May 2026

Flourish Project
The Ecology of Wellbeing

An ESF Evaluation of the Harvard Flourishing Schools Project: *A Reflection through the Lens of Ecosystemic Flourishing (ESF)*

Overview

The **Harvard Flourishing Schools Project**, developed through the Human Flourishing Program at Harvard University, represents one of the most significant contemporary initiatives seeking to move educational evaluation beyond narrow academic attainment metrics towards a broader understanding of student flourishing, wellbeing, character development, and school culture. The initiative combines psychometric assessment, longitudinal wellbeing measurement, evidence-informed educational practice, and school improvement methodologies to help schools strengthen the conditions that support flourishing across academic, emotional, relational, and developmental dimensions.

From the perspective of the Ecosystemic Flourishing (ESF) Framework, the Harvard Flourishing Schools Project demonstrates substantial strengths in the areas of human development, wellbeing, relational culture, and evidence-based evaluation. It represents an important contribution to the emerging global flourishing education movement.

However, important limitations remain regarding ecological flourishing, regenerative systems thinking, participatory governance, and whole-school ecosystem transformation.

ESF Evaluation Summary

Domain	Assessment
Human Capacities & Potential	Exceptionally strong integration of wellbeing, meaning, resilience, belonging, relationships, and developmental flourishing.
Cultural Values & Identity	Strong emphasis on belonging, community, and school culture, though less developed regarding civic participation, pluralism, cultural ecology, and student agency.
Natural Environment	Ecological literacy, regenerative education, biodiversity, nature connection, and environmental stewardship remain underdeveloped.
Circular & Regenerative Systems	Strong iterative evaluation methodology, though limited attention is given to regenerative institutional systems, governance, staff flourishing, and long-term systemic transformation.

Final ESF Rating: 15.5 / 20

The Four ESF Domains

1. Human Capacities & Potential

The strongest dimension of the Harvard Flourishing Schools Project lies in its recognition that education should support the flourishing of the whole human being rather than merely academic performance.
The framework integrates multiple dimensions of flourishing including:

- emotional wellbeing,
- resilience,
- meaning and purpose,
- relationships,
- belonging,
- character development,
- and positive developmental capacities.

The project successfully challenges reductionist educational paradigms focused primarily upon attainment, standardised testing, and economic productivity.

Particularly strong features include:

- validated flourishing measures,
- longitudinal wellbeing assessment,
- integration of social and emotional development,
- inclusion of meaning and purpose,
- and evidence-informed developmental evaluation.

The project aligns strongly with the ESF understanding that flourishing involves multiple developmental dimensions including security, relationship, engagement, fulfilment, contribution, and growth.

However, the framework remains more focused on individual flourishing outcomes than on the wider ecosystemic conditions that shape flourishing across the whole educational environment.

---

2. Cultural Values & Identity

The Harvard Flourishing Schools Project demonstrates considerable strength regarding:

- belonging,
- relational trust,
- school culture,
- community wellbeing,
- and shared purpose.

The inclusion of school-level community measures is particularly important because it moves beyond purely individualised wellbeing models towards a more relational understanding of flourishing.

The framework appropriately recognises that flourishing is influenced by:

- relationships,
- meaning systems,
- institutional culture,
- and social connection.

From an ESF perspective, the project aligns well with principles relating to compassionate educational culture, relational learning environments, and social cohesion.

However, several important dimensions remain underdeveloped, including:

- participatory democracy within schools,
- student agency,
- civic engagement,
- intergenerational connection,
- local cultural identity,
- Indigenous and place-based knowledge,
- and pluralistic cultural understanding.

While student experience is measured extensively, student co-creation and participatory governance receive comparatively limited attention.

---

3. Natural Environment

The ecological dimension represents the weakest aspect of the Harvard Flourishing Schools Project from an ESF perspective. Although the framework occasionally references learning environments and outdoor experience, ecological flourishing is not deeply integrated into the model.

