Placing Learners at the Heart of Education

Our annual report for 2021
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"By working more collaboratively than ever before, we’re gaining the momentum we need to tackle the big challenges still ahead of us.”

—Dr Charles CHEN Yidan
Opening statements | Our annual report for 2021
Dr Charles CHEN Yidan
Our Founder and Chairman of the Board of Directors
This year, we reflect on five years of the Yidan Prize. It’s my great pleasure to say that since 2016 we’ve welcomed 11 Yidan Prize laureates. They are evolving the theory and practice of teaching and learning for the next generation, and beyond.

**Today, we’re growing our family and our reach**

In 2021, we expanded our Judging Committee to include new voices—giving our panels a broader, even more diverse perspective. We found new ways to bring our laureates and luminaries together, whether virtually or in person. Many took part in research and events with organizations like the Asian Development Bank, Harvard University, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), University of Cambridge, and University of Oxford.

As a foundation, we’re proud to forge these connections and strengthen our voice in the global conversation around education. By working more collaboratively than ever before, we’re gaining the momentum we need to tackle the big challenges still ahead of us.

**We have an opportunity to reimagine the future of education—and we must grasp it**

As the world still reels from pandemic disruption, this is a moment to rethink education systems.

In November, UNESCO released its Futures of Education report, gathering the opinions of more than one million people and education experts—including our Council of Luminaries. The report asks what education could look like in 2050 and concludes that we need “a new social contract for education”.

We can shape a society where every child has access to education, to schools that are inclusive and innovative, and to teachers who are determined to help every child learn.

**To do that, we need to put learners at the heart of education**

It’s a core principle that shines through the work of every one of our laureates—whether they’re understanding the neuroscience of language development, designing flexible online degree courses, or nurturing networks that keep vulnerable pupils in school. Their projects show that every student matters, and can reach their full potential with personalized support. Our 2021 laureates, Professor Eric A. Hanushek and Dr Rukmini Banerji, reinforce these principles once again.

Eric’s research shows us that it’s how much people learn—not how long they’re in school—that makes the biggest difference to both individual wellbeing and a country’s economic health. He points to quality, child-centered teaching as the key to unlocking those fruitful futures.

As CEO of Pratham, Rukmini’s driven even wider adoption of their Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach. TaRL gives children a solid grounding in reading, writing, and arithmetic by grouping them by ability and progress, rather than age. Without it, too many children were leaving schools in rural India without basic skills.

When every child can learn at their own pace, guided by excellent teachers, and supported by fair, efficient, and flexible education systems, not only are they better off for it, but we tap vast pools of potential. After all, these are the generations who could solve our biggest problems: from global inequality to climate change.
**If we want to keep supercharging our progress, we must embrace innovation**

We award prizes for both research and development—theory and practice—because they're a virtuous circle. One informs the other, so we keep iterating and improving all the time. But we need to speed up this cycle—no easy feat in education systems, which tend to evolve slowly and cautiously.

To accelerate, we must focus on ideas that scale well, adapt to different regions and environments, and are thoroughly rooted in testing and learning. Connecting people and sharing what works, and why, is central to our work as a Foundation. In 2022, we’ll keep strengthening our networks and using our collective voice and influence to shape the future of education.
After all, we have a blueprint for creating a better world

Working with the Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Human Capital this year, we examined 70 years of research into the impact of education. From what we learned, we outlined the steps that could transform how we learn—and live.

Those steps include investment in early years support that gets children primed to learn. A focus on training more, and better, teachers. And using all the technology at hand, under the guidance of one of those teachers, so students can drive their own learning and broaden their horizons.

With this increasing wealth of information showing us that education is the fundamental force for change, we inform and influence policymakers to invest in all our tomorrows.

As we look to the next five years and beyond, I put my trust in our community

I offer my heartfelt thanks to our Board of Directors, Advisory Committee, Judging Committee, and Secretariat, as well as our laureates, luminaries, and partners. While we still have a long way to go, I know that, with this extraordinary team working together, we’ll keep moving closer to our goal of creating a better world through education.
Dr Qian Tang
Our Chairman of the Advisory Committee
Last year, I talked about our five-year plan, and set out our ambitious path. This year, I’m pleased to say, we’ve taken sizeable steps down this road, strengthening the Secretariat and Judging Committee, and expanding the Foundation’s influence.

The last five years have been a story of swift and steady progress
And expansion, too. The impact of our laureates' work extends globally—and we attract nominees from a wide range of disciplines. That open field is important: everyone has the right to a quality education, so we need a broad scope of ideas to make real impact.

The Foundation also has more, and richer, partnerships than ever before, including with Asian Development Bank, Brookings Institution, the International Education Funders Group, and UNESCO. In his first year, our Director of Partnerships, Dr Christopher Thomas, worked tirelessly with the support of the Secretariat to foster and deepen those relationships. Whether commissioning reports, taking part in conferences, or creating powerful content like podcasts and films, we're harnessing the power of community.

Because working together can take us further than we could ever go alone
The pandemic exposed and exacerbated inequities that have long existed in education. But the model of the prize shows us how we can start solving them.

When we champion innovative ideas, fund transformative projects, share results, and demonstrate scale and effectiveness, we bring theory and practice together. Research should not be restricted to universities, but tried and tested in the real world—making grassroots changes where they matter most.

As the Advisory Committee, our role is to keep the Foundation’s eyes on exactly that: what impact are laureates’ projects having, directly and indirectly? What else could we do to reach the countries that need help most—particularly in the developing world? These are our measures for creating a better world through education.

The Foundation has laid strong roots; now it can branch out even further
The past two years have been especially challenging for the whole education community. It’s testament to the strength of Dr Charles CHEN Yidan’s vision, and the passion and commitment of the Board of Directors, Advisory Committee, Judging Committee, and Secretariat that the Foundation has continued to thrive even under these conditions.

The next five years will undoubtedly present both new issues to tackle and new avenues to explore. As advisors, we’re always thinking about how we can develop the Foundation’s role in the future. To help us do that, we’ll continue to highlight strengths, areas for improvement, and new opportunities for the Foundation as it blossoms into this exciting new phase of possibility.
Dr Koichiro Matsuura
Our Chairman of the Judging Committee
We don’t set a narrow theme or geographical boundaries for the Yidan Prize. As judges, that presents us with a challenge: how to award just two prizes when we have such a broad field of outstanding candidates. But it’s also a great strength. By encouraging the widest possible range of nominations, we can highlight the most exciting ideas in education, regardless of disciplines or borders—ideas that really make a difference.

**In 2021, the judging process was one of our most diverse yet**

Our nominees came from 50 different countries and territories, working on projects that spanned over 130. We reviewed more nominations from across Africa and Asia than ever before, and received our highest number of education research nominations to date.

We were also delighted to welcome five new judges: Ms Vicky Colbert, Dr Elizabeth King, Professor Ju-Ho Lee, Ms Kiran Bir Sethi, and Professor Zhang Min-xuan. They bring valuable new perspectives, and strengthen the voices of both women and representatives from Asian and Latin American regions within our group.

**Together, we combed through ideas that look at education from every angle**

Like policy. Delivery systems. Technology. Inclusion. Nominees are rethinking education systems from top to bottom to tackle inequities and empower learners. And from those many themes, we saw two strong trends emerge: education in society, and a focus on teaching. Indeed, transforming teaching to close achievement gaps through personalized learning lies at the heart of both our laureates’ projects this year.

**It’s our privilege to review work that’s changing lives**

In 2021, we also asked for a short video submission from every nominee. It was our great pleasure to hear directly from them about their projects and plans. I know I speak for all our judges when I say we’re so grateful for every nominator’s and supporter’s time and effort in sending us so many excellent nominations.

If you’ve never made or supported a nomination before, I urge you to consider doing so. We can never have too many bold, effective ideas—especially as we have less than 10 years to meet the UN’s Sustainable Development Goal 4: quality education for all. The Yidan Prize exists to put resources and a platform in the hands of people who can create a better world through education. But we can only do that if we know about them.
About the Yidan Prize Foundation

How we’re building a better world through education
Our work and vision
We’re a global foundation committed to creating a better world through education. Where learning flourishes, so does society; we established the Yidan Prize in 2016 to champion the changemakers making that possible.

Our theory of change is rooted in innovation and community
A theory of change explains the methods we use, and how we expect them to meet our vision.

We know from decades of research that education leads to people living safer, healthier, longer lives. Every intervention that improves access to quality education builds a better world. To meet our goals then, we need to find the most effective ideas, and spread them far and wide.

We recognize the brightest minds in education and build a community around them. A community that promotes collaboration, shares what works, and is as strong in research and testing as it is in practical application.

That’s why our prize spans two areas:

**Education Research**
The theory of learning—science, psychology, statistics—that can help educators gain a more methodical understanding of their approaches.

**Education Development**
The practice of learning—new methods, ways to make education more widespread—so we can champion techniques that work.
Each year, we award our laureates a gold medal, a cash prize of HK $15 million and a project fund of HK $15 million (shared equally for teams) to help them scale up their work.

