



# Navigating Challenges and Inspiring Change

Accomplishments and Learnings of the School Leadership Network

## ANNUAL REPORT

2022





*Alfonso Jaramillo Gutiérrez School, Colombia  
School Principal: Carlos Villalba*

# WHY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP MATTERS

School leadership plays a critical role in driving educational improvement and influencing practices and behaviors that establish a strong connection between leaders and the organization. This connection enables leaders to inspire and mobilize members of the school community (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000). **Educational leadership extends beyond managerial responsibilities for principals; it encompasses setting institutional guidelines, fostering professional development, and facilitating collaboration with community stakeholders, including families** (UNESCO, 2018; Vaillant, 2015; UNICEF, 2009).

According to the Teacher Task Force (2020), school leaders have three crucial functions: establishing effective school practices, addressing school-specific needs, and providing guidance during challenging circumstances. However, **the transformation of every school principal into an effective school leader, equipped with clear and evidence-based tools tailored to their unique academic and policy context, remains an ongoing challenge.**

**School leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping the school climate and enhancing learning outcomes.**

It requires support and development opportunities for leaders to actively engage with the community, enhance their skills, and set strategic goals that foster an optimal learning environment. Furthermore, school leadership encourages the exploration of diverse experiences to enrich their role and contribute to innovative initiatives that foster continuous learning.

Recognizing, studying, and strengthening the role of school principals within the community has been a focus of global organizations and networks. Their objective is to establish effective policies and guidelines that recognize school leadership as a fundamental component of educational excellence. As emphasized by Weinstein & Muñoz (2014), understanding school principals goes beyond academic exercise; it is crucial for developing policies that benefit not only individual schools but the entire education system.

This recognition highlights the importance of contextualized knowledge about leadership. School principals need to apply research findings meaningfully within their specific contexts. Spillane et al. (2019) refer to this process as "sensemaking," acknowledging that addressing complex school challenges requires an evidence-based perspective tailored to unique circumstances. This approach fosters the development of solutions within enriching learning environments (Brauckmann et al., 2023) and promotes the qualification and contextualization of educational leadership (CEPPPE, 2009).

Recognizing the significance of school principals and being dedicated to driving transformation, we have decided to establish a global network that can provide them with support and guidance in their crucial roles.

The School Leadership Network (SLN) is dedicated to promoting a context-oriented and evidence-based approach to leadership, benefiting the entire school community. It encourages school principals to understand their role in relation to other stakeholders, recognizes the challenges they face within the broader context, and propose ideas that enhance the academic perspective to strengthen public policies. The SLN aims to establish a global community that supports effective school leadership and advocates for its crucial role in achieving equitable and high-quality education.

In our community, we strongly recognize the significance of school leaders in driving educational transformation, and we are truly honored to collaborate with all of you in pursuit of this shared objective. **It is the collective efforts of our community members, including School Principals and Educational Experts, that shape the essence of this community.** The success of this network relies on the active involvement and dedication of each individual, and we are thrilled to continue our collaborative journey as a network to uphold the crucial role of school leadership and amplify their influence. Thank you for your support and commitment to this community. We feel really honored by the possibility of working together.



Agustín Porres  
**Regional Director  
Varkey Foundation**



Azad Oommen  
**CEO Global School  
Leaders**





# ABOUT SLN AND THE MISSION



Heritage International School, Moldova  
School Principal: Rob Ford

The School Leadership Network is a collaborative initiative led jointly by the **Varkey Foundation, Global School Leaders, and the UNESCO Teacher Task Force**. The primary objective is to establish a robust global community centered around school leadership, with a core focus on enhancing the role of leaders in schools and advocating for their essential contribution to equitable and high-quality education.

By leveraging the collective strength of this network, our aim is to identify and **address the present and future challenges faced by school principals, promote innovative solutions, and amplify the voices of educators within the academic and policy-making spheres.**

Year after year, our unwavering commitment lies in supporting the pivotal leadership role of each school principal and its profound impact on student learning outcomes. As a network, we endeavor to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complex challenges encountered by school leaders and recognize the unique attributes of influential principals. This in-depth knowledge enables us to develop comprehensive policies that encompass all facets of effective school leadership.

The SLN comprises two groups: one composed of school principals and the other consisting of education experts. This collaborative approach ensures a well-rounded perspective and harnesses the collective expertise of both school leaders and educational specialists, reinforcing the quality and effectiveness of our initiatives.



### AMPLIFY VOICES OF SCHOOL LEADERS

Deepen knowledge and share perspectives across borders to build evidence and research-backed knowledge products on key themes that influence school leadership.



### BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE

Deepen trust between school leaders and experts/policymakers to bridge the gap between policy and practice in school leadership.



### FOSTER A COMMUNITY-LED NETWORK

Design a community-led approach to building this global School Leadership Network, ensuring sustainability and a sense of ownership.

**500**  
School Principals



**165**  
Educational Experts



**57**  
Countries







Agustín Porres  
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**Global School Leaders**



Swarna Surya  
**Global School Leaders**



Anjali Nambiar  
**Global School Leaders**

# THE TEAM

## • WORKING GROUP LEADERS

To promote sustainability and cultivate a sense of ownership, we introduced a working group framework this year, appointing a group of esteemed school principals to assume leadership roles. These dedicated leaders played a pivotal part in fostering collaboration by moderating discussions and providing continuous support to their fellow directors throughout the year.

Working closely with the network's coordination team, these leaders served as intermediaries, facilitating seamless coordination and offering guidance for the successful execution of each strategy.



