

2 South Africans in the running for Africa Education Medal 2023

Two South Africans, Grace Matlhape, CEO of SmartStart and Mary Metcalfe, executive director of the Programme to Improve Learning Outcomes, have been named as Top 10 finalists for the 2023 Africa Education Medal. Founded last year by T4 Education and HP in collaboration with Microsoft, the Africa Education Medal is Africa's most prestigious education accolade.



Source: <https://t4.education>

The Africa Education Medal is aimed at honouring individuals who have demonstrated exceptional impact, leadership, and advocacy in the field of education in Africa. The award celebrates their tireless efforts and shines a light on the stories of change that can inspire others to take action.

The Africa Education Medal was established in 2022 by T4 Education and HP in collaboration with Microsoft recognises the tireless work of those who are transforming education across the continent – to celebrate the stories of those who have lit the spark of change so others will be inspired to take up the torch. It is given to an outstanding individual who has demonstrated impact, leadership, and advocacy in the field of education.

Grace Matlhape

Grace Matlhape is CEO of SmartStart in South Africa, a social franchise that seeks to ensure every young child has access to a quality early learning programme in preparation for the opportunities ahead. Matlhape built SmartStart from the ground up into one of South Africa's largest networks of home-based early learning practitioners with more than 9,000 practitioners and 60,000 children across all 9 provinces.

SmartStart was founded in 2015 to address the problem that an estimated 1.24 million South African children between the ages of three and five do not attend an appropriate early learning programme. Over 750,000 of these children are from impoverished communities, where affordability is a key consideration. Matlhape has pioneered a community-centred approach to providing an affordable early learning programme that prepares young children for formal schooling.



Grace Matlhape, CEO of SmartStart in South Africa. Image supplied



Giving children a SmartStart with chatbots

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Matlhape, who is honoured to be a finalist says, “For those of us who work in education, the success of the country’s youth is one of the most important indications of how well we are doing. In addition to being a personal milestone, this nomination is confirmation that SmartStart is making a real and measurable impact on people’s lives. It also highlights the essential nature of our mission, which is to enable the potential of children and women by providing affordable access to quality early learning across South Africa,” says Matlhape.

Mary Metcalfe

Mary Metcalfe is a South African educationist, activist, and executive director of the Programme to Improve Learning Outcomes (PILO), an NGO whose work impacts three million learners. Metcalfe is a highly respected leader and a passionate advocate for equal education who has been instrumental in developing South African education policy.

She has worked in education since 1974 as a teacher, principal, and lecturer. Before the democratic transition of 1994, Metcalfe was a member of the United Democratic Front (UDF), which stood against Apartheid, and from 1994–2004 she served as the Provincial Minister for Education for Gauteng. She joined the Development Bank of Southern Africa as the lead sector specialist. While there she led a broad collaborative process to conceptualise a programme on systemic improvement in education. She left in 2013 to pilot the model at scale by founding the non-profit PILO.



Mary Metcalfe, executive director of the Programme to Improve Learning Outcomes (PILO). Image source: <https://t4.education>

At PILO, Metcalfe’s work focuses on the systemic improvement of curriculum management across the South African education system. Despite significant investment in public education, South Africa performs poorly in terms of delivering successful learners and enabling them to be socially engaged and productive adults.

Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, South Africa, was named the winner of the inaugural Africa Education Medal.

“It was the greatest honour to be recognised for my life's passion. Winning the Africa Education Medal 2022 gave me a global platform to advocate for that work and I hope it has inspired others across our continent to further the cause of African education”



UCT's Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng wins inaugural Africa Education Medal

5 Sep 2022



Top 10 finalists

The Top 10 finalists for the Africa Education Medal are:

- Mary Ashun, Principal of Ghana International School, Ghana
- Laura Kakon, Chief Growth & Strategy Officer of Honoris United Universities, Morocco
- Rogers Kamugisha, Country Director of Educate!, Rwanda
- Grace Malthape, CEO of SmartStart, South Africa
- Mary Metcalfe, former policymaker and CEO of Programme to Improve Learning Outcomes (PILO), South Africa
- Martha Muhrezi, Executive Director of FAWE, Uganda
- Jean-Claude Nkulikiyimfura, Executive Director of Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village, Rwanda
- Simi Nwogugu, CEO of JA Africa, Nigeria
- Sarah Ruto, Former Chief Administrative Secretary of Kenya's Ministry of Education and CEO of PAL Network, Kenya
- Snehar Shah, CEO of Moringa School, Kenya

The winner of the Africa Education Medal will be announced in July. Finalists will be assessed by a Jury comprising prominent individuals based on rigorous criteria.

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