

**Cabrobó, Brazil**

# **Escola Evandro Ferreira Dos Santos**

**Improving education by  
empowering students' mothers**



**WORLD'S  
BEST SCHOOL**  
Overcoming  
Adversity

FUNDAÇÃO  
**Lemann**



**WORLD'S  
BEST SCHOOL  
PRIZES**

# Table of Contents

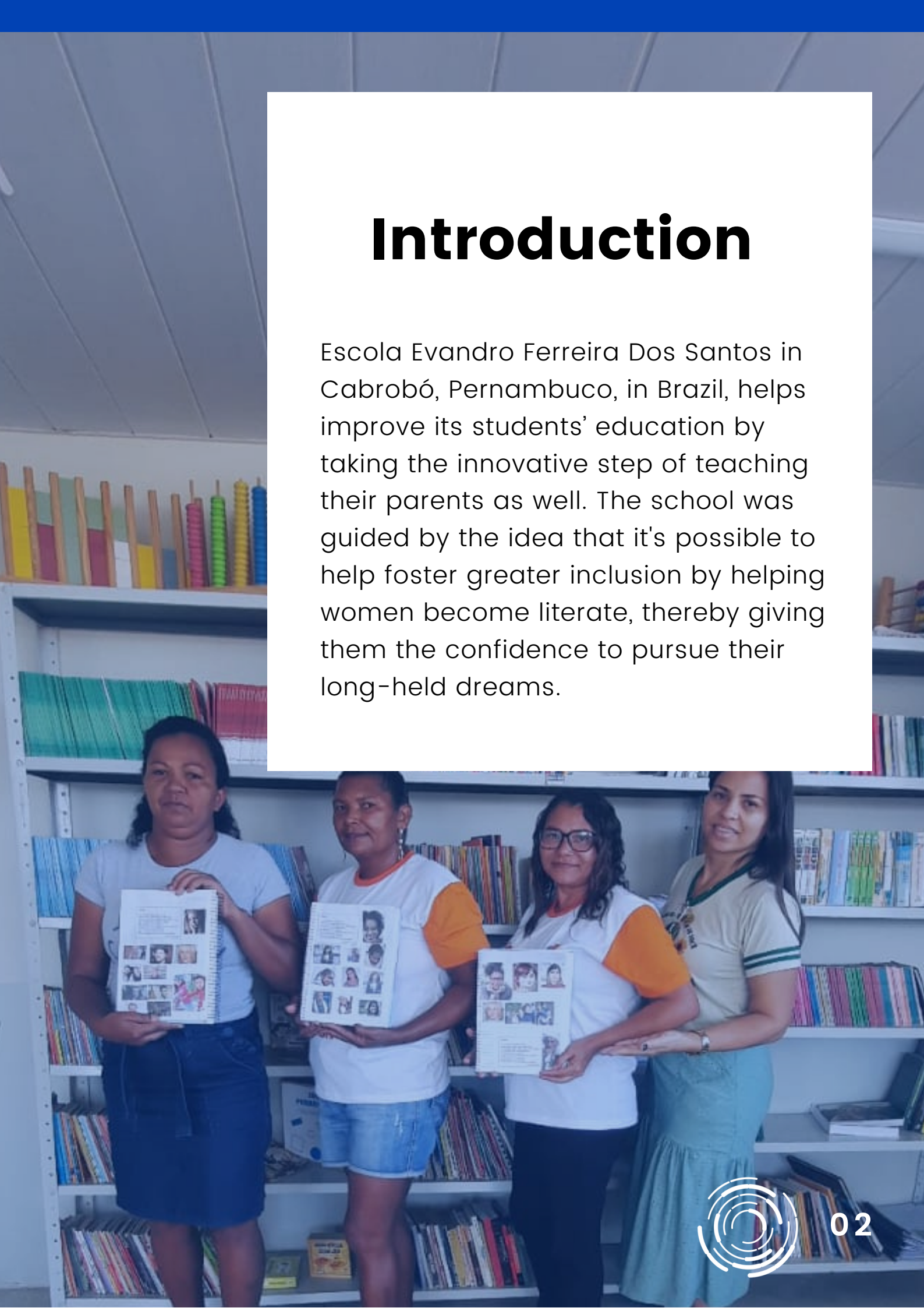
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- 02 — Introduction**
- 03 — Profile**
- 04 — Context and Challenge**
- 07 — Expertise and Approach**
- 09 — Outcomes and Results**
- 10 — Key Steps**
- 14 — Advice and Guidance**



# Introduction

Escola Evandro Ferreira Dos Santos in Cabrobó, Pernambuco, in Brazil, helps improve its students' education by taking the innovative step of teaching their parents as well. The school was guided by the idea that it's possible to help foster greater inclusion by helping women become literate, thereby giving them the confidence to pursue their long-held dreams.



