

Joanne Carter, Executive Director  
RESULTS and RESULTS Educational FUND  
1101 15th St. NW Washington, DC 20005

29<sup>th</sup> March 2017

Dear Joanne Carter,

I am writing in response to the publication of your recent RESULTS report: *'Are for profit, fee charging private schools the solution for the world's poor?'*

As you know, Bridge International Academies (Bridge) and RESULTS had an initial conversation about your forthcoming research in early 2016. However, we were surprised that RESULTS did not subsequently engage with Bridge as your report took shape to either verify cited facts or to check the accuracy of some of your assertions. It is common practice when producing credible research to engage with those profiled of your reports to ensure that the research can be held to a high standard and is both accurate and therefore credible. As you will be aware, Bridge offered to correct the many factual inaccuracies in your report prior to publication, an offer that was declined.

Having now had the opportunity to review your findings, it is important to note that there are both basic inaccuracies and broader misunderstandings, the presence of which sadly go on to undermine any of the wider conclusions you seek to draw. We hope that you will now rectify these within your report and address the wider misconceptions outlined.

*Pg 8. RESULTS states that Bridge International Academies charges about \$9 per month in school fees reaching as high as \$20 per month.*

Please note this is incorrect: It costs an average of just under \$7 a month to send a child to Bridge. Our Fees are published in every Bridge school and are in the appendix to this letter.

*Pg 33. RESULTS states that Bridge uses a cellular phone platform that provides real time information to teachers as to whether their students have paid their fees and whether they are allowed in class. The payment of fees is linked to teachers' salaries, which are to be deducted if "non-allowed" students are still in the classroom.*

Please note this is incorrect: Teachers do not have access to real time information about pupil fees. Teacher's salaries at Bridge are not based on pupil performance or attendance. As in all schools, the school principal or at Bridge, Academy Managers, have access to pupil information not classroom teachers.

*Pg 34: RESULTS states that Bridge's educational materials had not been approved by the government "because it did not meet standards as expected by KICD," and its schools were almost entirely unregistered*

Please note this is incorrect: All Bridge International Academies are in the process of being registered by the Kenyan government, in accordance with the APBET regulations that were only promulgated in March 2016. Prior to that, there was no registration pathway for "non-formal" schools serving pockets of poverty. Bridge has participated in seeking regulation of the sector since 2008, and celebrates the Ministry of Education's leadership under Fred Matiang'i, who oversaw the release of the long-awaited guidelines. Similarly, governance of materials in use at non—state schools has changed in recent years, and since new governance came into place in 2013, Bridge has been working with the MOE and KICD to provide oversight, advice and approval on various materials that Bridge has found

support teachers and learners in the classroom. Bridge is a licensed publisher in Kenya, and currently has dozens of titles formally under the editorial review process. Since 2013, the MOE has adopted the methodology of teachers' guides (or scripted instruction) for use in all 23,000 public primary schools, the same methodology used at Bridge schools.

*Pg 34: RESULTS states that Kenya and Uganda order closures of Bridge due to regulatory violations. Bridge has filed an appeal against the Ugandan government.*

Please note this is incorrect: Bridge schools have not been ordered to close in Kenya by the Government of Kenya. Bridge schools are open in Kenya. Engagement with the County Education Board of Busia County is underway, given direction by the Court that the Court would not instruct the County that it must enforce the APBET guidelines. Consequently, Bridge continues to work with the County Education Board on the goals APBET and how the county and its children benefit from this regulation. Working with the Education Board, the registration files for all schools in Busia have been received. As the APBET guidelines were only released in March 2016, there remains confusion across various bodies as to its enforcement. This is a normal process in a period of regulatory change.

Bridge continues to follow the licensing process in Uganda as set out by the MOEST, and all Bridge schools remain open, and serving over 14,000 children.

*Pg 37. RESULTS states that Partnership Schools Liberia (PSL) consists of 92 government primary schools. Bridge runs 23 Government schools.*

Please note this is incorrect: Bridge runs 25 schools as part of PSL and PSL, as a whole, runs 94 schools.

Contributions to the ongoing conversation and financial investments into Education across the developing world is important but it is equally important that those contributions are evidenced based and robust in their analysis. The newly published report by RESULTS was researched on the basis on being an investigation into IFC investments and low cost private schools and Bridge partook in the investigation on that basis.

However, the final report has seemingly publication morphed into an inaccurate assessment of the Bridge model which is riddled with factual inaccuracies and lacks a clear understanding about the nature of IFC investment. Bridge was not given the opportunity to correct factual inaccurate prior to publication, despite offering to engage.