Rob Ford  
**Principal of Heritage**  
International School group  
Moldova



Manuel Urrutia  
**Principal of María Auxiliadora.**  
Polytechnic Institute  
Chile



Rehema Kisitu  
**Principal Kisaana Secondary School**  
Uganda



Carlos Villalba  
**Principal of Alfonso Jaramillo**  
Gutiérrez School  
Colombia



Kavita Sanghvi  
**Principal of CSVKM's CNM**  
School  
India



Alindor Bazán  
**Principal of San Vicente de Paúl**  
School  
Perú



# THE ACTION PLAN

*“The challenge is unprecedented, but by tapping into the expertise and commitment of educators and policymakers in the region, can go beyond restoring pre-pandemic education. Contextualizing and blending evidence-based tools, models, and strategies are key to re-engaging students, reinventing learning, driving digital transformation, and ensuring safe school environments.” (IDB, 2022)*

In response to the challenges encountered at the outset of the year, the network formulated an action plan that was guided by the topics identified through the outcomes of the previous year's meetings. These topics were:



However, upon reconvening with school principals, it became evident that **our foremost priority was to address these issues by recognizing their present challenges, understanding their roles, and exploring the initiatives or best practices they could share from their respective countries.** The objective was to empower them to tackle these challenges and contribute to the establishment of an evidence-based leadership framework.

## • METHODOLOGY

Our goal was to make visible the voice of those who were on the ground and bring them closer to policymakers, academics, and other actors who built and shaped the regulations that governed education systems. In this way, we created a space for school leaders to meet with their peers and colleagues to reflect on the challenges.

The space was as well an opportunity for professional development in which educational experts from the network provided School Principals with concrete tools related to the three topics being addressed.

This initiative reinforced a leadership approach based on school experiences, which allowed us to identify the relevance of the relationship between cultural diversity and leadership as an opportunity to address daily challenges.

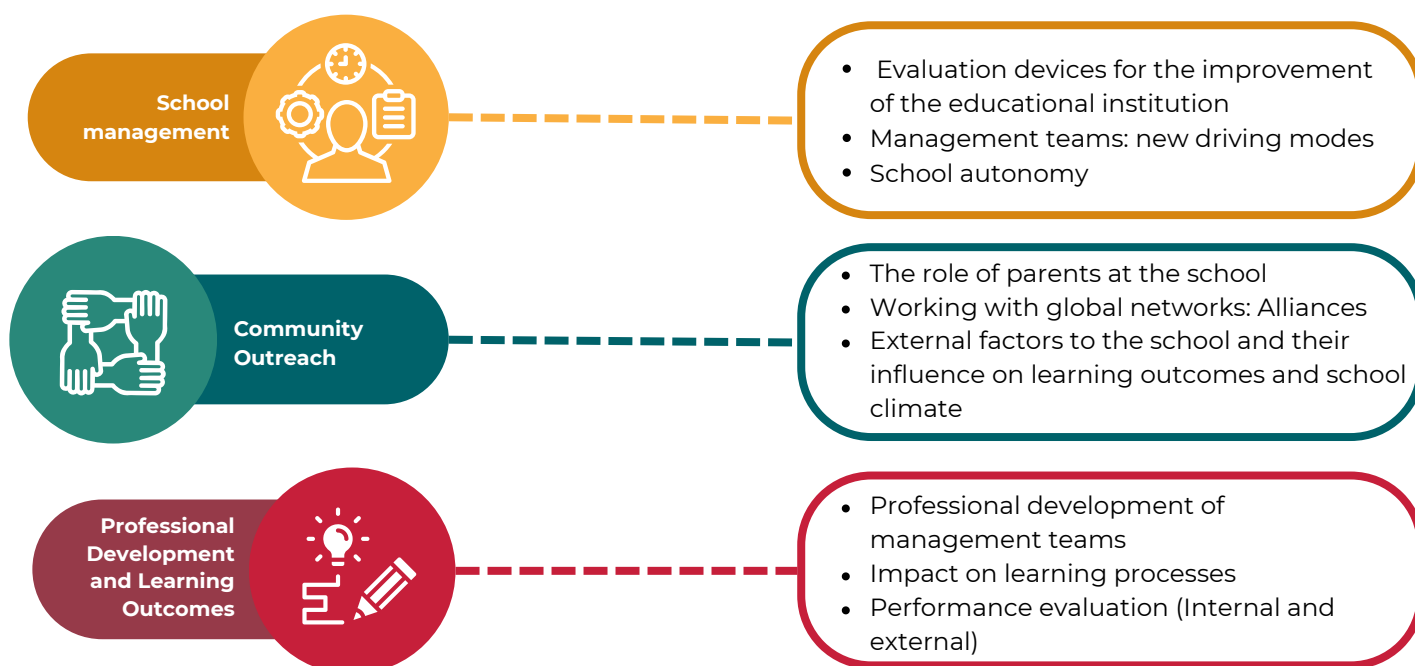
In that sense, the methodology adopted for the network's annual work **aimed to foster collaboration, gather innovative ideas, and drive significant change in the field of educational leadership.**



The following phases were developed to effectively address the three core topics:

