Summary

The Global Schools Forum (GSF) Annual Meeting, now in its third year, took place from 2 – 4 May 2018 in Zurich, Switzerland, with the generous support of the UBS Optimus Foundation. As one of the cornerstones of GSF, the Annual Meeting is part of our commitment to connect and provide support to great school operators from around the world.

We convened a group of 85 exceptional attendees, including school operators, investors, funders and other key stakeholders from around the world. The focus of the Annual Meeting was four-fold: to network with peers and engage in collaborative problem solving, develop new leadership and entrepreneurial skills, explore how to build high performing schools and school networks, and build greater cohesion around shared values, cultures and behaviors for the non-state sector.

Half the attendees were senior leaders from 32 school networks operating in 19 countries across Africa, Latin America and East and South Asia. The school networks were diverse in nature, ranging from small, early stage public-private partnership schools to well established affordable private schools. In addition, the group included high calibre external stakeholders, including donors, investors, economists, researchers and industry specialists.
“You have created such a wonderful collective of the world’s most passionate educators, investors and school leaders.” GSF 2018 Attendee

Key Takeaways

**Culture eats strategy, systems and processes for breakfast every single day**

The vital importance of organisational culture became apparent during the keynote and resonated through the meeting. Building a strong culture in your organisation is far more important than strategy, systems and processes. “Your organisational culture will be the only element defining your organisation in a couple of years”.

**Shared Principles - just words on a paper or a collective vision?**

There were mixed feelings about the viability and content of a set of Shared Principles for the non-state sector. Some attendees felt a strong need for shared values, with the belief that agreement on these could move the needle for the sector by creating a collective voice. Others raised concerns that the range of operators was too heterogeneous and that values would not be able to adequately capture this diversity while adding value.

**Mind the gap between school operators and funders**

Attendees strongly felt there is an opportunity to create better alignment of expectations between funders and school operators. GSF can potentially act as a translator between investors and operators to bridge the gap, including creating standardised definitions, greater transparency and understanding.
“This is my favourite event of the year! [There is a] palpable sense of excitement and collective industry, and a real sense that despite the broad range of models, we are working either together or in parallel and will converge to attain the same objectives.”

GSF 2018 Attendee

Session Highlights

Khurram Masood from African Leadership University….

...provided the keynote address on the opening day, and spoke about the importance of building a strong culture in all parts of your organisation as “culture eats strategy, systems & processes for breakfast every single day.” Khurram stated the five crucial areas to focus on when building culture are: 1. Instill values & mindsets from day zero. 2. Create culture in the student experience. 3. Start rhythms and routines to reinforce culture. 4. Incorporate cultural orientation and onboarding. 5. Have crucial conversations in crucial moments.**

Applying Design Thinking to Leadership facilitated by Caryn Voskuil from IDEO….

...followed the keynote. The session explored a “new way of thinking and framing challenges”; starting your challenge statement with “how might we” to shift from problems to opportunities. Attendees said the “new perspectives on old problems was the catalyst a lot of us needed.”

Leadership, Values and Culture with Lucy Heller from Ark Schools and Zia Abbas from The Citizens Foundation….

...facilitated by Susannah Hares from Ark, Lucy and Zia reflected on culture, values and leadership in their organisations and spoke with passion and pragmatism about their students, teachers and schools. Attendees valued hearing from two very different operators in terms of scale, and thought this session set the tone at the beginning of the conference.**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session Title</th>
<th>Facilitator</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Using Technology Effectively from Operations to Pedagogy…</td>
<td>Owen Henkel from Pearson Affordable Learning Fund</td>
<td>This interactive session explored how school networks are using technology to drive quality ranging from parent engagement apps to fingerprinting attendance to hardware maintenance to classroom instruction. The other operators in the room found great value in hearing from their peers’ innovation and operations.</td>
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<td>The survey of 27,500 parents across 29 countries on their children’s education highlighted that this often-overlooked stakeholder group was generally positive about the quality of education their child is receiving and agnostic about who is running their child’s school. Parents cared most about the quality of teachers.</td>
<td>Jonathan Simons from the Varkey Foundation presented the Global Parents’ Survey: Key Findings</td>
<td>The survey of 27,500 parents across 29 countries on their children’s education highlighted that this often-overlooked stakeholder group was generally positive about the quality of education their child is receiving and agnostic about who is running their child’s school. Parents cared most about the quality of teachers.</td>
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<td>Developing a Culture of Coaching for Teaching and Learning…</td>
<td>Jon Molver from Ark South Africa and Damian McBeath from Ark Schools</td>
<td>This session looked at how coaching can create a more supportive culture focused on improving teaching and learning within schools. Attendees had a rich discussion on how best to support teachers in their various contexts, especially teachers with little or no content knowledge in their subject area.</td>
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<td>Ameen Haque from Storywallahs led a session on How to Tell Your Story…</td>
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<td>…focusing on storytelling for school networks, reminding attendees that people forget facts but remember stories. Attendees took away that “stories are a powerful way to weave data” and “how to effectively use emotions to define and bind together your team, funders, the media and other stakeholders”.</td>
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<td>Financing and Service Delivery to Single-Proprietor Schools…</td>
<td>Allison Rohner from IDP Foundation and Peter Colenso, an independent consultant.</td>
<td>This session looked at the needs of single-proprietor schools and how financial intermediaries can incentivise quality improvement. It was clear that everyone was grappling with their approach to financing for quality. Grant funding continues to be necessary to enable experimentation and evaluation of these approaches.</td>
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<td>Financing Scale: What do Funders and Investors look for?</td>
<td>Dhun Davar from UBS Optimus Foundation, Jaume Iglesies from UBS Impact, Shikha Goyal and Fabio Tran from Omidyar Network</td>
<td>Facilitated by Dhun Davar from UBS Optimus Foundation, Jaume Iglesies from UBS Impact, Shikha Goyal and Fabio Tran from Omidyar Network. They demystified some of the language and systems around accessing funding. Attendees felt “clarity [was] shed on a challenging topic.”</td>
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<td>The Role of Funders in Shaping the Non-State Sector…</td>
<td>Peter Colenso, independent consultant.</td>
<td>…was facilitated by Peter Colenso, independent consultant. This was an opportunity for funders to share their experiences funding operators and identify shared challenges and problem solve them together.</td>
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### Challenge Carousel: Building a Culture of Collaboration...

