

A Collectively Developed

Vision of Student Success

Vision is a collective and ongoing conversation which enables a community to come to an agreement on what it wants to be true for students in the long term. In particular, a vision expresses what a community wants to be true for students when they leave school. Visions of student success drive lasting, transformative impact in classrooms and education systems. This is a pattern across the globe.

This concept of a vision for student success is at the intersection of purpose (what we want) and people (who gets to decide). A vision of student success should be *collectively created*, *locally rooted* and *globally informed*.

A vision is *collectively created* through co-construction with educators, students, families, and communities and should continually evolve in genuine human partnership. When collectively creating a vision for student success, consider:

- Who is involved in the process of creating and evolving the vision?
- Who hosts the discussion?
- Where do the discussions take place?

See examples from around the world of the process of collectively creating vision.

A vision is *locally rooted* when grounded in the history, culture, and values of a particular place, emerging from the people in that community. When constructing a locally rooted vision for student success, consider:

- What are the local challenges and opportunities facing children?
- What are the aspirations of students and families?
- What are the histories that shape the community? What are the traditions and values?

See how Anseye Pou Ayiti (Haiti) view depth of local engagement as at the core of their works.

A vision is *globally informed* by reflecting global aspirations, considering what has worked in other countries and communities, and engaging with global factors that interconnect us all. When developing a globally informed vision of student success, consider:

- What are our aspirations for students to enable them to grow as citizens who contribute to creating a world that is more inclusive, sustainable, and peaceful?
- What has inspired you from other places around the world?
- How would we make aspirations like the UN sustainable development goals a reality in our community?
- What economic and other trends are shaping the world that our children will be living in when they leave school?

See how a teacher at Teach For Armenia approaches global citizenship in her community.

VISION IS A LIVING PROCESS, NOT A FINISHED PRODUCT

One way to think of a vision is as a statement that answers the *why* of education. It tells us the intended outcome of school for students. For example, the vision at Enseñá por Argentina has four core aspirations for students: “They believe in education as an engine of change. They value continuous learning. They see themselves as agents of change. They are leaders in their communities.”

A clear vision statement can be helpful in some cultures and contexts. However, in some cases there may not be any neat expression of vision. Whether or not there is a vision product, the process of engaging with the community in an authentic, ongoing dialogue is always vital. This is because:

Visions Reflect Education Communities



The process of collectively creating vision grows the pool of people who are part of the conversation, drawing into these critical conversations people too often currently excluded. A vision of student success cannot be neatly separated from who decides on that vision; vision is a process of growing enfranchisement or engagement with education.

Visions Reflect Frontiers of Knowledge



There are always new insights to learn from, for example in the form of developments in the science of learning and inspiring examples from other communities. These new insights might inspire and shape new decisions.

Visions Reflect a Changing World



The world is constantly changing, and our vision for education should engage with that. For example, as the challenges that we collectively face shift, so too our collective aspirations for the next generation evolve.

Vision is an ongoing process of broadening and deepening engagement with the purpose of education, realigning actions based on the insights generated from this process, and doing so while learning from experience. Vision is never finally settled and resolved, it is a living process. Seeing vision as process, and not just product, helps us to see why the vision for student success should emerge from the community, rather than being imposed or adopting the vision of someone else. It is not the place of any external organization or expert to tell others what their vision for education ought to be. Sustainable visions that empower all children arise from, and are sustained by, local context and communities.

WHY VISION MATTERS

Millions of children lack the education, support, and opportunity they need to thrive. The obstacles they face—poverty, hunger, discrimination, trauma, and school systems that do not provide them with the education they need—can be overwhelming. When millions of children aren’t learning, it affects us all—perpetuating poverty, dividing societies, and weakening economies. Meaningful, sustainable change requires leaders who are rooted in their local culture, challenges and opportunities, and who believe in the potential of all children and their communities.

Teach For All’s core purpose is to develop collective leadership to ensure all children have the opportunity to fulfill their potential. Collectively created, locally rooted and globally informed visions of student success are proving critical to developing collective leadership to improve education and expand opportunity for all children, so they can shape a better future for themselves and the world around them. Moreover, virtually every difficult question faced by partner organizations in Teach For All—from whom to recruit and select, to how to train and support teachers, to what form of alumni support to provide—must be informed by a vision of students’ success.