## A Survey of challenges:

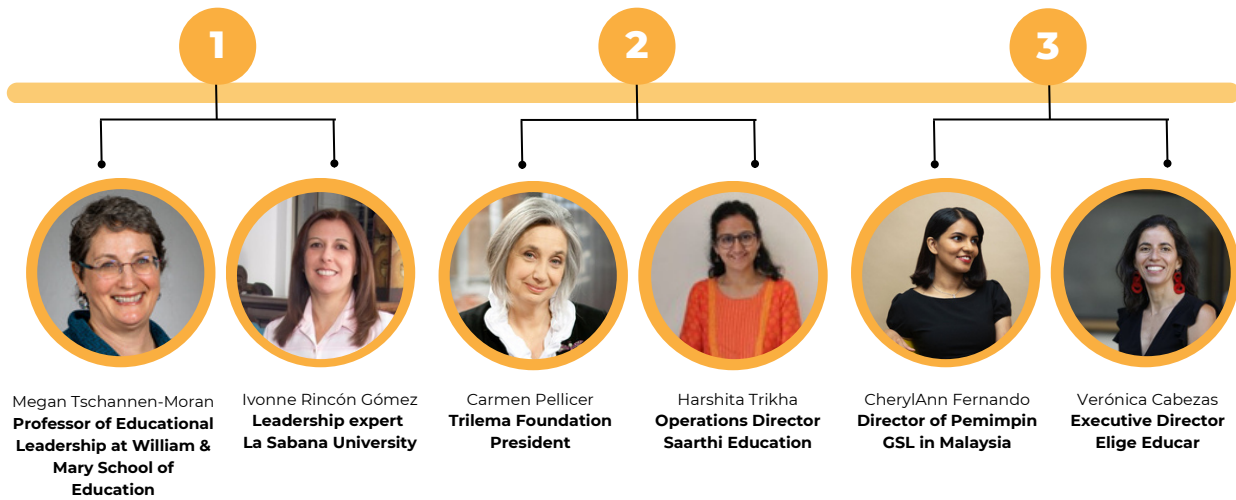
A comprehensive survey was conducted to identify the key challenges and areas requiring improvement in educational leadership. This survey involved gathering input from network members, including school principals, experts, and stakeholders. The survey findings provided valuable insights into the specific challenges faced by school leaders, guiding subsequent phases of the work and the subtopics of each group.





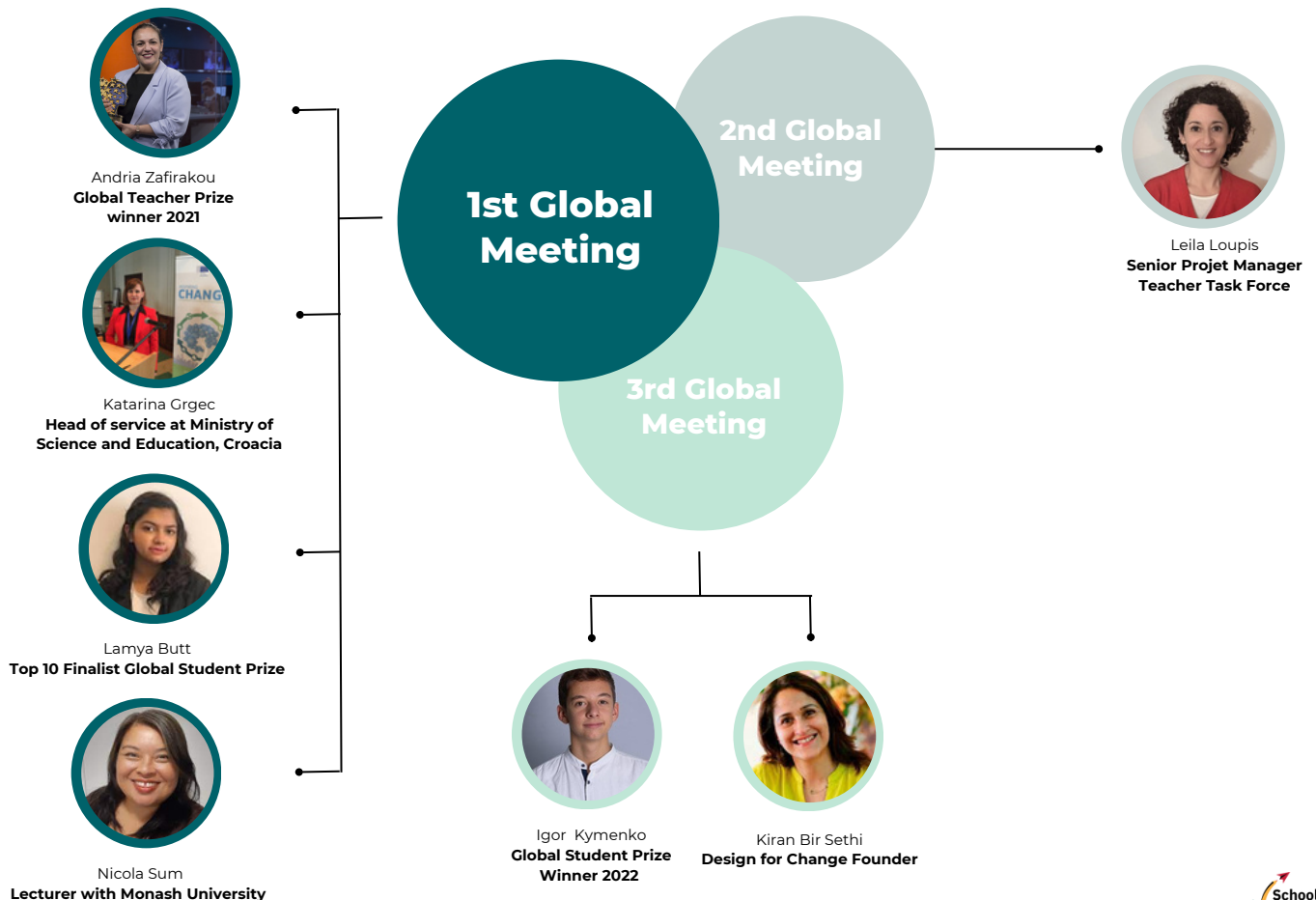
## B Working group meetings:

To delve deeper into each theme, working groups were established, comprising school principals and experts with relevant expertise and extensive experience. These working groups focused on the specific areas of school management, community outreach, and professional development. By bringing together diverse perspectives, the working groups fostered collaborative problem-solving and the exchange of best practices.



