

# Future Systems Roundtable: Future of Work

*September, 2025*

## 1. Introduction

*What should career-readiness in K-12 education mean today—and how must it evolve to ensure young people are equipped to thrive, not just succeed, in a rapidly changing world of work?*

This question opened the roundtable conversation convened by Teach For All on the future of work. The event brought together a diverse group of educators, corporate partners from foundations and industry, policy leaders, and student representatives, all grappling with the disconnect between our current education systems and the needed future systems. Participants shared the concern that current systems, focused narrowly on academic achievement, treat young people as “work machines” for an industrial past while failing to equip them with the transferable, social-emotional, and practical skills needed to thrive in a changing world and to navigate uncertainty. They also perceived a continued disconnect between the corporate and education sectors, with little systematic integration of the two, despite promising shoots in certain places. The roundtable centered on three core questions:

- What would the ideal future system look like in which all young people are career-ready?
- What are the key levers—in mindset, practice, and policy—to shift from our current reality to this future?
- And what are the enablers that can accelerate this change, and the barriers we must overcome to make it a reality?

This briefing distills key insights and outlines starting points for moving from isolated initiatives toward an interconnected ecosystem of opportunity.

## 2. Current Reality & Future Systems

*"Schools today are held responsible for academic achievement and not necessarily for helping students get ready for [the] World of Work."*

*– Swati Mohan, Antrang Foundation & Teach For India Alumna*

The group explored the shortcomings of current systems and envisioned a future where career readiness is an integrated component of all learning. Participants described a current reality that isn't broken, but is instead working as it was designed: to prepare students to be “work machines” for an industrial past. In response, they offered a vision for a future built not on sequential preparation, but on

a deeply interconnected ecosystem designed for continuous learning and human flourishing.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Current Reality</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Why are current systems failing to prepare students?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Future Systems</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">What systemic shifts are needed for a future where all students thrive?</p>
<p><b>A system with a misaligned purpose</b> responsible for "academic achievement" but not for the "world of work" or young people's wider contributions to the economy or society.</p> <p>This leaves young people unmotivated, following predetermined paths that increasingly don't result in meaningful work, and ill-equipped for their futures.</p>	<p><b>A system with a redefined purpose</b> of cultivating "whole human development." Schools become places where students build real-world skills, explore their future goals, and work on problems they care about—opening pathways to multiple careers.</p>
<p><b>A hierarchical and siloed structure</b>, where "individual institutions... sequentially prepare students for predetermined job paths." Schools are "very close to industry," and in contexts like Perú, "90% of schools don't have a counselor," leaving students "all alone in this journey."</p>	<p><b>An interconnected ecosystem</b> where power is shared. All stakeholders—schools, employers, nonprofits, and communities—work "simultaneously and collaboratively," and the private sector's role is seen as "systemic, rather than supplementary."</p>
<p><b>Career preparation and support as an add-on</b> to the core work of the school, usually delivered by an advisor or part-time by staff members, with little connection to the day-to-day learning activities</p>	<p><b>A focus on core transferable skills and mindsets</b>, honed "across the entire education journey," not just in the final years. This long-term approach recognizes that essential dispositions like resilience and curiosity are not taught in a single lesson but are internalized over time, becoming part of a student's daily thinking and behavior</p>
<p><b>Career education in the final years of school</b> at which point many young people have little sense of their purpose or passion, and so struggle to connect to potential pathways or opportunities.</p>	<p><b>Exposure to possible paths from the earliest years</b>, particularly in underserved communities, where connecting learning to future possibilities allows students to visualize themselves in diverse careers and builds the</p>