After 25 years, if there is one thing I could do differently from the beginning with Teach For America, it would be to ensure that everything we are doing was aligned to local, collectively contextualised visions of student success.

**Wendy Kopp | Co-Founder, Teach For All
& Founder, Teach For America**



While reflecting on purpose and engaging in open and honest conversations with the community can at times seem like a distraction from the burning demands of day-to-day work, in reality those challenges are all more effectively addressed by considering their relationship to vision. **There are three sets of reasons for focusing on vision:**



Head

Strong research and arguments for spending time on vision



Hands

Practical reasons for attending to vision



Heart

Ways in which our values draw us towards vision

TEACH FOR ALL'S EVOLVING LEARNING ABOUT VISION

Teach For All's learning on vision has shifted over the years as it gets challenged by insights and experiences from across and beyond the network. For example, Teach For All used to emphasize the product of vision: vision as an audacious goal for us to drive towards. This has changed to an emphasis on vision as a process through which the community comes together to share their long-term hopes for children. This process determines the purpose of education for that community, and binds people together in a common effort to make it a reality.

Another shift has been in the focus of vision. A decade ago **vision** was often used by Teach For All partners to describe changes in the education landscape: for example, how many of different kinds of schools would be created. Now the focus is on students. The most powerful visions center on what success means for students when they leave the education system. This is the foundation of the work of education. Ideas about what changes to schools and systems might be necessary flow from the student vision.

With the help of students, families, educators, and policy-makers across and beyond the Teach For All network, these insights are certain to continue evolving.

Please share evidence and insights at learning.lab@teachforall.org.

HEAD

Vision is critical to lasting, powerful impact.

In the research and literature on leading change, much emphasis has been placed on the role of vision. Students and studiers of social change have found that the organizations and individuals that have the most lasting, powerful impact have vision at the core of what they do. Across the history of social change, there are

always unifying visions. For example, think of Martin Luther King’s speech in which he crystallized his vision for civil rights, with the words “I have a dream”.

There are some clear reasons why vision is seen as essential:



Imagine a Different World

Articulating a vision makes it possible to visualize an alternative possible future for students. This generative process of imagination helps build a sense of possibility that a different future is within reach.



Break the Cycle

Current education systems across the world are failing to serve many students. Without a vision for a different future, the momentum of the status quo makes it likely the future will look like the past. Visions help push against this inertia.



Build a Movement

The process of creating a vision in itself builds the investment, belief, motivation, and focus of those working to achieve it. Those who work alongside each other to develop a vision that truly reflects shared interests and values harness and focus this collective energy of a community.



Foundation for Plans

A vision makes it possible to backwards plan. A shared sense of the end-goal creates a foundation for setting and working towards shorter-term goals. This builds confidence that daily actions are aligned with longer-term aspirations.

HANDS

Vision is essential to make aligned, intentional decisions.

Those of us working to create equitable education systems across the world have many difficult and pressing decisions to make. Teachers have to decide what to prioritize in their lessons. Program designers have to decide how to balance developing fellows to have impact in the classroom today, and cultivating the capabilities to have impact tomorrow as alumni. Citizens building coalitions to grow education systems that truly reflect our values, have to decide how to tell their story to inspire and galvanize others.

These are not abstract questions. They are immediate, practical and require decisions now. Amidst the pressure of these choices, it can seem like attending to vision is a luxury or a distraction. Yet the classrooms and communities that are most powerfully transforming the life chances of students have vision is at the heart of what they are doing.

Without working on vision, there is simply no way to answer the practical questions of how to transform the life chances of students in the classroom; how to design programs that grow inspiring leaders; or how to build a wider movement to drive change. Both the process of developing a vision, and the product that arises as a result have practical benefits. The process is about an ongoing, authentic conversation with the community. The product is the working definition of student success you collectively commit to as a result of that conversation.