# Profile:

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## Country:

Brazil



## Region:

Cabrobó- Pernambuco



## School type:

Public School



## Location area:

Town



## Student population:

101 to 200



## Prize Category:

Overcoming Adversity

**“We wanted to develop this idea inside of them, that they [students and families] are part of this whole community.”**

**– Fernanda Silva,  
Teacher, Escola  
Evandro Ferreira Dos  
Santos**



# In-depth look

## CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

Escola Evandro Ferreira Dos Santos serves students from the ages of 11-15, most of whom come from families with low incomes and vulnerable backgrounds. Often, the student's parents have little to no education, which has led them to be less engaged with their children's work at school. Taking note of this, the school has worked to create a culture of empathy, and develops strong interpersonal connections between students, their families, and the wider community.

To better support students in their needs, the school offers three school meals a day and arranges workshops and after-school clubs that help develop each student's talents in activities and sports such as Football, Music, and Dance (Capoeira).

During the pandemic, Escola Evandro Ferreira Dos Santos found that its pupils were struggling with their learning. Lacking motivation, and due to the larger situation, many of the students dedicated their time to taking care of their younger siblings or performing household chores, instead of spending it on their studies. When they started speaking to their parents about their concerns about students' learning outcomes, they realised that a large part of the parents themselves could not read or write.

In addition to that, the period of school closure during the pandemic also encouraged the school to think of ways to bring the community together, wishing to continue to promote the school's values of empathy and strong community relationships. "That was the main thing guiding us," said Fernanda Silva, a teacher at Escola Evandro Ferreira Dos Santos.



Whilst in-person classes were suspended and the pivot to digital and online learning began, the school struggled to acclimatise to the sudden change. Many families themselves did not have the skills or access to the digital tools needed for online learning. “When it came to the shift to at-home learning,” said Silva, “the disruption also impacted the school’s ability to provide free school meals, and families weren’t able to cater to their children’s welfare.”

When implementing the project, the school had to contend with its students’ social context. When faculty members consulted families, they realised that many didn’t have access to education due to a variety of socio-economic factors. Several women, for example, had no fixed income or full-time employment, many of them lacked a strong support network, or had to prioritise childcare and homemaking duties.

There were also instances in which some mothers dismissed the need for better qualifications or become literate because they believed it was already too late for them anyway.



**“What stands out [for the school] is how we made a difference, in a harsh context – both the social context that we face in the city and due to the pandemic. The empowerment of these women is a visible result of our work.”**

**-Fernanda Silva, Teacher, Escola Evandro Ferreira Dos Santos**



# EXPERTISE AND APPROACH

As the school started to rebuild its curriculum, it noticed a decline in the number of students doing their school work. This raised an immediate concern that students could be influenced by their parents' situation and stop pursuing a full, quality education of their own. When the school began to investigate, however, they discovered that their parents' illiteracy was a major contributing factor. Not being able to read or write sometimes meant that they could not support their children with their homework in some cases.

The school immediately set up a new programme to help parents complete their own formal education. It focused on helping mothers first, believing that they would be more receptive to the benefits of the proposed project.

To begin with, the school met with mothers face-to-face to discuss the project and convince them of its potential impact. "It wouldn't happen overnight," said Silva, "but that was not going to stop us." Classes would take place every week in person, and because this was during Covid, the school took great measures to keep the working environment clean and sanitary, and implemented mask-wearing and social distancing where necessary.

To better facilitate learning, the school also arranged out-of-class trips. As many of the women lived in a low socio-economic context, they rarely had the chance to experience life outside of housework and childrearing. "These outings [were] a nice moment," said Silva. "Many of these women had never gone to an ice cream shop before". It was a motivation for them.





