

Activities suggested by the EC on School Education

The EC held on 18th July 2021 approved the proposal of the Education desks. Based on this decision education desk prepared a detailed action plan for implementation. Discuss this in the Education desk of the state and state EC and prepare state specific plan of action with time line. We have to have time plan by upholding the proposed collaborative actions where we are also part of joint platforms.

We are part of the Joint Form for Movements on Education (JFME). And as a partner of the joint movement we have to participate and ensure the success of all programmes planned by JFME.

Back ground

1. The Central Govt. is implementing the National Education Policy 2020 even without tabling it in the parliament. And the Govt. is utilizing the pandemic situation for implementing the policy without considering the opinion of academics or even the opinion of some state govts. that pointed out the dangers of over centralization without considering the federal nature of the nation, the trust in commercialisation and the scope of communalisation. Ultimately the central govt. would like to withdraw its commitment from the public funded education even in school education.
2. Central govt. published a document which explains the action plan with time plan namely SARTHAQ ('Students' and 'Teachers' Holistic Advancement through Quality Education).
3. Without any Govt. orders or advisories to the states the central govt. is implementing the policies through various agencies. The SARTHAQ document even though it is released in the pandemic period is completely '*ignorant*' about the present pandemic realities of the county and the actual ground realities.
4. NCERT informed all the states its intention to develop National Curriculum Frame Works in the following
 - i National Curriculum Framework for school education(NCFSE)
 - ii National Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCFECCE)
 - iii National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education(NCFTE)
 - iv National Curriculum Framework for Adult Education(NCFAE)

- As a prelude to develop NCFs, NCERT has written to all the state SCERTs to develop draft State Curriculum Frameworks (SCFs) in all the above four areas. By considering the SCFs as inputs NCERT will develop NCFs in all the four areas and by adopting or adapting the inputs from the final recommendations of NCFs the states will finalize the SCFs. It is in a way encroach the academic autonomy of the states. Thus pushing malicious agendas against secularism and democracy even in state curriculums.
 - NCERT also informed the states that NCERT will provide templates for developing all four SCFs, surveys questionnaires, capacity building workshops etc. along with IT based portal for developing the SCFs in a paper less manner.
 - NCERT also identified 25 areas for developing position papers. SCERTs have to develop position papers in all those 25 areas before developing draft SCFs.
5. The Central Govt. is now started to implement a World Bank aid project namely STARS (Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States) and like projects. In the STARS project there are 6 states Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Odisha. As part of this project there is scope for privatizing student assessment, teacher training etc. Through this project the Central Govt. is consciously trespass the areas of academics in school education through technocrats and bureaucrats.
 6. The Central Govt. also initiates a literacy and numeracy mission for young children namely *National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy NIPUN BHARAT (A National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy)*.
 7. For the last 16 months children are denied any kind of social gatherings. There are no mechanisms in majority of the states for having any kind of linkages with school children. In certain areas PSM organizations are doing some kind of scaffolding to children by engaging them. Bringing the children back to school is going to become a major and difficult task. We have to discuss this issue and communicate a broader position to state units.
 8. Many studies revealed that this pandemic shall result in rising inequality, poor health outcomes, violence, child labour and child marriage. The longer children stay out of school, the less likely they are to ever return.

9. For the majority of rural families, children often rely on schools for their only meal of the day. But schools now closed because of COVID, lakhs of children are missing out on these nutritious meals which are a lifeline for poor families. This could do lasting damage especially for the most vulnerable children.
10. Many state govt. are considering this as a boon for implementing the neo liberal agendas which is the central thread of National Education Policy 2020 particularly closing the publically funded schools and paving bright carpets for the private parties or corporate.
11. AIPSN already circulated a position paper regarding NEP 2020. The JFME also formulated a joint statement draft on the NEP implementation.

Action Programmes

1. In this background, by considering realities we have to
 - i formulate programmes and strategies to resist the implementation of NEP.
 - ii develop plans and strategies regarding school education to address the present COVID scenario and post COVID scenario.
 - iii develop concept note as well as our recommendation regarding literacy and continuing education which is totally neglected in NEP 2020.
1. There is no uniform pattern in the implementation of NEP in states. Hence *each state has to*
 - i develop a status paper regarding the implementation of NEP with respect to school education and literacy.
 - ii take stock about the noon meal programme. Whether food grains are reaching to the children.
 - iii understand what kind of support the state is giving to children and their families during this pandemic period.