Photograph from Teach First Israel

The following table looks at the practical benefits for stakeholders of both the process and product of vision:

Role	Process	Product
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds credibility and trust with students and the wider community • Ensures what you are doing genuinely reflects the values of those who you are seeking to serve • Engages you in a journey of continuous learning in partnership with the community • Reduces potential barriers of power and distance that might separate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a foundation to assess student progress • Allows you to clearly communicate what you are aiming for • Serves as a support to bring you back to your core priorities
Teacher Coaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connects your work with the students and communities you are serving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defines what you are aiming for, which allows you to backward plan for the teacher mindsets / skills / behaviors needed to get there
Program Designers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brings teams together around shared aims • Reduces risk of organization being seen as imposing on the community • Builds stronger relationship with key stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifts the emphasis from the aims of the organization, to the aims of the community
Policy Makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures policy is based on the genuine interests of the community • Provides sources of innovation and diversity • Increases legitimacy of policy decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows multiple stakeholders to unite around common aims • Provides a foundation for common evaluation of progress

HEART

Vision is at the core of ensuring education systems reflect our values.

At Teach For All, our vision is that by 2040 we will see communities in every part of the world enabling all of their children to have the education, support and opportunity to shape a better future for themselves and all of us. These communities will be inspiring and informing a worldwide movement to achieve this everywhere. It is clear that this is not the current reality for the vast majority of people. In most communities, knowing certain facts about the parents of a child—where they live, how much they earn, what their ethnic background is, etcetera—makes it possible to make a very accurate guess as to how well they will do at school. The education systems that Teach For All partner organizations are seeking to challenge and change were built for different children, times, and purposes than the children in our partner organizations’ classrooms.



In many countries, education systems were built to develop efficient workers in the industrial age. The future our children are living into is fundamentally different.



In many countries, education systems were originally designed for a “mythical average”—and without the benefit of frontier neuroscience breakthroughs about the very nature of learning.



In many countries, education systems were originally designed for a narrow subset of children with certain privileged identities.



In many countries, education systems were put in place by powerful people or institutions (including colonizing invaders, dominating groups of privilege, etc.) without consideration of deeply held cultural values and historical contexts.

These factors have shaped what is taught, how it is taught, and the nature of schooling as a whole. The problem is not that education systems are broken, the problem is that they are inequitable by design. Inequity in education is not an accident of history, it is a direct result of the vision that has guided our schools, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly. So rather than trying to perfect our current education systems, communities need to reimagine them. This requires a clear vision of what communities want for their children, and a process that truly includes all voices.

The process of reimagination calls us to recognize that the histories of our education systems are overwhelmingly in conflict with the values of diversity and inclusiveness. There are many communities who have been systematically marginalized, and who experience the shadow of our education systems. For example, in colonized contexts, **such as New Zealand**, there has been a cumulative impact on the indigenous Maori population of an education system that neither included their voices in true partnership, nor reflected their values. If there are to be truly inclusive education systems, those who have been marginalized are vital in rejuvenating the practice of education. Those who have themselves experienced inequities should guide and lead this work.

CONCLUSION

Vision enables us to change the tide.

What is the purpose of education? And who gets to decide? For too long, we at Teach For All, and many others working in education, have assumed answers to these questions. Those assumptions have led us to incomplete or incorrect visions of student success that are being imposed on students, families, and communities rather than co-constructed with students, families, and communities. This has to change.

All partners across the Teach For All network share a commitment to equity: we believe that demography should not be destiny, that we should remove the predictability of failure or success based on background. Yet we know that there has never been a time and place where this has been a reality. Given this, it seems highly unlikely that if we keep operating in the same ways we have in the past, that we will achieve our goals. If we let the inertia of the current system drive us, we are likely to repeat the patterns of the past. If we want to change the flow, we will need a different kind of energy and approach.

Visions allow us to concretely declare what we want to be true for our children, which allows us to confidently determine how to align our individual and collective actions towards achieving them. Collective visions are respectful of, and responsive to, the local context of people, place and time, which make them effective in generating sustainable collective action towards making them a reality.

Vision-aligned work calls us to look outward to have a systemic-perspective on our work, seeing the complex histories and contexts in which we are working. And it requires us to look inward at the ways in which we are behaving, and the ways our own perspective and mindset might be replicating, or transforming, the systems in which we work. We see this type of vision-aligned approach as an essential ingredient in our aim to achieve our goals as a network.



Photograph from Teach First Israel

Teach For All Global Learning Lab

Teach For All's Global Learning Lab supports learning among classrooms and communities that are helping students grow as leaders of a better future for themselves, and all of us.