## C Global meetings

We held three global meetings opened to all network members, inviting leaders from other areas, and allowing deep and insightful conversations about school leadership and how to support these roles in schools.



## **D Final Evaluation of Learning**

At the conclusion of the annual work, a comprehensive evaluation was conducted to assess the outcomes, effectiveness, and impact of the network's initiatives. This evaluation process involved reflecting on the learnings from the working groups, global meetings, and implementation of strategies. The findings from the evaluation informed future planning, improvements, and the development of evidence-based recommendations.

[To see the final evaluation click here](#)



### • **MEETING MODALITIES:**

To facilitate effective communication and collaboration, various meeting modalities were employed throughout the year. The following approaches were utilized:

**1.Synchronous meetings for working groups:** Were conducted three times during the year via Zoom. These meetings brought together school principals and experts, with small groups formed based on language (English and Spanish).

**2.Communication Platform:** To maintain constant communication and facilitate asynchronous sharing of challenges and initiatives, each working group had a dedicated WhatsApp group. This platform enabled ongoing discussions, knowledge exchange, and the sharing of experiences among participants in relation to their respective themes.

**3.Synchronous Global Meetings:** Global meetings were also conducted via Zoom, following a similar dynamic. These meetings provided an opportunity for participants to engage in discussions, seek consultation with UNESCO, and exchange ideas and best practices on a global scale. These sessions fostered collaboration and facilitated a broader perspective on addressing school leadership challenges.

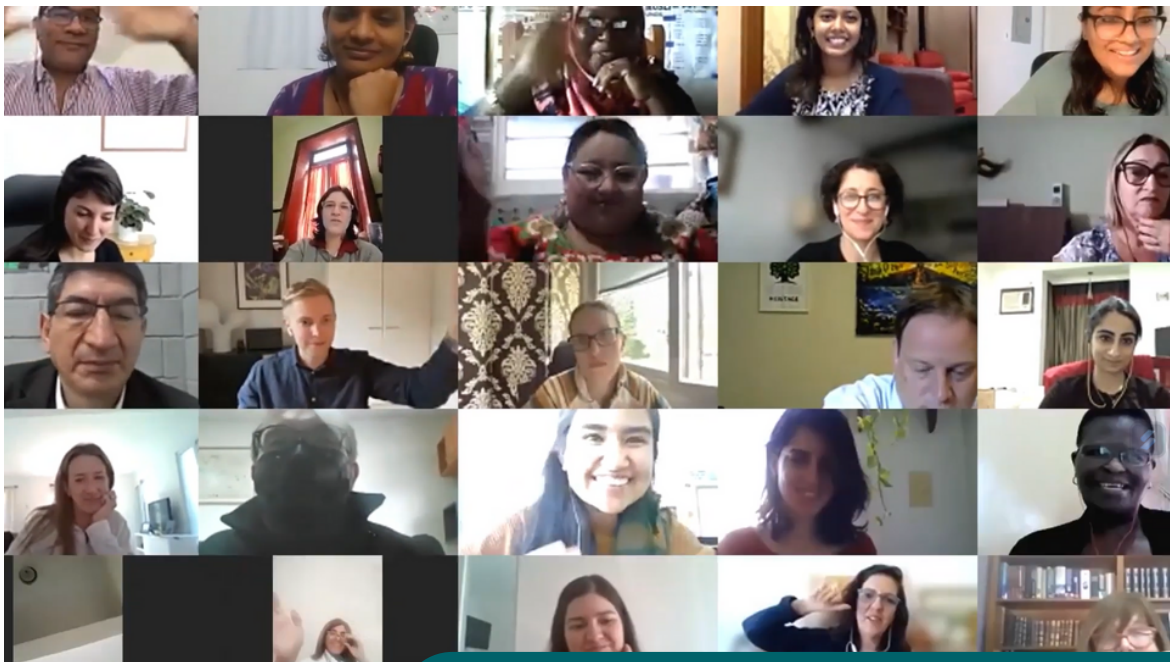
### • **MEETING CONTENT:**

By utilizing these meeting modalities, the network ensured that meaningful conversations, exchange of ideas, and valuable insights took place among school principals, experts, and stakeholders. The combination of synchronous meetings, dedicated communication channels, and global gatherings allowed for effective engagement and the sharing of experiences and expertise, ultimately contributing to the network's collective efforts in advancing educational leadership with the following topics:

Meetings/groups	School Management	Community Outreach	Professional Development & Learning Outcomes
1st Meeting	Evaluation devices for the improvement	Parents Role at school	Professional Development of management teams
2nd Meeting	Work with global networks	Driving modes	Impact on learning processes
3rd Meeting	School Autonomy	External factors of the school and their influence on learning outcomes and school climate	Performance evaluation

Discussions were moderated by the group leaders, allowing the note-takers (The coordination team) to systematize the information that emerged from the following questions:

- *What are we doing about the subtopic in my school that is working well?*
- *What are some challenges that I am facing?*
- *Why is the role of the Principal key to this subtopic?*



[Click here to see the video summary of the year 2022](#)



# FINDINGS OF THE YEAR

The following sections provide an overview of the findings from each working group for the current year. Each section includes an (1) analysis of the **initial discussions** held by the group, outlining their perspectives on the challenges prior to conducting the survey. Subsequently, (2) the **survey results** are presented, followed by (3) an explanation of the **subtopics chosen** derived from the survey. Furthermore, (4) key learnings about **experts' voices**, who were invited to address these specific challenges, and finally (5) the **conclusions** drawn from the collective discussions and analysis of each group.