	foundational motivation to learn. This prepares students to be adaptable, agentic, and ready to navigate multiple career transitions throughout their lives.
<b>A focus on outdated knowledge and skills</b> creates a "speed mismatch" where schools take years or even decades to adapt to changes in industry that happen in months. This leaves a widening gap between what is taught and what is needed.	<b>Mechanisms for rapidly updating skills curricula</b> in line with economic and technological shifts, and to reflect the changing nature of many industries, with a greater connection between people in business and people in schools.
<b>A disconnected and inequitable provision</b> where access to opportunity is often determined by socioeconomic status, making educational success feel inherited. This leaves many students without role models or the "opportunity to dream."	<b>An ecosystem of opportunity and agency</b> that addresses the "experience paradox" by ensuring all students have access to hands-on experiences, mentorship, industry knowledge, and the tools to discover their interests and build their own pathways.
<b>Separation of education and economic sectors</b> with only superficial interactions between the two at a systematic level. This might mean the generation of resources for schools or a limited number of work placement opportunities.	<b>Integrated partnership between schools and businesses at the local level</b> leading to greater access to role models, greater relevance of learning and up-to-the minute understanding of the skills required, as happens in institutions like High Tech High or East London Arts and Music.

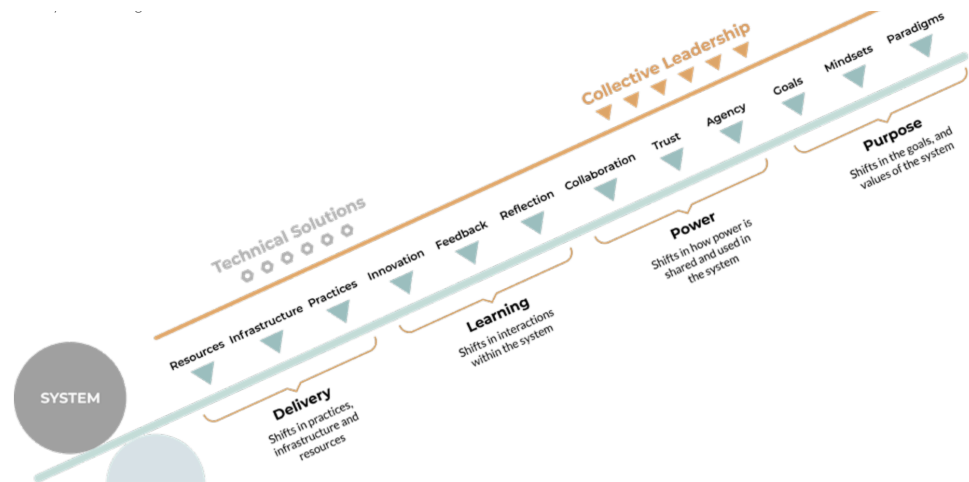
### 3. Levers for System Change

*"Systems are actually people, so we need to first tackle the mindset... everyone involved should feel responsible for the outcome."*

– *Alina Orkusha, Teach For Lebanon*

So, how do we actually move from an outdated model, where students are “work machines,” toward a future where education truly prepares them to thrive in a fast-evolving world and economy? Changing education means addressing deeper systemic drivers, not just surface-level fixes like new materials or curriculum tweaks. This roundtable reminded us that work that shifts at the systems level also has to happen at the level of purpose and power.

Unlocking that kind of shift takes more than technical solutions. It requires collective leadership—and coordinated action across a set of interconnected levers. We’ve used a helpful frame from [The Missing Piece](#) to organize them into four key domains: redefining the system’s Purpose, redistributing Power, improving how the system Learns, and transforming the Delivery of education.



### A. Purpose: Shifting the ‘Why’

Change the story the education system tells about itself. This means moving beyond a narrow narrative of academic achievement to one of collective responsibility and human flourishing.

- **Redefine the goal as "whole human development":** Shift the purpose of education from merely preparing students academically, with an afterthought of preparation for predetermined jobs, to the aim of cultivating “whole human development.” This means focusing on “what makes kids happy, can I get a decent job and income” alongside the capacity to “be motivated to go to work,” and “realize their full potential”, moving beyond a system of “academic sorting” to one that empowers young people to solve problems they care about.
- **Establish a shared responsibility:** Creating a unified sense of purpose requires all stakeholders—industry, policymakers, teachers, and parents—to act collectively with a “shared goal” that students need to be prepared for the economy and careers of the future, both at a global level, and a deeply locally-rooted way. As one participant emphasized, “everyone involved should feel responsible for the outcome of those children who will be the future of our world tomorrow.”