Each state organization have to form a small group and find out what are the steps taken by the respective state governments and has to develop a status paper within one month say by 30th August.
2. Each state organization has to plan what kind of actions that the organization intend to undertake in short term basis and long term basis as programmes against anti-people policies and deeds of the government specially in the context of NEP 2020 and the pandemic.

3. We have to look and analyze the action plan by the state govt. for supporting common people who are badly needed support and scaffolding for their children.
4. Each state organization has to develop materials suitable to their state and use it. The state organisations can develop materials by adapting and adopting the materials already developed and circulated by AIPSN secretariat and JFME statement and other supporting materials prepared by the national center.
5. PSM by forming joint platforms with likeminded organizations or by utilizing our potentials we have to plan awareness programmes regarding the threats put forward by NEP 2020. Each state has to develop an action plan for that campaign in this month itself.
6. Based on the state level action plan conduct dialogues with academics, opinion creators, political leadership, student's organization, youth organizations, teacher's organizations and public etc. We have to utilize the potentials of parents and SMCs in the rural areas.
7. Explore possibilities of social media campaigns.
8. Conduct webinars by involving likeminded groups and individuals.
9. Develop plans for addressing the education and social issues of children who are totally out of the frame of education.
10. If needed we can have digital workshops in order to equip the state level activists to lead the campaign.
11. Organize seminars to share the state specific status and experiences and activities undertaken by PSM organizations.
12. Each organization has to send **the name and contact address** (email& mobile number) to the desk convener at the earliest. We can have a joint meeting with state level contact persons in the month of August 2021.
13. Develop plan for addressing the education and social issues of children who are totally out of the frame of education
14. **JFME announced 9th August as Save Inda Day. On 5th September- teachers day also JFME announced a national programme. We have to participate in the programmes.**
15. *While going to the rural area we have to give importance to school closures resulting the negation of their children's right to education. We have to explain our position 'Quality education pupil's right'. And ensure equal opportunity for equitable education. And how school closures and the*

proposed machine learning will affect the children's right for getting quality education.

16. States shall consider the activity calendar. And shall prepare state specific calendar by considering the objective realities of the state. But NEP campaign is non negotiable.
17. Use the annexure for our campaign by adding the state specific issues also.
18. **Suggested Activity Calendar**

No	Activity	Time
<i>Building resistance movement against NEP 2021</i>		
1	Save education day announced by JFME	9 th August 2021
2	National wide Campaign by JFME on teachers day	5 th September 21
2	State Webinars	August 2021
3	State level workshops for preparing RPs who can transact our position. Pls find capable people from likeminded organizations and if possible plan jointly.	August 2021
3	District level seminars/webinars	August 2021
4	Conduct minimum 50 to 75 seminars in each district. Each seminar we have to participate 50 to 100 people.	September 2021
5	Conduct dialogue with people in the public/ common school catchment areas with the support of SMCs or Patents or peoples representative.	September-October
6	Signature campaigns and other forms of campaign designed by states.	
7	Formation of joint platforms to resist NEP and its implementation.	
8	Social media campaigns.	
9	Digital workshops in order to equip the state level activists to lead the campaign if needed.	
10	Explore and find out the decisions and actions related to NEP that is happening in the state.	
11	Developing status paper regarding the implementation of NEP with respect to school education and literacy. Entrust a small group.	
<i>Understanding the actual field reality regarding children and their education during the pandemic period</i>		

	Field level study regarding the situation what is the real world of children during pandemic period. How the pandemic affected socially and emotionally to children. People are talking about child marriage, trafficking, child labour, and various kind of atrocities etc.	
	What is the ground level reality of digital/ online education? People are talking about digital gap or divide. What is our understanding in these issues. Shall we do some study regarding this. If case studies are possible how can we do that and document.	
	What about mid day meal. How the govt. addressed these issue. Take stock about the Mid day meal programme. Whether food grains are reaching to the children	
	How can we ensure all children will be back to school when schools reopen? What are our suggestions or demands based on our assessment of the real field situations? How can we make our demands into people's demand?	
	How can we provide education support to children where we can do by using our organization potential? Some state already started learning centers to engage children.	
	Make a report regarding what kind of support the state is giving to children and their families during pandemic period.	
	other activities (states can add)	
	<u><i>Sending the contact address by each organization to the desk convener</i></u>	<i>Before 22nd August</i>

Expecting reply from all states.