SVKM's CNM School, India  
School Principal: Kavita Sanghvi

By following this structure, a comprehensive understanding of the working groups' journey throughout the year can be gained. It allows for a holistic view of the challenges identified at the outset, the alignment with survey findings, the exploration of sub-themes, and the valuable contributions made by experts. The concluding remarks encapsulate the key takeaways and implications derived from the discussions and findings, offering meaningful insights and recommendations for future endeavors.

## School management



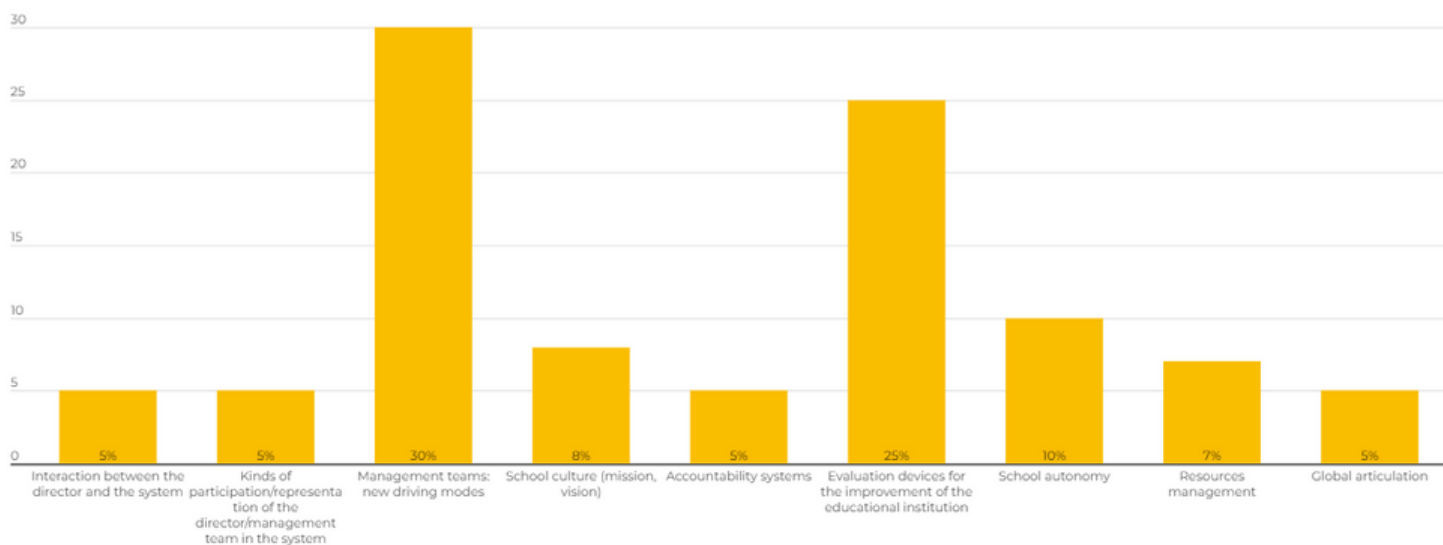
### • Initial discussions:

Discussions initially focused on the responsibilities and role of the school principal, who is critical in dealing with the multiple relationships that happen inside and outside the school. In this way, they express the need to establish pedagogical and community relations, beyond administrative ones, without ignoring the last ones.

The challenges that were established, frame (1) the role of the principal as the only one

involved in the school's strategy as operational/crisis management, with little management with others for an institutional culture and a shared vision. Related to this, (2) one of the barriers in their role becomes evident when unions and professional associations work according to the interests of their sector (3) hindering more active participation in the system to transform it, instead of limiting themselves to the normative standards.

- **Survey results:**



- **Subtopics chosen:**

Based on initial discussions, the school principals chose these subtopics:

1. Evaluation devices for the improvement of the educational institution
2. Management teams: New driving modes
3. School autonomy

This reaffirms the previously stated need to address a shared leadership role, school autonomy beyond sector interests, and the evaluation of processes that enable educational improvements.



*Heritage International School, Moldova  
School Principal: Rob Ford*

- **Experts' voices:**

During the working groups, we had the privilege of inviting two experts to discuss this topic. **Megan Tschannen-Moran** from William & Mary School of Education joined the English group, while **Ivonne Rincón** from La Sabana University participated in the Spanish group.

The insights shared by both experts were invaluable, and each interaction proved to be a tremendous learning experience. In particular, their affirmation of the crucial role of the school director left a lasting impact on us, prompting us to consider the following:



1. **Strengthening personal leadership skills** is essential for enhancing performance and fostering a conducive learning environment. By doing so, we can effectively manage teams and find optimal approaches.

2. **Embracing shared decision-making processes** can lead to improved decision quality and greater adherence. By involving teams and stakeholders in the decision-making process, we take the first step in assessing and refining our processes.

3. **Cultivating trust**, relevance, and experience in decision-making creates democratic situations that encourage the active participation of the educational community. This, in turn, facilitates the development of autonomous structures within the school, fostering a sense of ownership and collaboration.

- **Conclusions of the questions:**

### **Why the school principal's role is crucial?**

- Establishes a vision and shares it with his team (Distributed leadership).
- Promotes spaces of creation and collaborative solutions with the school community (parents, students and teachers).
- Participates in global and local networks in which shares and discovers learning and best practices.
- Cares about the autonomy of his team while giving continuity and follow-up to the processes in order to establish points of improvement.
- Evaluates processes and makes evidence-based decisions.

