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Highlights from the ARISE Learning Festival 2026—powerful conversations, distinguished voices, and the launch of AI Adoption for K-12: Moving Beyond Experimentation

## ARISE Learning Festival 2026 (In Collaboration with FICCI) Brings Together Education Leaders to Shape Connected, Future-ready Schools

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### NewsVoir

New Delhi [India], September 28: The Association for Reinventing School Education (ARISE), in collaboration with FICCI, concluded the ARISE Learning Festival 2026, bringing together school leaders, educators, policymakers, students, global experts and industry partners to exchange ideas, experiences and practices shaping the future of school education.

Held around the theme 'Connected Schools – Building Communities. Inspiring Futures,' this year's Festival was designed as an immersive, delegate-centred experience moving beyond a conventional conference format to combine school visits, keynotes and conversations with masterclasses, student voices, school showcases, partner and exhibitor engagements, peer learning and networking.

The Festival began with curated school tours across India on September 24 and across Delhi-NCR on September 25, offering delegates an opportunity to experience first-hand how schools are building collaborative cultures, strong communities and future-ready learning environments. The initiative brought together 6 host schools across India and 11 schools across Delhi-NCR\*.

The learning continued at the Dr. Ambedkar International Centre, New Delhi, through interactive masterclasses and breakout conversations spanning teacher development, school leadership, institutional culture, technology and AI, digital resilience, student wellbeing, curriculum leadership and future readiness.

A key knowledge outcome of the Festival was the launch of the FICCI-ARISE-EY-Parthenon Knowledge Report, AI Adoption Plan for K12: Moving beyond Experimentation, focused on enabling schools to move from experimentation with artificial intelligence towards more purposeful and responsible adoption.

### Perspectives shaping the future of education

Deepak Bagla, Mission Director, Atal Innovation Mission, NITI Aayog, shared perspectives on how schools can evolve from standalone innovation initiatives into connected ecosystems linking young people with creativity, entrepreneurship, problem-solving, partnerships and real-world opportunities. He highlighted the role of leadership and collaboration in embedding innovation more deeply within school culture.

Bringing a perspective from beyond education, Shikhar Dhawan, Chairman, Da One Group and former Indian international cricketer, drew upon his journey in high-performance sport, entrepreneurship and community initiatives to reflect on resilience, discipline, confidence and purpose. The conversation explored how schools and communities can create the conditions that help young people navigate challenges, build self-belief and translate their potential into meaningful achievement.

Patrick Derham OBE, former Head Master of Westminster School, Rugby School and Solihull School, drew on his extensive experience of school leadership to reflect on the fundamentals that continue to matter in education purpose, service, shared values, relationships and the strength of the school community. His reflections reinforced the importance of looking beyond academic outcomes to the broader role schools play in shaping young people.

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Nikole Blanchard, Head of Educational Technology and Innovation, LSU Laboratory School, brought the conversation to the intersection of technology and humanity, highlighting the distinctly human capabilities young people will continue to need including curiosity, creativity, empathy, judgement, collaboration, courage and imagination as schools prepare students for an increasingly unpredictable future.

#### Students at the centre

Student voice formed an important part of the Festival. A main-stage student panel brought together students from government and private schools to share their perspectives on learning, wellbeing, belonging, creativity, purpose and what they would like the next generation of schooling to look like. The conversation placed students not simply as recipients of education, but as important participants in shaping its future.

Students were also visible across the Festival through presentations and showcases, bringing their ideas, creativity and work directly into the delegate experience.

#### From conference to experience

A defining feature of this year's Learning Festival was its emphasis on participation and experience. The ARISE Experience Zone, school showcases, student presentations, partner and exhibitor engagements and interactive formats created opportunities for delegates to discover new practices and solutions, engage directly with innovators and connect with peers.

Across the programme, practitioners and experts also explored some of the most pressing questions facing schools today from the changing role of teachers and curriculum leadership to AI-enabled school management, career readiness, wellbeing, safeguarding and institutional culture.

Together, these formats sought to ensure that delegates did not simply listen to conversations about the future of education, but could experience ideas in practice, interact with those implementing them and build connections that could continue beyond the Festival.

#### Celebrating excellence in school education

The Festival culminated with the 4th Edition of the FICCI supported ARISE Excellence Awards, celebrating exemplary and innovative practices across school education.

The Awards drew participation from schools across the country, with an almost equal representation of government and private schools, reflecting the breadth and diversity of India's school education ecosystem. Entries underwent a structured evaluation process involving an Interim Jury followed by a Grand Jury, with EY serving as the official tabulator.

The Awards ceremony also saw the release of the FICCI-supported ARISE Excellence Awards Compendium, showcasing exemplary practices and initiatives from participating schools and enabling their learnings to reach the wider education community.



Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Arunabh Singh, President, ARISE; Co-founder & Director, Healthy Planet Schools & Nehru World School, said, "Connected schools are ultimately about people students, teachers, leaders and communities learning from and strengthening one another. Through the ARISE Learning Festival, we wanted to move beyond a conventional conference and create an experience where delegates could see, participate, exchange and connect. The diversity of voices represented this year from government and private schools to students, policymakers, experts and industry demonstrates the power of bringing the ecosystem together."

The ARISE Learning Festival 2026 (in collaboration with FICCI) reinforced the need for schools to remain connected, adaptive and deeply human-centred as they prepare young people for a rapidly evolving world. By bringing together ideas, lived experiences and on-ground practices, the Festival sought to translate conversations about the future of education into opportunities for learning, collaboration and action.

\*List of ARISE host schools:

For Delhi NCR, Host School are as follows:

1. Pathways World School, Gurugram, Haryana
2. Healthy Planet School, Noida, Uttar Pradesh
3. Khaitan World School, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh
4. Heritage International Xperiential School, Gurugram, Haryana
5. The Shri Ram School, Aravali, Gurugram, Haryana
6. The Ardee School, New delhi
7. Delhi Public School, Sector-45, Gurgaon, Haryana

8. Silverline Prestige School, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh

9. Vasant Valley, New Delhi

10. Nehru World School, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh

11. Shiv Nadar School, Noida, Uttar Pradesh

For PAN India, Host Schools are as follow:

1. The Ardee School, Sangolda, Goa

2. Valistus International School, Whitefield, Bangalore, Karnataka

3. Walnut School, Pune, Maharashtra

4. The Newtown School, Kolkata, West Bengal

5. Sagebrook International School, Hyderabad, Telangana

6. Grassroots Global Early Years, Patna, Bihar

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