It is important to note that the academic basis of this report in terms of research standards and sample and holistic perspective size leaves much to be desired. It is predominantly qualitative in basis with a sample size of 104 people. Bridge alone has hundreds of thousands of pupils. The report uses the conclusions of only 2 – 3 responders to validate a single point. In addition, the lack of transparency in the report, regarding the list of organizations and civil society groups included in the research for the report, leaves uncertainty whether it can claim to be balanced or whether it is ideologically driven.

It is also worth noting that the report does little to address the empirical evidence of learning gains, such as that which can be found in the archives of country national results. It raises a question as to why a report, looking at IFC investment would dismiss evidenced and independent numerical data. It is also worth raising the notable omission of learning outcomes currently being achieved in public schools, which are in many cases minimal, with a focus on inputs rather than outputs.

We trust that RESULTS, like Bridge, is working in support of SDG4 which establishes that quality, and learning outcomes, are required for a child's right to education to be delivered. When free public schools either do not exist or do not offer quality education, ethics of responsibility begs private actors to ensure that children have their right to education enabled through a mixed economy. At Bridge, we cannot stand by while children have either no school they can afford to attend, or only a school where they still cannot read after attending for 4 years. Any report on the value of investment in education must include measurement of learning, opportunity created – and critically, what is the alternative for the child if the option being evaluated does not exist.

For those operating in education, it is also interesting to note the ideological undertone which penetrates the report with no acknowledgement of a widely-endorsed understanding, that the private sector can offer benefit to the education system of developing economies in the same way that it has for Healthcare or Telecom systems.

The notion that there should be additional investment in education both globally and nationally, is something that all education providers, both NGO, donor, public and private agree with and is raised within report. It is clear that the argument for greater investment includes engagement with education enterprises operating and delivering learning gains and education transformation within the financial envelopes that currently exist in national economies. It is also essential that investment correspond with transparent and measurable learning outcomes. Bridge is one example of the success of investment in the private sector, where such investment by IFC has led to a model that delivers learning gain improvements within limited national budgets, and to the populations who need access and quality the most.

Fundamentally, the report conflates the difference between World Bank policy regarding fees in public schools and their position on fees charged by other education providers, the abolition of which is not and never has been a World Bank objective. In addressing the specifics, the opening premise of the report suggests that 'The practice of charging school fees has been consistently shown to be an ineffective means of poverty alleviation'. However, it is the learning delivered within education systems that is the single biggest intervention to alleviate poverty for future generations. This is evidenced in numerous assessments by the World Bank, UN and others. In 2015 the President of the World Bank himself commented that 'Bridge International Academies is a means to alleviate poverty'. This is because of the learning gains delivered, which empower this generation to build economic prosperity and improved health in the next generation.

It is worth noting that the primary purpose of low cost schools is to increase access to better education outcomes, outcomes which will subsequently drive prosperity and therefore alleviate poverty. Education for this generation is a long term sustainable solution to poverty alleviation, and in Kenya 90% of families in the communities Bridge serves, many of whom exist on under \$1.25 a day, can send their children to a Bridge school.

Bridge makes significant contributions to ongoing global efforts to achieve SDG4. Bridge believes that there should be enough great free public schools across the developing world, and that they should be providing high quality education. However, this isn't happening today. So, today's children need a solution not a decade from now, but today. Pragmatic realism necessitates that the private sector engages to help serve the needs of parents and children today, while all stakeholders work to demonstrate how government schools can become transformational places of learning. As UN figures emphasize, there are 263 million children not in school and the Education commission found that there are 330 million in school but not learning. Low cost schools are part of a mixed economy model for education which enables the gap to be bridged until developing economies get to the point where they can provide enough quality schools.

Politically and from a policy perspective, it makes sense for the World Bank, which provides public sector financing, to work towards the perfect long term solution with one hand, while with the other hand of the IFC

works with the private sector to create a short term, fast, high quality remedy – which may just become part of the public sector solution as well. Across the globe, evidence-based decisions are leading governments to look at how the public sector and private sector can work together to improve outcomes in education, from South Delhi, to Capetown, to Uganda, Zambia, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. Any sensible policy development must allow for both the public sector and private sector to work on the most important, and hardest to solve problem in the world today – how to ensure that every child is learning.

A productive area of investigation is suggested by Academic #1 who suggests that innovations could move from private to public schools. A case in point would be the Partnership Schools for Liberia program, which sees private sector organizations charged with bringing new materials, training, and management to work with existing civil service teachers and principals to create powerful public schools. Bridge is one of 8 private organizations tasked with this challenge, and after only 15 weeks, early indications published by the MOE show a 0.79 standard deviation gain in literacy. These are early results, but if maintained, would lead to dramatic change in the lives of children, and the future of Liberia. An investigation of the various specific methods used by Bridge and other operators that have delivered improved learning would demonstrate innovations moving from private to public schools, and be of interest to educators and policy leaders globally.

