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Background

'The crisis in education requires us to fundamentally rethink its purpose and curricula. The schools of the future, whether formal or informal, physical, or virtual, must evolve to become more inclusive, safe, healthy, and stimulating learning places.'

— António Guterres, UN Secretary-General, on Transforming Education

Putting happiness at the core of our education transformation agenda

Through the 'Happy Schools' initiative, UNESCO is placing happiness at the core of the transformation of education. It encourages education systems to recognize happiness as both **a means to and a goal of quality learning**. Studies show that joyful school environments that foster engaging pedagogies and supportive relationships can enhance teaching and learning experiences leading to better education outcomes. But to create and sustain such learning environments, we need not only to transform schools, but also education systems. This means reimagining education to better align with the demands of the 21st century, focusing on the holistic development of individuals and their capacity to meaningfully engage in society.

In observance of the **International Day of Happiness 2024** on 20 March, UNESCO is launching the new global Happy Schools report, "Why the world needs happy schools: Global report on happiness in and for learning." The report draws from findings in the learning sciences, including neuroscience and cognitive psychology, to advocate for the global recognition of the link between happiness and learning in education policy and practice. The Happy Schools framework identifies twelve key areas – spanning from relationships to curriculum to spatial design to realign education systems toward happiness *in* and *for* learning. When young students are nurtured by joyful learning experiences in their school environments, they become empowered adults capable of engaging positively with themselves, with others and with the world around them. After all, the foundation of peace lies within the minds of the next generation.

UNESCO is organizing an **online symposium** to highlight the importance of happiness in education. The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the International Day of Happiness in its resolution 66/281 of 2012, recognizing happiness as a **fundamental human goal** to be pursued in global policy agendas. If we want to achieve this goal, both individually and collectively, its pursuit must begin early, within our schools.

As the fourth installment of our [Happiness in and for learning](#) webinar series, this symposium will specifically explore one of the four pillars of Happy Schools framework, '**principles**', which describes the overarching values – trust, inclusion and engagement – we need to uphold and reinforce system-wide to create happy learning environments. Given the role of policy in shaping educational goals and values, the symposium notably aims to engage policy-makers and key thought leaders to mobilize **political commitment** to happiness in and for learning.

Objectives

This 2-hour webinar will explore the **principles** pillar of the global Happy Schools framework to:

- Launch UNESCO's global Happy Schools report and revised framework and promote its contextualized adoption for fostering positive learning environments.

- Showcase scientific evidence that contends that happiness and academic excellence are not competing priorities but rather mutually reinforcing, and that happiness can serve as a key lever for better and wider learning experiences and outcomes.

- Highlight existing policies and programmes aimed at fostering happiness in schools, with particular focus on government-led national and regional initiatives.

- Encourage all to join Happy Schools in partnership and commit to happiness and a whole school approach to learning as the foundation of quality education.

Participants

The symposium will bring together diverse educational stakeholders from around the world, including thought-leaders, policy-makers, development partners, researchers, school leaders, teachers, young people and their guardians.

Format & session logistics

The webinar will take place on Zoom in **English, French** and **Spanish**.

Key messages

- Children and youth today grapple with unprecedented levels of unhappiness and anxiety, and alarming rates of suicide and bullying. Many students are disengaged from learning with rising rates of early school-leaving. Meanwhile, teachers face overwhelming levels of stress and burnout. It is clear that prioritizing happiness in education is **not a luxury but a necessity**.

- The global Happy Schools Framework provides a model that encompasses 4 key dimensions (people, process, place, and principles) and **12 high-level and context-adaptable criteria**.

- The new framework is primarily designed for K-12 education, but its **approach can be replicated** to create happy early childhood centres, happy vocational schools, happy universities, ultimately feeding into happy workplaces and happy communities.

- The **principles** dimension of the framework includes three criteria: trust, inclusion and empowerment. These are the values that uphold a happy school and feed into the realization of the other nine criteria across the people, process and place pillars.

Time	Item
13:30 – 13:35	**Welcome remarks** *Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO*
13:35 – 13:40	**Introduction:** Brief overview of the global Happy Schools report and webinar agenda in three rounds: research, policy, practice.
13:40 – 14:15	**Lessons from science: Exploring the evidence behind happiness in and for learning** **Presentation 1**: Prof. Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Professor of Psychology at Temple University and Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution • High-level presentation of learning sciences research that is relevant to the Happy Schools approach, including recent work on play as a spectrum, knowledge translation to ensure research gets into the hands of educators and policy-makers, and on how to create intergenerational spaces that foster playful learning, creativity, and meaningful cross-age connections. **Presentation 2**: Lindsay E. Jones, Chief Executive Officer, CAST • Presentation on the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, its linkages with the principles of the Happy Schools framework (trust, inclusion and empowerment) and evidence on how UDL can improve teaching and learning experiences and outcomes. **Presentation 3**: Mario Piacentini, Senior Analyst, Innovative Assessments, Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), OECD Directorate for Education and Skills • Presentation of the 2022 PISA data on well-being and its relationship with performance; insights into the forthcoming PISA Happy Life Dashboard.
14:15 – 14:25	**Presenting the revised Happy Schools framework** *Borhene Chakroun, Director, Division for Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems, UNESCO*
14:25 – 14:50	**Lessons from policy: Regional and national cases** **Presentation 1**: Anna-Maria Giannopoulou, Deputy Head of Unit for Schools and Multilingualism at European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport Culture • Presentation of (1) the Pathways to School Success Recommendation and (2) The draft guidelines for policy makers, schools and educators to address well-being and mental health at school, developed by the European Commission's Expert Group on supportive learning environments for groups at risk of underachievement and for supporting well-being at school. **Presentation 2**: Natalia Miteva, Deputy Minister of Education, Buglaria • Presentation on Buglaria's vision for integrating holistic approaches to joyful learning spaces into the education system to tackle challenges Bulgaria currently faces in education and beyond. **Presentation 3**: Tashi Lhamo, Chief Program Officer, Ministry of Education, Kingdom of Bhutan • Presentation on Bhutan's national policy initiative *Educating for Gross National* Happiness and how it was translated into a Green Schools framework and teacher training programme, based on the eight elements of Bhutan's Green Schools.
14:50-15:00	**Rapid fire Q&A to all presenters**

15:00-15:20	**Lessons from practice: Portugal and Viet Nam**
	Presentation 1: Presentation of research study of Cartaxo Portugal and the findings of their validation of the Happy Schools framework criteria
	Presentation 2: Presentation of The Department of Education and Training of Ho Chi Minh city's Happy Schools programme and their 18 criteria for Happy Schools in Ho Chi Minh City's education sector
15:20-15:25	**Open Q&A from the audience**
15:25 – 15:30	**Closing remarks**