Crucially, we also create connections: from our laureates to our Council of Luminaries to the wider pool of people who attend our events. We’re building a community—one with the power to change the way the world learns.

Our success is our community’s success. We’ll measure ourselves through their work—from the students they reach to the improvements they see.
Our medals, logos, and their meanings

Designed by ink-brush artist Dr Kan Tai-Keung, our logo echoes our name, and centers on two Chinese characters.

The first is yi (一), the Mandarin character for “one”, suggesting the unity of our global community.

Then dan (丹), here finished with the red bloom of a lotus flower to represent a loyal heart. Together, these strokes create a door: a door to a better world, opened by education.
The *yi* symbol also forms the foundation of our gold medals

In both medals, you’ll again see “—”. A reminder for our laureates that our community is with them in spirit. And both depict a pine tree growing from a mountain rock; even from the toughest foundations, the evergreen branches of education can spread.

For Education Research, a figure meditates on the future

The medal shows a person posing meditatively, looking into the light on the horizon—forward into a better world, forged with a new understanding of education. And on the reverse, *The Thirteen Classics*: Chinese wisdom bound in a Western style to reflect the global reach of our prize winners.

For Education Development, the figure is ready to act

This time, they’re shown standing—they’ve gathered the understanding they need, and they’re ready to take it forward. For this medal, the reverse shows the twenty books of the Analects of Confucius to reflect the wisdom of the Chinese classics, passed down by expert educators across generations.
Our laureates, and how they’re putting learners at the heart of education

Introducing our 2021 laureates, and updating you on progress from previous years
Looking back on five years of Yidan Prize laureates
In 2021, we welcomed two new laureates—and once again broadened our horizons

Our laureate community has grown to include 11 changemakers: five men and six women from across the education world. They come from India, Bangladesh, Colombia, Zimbabwe, the US, and the UK—though their reach extends far beyond where they’re based. Their specialisms are just as diverse, as is the wealth of experience they can pour into tackling the challenges in education today.

Among our laureates are experts in girls’ education, play-based learning, STEM, neuroscience, psychology, economics, statistics, and educational technology. A broad range of disciplines gives us a broad range of ideas—as well as showing us crucial common threads. And one thing all our laureates agree on is that quality education means putting students’ needs first.

Our laureates’ projects demonstrate how great ideas can adapt

Perhaps it’s CAMFED’s Learner Guides offering individual support to vulnerable girls. Professor Usha Goswami uncovering how we learn so we can develop better teaching for children with language disorders. Or Pratham’s mastery-based programs, where children move up a level when they’re ready—not according to their age. From self-paced online learning to flexible field guides for teachers in remote village schools, all our laureates develop projects that are inclusive by design.

Over the years we’ve seen that student-centered learning leads to better outcomes—and that we don’t have to sacrifice personalization at scale. When our judges comb through compelling nominations each year, they’re looking for future-oriented, innovative, transformative, and sustainable ideas. As we look ahead to the next five years of laureates, we don’t know what those ideas will be—but we can predict that keeping learners at the heart of education is a core principle that’s here to stay.

And they show us the power of personalized learning

Take BRAC, who supports caregivers with play-based activities that bolster young children’s learning and development. Going remote isn’t easy when there’s little connectivity and limited resources. But the power of the ‘Pashe Achhi’ programme comes from making a connection—something that can also happen over a short phone call with a skilled facilitator. The team’s ingenuity opened the door to another way of having an impact when in-person visits weren’t possible.

In a world with many different constraints and cultures to navigate, adaptable ideas are the ones that will spread and scale—and keep moving us in the right direction.
Professor Eric A. Hanushek
Our 2021 Education Research laureate
We once thought of the economics of education as what goes into it: government spending, years of schooling, students’ backgrounds. Thanks to Eric and his colleagues, we’ve flipped that equation. Now we talk about quality education for all, and we measure it by how students are learning.

For Eric, *quality* changes the game: both for individuals and for entire economies. We talked to him about what that means for education systems, and where we can focus our efforts to build a better world.
“Quality drives growth, not the other way around.”

With Ludger Woessmann, Eric mapped global benchmarks like the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) against different countries’ economic growth. They demonstrated that growth almost entirely depends on how skilled the population is. In other words, by how well they learned.

Influenced by Eric’s work, the UN now refers to “effective learning outcomes” in the targets for meeting Sustainable Development Goal 4: quality education. And as far as Eric’s concerned, that underpins everything: education spurs growth, and together these two things lay the groundwork for the other 15 goals.

“There’s no way any country can improve if it doesn’t know already where it’s at”

In Eric’s view, global assessment programs spur action and establish baselines. Inevitably, they also lead us to think about teaching quality—and Eric thinks that’s exactly what we should do.

Take the USA. Right now, its overall education performance is below average among rich countries. Eric’s research estimates that replacing just the bottom 8% of teachers would catapult it to near the top of the list. Combine that with boosting the skills and motivation of good teachers, and you have a formidable force for public—and economic—good.

But what about lower-income countries? In many, measures like PISA struggle to track progress—the results are, in Eric’s words, “essentially at the level of guessing”. So that’s where we need to focus our greatest efforts. Until all learners in all countries have access to well-resourced schools with well-trained teachers, some economies will lag behind and the world won’t get any fairer.
We need to see learning as something that starts in school, but doesn’t stop there
Every year, jobs vanish, replaced by technology. Meanwhile, new ones spring up. After all, who expected to be a drone pilot 10 years ago? And how do we equip each generation to face the future when we don’t know exactly what it’ll include?

Eric points to student-centred learning that helps each individual develop a strong set of universal basic skills—in literacy, numeracy, and science—as well as the capacity to adapt. To thrive as adults, they’ll need to keep picking up new skills, and building on the ones they already have. So no matter what their working world looks like, they’re ready to take part.

We should keep sharing good ideas, as long as we’re sure they work
As a member of our Council of Luminaries and now a laureate, Eric’s a great believer in spreading good ideas. But he sounds a note of caution:

One of the standard problems with education policy is that many people have good ideas, and some of them catch on and are broadly used, but never really assessed. The bad ones are replaced only when someone has a different new idea.

That attention to detail is a key part of his plans for his Yidan Prize project funding
Eric plans to establish a fellowship for young researchers in sub-Saharan Africa. The goal is to produce high-quality, locally-relevant research and translate it into plans that policymakers can easily put into practice.

It’s research that, at heart, is deeply optimistic: it illuminates a path for improving not just education, but the world we all live in. It’s that determination to tackle the bigger picture that drew our judging panel to Eric’s work, and it’s what makes us so excited to work with him as a laureate.

He gives the example of low-cost private schools which, in many circumstances, help developing countries offer quality education to more people than the state system can alone. But not all these schools effectively educate their students, and information is often incomplete. For example, while most sub-Saharan governments make sure private schools participate in national testing, only a minority make the results public. Yet to improve schools we need to continually assess what’s working—and what isn’t.
Dr Rukmini Banerji
Our 2021 Education Development laureate
“Data needs human interaction to make it come alive.”

Pratham’s Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) revolutionized data collection in India. Every year it surveys 600,000 families in 100 days to establish how children are learning in rural districts. But for Rukmini, the process is more important than the data. She illustrates her point with an anecdote, describing how she met an elderly woman who told her: “a survey is what people do when they don’t know us. What you’re doing is finding out something—and we’re all finding out together.”

In Rukmini’s view, when you ask people to weave stories from information, you’re getting them to own the issues—and find ways to fix problems.

Rukmini has dedicated her professional life to understanding gaps in education and closing them. Previously a member of the leadership team and now CEO of NGO Pratham, her work has changed the way millions of children in India and beyond learn: shaping the curriculum around the student so no-one gets left behind.

Although she’s our development laureate, Rukmini talks a great deal about using research to solve real-world problems. We sat down with her to talk about connecting theory to practice—and why it’s important to put a face to every data point.
Thinking about the issues from the child’s point of view reveals solutions

ASER threw up a clear problem: some children were going to school but couldn’t read, write, or do arithmetic to their grade level. In fact, by grade three, nearly 70% were falling behind. And if they got further into their primary education without catching up on those foundational skills, they were unlikely to pick them up later.

So Pratham asked: what if children were not grouped by grade, but by learning needs? They developed the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach, making it totally child-centered. Teachers work with children in groups and individually based on learning levels, not age or grade, to focus on the basics. This approach has proven to be effective and efficient at helping children acquire basic reading and arithmetic at a low cost.

Over time, more than a dozen Indian state governments have worked in partnership with Pratham to deliver TaRL; the NGO either sends instructors to help, or helps to train the teachers already in schools.
Ideas can travel around the world if we test and learn

Much of Rukmini’s early work at Pratham grew out of her experience at graduate school in Chicago. She worked with children from low-income families while the city was deep in the throes of education reform—building links to local communities and testing new approaches. Would a similar structure work in India—a country with a heavily centralized education system, not to mention religious and social conflict?