The report's assertion that commercial operators are bound to put the business interest over education quality fundamentally misunderstands the focus of a mission-driven social enterprise, and the power of parent choice. First, let's focus on parents, and their wisdom in knowing what their own children need. Bridge operates a system where the parents are the customers and in Liberia, the customer is the government. If Bridge was not delivering results that parents valued and could readily see in their own children's learning, then parents would choose to take their children elsewhere; this is how parents are empowered through having choices, and how choice and competition forces service providers to continually improve their services. World Bank research has repeatedly shown how various types of competition improve learning outcomes for children. Second, as a mission-driven social enterprise, Bridge has dedicated itself to serving families living in poverty, and has now served 250,000 children. If the primary purpose was revenue or business interests than the organization would not have spent 10 years serving families living in poverty, where the environments are amongst the most difficult in the world, and financial sustainability requires delivering a great service to hundreds of thousands of children every day. Bridge is a highly leveraged long term growth model that puts quality education outcomes and opportunity for children above all else. In addition, the Bridge model has not made any profit to date, nor have any dividends been paid since it began. We believe that bringing new investment of over \$100m USD to build strong schools in marginalized communities in the developing world and build systems that other private and public school can learn from is a sound investment – one to be celebrated.

Another overall frame of the Report is that the quality of education should be defined by inputs whereas it is clearly evidenced that successful education programmes should be defined by outputs. If a child can achieve high academic results on national exams and develop the same self-confidence as a child who goes to school charging 10 to 100 times that of a low cost school, then inputs are proven as secondary. The only solution to get quality education to all is to ensure that good learning outcomes are available to all. Whilst detractors of low cost schools may focus on inputs, facilities and buildings are irrelevant if a child is not learning. Safe shelter is a necessary aspect of a school, but it is not a sufficient or effective measure of a *good* school. Focusing solely on the aesthetic appearance of a building rather than how teachers are supported and children are learning undermines the revolutionary reforms that are essential to drive prosperity in developing economies.

If the learning outcomes for each and every child were clearly transparent such that the educational performance and success of a school, school systems and models were clearly visible, evidence-based decisions could be made by all stakeholders. Bridge has been dedicated to such transparency and building of a strong ecosystem in

education reform since we began. While the RESULTS report refers to varying notions of quality, at Bridge we are clear that the measures of quality are demonstrable learning gains and strong academic performance.

The analysis within the report fundamentally undermines the parents right to choose and wrongly asserts that parents cannot afford low cost schools. This assertion is based on fundamental misunderstandings of both local context and community priority. As the report states, public schools *should* be an option, and Bridge fundamentally agrees that there should be free public schools that deliver a transformational education to children. However, where there are not transformational, free public schools, many parents are choosing to invest, or as the report frames it ‘sacrificing to invest’, in their child’s education because public schools are not delivering the quality education parents have a right to demand for their children.

It is also important to note that public schools in our operational countries are rarely ‘free’, with a range of fees being imposed from teacher ‘motivation fees’ to fees for school materials. To suggest that there is a simple choice between ‘free’ public schools and low cost schools is factually inaccurate. In addition, the report wildly inflates the cost of attending a Bridge school. This is a willful inaccuracy. On average a Bridge parent pays under \$7 dollars a month for a child to attend a Bridge school. Fees are publicized at each and every school and are publicly available, as are the costs of the uniforms. For families that may sometimes struggle to meet fees at certain times, there are a range of options including hardship programs to ensure that their children have the best possible chance of staying within Bridge. Naturally, there will be some in the communities Bridge serves who despite the low cost will still be unable to meet the fees, for those there is an extensive scholarship programme. Over 10% of pupils are at Bridge on scholarships and many go on to benefit from a scholarship programme for secondary school entry with a handful gaining entry to prestigious schools in the USA.

Supporting teachers to deliver the best possible lesson is at the heart of what Bridge does. The report states that Bridge teachers are not sufficiently trained to deliver lessons. The evidence to counter that is clear in the results that our children are achieving in National exams. In addition to intensive induction training, Bridge also provides robust ongoing in-service training and professional development. Moreover, Bridge works closely with regulatory bodies to ensure that teachers employed meet changing regulatory requirements. For example, under the ABPET guidelines for schools serving “pockets of poverty” released in March 2016, schools are to have 33% of their primary school teachers with a “P1” certificate. Within the 1 year of this new guideline being released, 39% of teachers at Bridge have a “P1” certificate. In Liberia, 98% of Bridge teachers have pre-existing government certification, and the other 2% were existing teachers the MOE requested remain at the school given their previous service. Teachers or education models which use scripted learning or teacher’s guides are almost dismissed by the report but academic evidence shows that it a proven method of delivering significant learning gains. USAID’s official policy is to encourage teacher guide use for English and Mathematics as a priority learning intervention, and now in Kenya all public primary schools use scripted instruction in Grades 1 and 2 – because this has been shown to dramatically increase children’s learning. In addition, it is untrue to say that this is only a method of instruction used in developing economies. In 2010, the USA scripted reading instruction program, Success For All (SFA) received a near \$50 million dollar grant from the US Department of Education to expand their work in US public schools based on the evidence of the program’s success in helping children learn.