Dr.Ramakrishnan
Convener Education Desk
9446464727
crpilicode@gmail.com

Desk Members: Prof.Sabyasachi Chatterjee, Prof.Rajamanikkam, Prof.Anita Rampal, Prof.V.Balasubrahmanian, Prof.R.Ramanujam, Prof. Prajval Shastri, Dr.Dinesh Abrol, Dr.Vivek Monteiro, Asha Mishra, Komal Sreevastav, Dr.Kamla Menon, Dr.Kashinath Chatterjee, Prof.Pramod Gouri, Chega Reddy, Blorin Mohanty, Geeta Mahashabde- Co-convener, Dr. Biplab Ghosh- Co-convener, Dr.C.Ramakrishnan- Convener

AIPSN on New Education Policy 2020 (NEP2020)

1. Overview

The National Education Policy 2020 (henceforth NEP2020) document is supposedly based on the Kasturirangan Committee's Draft New Education Policy (DNEP) of 2019 and the large numbers of public responses to it. Perusal of both documents reveals many differences between them. Yet there is no summary of responses received on DNEP2019, no explanation of changes made to DNEP2019 while formulating NEP2020 and reasons for the same, nor is there any statement about the authors of NEP2020. In fact, NEP2020 is so different from DNEP2019 that NEP2020 should be treated as a Draft and fresh public consultations should be held. In any case, thorough discussions on NEP2020 are required in Parliament before proceeding further. Also, as NEP2020 is highly centralized and intrudes heavily on the rights of States on a subject which requires therefore consultation with the state legislators. Discussions in State Assemblies are essential. Unfortunately, several aspects of NEP are already being implemented by the Centre and in some States pre-empting all participatory and democratic decision-making.

In one sense, NEP2020 seems to continue along the lines of several earlier Education Policies, long on rhetoric about major reform and change, short on fund allocation and implementation. Such policies have sought to capitalize on the frustrations of students, teachers, parents and the general public with the existing system, and promise them a much better system. On the other hand, NEP2020 contains several concrete proposals which do indeed mark a significant break from the extant educational system, and which may indeed bring about major changes if implemented as stated. However, most of the changes proposed in NEP2020 will cause severe damage to quality of education, increase education costs, and sharply reduce access to education for students from SC/ST and other socially and economically underprivileged sections, at a time when there is a legal obligation on the State to ensure quality outcomes in education for the large mass of students and youth as a right of all young citizens.

NEP2020 represents a sharp retreat of the State from public education. Its main thrusts are on centralization of authority in key areas, commercialization

and de-regulation of the education system, creating a basis for saffronization especially in schools, and withdrawal of Reservations and other affirmative action especially for SC/ST and other historically oppressed and deprived sections.

NEP2020 seeks to undo the right to education of good quality that poor and historically marginalized sections of society have managed to obtain after much struggle. It lays the groundwork for abandoning the justiciable Right to Education (RtE) Act for children of 6-14 years age. While NEP2020 makes tall claims about “universal access” from 3-16 years of age, making it sound like an advance over RtE, mere access is actually a step backward from the guarantee of good quality education contained in RTE read with NCF 2005. It will also be non-justiciable, since NEP2020 is not backed by any legislation. Access to education will *de facto* be restricted, especially for students from rural, tribal and remote areas, by NEP2020 proposals to close down many schools on grounds of “viability” and “efficiency.”

NEP2020 uses flowery phrases and policy proposals that appeal to either privileged sections of society or to the “cultural-nationalist” stream of the ruling dispensation. Whereas several proposals of NEP2020 give an appearance of being positive changes leading to long-awaited modernization of the educational system, closer examination shows that the NEP2020 does not address the ground realities of the Indian educational system, will worsen the prevailing inequality of access for Dalits, tribals, urban and rural poor and other socially, economically and educationally deprived sections of society. If at all there are benefits of NEP, these will be obtained only by already privileged and better-off sections of society.

