Policy Handbook: Advancing Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Key Success Factors for Policy and Practice

About the handbook
The idea for putting together a handbook on ESD success factors came about as we evaluated the results of an international conference the World Future Council hosted in Annapolis, Maryland in October 2016 that brought together legislators from 16 environment and education ministries from around the world to exchange good practice on ESD. The outcomes of this rich exchange have been distilled and supplemented with research, case studies, field visits, a literature review (particularly of UNESCO’s longstanding and extensive work on ESD), and interviews with international ESD experts.

Introduction to the topic
The future health of the planet rests on creating an education that is at least as far-reaching, systemic, and transformative as the problems we face. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) does just that. It can play a key role in promoting positive values and sustainable lifestyles and empowering people of all ages as actors for peace and inclusive social change. Learning is a key component of innovation, strengthening our collective ability to address complex global and local challenges. There is growing international recognition of ESD’s potential as an integral and transformative element of quality education and lifelong learning and a key enabler of more just, inclusive, sustainable and resilient societies.

Main Takeaways
There is strong and growing evidence to show that ESD can be a vital force in creating the flexible, innovative, problem-solving workforce that will be able to respond to the varied challenges of automation, climate change, disaster risk management and sustainable production and consumption.

To meet these challenges, and the potential opportunities they present, governments are recognizing that there is a need to invest in training, education and green programmes, particularly in the adoption, development and maintenance of STEM skills geared towards building sustainable societies. One of the major requirements will be for more teachers capable of integrating ESD into their teaching and training, and for more young people to be empowered.

Despite the hurdles and challenges outlined in the handbook, the need for ESD to be strengthened and promoted at all levels and in all educational settings is absolutely clear. It has the potential to change the way we learn and improve the quality of life for people across the globe. Together we must fight hard to ensure that it reaches every learner, instilling the values of peace, justice, equality, human rights and a genuine connection to the living world that sustains us all.

How you can help
Bringing decision-makers together to implement ESD in all settings is not possible without the support of our donors. If you wish to improve the livelihood of millions of children with your donation, please donate to the World Future Council.

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Recommendations

1. Political will for ESD policy and practice
   Political will from the national government and ESD stakeholders is crucial if ESD policy and practice is to go on to succeed. The growing evidence-base learning outcomes associated with ESD can be used to build and maintain commitment among decision makers.

2. ESD policy mandates and institutional coordination systems
   ESD policies introduced to move them from paper to practice – are important for providing the institutional support needed for stakeholders to implement ESD.

3. Multi-stakeholder collaborative ESD partnerships
   ESD partnerships can be instrumental at all stages of the policy cycle, helping to build coalitions and political will, assisting the drafting of legislation, supporting delivery and monitoring progress.

4. ESD curriculum revisions and integration practices
   Through integration and redesign, the national curriculum serves as a significant piece of educational policy available to secure the implementation of ESD.

5. Advancing ESD-aligned transformative pedagogies
   Progressive pedagogies that are transformative, learner-centered, and participatory to local communities are fundamental to the success of ESD, often having a stronger impact than sustainable development content.

6. Teacher education, training and resourcing
   Teachers can be powerful agents of sustainable progress and should be supported with quality pre- and in-service professional training to build the necessary knowledge and skills to deliver teaching and learning practices associated with ESD.

7. Whole school/institutional approaches reinforce system-wide change
   The whole school/institutional approach offers a particularly promising mechanism for integrating ESD across an entire learning community offering wide-ranging improvements.

8. School certification schemes to push ambition
   ESD policies introduced to move them from paper to practice – are important for providing the institutional support needed for stakeholders to implement ESD.

9. Local, culturally relevant, ‘place-based’ learning
   Different countries and regions all have their own unique challenges, local contexts, cultures and histories. All this richness and diversity affects the way ESD is perceived, adapted and implemented.

10. Monitoring and evaluation of ESD
    ESD has a number of features that make evaluating its outcomes, effects and impacts challenging, and to date there has been only limited use of monitoring tools to assess the quality of ESD programmes, their impacts.

11. Financing quality education and ESD
    Although it is clear that quality, inclusive and sustainable education is the best investment the world can make with huge returns, it often suffers from inadequate funding. A significant increase in levels of development cooperation and donor funding for education is needed!

12. Connecting ESD to 21st century skills, jobs and a sustainable economy
    To reach its full potential and continue to remain relevant beyond the years of formal education, ESD must forge deeper links with the world of work and the transition to sustainable economies and societies.