### **Main challenges**

- Strengthen the skills training of the teaching staff.
- Promote peer-to-peer learning spaces.
- Build a culture of autonomy that aims at academic excellence and commitment.
- Establish purpose and coherence in evaluations to reduce the fear of assessment.

### **Best practices**

- **Define internal work policies:** To allow adaptation to new realities and autonomy.
- **Transform evaluation:** Contextualizing it, establishing priorities, and working as a team. Seeking an evidence-based evaluation focused on the development of competencies.
- **Consolidate networks and alliances:** To rethink schools and establish shared visions.



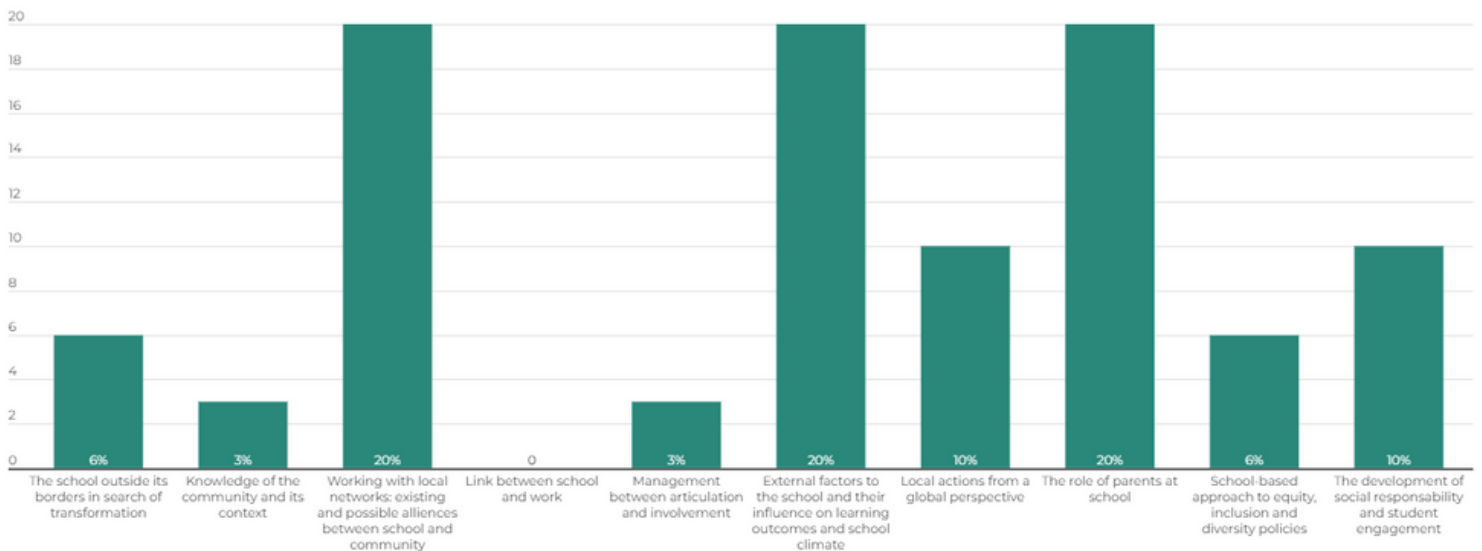


# Community Outreach

- **Initial discussions:**

This group focused on the relevant role of external community factors and actors in understanding the impact of school climate. This recognizes the need to create new spaces for interaction, establish the needs of the community and the school to join efforts, and strengthen trust as possible paths for action. Thus, setting up new networks between the different interests of family, community, and school will allow building tools to develop initiatives measuring the impact on student learning.

- **Survey results:**



- **Subtopics chosen:**

Based on initial discussions, the school principals chose these subtopics:

1. The Role of parents at the school
2. Working with global networks: Alliances
3. External factors to the school and their influence on learning outcomes and school climate

These topics answer the needs mentioned above that drive the search for new alliances, involve families, and recognize the impact of these interactions in the school.

- **Experts' voices:**

To address this topic, we had the privilege of counting on two esteemed guest experts: **Ankit Arora** from Saarthi Education Foundation and **Carmen Pellicer** from Fundación Trilema.



**1. The leader must demonstrate openness to collaboration**, actively seek opportunities for parental engagement, and explore different ways to connect with the community.

**2. Plurality in leadership allows us to understand that we are better together than alone**, and therefore the management model must be a shared one where intense linkages make management effective.

**3. Cultivating a culture of collaboration requires intentional prioritization in the school.** By placing collaboration on the agenda, we can establish mechanisms to coordinate with external organizations, engage diverse stakeholders within the school community, and evaluate outcomes effectively.

- **Conclusions of the questions:**

### **Why the school principal's role is crucial?**

- It is the crucial activator in the generation of strong links between the school, parents and other organizations or actors.
- Facilitates actions and projects to encourage teachers/students to look for what is working in other countries and industries.
- Promotes proposals in the school and projects seeking to humanize the school.
- Understands cultural and contextual practices to be connected to the needs of the community.

### **Main challenges**

- Establish trust to re-establish links between school teams, parents and the community.
- Generate a work culture, a methodology based on collaboration.
- Social changes or family difficulties that affect institutional dynamics, student attendance at school and the value of education for parents.
- Need for a flexible curriculum that can address the heterogeneity of students and student trajectories

### **Best practices**

- **Parents are part of the school:** Deepening in the professions of parents to invite them to school activities, also organize working groups of parents with well-defined approaches to action.
- **Community in the curriculum:** Articulation of contextual issues with the curriculum and classroom dynamics.
- **Community challenges:** Implement challenges that solve community problems with mentors that strengthen trust between organizations.