### B. Power: Shifting the ‘Who’

Redistribute power from top-down mandates to grassroots movements, and to young people from passive recipients to active agents of change. Collective

leadership isn't possible unless students' opinions are actively sought and genuinely considered in the decision-making process.

- **Amplify student voice and agency:** Shift how young people are engaged, moving beyond a system where “we don’t listen to students enough.” This means “amplifying their voice,” taking their input into consideration, *and* integrating their feedback into the design and implementation of career readiness programs.
- **Activate local community and industry ownership:** Shift the role of parents and the local community from passive observers to active drivers of accountability. This means creating a model in which businesses are more actively involved in supporting local schools, and in which parents hold the school systems responsible for career readiness outcomes. By doing so, the ownership is shared both ways, ensuring the system is more responsive to the needs and expectations of the community it serves.

### **Snapshot: How Teach For Nepal Puts Students in Charge of Their Career Journeys**

A key challenge in career education is that students often lack the resources and exposure to make informed decisions, limiting their ability to explore different paths. An initiative by Teach For Nepal fellows at Janakalyan Higher Secondary School in Tanahun, the "Career Education For Student Agency" project, provides a tangible example of shifting this model from passive guidance to active student leadership.

The objective of this approach is to empower students to take charge of designing their own exploration. The model involves several key actions:

- Co-organizing a collaborative Career Exhibition that brought together 171 students from four different schools with 250 key stakeholders, including teachers, local government officials, community members, and industry professionals.
- Empowering students to take the lead in identifying and inviting professionals from industries they are interested in. As one fellow noted, students successfully connected with and secured the participation of a football coach from a local academy.
- Involving students in the entire process to build their leadership, confidence, and critical skills in communication, teamwork, and problem-solving.

The result of this student-led approach is a fundamental shift in ownership and engagement. The hands-on experience allows students to gain insights beyond what textbooks can offer, with one student aspiring to be a scientist, discovering a concrete path in cybersecurity, and another reassessing their goals after meeting

professionals at the event. The Nepal model demonstrates that when students are empowered to co-create their career education, the experience becomes more relevant and builds the agency they need to shape their own futures.

### C. Learning: Shifting the 'How'

For a system to evolve, it must be able to learn, reflect, and innovate. This involves creating feedback loops and ensuring the system is responsive to the challenges it faces.

- **Establish a common language for essential skills:** To overcome “hazy notions of transferable skills,” a key lever is to create a “common language” and a clear assessment framework for essential skills. This shared understanding, used by schools, NGOs, governments, and employers, creates a “continuity of journey” that supports student development consistently. The Skills Builder Universal Framework is a successful example of this.
- **Measure what matters to shift incentives:** As one leader succinctly put it, “It’s very difficult to see and have a conversation about something that you’re not measuring.” The system must create “better metrics and better information about careers guidance” and measure actual student transitions at a state level, at a national level, into the world of work to hold schools accountable.
- **Create a responsive system through private sector partnership:** The private sector's role must evolve from supplementary to systemic. This means integrating employers as essential partners who provide direct input at both the national and local level to ensure the curriculum is responsive to real-world workforce needs. This early and continuous collaboration helps create a system of shared benefit, where students gain relevant skills and companies can help nurture a future talent pool.

### D. Delivery: Shifting the 'What'

Vision and purpose must be matched with tangible changes in practices, resources, and infrastructure. These are the concrete levers that translate intent into reality.

- **Invest in teacher capacity from induction onwards:** Teachers play a big role, yet often feel unprepared. Embedding career readiness into teachers’ induction systems and providing continuous capacity building is key, as it ensures educators develop their own self-awareness and social-emotional skills, empowering them to effectively integrate career readiness into their classrooms and see students holistically.
- **Integrate hands-on experience and mentorship:** To bridge the widening gap from school graduation to corporate roles, delivery must include “accessible internships,” micro-internships, and mentorship opportunities. Providing

students with these hands-on practice experiences at an early stage allows them to “choose their job or their career based on their personal experiences.”