For Rukmini, it’s always possible to translate and scale ideas by adapting their strengths to fit the local environment. Joining Pratham, she brought her research expertise to their work with pre-schools. The NGO launched 150 community pre-school centres in poor areas, led by young local people and sending the message out into the community that these centres were inclusive, joyful learning spaces. The result? Because local families could sign their children up for pre-school activities, and found it so worthwhile, most children progressed to the next stage of school. And 150 centres gradually became 3,500—transforming the lives of thousands of disadvantaged children.

“For young people see what others are doing, see them enjoying it—and it spreads,” Rukmini explains. That momentum matters: “if you have a country where many people say ‘let’s go for it’, many problems will be solved.”

Similarly, ASER and TaRL have spread, with adaptations, to countries across South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as emerging in Latin America.

For Rukmini, it’s about inspiring action, not advocacy

“Advocacy puts the onus on someone else. We need to think about the citizen’s role. Who’s responsible for change?” Pratham works widely with families, especially mothers, to help them see education as something far bigger than formal schooling: giving children the foundation and the opportunity to thrive, building social and thinking skills through play and interaction with others.

After all, today’s children have different challenges to their parents’ generation. Rukmini sees families and communities as more flexible than school systems—so asks if they can force those slow-moving systems to keep up with the rate of change.

A future-focused, scalable, and sustainable approach to change is exactly what we look for in our laureates. As she steps into her role and also joins our Council of Luminaries, we look forward to adding Rukmini’s voice and experience to our community, and amplifying her ideas even further.
Professor Carl Wieman
Our 2020 Education Research laureate
Carl’s work brings together ideas on learning theory, science instruction, and technology. In the classroom, he’s showing that techniques that develop independent decision-making in students yield better learning outcomes. And online, his work is getting quality STEM education to millions of students—while at the same time deepening his research into how simulations can impact teaching and learning in the developing world.

Carl launched PhET Interactive Simulations in 2002. Since then, it’s delivered over 1 billion simulations in 93 languages to learners of physics, chemistry, mathematics, earth sciences, and biology. His prize funding was earmarked to expand the platform.
In 2021, PhET launched PhET Global, reaching millions more learners with more content

The team worked with secondary school teachers in the US, Canada, Latin America, and Africa to develop new content for the interactive platform. They also expanded the number of languages available:

Now 50 million Yoruba speakers in and around Nigeria have access to quality online STEM learning they can master at their own pace.

Meanwhile, Carl is developing research aimed at answering two important questions: how well do students learn predictive frameworks through simulation-based activities? And how well does this learning process transfer to the classroom? As part of his team, post-doctoral researcher Dr Leonora Kaldaras has been busy conducting interviews with students to understand whether simulations help them to make sense of scientific concepts through mathematics—with promising early results.
Following our introduction, PhET secured funding from the Mastercard Foundation

PhET is being supported by the Mastercard Foundation through a US$1.5 million commitment. This partnership is part of the Mastercard Foundation effort to improve learning outcomes for all learners enabling them to ultimately gain dignified and fulfilling work. This partnership will enable the accessibility, localization, and effective use of PhET simulations in partnership with the STEM education community.

Beginning 2022, the program will establish the Africa PhET Translators Network, a cyclical program that will recruit and build a community of translators across Africa. In addition, the PhET Researcher-Practitioner Webinar Series will be launched to transfer capacity to participants and provide support to them.

In 2022 and beyond

Carl’s team is already welcoming applications for the PhET Fellowship, seeking 24 fellows based in Africa and Latin America. The 18-month program will include more than 80 hours of professional development and over 70 hours of leadership practice.
Lucy Lake and Angeline Murimirwa
Our 2020 Education Development laureates
CAMFED (the Campaign for Female Education), began as a Zimbabwe scholarship program supporting 32 girls in the early 1990s. By 2021, the organization extended its support to more than 4.8 million children through a network of partner schools in Zimbabwe, Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia. CAMFED has grown into a movement spearheaded by the young women once supported through school. They’re united in the CAMFED Association—now around 200,000 members strong—a peer support network helping girls to transition to independent livelihoods. It also offers a platform for young women to lead on the big challenges in their societies—from child marriage, and girls’ exclusion from education, to climate change.

As CEO and Executive Director—Africa, Lucy and Angeline were our first team laureates. They’ve spent their first year expanding the organization’s Learner Guide program.
Learner Guides spot girls at risk of dropping out, and help them stay in school

They’re former CAMFED scholars who commit to around two years of volunteering in their local schools. Having experienced educational barriers first-hand, they’re quick to spot girls who might be struggling with family pressures or learning challenges. To keep them in education, Learner Guides offer peer support, mentoring, and deliver a life skills and wellbeing curriculum called “My Better World”.

Photo credit: CAMFED/Eliza Powell
Learner Guides also benefit from training and support
Which is why CAMFED is using its prize funds to build a digital hub. It’s a platform for any Guide to go for resources and peer-to-peer networking, as well as a tool for online reviews and reporting.

The Learner Guide Hub will make it easier to recruit and train more than 100,000 guides

This year, CAMFED worked closely with end users across five countries to build a detailed plan for the hub. Although the pandemic meant more of this consultation took place online than they had intended, that had unexpected benefits: remote discussions actually helped people to take part and dig deeper.

CAMFED has now brought onboard a Chief Digital Officer, who is working with advisors across the CAMFED Association to define the digital architecture and technology for the hub, and manage its successful implementation.

In 2022 and beyond
The CAMFED team will be working hard on the platform development side of the project. They aim to announce the hub’s launch in mid-2022. They’ll also be tackling issues that came out of the consultation, like increasing digital literacy, and mapping out how the Learner Guide Hub will continue expanding after launch.
Professor Usha Goswami
Our 2019 Education Research laureate
Usha’s work goes to the heart—and the start—of learning. Her research asks: how do we first pick up language? And what’s happening in the brain when a child’s language learning is developmentally different from most of their peers? The more we know about the earliest stages of education, the better we can design interventions that support all children’s learning—and act faster to stop some students falling behind.
We’re getting a picture of how language learning develops

Usha’s project uses neuroimaging to see what’s happening in the brain when infants respond to spoken language. She and her team are gathering data from children who show typical learning patterns and children with confirmed developmental language disorders (DLD).

Although UK lockdowns slowed down the pace of the project this year, they reopened their EEG labs in the summer, and—working within pandemic restrictions that limited them to just three sessions a week—collected scans from a number of children to start setting the baseline for comparing the data.
Usha’s work is revealing both the roots of language disorders, and how to identify them
Not all learning disorders are the same. Usha’s work shows there are differences between dyslexia and DLD—and gives us the tools to spot both. A more accurate diagnosis gives us a better understanding of specific language-learning needs. Ultimately, Usha plans to develop advice for caregivers, teachers, and therapists that will make for more powerful, personalized support for every child.

In 2022 and beyond
Usha’s team will expand their sample group for the project, specifically working with more children with DLD. She expects to complete the project in 2025.
Sir Fazle Hasan Abed
Our 2019 Education Development laureate
As founder of BRAC, one of the world’s largest NGOs, Sir Fazle was widely recognized in his lifetime for his decades of work championing play-based learning and education as an essential catalyst for change. Sir Fazle sadly passed away in December 2019. He’s represented as a laureate by BRAC’s International Executive Director, Mr Shameran Abed, and Dr Erum Mariam, Executive Director of the BRAC Institute of Educational Development.

BRAC splits its Yidan Prize funding over two projects: a remote learning project developed in response to the pandemic, and daycare programs that bring play-based caregiving to communities in Bangladesh, Tanzania, and Uganda.
For children in crisis, play-based learning helps build resilience and wellbeing

‘Pashe Achhi’ means ‘by your side’ in Bengali—and that’s exactly where the BRAC team have been for families in Rohingya camps. They swung into action when the pandemic hit, pouring their expertise into a new way of keeping in touch when in-person visits became impossible. They set up regular, 20-minute calls for parents of children aged 0-2, in which they offer educational and emotional support to families—including rhymes, stories, play activities, mental health activities, and public health awareness.

In March 2021, the team’s agility was tested again by a devastating fire in the Cox’s Bazar camp. For a time, the program switched gears to offer immediate humanitarian support. Since July, the team has been working on developing the model within the Cox’s Bazar host community.
BRAC’s play lab projects enrich early education and empower female leadership

In Bangladesh, BRAC is positioning young women as micro-entrepreneurs with their own home-based daycare businesses. Recruited from their local communities, BRAC trains them in play-based caregiving, and helps them get started. Young children benefit from joyful learning experiences that set them up for school, while their mothers—mostly garment workers—can access safe, quality childcare.

BRAC is also driving early childhood development projects in sub-Saharan Africa. In Tanzania, the team is working with state and local governments to bring play labs to primary schools, with 15 built this year and another 15 under construction. Meanwhile the BRAC Uganda team has set up field offices in the Rhino Camp refugee settlement, as well as 10 classrooms offering spaces to 400 children. They’re now recruiting and training play leaders from both the refugee and local communities.