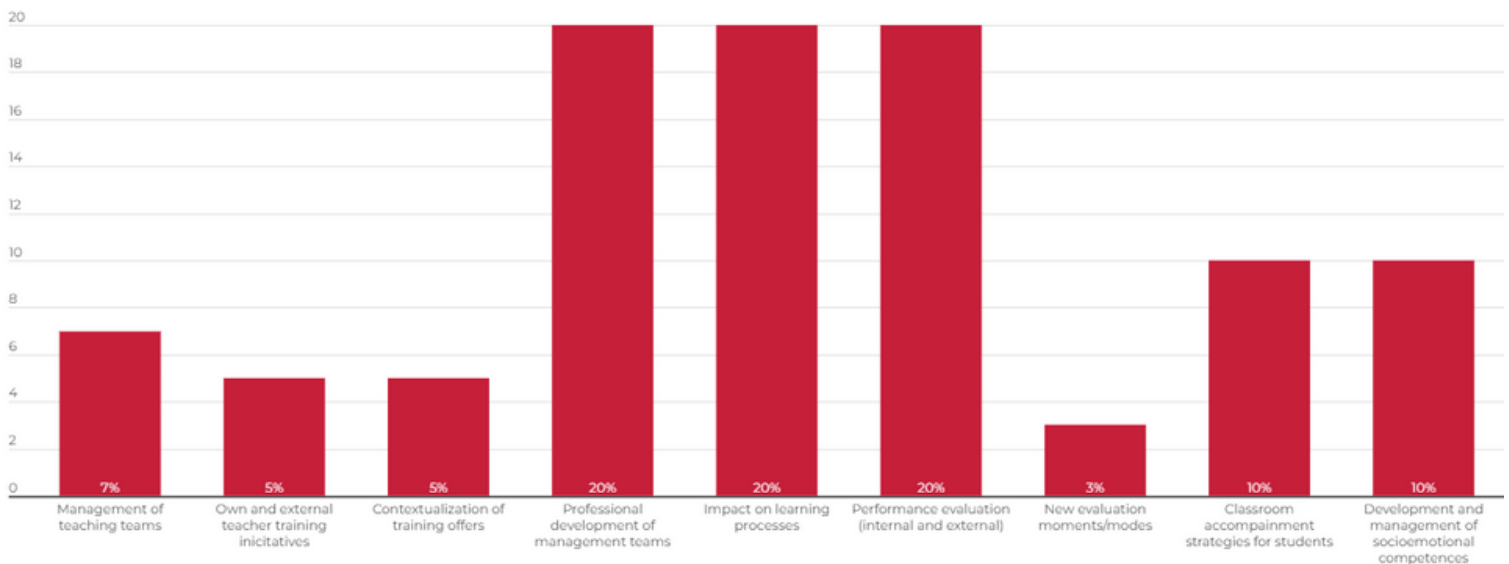
# Professional Development and Learning Outcomes



- **Initial discussions:**

The group recognizes that team training is a priority, especially regarding teachers. Although this formative aspect is visible in the academic offerings of the government and universities, there are few connections with the indicators on which they are evaluated. Furthermore, the lack of time, resources, motivation, and the misalignment with the school's needs make professional development a challenge for school teams. Thus, a shared vision that recognizes training in time, performance, and growth opportunities is necessary.

- **Survey results:**



- **Subtopics chosen:**

Based on initial discussions, subtopics chosen by the school principals are:

1. Professional development of management teams
2. Impact on learning processes
3. Performance evaluation (Internal and external)

The selection of these three topics underscores the importance of professional development as an ongoing and essential process. They highlight the significance of experiential training and the necessity to measure its impact on learning, both within the school community and in external contexts. These topics collectively emphasize the value of continuous growth and improvement in professional practice within the school environment.

- **Experts' voices:**

In this group, our guest speakers, **Cheryl Ann Fernando** from Pemimpin GSL in Malaysia and **Veronica Cabezas** from Elige Educar, shared their valuable insights and projects implemented in their respective countries, shedding light on professional development and learning outcomes.

The key takeaways from their presentations and the debate that followed the conversation are:



**1. Macro trends in education can significantly impact the daily challenges** faced by schools and the broader educational community. It is crucial to be aware of and adapt to these trends to effectively address them.

**2. The support and maintenance of professional development initiatives are vital**, and collaboration with civil society organizations, universities, and municipalities can play a crucial role in ensuring their success.

**3. The challenge lies in sustaining improvement programs over time.** To overcome this, it is important to establish learning networks and identify specific learning outcomes that align with the school's needs. This approach enables the development of scalable initiatives that can be sustained in the long run.

- **Conclusions of the questions:**

### **Why the school principal's role is crucial?**

- It is the key to inspire and challenge their team to generate a sense of belonging and commitment.
- Knows the purpose of the teacher's life and the school to identify learning gaps and promote professional development.
- Encourages regular reflection (with the team) to provide new learning paths that respond to new educational scenarios.
- The principal is knowledgeable enough to provide the technical assistance needed by teachers.

### **Main challenges**

- Difficulty in generating a sense of ownership and involving new team members in the process.
- Getting the teacher to change his or her role to that of a student and break the barrier of fear of taking risks.
- Difficulty in focusing on the long term with daily urgencies and coordinating time. Create strategies to measure teaching innovation, teachers still do not trust the feedback they receive from each other and think that external feedback is more valuable.