Shockingly, NEP2020 does not even mention Reservation even though it is enshrined in the Constitution. Everywhere only “merit” is mentioned as the basis for admissions at all levels, despite it being well known that so-called “merit” is only a reflection of privilege and benefits accruing from higher incomes and social status. It is to be noted that Tamil Nadu, for instance, has managed to attain a Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of 49.5% primarily due to its reservation policies, along with absence of entrance examinations for UG and PG courses. In India, examinations by themselves are not a true test of ability, and relate more to exam-performance ability often acquired through resource-intensive tuitions, training institutions and orientations obtained through private schools and enabling home environments.

How can the NEP2020 goal of 50% GER be achieved without Reservation and with the National Entrance Tests for higher education that it suggests? The answer lies in the undisguised running thread of on-line education at all levels in NEP2020, which is falsely projected as equivalent to classroom teaching and learning. If a large proportion of children and youth are denied access, either because of lack of financial wherewithal or due to supposed lack of academic “merit,” they will be forced into on-line education which the State will pass off as mainstream education.

The sharply increased centralization in NEP2020 will erode federalism and the rights of States. Even though Education is in the Concurrent List, under NEP2020 the States will only be allowed to implement Centrally-imposed policies under supervision of Central agencies for examinations, admissions, standards, funding and assessment, and with centrally imposed text books. NEP2020 leaves almost no scope for State-level shaping of Education which is essential in India because of its cultural, social and linguistic diversity. This makes it even more necessary that deliberations be held in State Assemblies, positions be taken by State Governments, and public opinion be mobilized in States to put forward State-level perspectives on education and the NEP2020 proposals.

NEP2020 provides an open playing field at the pre-school, school and college/university levels for corporate and private interests, while making token statements about preventing commercialization of education. The NEP2020 schema of “light but tight regulation,” essentially means free rein to private schools and “light” or no regulation over higher-education curricula, fees, admissions and conditions of work of Faculty, along with supposedly “tight” control over university admissions tests, accreditation, and some very broad outcome standards.

Teachers will be severely impacted by NEP2020 proposals for dilution of teacher training at the school level, for extending probation period in higher education institutions (HEI), and for linking tenure of service and other conditions of service to subjective assessments by autonomous and unregulated HEI managements.

Many NEP2020 proposals will require substantial increase in public expenditure on education which goes against the observed withdrawal of the State from this sector. While NEP2020 talks of raising public investment in education to 6% of GDP, so did the Kothari Commission Report way back in 1966 with implementation falling far short. From subsequent comments by the

Minister for HRD, government is likely to include both expenditures by States and by the private sector in estimation of investments in education. Regrettably, even the more meaningful suggested increase in annual budgetary expenditure on education proposed in DNEP2019 has been dropped in NEP2020.

All in all, while creating a few expanded opportunities for better-off sections of society, NEP2020 undermines existing rights of the majority and fails to meet the aspirations of economically and socially disadvantaged children and youth in India for all-round knowledge and gainful employment in the modern globally-integrated economy that is both knowledge- and skill-intensive.

Major proposals of NEP2020 for different stages of education are discussed below.

2. Early Childhood Care, Development & Education (ECCE)

NEP2020 represents a reversal of a positive aspect of NEP2019 which had specifically proposed to amend and extend the RTE Act to cover the age group 3-6. This welcome proposal in NEP2019 to amend the RTE Act is replaced by only a recommendation to provide for pre-school early childhood care and preparation for entry into the education system for children in the 3-6 years age-group. This is internationally encouraged including by UNESCO and in many developed and middle-income developing countries is provided within the government-run school system. In India, there has been a mushrooming of the private pre-school education business in recent years, which idea is now being given policy recognition. However, most experts have questioned whether the emphasis in NEP2020 on literacy and numeracy during ECCE, essentially extending school learning to younger pre-primary ages, is pedagogically and developmentally correct.

In any case, NEP2020 proposes to primarily use the existing Anganwadi system, which is already providing early childhood mother-and-child care and nutrition, and would also utilize local primary schools. Sensitive handling of children in the 3-6 years age-group and providing pre-school exposure to education requires specialized training and NEP2020 proposes to provide on-line training to Anganwadi workers including periodic contact classes in local schools.