In 2022 and beyond

BRAC will keep working with prize funds and in partnership with other organizations to develop Pashe Achhi and expand its play lab projects.
Professor Larry Hedges
Our 2018 Education Research laureate
As the saying goes: sometimes it’s hard to see the forest for the trees. Larry’s view is that we too often see education policy based on cherry-picked studies—that is, individual trees—rather than evidence that shows what works across the whole forest.

Larry’s pioneering methods in meta-analysis give us the tools to bring together wide-ranging research across education and draw out common themes and results. The objective: a policymaking process that’s unbiased, rigorous, and scientific. Larry’s prize funding is split across plans to foster collaboration between researchers, and work that’s improving how we design educational studies.

Larry has also served as a Commissioner on the Global Evidence Commission. The committee’s mission is to advance the use of evidence in policy making worldwide. The commission has finished its work and will present its report to the United Nations and member nations early in 2022.
While meeting in person is off the table, Larry’s laid the groundwork for a busy 2022
Since 2020, he’s paused many of his plans to build a community of champions for evidence-based decision-making in education. Collaboration is a job best done in person, and the experts Larry’s reaching out to are based all over the world. Now that travel is slowly coming back on the agenda, his calendar can start filling up again. In the meantime, he’s been speaking at virtual events in the US and Europe to set out the issues and spark the kinds of discussions he’s keen to have in 2022.
And he’s literally writing the book on evaluating education research and development

Larry and Beth Tipton already have a first draft of a book that looks into how to rigorously assess the information we collect from studies and interventions. Throughout 2021, he’s also published a number of papers with colleagues in scholarly journals. He’s particularly focused on research methodology and challenges around replicating results.

In 2022 and beyond

Larry will start to get his collaboration project back underway, as well as finishing his book and continuing to build on the wealth of scholarly research he and his colleagues have delivered this year.
Professor Anant Agarwal
Our 2018 Education Development laureate
As a leader in education technology, Anant saw a different side of the pandemic from most of our laureates—with all eyes on online and hybrid learning. edX, the learning platform he founded with Harvard and MIT, has helped more than 35 million users around the world access over 3,000 free or low-cost courses. Anant’s prize funds went into launching the innovative, stackable undergraduate degree program, MicroBachelors®.

The program was effectively launched in 2020, with the Yidan Prize funding now fully disbursed. In 2021, 2U, Inc. acquired edX’s assets. edX is now operated as a public benefit company, with Anant on board as Chief Open Education Officer.
MicroBachelors makes it possible to gain job-relevant skills while earning college credit

There are plenty of reasons why attending further education in person might be difficult—not least for people who want to build up skills and certifications while they work. MicroBachelors is entirely learner-centered: people develop job-related skills while earning college credits, all at their own pace.

Courses are backed by partnerships with major universities and leading employers like IBM, who this year launched a MicroBachelors program teaching full stack development from scratch.
Although MicroBachelors is barely two years old, students are already completing its first programs

Not all learners will go on to complete a whole degree. Some use credits to qualify for undergraduate programs elsewhere, while others are looking for specific skills to boost on-the-job learning and performance.

Early data from learners who completed a MicroBachelors program said they’d already seen tangible benefits from their courses: new jobs, promotions, or successful applications to traditional schools.

In 2022 and beyond

Anant remains a valued member of our prize community and Council of Luminaries. As educational technology continues to evolve rapidly, we look forward to seeing the next phase of his work unfold.
Professor Carol S. Dweck
Our 2017 Education Research laureate
Carol’s pioneering work in psychology gets to the heart of motivation and attitude to learning, showing us how we can create environments where each student can thrive. Crucially, the measure for growth mindset isn’t only how students feel about their learning—although that’s important—but how that translates into better outcomes.

In 2021, Carol used her prize funding to continue two projects in US schools. One focuses on teacher training and cultural sensitivity, while the other is developing a long-term research bank for mapping the impact of mindsets. As our inaugural research laureate, Carol hoped to complete both this year—but the pandemic had other ideas. Carol now expects to wrap up the projects in summer 2022.
How can teachers foster a classroom culture that helps students reach their full potential?
That's the question Carol and her colleagues Professor Stephanie Fryberg and Professor Mary Murphy, are tackling through the Enhancing Cultural Toolkits and Student Mindsets Teacher Training Institute. The program is coaching teachers to nurture culturally inclusive growth mindsets (CIGM) in their classrooms.

CIGM embeds strong beliefs about students' capacity to contribute ideas and grow their abilities no matter what their background. And it focuses on learning as a continual, iterative process, with plenty of room for trial and error.

With the support of our funding as well as partnerships with the Gates Foundation and the Seattle Public School district, the team is scaling up CIGM teacher training across seven school districts. Spurred by the pandemic, they're also working on hybrid online and face-to-face training to reach more staff.

Of course, they're also collecting data on performance and surveying 600-1,500 students and staff. Carol and the team plan to submit their initial findings to peer-reviewed psychology and education journals in early 2022.
We’ll soon have a US research bank on the long-term impact of growth mindsets
Since 2018, Carol and Professor David Yeager have tracked the long-term impact of growth mindsets in US schools. They aim to produce a first-of-its-kind information bank for the wider research community, including high school and college preparation data from at least 60 schools across the country.

Carol’s also analyzing data on the paths students take based on their backgrounds, their family’s level of education, and their psychological resources. She’s sharpening our picture of where and how inequalities emerge—and how mindset interventions can tackle them.

In 2022 and beyond
Carol and the team will continue to share insights with the global education community. The OECD recently released exciting results from the 2018 PISA tests and surveys, showing widespread prediction from growth mindset to achievement and well-being around the globe. Carol is collaborating with the OECD to host workshops and develop more growth-mindset-related questions in upcoming global assessments—further enriching what we know about unlocking potential in every student.
Vicky Colbert
Our 2017 Education Development laureate
This year, we were delighted when Vicky agreed to join us as a new member of our Judging Committee. Joining the panel for Education Development, Vicky told us she learned a great deal and found the process ‘enriching and inspiring’. We’re grateful to add her valuable perspective as a sociologist, former policymaker, and education development expert to our panel.

As our inaugural development laureate, Vicky has now used all her prize funds for Fundación Escuela Nueva (FEN) projects that benefit learners across some of South America’s most remote, rural, and conflict-scarred districts.
The Escuela Nueva model is rooted in child-centered learning and a new role for the teacher

A powerful example of this is the EN learning guide: a textbook for students, a guide for the teacher, and a curriculum planner in one. It’s a lifeline for resource-strapped teachers, often in one-room schools, encouraging self-paced, self-directed, cooperative learning, and teamwork.

Crucially, FEN trains teachers using the same methodology they’ll use with their students—encouraging working in small groups and at their own pace with a skilled facilitator. When the pandemic hit, the learning guide, with its focus on autonomous learning, became even more crucial. Through print-outs, WhatsApp, and other means teachers connected with their classes as best they could, helping students continue their learning process at home.

While Escuela Nueva might mean ‘new school’ in Spanish, there are now decades of data to show how effective the model is. FEN continues to expand its goals, spreading this way of learning far beyond Colombia to reach some of the world’s most marginalized learners.

The EN Learning Guide is:

- A textbook for students
- A guide for the teacher
- A curriculum planner
Vicky used her funding to spread the model to more districts, and expand a virtual campus for teachers

Some funding went towards training more than 2,200 rural teachers and delivering learning guides to over 57,000 students. Vicky’s team also used part of the prize as matched funding to incentivize Colombian local governments, education authorities, and the private sector to implement Escuela Nueva in more rural schools. That helped to provide quality education to tens of thousands of children who would otherwise have struggled to access it, as well as supporting government peace-building efforts in areas affected by armed conflict.

Vicky also invested in FEN’s capacity for research and development. A significant part of that was strengthening Renueva—a virtual campus that serves as both a remote teacher training hub and community networking resource. Though this launched before the pandemic, it's become even more important and active since. In 2020, the Colombian National Ministry for Education came calling with a plan to train 1,000 teachers in remote locations—adding 1,200 more in 2021. Renueva was a vital tool for making that happen.

In 2022 and beyond

FEN continues its ambitious agenda under Vicky’s leadership. And Vicky will be rolling up her sleeves to join our judges again and discover our 2022 Yidan Prize laureates.
Community and partnerships

Working together to shape the global conversation around education
Council of Luminaries

Coming together when current events keep us worlds apart

When we launched the Council of Luminaries, we'd hoped to bring everyone together within a few months. Some conversations are even more fruitful in person, and many of our luminaries have followed each other’s work for years, but have never had the opportunity to meet.

The pandemic, of course, changed our plans. But it didn't stop our luminaries joining workshops, events, and podcasts—or speaking out together on the most pressing issues in education today.
Community and partnerships | Our annual report for 2021

Speaking with a shared voice on the future of education

In 2021, our luminaries contributed to two significant reports which shine a light on how education must change to make it better, fairer, and more accessible to all.

