



Why this Philanthropist Decided to Make a Significant Change in Giving Philosophy

How an emergency grant became an annual award, which led to a foundation that ignited a movement.

In August 2021, as Covid continued to assault our every way of life, the word “hero” became inextricably linked to “healthcare worker.” And make no mistake: Everyone from doctors and nurses to physician assistants and therapists deserved our undying gratitude.

At the same time, no one was really talking about the heroes of *education* — the teachers who continued to work with kids despite the most trying circumstances of our lifetime. Didn’t these beacons of resilience deserve a prize, too?

My husband, Jeff, and I posed that question to our longtime friend [Jeanne Allen](#), the CEO of the Center for Education Reform. They absolutely do, she said — and so we got to work.

In my home state of Philadelphia, when the schools closed, we provided laptops to children who didn’t have them at home. That seemed like a quick and easy win. However, as some schools reopened, the reality was depressing: Technology was being substituted for learning.

At the same time, thanks to the publicity around these gifts, we started hearing about parents in underserved communities who weren’t waiting for charity but taking matters into their own hands. Perhaps the best example was the [Black Mothers Forum](#) in Arizona. These moms formed learning pods, yet they lacked money for necessities such as heat.

This was a need we could fill, and so we created a grant for 60 kids to learn in a safe environment.

What’s more, our seed money inspired the state to sustain the program. Indeed, Governor Ducey signed [a law that created](#) the equivalent of educational savings accounts, which picked up the program’s cost.

Our success in the Southwest got us thinking: Why limit these opportunities to Arizona? Kids and parents shouldn’t need to beg for money in order to learn.

Put another way: No doubt, there were many more groups like the Black Mothers Forum across the country. How could we uncover their achievements?



In *Forbes*, we found a media partner that helped spread the word far and wide. Within a few months, thousands of applications poured in. Our gloom turned to joy as we saw how many organizations were doing such spirited and stupendous work.

Indeed, as we reviewed applications, we came across one that positively dazzled us. In Springfield, Missouri, a museum had been transformed into a school. In five days, children whose buildings had suddenly been shuttered could now continue learning.

Equally important: Since many of their parents were economically insecure first responders, the school — the [Discovery Center](#) — provided free childcare and meals. As a result, 1,500 students were able to continue their studies during the depths of the pandemic.

This is the essence of what we call a “STOP” education:

The work must be *sustainable* over time, meaning it can be funded independently without continual philanthropy.

The effort must be *transformational*, meaning it uses innovative new approaches to change the way students are educated.

The programs must be *outstanding*, meaning they’re demonstrably successful by every measure that matters.

And the work must require no permission — it must be *permissionless* — meaning it’s free to exist and thrive without depending on regulatory bodies.

This last point — about permission — is particularly important. Over the past quarter century, I’ve helped families in inner cities unlock educational options. In doing so, I’ve learned a lot of lessons. For example, trying to get charter applications approved — is too difficult. Trying to get state scholarships approved — more of the same. It should not be so daunting a task to create more opportunities for students. That’s why we are building a movement, to not only reward those STOP educators that don’t take “no” for an answer, but who are committed to truly transforming education for all students, and the policies that currently prevent that from happening.

As the Discovery Center discovered, “If you build it, they will come.” This go-getter attitude was essential not only during Covid, when nobody knew what was happening next; it also describes the mindset of every innovator in history.

It’s impossible for stories of success such as these not to inspire you. Indeed, Jeff and I were so moved that we’ve decided to turn an emergency grant into an annual award, housed in the newly established [STOP Foundation 4 Education](#).

We’re also tripling the size and scope of STOP Awards: Instead of giving away \$3 million to 20 awardees, we’re now giving away \$10.6 million to 64 awardees, each of which will receive a minimum of \$100,000. And we’ve named the grand prize of \$1 million the Yass Prize, which we hope will become the educational equivalent of the Pulitzer.

Finally, the STOP Awards bring together all semifinalists for a month long business accelerator. Last year’s accelerator proved that the experience of learning from, and partnering with, entrepreneurs, mentors, and, above all, one another was even richer than the financial rewards. We have no doubt these sentiments will be strengthened, since this year, we’re doubling the number of participants (to 32!).

Where do things stand now? On April 20, we [launched the 2022 STOP Awards](#). If you’re a public school or a private one, an after-school provider or a microschool, a mom who’s forming a learning pod or a software engineer who’s developing an app — we want to hear from you. We want to tell members of Congress that there’s an education provider delivering a STOP experience in their state or district.



