People + Planet

Equity in Education

Reimagining equity and wellbeing in our teaching and learning environments

Read 3 minutes

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the growing global crisis surrounding student and teacher wellbeing. In response, Steelcase created the Steelcase Social Innovation Lab to identify and accelerate the development of solutions addressing issues of equity and wellbeing.

Research shows teachers and students are more stressed, anxious and depressed than ever before. The creation of the lab and its inaugural global challenge, “Equity in Education,” targeted educators and community leaders and asked them:

“How might we leverage this time of global disruption to reimagine equity and wellbeing in our teaching and learning environments?”

Participants were invited to attend four free open innovation workshops, attracting 370 attendees from 30 different countries spanning four continents. Attendees were asked to submit concepts on how they plan to address the issues of equity and wellbeing through their work.

A guest evaluation panel then selected 15 submissions to move forward in a virtual fellowship program. Over the course of two months, fellows received tools, training and support, including $5,000, to accelerate the development of their prototypes.

Projects ranged from a program that creates and supports a sense of belonging for girls and students of color that feel isolated in STEM pursuits to an intensive course for BIPOC high school students, which guides them through the key transitions in a student’s life to finding and pursuing their professional vocation.

Throughout the program, the fellows gained access to curated virtual workshops, guest lectures and ad hoc support to address challenges that arise in early-stage prototype development. They were joined by experts from Steelcase and special guests from the broader Steelcase network – thought leaders, authors and facilitators who are pushing the boundaries of design, equity and belonging in their work.

“As a global company, Steelcase has the privilege of working with people and communities throughout the world. That privilege comes with the responsibility to lead with empathy, challenge the status quo and design sustainable systems that open the door to new opportunities,” says Kim Dabbs, Global Director of Social Innovation. “That is why we are committed to thinking, learning and co-creating together with our community partners to achieve a more just and equitable world. Our Social Innovation Lab allows us to leverage our global scale and our network of exports to mentor, share and amplify new ideas to begin addressing issues systemically.”

With the Social Innovation Lab, Steelcase has created a platform for scaling impact that helps its community partners build their innovation capacity, accelerate the development of their concepts and launch new ideas.

The open social innovation platform is just one way Steelcase is supporting and amplifying the efforts of creative leaders on the front lines of positive change. After a successful inaugural challenge, the insights will be scaled so that they can be repeated in the future.

To discover more about the fellows and their organizations, visit https://www.steelcase.com/social-innovation-fellowship/.

To sign up to receive updates for our next Open Innovation Workshops, visit https://www.steelcase.com/eu-en/socialinnovationlab/.

2021 Steelcase Social Innovation Fellows:

- Alison Malisa of Prosocial Schools
- Allyson Paris of Grand Rapids Civic Theatre
- Ana Ortiz of Hispanic Center of Western Michigan
- Carol Lautenbach of Godfrey-Lee Public Schools
- Cecilie Schjerven of Joblinge
- Danielle C. Wyckoff of Reproductive Media
- Ellen Fischer of New York School of Interior Design
- Holly Hetherington of Affinity Mentoring
- Jennifer Gaspar Santos of St. Ignatius College Preparatory
- Jessie Weiser of Substantial Classrooms
- John Schoppert of Oregon Institute of Technology
- Kelly Parke of York University
- Nkechy Ekere Ezeh of Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative
- Rachel Gleason of The Diatribe
- Toni DiMella of University of South Carolina Upstate