

# Executive Summary

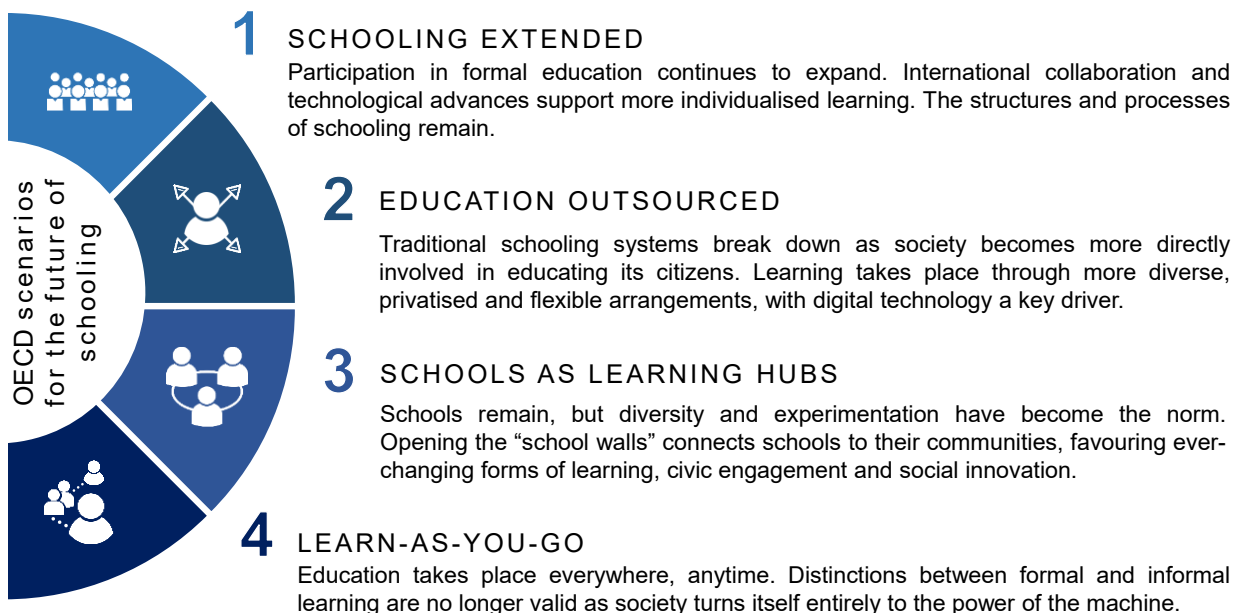
There are always multiple versions of the future – some are assumptions, others hopes and fears. To prepare, we have to consider not only the changes that appear most probable, but also the ones that we are not expecting. In 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us of how comfortable assumptions about the future may change in an instant.

*Back to the future of education: Four OECD Scenarios for Schooling* is a tool to support long-term strategic thinking in education. Inspired by the ground-breaking 2001 OECD Schooling for Tomorrow scenarios, these scenarios can help identify potential opportunities and challenges and stress-test against unexpected shocks. We can then use those ideas to help us better prepare and act now.

## Why scenarios?

Scenarios are fictional sets of alternative futures. They do not contain predictions or recommendations. Imagining multiple scenarios recognises that there is not only one pathway into the future, but many. **Chapter Two** provides an overview of strategic foresight, highlighting three main benefits: 1) to reveal and test assumptions, 2) stress-test and future-proof plans, and 3) generate shared visions of the future to support action in the present. The chapter sets out key steps for using the scenarios, including questions for identifying implications and taking strategic action.