The report advocates that schools such as Bridge are not a complement to the public school system, however, without schools such as Bridge more than 1 million primary age children would be out of school across Kenya.

The need for “non-formal” or now called APBET schools has been documented in Kenya education policy since KESSP I to the National Education Reform Council’s work in 2012. Education Minister Mutula Kalonzo considered the “formalization” of “non-formal” schools an issue of Constitutional importance, given that it was these low-cost

private schools that were serving impoverished families across both urban and rural Kenya. Without these “non-formal” schools, many children would be out of school. For example, the 2014 Nairobi Education Taskforce report noted that there were more than 1500 low-cost private schools alone, serving at least 150,000 children. With these low-cost or APBET schools concentrated in the informal settlements where there are far too few public schools, without these schools, the majority of those 150,000 children would be on the street. As such, another name for APBET schools in Kenya is “complementary” schools.

We at Bridge would agree that strong and clear regulation in this space is critically important to both encourage more actors to serve the needs of children, and to ensure learning gains and critical standards are being met. Bridge has advocated for regulation of non-formal schools since becoming a partner to the MOE in Kenya in 2008, and has been a strong proponent of the Kenyan Alternative Provision of Basic Education and Training (APBET).

Moreover, there is much that is learned from the public sector seeing what works in low-cost private schools. As mentioned before, teacher guides or scripted instruction is now the formal method of instruction in all Kenyan primary schools. Early Grade Reading and Early Grade Mathematics programs. In addition, governments are adopting both teacher computers and school management information systems first used in private schools to improve teacher performance and accountability in the classroom. In Uganda the MP for Butembe said: "If teacher absenteeism is the problem and Bridge International Academies has found the solution to it, then why can't we pick a leaf from Bridge. Learn how the teacher computers work and then settle the issue once and for all'. The MP for Arua in Uganda said: " I am amazed at what these people have done to change the lives of these little ones." It was the Liberia Education Minister's seeing the support provided to teachers and active learning and subject mastery of children at Bridge schools in Uganda that inspired him to share what he saw with other government officials in Liberia, and which then brought President Sirleaf to see for herself that even on the limited budgets of a developing country, the public school system has a large enough budget to deliver on the promise of powerful public schools. In her 2017 Annual address, she argued that: "The children and their families are the program's strongest advocates, and that, to me, says it all."

All Bridge schools adhere to local and national standards from inspection reports right through to developing lesson plans based upon national curriculums. Despite the claims of the RESULTS report, which reassert Brussels-based Trade Union findings, Bridge schools have not been closed in either Uganda or Kenya. Ongoing discussions with government both local and national continue to clear up misinformation, and we are confident schools will continue to serve communities for years to come.

The learning that children receive, and the increased opportunity created, is not a private good. It is a public good. Without the investment needed to fund intensive R&D to create scientific-based programs for learning, it would not be possible for any organization to create improved teacher training, improved software for learning, improved textbooks, teacher guides, school management software, or many of the other specific innovations that all contribute to the powerful learning environment that Bridge provides parents in the academies it manages, or in the powerful public schools we run in partnership with governments.

Children who have been studying with Bridge achieve a 59% pass rate on the Kenya Certificate of Primary Examination as compared to 44% at public schools. 74% of children who've been studying at Bridge for 4 years pass the national exam. More than 50 schools had a 100% pass rate. We are proud of our service to parents and governments, and the clear evidence of the quality of the work that Bridge does. We trust that you will find it important to correct the factual errors in the RESULTS report, and to include additional perspectives of leading voices in the sector.

Yours Sincerely



Dr. Shannon May

Chief Strategy Officer – Bridge Academies International

[www.bridgeinternationalacademies.com](http://www.bridgeinternationalacademies.com)

**Appendix 1:**

Averages change, as academies are built: Bridge Fee Table 28<sup>th</sup> March 2017,:

- Kenya - average of 7,996 Kenya Shillings per year (plus 775 Kenya Shillings for a uniform)
- Uganda - 254,220 Uganda Shillings per year (plus 26,985 Uganda Shillings for a uniform)
- Nigeria - 22,071 Naira per year (plus 2,150 Naira for a uniform)
- India - 8,334 Rupees per year (plus 650 rupees for a uniform)
- Liberia – no fees for students due to PPP arrangement with the government.

cc.

Tony Baker, RESULTS Educational Fund  
EACHrights  
World Bank  
IFC