However, several questions remain unanswered in NEP2020 regarding ECCE. Will Anganwadi workers be provided additional remuneration and due recognition through appropriate re-designation giving due recognition to their new and more specialized roles? Will local panchayats be provided the

additional funds required for additional space and facilities needed such as play and activity areas, and educational materials etc? Where will additional funding come from for providing good sanitation, clean drinking water, and additional nutritional food for the children in these upgraded facilities?

3. School Education_

A basic and fundamental flaw in NEP2019 is its attempt to replace the right to good quality outcomes guaranteed by the RTE Act read with NCF 2005, by mere access to quality education. This will take Indian school education back by 50 years.

There has been much discussion in the country over the past several years about the school system overburdening children with huge curricular load, textbook-based rote learning and examination pressure. Internationally the trend is towards more open learning, teaching and testing methods emphasizing critical thinking and problem-solving. NEP2020 pays lip service to these issues in speaking of more open and flexible teaching-learning.

Yet, going against this entire trend and its own rhetoric, NEP2020 introduces public national-level examinations after Grades 3, 5 and 8, apart from the existing exams after Grades 10 and 12. Although this is supposedly for the purpose of assessing schools and monitor progress, it will undoubtedly increase pressure on students and re-emphasize rote learning. There is even talk of semester-wise, course-wise and other periodic exams, again at the national level. This “exam raj” runs counter to all global trends, and not only adds to the burden and pressure on children, it further exaggerate the importance of exam performance as a means to assess learning outcomes.

A new centralized all-India University entrance exam is also proposed under a new National Assessment Centre. This not only introduces yet another exam, it also undermines the role of State Boards and even of the CBSE, and once again emphasizes exam performance which will further encourage coaching establishments.

The trend of centralization is also reflected in NEP2020’s call for National Textbooks, supposedly with “local content and flavor,” instead of adopting a National Curriculum Framework and allowing States to develop their own textbook content. Experts assert that the learning process is most effective when education is rooted in a familiar physical, social and cultural environment. This is especially true in a culturally diverse country like India, and precisely this diversity is sought to be buried under centralized curricula and textbooks. Further, as we know, this centralization can also lead to

arbitrary and motivated actions as witnessed recently during the Covid19 pandemic when subjects/chapters related to secularism, critical thinking and certain historical/political figures were removed from the syllabus under cover of reducing load imposed by Covid-related lockdowns and restrictions.

The centralization assumes more sinister dimensions in the clearly displayed desire to push a saffronization agenda through the Sangh Parivar perspective of Indian society and culture in curricula and in schools in general. Despite talking about promoting constitutional values in school education, the word “secularism” does not occur even once in NEP2020. While speaking of promoting critical thinking and scientific temper, NEP2020 says “Indian Knowledge Systems” would be taught, without explaining what this term means. For instance, will it mean propagating the idea that ancient India had aerospace technologies including inter-planetary travel, or that internet was prevalent during the Mahabharata war, or that various mythologies “prove” knowledge of advanced plastic surgery and in-vitro fertilization etc, as propagated by leading lights of the present ruling dispensation?

At the same time, NEP2020 only makes passing references to tribal and indigenous knowledge, showing what the present government considers “mainstream” or “marginal” knowledge traditions. Additionally, in language education in Grades 6-8, NEP2020 takes forward the Hindutva idea of “one nation, one language” by emphasizing the “remarkable unity of most... major Indian languages, [and] their common... origins... from Sanskrit,” completely downplaying the independent ancient, historical and continuing Dravidian and different Adivasi and other language groups in the North-East. NEP2020 also speaks of India’s classical and other Indian languages having rich literature and culture, and mention is made of Pali, Prakrit and even the obviously foreign Persian, but does not at all mention Urdu, a quintessentially Indian language and a great example of the syncretic culture of the Indian civilization! There are many other problematic proposals in NEP2020.

A large number of government schools, especially those in small or isolated communities, are to be shut down in the name of efficiency, viability and resource optimization. While such a process is already under way, NEP2020 now gives this process *de jure* status. Many teachers would lose jobs, and children would have to travel over greater distances under difficult circumstances, further reducing access to education and prompting additional drop-outs.

