

NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY

Opportunities & Challenges

**A WHITE PAPER ON INDIA'S NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY AND DISABILITY INCLUSIVE
EDUCATION**

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NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY: Opportunities & Challenges

**A White Paper on India's National Education Policy and
Disability Inclusive Education**

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I wanted Shashank to get an education that prepared him for all challenges and obstacles. I am so proud of what he has achieved in the past few years. But it has been a lonely, difficult struggle, and the fractured ecosystem of inclusive education was a huge challenge.

The schools accepted him, and give him a lot of love. They included him in activities, but they were not equipped to cater to his special needs. There were no trained people and no special educators. The schools had neither the resources nor the exposure to make sure that he got the same opportunities to participate to the best of his abilities.

As a parent, these responsibilities were left to me.

Whatever additional effort was required in terms of teaching Shashank or getting his assignments done, fell entirely on my shoulders. It was very difficult to keep up with the pace of the class and the expectations of the teachers. All this took a toll on my health, and at times also affected my relationship with him. Being a parent meant shelving all my personal needs and space, and relentlessly striving to ensure that my son got an education.

Abhilasha, mother of Shashank (name changed) who is a child with cerebral palsy

Foreword

India's New Education Policy (NEP) came at a time when the world is undergoing rapid transformation in the education sector. It is heartening to note that the Policy lays particular emphasis on the development of the creative potential of each individual, basing itself on the principle that education must not only develop cognitive capacities, but also social, ethical and emotional thinking leading to a holistic development.

The emphasis on provision of a quality education system with particular focus on historically marginalized, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups is also noteworthy. And it is particularly encouraging to note that the Policy acknowledges that a number of initiatives will be required, including innovative use of technology, to ensure that learning environments are supportive, engaging and enabling. These are welcome steps in shaping an equitable and vibrant knowledge-based society.

However, challenges to disability inclusive education continue to persist. More than 1 billion¹ children are at risk of falling behind school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Among these 1 billion children the most vulnerable are often children with disabilities. The time is now right to ensure that the roadmaps prepared for the implementation of the NEP is disability inclusive. And it is imperative that both Civil Society and Governments come together and work towards ensuring that *'No one is left behind'*.

Arman Ali
Executive Director
NCPEDP

¹ <https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/covid-19/>

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List of Abbreviations

AAC	Augmentative and Alternative Communication
ADIP	Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchasing/Fitting of Aids/ Appliance
BRCs	Block Resource Centers
CRCs	Cluster Resource Centers
CRE	Continuing Rehabilitation Education
CWD	Children with Disabilities
CWSN	Children with Special Needs
DEPwD	Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities
DIET	District Institute of Education and Training
DIKSHA	Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing
DoSEL	Department of School Education and Literacy
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
GIGW	Guidelines For Indian Government Websites
GPI	Gender Parity Index
HBE	Home Based Education
IEDSS	Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage, Scheme
IE	Inclusive Education
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
MoE	Ministry of Education
MSJE	Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
NAS	National Achievement Survey
NEP	New Education Policy
NIEPA	National Institute of Education Planning and Administration Admission
NIOS	The National Institute of Open Schooling
NMHS	National Mental Health Survey
PARAKH	Performance Assessment, Review and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development
PTR	Pupil – Teacher Ratio
RMSA	Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan

RPWD Act	Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act
RTE Act	Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education Act
SARTHAQ	Students' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement Through Quality Education
SCCD	School complex Cluster Development
SCDP	School Complex/Cluster Development Plan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEDGs	Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups
SEZ	Special Education Zones
SIDPA	Scheme for Implementing of Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995
SMCs	School Management Committees
SDMCs	School Development Monitoring Committee Coordination Forum
SMSA	Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan
SQAAF	School Quality Assessment and Accreditation Framework
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
TLM	Teaching and Learning Material
UDISE	Unified District Information System for Education
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UTs	Union Territories
WCAG	Web Content Accessibility Guidelines
VRW	Village Rehabilitation Worker
WHO	World Health Organization

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This white paper comes at a time when India has announced its New Education Policy (2020) which attempts a paradigm shift in education planning and transaction in the country. While the focus is the equal participation of children with disabilities in school education, the white paper recognizes that children with disabilities are represented in all vulnerable groups in our society, and that an inclusive education system cannot be built by focusing on one group or another.

POLICY MILESTONES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

UNCRPD

Article 24 of the Convention states that “States parties must ensure the realization of the right of persons with disabilities to education through an inclusive education system at all levels.”

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016)

“Inclusive education” means a system of education wherein students with and without disability learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities.” According to sec 16, “the appropriate Government and the local authorities shall endeavor that all educational institutions funded or recognized by them provide inclusive education to the children with disabilities.”

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009)

It gave children with severe and multiple disabilities the right to opt for Home Based Education. This law also referenced the 1995 Persons with Disabilities Act, thus leaving some ambiguity as to who was to take the full responsibility for the education of children with disabilities. Its silence on the status of special schools meant that education of students with disabilities continued to come under different Ministries.

NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY (2020) – KEY ASPECTS

While the policy is not strong in its endorsement of the RTE Act, it endorses completely the provisions of the RPWD Act and “endorses all its recommendations with regard to school education” and promises that the inclusion and equal participation of children with disabilities in ECCE and the schooling system will be accorded the highest priority.

Students with disabilities are a part of the ‘Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups’ (SEDG), a new term coined by the policy. The SEDGs are “based on identities such as gender identities (particularly female and transgender individuals), socio-cultural identities (such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, and minorities), geographical identities (such as students from villages, small towns, and aspirational districts), disabilities (including learning disabilities), and socio-economic conditions (such as migrant communities, low income households, children in vulnerable situations, victims of or children of victims of trafficking, orphans including child beggars in urban areas, and the urban poor).”

The NEP focuses on technology based tools for students with disabilities. Assistive devices and appropriate technology-based tools, as well as adequate and language-appropriate teaching-learning materials will be made available to help children with disabilities integrate more easily into classrooms and engage with teachers and peers.

CHALLENGES OF DISABILITY INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Persistently Low Enrollment

Analysis of the UDISE data and presently the UDISE+ data has consistently given us a picture of status of school education. UDISE+ data of 2018-2019, tells us that India had 15,51,000 schools with 24,78,53,688 children attending them in different states of the country. Of these 21,10,844 were students with disabilities. The trend of a decline or stagnancy in enrollment can be seen even in some of the best performing states. Only 29.47% of the schools across the country have children with disabilities enrolled in them in 2018-19 and there is wide inter-state variation.

Sharp Drop in Enrolment of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

At the Junior/higher secondary level schools, only 0.48% of schools have CWSN/Children with disabilities enrollments. The enrolment of the children with disabilities at secondary level of school education is almost half of the total number of children with disabilities enrolled in the elementary level.

Persistent Gender Disparity in Enrollment of Girls with Disabilities

The GPI (gender parity index) of children with disabilities from 2014-15 to 2018-19 indicates constant but low ratio of girls with disabilities to boys with disabilities. This ratio between the girls and boys with disabilities remains between 0.74-0.7 in school education.

Special Schools

We see no official policy document or plan on the nature and spread of special schools in the country and whom they should address, what standards they should follow and how they are to be regulated. Many schools, supported by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, particularly those for students with developmental disabilities continue to be run informally and not connected to Boards of Education. With the big shifts in the organization of education that the policy aims at, discussion on the status of the special schools ought to be an urgent priority.

Home Based Education

The NEP 2020 wholeheartedly endorses and aims to strengthen home based education as a legal option in the RTE Act for students with severe and multiple disabilities under the National Trust Act 2000. However, it puts the onus of educability and accessibility on the child when it says that “home-based education will continue to be a choice available for children with severe and profound disabilities who are unable to go to schools.”

Teachers

In the year 2018-19 only 642,608 teachers were trained to teach students with disabilities. Recognising the fact that teachers with disabilities are important role models in the system and that they would have skills like sign language or know braille and be able to teach in these languages and modes of communication, the RPwD Act, 2016 talks about the appointment of

persons with disabilities as resource persons and special educators to cater to the needs of the children with disability.

Special Educators

Special educators (also called resource teachers) are a group of teachers who are trained to teach students with disabilities. Working largely in itinerant mode these educators have often been stationed at the block level in states going from school to school in support of the child under the SSA and now the SMSA. They have also been stationed at resource centres wherever states had them. Not being at par with other teachers since they are usually taken on contract with lower honorariums and no job security. There is no uniform and defined mechanism for selection and appointment of special educators in different states.

Dilution of Standards

With the RTE Act, the education system of the country attempted to move away from informal and alternate education facilities to setting standards of physical infrastructure in schools. The RPWD Act 2016 has strong commitments where school buildings, among others, are seen as buildings that provide 'essential services'. The 2020 New Education Policy seems to dilute these standards by giving individual schools the autonomy to decide "land areas and room sizes, practicalities of playgrounds in urban areas." etc.

Budgetary allocations

The decline in share of investment by the Central government has increased the financial burden of the states. Lack of transparency of the State budgets towards allocation and utilization of funds towards education remains a major challenge which needs to be addressed urgently. Over the years major portion of funds is diverted towards school education and hence higher education remains highly unfunded

The inclusive education component has been impacted due to low budgetary allocation.

There has been a constant decline in the funds allocated towards the inclusive education under SMSA. In year 2018-19, Rs. 1,06,425.72 lakh is the estimated approved outlay for inclusive education. This further decreases in 2019-20 to Rs.1,02,350.91 lakh in 2019-20 and 85,538.831 in year 2020-21. These amount to 0.02% of budget approved for school education.

Under the general pools, students with disabilities have funds approved for toilets, ramps and rails under the Strengthening of Schools, Braille Books and Large Font books under RTE component, Salary for Resource Teachers. For all other activities like, transport, therapeutic services, orientation of parents, stipends for girls, salaries of special educators etc. that cater to educational needs of children with disabilities, the funds are withdrawn from the earmarked Rs. 3,500 per child per annum Inclusive Education.

NEP – OPPORTUNITIES TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

National Institute of Open Learning

NIOS will develop high-quality modules to teach Indian Sign Language, and to teach other basic subjects using Indian Sign Language. As guidelines are made it must be ensured that students with disabilities are not forced to choose the NIOS option at a very young age or because schools are not prepared to teach them.

ECCE and Children with Disabilities

The NEP recognizes Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as a measure of equity and inclusiveness when it says that “Schools providing quality ECCE reap the greatest dividends for children who come from families that are economically disadvantaged.” According to the NSSO 2018 data, only 10.1 % of persons with disabilities had ever attended a pre- school program. In order to plan for education services at the early childhood level, it is important for the education system to take cognizance of the fact that there are conditions that begin in early childhood, sometimes even before a child is born. The NEP’s focus on ECCE has the potential to ensure effective inclusion but this will require effective strategies and coordinated efforts of all stakeholders.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

The NEP 2020 recognizes the “learning crisis” and attempts to make a paradigm shift both in curriculum and pedagogy as well as in teachers’ education and the conditions of their work. A particular focus is given to Indian Sign Language (ISL) which will be standardized across the country and National and State curriculum materials developed, for use by students with hearing impairment. Local sign languages will be respected and taught as well, where possible and relevant.

Flexibility and More Choices in Education

Instead of fitting the student into a system, the promise of an individualized response is far more conducive to the development of inclusive education systems.

A Diversity of Learning Styles, Ways of Communication and Requirements

Recognizing the diversity of languages in our country, the NEP 2020 focuses on students learning in their home languages and on having high quality textbooks in different languages. This understanding that students learn best in their home language can enable a significant number of students with disabilities. Deaf students will largely use sign language, deaf blind students will use tactile sign language.

Individualised Tracking of Students: Opening Possibilities for Reasonable Accommodation and Individual Support

The promise of the 2020 policy for individualised tracking and individual choices for students can provide an opportunity for the planning of reasonable accommodations and individualised supports to be built into the education system for students with disabilities and others in need. It is important now that schemes and rules and regulations are made flexible enough to be able to cater to individual variation. It is equally important that schools and states have resources to make that small change that will enable the right to education for a child.

The Use of Information and Communication Technology

MoE Guidelines recommend that post (national curriculum framework) NCF-2021, new books should be in Accessible Digital Format (ADTs) so that all books are ‘born accessible’ ab initio. The National Book Promotion Policy and the promise of high-quality textbooks and libraries across the country can only be achieved if these guidelines are adhered to.

With the focus of the policy on the use of technology in every area from teacher’s education to student learning, and the probability of continued blended learning, in the light of the recent pandemic, the need and permissions to use required assistive devices, mobile phones, appropriate software, etc. may need to be seen as essential inputs of enabling infrastructure and facilities and in the learning, examination and assessment system.

Sports and the Arts

Given the focus of the NEP on sports and arts as an integral part of school education, it is important that the participation of students with disabilities is ensured.

School Readiness: Not an Excuse to Exclude the Child

With the policy promise of universal access, joining education at the correct age is also important so that children can learn with their peers. The policy aims that all students “entering grade 1 are school ready”, can only be fulfilled if there is focus on access, on preparing families, on understanding and providing for the accommodations and individual supports that the child needs, giving adequate information and support to the child rather than rely on attainment of goals or learning outcomes for the child.

Teachers and Teachers Training

The policy tries to ensure to restore the status of teaching profession. As with curriculum and pedagogy, the policy attempts systemic changes in teacher’s education and empowerment. All B.Ed. programmes will include training in time-tested as well as the most recent techniques in pedagogy, including pedagogy with respect to foundational literacy and numeracy, multi-level teaching and evaluation, teaching children with disabilities.

Shorter post B.Ed. certification courses will also be made widely available, at multi-disciplinary colleges and universities to the teachers who may wish to move into more specialized areas of teaching, such as teaching of students with disabilities, or into leadership and management positions in the schooling system, or to move from one stage to another between foundational, preparatory, middle and secondary stage.

The policy addresses the shortage of special educators. It emphasises the need for additional special educators for certain areas of school education.

The Promise of the Policy for Good Governance

The 2020 NEP promises good governance and efficient use of resources. It sets up new standard setting, quality assessment and regulatory bodies. It also brings forth a re-organization of administration of schools in the form of school complexes.

The School Complex: A Semi-Autonomous Unit

As suggested in sec 6, the school complex is the unit which will “provide resources for the integration of children with disabilities, recruitment of special educators with cross disability training and for the establishment of and for the establishment of resource centers wherever needed especially for children with severe and multiple disabilities.” The interaction of the school complex with the block development plans and the block education officers can lead to a lot of localized planning and mapping of vulnerable groups as well as resources.

The School Complex Management Committees

With the re-arrangement of the administrative units the policy now envisages an additional body, the School Complex Management Committee. The School Complex/Cluster Development Plan (SCDP) will be the plan that will be used by all authorities for planning and resourcing. Other important initiatives that will improve the governance and carry forward the spirit of the policy are establishment of Bal Bhawans in every state where all children will visit and partake in art, play and other activities, the twinning and sharing of good practice between private and government schools and the use of school building for the community after school hours.

Separation of Policy Making and Operational Functions

The Department of School Education will now function only as a policy maker doing overall monitoring of the education system. The educational operation and service provision for the public schooling system will be the responsibility of the Directorate of School Education (including the offices of the DEO and BEO) which will work independently to implement policies regarding educational operation.

The Resource Centre and the School Complex

“Resource centers in conjunction with special educators will support the rehabilitation and educational needs of learners with severe or multiple disabilities and will assist parents/guardians in achieving high-quality home schooling and skilling for such students as needed.”

New Regulatory and Assessment Bodies

State School Standards Authority (SSSA) in every state and UT to monitor will be one such body that will ensure that all schools follow certain minimal professional and quality standards. The framework for these parameters will be created by the SCERT in consultation with various stakeholders, especially teachers and schools.

Financing affordable and quality education for all

The policy emphasizes on increasing the investment on education and to allocate 6% of total GDP towards education.

Financial Support to Key Elements and Components of Education

In order to provide high quality education, the policy emphasizes on providing financial support to key educational elements like universal access, nutritional support, learning resources, support for all key initiatives towards equitable high-quality education for underprivileged and socio-economically disadvantaged groups, etc.

Identification of Areas with One-Term Investment and Long-Term Investments in Education

The policy has laid thrust on identifying areas that require one-time investment in infrastructure and resources.

Performance Based Funding and Funds for SEDGs

The policy with its commitment on providing quality education to SEDGs emphasizes on ensuring efficient mechanisms for the optimal allocations and utilization of funds earmarked for SEDGs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Legal Framework

It is now imperative that the laws (RTE and the RPWD) are integrated to create a clear legal framework for inclusive education in India. The terms and concepts relevant to making systems inclusive, such as reasonable accommodation, universal design, a wider understanding of communication now need to become common parlance in the education sector so that schemes and policy implementation can flow from them. Laws such as the Rehabilitation Council of India Act and the National Trust Act have not been amended or rewritten since India's ratification of the UN Convention of the Rights of persons with Disabilities.

The Different Sites of Education

Students with disabilities must be able to move from one site to another and from one level of education to another within these sites of education. Availability of trained teachers, provision of individualized support and reasonable accommodations and teaching and learning in preferred means and modes of communication are needed in all sites of education. Authentic data on the children transiting from one site of education i.e., is from regular school to special school or HBE and vice-a-versa must be captured and made available in the public domain. For this the MoE, must ensure to develop a system to track each child in these sites of education. A system of regular audit must be carried out on the status of all these sites of education and the information needs to be made available in public domain.

Special Schools

Special schools are one set of schools that neither the NEP 2020 nor the law elaborated on. The law needs to be amended with a clearer definition of nature and function of these schools. Given the fact that they are a legal option for children, it is important that a policy paper or guidelines are drawn on the nature and spread of special schools in the country. All existing special schools need to be formalized and included within the education system.

Home based Education

As standards and guidelines promised by the NEP 2020 are made in different states and UTs, support must be given to families to make informed choices and the views of the child are paramount as per the law. HBE must be an education option, and separate resources put in for this form of education. Standard setting should include concerns such as number of days and hours of instruction, assessment and examinations, transportation to facilities to resource centres and schools, outings and regular visits to Bal Bhawans.

Bring Out of School Children Back into School

The system should plan with the assumption that all school should have students with disabilities. In their planning for bringing out of school children into schools, states can start by identifying schools with no students with disabilities. They can then map resources such as anganwadi and ASHA workers, special schools and CBR programs and other community groups and others in the area and bring children back and into schools.

Particular emphasis has to be given to identifying and bringing girls with disabilities into schools. As girls are more likely than boys not to come back to school, emphasis has to be given in information campaigns on the importance of girls and girls with disabilities continuing education. Affirmative actions, food security, health and other protections should be linked and ensured to facilitate return and retention of children with disabilities in schools.

Building Knowledge of all Disability Groups Identified under the RPWD Act 2016

The RPWD Act identifies twenty-one (21) impairment groups as persons with disabilities. A relatively new law, there is need for the education system to build knowledge on the newly identified groups and their requirements. This understanding must percolate throughout the system and not just the teacher. This is particularly important for panchayats, education officers, school heads as well as the School Management Committees (SMCs) and school complex management committees (SCMC) as they are legally bound to ensure enrollment and completion of education for children with disabilities.

The Foundational and Preparatory stages

States need to plan for the fact that childhood disabilities often occur at birth or in early childhood and that early intervention services need to be available closest to the child so that they can participate fully in education and at the right age. Tracking each child and facilitating habilitation and rehabilitation requirements of young children will be paramount in enabling support. These convergences need to be made with different Ministries to support the comprehensive development of the child.

