

Unlocking the Impact of EdTech to Advance Learning & Development

Jacobs Foundation commits CHF 40 million to global EdTech research and investment

The opportunity we want to harness

In a year that was hugely disruptive to education around the world with 1.5 billion children out of school, **2020 proved to be a major milestone moment for the EdTech industry** with over [\\$16 billion raised in venture capital](#), and 2021 [is on track to smashing that record](#), showing promise for sustained investment in EdTech around the world. While Covid-19 has further accentuated this investment trend, the experience from the past year has raised significant questions around EdTech's role in widening disparities and increasing inequality around the world.

The current momentum presents an enormous opportunity to influence the direction of the EdTech industry to be a force of positive change in education. Acting in three key areas can unlock the potential of EdTech to deliver on its impact promise:

- **A focus on evidence needs to become a much more integral part of investment decisions.**

While EdTech use is growing, evidence on effectiveness is scarce. Commercially successful models rarely have a strong evidence base to prove their impact on learning. The use of evidence in investment decisions needs to become a priority if EdTech is to fulfil its impact potential.

- **Robust science needs to play a key part in how EdTech products are designed and deployed.**

Research shows promising impact of EdTech—e.g., personalized learning—but is rarely used to inform EdTech design and purchasing decisions. Bridging the divide between science and industry will be essential in ensuring that robust evidence drives how EdTech is developed and used.

- **Strategic learning and collaboration among funders can advance evidence use in EdTech.**

Leading foundations working in EdTech can come together as a learning and investment community to incentivize evidence demand and use, create investment standards and rating systems, and influence both companies and consumers to adopt an evidence-based impact orientation.

The impact we want to create

The Jacobs Foundation has [committed CHF 500 million](#) to advance learning and education around the world by 2030. As part of this commitment, the Foundation is investing in unlocking the impact of EdTech globally through the launch of three major mutually reinforcing initiatives:

- **Learning EdTech Impact Funds (LEIF)**

A total of CHF 30 million is deployed through leading EdTech Venture Capital (VC) funds to promote the use of evidence in EdTech among investors and portfolio companies. These VC funds commit to use evidence in decision-making processes, to diversify investments across beneficiaries and geographies, and to collaborate on research projects. The portfolio companies benefit from engaging with top researchers of the Jacobs Foundation network working on issues of relevance to product development and uptake. Learning from LEIF will serve to inform philanthropic and public policy decisions on EdTech including the creation of investment standards and better use of data in investment processes. Partner VC funds to date include: [Learn Capital](#), [Reach Capital](#), [New Markets Venture Partners](#), [Sparkmind.vc](#), [Rethink Education](#), [Educapital](#) and [BrightEye Ventures](#).