NEP2020 proposes a three language formula, where Sanskrit could be exercised as an option apart from the mother tongue or local language, and has already met with opposition by Tamil Nadu, exposing the lack of consultations with State Governments.

Most unfortunately, NEP2020 effectively suggests withdrawal of the State from its commitment to *provide* education of good quality to the 6-14 years age groups as a *justiciable right* under RTE 2009, and replaces it with a vague assurance to “ensure universal access to education at all levels from age 3 to 18”. So as to evade the responsibility of the State to ensure enrolment and retention of dropouts in the public education system, NEP2020 recommends “alternative and innovative education centres... in cooperation with civil society” for children of migrant workers and other drop-outs. Similarly, there is a proposal that Socio-economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDG) (including differently-abled children), a new grab-all term which eliminates recognition of the unique historical discrimination against SC and ST communities, could be taught mainly through National and State Institutes of Open Schools (NIOS/SIOS), increasing their deprivation and widening the digital divide, instead of having reservations and special arrangements within the public education system. After this NEP2020-recommended system comes into effect, Government can in future wash away any responsibility for low enrolment and high drop-out rates, and can shift responsibility on poor performance by NGOs or failure of children to utilize on-line or other distance learning facilities.

Importantly, the entire NEP2020 approach of withdrawal from public education runs counter to the trend in most developed and middle-income developing countries. NEP2020 does not contain any significant policy directions or promises to strengthen and expand public education, meaning that India can expect continued expansion of the private school system which only widens social and economic disparities, and perpetuates privilege.

Previous Education Commissions and Education Policies had called for a strong publicly-funded Common School System based on Neighbourhood Schools, although implementation never delivered. NEP2020 has now completely abandoned this basic and important idea for a deeply unequal society as prevails in India. RtE gave the right to good quality education from 6-14 years, but NEP2020 does not give any right, of good quality education, not only for the above age group but also for the 3-6 yrs age group or for 14-18 yr-olds.

4. Teacher Education_

The well-known shortage of qualified and trained teachers, especially in the public education system and, within that, in tribal and remote areas, is acknowledged in NEP2020 but inadequately addressed. NEP2020 demonstrates a lack of interest by the Government in genuine expansion and strengthening the public education system, especially the number of teachers and other resources. Instead, NEP2020 suggests a highly impractical concept of school complexes, clubbing together schools within 10km radius and sharing of teachers.

The running thread of centralization and “Exam Raj” again comes to the fore in the NEP2020 proposal for a national Teacher Eligibility Test (TET), which is to be extended to all levels of education from foundation to secondary. This calls into question the quality of teacher training and the relevant degrees awarded by Universities.

The specialized skills required for teaching are devalued by the NEP2020 scheme under which Teachers all the way from Grade-1 right up to Grade -12 will go through the same 4-year integrated BEEd degrees with one subject specialization. The existing system addresses the specific teaching requirements for each school stage, such as the BEIEd programme for elementary school teachers. The NEP2020 scheme also introduces a 2-year BEEd for Graduates and a 1-year BEEd for post-grads, again underestimating the special training required to become teachers, and instead assumes that graduate or post-grad degree with brief training on teaching as such would be adequate. NEP2020 also introduces short-term courses of 2 weeks to 3 months for any person with or without adequate qualifications. These provisions will create under-qualified teachers adversely impacting quality of education, and will open the doors for commercialization of teacher training.

5. Vocational Education

Vocational Education (VocEd) in India has historically been badly managed and understood. Till now, India has oscillated between entry-level vocational skills at the +2 stage in high school, and a weak system of ITIs in a few (now outdated) trades. In India’s caste- and class-ridden society stretching back thousands of years, the middle classes/upper castes received education while lower classes/castes received skills-training passed down from earlier generations. This casteist framework persists to this day, where a virtual ‘firewall’ persists between the education system and the skills system, ill-suited to a modern industrial economy where the work force requires not only advanced skills but also higher levels of knowledge in related areas. Only

around 2% of the labour force in India has had any formal training whatsoever, compared to around 50% in China, 55% in the US, 80-85% in the EU and S.Korea, and over 90% in Japan. International experience, in both advanced industrial economies and middle-income developing economies as in South-East Asia, is that Vocational Education (VocEd) is part of tertiary education after school *for young adults*, after either completion of a full secondary education or achievement of some minimum levels there, with attainment of higher education levels along with skills training at the tertiary level.