Girls with Disabilities and other Vulnerabilities: The Twin Track Approach

Very little is known, researched or documented about the status of education of students with disabilities who belong to socially and economically disadvantaged groups and the multiple barriers they must face in education. Even current schemes do not acknowledge this intersection and children with disabilities are often invisible within these groups.

Building Environments that Maximize Inclusion

Direct and indirect forms of discrimination, leading to isolation and humiliation must now be acknowledged in standards and quality frameworks if students with disabilities are to continue to stay in education. States can set up regular systems of audits and feedback from students and parents. These interactions will enable an inclusive education system without great cost and resources and with equity and dignity.

A Cadre of Resource Teachers and Special Educators

In order to strengthen inclusive education both in principle and in practice, a cadre of special educators and resource persons should be formulated with adequate pay scales and avenues for growth so that all the provisioning and facilities that NEP envisions for the general teacher are extended to them as well. The NEP 2020 vision on different cadres of teachers specializing in teaching at different levels of education must apply to the resource teacher also.

Teachers with Disabilities

Incentives need to be given to students with disabilities to train as teachers and targets need to be set by states for recruiting teachers with disabilities. The five percent reservation for persons with disabilities in all government jobs needs to be fulfilled.²All requirements of this teacher of reasonable accommodation and support structures need to be available so that they can discharge their duties.

Trainings of General Teachers and other Personnel

The NEP 2020 now lays much emphasis on quality teachers and teachers trained to teach students with disabilities. The RPWD Act too focuses on training of teachers and all other personnel in the system. It is time to focus on content, duration and frequency of such training for all levels of teachers from the ECCE to secondary education.

The Resource Centre

Both the RPWD Act and the NEP mandate resource centers that can support the teacher and student at all levels of education. According to the NEP resource centers would also be used to reach out to learners with severe and multiple disabilities. The possibility for building a universal design of learning and training is higher when resource persons work together in a more transdisciplinary way to support children and other teachers.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

As in other areas, systems changes are required in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy so that all students as well as students with disabilities study together using the universal design of learning approach. New curriculum frameworks are being written for every stage of education as per the NEP 2020. There is need to revisit all the present institutions that presently produce these resources and look at their capacity to produce accessible material in different languages for all students with disabilities. This would have to be done both at the Central and state levels.

In order to plan well, states must have an idea of the numbers of students they are likely to need these resources. A strengthened UDISE+ data for different states can be useful and used as a guiding tool for students who are presently in school. Small task forces at the state level comprising members of civil society, parents, students who have passed out of school as well as teachers and

²Ministry of Law and Justice, 2012, Right to Free and Compulsory Education, Amendment 4, Sec (33 & 34), *The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Amendment Act 2012*, New Delhi: GOI.

principals of schools and others could pool the already existing resources to share with the rest of the state.

Reasonable Accommodation and Individualized Support

Systems have to be created within the system at the state level to provide reasonable accommodations and to do individual support planning for students with disabilities.

Governance

For inclusive education to happen, the onus of the education of this child and the resources for this must now be provided by the Ministry of Education. With the school complex becoming the important administrative unit, states will need to plan the availability and accessibility of resource centers in relation to the school complex.

Enhancing Financial Resources

In order to implement the new national education policy both in spirit and practice, it is now essential expenditure towards education to 6% of GDP. Under the SMSA, inadequate funds for inclusive education have implications for the quality education of children with disabilities. The provision of Rs 3,500 per annum per children with disabilities needs to be relooked and revisited so that the teaching and learning needs of children with disabilities is not affected due to the lack of financial resources.

There is also an urgent need to focus on secondary education which has suffered due to low budgetary allocation towards it over the years. The scope for the ADIP schemes, scholarship and stipends and other schemes under the MSJE should be widened and the budgets for each of these components should be enhanced to ensure that all children with disabilities enrolled within the school system are the beneficiaries. Also, regular audits of these schemes should be carried out.

INTRODUCTION

World over, education systems are grappling with the realities of a world marked by conflict, disaster, economic disparities and technological breakthroughs. The Covid 19 pandemic, probably the biggest humanitarian disaster since the Second World War, has brought the world and its education systems to practically a standstill for over a year now, with schools having had to re-invent themselves.

More than 1 billion³ children are said to be out of school. Amongst these are the most vulnerable of children – children with disabilities, children who are homeless, and children living in difficult circumstances. They also include children who have lost both or one primary caregiver to the pandemic.

At times like this, an ‘inclusive education’ system that takes every child along assumes great significance. It must be the yardstick that we apply to any rebuilding and re-envisioning in education.

NEED FOR THIS WHITE PAPER

This white paper comes at a time when India has announced its New Education Policy (2020) which attempts a paradigm shift in education planning and transaction in the country. In this moment of change, it is important to critically examine the scope of inclusive education in light of the new policy and existing laws, as well as point out the barriers that confront students with disabilities, so that new plans can take them into account.

While the focus is the equal participation of children with disabilities in school education, the white paper recognizes that children with disabilities are represented in all vulnerable groups in our society, and that an inclusive education system cannot be built by focusing on one group or another. What is emphasized is the need to seek reform in education systems at the core, so as to achieve give equal opportunity for all.

The idea of inclusive education started with ending the segregation of children and persons with disabilities from the education systems of a country. Now it has widened to become a vision of an education system that includes all and enables equal participation for all who are vulnerable in their participation in the education system. This widening of concepts of education from segregation to integration to inclusion of students with disabilities and then inclusive education systems for All, intersects with the big changes in thinking about disability that the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), 2007 advocates.

³UNICEF, 2020, Education and COVID-19, September 2020. Retrieved from: [https:// data.unicef.org/topic /education/covid-19/](https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/covid-19/)

POLICY MILESTONES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

UNCRPD

The UNCRPD grounded children and persons with disabilities as holders of equal rights within society. Every institution of society must be designed in a way that this equal participation is possible. The person with disability is no longer seen as just a person with a disabling medical condition but as equal with others in a society, and whose participation in all aspects of life is affected by all kinds of barriers social, economic, political and others.

“Persons with disabilities include those who have long term, physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”⁴

Article 24 of the Convention states that “States parties must ensure the realization of the right of persons with disabilities to education through an inclusive education system at all levels.”⁵

With a promise of lifelong learning, it lays out strategies that are important for the right to education of students with disabilities in inclusive education systems. These include among others:

- Children with disabilities are not to be excluded from free compulsory primary education or from secondary education on the basis of disability
- Reasonable accommodation for individual requirements
- Persons with disabilities to receive the supports required within the general education system to facilitate their effective education
- Effective individualized support measures to be provided in environments that maximize academic and social development consistent with the goal of full inclusion.

The other important factors for full inclusion are the recognition of differing ways of communication, reading and writing for some students with disabilities. The teaching of braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes of communication, life skills orientation and mobility skills, sign language are emphasized. Students who are blind, deaf and deaf blind are to be taught in “language and modes and means of communication for the individual and in

⁴United Nations, 2006, Purpose, Article-1, United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocols. <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>

⁵United Nations, 2006, Education, Article-21(1), United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocols. <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>

environments which maximize academic and social development.”⁶Teachers with disabilities and those who know how to teach using tactile modes and use braille and sign language are equally important if students are to be taught well.

Inclusive Education “requires an in-depth transformation of education systems in legislation, policy, and the mechanisms for financing, administration, design, delivery and monitoring of education.”⁷ Transformation is needed equally in the ways education is transacted: “cultures of educational institutions, curriculums, teaching methodologies, policies for the full participation of all students, the training of teachers and other personnel and the interface with parents and community at large.”⁸

Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015 the international community moved away from the Millennium Development Goals and adopted the Sustainable Development Goals with a 2030 deadline. Here SDG 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016)

Eight years after the ratification of the UNCRPD, and following strong and sustained advocacy from disability groups, India got the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act in 2016 (RPWD Act). This law for the first time defines “inclusive education,” a long-time demand of the disability sector in India. The RPWD Act brings in many concepts and terms that reflect a paradigm shift in the inclusion and disability discourse in line with the UN Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Like the UNCRPD, the RPWD Act defines persons with disabilities very differently from the earlier medical notion of disability: “*person with disability* means a person with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders his full and effective participation in society equally with others.”⁹

The RPWD Act recognizes 21 impairment groups as persons with disabilities. These include, persons with cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, leprosy cured persons, dwarfism, acid attack victims, blindness, low vision, hearing impairment and people with speech and language disabilities. Intellectual disability, specific learning disability and autism spectrum disorders are

⁶United Nations, 2006, Education, Article-24(3c), United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocols. <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>

⁷ UNCRPD, 2016, General comment No. 4 (2016) on the right to inclusive education. Pg. no. 3. Retrieved from: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD/C/GC/4&Lang=en

⁸IDA, 2020, What an Inclusive, Equitable, Quality Education Means to Us. https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/ida_ie_flagship_report_english_29.06.2020.pdf

⁹Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, Preliminary, Sec. 2(s), *The Rights of Persons with Disability Act*. 2016. New Delhi: GOI.

other groups recognized by the law. Further, people with blood disorders such as Thalassemia, Hemophilia and Sickle Cell Disease are also included. Mental illness and multiple disabilities are other conditions. Chronic neurological diseases like multiple sclerosis and Parkinson disease are also part of the new law¹⁰.

The law goes on to define the term barrier as “any factor including communicational, cultural, economic, environmental, institutional, political, social, attitudinal or structural factors which hampers the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in society.”¹¹

For policy makers and planners, the implications are that the barriers in the system must be addressed, not just the person. It is not that the student cannot participate in the class because of impairments, but the class is not designed to include the student.

Inclusive Education in RPWD Act

In India the term ‘Inclusive education’ has till recently been used only in relation to the education of children with disabilities, and seen as a separate element/ program of the larger education scheme – the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan scheme, and then the Samagraha Shiksha Abhiyan scheme. The term has been used without clear definition until 2016, when the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act defined the term with a more systems approach:

“Inclusive education” means a system of education wherein students with and without disability learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities.”¹²

According to sec 16, *“The appropriate Government and the local authorities shall endeavor that all educational institutions funded or recognized by them provide inclusive education to the children with disabilities.”*

Chapter 3 sec 16 and 17 then go on to outline the steps and building blocks that will be required to provide inclusive education to children with disabilities. These include clauses that involve every aspect of education from the provision of reasonable accommodations and individual support, accessibility, to curriculum and teacher’s preparation.

¹⁰ Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, Schedule, *The Rights of Persons with Disability Act*. 2016. New Delhi: GOI.

¹¹Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, Preliminary, Sec. 2(c), *The Rights of Persons with Disability Act*. 2016. New Delhi: GOI.

¹²Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, Preliminary, Sec. 2 (m), *The Rights of Persons with Disability Act*. 2016. New Delhi: GOI.

Acknowledging widespread discrimination in access to education, Section 16 exhorts the state to provide inclusive education by:

- (i) Admitting students with disabilities without discrimination and provide education and opportunities for sports and recreation activities equally with others;*
- (ii) Provide reasonable accommodation according to the individual's requirements;*
- (iii) Provide necessary support individualized or otherwise in environments that maximize academic and social development consistent with the goal of full inclusion;*

This focus on individual requirements of students recognizes the great diversity of needs of students in education systems. For students with disabilities, reasonable accommodations (i.e. small individual changes required for the students to participate in education) are an essential part of non-discrimination and have to be provided as a matter of right not charity.

Modification in Curriculum and Pedagogy

In line with the definition of inclusive education where “*teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities,*”¹³ the law promises “*modifications in the curriculum and examination system to meet the needs of students with disabilities*”.¹⁴

Along with this is the promise of free education, “*to provide books, other learning materials and appropriate assistive devices to students with bench-mark disabilities free*” of charge. Early detection and suitable pedagogic intervention of children with learning disabilities is another focal area in education.

Diversity in Communication

The law recognizes that children and persons with disabilities can use a range of languages and modes and means of communication, and this needs specific provisioning and recognition. Sign language, braille, alternative and augmentative communication are to be promoted for students who require them. The implications of these commitments for the education system are profound as it must ensure training for students, teachers, resources and TLM in these areas if the law is to be implemented.

Teachers and Other Personnel at all Levels of Education

Section 17 focuses on teacher preparation with the establishment of teachers training institutions so that there are teachers qualified to teach Braille and sign language, as well as teachers who know how to teach children with intellectual disability. Teachers with disabilities are important role models for students and the law acknowledges their important role in imparting education.¹⁵

¹³Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, Preliminary, Sec. 2(m), *The Rights of Persons with Disability Act*. 2016. New Delhi: GOI.

¹⁴Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, Education, Sec. 17(i), *The Rights of Persons with Disability Act*. 2016. New Delhi: GOI.

¹⁵ Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, Education, Sec. 17 (c), *The Rights of Persons with Disability Act*. 2016. New Delhi: GOI.

Taking a systems approach, the law requires the training of “professionals and staff to support inclusive education at all levels of school education”.¹⁶ It further aims to establish resource centers to support educational institutions at all levels of school education.

Accessibility to and in Schools

Getting to school and being able to use school infrastructure, participate in every aspect of education is an important part of the right to education of students with disabilities. Section 16 promises “accessibility of school buildings, campuses and various facilities”, along with the “provision of transport for children with disabilities and in particular for children with high support needs and their attendants.”¹⁷

Other Sections that Strengthen the Right to Education of Students with Disabilities

Other sections of the law that strengthen the right to education of students with disabilities include the concepts of universal design, reasonable accommodation, discrimination, as well as the concept of high support needs.

A special focus on the rights of the child and their right to freely express their views on all matters affecting them are equally important for the realization of the right to education of the child whose voice is often ignored in the system. Sections 29 and 30 provide a series of strategies for promoting and protecting the rights of all persons with disabilities to have a cultural life, to participate in recreational activities and in sporting activities.

The provision of making school buildings and campuses accessible is strengthened with sections 40-47 where school buildings are seen to provide “essential services”. A time limit of five years is given in which all existing public buildings are to be made accessible in accordance with the rules and an action plan made by the government.

The Special School: A Choice for Students with Benchmark Disability

Chapter 6 of the RPWD Act (‘Special Provisions for Persons with Benchmark Disabilities’) endorses the special school as a site of education for students with disabilities. Students with benchmark disabilities have the choice of attending a special school. Unfortunately, we do not see any further elaboration in the law of this site of education.

Children and persons with benchmark disabilities are those who have over 40 % of disability and who can get a disability certificate which entitles them to avail of all the schemes of the government.

¹⁶ Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, Education, Sec. 17 (d), *The Rights of Persons with Disability Act*. 2016. New Delhi: GOI.

¹⁷ Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, Education, Sec. 16(viii), *Right to Persons with Disability Act 2016*, New Delhi: GOI

The RPWD Act also extends the clause of free education for students with benchmark disability up to the age of 18. “Every child with benchmark disability between the ages of **six to eighteen (6-18)** years shall have the right to free education in a neighborhood school, or in a special school, of his choice.”¹⁸

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009)

In 2009 the fundamental right to education for children from the ages of 6 to 14, took the shape of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act in 2009 (RTE Act). This law is critically important for the education of students with disabilities as it represents India’s effort to universalize school education for children between the ages of 6-14. After much advocacy, through an Amendment in 2012, the RTE Act made specific mention of children with disabilities in the “disadvantaged groups” and other areas.

Legitimizing Home Based Education: Another Site of Education

In the same amendment, this law legitimized home-based education as yet another site of education for students with disabilities.

It gave children with severe and multiple disabilities the right to opt for Home Based Education¹⁹. This law also referenced the 1995 Persons with Disabilities Act, thus leaving some ambiguity as to who was to take the full responsibility for the education of children with disabilities. Its silence on the status of special schools meant that education of students with disabilities continued to come under different Ministries.

The RTE Act gives children with severe and multiple disabilities the right to opt for Home Based Education

However, the RTE Act also has many enabling clauses that can make the system of education more inclusive and responsive to diversity, such as the move to formalize education, setting standards in schools, and the recognition that some children are more disadvantaged than others and need affirmative action.

Setting Standards

The move to formalize education and set standards of what is a school and minimum requirement in a school for infrastructure and PTRs and trained teachers can go a long way in ensuring the

¹⁸Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, Provision for Benchmark Disabilities, Sec 31, *The Rights of Persons with Disability Act*. 2016. New Delhi: GOI.

¹⁹ Ministry of law and Justice, 2009, Right to Free and Compulsory Education, Sec 3 (3), *The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009*, New Delhi: GOI.

inclusion of children with disabilities. The schedule of the RTE Act specifies a “classroom for every teacher and a PTR of 30:1.”²⁰

The RTE Act’s silence on the status of special schools meant that education of students with disabilities continued to come under different Ministries.

Further, the requirement of schools to have playgrounds, libraries, toilets and drinking water facilities with a barrier free access can be extremely enabling for children with disabilities if these basic facilities are made accessible to all based on the principles of universal design.

Child Centered Education and Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation

A child centered education, clear setting of curriculum that enables the full physical and mental development of the child, commitment to provide all teaching and learning materials required by children, and continuous and comprehensive evaluation are important ideas for the inclusion of a diversity of students who may have many different abilities.

Parents and Communities as Important Stakeholders

The involvement of parents and others from outside the school in the school management committees (SMC) gives multiple stakeholders a stake in the education of children in the community. The fact that the SMCs themselves are inclusive and mandate the inclusion of women and persons belonging to the weaker sections of society is an added advantage towards inclusion of all children. Some states like Assam have also included parents of children with disabilities as members of the SMC in their rules.

The role of monitoring the implementation of the Act and the big responsibility of preparing school development plans gives important opportunities for families and communities to steer education. The model rules of the Act further specify that SMCs must monitor the inclusion of children with disabilities and ensure their right to education.²¹

²⁰Ministry of Law and Justice, 2009, Schedule, The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, New Delhi: GOI.

²¹ RTE, 2009, Under Sec. 18, Rule no. 7 (v). Model Rules under the Rights of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009. New Delhi: GOI

NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY (2020) – KEY ASPECTS

In the midst of the COVID 19 lockdown in 2020, India got a new education policy for which implementation plans are already being made in different states. The National Education Policy of 2020 attempts another paradigm shift in education in India. Some of the major changes are in the organization of education, with a 5+3+3+4 formula for school education. In terms of the organization of school education, the school complex is now the basic unit of governance.

The creation of many new bodies and structures for quality assessment and accreditation of schools (SQAAF), assessment of students (PARAKH), School Standards Authority and a push for education through technology are hallmarks of the new policy. Encouragement of the private along with the public is coupled with a re-opening to alternative forms of education and different pathways of learning, with a big push to the NIOS system.

A paradigm shift in curriculum and pedagogy includes a focus on learning to learn strategies, a lighter school bag and a mission on foundational literacy and numeracy.

Teacher education is reconsidered and new curriculum frameworks are envisaged.

Students can look forward to a greater choice of subjects including vocational education at the later stages, activity- based and individual pathways of learning. The big focus on ECCE and its integration within the education system and administrative structures is another major leap in the policy.

Students with Disabilities: Complete Endorsement of the RPWD Act

While the policy is not strong in its endorsement of the RTE Act, it endorses completely the provisions of the RPWD Act and “endorses all its recommendations with regard to school education” and promises that the inclusion and equal participation of children with disabilities in ECCE and the schooling system will be accorded the highest priority.

Students with disabilities are a part of the ‘Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups’ (SEDG), a new term coined by the policy.