Our luminaries were among the one million people consulted by UNESCO for its report, *Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education*. The report calls for rethinking education systems to meet existential challenges: rising economic and digital inequality, climate change, and, of course, the damage done by the pandemic.

The conclusions of the report—and UNESCO’s call for personalized, inclusive, lifelong learning—resonate strongly with our council. And they’ve added their expertise to the global debate by releasing their own report: *Are we ready for a leap forward in education?* In it, they consider the schools of the future, and how we can lay the groundwork for them now.

» See more about our events on pages 79-86

Among a broad group of experts, small gatherings are powerful too

One of the biggest strengths of our council is its diversity. Which means that great conversations happen when even just a few members get together. For example, this year sparked fascinating discussions on Mr Sal Kahn’s podcast, Homeroom, with Professor Carol S. Dweck, Ms Vicky Colbert, Ms Wendy Kopp, and Professor Anant Agarwal all stepping up to the mic.

Vicky and Professor Larry Hedges also joined Carol in her work with the OECD, getting growth mindset on PISA’s agenda. And other shared areas of particular interest are cropping up: Vicky, Wendy, and Mr Kamal Ahmad’s views on leadership; Professor Thomas Kane and Wendy’s work on educational improvements in the US; and common threads in the development work of Pratham, CAMFED, and BRAC.
Community and partnerships | Our annual report for 2021

Our luminaries

**Sir Fazle Hasan Abed KCMG**  
Founder and Chair Emeritus, BRAC  
The late Sir Fazle championed education (particularly play-based learning) as a force for change. He founded BRAC in 1972, and today it’s helped 13 million children across 12 countries in Africa and Asia. We warmly welcome **Mr Shameran Abed**, Executive Director, BRAC International, and **Dr Erum Mariam**, Executive Director, BRAC Institute of Educational Development to represent Sir Fazle’s pioneering work in our council.

**Professor Anant Agarwal**  
Founder and CEO, edX  
Anant’s starting point is that “everybody in the world should have access to education, no matter who they are, where they live, or what they can afford.” Founded with Harvard and MIT, edX gives learners free access to over 3,000 courses from more than 165 institutions worldwide. It’s being used by 3,000 organizations, countries, and institutions around the world to launch their own sites, including in China, France, Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong, and Jordan.

**Mr Kamal Ahmad**  
Founder, Asian University for Women (AUW)  
Early in his life, Kamal recognized the importance of access to education as a key pathway toward achieving a more just society. He’s devoted the last decade and more to building the Asian University for Women (AUW) in Chittagong, Bangladesh to educate women, particularly first-generation university entrants, from across Asia and the Middle East. AUW was established on the belief that no one community has a monopoly on talent; it’s in the public interest for our institutions to cultivate the talents of all.
Community and partnerships | Our annual report for 2021

**Professor Carol S. Dweck**

Lewis and Virginia Eaton Professor of Psychology, Stanford University

Carol’s work shows that, in the right environment, students can build a growth mindset—improving their intellectual abilities, raising their level of attainment, and opening doors for the future. Creating these growth mindsets calls for a united effort between school settings and family life—peers and parents play a part, and teachers perhaps have the biggest role.

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**Dr Rukmini Banerji**

CEO, Pratham Education Foundation

Rukmini’s work has been guided by Pratham’s mission of “every child in school and learning well”. Under her leadership, Pratham has focused on understanding and solving the problem of why children are in school, but not learning. Her team’s ‘Teaching at the Right Level’ (TaRL) program has been used by many India’s state governments to deal with the learning crisis. And the model is spreading to countries in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

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**Ms Vicky Colbert**

Founder and Director, Fundación Escuela Nueva (FEN)

Escuela Nueva was built on Vicky’s twin beliefs: all children have a right to quality education, and quality education is the best way to reduce inequality. Her work has demonstrated—first in Colombia, now around the globe—that with proper innovation, even small remote rural schools can develop active, cooperative, and personalized learning environments where children learn to learn, and where a new role of the teacher as facilitator and guide can be promoted.
Community and partnerships | Our annual report for 2021

Professor Usha Goswami  
Professor of Cognitive Developmental Neuroscience, University of Cambridge  
Usha’s neuroscience research suggests that rhythm is the hidden factor in how children learn and process speech. She recommends building strong links between education and psychology departments, and emphasizes the value of play-based learning and human interaction for a child’s development. Her work has the potential to reveal the origins for developmental language disorders, and is already laying the groundwork for more effective ways to tackle screening and intervention.

Professor Eric A. Hanushek  
Paul and Jean Hanna Senior Fellow and Professor, Hoover Institution of Stanford University  
In graduate school, Eric asked himself: how could economics shape our understanding of learning inequality? How could it inform policymaking in that area? His research has inspired the growth and development of a new disciplinary subfield: the economics of education. With his colleagues, he’s shown that cross-country differences in economic growth are almost completely determined by the skills of the population. It’s a remarkable finding, and it’s reshaping the conversation on education policy all over the world.

Professor Larry Hedges  
Chairman of the Department of Statistics, Northwestern University  
Larry’s goal is to help transform the loose-knit study of education into a more rigorous science—one that accumulates, interprets, and applies knowledge through testing. Using that approach, he’s known for shedding new light on subjects like class size and school funding. Larry sees three ways to strengthen educational research: creating rigorous methods for research; training researchers; and improving how research findings are shared.
Professor Thomas Kane  
Walter H. Gale Professor of Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education  
Teaching has long been viewed as an “art”, not subject to scientific study—with the result that we know surprisingly little about the relationship between specific teaching practices and student achievement. Thomas led the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project to lay the foundation for a science of teaching. The study revealed that it’s possible to identify teachers and teaching practices that lead to faster student learning. Beyond his research on teaching, he advocates creating a research infrastructure to test, iterate, and scale educational innovations.

Mr Salman Khan  
Founder and CEO, Khan Academy  
“A free, world-class education for anyone, anywhere,” is Khan Academy’s mission. For Sal (better known to his colleagues as Sal) that means three things: making learning materials available in every major language and core subject; engaging learners and showing results; and turning learning into opportunity. Today, Khan Academy has more than 115 million registered users. Sal hopes the numbers will expand into the hundreds of millions in the next five to ten years, and that the model will keep showing measurable results.

Ms Wendy Kopp  
CEO and Co-Founder, Teach For All  
Wendy founded Teach For America in 1989, and co-founded Teach For All, a global network, in 2007. The network now comprises about 60 independent, locally led organizations around the world—organizations that believe meaningful, sustainable change calls for leaders rooted in local culture. To that end, these network partners recruit promising graduates and professionals for teaching positions in high-need schools, invest in their development, and building their ongoing leadership skills.
Community and partnerships | Our annual report for 2021

Ms Lucy Lake  
CEO, CAMFED  
People often talk about girls’ education in terms of secondary benefits: lower birth rates, better family health. But as leaders of CAMFED—the Campaign for Female Education—Lucy and fellow luminary Angeline Murimirwa know it’s about much more than that. Girls’ education is the foundation of social justice. CAMFED started out to prove that, if you took poverty out of the equation, girls would be in school alongside boys. Now there are 157,000 young women in their CAMFED Association network, and they work with clients in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Ghana, Tanzania, and Zambia. Lucy sees the council’s potential for championing ways to tackle inequality in education systems around the world in the drive for inclusive and equitable quality education.

Ms Angeline Murimirwa  
Executive Director—Africa, CAMFED  
Together with Lucy Lake, Angeline is part of the first team to become Yidan Prize laureates. She was also once a client of the organization she now helps lead, having been among the first Zimbabwean girls to get a CAMFED scholarship. Angeline also knows the impact of being a decision-maker who’s experienced marginalization, and dreams of a time when more women occupy leadership positions—particularly women who’ve experienced exclusion first-hand. In this world, women will be champions from within the system, advocating for critical investments and driving reform, and making sure school systems are sensitive to the realities of those left behind.

Professor Patricia K. Kuhl  
Co-Director, University of Washington Institute for Learning & Brain Sciences  
Patricia’s research reveals that, in her own words, “the early brain is born to learn, ready to learn—with certain conditions, kids can soar.” Early learning experiences shape children’s thinking skills, school performance, health, and behavior. Most of all, Patricia talks about learning as an interactive experience. Just one example is acquiring language: infants “crack the speech code” by gleaning statistical patterns from experience, and learning necessitates social interaction. If we could better understand the social and contextual ways children learn, we could uncover what motivates us to learn and stay open to ideas at all ages.
Professor Carl Wieman
Professor of Physics and Graduate School of Education, and DRC Chair at Stanford University

Carl has noticed that academic performance isn’t always a good indicator of how a student will fare as a practicing physicist. And what’s often identified as talent actually comes down to the quality of someone’s education. For Carl, we need to focus on how students learn, and which practices most effectively support the success of all. As well as studying the effectiveness of teaching interventions, Carl has launched a STEM learning platform, PhET Interactive Simulations, at the University of Colorado Boulder. So far, the PhET project has delivered more than 800 million simulations in 93 languages to learners of physics, chemistry, mathematics, earth sciences, and biology—and he continues with his research to evaluate its impact on understanding and achievement.