There was some recognition of this in DNEP2019 which had correctly proposed a major shift in VocEd and had placed it in Higher Education Institutions, although there were several problems in the modalities suggested in DNEP2019 which had been highlighted in AIPSN's response. However, this is rolled back in NEP2020 where VocEd is once again dragged back to the school system.

NEP2020 states that VocEd would be fully "*integrated with the educational offerings of all secondary schools in a phased manner*" and further, that towards this end, "*secondary schools will collaborate with ITIs, polytechnics, local industry etc (NEP2020 Para 16.5).*" DNEP2019 had proposed that such collaboration would more appropriately take place between HEIs and ITIs etc. Going further to even earlier stages of schooling, NEP2020 speaks of VocEd courses in Gr.6-8 including internships with artisans! These are all unwelcome backward steps for several reasons.

Encouraging adoption of VocEd in secondary school, takes away considerable time from the educational curriculum, and prevents children from obtaining a complete and well-rounded secondary education, considered by most modern nations to be essential not only for a competent work force but also for empowered citizens. The step can encourage drop-outs by making children think they are prepared for entry into the job market. However, skills and accompanying educational levels obtained in Gr.8-12 as proposed under NEP2020 can only be low- and entry-level qualifications, inadequate for most real-life industrial or service-sector jobs except at the lowest rung. All international Skill Qualification Frameworks (SQF) such as in the UK, EU, Australia etc, including at least on paper the NSQF to be adopted in India along those lines, place vocational skills along with +2 level educational qualifications at the lowest Level 1 or at best Level 2 with some post-school certificates or diplomas, all higher level SQF rankings requiring tertiary education and corresponding better and more sophisticated skills. Placing Gr.6-8 students in

artisanal internships can encourage children to follow hereditary caste-linked occupations, and even secondary school VocEd will only enable semi-skilled or low-skilled vocations, going in the opposite direction to demands of an increasingly knowledge-based and higher-skilled economy.

The NEP2020 proposal to place VocEd in secondary schools also puts a burden on the already stressed school system with additional responsibilities, need for new teachers with adequate skills, experience and qualifications and, above all, expensive infrastructure in equipment/machinery for different trades/vocations. Schools are struggling even to have the most basic facilities such as science laboratories, and to expect them to be equipped enough to provide skill-training in a wide range of vocations is a pipe-dream. In the absence of skilled and qualified instructors and requisite equipment, most schools will end up providing low-level skills in a limited range of vocations, such as for instance carpentry or tailoring. As proposed, the entire schema is doomed to fail due both to practical unfeasibility and inability to meet stated goals.

It needs emphasis that we fully support and encourage introduction of co-curricular activities in different arts, crafts, trades and services, at least from Gr.9 onwards and even during Gr.6-8 if feasible subject to availability of facilities, in which all students participate. These courses would provide orientation and entry-level skills enabling students to gain insights into different vocations and assess their own interest and talent in different spheres which they may, or may not, pursue further after school towards a career. However, these courses in school should not be considered directly linked to jobs, and therefore the term “Vocational Education” is wholly inappropriate in school.

Finally, it needs to be noted that, contrary to the intensive discussions taking place in the industrial and corporate systems regarding the paucity of skills and related education in the work force in India, the NEP2020 proposals on VocEd have been placed in a vacuum, with no connection to industrial, employment and human resource planning, as is necessary, and as attempted in DNEP2019. It is also divorced from the National Skills Development Mission, which is proceeding completely independently, with little or no linkage with the educational system. Therefore NEP2020 and the government policy framework within which it is situated, completely fails to address the needs of Indian industry and economy, and will not meet the aspirations of India’s youth with regard to the knowledge- and skill-intensive economy of the future.