- **Connecting the EdTech Research EcoSystem (CERES)**

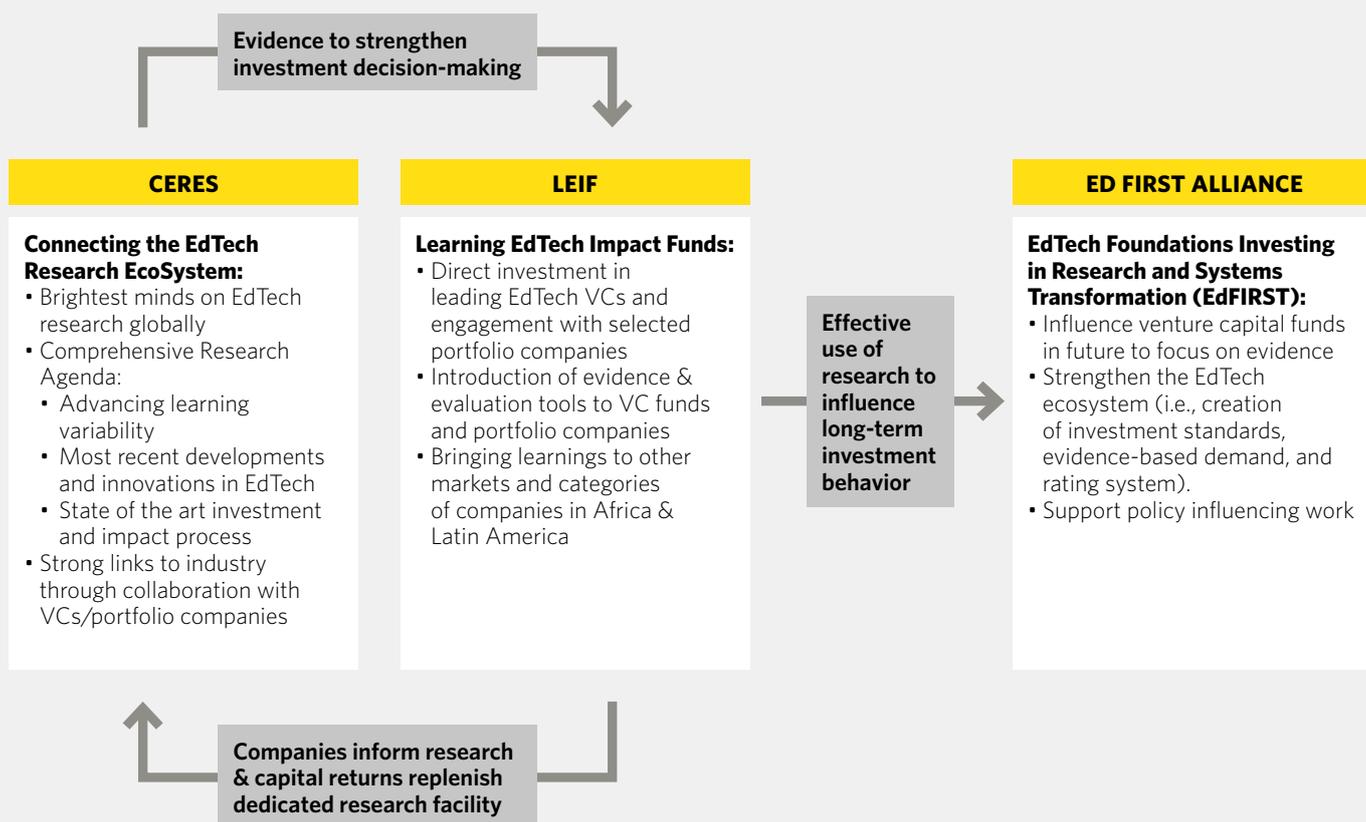
This CHF 10 million research facility is set up to bridge the divide between science and industry and close a key gap that inhibits progress on promising EdTech models. Housed at University of California Irvine (UCI), CERES will spearhead pioneering robust open science—combining expertise in computer science, human computer interaction, education, and psychology—structured around strategic learning and data sharing partnerships with EdTech companies. It will look at

topics such as understanding the widening digital divides and seek to build the capacity of scientists and EdTech leaders to collaborate and shape the next phase of research, innovation, and evidence-based products. CERES is seeded through an initial Jacobs Foundation grant and in the long-term is expected to be a financially self-sustaining research facility.

▪ **Education Foundations Investing in Research and Systems Transformation (EdFIRST)**

A fledgling alliance of leading foundations funding EdTech ventures and research seeks to advance the industry’s focus on evidence-based impact. Spearheaded by the Jacobs Foundation, the EdFIRST alliance is conceived as a learning community that works together towards increasing the use of evidence in investment decisions and advancing change in practices and standards of EdTech companies. This alliance ultimately wants to strengthen the EdTech ecosystem and support a large-scale shift towards evidence for impact in EdTech to shape education policy globally and locally by 2030 and beyond.

LEIF, CERES and **EdFIRST** are designed to complement each other offering the opportunity for unparalleled collaboration between EdTech companies, premier research institutions, and philanthropic actors.



Learn more

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