Limited attention is given to:

- ecological literacy,
- biodiversity,
- regenerative education,
- nature connection,
- climate resilience,
- ecological stewardship,
- food systems,
- and the relationship between human flourishing and living systems.

From an ESF perspective, flourishing cannot be fully understood apart from ecological conditions and relationships with the living world. The absence of a substantial ecological dimension limits the project's ecosystemic scope.

Potential areas for future development include:

- regenerative school grounds,
- outdoor experiential learning,
- ecological citizenship,
- climate wellbeing,
- and schools as living ecological systems.

At present, the framework remains *substantially anthropocentric in orientation.*

---

4. Circular & Regenerative Systems

The Harvard Flourishing Schools Project demonstrates strengths in its iterative improvement methodology, longitudinal assessment structures, and evidence-informed school development

processes.

The use of:

- annual evaluation,
- benchmarking,
- reflective improvement cycles,
- and institutional learning

provides schools with practical tools for developmental reflection and adaptation.

The framework therefore demonstrates meaningful alignment with ESF principles regarding systems improvement, reflective practice, and long-term developmental evaluation. However, the project does not yet fully address broader regenerative institutional transformation.

Underdeveloped areas include:

- staff flourishing,
- governance systems,
- participatory leadership,
- organisational wellbeing,
- workload culture,
- economic sustainability,
- time culture,
- and regenerative operational design.

The relationship between flourishing education and wider socio-economic systems also receives relatively limited attention. From an ESF perspective, flourishing schools require transformation not only at the level of student wellbeing, but across the entire institutional ecology.

Key Strengths

The Harvard Flourishing Schools Project demonstrates major strengths in:

- evidence-based wellbeing evaluation,
- longitudinal flourishing assessment,
- integration of character and relational development,
- movement beyond narrow attainment metrics,
- school culture evaluation,
- and practical implementation methodologies.

Its strongest contribution lies in providing a rigorous and internationally credible flourishing evaluation model for schools.

Key Limitations

From an ESF perspective, the project would be significantly strengthened through greater integration of:

Ecological Flourishing

- ecological literacy,
- regenerative education,
- biodiversity,

- climate resilience,
- and nature connection.

Whole-School Ecosystem Evaluation
- staff flourishing,
- institutional wellbeing,
- governance culture,
- and regenerative operational systems.

Participatory Culture
- student leadership,
- democratic participation,
- youth co-creation,
- and civic engagement.

Cultural and Place-Based Dimensions
- local identity,
- Indigenous knowledge,
- intergenerational learning,
- and cultural pluralism.

Regenerative Systems Thinking
- circular systems
- stewardship culture,
- systems literacy,
- and schools as living ecosystems.

Concluding Assessment

The Harvard Flourishing Schools Project represents one of the strongest current international approaches to measuring and supporting flourishing within educational settings. Its psychometric rigour, longitudinal methodology, practical implementation structures, and evidence-informed developmental approach make it a highly significant contribution to contemporary educational transformation. From an ESF perspective, the project is best understood as a highly credible and well-developed flourishing education framework with significant potential to evolve into a fuller ecosystemic model. Its greatest opportunity lies in evolving from **measuring human flourishing within schools** towards **supporting schools to become flourishing ecosystemic communities** embedded within regenerative social, cultural, and ecological systems.

The Flourish Project is a global initiative dedicated to advancing the Ecosystemic Flourishing (ESF) Framework - an integrative approach to wellbeing that recognises the deep interdependence between human development, cultural values, regenerative economies, and the natural world. Rooted in systems thinking, relational practice, and emerging research on flourishing, the project seeks to support the development of compassionate, resilient, and ecologically conscious individuals and communities through education, policy innovation, research, and cross-sector collaboration.
A global multidimensional framework designed to complement GDP through the measurement of equitable, inclusive, and sustainable wellbeing across present and future generations. The framework integrates wellbeing, inclusion, sustainability, resilience, institutional quality, and environmental conditions into a unified dashboard architecture for national and international policy application.