



MAY 13TH 2026

THOUGHTMEET

on Achievement and Well-Being



How can we strengthen student health and well-being while also improving achievement?

On May 13, 2026, ARC members gathered for a ThoughtMeet on one of the most urgent questions facing education systems today: How can we strengthen student health and well-being while also improving achievement?

From Policy to Practice

Across the world, education systems are under growing pressure to respond to declining student well-being, increasing mental health concerns, inactivity, inequity and disengagement. At the same time, systems are expected to maintain high standards of learning and achievement. The ThoughtMeet explored how these priorities are not separate or competing agendas, but deeply connected dimensions of what it means to create strong, inclusive and future-oriented education systems.

Dr. Beatriz Pont, Global Training Lead with IIEP UNESCO, opened the session by setting out a powerful policy and implementation perspective. Drawing on international evidence, she highlighted that policies and plans alone are not enough. Real change depends on sustained investment, adaptive leadership and the capacity to support implementation across all levels of the system. Her contribution reminded participants that well-being policies must be understood as living processes, shaped by people, relationships, context, monitoring and continuous learning.

The ThoughtMeet then turned to the experiences of two ARC member systems: Ireland and Uruguay. Ireland shared how well-being has become a central part of national education policy, connected to curriculum, school culture, relationships, partnerships and planning. The Irish experience showed how a system can pursue high achievement and student well-being together, supported by professional learning, implementation structures and a strong commitment to safe and supportive schools.

When well-being and learning go hand in hand

Uruguay offered an inspiring example of how innovation, student voice and belonging can be placed at the heart of system development. Through digital tools, student surveys, sociograms, school climate work and programmes that invite young people to participate actively in shaping their learning environments, Uruguay demonstrated how data can be used not simply for monitoring, but for strengthening relationships, inclusion and agency.

A key message from the session was that achievement and well-being must be understood together. Students learn better when they feel safe, connected, respected and able to participate. At the same time, meaningful learning, engagement and a sense of purpose are themselves essential to well-being.



The ThoughtMeet showed the strength of ARC as a learning community: bringing together international expertise, system experience and shared reflection across countries. The discussion highlighted both the urgency of the challenge and the possibility of progress when education systems work deliberately, collaboratively and with young people's lives at the centre.