Why We Can't Wait For the System to Repair Itself

Guest Post by Allan Sherer, New Way Global



New Way Global serves more than 250 students across 10 learning pods in Greenville, SC.

The documentary *Waiting for Superman* captures the failure of American education for many minority and low-income students. The film argues our education systems often inhibit rather than encourage academic excellence and equity. In the opening sequence, education pioneer Geoffrey Canada recollects a formative moment in his early childhood: “One of the saddest days of my life was when my mother told me Superman did not exist. I was like, ‘what do you mean he’s not real?’ And she thought I was crying because it’s like Santa Claus is not real, and I was crying because there was no one coming with enough power to save us.”

For over two years we have watched the devastation COVID-19 has caused our children. Complex studies and simple observation both demonstrate conclusively this devastation once again disproportionately impacts children who were already disadvantaged. Covid both uncovered and exacerbated a stubborn opportunity gap. For decades we have promised to eradicate this opportunity gap; yet, those closest to the reality of education in our poorest communities struggle to maintain hope. What hope is left is taking a serious beating as Covid stubbornly persists.

Years ago Canada warned, “There is an education cliff we are walking over right this very second.” Covid gave our poorest children a mighty shove. And it hasn't been lost on the education community. Said Michael Petrilli of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, “We

haven't seen this kind of academic achievement crisis in living memory.”

The tragic reality is, Superman isn't coming to make it right. As Canada said years before Covid, "I've met with several presidents, several secretaries of education... and there's no plan. If you want to save our children, you're going to have to do it yourself. It's just us."

The silver lining of Covid is the story of how individuals and organizations across America spontaneously took initiative to serve our least-served children. Churches, charter schools, businesses – organizations of every description mobilized to empower children to not only *survive* Covid, but to *thrive* educationally throughout the crisis.

In my city, Greenville, South Carolina, churches, businesses, educators, and community organizations coalesced to open ten learning pods for minority and low-income children in our poorest communities. More than 200 children received personalized educational support in venues situated within walking distance or a short drive from where they lived. The majority of children entering these pods at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year were failing in several subjects. By the end of the school year, the overwhelming majority of these children were honor roll students. We saw real change is possible when a community takes the lead in education.

Community-driven collaboration is more than a passing phenomenon. Covid surfaced a latent ecosystem with the potential to create unprecedented educational excellence and equity. Perhaps we have grossly underestimated the potential of communities to assume a greater role in reversing the education gap.

My organization, [New Way Global](#), is working to build a new, community-based educational ecosystem that will create educational opportunity for our children who need it most. We believe hundreds of excellent and innovative schools will be started in our poorest communities over the next twenty years.

While this vision may seem audacious, even outlandish, it is not a new idea. In the early 20th Century Booker T. Washington, president of Tuskegee College, partnered with Julius Rosenwald, philanthropist and president of Sears Roebuck to open innovative community-based schools for the descendants of former slaves. In roughly 20 years more than 5300 schools were erected across fifteen states in the rural south. By 1928, more than one third of black children in the rural South attended [Rosenwald Schools](#), including such notable leaders as Maya Angelou and John Lewis.

Is it really possible for the private sector to support education on a broad scale? Consider, who would have imagined only 20 years ago that Space-X, Blue Origin and other private companies would be leading the way in space exploration and colonization?

In a recent interview, Elon Musk was asked why he has spent billions of dollars trying to go to Mars. He responded, "I'm going to Mars for one picture: A lush green landscape in front of a red dirt mountain... That picture is going to invite every Ideator, every Inventor, every Explorer, every Investor to say, "This is possible." It takes entrepreneurial vision and innovation to forge major change, especially in systems that are essentially self-propagating monopolies.

We believe in less than 20 years we will see clearly that the community-driven response to Covid ignited a wave of education reform that broke the monopoly of a bloated and outdated bureaucracy and dramatically advanced education opportunity.



Greenville nonprofit in the running for \$1 million 'education innovation' prize



Angelia L. Davis
Greenville News

A Greenville-based nonprofit is a semi-finalist for a \$1 million award to "transform education."

New Way Global is one of 20 nationwide groups in the running for the STOP (Sustainable, Transformational and Outstanding education for students in Permissionless settings) award presented by The Center for Education Reform (CER) and its media partner Forbes.