Professor Zhu Yong-xin
Founder, New Education Experiment

Professor Zhu founded the New Education Initiative—China’s largest education reform experiment—in 2000 and has led its development ever since. Its systemic concepts and methods have helped to create an enabling structure for school ecosystems that empower teachers and students to achieve wellbeing through a growth mindset for learning at very low cost. Professor Zhu believes a good education brings the heart, soul, and mind into harmony. Learning increases wellbeing, and helps people discover their better selves—developing their full potential as students, teachers, or parents.
Strengthening our partnerships

We have three core goals for our partnerships. We want to:

1. Build relationships with other organizations to track emerging issues and challenges

2. Broaden the range of nominations we get for the prize, so we’re finding ideas from everywhere

3. Amplify our laureates and luminaries’ work—particularly in parts of the world with significant ambitions to develop
Here’s how we built on these goals in 2021.

We agreed on partnerships with Asian Development Bank and Brookings Institution
In 2021, we supported and spoke at the ADB’s 9th International Skills Forum, reaching more than 2,000 policymakers and academics across the Asia-Pacific region. We also signed a ‘memorandum of understanding’ with both ADB and Brookings, laying out our shared goals and agreeing to work together on future projects. That includes a series of Yidan-Brookings seminars to take place in 2022, on creating a better world through education.

We strengthened collaborations and reached global audiences through a packed event schedule
In the UK, we held our European conference and launched our first ever doctoral conference in partnership with the Department for Education at the University of Oxford. We also partnered with the University of Cambridge and our laureates at CAMFED for an event highlighting inequality in education. And members of our Council of Luminaries joined the Harvard Graduate School of Education for a special edition of Education Now, looking at ways to accelerate progress by sharing global expertise.

For implementing High Touch, High Tech, an event supported by the Education Commission Asia, our Director of Partnerships joined one of our newest judges, Professor Ju-Ho Lee, and luminary Professor Eric A. Hanushek, to discuss how best to integrate technology into the classroom.

» See more about our events on pages 79-86

We developed our networking through IEFG and introducing laureates to partner organizations
One of our crucial roles is connecting the dots between big ideas and the means to make them happen. As a member of the International Education Funders Group, we join over 100 diverse member organizations sharing knowledge and encouraging collaboration. We also champion our laureates across the world of education; in 2021, we introduced Professor Carl Wieman’s PhET Interactive Simulations to the Mastercard Foundation, who have since agreed funding to expand the platform’s work in 10 countries in Africa, as well as to the mEducation Alliance, an organization dedicated to promoting EdTech solutions globally.
Reports and publications

We’ve never known more about the impact of education than we do right now. And, as we stand at a crucial moment in history, it’s never been more important that we use that knowledge to act—quickly.

In 2021, we hoped to spur action by writing or contributing to reports that open debate, as well as commissioning a wide-ranging review of the 70 years of evidence at our fingertips.

Here’s what we published this year. You can download the full reports from our knowledge hub at yidanprize.org.

**Education: the key to global sustainable development**

With the Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital, we looked at how education helps us build a better world. What we found in 70 years of research proves that education really is the bedrock of human progress.

Education is the key to making our world healthier, fairer, richer—and more resilient to global threats like climate change. The research tells us that, with quality education, we live longer and more productive lives. It physically molds our minds, changing our behavior for the better. And now we can see that—although education is a long game—we can make progress, fast.
The report concludes that there are five policy areas where we can take action, now. We can:

**Invest in early years support that gets children primed to learn.**
Like the Finnish neuvoa (‘advisory’) system that offers free medical care, mental development check-ups, and education counselling long before formal schooling starts.

**Give every child at least 10 years of quality education.**
Even better, 12. The evidence shows universal primary education alone isn’t enough to pull countries out of poverty—but investing in quality secondary education can.

**Train more, and better, teachers.**
Nothing makes a bigger difference than confident, motivated teachers that empower and inspire their students.

**Use all the technology at hand.**
With a grounding in basic literacy and critical thinking skills—and especially the guidance of a good teacher—technology means students can navigate their own learning and broaden their horizons.

**Set ourselves up for lifelong learning.**
Our world is changing—as are the skills we need to thrive. We can’t expect that what children learn in school now will still be relevant at work in 30 years. And opportunities for adult learning keep people healthier and more active into old age.
Are we ready for a leap forward in education?

Education transforms and saves lives. So it’s all the more devastating that it’s been hit so hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. One billion children and young people have had their learning disrupted. Some of them will never return to school—particularly those already marginalized through poverty, gender, or disability.

But from this difficult place, green shoots are starting to appear—green shoots we can nurture. We’ve done it before: Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—“everyone has the right to education”—was embraced by survivors of colonization, the 1918 pandemic, and two world wars. In the 1940s, the drive to recover ushered in a period of tremendous social, cultural and economic progress. This time round, the scale of what we’ve lost could once again spur policymakers, philanthropists, and educators to create widespread change.

In this report, our Council of Luminaries considers: what will schools of the future look like? How can we prepare schools for that future? And what can we do right now, as the world rebuilds, to take that opportunity to not just restore, but renew education systems?

Our luminaries agreed that in the future:

• **Teachers and school leaders will drive our success**—if we give them the right access to research, and training in how to use it.

• **Educators will benefit from a new, science-based focus on early learning.** We know children benefit immensely from joyful, social learning environments that encourage curiosity and agency. We’re also able to spot neurodiverse learners earlier, and build education systems that work for them.

• **We’ll rethink how students learn,** casting off old ideas about talent and fixed potential. And we’ll look beyond tests to measure students’ capacity to succeed: at socio-emotional skills, problem-solving, teamwork, mindsets, and citizenship.

• **Digital learning will keep growing rapidly.** Blended learning is likely to become the norm, and schools will need to invest in both bricks and mortar and bits and bytes—as well as learning to strike a balance between the two.
Sky’s the limit: growth mindset, students, and schools in PISA

With the OECD, we published this report to help educators and policymakers better understand growth mindset: what it is, what impact it can have, and how they can begin to embed it in schools and systems.

Working with our inaugural education research laureate, growth mindset pioneer Carol S. Dweck, the OECD is measuring the impact of growth mindset through its Program for International Assessment (PISA). PISA surveys 600,000 15-year-olds every three years, and each assessment adds new areas to explore. In 2018, for the first time, it included a question measuring whether students in 78 countries/economies have growth or fixed mindsets.

With data from 2018, the report explores questions including: do we see distinct differences in growth mindset between different countries? Does social and economic advantage play a role? And does gender make a difference? The results show that the endorsement of a fixed mindset varied widely across countries—which suggests that environment makes a major difference.

It also delves into issues around student wellbeing, teaching methods, school practices, and education policies, to help paint a clear picture of the different ways growth mindset can be supported and can have an impact on educational life.

Of course, education systems can’t rely on a single type of improvement or intervention. But well-tested growth mindset programs can be relatively cost-effective and, when carefully adapted for and tested in new cultures, may be administered on a large scale in the future. Such programs could then be used to support and enhance more traditional educational reforms such as restructuring schools or improving teacher training.

The OECD continues to explore growth mindset through PISA, workshops with Carol, and working with fellow laureates Vicky Colbert and Larry Hedges.
05

Our year in events

Embracing online and hybrid occasions to keep spreading the word
A timeline of our events, celebrations, and ceremonies

This year, the world embraced hybrid events. By the end of 2021, we were delighted to make the most of finally getting together with colleagues face-to-face while still connecting with guests remotely. Here’s an overview of the events we hosted or spoke at. More detailed summaries and videos from events are available at yidanprize.org.

In February, we held our first nomination webinars

We want to celebrate and share the most innovative ideas in education—but we can only do that if we know about them. In this virtual session, our Secretariat covered everything you need to know about crafting a strong nomination. It was so well-received we’re making it an annual event.
Then in April, we held a virtual launch for the OECD PISA report on growth mindset

Sky’s the limit: Growth mindset, students, and schools in PISA analyzes ideas around whether we can develop intelligence over time. Growth mindset challenges traditional notions of innate limits to talent or ability. The theory’s pioneer, Professor Carol S. Dweck, joined us along with the OECD’s Mr Andreas Schleicher, and our Secretary-General Mr Edward Ma, to launch the report. The collaboration with PISA, which will include growth mindset questions in future surveys, shows how testing research in the field can strengthen both theory and practice in education.