Seven school operators outlined a specific challenge they are facing and worked with a group of like-minded individuals to **collaboratively problem solve**. The challenges ranged from parent engagement to 21st century skill measurement. The presenters felt they got great value out of brainstorming with such a diverse group of stakeholders, some who were **operators facing the same challenges**.

### Approaches to Research Design

Facilitated by Nic Spaull from University of Stellenbosch

This session explored the range of approaches to research design that are relevant and feasible for school networks, focusing on randomized control trials and the differences in what school operators and researchers are interested in measuring. **School operators want to focus on measuring their differential impact on student learning, while researchers are keen to study the impact of a specific intervention.**

### Lean Data: Building Customer Insight

Facilitated by Kasia Stochniol from Acumen

This session focused on school networks learning about **practical, quick and cost-effective methods to listen to their customers**. Attendees “loved [this session’s] practical nature and connection to the work we do. The facilitator used great examples that were relevant to the operators and it was done with great clarity and transparency.”

### How to use the Global Dataset on Education Quality

Presented by Harry Patrinos from the World Bank

This session presented the findings of the World Bank’s new Global Dataset on Education Quality and how they are relevant for the non-state sector and for preparing students for the world of work. One takeaway from the data was **improvements in education primarily come from policy reform, over long periods of time and with high quality implementation.**

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**Watch three of our speakers here:** [https://www.pscp.tv/GSF_talks](https://www.pscp.tv/GSF_talks)
How did we do?

66% of attendees completed our evaluation form, here’s what they thought of the event...

100% of respondents found the Annual Meeting very useful. The feedback mainly fell under four themes: 1) High quality and diverse group of people 2) Plenty of informal networking opportunities 3) Excellent workshop style and small group sessions; and 4) Sense of collective industry and working towards the same mission.

98% of respondents said they were able to build and deepen important relationships and networks, highlighting: the openness of others to learn, share and support; meeting new people who can become long term partners; and the opportunity to “connect with others who are aligned with similar values and motivations”.

83% of respondents said they are extremely likely to recommend this event to a friend or colleague.

53% of respondents said they were able to strengthen and develop their leadership and entrepreneurial skills. Some respondents agreed that the Annual Meeting provided useful conversations and skill-building workshops for leadership development. Others felt that this leadership was not a primary focus of this year’s agenda.

Twitter 394 tweets, 143 people participating
“Thank you all for inviting me to take part in what has to date been the most impressive and worthwhile conference I’ve ever attended. The quality of the sessions, calibre of the people and setting of the venue (!) were all exceptional.”

GSF 2018 Attendee

Who was missing?

1. More school operators represented at the meeting, particularly single school operators, those from East Asia and charter school networks.
2. More funders and investors
3. Representation from government or education ministers
4. A larger cohort of academic researchers

What else can GSF do?

1. More collaboration and networking including hosting regional events and school exchange visits.
2. Broker the relationship between operators and funders including:
   - Standardising language and definitions for the sector
   - Creating aligned due diligence processes
   - Providing funding opportunities under the GSF umbrella
3. Curate a shared body of knowledge and best practices, including case studies for operators.

Annexes

1. Agenda
2. List of Attendees