- **Design local pilots for scalable impact:** Recognizing that large-scale systemic changes “are huge, and sometimes... very hard to implement,” a powerful lever is to move beyond isolated initiatives and instead launch local pilots intentionally designed for scale. As one participant noted, starting at the “city level, or even smaller” allows for steady, manageable progress. However, the crucial shift is designing these pilots as “learning ecosystem accelerators” that produce not just local success, but also the assets needed for broader change: evidence-based insights that create a strong case for investment and policy adoption; scalable career education content and models that can be adapted to new contexts; clear, real-world use cases that bridge the critical “implementation gap” and show leaders how to “move the policy into action.

### **Snapshot: A Three-Stage Framework for Career Readiness Education**

The [Career Readiness Education Framework](#) is a practical guide designed for educators, students, business leaders, and policymakers. Its core purpose is to help students develop the necessary mindsets, knowledge, and skills to navigate the evolving world of work, with a particular focus on closing opportunity gaps in underserved communities. Developed through collaboration, the framework provides a clear and actionable approach to preparing young people for meaningful, purpose-driven careers.

The framework offers a structured yet adaptable pathway built on three core stages of student engagement: Expose, Explore, and Practice. The model involves several key actions within these stages:

- **Expose:** Allows students to get information about the professional work environment and gain insight into career opportunities. Key activities include workplace visits, career fairs, and career talks with professionals.
- **Explore:** Students actively investigate the world of work and learn specific skills to make important decisions about their future. Activities include career guidance, CV writing, and interview skills training, job shadowing, and mentoring.
- **Practice:** Provides youth with the opportunity to experience the working world in a real business environment, applying skills they have already developed. This is achieved through internships, volunteering, and part-time work.

The result is a comprehensive approach that provides a common language for effective collaboration between educators, employers, and communities. By

aligning with clear student outcome metrics, the framework enables organizations to measure impact, share learning, and make evidence-based improvements. This makes it a powerful tool not only for designing impactful programs but also for advocating for more equitable, future-focused career education for all students.

#### 4. From Inertia to Action: What It Takes to Shift the System

*"Policy can be an accelerant, but I don't think it's the solution."*

– **Tom Ravenscroft, Skills Builder Global**

*"I don't think we listen to students enough."*

– **Ahmad Kassem, Teach For Lebanon**

Shifting an entrenched system is not just a matter of identifying the right levers; it requires navigating the landscape of human mindsets, political realities, and structural inertia. The roundtable conversation unearthed what accelerates change and what holds it back, revealing a path forward that relies less on a single policy mandate and more on the patient work of building a broad, resilient coalition.

<b>Enablers</b> <i>What Accelerates Change?</i>	<b>Barriers</b> <i>What Holds Us Back?</i>
<p><b>A groundswell of support from a coalition of the willing:</b> Progress accelerates when change is driven by a "groundswell of support" from the bottom up. Rather than trying to convince skeptics, leaders can "work with those that are on board and showcase success," creating a powerful peer effect that makes it safer for others to join and ensures the movement is not a "political project" that can be easily dismantled.</p>	<p><b>Political volatility and fragile commitments:</b> The constant turnover of government officials makes long-term policy consistency difficult. As one participant warned, "when you work with politicians, they are quite volatile," and progress can "get into the air and disappear" with a single election, making initiatives dependent on political will incredibly fragile.</p>