The SEDGs are “based on identities such as gender identities (particularly female and transgender individuals), socio-cultural identities (such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, and minorities), geographical identities (such as students from villages, small towns, and aspirational districts), disabilities (including learning disabilities), and socio-economic conditions (such as migrant communities, low income households, children in vulnerable situations, victims

of or children of victims of trafficking, orphans including child beggars in urban areas, and the urban poor).”²²

The NEP recommends that regions of the country with large populations from educationally-disadvantaged SEDGs should be declared Special Education Zones (SEZs), where all the schemes and policies are implemented to the maximum through additional concerted efforts, in order to truly change their educational landscape

Apart from these vulnerabilities, the policy recognizes that certain geographical areas contain significantly larger proportion of SEDG and recommends that “*regions of the country with large populations from educationally-disadvantaged SEDGs should be declared Special Education Zones (SEZs), where all the schemes and policies are implemented to the maximum through additional concerted efforts, in order to truly change their educational landscape.*”²³

Sec 6 of the policy entitled ‘Equitable and Inclusive Education: Learning for All’ draws the broad canvas of strategies for the SEDGs including students with disabilities. Special attention has to be given to reduce gender disparity across all the disadvantaged groups and to students from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Technology-Based Tools for Students with Disabilities

The NEP focuses on technology based tools for students with disabilities. Assistive devices and appropriate technology-based tools, as well as adequate and language-appropriate teaching-learning materials will be made available to help children with disabilities integrate more easily into classrooms and engage with teachers and peers.

The New Curricular Stages

The policy changes the earlier organization of education and therefore curriculum planning and details regarding different curricular stages of education starting from ECCE.

New Curricular Stages

The Foundational Stage: 3 years of Anganwadis plus 2 years of grades 1 and 2 in primary schools (ages 3-8)

The Preparatory Stage: 3 years of education from grades 3 to 5 (ages 8-11)

The Middle Stage: 3 years of education in grades 6-8 (ages 11-14)

The Secondary Stage: 4 years of multidisciplinary study, building on the subject-oriented pedagogical and curricular style of the Middle Stage

²²Ministry of Education, 2020, Equitable and Inclusive Education: Learning for All, Sec.6.2, Pg no. 24, National Education Policy 2020, New Delhi: GOI

²³Ministry of Education, 2020, Equitable and Inclusive Education: learning for All, Sec.6.6, Pg26,,National Education Policy, New Delhi: GOI.

- ☪ *The Foundational Stage:* Three years of Anganwadis plus two years of grades 1 and 2 in primary schools (ages 3-8). It will consist of flexible, multilevel, play/activity-based learning and the curriculum and pedagogy of ECCE.²⁴ Every child before the age of five (5) will move to a preparatory class or *balvatika* with an ECCE qualified teacher. Here learning will be play based with a focus on developing cognitive, affective and psychomotor abilities and early literacy and numeracy.
- ☪ *The Preparatory Stage:* Three years of education from grades 3 to 5 (ages 8-11) building on the play, discovery, and activity-based pedagogical and curricular style of the Foundational Stage, and will also begin to incorporate some light text books as well as aspects of more formal but interactive classroom learning.
- ☪ *The Middle Stage:* Three years of education in *grades 6-8 (ages 11-14)*, building on the pedagogical and curricular style of the Preparatory Stage, but with the introduction of subject teachers and more abstract concepts in each subject. Experiential learning within each subject, and explorations of relations among different subjects, will be encouraged and emphasized.
- ☪ *The Secondary Stage:* Four years of multidisciplinary study, building on the subject-oriented pedagogical and curricular style of the Middle Stage, but with greater depth, critical thinking, greater attention to life aspirations, and flexibility and student choice of subjects. Students will be given increased flexibility and choice of subjects including in physical education, arts and crafts and vocational skills. In particular, students would continue to have the option of exiting after Grade 10 and re-entering in the next phase to pursue vocational or any other courses available in Grades 11-12.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

The NEP recommends:

- ☪ Consultation with expert bodies such as the National institutes of DEPWD while making curriculum frameworks as well as assessment guidelines
- ☪ NIOS to develop high quality modules to teach Indian Sign Language
- ☪ Special focus on children with specific learning disabilities, their early identification and planning for them
- ☪ Technology based solutions for parents for orientation of caregivers and wide scale dissemination of learning materials for parents to support their child's education

Safety and Security

The NEP mandates adequate attention to the safety and security of children with disabilities.

²⁴ Ministry of Education, 2020, Restructuring school curriculum and pedagogy in a new 5+3+3+4 design, Sec. 4.2, Pg. no. 11, New Education Policy 2020, New Delhi: GOI

Teachers and Other Personnel

- 🗎 Inclusion and equity will become a key aspect of teacher education (and training for all leadership, administrative, and other positions in schools)
- 🗎 Recruitment of special educators with cross-disability training, and for the establishment of resource centers, wherever needed, especially for children with severe or multiple disabilities.
- 🗎 Teachers to have knowledge on how to teach children with specific disabilities including learning disabilities
- 🗎 Counsellors and social workers to be added to the system

Taking the School Complex as the Unit of Governance

School complexes are to be the units of governance responsible for providing resources for the integration of children with disabilities. They will work and be supported for providing all children with disabilities accommodations and support mechanisms tailored to suit their needs and to ensure their full participation and inclusion in the classroom. In particular, this will apply to all school activities including arts, sports, and vocational education.

The Participation of Students with Disabilities in Different Sites of Education

Students with disabilities are perhaps the only set of children in India who are to be educated in a range of sites that are legitimized by both policy and law.

Children with disabilities are to be given a choice of regular schools or special schools as per RPWD Act 2016. Home based education is to be audited and then strengthened with standard setting and guidelines.

Resource centers to support rehabilitation and educational needs of learners with severe and multiple disabilities and assist parents in achieving high quality home schooling and skilling.

Curricular Frameworks and a Mission for Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

A ‘National Mission’ for attaining foundational literacy and numeracy will be set up with the clear aim that every child will gain foundational numeracy and literacy by standard 3. A National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCPFECCE) for children up to the age²⁵ of 8 will be developed by NCERT in two parts, namely, a sub-framework for 0-3-year-olds, and a sub-framework for 3–8-year-olds. The NCFSE (National Curriculum Framework for School Education) will be formulated by NCERT after extensive discussions with all stakeholders.

²⁵ Ministry of Education, 2020, Early Childhood Care and Education: The Foundation of Learning, Sec. 1.3, Pg. no. 7, New Education Policy 2020, New Delhi: GOI

Libraries and Book promotion: A focus on Reading and High-Quality Text Books

In an effort to ensure a reading culture the policy promises, A National Book Promotion Policy. High quality textbooks to public schools and digital libraries are promised along with extensive initiatives to ensure the availability, accessibility, quality, and readership of books across geographies, languages, levels, and genres.²⁶

Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA)

A national repository of high-quality resources on foundational literacy and numeracy will be made available on the Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA). Technological interventions are to serve as aids to teachers and to help bridge any language barriers that may exist between teachers and students.²⁷

Focus on language Development and Learning in Home language

Recognizing the importance of learning in the language a child is growing up speaking, the policy promises that wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language. Thereafter, the home/local language shall continue to be taught as a language wherever possible.²⁸

Transforming Assessment for Student Development

A move from summative assessments testing rote memorisation to more formative, competency-based assessments that test higher level of skills such as analysis, conceptual clarity and critical thinking are envisaged.²⁹

The progress report card will be a holistic, 360-degree multidimensional report, depicting student capacities and capturing their work with peer and self-assessment.

All students will take school examinations in Grades 3, 5, and 8 and a semester system that takes the intense pressure of a one-time exam introduced.

Another significant promise of the policy is that continuous formative/adaptive assessment will track and thereby individualise and ensure student learning.

²⁶ Ministry of Education, 2020, Foundational Literacy and Numeracy: An Urgent & Necessary Prerequisite to Learning, Sec. 2.8, Pg. no. 9, National Education Policy 2020. New Delhi: GOI

²⁷ Ministry of Education, 2020, Foundational Literacy and Numeracy: An Urgent & Necessary Prerequisite to Learning, Sec. 2.6, Pg. no. 9, National Education Policy 2020. New Delhi: GOI

²⁸ Ministry of Education, 2020, Multilingualism and the power of language, Sec. 4.11, Pg. no. 13, National Education Policy 2020. New Delhi: GOI

²⁹ Ministry of Education, 2020, Transforming Assessment for Student Development, Sec. 4.34, Pg. no. 17, National Education Policy 2020. New Delhi: GOI

A new body PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development), is to be set up as a standard-setting body under Ministry of Education. This body is to advise school boards regarding new assessment patterns and latest research, promote collaboration between school boards, become an instrument for sharing best practices and ensuring equivalence of academic standards among learners across all school boards.

A Focus on Health and Nutrition

The NEP 2020 promises that nutrition and health (including mental health) of children will be addressed through

- ☛ Healthy meals: a simple but energizing breakfast will be given to children along with the midday meal
- ☛ All school children to undergo regular health check-ups especially for 100% immunization in schools and health cards will be issued to monitor the same
- ☛ Introduction of well-trained social workers, counsellors, and community involvement into the schooling system.³⁰

Continuous Professional Development for Teachers

A merit-based structure of tenure, promotion and salary, with multiple levels within each teacher's stage is proposed. ³¹States are required to develop a system of multiple parameters for proper assessments of performance based on peer-review, attendance, commitment, hours of Constant Professional Development, and other forms of services or based on National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST).³² Continuous professional development of teachers is required. Teachers must participate in at least 50 hours of professional development every year.

The policy recognises that all levels of education require high quality teachers and emphasises that career growth is available in a single school stage. Vertical mobility of teachers is possible only if they have the requisite qualifications.

It talks about providing training to the deserving/outstanding teachers in academic leadership position as well as in government department.

The Teachers Eligibility Test (TET) is to be strengthened by incorporating better test material in terms of content and pedagogy.

³⁰ Ministry of Education, 2020, Foundational Literacy and Numeracy: An Urgent & Necessary Prerequisite to Learning, Sec. 2.9, Pg. no. 9, National Education Policy 2020. New Delhi: GOI

³¹ Ministry of Education, 2020, Teachers, Sec 5. 18, pg 22, National Education Policy 2020, New Delhi: GOI.

³² ibid

The process of transfer of teachers will be paused and will be done only in very special circumstances as suitably laid down by the state/UT government.³³ The process will be computerized to ensure transparency. A common guiding set of National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) will be formulated. These standards would cover expectations of the role of the teacher at different levels of expertise/ stage and the competence required for each stage.

National Initiative for School Heads' Teachers' Holistic Advancement (NISHTHA)

NISHTHA a capacity building program was launched in 2019-20 to improve the learning outcomes at the elementary level. The initiative is first of its kind wherein standardized training modules are developed at national level for all states and UTs. Among its various outcomes, the program aims at bringing about the improvement in learning outcomes of the students, creating an enabling and enriching inclusive classroom environment. For the heads of the school NISHTHA aims at their transformation for providing academic and administrative leadership in the schools for fostering new initiatives.

³³ Ministry of Education, 2020, Teachers, Sec 5.3, Pg no. 20, National Education Policy 2020, New Delhi: GOI

CHALLENGES OF DISABILITY INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

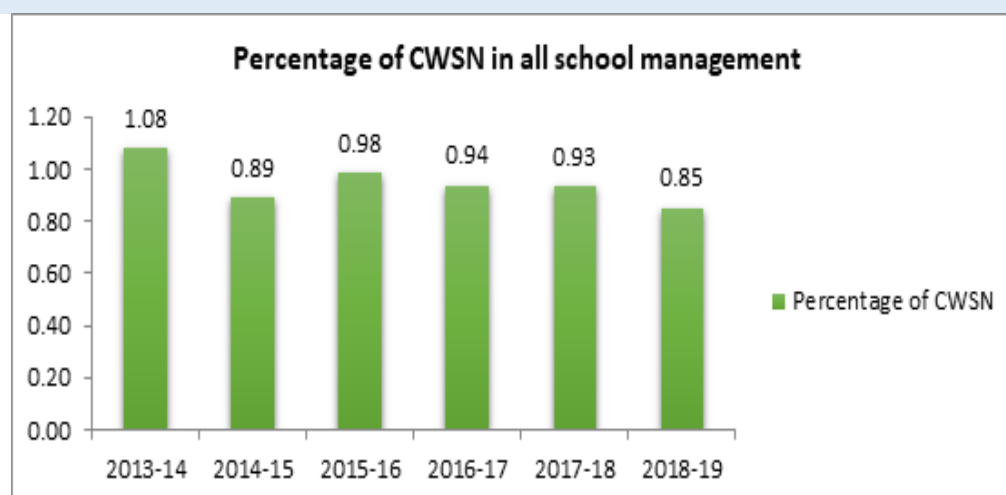
Persistently Low Enrollment

Analysis of the UDISE data and presently the UDISE+ data has consistently given us a picture of status of school education. UDISE+ data of 2018-2019, tells us that India had 15,51,000 schools with 24,78,53,688 children attending them in different states of the country. Of these 21,10,844 were students with disabilities.³⁴

The UDISE data and UDISE+ data on enrolment in the school education system show *persistently low and almost static enrolment of the children with disabilities over the years*. In 2013-14, the enrolment for children with disabilities in school education was 1.08%. This declined to 0.85% in the year 2018-19, despite addition of new impairment groups in the counting, with little variation in the intervening years.

Data shows persistently low and almost static enrolment of the children with disabilities over the years. The trend of a decline or stagnancy in enrollment can be seen even in some of the best performing states.

FIGURE 1: PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES TO THE TOTAL ENROLMENT IN SCHOOL EDUCATION



Source: UDISE data from 2013-14 to 2016-17, Flash Statistics (UDISE) 2017-18 and UDISE+ data 2018

The trend of a decline or stagnancy in enrollment can be seen even in some of the best performing states. The UDISE and UDISE+ data representing the four categories of the states (as specified by

³⁴ UDISE+ (2018-19), CWSN Enrolment by Gender & Educational Level (Government). Retrieved from: <http://dashboard.seshagun.gov.in/#!/reports> (Accessed on 19/05/2021)

the NITI Aayog while reporting on the SDG 4 goal), indicates poor enrollment of students with disabilities even in front runner states.³⁵

For example, in 2013-14, Kerala, (a front runner state) has 3.27% CWSN/Children with disabilities enrolled to total enrolment in all school managements. Since then, a steep decline in their enrolment with 2.27%, 2.38%, 2.58%, and 2.51%, in 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17, and 2017-18 respectively is observed.

Only 29.47% of the schools across the country have children with disabilities enrolled in them in 2018-19

The UDISE+ data of 2018-19 continues to reflect this trend with 2.34% students with disabilities enrolling out of the total school enrolment. Such trends are reflected even for Delhi which has been performing well on various social sector indicators. The UDISE data from 2013-14 to 2017-18 reveals that the enrolment of children with disabilities in Delhi continues to persist between 0.78%-0.66%.³⁶

Very few schools across the country actually have students with disabilities enrolled in them. *Only 29.47% of the schools across the country have children with disabilities enrolled in them in 2018-19* and there is wide inter-state variation. While the front runner state of Kerala has 60% of the schools with students enrolled, Bihar (an aspirant state) has only 29.47% schools having children with disabilities enrolled in its school system.³⁷

Data shows a 1.1% to 0.25% drop in enrollment of students with disabilities from primary to the higher secondary level. These drops are far sharper than those of other vulnerable groups such as students from the Scheduled Castes (19.6 to 17.3%) and Scheduled Tribes (10.6 to 6.8%).

³⁵In the SDG Index of NITI Aayog, the states are categorized as the Achievers, Front Runners, Performers and Aspirants on the basis on their performance score in various Goal (NITI Aayog, n.d).

³⁶ UDISE (2013-14) Flash Statistics, Grade-wise CWSN: Grade I to XII and Enrolment by Educational Level, Pg. 43 & 34. <http://udise.in/Downloads/Publications/Documents/U-DISE-SchoolEducationInIndia-2013-14.pdf>; UDISE (2014-15) Flash Statistics, Grade-wise CWSN: Grade I to XII and Enrolment by Educational Level, Pg. 43 & 34. <http://udise.in/Downloads/Publications/Documents/U-DISE-SchoolEducationInIndia-2014-15.pdf>; UDISE (2015-16) Flash Statistics, Grade-wise CWSN: Grade I to XII and Enrolment by Educational Level, Pg. 45 & 35. <http://udise.in/Downloads/Publications/Documents/U-DISE-SchoolEducationInIndia-2015-16.pdf>; UDISE (2016-17) Flash Statistics, Grade-wise enrolment of CWSN in School Education and Grade-wise enrolment of boys and girls in school education, Pg. 267 & 217, 219 & 221. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EQ2Xdqjwd3JRJ34L7ftZzkQOu5vtRIJE/view>; UDISE (2017-18) Flash Statistics, Grade-wise enrolment of CWSN in School Education and Grade-wise enrolment of boys and girls in school education, Pg. 273 & 223, 225, & 227. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sx4WgvueX1SoflWsiY0_Z5TLF5CyG6il/view; USID+ (2018-19), CWSN Enrolment by Gender & Educational Level and Enrolment. Retrieved from: <http://dashboard.seshagun.gov.in/#!/reports> (Accessed on 3rd March, 2021 and 5th April, 2021)

³⁷ UDISE+ (2018-19), *Schools having CWSN Enrolment*. Retrieved from: <http://dashboard.seshagun.gov.in/#!/reports> (Accessed on 3rd March, 2021)

TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOLS HAVING CWSN/ CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES ENROLMENT*(STATE-WISE)

States	Schools having CWD Enrolment	Total no. of Schools	% of schools having CWD enrolment
Chandigarh	167	229	72.92
Kerala	10005	16701	59.90
Tamil Nadu	29178	59152	49.32
Delhi	2300	5703	40.32
Mizoram	1230	3913	31.43
West Bengal	38507	97828	39.36
Uttar Pradesh	76913	273235	28.14
Assam	22808	66324	34.38
Bihar	26299	89224	29.47

Source: UDISE+ 2018-19 (State-wise)

(*Note: For the calculating the Percentage of schools having CWSN/ Children with disabilities enrolment, a formula was used which is Schools having CWSN/ Children with disabilities enrolment divided by Total number of schools and the multiplied by 100.)

