and/or outside of school.

**Teaching & Learning** – teaching and learning approaches that offer a diverse menu from direct instruction to playful learning so that students are able to develop a wide range of skills and competencies from mastering academic subjects to learning to creatively and collaboratively solve problems to learning how to apply knowledge to real world situations.

**Recognition of Learning** – creative forms of recognising students learning while in school (e.g. from standardised tests on academic subjects to demonstrating mastery of competence on key skills like communication and empathetic listening; from cohort-based to personalised).

**Relevant Technology and Data** – technology and data are used to enhance the learning and pedagogical practice for inclusivity and equity with teaching and learning being modified/redefined. Evidence and data are used to transform the learning experience and improve on programs, procedures, and pedagogy.

## OVERCOMING ADVERSITY

Across the globe, adversity in all its forms affects schools in profound ways. Datoo and Johnson illustrate how political elections contested along ethnic lines in Kenya led to violence, rape, and trauma in schools<sup>3</sup>. But while schools were unable to quell adversity, many under good leadership ensured that they remained places of learning and became places of healing. Biannuchi and Johnson (2021) also show that in Sierra Leone the impact of the civil war (1991-2002), Ebola (2014) and unrelenting rains and mudslides (2017) placed an enormous burden on schools. But far from damaging their aspirations, self-belief, and determination to succeed, secondary school students demonstrated a capability or 'capacity to learn'. 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: school 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"<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, resilience provides the conditions and support for aspiration to thrive.

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, race, class, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, age, disability, spirituality, nationality, indigeneity, refugee status, language and education. 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

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<sup>3</sup> Datoo, AA, Johnson, D (2013) *Kenya: School leadership and the 2007 post-election violence*, in Clarke, SRP, O'Donoghue, TA (eds.)

<sup>4</sup> Southwick et al., 2014

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<sup>5</sup>. Shared trauma, experiences, and challenges, might not have been responded to in the same way depending on the schools' context. Yet, debriefing, reflecting, and sharing your schools' story could help many other schools make sense of how they are dealing with similar adversity and empower them to face it by building resilience.

Adversity will come in many forms for schools; the dynamics, situations, and contexts are truly limitless.

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. The World Bank speaks about transforming crisis into opportunities in education by "making sense and finding purpose, seeking identity and well-being, proactive engagement, connecting with others, and committing and being accountable."

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 etc. 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-

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<sup>5</sup> Sanders et al., 2017; Appadurai, 2004.

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 their own right.

Therefore, 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.

## CRITERIA FOR THE OVERCOMING ADVERSITY CATEGORY

This category recognises that while living in an increasingly uncertain world, schools must support and develop children in the kinds of socio-emotional skills that can support their personal growth and the school as a community. There is increasing scientific evidence that programmes to build these skills result in both better academic outcomes and also better life outcomes. Two specific examples of character strengths that particularly support overcoming adversity are empathy and forgiveness. This category therefore assesses how the school builds the character strengths both individually and as a community in order to support the greater resilience of all students.

**Teaching & Learning** – teaching and learning opportunities and pedagogy both inside the classroom and out, that help to build knowledge about the self and others, habits and skills to build resilience and navigate uncertainty amongst students, and all stakeholders in the school community (teachers, parents, headteachers), and community overcoming adversity.

**Home, School, & Community Engagement** – linking the school to the broader community, enhancing the range of support available to students, school, parents, and the community. It is the connection between school and all the education stakeholders with proactive consultation, collaboration and shared leadership with these stakeholders to tackle adversity, obstacles, and/or challenges the school faces every day to make it a safe space.

**Collaborative Leadership & Practice** – shared leadership & management practices, decision-making processes, systems, rules, pedagogy, culture, procedures and policies at all levels is a foundational piece of the school in creating a safe space where all stakeholders can thrive.

**Integrated Student Services** – securing, coordinating, and integrating student support services to help develop and promote resilience for students, families, and communities giving them the tools to self-regulate, practice mindfulness and overcome their personal challenges.

**Forgiveness & Healing** – students, school, and staff implement restorative practices that develop the ability to forgive, build positive relationships, develop self-regulation, and a positive mental outlook of themselves and their future.

**Purpose & Outlook** – developing programs, procedures, pedagogy, partnerships that are focused on the purpose of building resilient students, staff, and community. While overcoming adversity, the school stays through to their purpose and tackles any obstacle/challenge with a positive outlook and strength-based approach.



## SUPPORTING HEALTHY LIVES

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 their press release<sup>6</sup>, UNESCO and WHO urge countries to make every school a health-promoting school, and it made clear the role schools played in the mental, physical, social and emotional health of students. 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 students and their communities thrive. Throughout the Sustainable Development Goals, many are linked to helping students and their community be healthy such as No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well-Being, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation etc. All these SDGs foundationally start with schools, families, and their communities.

Furthermore, health is a human right, as stated by Audrey Azoulay, UNESCO Director General, "Education and health are interdependent basic human rights for all, at the core of any human right, and essential to social and economic development"

The Supporting Healthy Lives category seeks an integrated whole school approach. Students, teachers, school leadership and staff, community, businesses, 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.

These schools establish a safe and caring environment creating community collaborations and partnerships that encourage, promote and develop healthy

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<sup>6</sup> ["UNESCO and WHO urge countries to make every school a health-promoting school". Press release, June 2021.](#)

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 have health education programs that are science based 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 much more.

This will look different depending on your 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 us is that we must develop the whole child with the community to attain the SDGs.

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

### **CRITERIA FOR THE SUPPORTING HEALTHY LIVES CATEGORY**

This category recognises schools that provide access, relevance, and opportunities for students, staff, and the community to develop healthy habits, behaviors, knowledge, and skills. We understand that health is about balance, resiliency, and consistency and has many components including mental, physical, nutrition, personal safety, sexual, environment, emotional, and much more. We are looking for a school that promotes any and all of these areas of health in a planned, integrated and holistic sustainable way.

**Teaching & Learning** - teaching and learning opportunities and pedagogy both inside the classroom and out, that help to build knowledge, habits and skills to improve health and wellbeing for students, the school, and the community.

**Collaborative Leadership & Practice** - leadership & management practices, decision-making processes, systems, rules, pedagogy, culture, procedures and policies at all levels is a foundational piece of the school prioritising health and wellbeing that is inclusive and equitable. They can include everything from guidelines for recess every day, for play based learning, for physical activity, for healthy food programs, social and mental health programs etc.

**Social & Physical Environments** - quality relationships, emotional well-being within the school and the wider community as well as the school infrastructure, grounds, and equipment in and surrounding the school to promote, teach, and enhance healthy behaviors, food security, healthy food choices, skills, knowledge and ability for all stakeholders.

**Home, School & Community Engagement** - linking the school to the broader community, enhancing the range of supports and opportunities available to students, parents, educators and others by making connections between the school and the community, including parents, other schools, community organisations and health professionals. Consultation and participation with these stakeholders enhance access, relevance, and opportunities for health promoting school, students, and the community.

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