### **Best practices**

- **Monitoring and data analysis:** Evaluation systems based on instructional leadership, evaluation cylinder for teachers; at the beginning of the cycle, they evaluate where they are and what their objectives are, and at the end of the cycle, they reevaluate to see where they are now.
- **Periodic team meetings:** Work on strategic themes and transversal projects that allow addressing central themes that involve the whole school promoting instances of team meetings, and generating instances of observation and feedback among peers.
- **Recognize good teaching practices**



# GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

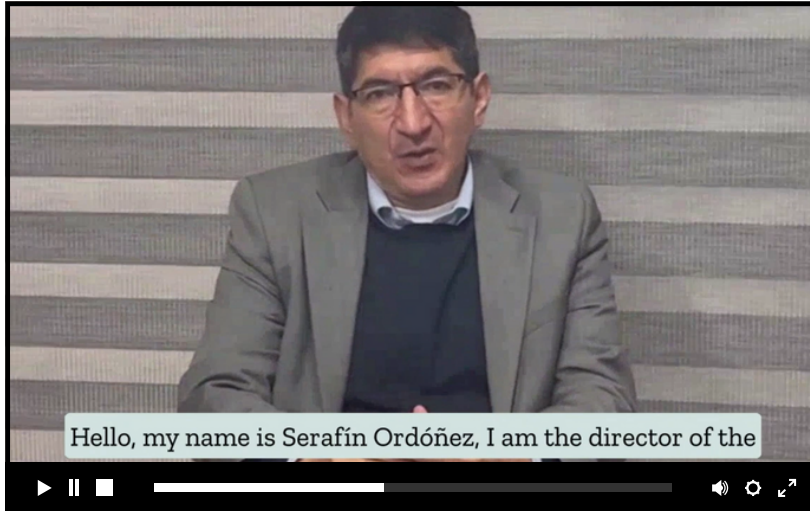
As a network of school principals and educational experts, we recognize the challenges faced in our leadership roles. This report presents key findings and insights on school leadership, community outreach, and professional development. By sharing these challenges and best practices, we aim to foster collaboration and support among school leaders, enabling them to develop effective leadership strategies. Through the exchange of knowledge and experiences, we seek to empower school principals to transform their schools and enhance student outcomes and so keeping in mind the topics of conversation during 2022 these are some best practices for school principals:

**1** Challenges in promoting peer-to-peer feedback, autonomy, and reducing assessment fear can be addressed through the implementation of **defined work policies**. By establishing clear guidelines and expectations, school leaders can foster a **learning culture that encourages personal development and active participation**. School principals should strive to understand their teams on a personal level, fostering commitment and a shared vision among staff members.

**2** **Re-establishing trust with the educational community** and addressing social and family difficulties that impact institutional dynamics can be achieved through community engagement and involvement. By incorporating community challenges into the curriculum, participating in local networks, and actively engaging parents in school activities, school leaders can foster openness, recognition, and opportunities for collaboration. Building strategic alliances and demonstrating the value of working together can contribute to a stronger institutional core.

**3** Overcoming challenges related to changing traditional strategies, dedicating time to professional development amidst urgent demands, and effectively measuring the impact of learning requires the implementation of several best practices. School leaders should **recognize and celebrate good team and teaching practices, conduct periodic team meetings to share impactful learnings, and utilize monitoring and data analysis tools**. By prioritizing professional growth and continuous improvement, school leaders can drive positive change and enhance the institutional core.

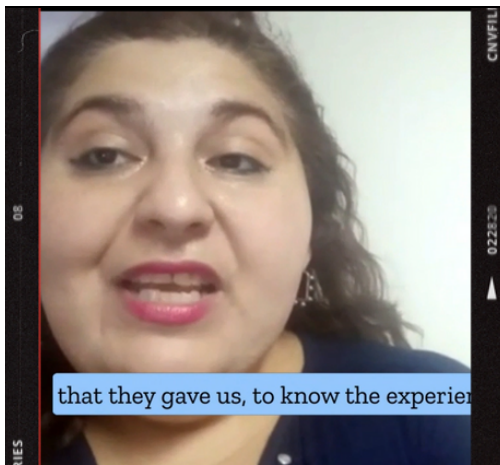
# SCHOOL PRINCIPALS EXPERIENCES



Serafín Ordóñez, Colombia - La Giralda School



Rob Ford, Moldova - Heritage international School



Mabel Valdez, Argentina - School 253 Israel State



Kavita Sanghvi, India - SVKM's CNM School



Manuel Urrutia, Chile - María Auxiliadora Polytechnic Institute



Madina Woche, Kenya - Maikona Girls School



# Featured events 2022



Pre-congress of the "Transforming Education Summit" organized by **UNESCO in Paris**.

Presentation by Agustín Porres and Lucila Malnatti entitled at the UC Education Summit.

## SLN at UNGA Summit Week:

In September, we were invited to present our network at the United Nations General Assembly in New York



Editorial article for the Spain magazine "Cuadernos de pedagogía".



The network contributed to the GEM 2023 Report Consultation organized by the Organization of Ibero-American States and ProFuturo.



Consultancy for UNESCO on its document "Thematic Action Area 3: Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession".



Thank you all for being part of this journey!



## GET INVOLVED!

🔊 If you are a School Principal join our School Leadership Network 2023 🔊

As an SLN member, you will be able to:

- ◆ Attend Online Global Meetings and engage in deeper discussions with a global network of School Principals and Experts.
  - ◆ Contribute to UNESCO's GEM Report 2024/5 which will focus on education leadership.
- ◆ Share Resources and Practices related to leadership practices to inspire and support other leadership roles in schools across the globe through the TTF Knowledge Hub and Teacher Resource Center

[REGISTER HERE](#)

[2023 VISION](#)



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<https://schoolleadershipne.wixsite.com/website>