Sharp Drop in Enrolment of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

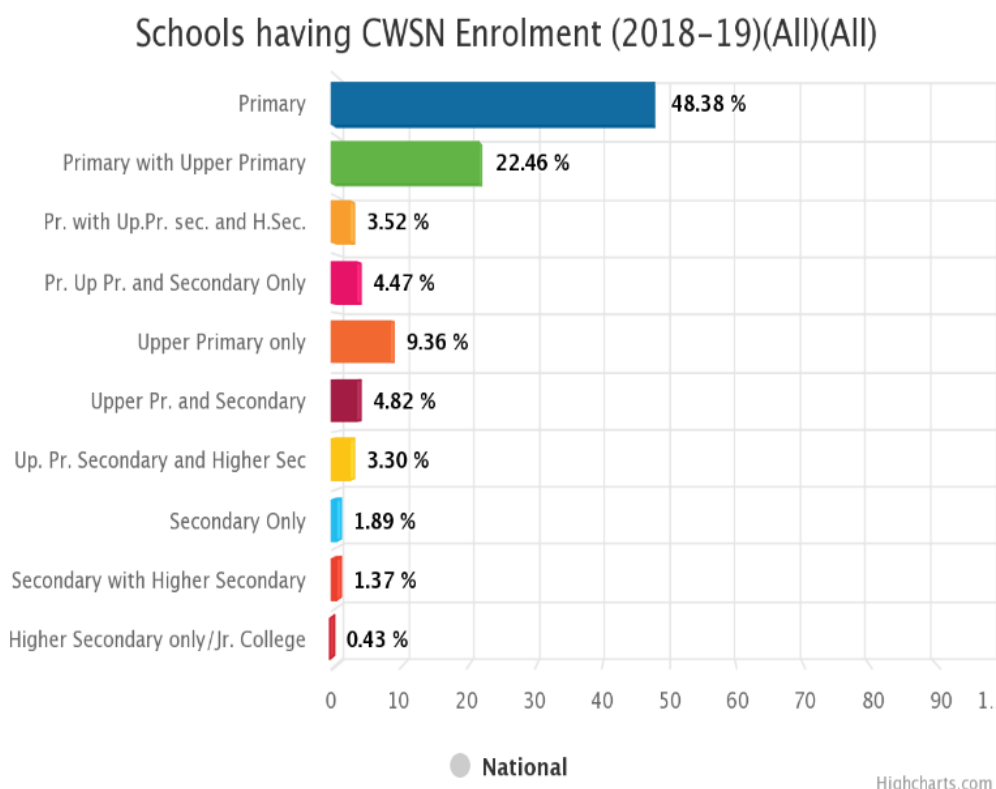
Among all the schools in India, primary schools (48% primary schools) have the largest percentage of children with disabilities in the school education system. This is followed by schools having Upper Primary sections (22.46%) and Upper Primary Schools (9.36%).

The percentage of schools having children with disabilities declines as one goes towards the schools having higher school sections. *At the Junior/higher secondary level schools, only 0.48% of schools have CWSN/Children with disabilities enrollments.*

A similar persistent pattern of sharp drops in the participation of students with disabilities in higher education is evident even in the earlier years. Data of several years (from 2013-14 till 2017-18) and UDISE+ 2018-19 reflects that *the enrolment of the children with disabilities at secondary level of school education is almost half of the total number of children with disabilities enrolled in the elementary level.*

The 2020 NEP recognizes this in sec 6.2.1 when it quotes UDISE data of 2016-17 to show the drop from 1.1% to 0.25% in enrollment of students with disabilities from primary to the higher secondary level. These drops are far sharper than those of other vulnerable groups such as students from the scheduled castes (19.6 to 17.3%) and scheduled tribes (10.6 to 6.8%).³⁸

FIGURE 2: SCHOOLS HAVING CWSN/CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES ENROLMENT (IN PERCENTAGE)³⁹

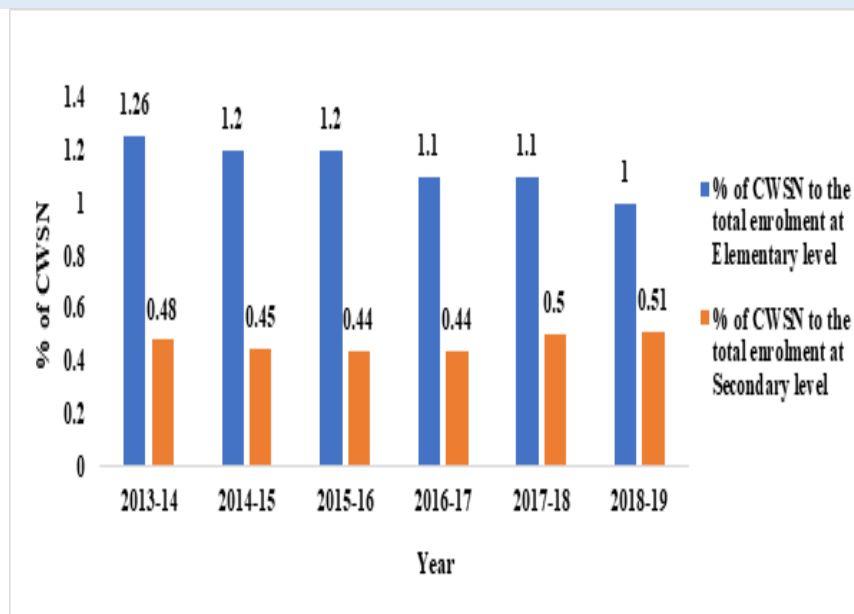


Source: UDISE+ Data of 2018-19, Report Code: GRPH00139

³⁸ UDISE (2013-14), *School Education in India, Enrolment by Educational Level and Grade-wise SC/ST: Grades I to XII*.

³⁹ UDISE+ (2018-19) Schools having CWSN Enrolment. Retrieved from: <http://dashboard.seshagun.gov.in/#!/reports> (Accessed on 3rd March, 2021)

FIGURE 3: PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AT ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY LEVEL OF EDUCATION SYSTEM TO THE TOTAL NUMBER OF CHILDREN AT ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY LEVEL



Source: UDISE data of (Flash Statistics).⁴⁰

Persistent Gender Disparity in Enrolment of Girls with Disabilities

The GPI (gender parity index) of children with disabilities from 2014-15 to 2018-19 indicates constant but low ratio of girls with disabilities to boys with disabilities.

The persistently low participation of girls with disabilities in the general school system indicates that not enough attention and thought has gone to enabling their enrolment in education. *The GPI*

⁴⁰ UDISE (2013-14), School Education in India, Enrolment by Educational Level and Grade-wise CWSN: Grades I to XII. Retrieved from: <http://udise.in/Downloads/Publications/Documents/U-DISE-School Education In India-2013-14.pdf> UDISE (2014-15), School Education in India, Enrolment by Educational Level and Grade-wise CWSN: Grades I to XII. Retrieved from: <http://udise.in/Downloads/Publications/Documents/U-DISE-School Education In India-2014-15.pdf> UDISE (2015-16) School Education in India, Enrolment by Educational Level and Grade-wise CWSN: Grades I to XII. Retrieved from: <http://udise.in/Downloads/Publications/Documents/U-DISE-School Education In India-2015-16.pdf> UDISE (2016-17), Flash Statistics, Enrolment of boys and girls by stage of school education, all India and Enrolment of CWSN by stage of school education. Retrieved from: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EQ2XdqJwd3JRj34L7ftZzkQOu5vtRlJE/view> UDISE (2017-18), Flash Statistics Flash Statistics, Enrolment of boys and girls by stage of school education, all India and Enrolment of CWSN by stage of school education. Retrieved from: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sx4WgvueX1SoflWsiY0_Z5TLF5CyG6il/view UDISE+ (2018-19), Enrolment by school category and Enrolment by Gender & Educational Level. Retrieved from: <http://dashboard.seshagun.gov.in/#!/reports> (Accessed on 3rd March, 2021)

(gender parity index) of children with disabilities from 2014-15 to 2018-19 indicates constant but low ratio of girls with disabilities to boys with disabilities.

This ratio between the girls and boys with disabilities remains between 0.74-0.7 in school education. (Gender parity index is calculated for each year by total number of girls with disabilities divided by total number of boys with disabilities across school education level in all management).

TABLE 2: GENDER WISE DISPARITY IN ENROLMENT OF CWSN/CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Years	Girls with Disabilities	Boys with Disabilities	Ratio
2014-15	1,110,469	1,488,011	0.74
2015-16	1,093,037	1,471,818	0.74
2016-17	1,023,646	1,354,579	0.75
2017-18	1,002,964	1,342,022	0.75
2018-19	902,407	1,208,437	0.75

(Data from 2014-15 to 2017-18) and UDISE+ 2018-19⁴¹

Source: UDISE Flash Statistics 2017-18, Table no. 1.40, Page no. 39

Disability-Wise Enrollment

The UDISE+ data of 2018-19 for the first time provides data on the enrolment of students with disabilities in schools as per the 2016 RPWD Act. This data reveals that student having low vision (396,959) constitute the highest number of students, followed by students having locomotor disability (302,085).

Students with intellectual disability (23,729), hearing impairment (229,813) and mental illness (218,508) are the next largest groups within the system. Students with developmental disabilities, Cerebral palsy (6280), Autism (24,820) and multiple disabilities including deaf blindness (100,873) also form a significant group. For the first time we also have an understanding of the participation of students with progressive conditions like muscular dystrophy (37,193) where a

⁴¹ UDISE (from 2014-15 to 2017-18) Flash Statistics, Grade-wise enrolment of CWSN in school education, all India. Retrieved from: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sx4WgvueX1SoflWsiY0_Z5TLF5CyG6il/view
UDISE+ (2018-19), CWSN Enrolment of Gender & Educational Level. Retrieved from: <http://dashboard.seshagun.gov.in/#!/reports> (Accessed on 3rd March, 2021)

student might lose their physical abilities as the condition progresses and will need different kinds of accommodations to continue education.

Students with blood disorders like Thalassemia, Hemophilia and Sickle Cell Diseases who need regular medical attention are a very small number in education. The lack of information and pre-requisite knowledge about the identification of these children and their recent acknowledgement in the RPWD Act could be some of reasons for this.

The participation of so many different acknowledged disability groups indicates great diversity, and education systems must be ready to include all. Apart from the medical conditions, students with disabilities also live in different contexts, belonging to different social and economic groups, adding to the diversity and barriers that many can face in education.

TABLE 3: NUMBER OF CWSN/CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES ENROLMENT IN SCHOOLS⁴²

Category	Total	Percentage
Blindness	80,434	3.77%
Low Vision	396,959	18.62%
Hearing Impairment	229,813	10.78%
Speech and Language	202,604	9.50%
Locomotor Disability	302,085	14.17%
Mental Illness	218,508	10.24%
Specific Learning Disabilities	189,019	8.86%
Cerebral Palsy	62,380	2.92%
Autism Spectrum Disorder	24,820	1.16%
Multiple Disability including deaf, blindness	100,873	4.73%
Leprosy Cured Students	6,062	0.28%
Dwarfism	11,945	0.56%
Intellectual Disability	237,229	11.12%

⁴² UDISE+ (2018-19), CWSN Enrolment (Disability-wise). Retrieved from: <http://dashboard.udiseplus.gov.in/#/reportDashboard/sReport> (Accessed on 24th May, 2021)

Muscular Dystrophy	37,193	1.74%
Chronic Neurological	4,785	0.22%
Multiple Sclerosis	6,786	0.31%
Thalassemia	4,148	0.19%
Hemophilia	1,946	0.09%
Sickle Cell Disease	10,476	0.49%
Acid Attack Victim	730	0.03%
Parkinson's Disease	3,020	0.14%
Total	2,131,815	

Special Schools

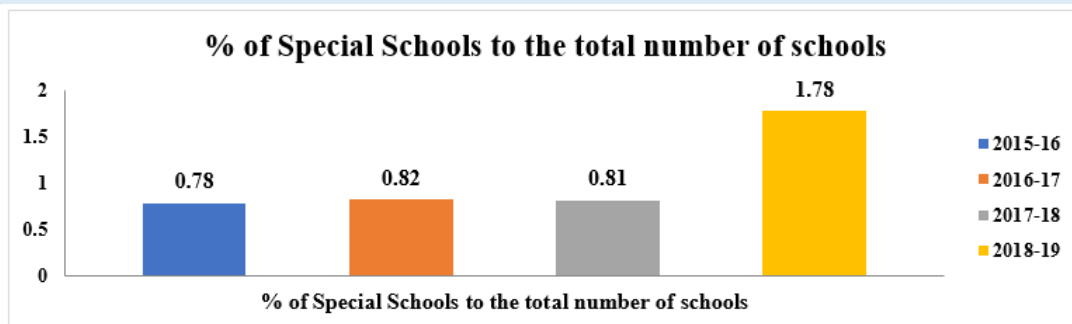
There is no official policy document or plan on the nature and spread of special schools in the country and whom they should address, what standards they should follow and how they are to be regulated

The concept of the special school started at the time when it was thought that students with disabilities were best taught in segregated environments. As advocacy for inclusive education grew it was thought that with their vast knowledge they work more as resource centers supporting inclusive education systems. Indian law (RPWD Act 2016) has however, endorsed the special school and made it an option and a legal choice for the students with benchmark disability⁴³.

From 2015-16 to 2018-19, we see a jump in the number of special schools in the country from 11,877 to 27,675 in the country. Yet special schools continue to be a miniscule percentage (1.78%) of all schools in India, and their spread is uneven across states and at different levels of education. *We see no official policy document or plan on the nature and spread of special schools in the country and whom they should address, what standards they should follow and how they are to be regulated.* The 2020 policy is silent on any of these scores even as it mandates the RPWD Act 2016. Unfortunately, apart from making it a legal option for students with benchmark disabilities, the law itself is silent on the special school.

⁴³ Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, Social Security, Health, Rehabilitation and Recreation, Sec.31 (1), Right to Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016., New Delhi: GOI

FIGURE 4: PERCENTAGE OF SPECIAL SCHOOLS TO THE TOTAL NUMBER OF SCHOOLS⁴⁴



Source: UDISE+ data from 2015-16 to 2018-19

As a viable legal option, special schools ought to be available at all levels of education and in all parts of the country. However, over 70% of the special schools in 2018-19 are concentrated at the primary, and primary with upper primary levels.⁴⁵ A sharp drop in availability is seen at the secondary and higher secondary levels with less than five percent of the schools at these stages of education (see annexure 3, for detailed chart).

Unfortunately, neither the UDISE+ nor the Annual reports of the Ministry of MSJE give us an indication of the numbers of students in these special schools or the disability groups that the schools cater to. Ground experience tells us that the majority of these schools are schools for students with blindness or hearing impairment.

Many schools, supported by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, particularly those for students with developmental disabilities continue to be run informally and not connected to Boards of Education

Many schools, supported by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, particularly those for students with developmental disabilities continue to be run informally and not connected to Boards of Education. With the big shifts in the organization of education that the policy aims at, discussion on the status of the special schools ought to be an urgent priority.

⁴⁴UDISE+ (2015-16), Special Schools for CWSN by School Category and Schools by School Category. Retrieved from: <http://dashboard.seshagun.gov.in/#!/reports> (Accessed on 8th April, 2021)







UDISE+ (2016-17), Special Schools for CWSN by School Category and Schools by School Category. Retrieved from: <http://dashboard.seshagun.gov.in/#!/reports> (Accessed on 8th April, 2021)

UDISE+ (2017-18), Special Schools for CWSN by School Category and Schools by School Category. Retrieved from: <http://dashboard.seshagun.gov.in/#!/reports> (Accessed on 8th April, 2021)

UDISE+ (2018-19), Special Schools for CWSN by School Category and Schools by School Category. Retrieved from: <http://dashboard.seshagun.gov.in/#!/reports> (Accessed on 8th April, 2021)

⁴⁵UDISE+ (from 2015-16 to 2018-19), Schools by School Category. Retrieved from: <http://dashboard.seshagun.gov.in/#!/reports> (Accessed on 8th April, 2021)

Some of the major areas of discussion are:

-  *Bringing all special schools under the banner of the Ministry of Education of the Country for the integration of resources and regular reporting on status*
-  *Developing standards and guidelines around the functioning of these schools within the bodies such as the school standards authority, PARAKH and other quality frameworks*
-  *Developing a plan at the national and state levels for the even spread of these schools where required and their role within the education system*
-  *Linking all unrecognized special schools to Boards of education so that students with disabilities can avail of higher education.*
-  *Developing administrative as well as other mechanisms for synergy and transitioning from one type of school to another.*
-  *Provision of resources and training for special schools that will function as resources for the general school system.*

Although it is known that some students with disabilities do move from special schools to the general system and vice versa, there are no guidelines or administrative mechanisms that enable this. Because of the lack of administrative mechanisms and a consonance of curriculum, examination etc. across the general school and special school system, it is likely that a large number of children with disabilities in these schools are also dropping out rather than transitioning from one system to another. They may also drop out because, as the data shows, special schools that take children through all levels of education are not available. Presently, apart from field experience of organizations running special schools and personal experiences, there is no official data on how many students are transitioning from the special school to the general school or dropping out.

Home Based Education

While the RTE Act refers to children with multiple and “severe disability” according to the National Trust Act, the RPWD Act does not use these terms. Instead, the term children and persons with “high support needs” have been used. These divergences and confusions now need to be clarified in law







Home based education of students with disabilities has been a much-debated option within the disability sector. In this form of provisioning, the child is enrolled in a neighborhood school but stays at home. Depending on the arrangement made in different states, the child is visited by either a teacher or a volunteer occasionally.

The NEP 2020 wholeheartedly endorses and aims to strengthen home based education as a legal option in the RTE Act for students with severe and multiple disabilities under the National Trust Act 2000. However, it puts the onus of educability and accessibility on the child when it says that

“home-based education will continue to be a choice available for children with severe and profound disabilities who are unable to go to schools.”⁴⁶

Since its acknowledgment in law, there have been many grey areas in the legal framework, implementation and official reporting on this form of provisioning.


Some of these are:

-  *Lack of available data or official reporting in the public domain on home-based education*
-  *Lack of any data on children transitioning from home-based education to schools*
-  *Rules of RTE remain unchanged even after the amendment on home-based education in 2012, leaving the option open to interpretation*
-  *The RPWD Act remains silent on home-based education*
-  *While the RTE Act refers to children with multiple and “severe disability” according to the National Trust Act, the RPWD Act does not use these terms. Instead, the term children and persons with “high support needs” have been used. These divergences and confusions now need to be clarified in law*
-  *Confusion in concept and terminology: home based education and home schooling.*

In the absence of any reporting on home-based education by UDISE and UDISE+ and official reports, field experience and a few localized studies provide a worrying picture of its efficiency and efficacy as an option in education

Studies from different states including Karnataka highlight the inappropriateness of choice of children with disabilities for home-based education, administrative and governance issues and negative impact on children who were placed in this way of education.

For instance:

-  *“...the work of the Fourth Wave Foundation in the four Karnataka districts of Dharwad, Gadag, Haveri and Semi Urban Bangalore shows that nearly 80 percent of children who have been identified for HBE are mobile and capable of being integrated in normal schools. Yet, they remain in this programme as the schools and teachers feel they are not equipped to handle them.”⁴⁷*

⁴⁶Ministry of Education,2020, Equitable and Inclusive Education: Learning for All, Sec. 6.12, Pg:27, *National Education Policy, 2020*, New Delhi:GOI

⁴⁷Diana Joseph, quoted in *A School for Me Too*, by SatarupaSen Bhattacharya, Associate Editor at India Together,15 Jan 2014.<http://indiatogether.org/nshaale-education>

🗎 *A pilot study was conducted by SEVA in Action in Ramnagar, had similar findings. Of the 250 children already in home-based education, 180 children could have easily gone to school according to their study.*⁴⁸

In the absence of any reporting on home-based education by UDISE and UDISE+ and official reports, field experience and a few localized studies provide a worrying picture of its efficiency and efficacy as an option in education

A study on parents' concern on home-based education in Karnataka, Uttarakhand, Goa and Rajasthan, revealed that while parents found HBE beneficial as the children are provided with medical facilities and other devices, they wanted their children to go to schools for teaching related assistance and information about provisions for their children.⁴⁹

In a white paper on Home based education in Tamil Nadu,⁵⁰ majority of children showed interest in going to school daily. They gave a range of reasons for going to school e.g. desire to study, learn new things, and play and study with other children.