STOP recognizes education providers who powered through the pandemic and delivered for underserved students during COVID.

New Way Global, a nonprofit started by Allan Sherer of North Hills Church in Taylors, was selected for the "Come Out Stronger (COS)" program which involved the creation of 10 learning pods during the 2020-2021 school year. The pods served communities such as Judson Mill, Poe Mill, Nicholtown, Bell Meade and others.

A goal of COS was to "flip the script for minority and low-income children; to not only prevent them from falling behind in school, but to empower them to excel," a report on the program said.





Forbes Chief Content Officer and Editor Randall Lane said in the release that while COVID presented an unprecedented challenge to the nation's education system, it also sparked "innovative thinking and new ideas that supported underserved families like never before."

Sherer said he had been reading lots of articles about how wealthy people were setting up "pandemic pods," where one or groups of families would hire a teacher to provide in-person education during the pandemic.

"This was happening all over America and I said, 'What about the people who can't do that?'" he said. "I saw the education gap widening, probably more than anytime in our lifetime and said, 'it can't be right that underserved children don't have this kind of support.' That's what got me going."

The applicants for the STOP award included teachers, technology innovators, school leadership teams, community and grassroots organizers, college achievement prep organizations and individual entrepreneurs.

Each told remarkable stories of resilience in the face of COVID and "an unshakable determination to deliver for students," said Jeanne Allen, CER's founder and CEO, in a press release.

The semi-finalists were judged not only on what they did during the pandemic, but how they plan to change the trajectory of K-12 education, Allen said.

The COS program was a collaboration of businesses, nonprofits, and churches such as Long Branch Baptist, Greater Mount Calvary Baptist, and Reconcile Community Church. North Hills Church was a major partner and organizer for the COS project.

Over 200 children were served and more than \$300,000 raised within six weeks to support the pods, Sherer said.

"When I saw that there was so much momentum, so much focus on these children, it was like, how do we harness this momentum to do something that will serve these children in an ongoing way?," he said.

An answer: the launch of a new innovative school in the Judson Mill community. If New Way Global wins the STOP grand prize, plans are to use that \$1 million to open that school.

But win or not, Sherer said the school is slated to open at Greater Mount Calvary Baptist early next year. Some funds have already been raised for the project, he said.

The STOP Award was made possible and underwritten by educational entrepreneur Janine Yass, nationally recognized education advocate and founder of the Boys' Latin Charter School in West Philadelphia, co-founder of the Philadelphia School Partnership, and a CER Director Emeritus, the release said.

Five finalists will be selected from the 20 semi-finalists in December during a Forbes gathering in New York City.

The winner of the \$1 million prize will be announced at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in January.

Alternative school looks to help students in Judson Mill get ahead

- Mike McMillan
- June 23, 2022



Pastors Allan Sherer and Windell Rodgers believe they have the answer when it comes to helping low-income students avoid low achievement and trouble: The Judson School.

The new private school is located in the Judson Mill neighborhood, where 76% of households live below the federal poverty line. The school will open Sept. 5 at Greater Mount Calvary Baptist Church, where Rodgers pastors. It will initially have about 20 K3 and K4 students.

But within just three years, Sherer and Rodgers expect to serve about 120 students through the fifth grade.

Sherer said the student-to-teacher ratio should be between 12-to-1 and 15-to-1.

The school is funded in part through community stakeholders, churches, businesses and individual philanthropists, but there will also be a “pay what you can afford” tuition model for families. There’s already growing support in the Upstate for opening

similar schools, according to Sherer and Rodgers, and the South Carolina Legislature could pass an education savings bill that will provide vouchers for private schools.

“Make or break”

Most children from middle-income families have about 1,000 to 1,700 hours of one-on-one reading by the time they get to school. For students in neighborhoods like Judson, it can be as little as 25 hours. – Jeff McQuillan, “The Literacy Crisis”

“We have to give children an alternative to what they’re given,” Rodgers said.

The goal is to steer clear of an overreliance on test scores and instead build a holistic program that incorporates more Christian themes, with programs specifically designed for students in lower-income neighborhoods, Sherer said.

“We want to flip the script and provide the most excellent education possible,” he said. “All the research shows it’s make or break at the earliest ages.”

The Judson School values:

- Intrinsic value
- Community and culture
- The whole child
- Individual needs
- Exceptional education
- Collaboration