<p><b>Local adaptation and ownership:</b> Systems change is most effective when it is locally championed and adapted to meet specific contextual needs. Whether it's a country's focus on unemployment or a community's unique industry landscape, tailoring the approach with "concrete evidence of what's lacking, and what's in it for the government" ensures relevance and deepens local ownership.</p>	<p><b>The experience paradox and widening gaps:</b> Entry-level jobs are disappearing, making it harder for young people to gain initial experience. The "jump from school graduation to corporate roles is widening," yet there is "no incentive for employers to create that bridge program," leaving students caught in a structural dilemma.</p>
<p><b>Policy lock-in for durability:</b> While policy isn't the sole solution, it is an accelerant. The critical moment is when a strategy crosses "the line" and is written down into formal policy. This "policy lock-in" provides clear, durable direction for the entire system, ensuring that change outlasts any single political administration and "all the schools know what to do."</p>	<p><b>Stuck mindsets and lack of buy-in:</b> The most stubborn barriers are often invisible: the deeply entrenched mindset that schools are "held responsible for academic achievement and not necessarily for helping students get ready for the World of Work." This is compounded by the risk that key stakeholders—including students themselves—may not "buy in" to new strategies, viewing them as "archaic."</p>
<p><b>Patience and a long-term view:</b> Acknowledging that it takes time to work with systems is itself an enabler. As one leader noted from their seven-year journey in the UK, a persistent, long-term approach is essential for navigating complexity, building trust, and creating the conditions for lasting, systemic change.</p>	<p><b>The implementation gap:</b> Even when policies exist, a significant barrier is that states and schools often "don't actually know how to move the policy into action." This gap between policy on paper and practice on the ground can render even the best-laid plans ineffective without clear guidance on "how you do it."</p>
<p><b>Leadership within schools and businesses</b> to bring the two sectors together at both the national and local level in meaningful, sustained partnerships that result in the embedding of new mindsets, processes and approaches that result in transformed institutions</p>	<p><b>Transactional efforts</b> which result in grand announcements or surface-level partnerships, without ensuring the critical mass of leadership needed to sustain the kinds of shifts that are required.</p>

## 5. The Path Forward: Laying the Ground for What Comes Next

*“The next steps... should focus on continuing to create spaces for dialogue and exchange. Bringing people together to share ideas, resources, and inspiration is essential to keep the momentum alive.”*

— **Noemí Martín, *Empieza Por Educar*.**

The roundtable ended with the challenge to move from an inspiring conversation to a fundamental shift in practice. Leaders were clear-eyed about the scale of the challenge, yet energized by the collective potential in the room. The conversation made clear that the path forward isn't about finding a single solution, but about building the connective tissue for a more coherent and responsive ecosystem. This includes moving beyond intellectual agreement to embodied practice, where building evidence, building partnerships, and innovating with courage become a living practice for everyone – young people, industry and policy leaders, parents, educators – and everyone involved. It's about fueling a movement: backing early actors, building a "groundswell of support," and weaving together efforts that can tip systems toward a future where every student is prepared not just to succeed, but to thrive.

At the heart of it all is a simple truth the roundtable made clear—systems are powered by people. And people, when connected by a shared purpose, can create transformative change. The power and the responsibility to create change reside within the collective, and the work starts now—in the daily actions, mindsets, and relationships that will lay the ground for what comes next.

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## 6. Resources & Further Readings

- [Teach For All's Future of Work Initiative](#) - If you are interested in learning more or being part of this evolving work, please reach out to Tarek Chehidi ([tarek.chehidi@teachforall.org](mailto:tarek.chehidi@teachforall.org)), Global Head of Future of Work at Teach For All.

- [Call recording](#) (passcode &K&BWD04)
- [Career Readiness Education Framework](#): Teach For All, in partnership with DHL Group's GoTeach program and grounded in OECD research, has developed a practical guide tailored for educators, career professionals, and corporate volunteers that helps them identify effective career education activities to equip students with the mindsets and skills they need to thrive in future careers. The framework also provides specific examples of what to assess, enabling a clear evaluation of activity impact and ensuring measurable, meaningful outcomes.
- [Turning learning into leadership: Preparing students for the future of work](#) - Alria Monteiro Kharage, Teach For India alumna
- [A tale of two journeys: Personal lessons and collective career growth through career education](#) - Ankit Bhattarai, Teach For Nepal fellow
- [Breaking stereotypes: Fostering the empowerment of girls through practical projects in Vienna](#) - Theresa Valenta, Teach For Austria alumna
- [Global Career Education Network](#)
- [Skills Builder Global Partnership](#)