The white paper also drew attention to findings that:

- 🗎 Majority of parents were not given any information about home-based education
- 🗎 Most parents were not given any education plan for their children
- 🗎 While a large number of students were linked to a resource center, most of the students were able to access these centers only once a month
- 🗎 Forty three percent of the parents stated that no teacher comes home to train their child, with only 22% saying that the teacher visits their child once in three days, and 28% saying that the teacher visits their child only once a month.

It seems that home-based education has been more of a therapy and information giving program rather than a quality education option for the child who needs the most support in education.

From these and field experience it seems that home-based education has been more of a therapy and information giving program rather than a quality education option for the child who needs the most support in education. There has been no clarity on how students with disability in home-

⁴⁸Shared during meeting organised by the National Law School University, Bangalore, 7th November 2015.

⁴⁹Julka, A. 2015, Parents' Concerns on Home Based Education. *Journal of Indian Education*, Vol. XXXX1, (1), May 2015. Pg 32-44.

⁵⁰Vidya Sagar Organization, 2018, *White Paper on Home-based Education*, Pg. 19.

based education will move from one site of education to another or from one level of education to another.

According to the NEP 2020, “there shall be an audit of home-based education for its efficiency and effectiveness using the principle of equity and equality of opportunity.”





The 2020 COVID pandemic has seen nearly all children in the world go into ‘home based education’ as schools have shut and attempts at online education have started. As the crisis unfolded, studies on school going children revealed the great mental health toll and isolation that children experience without their friends and the physical school community.

As nations and India scramble to open schools so that children can get their midday meal, meet friends, play in playgrounds, and learn in person from their teachers, it is time to ask whether any child should be relegated to the home without adequate resource and regular learning opportunities just on the basis of their disability.

According to the NEP 2020, “*children under home-based education must be treated as equal to any other child in the general system. There shall be an audit of home-based education for its efficiency and effectiveness using the principle of equity and equality of opportunity. Guidelines and standards for home-based schooling shall be developed based on this audit in line with the RPWD Act 2016.*”⁵¹

As states go into audits of home-based education there is a need to revisit our commitments to an inclusive education system and see whether this kind of provisioning can be equated to educating a child and whether it represents an exclusion of the child on the basis of their disability. It is important to look at the concerns of families and the children and their desires and match them with standards for inclusive education systems.

States can also start their audits by ensuring that:

-  *Parents have the resources to make an informed choice*
-  *Students are not put into home based education because of the absence of support in education, or the assumption that they cannot go to school*
-  *The choice of the student is respected and that the student is given the right to express their views*
-  *Education does not become the sole responsibility of the parent/family*

⁵¹Ministry of Education, 2020, Equitable and Inclusive Education: Learning for All, Sec.6.11, Pg. no. 26, New Education Policy 2020, New Delhi: GOI

- 🧑‍🎓 *Education is not narrowed down to a rehabilitation intervention only*
- 🧑‍🎓 *Trained teachers and rehabilitation experts attend to the education of the child, and not just volunteers*
- 🧑‍🎓 *Resources for reasonable accommodation supports and assistive devices are made available to children free of cost*
- 🧑‍🎓 *Number of days that child comes to school are clearly settled, and arrangements are made for the same.*
- 🧑‍🎓 *Children get all the supports like the midday meal, scholarships etc. that are given to other children on a regular basis, and they attend and participate in all festivals and celebrations*
- 🧑‍🎓 *The child is part of all outings as well as trips to the balwadis in the school complex*
- 🧑‍🎓 *Transitioning from home-based education to the general or special school is not hampered.*

Teachers

In the year 2018-19 only 642,608 teachers were trained to teach students with disabilities

The promise of the RTE Act 2009 was that all teachers were to have a minimum qualification as laid down by the academic authority. A time period of five years was given to those teachers who did not have the qualifications to acquire them.⁵² However, audits of the law showed that these deadlines could not be kept by many states. Around 18.5% of teachers in India lack requisite qualification.⁵³ In states like Meghalaya, 70.3% of teachers are unqualified.⁵⁴

Along with issues of qualifications, the shortage of teachers over the years has remained a point of concern. *In the year 2018-19 only 642,608 teachers were trained to teach students with disabilities.*⁵⁵ UDISE+ data suggest despite increase in the percentage of teachers trained for teaching children with disabilities, very few teachers under various departments/managements are trained to cater to their educational needs. Among the various department/managements the teachers from local bodies constitutes highest proportion of teachers trained in teaching children with disabilities (9.8% in year 2015-16, 10.7% in year 2016-17).

⁵²Ministry of law and Justice, 2009, Sec 23(2), The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, New Delhi:GOI.

⁵³ RTE (2020), Status of Implementation of the Rights of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009: Draft report card, 2014-19. Retrieved from: <http://rteforumindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/10th-Stocktaking-Report.pdf>

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵ UDISE+ (2018-19), Teachers Trained for Teaching CWSN. Retrieved from: <http://dashboard.seshagun.gov.in/#!/reports>(Accessed on 3rd March, 2021)

Recognising that teachers with disabilities are important role models and that they would have skills like sign language or know braille and be able to teach in these languages and modes of communication, the RPwD Act provides for the appointment of persons with disabilities as special educators

Recognising the fact that teachers with disabilities are important role models in the system and that they would have skills like sign language or know braille and be able to teach in these languages and modes of communication, the RPwD Act, 2016 talks about the appointment of persons with disabilities as resource persons and special educators to cater to the needs of the children with disability.⁵⁶

UDISE+ data from 2015-16 to 2018-19 reflects that although there has been increase (95,927 teachers in 2015-16 which rose to 140,087 teachers in 2018-19) in their participation in school education, the numbers remain small and have not grown significantly. Teachers with hearing impairment are just beginning to come into the system in 2018-19 according to this data. The participation of teachers with locomotor disability is the highest with 59.2%, teachers with visual impairment being 14.5% and deaf teachers only 1.30% of the teachers with disabilities in the system.

TABLE 5: PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS BY TYPE OF DISABILITY AND ITS TOTAL (ALL-NATIONAL)

Year	Loco motor Disability	Visual Impairment	Others	Hearing Impairment	Total
2015-16	68.6%	13.06%	18.33%	(NA)	95927
2016-17	68.61%	13.39%	18%	(NA)	101394
2017-18	67.18%	13.37%	19.45%	(NA)	108556
2018-19	59.26%	14.15%	25.29%	1.30%	140087

⁵⁶ Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, Education, Sec. 17, *Right to Persons with Disability Act 2016*, New Delhi:GOI

Source: UDISE+ data from the year 2015-16 to 2018-19.⁵⁷

Special Educators

Special educators (also called resource teachers) are a group of teachers who are trained to teach students with disabilities. In India their training and accreditation is carried out by the Rehabilitation Council of India set up in 1992 under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Starting with being trained to work in special schools, these educators have over the years been absorbed more and more in the general school system as it included the child with disabilities.

Special educators across states work in the itinerant mode dealing with large numbers of schools and distances. This kind of arrangement has led to a detrimental quality of support that the teacher is able to give either to the student or to the school.

Apart from B.Ed. and M.Ed. in Special Education, the RCI recognizes range of diploma and certificate courses in specific disabilities. In a current system of training, the majority of special educators have been trained in teaching only one disability. However, in real classroom settings they are required to cater to the heterogeneous group of children with disabilities many of them requiring accommodation, individualized support etc.

At the ground level there seems to be a lack of job roles for these educators in different states. Special educators have to work with children across all grades and disabilities for which they are often ill-equipped

Working largely in itinerant mode these educators have often been stationed at the block level in states going from school to school in support of the child under the SSA and now the SMSA. They have also been stationed at resource centres wherever states had them. Not being at par with other teachers since they are usually taken on contract with lower honorariums and no job security. Their salaries are disproportionate to the actual work they were responsible for and carried out.⁵⁸

Even though recruitment of teachers and special educators is state subject, studies and audits have pointed out that *there is no uniform and defined mechanism for selection and appointment of special educators in different states.*⁵⁹ There is a complete lack of accountability, coordination, and convergence among the line departments for the appointment of special educators. *Special educators across states work in the itinerant mode dealing with large numbers of schools and*

⁵⁷UDISE+, from 2015-16 to 2018-19, *Percentage of teachers by type of disability and its total*. Retrieved from: <http://dashboard.seshagun.gov.in/#!/reports>

⁵⁸ N. Seth, N. Vernekar, 2021, *In Transit: Special Educators in the Framework for Inclusion in Education*. New Delhi: Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy.

⁵⁹ ASTHA, 2019, *Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities, Under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan: A Comprehensive Report*. New Delhi: ASTHA. (For copy contact ASTHA).

distances. This kind of arrangement has led to a detrimental quality of support that the teacher is able to give either to the student or to the school.

At the ground level there seems to be a lack of job roles for these educators in different states. Special educators have to work with children across all grades and disabilities for which they are often ill-equipped. As with other teachers they are given a host of other duties often taking them away from their real work.

Across states, over the years it has been seen that the entire responsibility of the child with disabilities falls on the special educators. In fact, students across states have often reported being asked to coming to school only when their teacher the special educator comes to school.

Around 65% of the posts of special educators remain vacant throughout the country.⁶⁰ There is huge gap in the number of special educators admitted to the various courses recognized by the RCI and the actual number of special teachers that we actually require in the system.

Children with Disabilities across Vulnerabilities

The child with disabilities fits into a multitude of these interconnected realities- gender, class, caste and all the other identities and vulnerabilities

Poverty and lack of sensitivity towards the range of vulnerabilities that the child with disabilities encounters are other barriers that impede their educational rights. Like any other child, the child with disabilities fits into a multitude of these interconnected realities- gender, class, caste and all the other identities and vulnerabilities acknowledged in the NEP.

Girls with disabilities are the most vulnerable students in the education system because of their impairment and gender interplay

Girls with disabilities are the most vulnerable students in the education system. Her impairment and gender interplay, perhaps makes her more vulnerable than other girls in the system affecting her access to and participation in school. She may require more support than other girl children in the school to perform her daily activities and lack of such support system is likely to affect her retention in the education system.

Similarly, children with disabilities constitute a major section among the Scheduled Castes. According to the census 2011, 20.69 % of children with disabilities in the 5-19 age groups are children belonging to the Scheduled Castes.⁶¹ They also constitute a major proportion among the

⁶⁰ASTHA, 2019, Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities, Under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan: A Comprehensive Report. New Delhi: ASTHA

⁶¹ Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2011, Distribution of disabled in the age-group 0-6 by type of disability, sex and residence for Scheduled Castes (India & States/UTs). Retrieved from: https://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/population_enumeration.html (29th June, 2021).

Scheduled Tribe population. In some districts of Madhya Pradesh for example, about ninety percent of the children with disabilities are tribal children with disabilities.⁶²

An Outcome Centred Education and Exams

A time bound outcome-oriented syllabus, the setting up of a National Mission for Foundational literacy and Numeracy with clear outcomes is one of the promises the policy. While this push can be very important in counteracting the prevailing low expectations that schools and teachers have of students with disabilities, it can also bring very early failure to children who will not achieve these goals in the prescribed time limit. They will need adaptations in curriculum and many other changes so that they continue to move to the next level. An inclusive education system has to recognize this and flexible in its approach by recognizing that children will learn at different paces and different ways. This should not become then a basis for excluding the child from the system.

Warnings from the Pandemic

For students with disabilities who are often at the peripheries of the education system, the effects of the pandemic on their learning levels are manifold. Inaccessibility of online learning, the lack of nutrition because of the food crisis, as well as the halting of habilitation and rehabilitation services will have an adverse impact on the ability of the child to learn.

The adverse impact of the pandemic on the learning and health of children cannot be underestimated. School closures have not only affected learning levels, but economically weaker children have been impacted disproportionately resulting in greater educational inequality across states. “States and children who had lower learning levels to start with, will experience greater learning losses due to limited access to learning resources during this period. This in turn will lead to a widening gap between children from poorer backgrounds as compared to more well-off children; and between better performing states and states that are lagging behind.”⁶³

For students with disabilities who are often at the peripheries of the education system, the effects of the pandemic on their learning levels are manifold. Inaccessibility of online learning, the lack of nutrition because of the food crisis, as well as the halting of habilitation and rehabilitation services will have an adverse impact on the ability of the child to learn.

Given the possibilities of increased humanitarian disasters linked to climate and other change, it is important that new curriculum frameworks take cognisance of building resilience among students, particularly the most vulnerable, to be able to negotiate different shifting learning spaces.

⁶²Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2011, Distribution of disabled in the age-group 0-6 by type of disability, sex and residence for Scheduled Tribes (India & States/UTs). Retrieved from: https://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/population_enumeration.html (29th June, 2021)

⁶³ASER, Wave 1, 2020, Pg: 17. Retrieved from: http://img.asercentre.org/docs/ASER%202021/ASER%202020%20wave%201%20-%20v2/aser2020wave1report_feb1.pdf

It is feared that many students will slip back in learning levels as a result of not being in schools. Similarly, younger children, who are just beginning to read and work with numbers, and children who were just acquiring minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics, may slip more easily and require more attention when they return to school. Planning for how to overcome this big loss must be the first priority of the system now.

Infrastructure

Just as it is important to keep track on the health of the child so that the learning process is not hampered, it is also imperative to keep track on the availability of infrastructure in the school premise. Functional physical infrastructure in the school premises is intrinsically linked to the safety and security of the students, especially for the girls and vulnerable children including students with disabilities.

Despite much emphasis on providing physical infrastructure like drinking water facilities, toilets, ramps etc. in the schools under legal frameworks and schemes like Accessible India Campaign, the ground realities suggest there is a little compliance

In the absence of physical infrastructure, the safety and security of the students are at risk which eventually has implications for the learning process of the students and often leads to drop-out of the students. Despite much emphasis on providing physical infrastructure like drinking water facilities, toilets, ramps etc. in the schools under legal frameworks and schemes like Accessible India Campaign, the ground realities suggest there is a little compliance.

Analysis of UDISE Data tells us that from 2014-15 to 2018-19 basic facilities like drinking water facilities, toilets for girls and boys continue to remain unavailable in many schools. Despite some initial improvement, there has been constant decline in availability of water in the school.⁶⁴

In 2018-19, only 13.61% of schools reported to have functional CWSN/Children with disabilities toilets.⁶⁵ The UDISE+ data shows that only 62.98% in 2018-19 have reported to have ramps.⁶⁶ The figures clearly indicate that despite emphasis on toilets for CWSN/Children with disabilities and ramps, their availability continues to be persistently low.

Making the school accessible for child requires much more than ramps and rails. Children with disabilities are a heterogeneous group of children with each group requiring a different set of support system. For example, a child with visual impairment will require tactile floor guides, good lighting etc. Similarly, a deaf child will benefit from very good signage of directions of classroom.

⁶⁴UDISE+, 2018-19, *Schools with available infrastructure facility*. Retrieved from: <http://dashboard.seshagun.gov.in/#!/reports> (Accessed on 3rd March, 2021).

⁶⁵UDISE+, 2018-19, *Schools with available infrastructure facility*. Retrieved from: <http://dashboard.seshagun.gov.in/#!/reports> (Accessed on 3rd March, 2021).

⁶⁶UDISE+, 2018-19, *Schools with available infrastructure facility*. Retrieved from: <http://dashboard.seshagun.gov.in/#!/reports> (Accessed on 3rd March, 2021).

Dilution of Standards

With the RTE Act, the education system of the country attempted to move away from informal and alternate education facilities to setting standards of physical infrastructure in schools. The schedule of the law for example, sets standards such as a playground, a boundary wall etc., Certification was given to schools based on these standards.

The 2020 New Education Policy seems to dilute these standards by giving individual schools the autonomy to decide “land areas and room sizes, practicalities of playgrounds in urban areas,” etc.

The RPWD Act 2016 has strong commitments where school buildings, among others, are seen as buildings that provide ‘essential services’.⁶⁷ The commitment of clause 16(ii) to make building, campus and various facilities accessible is strengthened by clauses on accessibility from section 40 to 45 of the law. A time limit of five years is given in which “all existing public buildings shall be made accessible in accordance with the rules and an action plan made by the government.

The 2020 New Education Policy seems to dilute these standards by giving individual schools the autonomy to decide “land areas and room sizes, practicalities of playgrounds in urban areas,” etc. According to the policy, “these mandates will be adjusted and loosened, leaving suitable flexibility for each school to make its own decisions based on local needs and constraints, while ensuring safety, security, and a pleasant and productive learning space.”

Budgetary allocations

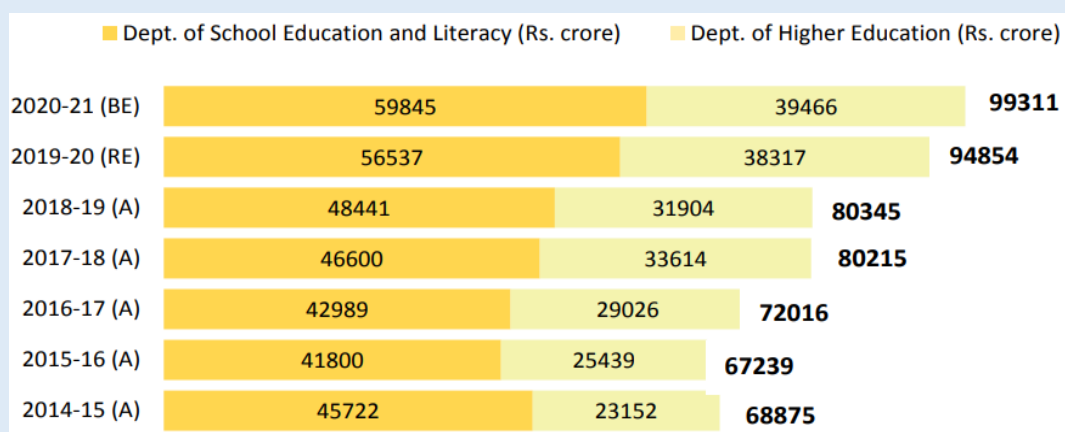
Education is a subject under the concurrent list and the budget for educational activities are shared between the Union and State. *The decline in share of investment by the Central government has increased the financial burden of the states. Lack of transparency of the State budgets towards allocation and utilization of funds towards education remains a major challenge* which needs to be addressed urgently.

*Over the years major portion of funds is diverted towards school education and hence higher education remains highly unfunded.*⁶⁸In year 2014-15, Rs. 45,722 crore was approved for school education and higher education received only Rs. 23,152 crore – a difference of around 22 thousand crores. Even after six years, i.e., 2020-21, the huge difference between the funds allocated for school education (Rs.59,845 crore) and higher education (Rs. 39,466 crore) continues to persist.

⁶⁷ Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, Duties and Responsibilities of Appropriate Governments, Sec.45 (2), *Right to Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.*, New Delhi: GOI.

⁶⁸CBGA, 2020, *Decoding the Priorities: An Analysis of Union Budget, 2020-21*, Pg:16

FIGURE 5: DEPARTMENT WISE ALLOCATION/EXPENDITURE BY MHRD (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION)



Source: CBGA Report.⁶⁹

In the school education system also, the major portion of the funds are basically provided for the elementary level. The low budget allocation for the secondary education and teachers training has severe implications for the availability of requisite infrastructure (physical and human) for quality education at these levels.