In the same month our luminaries joined Education Now to talk about breaking down barriers

Harvard Graduate School of Education brought together four members of our Council of Luminaries for a special episode discussing how policymakers can look beyond their own borders to solve common issues in education. Professor Anant Agarwal, Professor Usha Goswami, Professor Thomas Kane, and Ms Angeline Murimirwa dove into the discussion. The key theme? Collaboration. Sharing what works is powerful: the languages might be different, but we can teach literacy the same way beyond borders. And working together can level the playing field for learners marginalized by gender, poverty, or even biology.
In May, we took a seat in Homeroom with Sal to consider the future of education

Mr. Salman Khan welcomed two of his fellow luminaries, Professor Carol S. Dweck and Ms. Vicky Colbert, to his podcast to ask what education will look like in a post-pandemic world, and how teacher’s roles will evolve.

And hosted our Europe Conference Series

With our partners from the Department of Education at the University of Oxford, we asked: what is innovation in education? Panel discussions looked at how innovative approaches can lead to better outcomes: for example, taking a scientific approach to improve teaching or exploring how motivation affects behavior. And we followed up with Q&As with laureates, luminaries, and distinguished guests including Dr. Sobhi Tawil, Director, Future Learning and Innovation at UNESCO, and Professor Sibel Erduran, Professor Harry Daniels, and Dr. Susan James Relly of the University of Oxford.
Which also marked the launch of our first doctoral conference
At the same event with the University of Oxford, we launched our inaugural doctoral conference—and the theme was similarly forward-thinking. We explored how education will be delivered in the future, and what skills young people will need to tackle tomorrow’s challenges. Following a blind review by leading Oxford academics, we’ve now published 16 of the papers submitted for the event. We’re pleased to connect and support the next generation of young researchers around the world grappling with issues in education.

In June, we headed back to Sal Kahn’s Homeroom to dive into ed tech
Professor Anant Agarwal is more than a fellow luminary—he was also once Sal’s teacher. He’s often talked about how Sal’s Khan Academy was an inspiration for his own online learning platform, edX. Here, the two get together to discuss the future of virtual education, and how it could shape tomorrow’s workplaces.
And we kept up the future focus in July at High Touch High Tech

HTHT asks how we can combine classroom technology with hands-on learning. We know both play a role in improving learning outcomes—so how do we strike the right balance, keeping students’ needs at the center? Luminary Professor Eric A. Hanushek joined our Director of Partnerships Dr Christopher Thomas for a discussion with Chairperson and CEO of Education Commission Asia Professor Ju-Ho Lee, who is also a member of our Judging Committee.
In August, the ADB 9th International Skills Forum considered the ‘new normal’

How can we prepare learners now for a future we can never entirely predict? Dr Christopher Thomas hosted members and representatives from our Council of Luminaries to explore the issues and ask where collaboration and convergence can take us. Early childhood expert Dr Patricia Kuhl and BRAC’s Dr Erum Mariam talked about preparing young minds for learning. Professor Carol S. Dweck described the power of getting students to believe in their own potential. And Professor Anant Agarwal talked quality higher education at scale, with learnings from his edX MicroBachelors program.

In September, we discussed the role of philanthropic prizes like ours

Can prize funding accelerate change the way philanthropists hope it does? Our Secretary-General, Mr Edward Ma, joined podcast The Impact Room to explain why we think philanthropy has a part to play in developing and scaling up big ideas. Prizes are frequently more flexible than other sources of funding—and where education systems need to show value from tried and tested ideas, philanthropists can focus on investing in innovation.
Our year in events | Our annual report for 2021

And we took one more visit to Sal’s Homeroom
This time, Teach for All’s Ms Wendy Kopp, another fellow luminary, joined Sal to talk about equity and inclusion in the classroom. The pandemic has made it clearer than ever which students are marginalized in our current systems. Wendy discussed how we can rethink the classroom and teacher engagement to start solving those issues once and for all.

In October, we held our first hybrid event with Cambridge and CAMFED
We were delighted to finally meet some of our guests in person for a seminar on building an equitable future for education. In partnership with CAMFED and the University of Cambridge, we convened at Jesus College and online for a day of discussion. Laureates Lucy Lake and Angeline Murimirwa shared what they’ve learned about getting—and keeping—marginalized girls in school with Julia Gillard, chair of the Global Partnership for Education and former Prime Minister of Australia. We also delved into issues like climate change disruption, mental health in the classroom, and cross-sector support for education, welcoming panel and keynote speakers including HRH Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands, Lord Jo Johnson, and Professor Leszek Borysiewicz, as well as hearing directly from students about the issues that affect them.
Finally, we closed the year on our annual high note: our Awards Ceremony and Summit

Following last year’s virtual presentation, it was our privilege and pleasure to host a hybrid ceremony in December and once again invite guests to join us in Hong Kong. We were delighted to be joined by the Chief Executive of Hong Kong SAR, Mrs Carrie Lam, as we presented Professor Eric A. Hanushek and Dr Rukmini Banerji with their accolades, and officially—and warmly—welcomed them to the laureate community. One of our most crucial roles is a facilitator, so our Summit focused on fostering dialogue around education’s most pressing issues.

Eric joined a panel of economists who emphasized the importance of quality teaching for future success. Rukmini brought her expertise in scaling projects and personalized learning to another panel. We also heard from distinguished guest speakers including Dr Jaime Saavedra of the World Bank Group, Professor Ludger Woessmann from the University of Munich and Mr Andreas Schleicher, head of our Education Research judging panel. Joining us in person were The Hon. Bernard Charnwut Chan, Mr Leong Cheung, Mr Ronnie C. Chan, and Professor Rocky S. Tuan, who offered their local perspectives on the global issues we discussed.

This annual celebration of our expanding community is a treasured moment to reflect on how far we’ve come—and focus with renewed energy on the long road ahead.
Structure and governance

We’re supported by our Board of Directors, Advisory Committee and Judging Committee—here’s who they are
Our Board of Directors

Our Board oversees everything we do as a Foundation. In particular, they appoint people to sit on our Advisory and Judging Committees, and approve the judges’ decisions on each year’s laureates.

**Dr Charles CHEN Yidan**  
Founder, Yidan Prize  
Best known for his work with Tencent and his philanthropy, Dr Chen has had a lifelong love of learning. These days, he spends most of his time on education initiatives, from our Foundation to the non-profit university he set up in Wuhan.

**HRH Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands**  
Founder and Director, Number 5 Foundation  
Princess Laurentien believes in “unexpected experts”: letting children and students play a part in shaping their own learning experience. It’s a philosophy she’s used in her work as a UNESCO special envoy, and in the various educational foundations she’s established.

**Professor Sir Leszek Borysiewicz**  
Chairman, Cancer Research UK and Vice Chancellor Emeritus, the University of Cambridge  
With a career that spans both the research and educational worlds, Sir Leszek understands the joint aims of our Education Development and Research prizes better than anyone. In fact, his 2001 knighthood was in part based on his contribution to medical education.
Professor Rick Levin
Senior Advisor, Coursera and President Emeritus, Yale University
In Professor Levin’s 20 years as President of Yale University, he’s rebuilt the campus, redeveloped downtown New Haven, strengthened the university’s international programs, and co-founded Yale-NUS College. Now he acts as an advisor to Coursera—an online learning platform offering courses from 150 top universities.

Professor Tony Chan Fan-cheong
President, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, and President Emeritus, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
Professor Chan might be a mathematician by trade, but as Assistant Director at the US National Science Foundation, he managed everything from astronomy to physics to material science. Today he splits his time between university positions and involvement with various global institutions and events, like the World Economic Forum in Davos.
Our Advisory Committee

Our Advisory Committee is an independent team that closely examines our work as a Foundation, and designs strategies to help us increase our impact on education around the world.

Dr Qian Tang
Chairman, Advisory Committee; and former Assistant Director-General for Education at UNESCO

In his role at UNESCO until 2015, Dr Tang facilitated education programs in all 195 member states. In particular, he helped to draft and roll out the 2030 Education Agenda—the fourth goal of the wider Sustainable Development Agenda—that so greatly influences our work today.

Professor Cheng Kai-ming
Convenor, Advisory Committee; and Emeritus Professor, the University of Hong Kong

Professor Cheng started his career as a school teacher; now, as an Emeritus Chair Professor of Education, he’s particularly interested in how societal changes impact education. He consults with organizations like the World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF on this topic.

Dr Manzoor Ahmed
Professor Emeritus, BRAC University

As Professor Emeritus of BRAC’s Dhaka University and Founding Director of their University Institute of Educational Development, Dr Ahmed is another one of our links to a brilliant organization. In particular, his research focuses on policy and planning for national learning systems.
**Mr Marc S. Tucker**  
President Emeritus and Distinguished Senior Fellow, American National Centre on Education and the Economy  
Mr Tucker focuses specifically on standards and assessment, and researches the countries with the best education systems in the world. He created the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (later called the NCEE), and has advised governments—former US president Bill Clinton called him a major contributor to his policies.

**Dr Jamil Salmi**  
Global Tertiary Education Expert  
In his role at the World Bank, Dr Salmi shaped policy on world-class universities. Now he acts as a consultant on tertiary education for institutions, banks, professional associations, and governments from Macedonia to Mongolia.