## The four OECD Scenarios for the Future of Schooling



## Understanding the present helps us think about the future

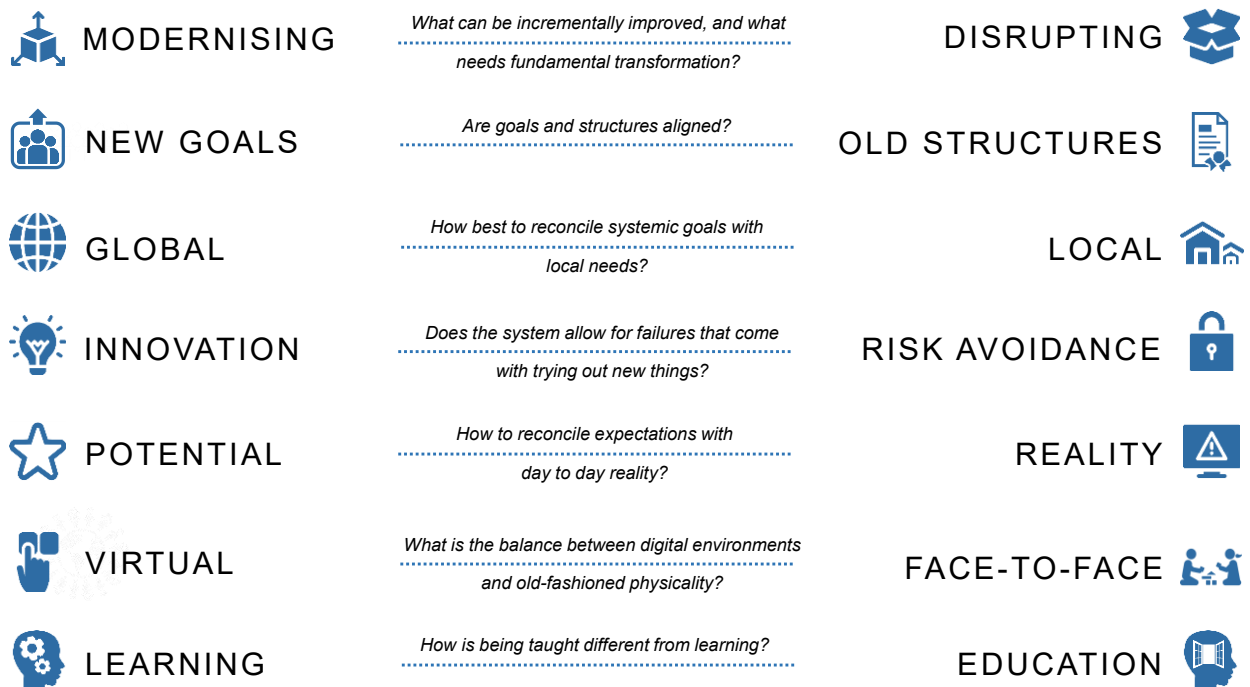
**Chapter Three** looks at how education's goals and functions, structures and organisation, and processes and practices have unfolded over the last two decades. It covers the continuing expansion of formal education and our evolving understanding of human learning. It addresses modern shifts in learning objectives and looks at the ways in which education policy and practice works to prepare teachers, schools and systems to effectively respond to such changes.

The four OECD scenarios are presented in **Chapter Four** along with key questions for discussion. The scenarios have a time frame of approximately 20 years – long enough for significant change beyond immediate political cycles, but not too remote for anyone except futurists and visionaries.

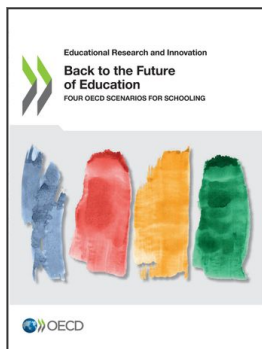
## What futures for schooling? Seven tensions and paradoxes

Education must evolve to continue to deliver on its mission of supporting individuals to develop as persons, citizens and professionals. In a complex and quickly changing world, this might require the reorganisation of formal and informal learning environments, and reimagining education content and delivery. In an ageing world, these changes apply not just to basic education, but to lifelong learning as well.

But, what is the best way to do this? Just as there is no “one” future, there is no single correct path to the futures of education. And indeed, the future is not a place where problems will magically disappear. By exploring, reflecting and preparing, we can respond to difficult challenges more effectively. **Chapter Five** sets out seven inherent tensions that must be considered in this process:



A large body of CERI work has focused on the need for education to be better informed by evidence, awareness of what is taking place in other places and at other times, and by the need to consider the bigger, long-term picture. This volume follows proudly in that tradition. In our rapidly changing world, education cannot rely on lessons of the past to prepare for the future. The future is here, and education systems need to learn from it. Our success will depend on how effectively we use our knowledge to anticipate the future, and how quickly we take action to shape it.



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