The budgets for the school education system are approved for various schemes of school education systems e.g. School education mission, mid- day meal, SMSA, National Scheme for Incentive to Girl Child for Secondary Education etc. These have remained severely underfunded. For example, in 2020-21 (BE) against a projected demand of Rs 45, 934 crores, SMSA has received an allocation of Rs 38,750 crore.⁷⁰ Similarly, Mid-day Meal which would now be extended from pre-primary to Class 12 has received only Rs 1,100 crore in year 2019-20 and has remained unchanged in 2020-21.

FIGURE 6: BUDGETARY ALLOCATION FOR SELECT SCHEMES FOR SCHOOL EDUCATION (RS. CRORE)

Schemes	2014-15 (A)	2015-16 (A)	2016-17 (A)	2017-18 (A)	2018-19 (A)	2019-20 (BE)	2019-20 (RE)	2020-21 (BE)
National Education Mission	29070	27066	27616	28209	29437	36447	36292	38861
Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)	24097	21661	21685	23484	25616			

⁶⁹CBGA, 2020, *Decoding the Priorities: An Analysis of Union Budget, 2020-21*, Pg:16.

⁷⁰CBGA, 2020, *Decoding the Priorities: An Analysis of Union Budget, 2020-21*, Pg 59.

Schemes	2014-15 (A)	2015-16 (A)	2016-17 (A)	2017-18 (A)	2018-19 (A)	2019-20 (BE)	2019-20 (RE)	2020-21 (BE)
Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)	3398	3563	3698	4033	3399			
Strengthening of Teachers Training Institutions	-	-	495	478	374			
# Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan					29389	36322	36274	38751
Mid Day Meal	10523	9145	9475	9092	9514	11000	9912	11000
Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS)	3243	3278	3987	4997	5007	5012	6006	5517
National Scheme for Incentive to Girl Child for Secondary Education	154	-	45	292	165	100	88	110
National Means cum Merit Scholarship	-	127	39	-	319	368	335	373

Source: CBGA Report⁷¹

There has been a constant decline in the funds allocated towards the inclusive education under SMSA. These outlays amount to 0.02% of budget approved for school education.

The inclusive education component has been impacted due to low budgetary allocation. Prior to 2018, the inclusive education at elementary level was an integral part of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan which provides Rs. 3,000 per child per annum for interventions related to education of children with disabilities. At the secondary level, apart from Rs 3000, an additional Rs 600 per disabled child was provided as a scholarship. These included free aids and appliances, transport, escort support, appointment of resource teachers, and barrier free access etc.

Since 2018-19, with the implementation of Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, Rs 3,500 is allocated under this scheme per annum to every child with disabilities from class 1 to class 12 under inclusive education component of SMSA. *There has been a constant decline in the funds allocated towards*

⁷¹ *ibid.*

the inclusive education under SMSA. In year 2018-19, Rs. 1,06,425.72 lakh is the estimated approved outlay for inclusive education. This further decreases in 2019-20 to Rs.1,02,350.91 lakh in 2019-20 and 85,538.831 in year 2020-21.⁷² These amount to 0.02% of budget approved for school education.

Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan has provisions for children with disabilities under various interventions including teacher's education and training, Information and Communication Technology, vocational training, early childhood etc. The PAB (Project Approval Board) minutes of the various states shows that the budget heads do not correspond to these activities.

Under the general pools, students with disabilities have funds approved for toilets, ramps and rails under the Strengthening of Schools, Braille Books and Large Font books under RTE component, Salary for Resource Teachers. For all other activities like, transport, therapeutic services, orientation of parents, stipends for girls, salaries of special educators etc. that cater to educational needs of children with disabilities, the funds are withdrawn from the earmarked Rs. 3,500 per child per annum Inclusive Education.

The budget analysis from 2018-19 to 2020-21 shows that huge amount of funds under the inclusive education (i.e., Rs. 3500 per child per annum) is utilized for paying the salaries of special educators, salaries of aayas, the transport and stipends for girls. In budget approved by the Ministry of Education for various states reflects that for almost all states whether they are front runner states like Tamil Nadu⁷³ or Kerala⁷⁴ or aspirant states like Bihar⁷⁵ or Uttar Pradesh⁷⁶ around 70-80% of the approved amount is allocated for the salaries of the special educators at all level.

The analysis of the PAB minutes of various states highlights that for all the other activities like assistive devices, services for students with high support needs, teaching and learning methods, trainings of the special educators and teachers, AAC, Sign Language, ICT that involve software like SAFTA, JAWS etc. either remain severely underfunded or do not find any mentions in the activities approved. It fails to create budgetary space for the range of provisions incorporated in RPWD Act.

In addition to Ministry of Education, the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities has a financial provision for the education of CWSN/Children with disabilities. For example, funds are given to special schools under 'Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme' (DDRS). *Through the ADIP scheme, aids and appliances are provided to persons and children with disabilities.* Special Schools have been mentioned under the RPWD Act as a site of education for

⁷²This has been calculated by collecting the data from PAB minutes from 2018-19 to 2020-2021 of all states of India. The detailed table is given in the annexure12.

⁷³<https://dsel.education.gov.in/sites/default/files/2020-08/TamilNadu.pdf>

⁷⁴<https://dsel.education.gov.in/sites/default/files/2020-08/Kerala.pdf>

⁷⁵<https://dsel.education.gov.in/sites/default/files/2020-08/Bihar.pdf>

⁷⁶https://dsel.education.gov.in/sites/default/files/2020-10/up_pab.pdf

CWSN/Children with disabilities. *They are supported by the MSJE under DDRS.* The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities assisted 371 special schools during 2016-17.⁷⁷

The analysis of the PAB minutes of various states highlights that for all the other activities like assistive devices, services for students with high support needs, teaching and learning methods, trainings of the special educators and teachers, AAC, Sign Language, ICT that involve software like SAFTA, JAWS etc. either remain severely underfunded or do not find any mentions in the activities approved.

Aids and Assistive Devices costing Rs.196.48 crore approx. was provided to 5.67 lakh Children with Special Needs through 5749 Camps under ADIP schemes from 2014-15 till 2020-21.⁷⁸ The Accessible India Campaign has provided for making government buildings accessible. The Annual Report of the various years of the MSJE does not give us the picture of funds allocated to make school buildings accessible.

Apart from this Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities launched the scheme in 2014- 15 for support for establishment/ modernization/capacity augmentation of Braille presses. The aim of the scheme is to facilitate the production of Braille Text Books for free distribution to children with visual impairment studying in various schools in the country⁷⁹ So far 26 Braille Presses have been supported under this Scheme with Rs. 34.43 crore as the total financial assistance.

A system should be developed wherein the state budgets on school education system and inclusive education system in particular are made available in the public domain. This would enable in understanding, strengthening and enhancing the funds for inclusive education from the state budgets of the respective states.

⁷⁷CBGA, 2018, *Budgeting School education, what has changed, what has not changed*, pg. 53.

⁷⁸Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (2020-21), *Annual Report*, pg:103 Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJE): India.

⁷⁹Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (2020-21), *Annual Report*,pg 122. Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJE): India.

NEP – OPPORTUNITIES TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

National Institute of Open Learning

As guidelines are made it must be ensured that students with disabilities are not forced to choose the NIOS option at a very young age or because schools are not prepared to teach them.

Along with home-based education, the NIOS has been given a big push as an option for disadvantaged students in the 2020 New Education Policy. Under section 3.5 the policy document talks about broadening of the scope of school education and providing multiple pathways to learning, involving both formal and non-formal education modes. It further talks about the expanding and strengthening of the Open and Distance Learning Programmes under the NIOS and SIOS to cater to the learning needs of the students who are unable to attend mainstream schools.

NIOS will develop high-quality modules to teach Indian Sign Language, and to teach other basic subjects using Indian Sign Language.

While the NIOS has been seen often as an option for students with disabilities because of its time flexibility in clearing subjects and the different subjects that it offers, students with disabilities do not seem to be enrolled in substantial numbers from 2013-2014 to 2017-2018.

Students enrolled in NIOS Academic Courses numbered 562,222 during the year 2017-18. Out of these only 7,567 were students with disabilities. On the positive side, there has been a substantial increase in the number of students with disabilities enrolled in NIOS from 2,445 in 2013-14 to 7,567 in 2017-18.

A huge gender gap persists even in the NIOS, with enrolment during 2017-18 showing that 66% were males and only 34% were girls/women. Although the Annual report of NIOS does not give us a gender breakup of the participation of students with disabilities in NIOS, it is likely to be worse than the already low figures for all girls participating in NIOS.

As states go into the strengthening of NIOS, inclusive education has to become the benchmark of this strengthening. The development of high-quality modules to teach Indian Sign Language, and using Indian Sign Language to teach other basic subjects, and the guidelines to develop inclusive learning materials are a start in this direction. However, the spread of the NIOS will be better if all centers were able to cater to all students, including students with disabilities.

It is also important to strengthen both the prospective student and the center with assistive technology, resources and accommodations and support structures. Teachers would need to be trained especially in the distance mode and become very proficient with technology. They must also be aware of various resources that can be used for the students. NIOS centers could be linked to the BRCs resource centers and the school complex to get better support for their students with disabilities.

TABLE 4: DISABILITY-WISE ENROLMENT IN ACADEMIC COURSES FROM 2013-14 TO 2017-18⁸⁰

Disability	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Loco Motor	129	117	887	247	325
Visually Impaired	44	69	241	1395	2728
Hearing Impaired	361	611	672	529	785
Leprosy Cured	4	9	25	201	36
Mentally Retarded	94	214	388	981	661
Mental Illness	8	12	24	22	34
Multiple Disability	313	340	221	188	295
Cerebral Palsy	808	230	118	127	758
Learning Disabilities	684	675	1441	1320	1392
Autism	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	553
Total	2,445	2,277	4,017	5,010	7,567

Source: NIOS, Annual Report, 2017-18, Pg.: 65

At present, the majority of students attending NIOS are in secondary (41%) and senior secondary courses (59%). Fifty-three (53%) learners enrolled in the academic courses are of age group 14 to 20, and 17% learners are in the age group 21 to 25, while 2% are in the age group above 50.⁸¹ At these ages, students are better prepared to learn through distance mode. *As guidelines are made it must be ensured that students with disabilities are not forced to choose the NIOS option at a very young age or because schools are not prepared to teach them.*

ECCE and Children with Disabilities

The NEP recognizes Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as a measure of equity and inclusiveness when it says that “Schools providing quality ECCE reap the greatest dividends for

⁸⁰NIOS (2017-18), *Annual Report, 2017-18*, MHRD: India. Retrieved from: https://www.nios.ac.in/media/documents/annual_reports/FINAL_ANNUAL_REPORT-2017-18_website-min.pdf

⁸¹National Institute of Open Learning, 2018, pg:2, *Annual Report 2017-18*, https://www.nios.ac.in/media/documents/annual_reports/FINAL_ANNUAL_REPORT-2017-18_website-min.pdf (last retrieved on 27th June 2021).

children who come from families that are economically disadvantaged.”⁸² For students with disabilities, a strong commitment of inclusion is given at this stage of education.

According to the policy, ECCE shall be delivered through a significantly expanded and strengthened system of early-childhood education institutions consisting of:

- standalone anganwadis
- anganwadis co-located with primary schools
- pre-primary schools/sections covering at least age 5 to 6 years co-located with existing primary schools, and
- stand-alone pre-schools.

According to the NSSO 2018 data, only 10.1 % of persons with disabilities had ever attended a pre- school program.

As yet there is very little formal understanding of the participation of children with disabilities in ECCE facilities in the country. *According to the NSSO 2018 data, only 10.1 % of persons with disabilities had ever attended a pre- school program.*⁸³

The largest provisioning for young children in the country since 1975, the ICDS program, with its web of 1,383,955 anganwadi and mini anganwadi centres, reported catering to 8.31 crore children as on 30th June, 2020.⁸⁴ Yet there is no data on the participation of children with disabilities in this program over the years.

Although there is no updated countrywide data on numbers, international and national studies gives us an idea of significant numbers of children who are either at risk of disability or have a childhood disability.

In order to plan for education services at the early childhood level, it is important for the education system to take cognizance of the fact that there are conditions that begin in early childhood, sometimes even before a child is born.

Of the conditions that are recognized in the RPWD Act 2016, cerebral palsy, dwarfism, muscular dystrophy, intellectual disability, specific learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, and blood disorders (Hemophilia, Sickle Cell disease, Thalassemia) are all conditions that children have in early childhood and all last for a lifetime. Some kinds of vision and hearing impairments also are childhood conditions. Early childhood education and care system have to be ready to include all these children. Some of these conditions that are associated with impact on the growing

⁸² Ministry of Education, 2020, Equitable and Inclusive Education: Learning for All, Sec.6.5, Pg no. 25, National Education Policy 2020, New Delhi: GOI.

⁸³ Ministry of Statistic and Program Implementation, 2018, Summary of the Findings, Pgno. 50 in NSS Report No. 583: Persons with Disabilities in India, ,New Delhi: GOI.

⁸⁴ Ministry of Women and Child Development, Annual Report 2020-21, MWCD: New Delhi

brain and nervous system are today known as developmental disabilities/ neuro developmental disorders.⁸⁵

*In 2013, the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram document estimated around 17 lakhs birth defects annually in the country, with developmental delays affecting at least ten percent of children. These delays if not intervened timely may lead to permanent disabilities including cognitive, hearing or vision impairment.*⁸⁶

Data reveals that globally, 52.9 million children younger than 5 years had developmental disabilities in 2016. About 95% of these children lived in low-income and middle-income countries with South Asia having the highest prevalence of children with developmental disabilities.

Conducted on 4,000 families from 6 regions of India, the INCLEN study revealed that 7.5% to 18.5% of children ages 2-9 years have one or more neuro development disorder (NDD), including those who exhibited more than one NDD. If one excludes isolated hearing impairment, the overall prevalence of NDD's seems to be from 4.7 to 13.7%. The conditions studied included Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders, Intellectual Disability, Epilepsy, Learning Disability, Neuromuscular Disorders including cerebral palsy, Speech and Language Disorders, and Hearing and Vision Impairment.⁸⁷

In 2016 the Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors Study 2016 provided a comprehensive assessment of prevalence and years lived with disability (YLDs) for development disabilities (epilepsy, intellectual disability, hearing loss, vision loss, autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) among children younger than 5 years in 195 countries and territories from 1990 to 2016.

The study⁸⁸ finds that “globally, 52.9 million children younger than 5 years (54% males) had developmental disabilities in 2016, compared with 53.0 million in 1990. About 95% of these children lived in low-income and middle-income countries with South Asia having the highest

⁸⁵ The term developmental disabilities is now internationally used for group of conditions resulting from impairments that affect a child's physical, learning, or behavioral functioning. usually become apparent during infancy or childhood and are marked by delayed development or functional limitations especially in learning, language, communication, cognition, behavior, socialization, or mobility. Children may have sensory impairments (hearing and vision loss), epilepsy or seizures, cerebral palsy, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), intellectual disability, or other learning conditions.

⁸⁶Ministry of Health and Family Welfare,2013, Operational Guidelines

⁸⁷ Silberberg, D, Arora.N, et al. 2014, Neuro Developmental Disorders in India – From Epidemiology to Public Policy ,*Neurology*, April 2014, 82, (10 Supplement), 10-1.006

⁸⁸Global Research on Developmental Disabilities Collaborators, 2018, Developmental disabilities among children younger than 5 years in 195 countries and territories, 1990–2016: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2016 *Lancet Glob Health*. 2018 Oct;6(10):e1100-e1121. doi: 10.1016/S2214-109X(18)30309-7. Epub 2018 Aug 29. Erratum in: *Lancet Glob Health*. 2018 Dec;6(12):e1287. PMID: 30172774; PMCID: PMC6139259.

prevalence of children with developmental disabilities. The highest YLDs for all disabilities except ADHD were found in India.

The NEP's focus on ECCE has the potential to ensure effective inclusion but this will require effective strategies and coordinated efforts of all stakeholders.




Curriculum and Pedagogy

Curriculum and pedagogy and the transaction of how to teach, what to teach and who teaches are at the heart of any education system. While countrywide surveys and studies such as the ASER report⁸⁹ have consistently warned about the low learning levels of students in the education system, they have often missed out on reporting on the students with disability. One of the reasons for the low participation of students with disabilities in education has been the lack of interrogation of their requirements, learning levels and discussions on how to build systems that cater to diversity of requirements even though they have been spelt out in the law.

The NEP 2020 recognizes the “learning crisis” and attempts to make a paradigm shift both in curriculum and pedagogy as well as in teachers’ education and the conditions of their work.

It addresses curriculum and pedagogy for quality education at all levels of education starting from ECCE to the school leaving stage envisioning a unified administrative system that binds all the stages of education together.

Some of the important changes that can serve as opportunities in achieving disability inclusive education are:

-  In an effort to ensure a reading culture the policy promises a National Book Promotion Policy. High quality textbooks to public schools and digital libraries are promised along with extensive initiatives to ensure the availability, accessibility, quality, and readership of books across geographies, languages, levels, and genres.⁹⁰
-  A national repository of high-quality resources on foundational literacy and numeracy will be made available on the **D**igital **I**nfrastructure for **K**nowledge **S**haring (DIKSHA). Technological interventions are to serve as aids to teachers and to help bridge any language barriers that may exist between teachers and students.⁹¹
-  *A particular focus is given to Indian Sign Language (ISL) which will be standardized across the country and National and State curriculum materials developed, for use by*

⁸⁹ASER surveys have repeatedly pointed (for over fifteen years) to weak levels of basic learning for primary school children across India. The finding that even after five years of schooling, half of all Std 5 children still struggle to read basic text fluently or do simple arithmetic operations - has remained persistently unchanged over time.

⁹⁰ Ministry of Education, 2020, Foundational Literacy and Numeracy: An Urgent & Necessary Prerequisite to Learning, Sec. 2.8, Pg. no. 9, *National Education Policy 2020*. New Delhi: GOI

⁹¹ Ministry of Education, 2020, Foundational Literacy and Numeracy: An Urgent & Necessary Prerequisite to Learning, Sec. 2.6, Pg. no. 9, *National Education Policy 2020*. New Delhi: GOI

*students with hearing impairment. Local sign languages will be respected and taught as well, where possible and relevant.*⁹²

Flexibility and More Choices in Education

The increased flexibility of choices for courses in secondary education “including subjects in physical education, the arts and crafts and vocational skills”⁹³ as well as experiential learning with art integrated and sports integrated education⁹⁴ can be another major enabler for students including students with disabilities as it gives students the choice to excel in diverse areas rather than just the scholastic areas.

Enabling Continuous formative/adaptive assessment to track and individualizing and tracking each student’s learning can open a space for individualized planning, provision of reasonable accommodation and an individualized support plan for students with disabilities and other who may need it.

Instead of fitting the student into a system, the promise of an individualized response is far more conducive to the development of inclusive education systems.

A Diversity of Learning Styles, Ways of Communication and Requirements

Recognizing the diversity of languages in our country, the NEP 2020 focuses on students learning in their home languages and on having high quality textbooks in different languages.

This understanding that students learn best in their home language can enable a significant number of students with disabilities.

Deaf students will largely use sign language, deaf blind students will use tactile sign language.

Other students may not use oral speech and may communicate alternative and augmentative methods, either through pointing, sign, facial expressions or using equipment such as communication boards, computers, tablets and speech generating devices to communicate. Some students with autism, cerebral palsy, learning disabilities, and multiple disabilities among others may require AAC.