**Mr Dankert Vedeler**  
Chair, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) Governing Board; and former Assistant Director General, Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research  
In his role at the ministry, Mr Vedeler has reformed secondary education, rolled out wide-scale programs, and chaired the steering committee for Education for All (EFA). In this role, he worked with Dr Tang to draft the Incheon Declaration.
Our Judging Committee

Our judges go through each nomination carefully, analyze the entries, and decide on our laureates. There are two panels—one for each award—both overseen by our Chairman.

To really make the impact we want to, we need to uncover and reward a wide range of ideas. That means our judging panels should also bring a wealth of different experiences and perspectives to the process. This year, we welcomed five new judges to the committee—Ms Vicky Colbert, Dr Elizabeth King, Professor Ju-Ho Lee, Ms Kiran Bir Sethi, and Professor Zhang Min-xuan—increasing the number of female voices and adding greater representation from Asian and Latin American regions.

Dr Koichiro Matsuura
Chairman of the Judging Committee and former Director-General of UNESCO
With over 40 years in international relations, Dr Matsuura brings wisdom and a global outlook to our judging panel. His role as Director-General of UNESCO spanned 10 years, in which time he led reform in many areas of great impact, from universal basic education to freshwater management.

Education Research

Mr Andreas Schleicher
Head of the Judging Panel and Director for the Directorate of Education and Skills, OECD
In his work at the OECD, Mr Schleicher analyzes and advises on policies for economic growth and social progress. He oversees several international assessments and surveys, most notably the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).
Professor Bruce M. Alberts  
Chancellor’s Leadership Chair in Biochemistry and Biophysics for Science and Education, the University of California, San Francisco  
As a prominent biochemist dedicated to improving science and math education, Professor Alberts is on the boards of more than 25 non-profits—and in 2014, was awarded the American National Medal of Science by Barack Obama.

Dr Elizabeth M. King  
Non-resident Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution  
Dr King, an economist, spent much of her professional career at the World Bank, ending her time there as the global director for education policy. She’s currently an editor of the Journal for Development Effectiveness and teaches at Georgetown University. She’s published widely on education, poverty, the care economy, and gender inequality.

Professor Ju-Ho Lee  
Chairperson and CEO, Education Commission Asia  
After almost a decade in the South Korean government, including a stint as Minister of Education, Science and Technology, Professor Lee returned to academia in 2013. His research covers a wider range of human development and education reform areas, including 21st century skills and innovation ecosystems.
**Dr Felice J. Levine**  
Executive Director American Educational Research Association (AERA)  
Dr Levine is known for her work across a vast span of research and science topics—from big data to policy, and higher education to ethics. She serves on several steering groups and boards of national associations focusing on sciences, statistics, and data.

**Professor Zhang Min-xuan**  
Director of the Teacher Education Centre under the auspices of UNESCO  
Professor Zhang is passionate about education research in areas of systems and policy, teacher education, and school-based curricula. He plays a pivotal role in leading education research and advises on policy in China and globally. In 2014, the Asia Society awarded him the Asia Outstanding Education Leader and Game Changer Award.
Ms Dorothy K. Gordon
Head of the Judging Panel; and Board Member, UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education

As a technology activist and a firm believer in internet for all, Ms Gordon’s judging perspectives are more valuable than ever in light of 2020’s online education boom. In particular, she draws on her government, corporate, and UN policy and management experience to find laureates who can make an impact.

Dr Steven Cohen
Professor at the School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University

In his work at Columbia, Dr Cohen is an expert in public administration with a focus on environmental protection, and leads several of the university’s programs in that area. He’s been Executive Director of their Earth Institute, a policy analyst and consultant to the US Environmental Protection Agency, and he’s written a series of books in the field too.

Ms Vicky Colbert
Founder and Executive Director of Fundación Escuela Nueva (FEN)

Among her many accolades, Ms Colbert was also our inaugural education development laureate. A sociologist and former Colombian Vice-Minister of Education, she pioneered the Escuela Nueva way of learning. It’s now a world-renowned model, transforming learning in remote, resource-strapped regions of Latin America and beyond.
Dr Allan E. Goodman  
President and Chief Executive Officer, the Institute of International Education  
Dr Goodman runs the Institute of International Education, a non-profit focusing on global educational exchanges and development training. He’s created academic exchanges in Moscow, run diplomatic training programs in Vietnam, and authored several books on international affairs.

Ms Kiran Bir Sethi  
Founder and Director of the Riverside School  
Ms Sethi brings a designer’s vision to education, as the driving force behind the aProCh initiative for child-friendly cities, the award-winning Riverside School, and Design for Change. DFC is now in more than 60 countries, where children are empowered by the ‘feel / imagine / do / share’ framework to design solutions for some of their greatest challenges.

Mr Ruben Vardanyan  
Social entrepreneur, impact investor, and venture philanthropist  
Mr Vardanyan is a recognized expert on the global economy, entrepreneurship, and education, and acts as a strategic consultant on those topics to a range of organizations, from banks to business schools. He’s also co-founded several organizations over the years—like the Moscow School of Management SKOLKOVO, to name just one.
Acknowledgements

We offer our heartfelt thanks to the people and organizations whose generous support helps drive our mission.

Honorary Investment Advisor
Mr John Lo
Chief Financial Officer, Tencent Group

Honorary Investment Advisor
Mr Tsang Wai-yip
Group Financial Controller, Tencent Group

Honorary Legal Advisor
Mr Richard Pu
Co-head of Tencent Legal

Honorary Auditor
PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC)
Looking forward

Because when it comes to shaping education systems fit for the future, we can’t afford to wait
Looking back at 2021
By Mr Edward Ma, our Secretary-General

At the start of this report, we published our theory of change. But if we’re going to reach our goal of creating a better world through education, we need to prove our theory works. In the past year, we’ve tested what can happen when we pull our network together and we’ve seen results that give us confidence we’re on the right track.
We’ve introduced laureates to new partners, so they can expand their impact

For example, Professor Carl Wieman’s PhET Interactive Simulations. After an introduction from our Director of Partnerships, Dr Christopher Thomas, the team secured new funding from the Mastercard Foundation to expand their work across Africa. Through one of our external reviewers, we also linked Carl with the University of Rwanda. The university had ambitions to build a virtual science lab, but needed resources to make it happen. That’s something PhET is now helping with.

None of these individuals or organizations had ever worked together before. But we’ve shown that when we bring like minds together, we can accelerate progress and spread ideas that work—exactly what our Foundation was set up to do.

We’re also reaching out to find more nominees, from more places

We’ve grown our team, streamlined our processes, and strengthened our partnerships—all of which help us promote our prize far and wide. And every year we see the results in a wider range of nominations. Our newly expanded and increasingly diverse Judging Committee is helping us find the brightest, most innovative ideas, no matter where they come from.

Thanks to our larger team, we’ve stepped up our communications outreach too, building close connections with NGOs, universities, and other foundations who can help news of our prize filter through to potential laureates. Crucially, our network also amplifies the work of our laureates and luminaries across borders—with the aim of capturing the interest of policymakers working to change education systems.

It’s not just about more people—we’re becoming a movement

In what proved to be another difficult year, I’m deeply grateful for the drive and passion the Yidan Prize community brought to our shared mission. It’s exciting to see how, with every person who joins our network, our energy grows exponentially. It’s in that spirit of collaboration and determination that we’ll move forward into the next five years of our prize.
Looking forward: how do we catalyze change?

Solving the education puzzle is complex. There’s an endless list of questions, such as: what are the barriers to inclusive education—and can technology help overcome them? Why is it so hard to pass on knowledge through the traditional way of teaching? What stops good ideas from scaling up?

After two years of COVID-related disruption, finding answers is more urgent than ever. Of course, we can’t fix every problem at once—but if we target our efforts in the right places, we can pick up the pace of change.
We’ll make more progress by working together
Take technology—a major area of debate. When it comes to access, there’s a clear digital divide. But even where resources exist, not everyone is getting the same results. Some school systems managed to accelerate learning online during the pandemic, while others saw lost learning and disengaged students. When we share experiences from everywhere, we reveal techniques that work—and pitfalls to avoid. Education technology offers powerful potential to level the playing field for learners around the world, but we need widespread collaboration to work out the most effective ways to use it.

And our community can shine a light on policy priorities
We have a wealth of research that shows how important it is to have quality early years education. But public policy and education systems have been slow to respond to it. What do we need to do so systems are more ready to hit refresh? Are we making the links between early childhood development and economic development compelling enough for policymakers to act? When we make progress on this issue, we lay crucial foundations for learning, as well as priming systems to respond more readily to education research.

As a Foundation, we’re doing our part to speed up the rate of change
We’ve already taken steps to diversify our pool of nominees and judges. Now we’re working hard to make our nomination process even more inclusive and rigorous—so we can be sure we’re finding the brightest ideas from everywhere. We’re formalizing our partnerships around clear objectives, so we can accelerate and track our impact. And we’re creating more channels to share our laureates’ work and excite the wider world about the possibilities of progress. Because when it comes to shaping education systems fit for the future, we can’t afford to wait.