To formulate its expertise, the faculty took direction from academic research, such as Paulo Freire’s book, in which he cites the importance of education in shaping the lives and fortunes of individuals to help them be a better part of wider society. There were also the works of Brazilian writer Rubem Alves, who argued that those who could read hold “the key to the world in their hands”, and the online “Principles of Dialogical Learning and a set of Successful Educational Actions” research project that outlines ways to effectively incorporate classroom educational practices and school management systems.

The programme also offered great emotional support, creating a space for women to speak more openly about their mental well-being and receive services that better catered to their needs. Ultimately, the classes became collaborative environments between teachers and those mothers who could read and those who couldn’t. This environment transcended the project’s original purpose but was actually key in achieving the school’s ethos of empathy and community solidarity.



# OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

The project was based on the need to endow previously illiterate mothers with the skills to read and write, in order to get them into the Youth and Adult Education System (YAE) to complete their formal education. By the end of 2021, the project started to bear fruit: where mothers who used to sign documents with a stamp of their fingerprint could now sign their names and even started to respond in WhatsApp study groups. At the same time, the programme had begun to nurture and embolden these women's ambitions, who had previously believed that their lives had already passed them by.

Some mothers were openly grateful. In the words of one participant who had given up on her education after marriage, the project gave her confidence and allowed her to pursue her studies with the support of her family. .

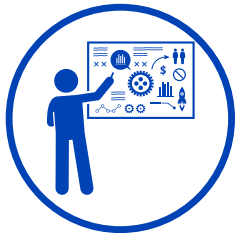
As a result of her newfound education, she managed to secure a new job in a better field after years of working as a cleaner.

This mother wasn't the only one with newfound hope. By liaising with local businesses and municipal government officials, the school was able to secure specialised health care and professional courses for these women, which allowed them to be more engaged in the community.

Altogether, the project created a warmer rapport within its community and promoted its own role in fostering inclusivity and achievement, with the end result of better supporting its students' learning.



# Key Steps



## ASSIGNING RESPONSIBILITIES

The first step the school took was to designate core responsibilities to each member of the faculty, who surveyed students' families to narrow down the number of mothers who would best benefit from the programme. After the survey, faculty consulted with the mothers about the programme to convince mothers of its benefits.



## HIRING INSTRUCTOR

The school then looked for a teacher that would act as a core instructor for the project. This teacher had to have a high-quality education and relevant teaching qualifications in Brazil. Once selected, the teacher prepared the learning materials and classroom schedule, according to the needs of the mothers.



Other faculty members did classroom observations, and a school coordinator was assigned to follow the project's process to evaluate its effectiveness.

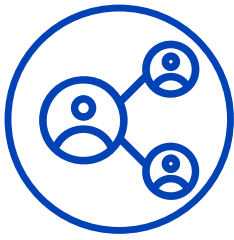


## **LESSON AND FINANCIAL PLANNING**

The school then adapted the classes to the needs of the programme's students, including lessons on financial literacy. Other lectures focused on entrepreneurship, health, and well-being. In partnership with the secretaries of health, transportation, social action, and citizenship, the school also hosted lectures in these areas, in addition, to finance at the request of the mothers involved in the project.

To better facilitate learning, the programme also included trips around the local area. For this, the school relied on its partnership with the Department of Transportation, the Secretary of Education, and other school partners.





## **ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION AND INCREASING OUTREACH**

Though some mothers were registered for the project, there were cases where they did not show up or began to drop out. To address this, the school faculty visited mothers at home to enquire about their absences. This gave the school more insight into the context of these women's lives: many of them were dropping out due to a lack of motivation, family support, or a weak support network. This emboldened the school to push harder on the values and benefits of its programme. The faculty also focused on creating a warm and nurturing environment that made the women feel more at ease during classes.



## **ENCOURAGING THE BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT**

Lastly, the school made sure that participants felt welcomed and included, making sure that their voices were heard, and that their feedback was incorporated into the programme's development.



By doing this, mothers felt more motivated to attend class, even encouraging other mothers to attend. The classes also became an open space for women to talk about their problems. Because some of these topics were delicate, the school took great care in facilitating these discussions and providing emotional support when needed.



# Advice and Guidance

Make sure the family are consulted and heavily involved in the decision-making process regarding the nature and implementation of the programme because it impacts most students and their families. Conducting other activities outside of classroom contact also helps build rapport between families and faculty. It is also important to understand the families' social context to better adapt the project to its intended audience.

## More information



**[Blog](#)**



**[Escola Evandro Ferreira Dos Santos](#)**



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