⁹² Ministry of Education, 2020, Multilingualism and the power of language, Sec. 4.22, Pg. no. 17, National Education Policy 2020. New Delhi: GOI

⁹³Ministry of Education, 2020, Curriculum and Pedagogy in Schools: Learning should be holistic, integrated, enjoyable and engaging, Sec.4.9, Pg. no.13, New Education Policy 2020, New Delhi: GOI

⁹⁴Ministry of Education, 2020. Curriculum and Pedagogy in Schools: Learning should be holistic, integrated, enjoyable and engaging, Sec.4.6, Pg. no.12, New Education Policy 2020, New Delhi: GOI

Individualised Tracking of Students: Opening Possibilities for Reasonable Accommodation and Individual Support

The promise of the 2020 policy for individualised tracking and individual choices for students can provide an opportunity for the planning of reasonable accommodations and individualised supports to be built into the education system for students with disabilities and others in need.

An individual support plan for inclusion of the students can include for example, the accommodations the child may need in class/school, the assistive devices and any other support structures required.

Reasonable accommodation can be required by a student in any aspect of education including in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy, in the ways curriculums are taught and transacted. For example, reasonable accommodation can be required by a student in the physical arrangement of a class, in transport provisions, or in the way material is presented and assessment is done, or in the requirement of an assistive device or small changes in the environment that may benefit the student.

These changes may be just in getting to school or in accessing all parts of the school building for different classes and other activities. Even if school transport is provided, a child may need safety supports on the seat to enable comfortable seating without falling. Accommodations may include changing the location of a class so that the child can participate and is not left behind. A child with Thalassaemia or chronic illness may require frequent rest periods in class.

Post (national curriculum framework) NCF-2021, new books should be in Accessible Digital Format (ADTs) so that all books are 'born accessible'

It is important now that schemes and rules and regulations are made flexible enough to be able to cater to individual variation. It is equally important that schools and states have resources to make that small change that will enable the right to education for a child.

While in the early years it is the parent who will partner with the school and teacher to work out the accommodations required for the child, in the later years students with disabilities must be consulted for the kinds of changes that they require. The development of these life skills of knowing how they study best must now be encouraged by an education system that is focusing so much on the growth of the individual child.

The Use of Information and Communication Technology

India was the first nation to sign the Marrakesh treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons who are Blind, Visually Impaired or otherwise print disabled in 2014. This treaty addresses the book famine by requiring its contracting parties to adopt national laws that permit the reproduction, distribution and making available of published works in accessible formats.

The policy aims that all students “entering grade 1 are school ready”, can only be fulfilled if there is focus on access, on preparing families, on understanding and providing for the accommodations and individual supports that the child needs, giving adequate information and support to the child rather than rely on attainment of goals or learning outcomes for the child.

Recently, detailed guidelines for development of e-content for children with 21 Disabilities as specified in RPwD Act were formulated by a committee of experts nominated by the Ministry of Education.⁹⁵ These guidelines recommend that in future all content should meet GIGW 2.0 and/or WCAG 2.1 guidelines to ensure that material becomes accessible to all including students with disabilities. Separate chapters also deal with specific requirements of different impairment groups. These guidelines also make a beginning in the use and explanation of terms such as ‘universal design’, ‘reasonable accommodation’, ‘augmentative and ‘alternative communication’.

These MoE Guidelines recommend that post (national curriculum framework) NCF-2021, new books should be in Accessible Digital Format (ADTs) so that all books are ‘born accessible’ ab initio. The National Book Promotion Policy and the promise of high-quality textbooks and libraries across the country can only be achieved if these guidelines are adhered to.

As curriculum frameworks are made, India needs to take note of these commitments to materials in accessible formats right from the ECCE stage. Intensive training and retraining campaigns for both teachers and students and content makers will be required urgently to integrate these new guidelines and concepts and guidelines and regular audits and planning are to be done as the country continues to use the online mode to reach out to its students.

With the focus of the policy on the use of technology in every area from teacher’s education to student learning, the need and permissions to use required assistive devices, mobile phones, appropriate software, etc. may need to be seen as essential inputs of enabling infrastructure and facilities and in the learning, examination and assessment system.

For agencies such as PARAKH that will guide the education system in how to assess knowledge of a student, as well as resource portals such as Diksha, knowledge of these methods will be crucial. At present many students with disability fall through the cracks because materials and teaching are not available in their language and mode of communication.

With the focus of the policy on the use of technology in every area from teacher’s education to student learning, and the probability of continued blended learning, in the light of the recent pandemic, the need and permissions to use required assistive devices, mobile phones, appropriate

⁹⁵Gohain. M, 2021, 8 June, Govt. releases guidelines for e-content development for children with disabilities. The Times of India. Retrieved from: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/education/news/govt-releases-guidelines-for-e-content-development-for-children-with-disabilities/articleshow/83334126.cms>

software, etc. may need to be seen as essential inputs of enabling infrastructure and facilities and in the learning, examination and assessment system.

Sports and the Arts

Students with disabilities are often excluded from both arts and sports activities in schools. One of the reasons for this is the lack of adaptations and knowledge among teachers and schools on how to enable participation, the accommodations to make and the adaptations. Recognizing this, the RPWD Act chapter on education makes specific mention of non-discrimination in opportunities for sports and recreation activities equally with others. *Given the focus of the NEP on sports and arts as an integral part of school education, it is important that the participation of students with disabilities is ensured.*

School Readiness: Not an Excuse to Exclude the Child

In the interest of ‘school readiness’, students with disabilities are often asked to leave schools or not admitted into pre-schools, because they are not toilet trained or do not talk or walk or eat independently in the same way as others. Alongside this, early childhood is the time when families run from hospital to hospital, often migrate from the rural areas to the big cities, lose their homes in order to understand what is happening to their child. In the absence of any publicly available information as well as the understanding of what to do and who to approach, the attention on the impairment of the child often becomes paramount and education is delayed.

With the policy promise of universal access, joining education at the correct age is also important so that children can learn with their peers. The policy aims that all students “entering grade 1 are school ready”, can only be fulfilled if there is focus on access, on preparing families, on understanding and providing for the accommodations and individual supports that the child needs, giving adequate information and support to the child rather than rely on attainment of goals or learning outcomes for the child.

Teachers and Teachers Training

The National Education Policy 2020 has marked the paradigm shift in the whole teaching learning process by incorporating the pedagogy, frameworks that aim to serve the wide range of diversities in the real classroom settings. To bring about such a paradigm shift and to serve the educational needs of all the children including children with disabilities there is a need for adequately trained and quality teachers. The RPwD Act 2016, talks about establishing adequate number of teacher training institutions. It also talks about training and employing teachers, including teachers with disabilities who are qualified in sign language and Braille and also teachers who are trained in teaching children with intellectual disability.⁹⁶ It further enunciates providing training to the professionals and staffs to support inclusive education at all level of school education.

The NEP in Chapter-5 refers to Special Teachers in section 5.21. It also details about the school teachers and their trainings. The policy acknowledges the undesirable scenario and standards of

⁹⁶ Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, Education, Sec.17(c), *Right to Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.*, New Delhi: GOI.

quality teachers caused due to poor quality of teachers' education, recruitments, deployments, service conditions and empowerment of teachers. Consequently, *the policy tries to ensure to restore the status of teaching profession. As with curriculum and pedagogy, the policy attempts systemic changes in teacher's education and empowerment.*

In the area of teachers training the policy offers a four years of integrated B.Ed. course for teachers with many avenues for growth and further learning.⁹⁷ In order to boost education and employment in the rural area, such scholarship will also have provision of preferential employment in their local area on completion of job.

*All B.Ed. programmes will include training in time-tested as well as the most recent techniques in pedagogy, including pedagogy with respect to foundational literacy and numeracy, multi-level teaching and evaluation, teaching children with disabilities.*⁹⁸

*Shorter post B.Ed certification courses will also be made widely available, at multi-disciplinary colleges and universities to the teachers who may wish to move into more specialized areas of teaching, such as teaching of students with disabilities, or into leadership and management positions in the schooling system, or to move from one stage to another between foundational, preparatory, middle and secondary stage.*⁹⁹

*The policy addresses the shortage of special educators. It emphasises the need for additional special educators for certain areas of school education.*¹⁰⁰ Some examples of such specialist requirements include subject teaching for children with disabilities at middle and secondary school level, including teaching for specific learning disabilities.¹⁰¹ Special educators would require not only subject-teaching knowledge and understanding of subject-related aims of education, but also the relevant skills of understanding of special requirements of children.

The Promise of the Policy for Good Governance

The 2020 NEP promises good governance and efficient use of resources. It sets up new standard setting, quality assessment and regulatory bodies. It also brings forth a re-organization of administration of schools in the form of school complexes.

The School Complex: A Semi-Autonomous Unit

In order to ensure good governance and efficient use of resources, the policy advocates the establishment of a grouping structure called the school complex, consisting of one secondary

⁹⁷ Ministry of Education, 2020, Teachers, Sec.5.2, Pg no. 20, *National Education Policy 2020*, New Delhi: GOI.

⁹⁸ Ministry of Education, 2020, Teachers, Sec. 5.24, Pg no. 23, *National Education Policy 2020*, New Delhi: GOI.

⁹⁹ Ministry of Education, 2020, Teachers, Sec. 5.26, Pg:24, *National Education Policy, 2020*, New Delhi: GOI.

¹⁰⁰ Ministry of Education, 2020, Teachers, Sec.5.31, Pg no. 23, *National Education Policy 2020*, New Delhi: GOI.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

school together with all other schools offering lower grades in its neighborhood including anganwadis, in a radius of five to ten kilometers.

The school complex is envisioned as a semi-autonomous unit with the Department of School Education devolving much of its earlier administrative authority to the complex. This includes independence to “innovate towards providing integrated education and to experiment with pedagogies, curriculum, etc., while adhering to the National Curricular Framework (NCF) and State Curricular Framework (SCF)”. The establishment of school complexes will bring in a great vibrancy in the school, teacher and student community with sharing of resources, subject teachers, social workers, counsellors and the spread of the arts crafts and vocational subjects across the complex.

As suggested in sec 6, the school complex is the unit which will “provide resources for the integration of children with disabilities, recruitment of special educators with cross disability training and for the establishment of and for the establishment of resource centers wherever needed especially for children with severe and multiple disabilities.” (sec. 6.11)

Sec 7.7 once again reiterates the importance of the school complex as being able to provide “improved support for children with disabilities”. However, there is no further elaboration of the how in this section.

The cluster approach of the school complex can have many advantages for students with disabilities and other students. Sharing of resources and creating vibrant learning communities can bring a lot of inclusion of children with disabilities. However, inclusive education has to be the benchmark in every step of the planning and implementation.

Administratively, and for the flow of multiple schemes, the block is the converging point. Being a planning and development unit of the district, a block represents a compact area for which effective plans are prepared and implemented through Gram Panchayats. *The interaction of the school complex with the block development plans and the block education officers can lead to a lot of localized planning and mapping of vulnerable groups as well as resources.*

The School Complex Management Committees

The RTE Act 2009 had elaborated the concept of the school management committees. Consisting of parents, representatives of the school and local authorities, these committees are to plan for the school and have many responsibilities to oversee its running.¹⁰² *With the re-arrangement of the administrative units the policy now envisages an additional body, the School Complex Management Committee.*

¹⁰² Ministry of Law and Justice, 2009, Responsibilities of Schools and Teachers, Sec. 21 (1). *The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009*. New Delhi: GOI

This committee will integrate all the school management plans made by the individual schools to create the school complex cluster development (SCCD) plans. The SCCD plans will also include plans of all the other institutions associated with school complexes. These plans that will be publicly available will include human resources, learning resources, physical resources and infrastructure, improvement initiatives, financial resources, school culture initiatives, teacher development plans, and educational outcomes.

The School Complex/Cluster Development Plan (SCDP) will be the plan that will be used by all authorities for planning and resourcing. Other important initiatives that will improve the governance and carry forward the spirit of the policy are establishment of Bal Bhawans in every state where all children will visit and partake in art, play and other activities, the twinning and sharing of good practice between private and government schools and the use of school building for the community after school hours.

Although the policy is silent on this, the school complex must include all special schools, students in home-based education as well as students in NIOS within the vicinity of the complex. It should plan for them so that they become part of the vibrant communities and are able to access and meet with other students, go and learn in the Bal Bhawans and partake in such activities that will enable greater inclusion of all.

Separation of Policy Making and Operational Functions

The policy in sec 8 attempts to break-up the all-inclusive functions and powers of the Department of School Education at the State level which was earlier responsible for policy making, monitoring of schools as well their operationalization.

The Department of School Education will now function only as a policy maker doing overall monitoring of the education system. The educational operation and service provision for the public schooling system will be the responsibility of the Directorate of School Education (including the offices of the DEO and BEO) which will work independently to implement policies regarding educational operation.

The Resource Centre and the School Complex

The RPWD Act in sec 17 (e) promises “to establish adequate number of resource centers to support educational institutions at all levels of school education.” According to the NEP 2020 policy “Resource centers in conjunction with special educators will support the rehabilitation and educational needs of learners with severe or multiple disabilities and will assist parents/guardians in achieving high-quality home schooling and skilling for such students as needed.”

With the school complex becoming the important administrative unit, states will need to plan the availability and accessibility of resource centers in relation to the school complex. Some important factors to be considered in this planning are:

- ♿ A reconsideration of the practice where students with disabilities have to travel to resource centers to get habilitation and rehabilitation and other specific support during school hours. The principle of services being available closest to the child should be followed, with rare exceptions.
- ♿ The principle of the service reaching the child and not the other way round is important especially for learners with severe and multiple disabilities.
- ♿ Putting responsibility on the school to make available these resources, and not the parent. Factors such as the age of the child become important while making these decisions. For example, it is not in the best interest of the very young child to have to travel far for services, but a child in secondary education is more able to go to a particular space for specialized help and support.

Adequate personnel to support the students with disabilities need to be accessed through the resource centers. The linkages with speech and occupational therapists and others as required by students to participate in education must now be made. As with all personnel even the specialist in different areas will need training and sensitization to work with children and within an inclusive education system. In the past, the grave shortage of adequately trained resource teachers and other personnel has been a major reason for students not being supported in their education.

New Regulatory and Assessment Bodies

Under Section 8, the policy envisages to establish new independent state and national bodies to ensure standards and quality of education services and student learning outcome.

State School Standards Authority (SSSA) in every state and UT to monitor will be one such body that will ensure that all schools follow certain minimal professional and quality standards.

The SSSA will establish a minimal set of standards based on basic parameters which shall be followed by all schools. These parameters are safety & security, basic infrastructure, number of teachers across subjects and grades, financial probity, and sound processes of governance. *The framework for these parameters will be created by the SCERT in consultation with various stakeholders, especially teachers and schools.*

Reinvigoration of SCERT and Other Institutions

SCERT will look into all academic matters including academic standards and curricular.¹⁰³ The NEP also envisages reinvigoration of CRCs, BRCs, and DIETs through “change management process” to change the capacity and work culture in 3 years.

¹⁰³ Ministry of Education, 2020, Standard Setting and Accreditation for School Education, Sec 8.5(d), Pg: 31, *National Education Policy*, New Delhi: GOI.

Financing affordable and quality education for all

For any major policy reform, a huge amount of investment is required. The National Education Policy acknowledges this fact and under Chapter-26, it details about the financing of resources.

*The policy emphasizes on increasing the investment on education and to allocate 6% of total GDP towards education.*¹⁰⁴

It further envisions governments at various levels to work in the coordinated and cooperative manner for investment in education.¹⁰⁵

Financial Support to Key Elements and Components of Education

*In order to provide high quality education, the policy emphasizes on providing financial support to key educational elements like universal access, nutritional support, learning resources, support for all key initiatives towards equitable high-quality education for underprivileged and socio-economically disadvantaged groups, etc.*¹⁰⁶

Identification of Areas with One-Term Investment and Long-Term Investments in Education

The policy has laid thrust on identifying areas that require one-time investment in infrastructure and resources. It also talks of identification of long term investment in areas like universal provisioning of quality early childhood care education, ensuring foundational literacy, investment in food and nutrition.¹⁰⁷

Efficiency in Increasing the Utilization of the Available Budgets.

It acknowledges the underspending of approved budgets in a time-bound manner especially at the district/institutional level. As such it talks of smooth, timely and appropriate flow of funds along with prevention of huge unspent balance through reforms in administrative processes.

Performance Based Funding and Funds for SEDGs

The policy in pursuance of its aims and objective advocates performance-based funding mechanism for disbursing the funds to the states.

¹⁰⁴ Ministry of Education, 2020, Financing, Affordable and Quality Education for All, Pg 60, *National Education Policy 2020*, New Delhi:GOI.

¹⁰⁵ Ministry of Education, 2020, Financing, Affordable and Quality Education for All, Pg 61, *National Education Policy 2020*, New Delhi:GOI.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*

The policy with its commitment on providing quality education to SEDGs emphasizes on ensuring efficient mechanisms for the optimal allocations and utilization of funds earmarked for SEDGs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Legal Frameworks

Attempting a paradigm shift in education, the NEP 2020 has also focused on children with disabilities. *It is now imperative that the laws (RTE and the RPWD) are integrated to create a clear legal framework for inclusive education in India.* The grey areas caused by the use of different terms used in different laws now need clarification.

Terminologies such as ‘severe disability’ used in the in the RTE Act for example is no longer used in the RPWD Act. The ‘special school’ and ‘home-based education’ which have been left to a line each in different laws, need to be defined and cross referenced in both the laws for adequate implementation.

Without any direction as to the nature of these sites of education in either the statutes or their rules, individual guidelines and standards made by different states can vary widely, leading to grey areas in the law. This makes for added complexity when students migrate from one state to another with their families – a very common occurrence in the country.



The terms and concepts relevant to making systems inclusive, such as reasonable accommodation, universal design, a wider understanding of communication now need to become common parlance in the education sector so that schemes and policy implementation can flow from them.

In the larger context there needs to be an integration of all the disability related statutes such as the National Trust Act, the Rehabilitation Council of India Act and the Mental Healthcare Act. *Laws such as the Rehabilitation Council of India Act and the National Trust Act have not been amended or rewritten since India’s ratification of the UN Convention of the Rights of persons with Disabilities.*

A committee needs to be set up to examine these changes with action to follow.

The Different Sites of Education

In order for all students with disabilities to have equal opportunity in education, the sites of education should have parity in in terms of:

-  Recognition of all sites of education within the education system.
-  Synergy in curriculums and pedagogy in the new curriculum frameworks so that students are able to move from one site of education to another and on to higher levels of education. The New curriculum frameworks could address the requirements of students studying in different contexts and sites of education. *Students with disabilities must be able to move from one site to another and from one level of education to another within these sites of education.* The different sites of education for children with disabilities i.e., HBE and even NIOS must not be treated as a permanent alternative to the education of students with disabilities, particularly in the younger age groups. The system must design and implement a strategy to ensure smooth transition of children into the mainstream regular school. For

this, necessary changes need to be made to the legal framework. In the interim, clear guidelines and plans could be made.

- ♿ *Availability of trained teachers, provision of individualized support and reasonable accommodations and teaching and learning in preferred means and modes of communication are needed in all sites of education.*
- ♿ All new quality assessment and standard setting bodies to include all sites of education including the special school as well as the home-based education.
- ♿ *Authentic data on the children transiting from one site of education i.e., is from regular school to special school or HBE and vice-a-versa must be captured and made available in the public domain. For this the MoE, must ensure to develop a system to track each child in these sites of education.*
- ♿ *A system of regular audit must be carried out on the status of all these sites of education and the information needs to be made available in public domain.*

Special Schools

- ♿ Special schools are one set of schools that neither the NEP 2020 nor the law elaborated on. The law needs to be amended with a clearer definition of nature and function of these schools.
- ♿ Given the fact that they are a legal option for children, it is important that a policy paper or guidelines are drawn on the nature and spread of special schools in the country.
- ♿ All existing special schools need to be formalized and included within the education system.
- ♿ Given the vast knowledge that many such school have, schemes should be framed to convert them into resource centres if they so desire.

Home based Education

- ♿ As standards and guidelines promised by the NEP 2020 are made in different states and UTs, support must be given to families to make informed choices and the views of the child are paramount as per the law.
- ♿ HBE must be an education option, and separate resources put in for this form of education
- ♿ Standard setting should include concerns such as number of days and hours of instruction, assessment and examinations, transportation to facilities to resource centres and schools, outings and regular visits to Bal Bhawans
- ♿ All affirmative action, entitlements meant for students in the education system must be available for this child as well.

Strengthening the Government School System in Inclusive Education

With 2,110,844 students with disabilities attending the general school system, the government school system is arguably the system with the largest numbers of known students with disabilities. With the vast numbers of schools still available across the country, it is this system that needs strengthening to include students with disabilities and other vulnerable students.

Responsibility of the Child to Shift from Parents to the School and System

Parents of students with disabilities have had to take the responsibility of their children's education much beyond what is required from other parents. They have had to take responsibility for transporting their child to school, caretaking within the school, getting their children assessed, and often have had to take on the responsibility of taking their children to specialists and resource centers within the system.

As with other children, the duty of the state to provide education needs to be demarcated from parental duty and responsibilities very clearly stated.

For example, it should not be the duty of the parent to be present in the school to feed their children, or take them to the toilet, or sit in class to support their child in their education. Schemes for transport and escort allowance for students with disabilities need to be scrutinized and audited from the aspect of the state responsibility to provide education and such services to the child. As education systems are audited for their quality by agencies such as SQUAFF and standards are set, provisions need to be made for supporting the child in school and not depending on the parent.

Participation of the Parents and the Community

For inclusive education to happen in real terms, the system must involve parents and the community for knowledge building. Parents and children with disabilities have the best experience and understanding of their conditions. Their active involvement in the school and school complexes development plans will help in making the system more inclusive. Parents already have a legal place in the school management committees. In different states parents of students with disabilities need to be strengthened to participate in education system.

Physical Infrastructure and Accessibility within the School

As the states are planning to implement the various provisions of NEP, it now becomes imperative to emphasis on dignified physical infrastructure and accessibility within the school. The need to build up toilets and ramps for children with disabilities is important, but now there is also a need to look beyond toilets and ramps. Tactile paths, signage at proper intervals, lighting for students with poor vision should now be made available within the school premises. All physical infrastructures in the school including drinking water facilities, toilets, libraries, and playground must be safe and accessible not only for all students but also for all teachers including teachers with disabilities.

Bring Out of School Children Back into School

With only 29.47% percent of schools in the country actually catering to students with disabilities, it is not surprising that provisioning for children with disabilities has often been an afterthought with the child made to fit into the existing structure and practices in the school rather than a universally planned approach. This also gives an indication of the large numbers of out of school children. With the COVID 19 humanitarian crisis still ongoing, there is danger of larger numbers of students with disabilities who were studying in schools now dropping out. As states plan, it

would be important to track each student who is in school and support the child to come back to school. This plan has to be urgently implemented.

The system should plan with the assumption that all school should have students with disabilities.

In their planning for bringing out of school children into schools, states can start by identifying schools with no students with disabilities. They can then map resources such as anganwadi and ASHA workers, special schools and CBR programs and other community groups and others in the area and bring children back and into schools.

Particular emphasis has to be given to identifying and bringing girls with disabilities into schools.

As girls are more likely than boys not to come back to school, emphasis has to be given in information campaigns on the importance of girls and girls with disabilities continuing education.

Affirmative actions, food security, health and other protections should be linked and ensured to facilitate return and retention of children with disabilities in schools.

Building Knowledge of all Disability Groups Identified under the RPWD Act 2016

Knowledge of disabilities under the RPWD Act must spread among panchayats, education officers, school heads as well as the School Management Committees (SMCs) and school complex management committees (SCMC) as they are legally bound to ensure enrollment and completion of education for children with disabilities

The RPWD Act identifies twenty-one (21) impairment groups as persons with disabilities. A relatively new law, there is need for the education system to build knowledge on the newly identified groups and their requirements. This understanding must percolate throughout the system and not just the teacher. This is particularly important for panchayats, education officers, school heads as well as the School Management Committees (SMCs) and school complex management committees (SCMC) as they are legally bound to ensure enrollment and completion of education for children with disabilities.

Other new professionals added by the NEP 2020 such as the social workers, counsellors and teachers from the community also need to have this understanding. Regular audits in all states must be undertaken to ensure this knowledge is there.

The Stages of Education

Each stage of education brings different needs and expectations from and for the students and the system. Data shows persistent low enrollments in elementary education and big drops in participation of students with disabilities in secondary education. As states go into planning for students belonging to the SEDGs, the focus has to be to analyze:

- ❏ Why such few students with disabilities are going onto secondary education?
- ❏ At the planning phase, states must consider the range of factors like adolescence, puberty and major psychological changes as big factors in the life of every student's life at the secondary level.

Children with disabilities are however, more vulnerable and at a disproportionate risk of physical and sexual violence, both in childcare institutions and schools. This fear safety and issues including menstrual hygiene at the secondary level prevent the retention especially for girls with disabilities.

- ❏ Apart from the macro view it would also be important to do a disability wise analysis to see which groups are getting left out in higher education and make specific plans for them.
- ❏ States need to set targets to ensure effective transitions from elementary to secondary education.
- ❏ States need to be aware that while there are some impairments that are present in early childhood, impairments like mental illness are more likely to be seen in the secondary education
- ❏ States need to look at the budgetary resources at the secondary level which have direct and indirect implications for the availability of infrastructure at secondary level and henceforth poor enrolment and retention at secondary level of education.

The Foundational and Preparatory stages

According to SARTHAQ task 170 “For providing support to the learning of children with disabilities, focus will be on early identification and support. States/UTs will build capacities of teachers at Foundational and Preparatory levels.” In order to fulfill the promise of early identification and support at foundational and preparatory levels, states will need to have links with a range of professionals who can support teachers in identifying, assessing the abilities and requirements as well as creating plans for the child.

States need to plan for the fact that childhood disabilities often occur at birth or in early childhood and that early intervention services need to be available closest to the child so that they can participate fully in education and at the right age.

Tracking each child and facilitating habilitation and rehabilitation requirements of young children will be paramount in enabling support. These convergences need to be made with different Ministries to support the comprehensive development of the child.

In the early years with so much development happening, it is important for states to include children at risk of disability as much as children with acknowledged impairments. Any child with a developmental delay needs specific attention and needs to be tracked by the school authorities.

Much research is still required to understand the incidence and prevalence of different impairments in different parts of the country. This knowledge will help states plan for students at the foundational and preparatory stages of education.

Girls with Disabilities and other Vulnerabilities: The Twin Track Approach

Very little is known, researched or documented about the status of education of students with disabilities who belong to socially and economically disadvantaged groups and the multiple barriers they must face in education. Even current schemes do not acknowledge this intersection and children with disabilities are often invisible within these groups.

As states plan for the implementation of NEP 2020, it is important to find twin track strategies where students with disabilities are included, for example in all schemes for girls, and there should be separate specific schemes and strategies for girls with disabilities. However, acknowledging the principle of reasonable accommodation and individual needs, all schemes do need to have a flexibility to include this child. For example, the very successful scheme for providing cycles to girl students for easy access to school could also include resources for a tricycle or adapted cycle or wheelchair for a girl who had limited mobility. The proposed gender funds should find place for girls with disabilities and all other vulnerable groups.¹⁰⁸

Additionally, there should be a regular audit on the out of school children with disabilities with the focus on girls with disabilities across vulnerabilities. Such audits would enable understanding the status of enrolment, education and the challenges children face in the system. The SMCs, who are mandated to bring students with disabilities in school and the new social workers and others can easily find the child who needs to be in school.

Building Environments that Maximize Inclusion

The RPWD Act emphasizes the building of environments that maximize inclusion. Students with disabilities often do not go onto the next stage of education or drop out because of seemingly small things like calling a student by the name of their impairment, or not making arrangements for a

¹⁰⁸Ministry of Education, 2020, Equitable and Inclusive Education: Learning for All, Sec. 6.8, Pg no. 26, National Education Policy 2020, New Delhi: GOI.

student to join all others during the midday meal, not asking students with disabilities to participate in activities and functions, or not expecting the child to excel in anything, lack of caretaking, etc.

These direct and indirect forms of discrimination, leading to isolation and humiliation must now be acknowledged in standards and quality frameworks if students with disabilities are to continue to stay in education.

States can set up regular systems of audits and feedback from students and parents. These interactions will enable an inclusive education system without great cost and resources and with equity and dignity. It will facilitate the development of modules on equity, gender, and needs of students with disabilities which NCERT and the RCI are charged with in the SARTHAQ guidelines.¹⁰⁹

Principals, administrators, bodies that address grievances must be aware of the different ways in which students with disabilities face discrimination so that they are able to take effective action.

A Cadre of Resource Teachers and Special Educators

For far too many years, resource teachers/ special educators have worked at great disadvantage in the system. For now, it would be most important that they are given a formal place within the education system.

In order to strengthen inclusive education both in principle and in practice, a cadre of special educators and resource persons should be formulated with adequate pay scales and avenues for growth so that all the provisioning and facilities that NEP envisions for the general teacher are extended to them as well.

In all states, resource teachers have had to cover large numbers of schools (often upto 100) and therefore the quality of support to students as well as general teachers becomes inadequate. This situation has been one of the biggest barriers in participation of students with disabilities in education. In their planning for teachers States must find ways to ensure adequate support to the student and the general teacher.

Resource teachers within the education system have many demands on them. They have to be able to teach in different sites of education, the inclusive school, the special school, in home-based education, NIOS and across different levels of education right from ECCE to secondary education, travel to many schools to reach out to the child with disability. This must now change to match the NEP 2020 recognition and vision for teachers in the country.

¹⁰⁹SARTHAQ, 2021, Task 183, Pg. 154, Implementation Plan for National Education Policy, 2020. Ministry of Education: New Delhi.

The NEP 2020 vision on different cadres of teachers specializing in teaching at different levels of education must apply to the resource teacher also. The demands of different sites of education must be acknowledged and teachers must be trained to teach in an inclusive classroom, a classroom with only specific impairment group, a distance mode classroom etc.

Teachers with Disabilities

Teachers with disabilities are the best role models for inclusion. Through them students with disabilities and others can be exposed to “knowledgeable professionals with first-hand experience with particular impairments.”¹¹⁰

Recognizing this, incentives need to be given to students with disabilities to train as teachers and targets need to be set by states for recruiting teachers with disabilities. The five percent reservation for persons with disabilities in all government jobs needs to be fulfilled.¹¹¹ All requirements of this teacher of reasonable accommodation and support structures need to be available so that they can discharge their duties.

Trainings of General Teachers and other Personnel

General teachers have often felt that the student with disability was an add-on in their class, and it was really the responsibility of the specialist teacher to teach this child. Students with disabilities have often been told to come to school only when ‘their’ teacher is visiting the school. This feeling has had much to do with how the system views this child and not so much the view of individual teachers.

The NEP 2020 now lays much emphasis on quality teachers and teachers trained to teach students with disabilities. The RPWD Act too focuses on training of teachers and all other personnel in the system. It is time to focus on content, duration and frequency of such training for all levels of teachers from the ECCE to secondary education.

Supported Teachers

All teachers and special educators need to be supported by other professionals (disability specialists) who will be able to facilitate the teacher in reaching out to the great diversity even among students with disabilities. Building other mechanisms of support to teachers within the school complex to discuss and share strategies and accommodations made for certain students can support the cause of building an inclusive education system. Using the possibility of connecting online to other specialists within the state can also enable resources for the student with disability given the current shortage of such professionals.

¹¹⁰ International Disability Alliance, 2020, *What an inclusive, equitable, quality education means to us*, pg. no. 31. Retrieved from: https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/ida_ie_flagship_report_english_29.06.2020.pdf

¹¹¹ Ministry of Law and Justice, 2012, Right to Free and Compulsory Education, Amendment 4, Sec (33 & 34), *The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Amendment Act 2012*, New Delhi: GOI.

The Resource Centre

Both the RPWD Act and the NEP mandate resource centers that can support the teacher and student at all levels of education. According to the NEP resource centers would also be used to reach out to learners with severe and multiple disabilities. The SARTHAQ Guidelines recommend that resource centers be housed in CRCs and BRCs.¹¹² This should enable a wide continuum of support for students who need it as CRCs and BRCs would have other resource persons there too.

The possibility for building a universal design of learning and training is higher when resource persons work together in a more transdisciplinary way to support children and other teachers.

Resource centers may also harness other resources available at the community level, parents' community resources as well other CBR projects and others for the continued education of students who are vulnerable and those who have high support needs. However, the principle of the resource going to the child and child not coming to the resource, especially at a young age must be followed and parents should not have to run with their children to the center as often happens today.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

As in other areas, systems changes are required in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy so that all students as well as students with disabilities study together using the universal design of learning approach. New curriculum frameworks are being written for every stage of education as per the NEP 2020.

These frameworks must now acknowledge that a significant number of India's children communicate and think in a diversity of ways, adding another layer to the already existing diversity of Indian students, cultures and languages. The education system now has a responsibility to respond to this diversity in terms of teaching methodologies, availability of learning materials and the ability to address students in a diversity of ways right from the early stages of education. Finally, the system must have the ability to teach in these different forms of communication such as sign language, reading and writing in Braille, alternative and augmentative communication and much more.

In order to do this,

there is need to revisit all the present institutions that presently produce these resources and look at their capacity to produce accessible material in different languages for all students with disabilities.

¹¹²SARTHAQ, 2021, Equitable and Inclusive Education: Learning for All, Task 184, pg. no. 154, *Implementation Plan for National Education Policy, 2020*. Ministry of Education: New Delhi

This would have to be done both at the Central and state levels.

In order to plan well, states must have an idea of the numbers of students they are likely to need these resources. For example, the 2018-19 data of UDISE+ tells us that nearly 30% of the students with disability presently enumerated in the system may require means and modes of communication other than the spoken language. Here, a strengthened UDISE+ data for different states can be useful and used as a guiding tool for students who are presently in school.

Small task forces at the state level comprising members of civil society, parents, students who have passed out of school as well as teachers and principals of schools and others could pool the already existing resources to share with the rest of the state. This is particularly important in areas such as the use of augmentative and alternative communication where there is little understanding of such resources.

The schemes for provisions of books and TLMs both at the center and state need to be revisited to become more diverse in their provisioning. More resources may need to be allocated for the same.

Online Resources

With the guidelines for making e – content accessible out in the public domain, it would be important to run training programs for teachers and Principals on how to use them to make materials accessible. Further all the various online resources and the various portals that the government has set up and plans to set up need to be audited for their accessibility for all students with disabilities.

Reasonable Accommodation and Individualized Support

Systems have to be created within the system at the state level to provide reasonable accommodations and to do individual support planning for students with disabilities.

This will require flexibility within existing schemes and ways of provisioning as well as resources at the school level so that accommodations can be done. Many more resources and handbooks need to be created for better understanding the requirements of reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities.

Flexible financial resources would also be required within the scheme to be able to provide need based individualized accommodations for students with disabilities. There is also a need to explore how some of these concepts can be used for other students, for example students who are chronically ill and others who are vulnerable in some way.

Governance

The divided responsibilities among the various ministries with regard to disability inclusive education must now be abandoned.

For inclusive education to happen, the onus of the education of this child and the resources for this must now be provided by the Ministry of Education.

A relook at all schemes for students with disabilities and their inclusion in schemes for all children and other vulnerable children is the need of the hour.

The standards, regulations, quality as well as students' achievements of any school or education system are intimately linked. A focus on achieving high quality education with inclusion with dignity of students with disabilities and all other vulnerable children needs to guide every area that these bodies address.

With the school complex becoming the important administrative unit, states will need to plan the availability and accessibility of resource centers in relation to the school complex.

The policy recommendation for the rationalization and consolidation of schools will limit the opportunity of schooling for all children including children with disabilities both in urban and rural areas. Long distance between the school and home also raise the safety and security of the children commuting to school.

The issue of access and accessibility should now address questions that the child faces right from the point he/she steps out of the house to reach school. Is the road accessible enough for the child to reach the school? Is there enough signage on the road to facilitate the child to reach safely to school? Are the schools, school complexes and resource centers easily accessible for children with disabilities in a way that is compatible with their dignity?

Enhancing Financial Resources

The constant decline in the expenditure of government towards education has impacted the various schemes including SMSA and mid-day scheme of MoE. The underfunding of these schemes has implications for quality of education as well as nutrition of the students. Civil society organizations have been raising the demand to improve and enhance budgetary allocation towards education.

In order to implement the new national education policy both in spirit and practice, it is now essential expenditure towards education to 6% of GDP. Under the SMSA, inadequate funds for inclusive education have implications for the quality education of children with disabilities. The provision of Rs 3,500 per annum per children with disabilities needs to be relooked and revisited so that the teaching and learning needs of children with disabilities is not affected due to the lack of financial resources.

It should be ensured that the budget allocated towards the 'inclusive education' should be diverted towards their learning needs rather than towards payments of human resources. The funds for the

activities other than learning needs of students with disabilities must be drawn from general pool of SMSA.

There is also an urgent need to focus on secondary education which has suffered due to low budgetary allocation towards it over the years.

This has impacted the availability of infrastructure at secondary level of education. An enhanced budget in the secondary level will strengthen it and prevent the huge drop out not only of children with disabilities but children in general.

The budget allocation for the MSJE must now be enhanced to support various schemes adequately. For example, aids and assistive devices costing approximately Rs.196.48 crore was provided to 5.67 lakh Children with Special Needs through 5,749 Camps under ADIP schemes in schools all over the country since 2014-15 onwards.¹¹³ *The scope for the ADIP schemes, scholarship and stipends and other schemes under the MSJE should be widened and the budgets for each of these components should be enhanced to ensure that all children with disabilities enrolled within the school system are the beneficiaries.* Also, regular audits of these schemes should be carried out.

The Importance of Adequate Data for Planning

For UDISE+ data set there is a need to plan, how it can be made more rigorous and what more data sets are required to enable better planning for disability inclusive education. The UDISE+ data should now capture and provide the picture of vital statistics like drop-out rates, retention and transition of children with disabilities across different sites and stages of education. Additionally, it must provide us with the range of accommodations and individualized support required by children with disabilities across the sites of education.

Disaster Preparedness and School Reopening

For children it is the education system that the majority of students are linked with. In times of disaster, it is this system that can take responsibility of bringing together many different schemes. Planning must emphasize on disaster preparedness to ensure disability inclusive disaster risk reduction and management and ensure that no matter what the disaster – that no child with disability is left behind.

¹¹³Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, 2021, Schemes of the Department, pg:103. *Annual Report 2020-21*, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, New Delhi:GOI.