6. Higher Education (HE)

Indian higher education after 1990 has already gone far down the path of privatization, with mushrooming of private higher education institutions (HEI) especially in professional courses like engineering, management and medicine. As much as 72.5% of undergraduate and around 60% of post-graduate enrolment in HEI is in private unaided institutions. Many of these have poor facilities and faculty, especially in technical subjects, but charge unregulated high fees and various under-the-table payments. However, they are still unable to ensure well-qualified and trained graduates. Public HEI still dominate in University enrolment, but even here the situation is changing rapidly due to the inroads made by self financing courses and autonomous colleges. In the past 5 years, 55 per cent of the total increase in university enrolment was in private universities and another 33 per cent in public open universities, not regular Central and State Universities where enrolment has stagnated or declined.

Public universities are meanwhile starved of funds for teaching, with almost no support for research, and are compelled to raise fees or otherwise commercialize. In keeping with overall trends, even many public HEI, especially in professional courses, have witnessed a significant increase in fees. All this reflects low and decreasing public investment in higher education, with consequent increase in privatization and commercialization, higher costs and reduced access for students from lower-income households, and lower quality of higher education in an unregulated environment.

There is certainly considerable need for reform in higher education from the point of view of both students and employers. Frustration arising from the current unsatisfactory situation often prompts demands for change and a tendency to accept promises of improvement. This has also been witnessed in public response to earlier new education policies which have proposed major even radical reforms, only to later completely fail to deliver on any of them.

NEP2020 similarly is full of lofty phrases, flowery language and appeals to aspirational sentiments of students. However, the concrete proposals actually do not offer socially desirable and practically feasible solutions to the fundamental problems outlined above. Some are completely impracticable and are therefore likely to fall by the wayside, and many proposals are such as to exacerbate privatization and commercialization, raise costs, and reduce access

to socially and economically deprived sections, while negatively impacting quality with the possible exception of a few elite and expensive institutions which will be out of reach of the vast majority of students. Some of the major proposals of NEP2020 are examined below.

NEP2020 makes the highly disruptive proposal to completely do away with affiliated colleges and move towards large, multi-disciplinary campus-based Universities or HEIs which would offer courses across all disciplines and categories, with a selected set of colleges becoming Autonomous Colleges with powers to grant degrees. All the multi-disciplinary HEIs will offer 4-year undergraduate courses with entry and exit points after each year with Certificates, Diplomas, Advanced Diplomas and Degrees. It is necessary to understand the significance of these proposals and their impact on quality, cost and access to education.

Large multi-disciplinary campus-based universities offering courses across all disciplines would of course be welcome, wherever feasible in terms of space, infrastructure and facilities. However, many existing universities will not have the land, buildings or funds to expand their campuses as called for in NEP2020, and may also be unduly diluting their specialized capabilities. Meanwhile, the NEP2020 proposal would also lead to large-scale closure of affiliated colleges, severely impacting access to higher education of rural, SC/ST and socio-economically deprived sections.

The NEP2020 also proposes that even existing specialist professional institutions, such as IITs would be required to include humanities and social sciences courses in their offerings and become fully multi-disciplinary. There can be no objection in principle, and most IITs for example already offer such courses. However, there are limits to such expansion, and many practical limitations should be respected, especially so that specialized capabilities are not lost or unduly diluted. For instance, it would make no sense to insist that specialist medical institutions like AIIMS or PGIMER, IIMs, National Law School Universities, are compelled to offer a wide range of courses in the sciences, engineering or humanities. It should also be noted that specialized technical universities such as MIT or Caltech in the US, whose model is clearly sought to be replicated in India by NEP2020, retain their core technical specializations while offering some humanities courses, somewhat like the IITs, albeit on a much larger scale. MIT and Caltech have 5-6 Schools in technical disciplines and 1 School for all humanities and social science disciplines, but no law or specialized business schools and programmes. NEP2020's proposal to compel

all Universities/Institutions to transform into multi-disciplinary campuses in this regard will either collapse under its own contradictions or will simply not take off except in a few cases where there are large corporate profiteering interests.

NEP2020's proposal for 4-year undergraduate degrees with entry and exit points after each year with different Certificate/Diploma qualifications defeats the intention to expand higher education. The proposal provides for multiple entry and exit points. The purpose of providing different points of lateral entry and exit, as provided for in HEI in other countries, is to enable lateral transitions between industry and education, providing opportunities for life-long education to people to upgrade their qualifications as desired at different point of their careers. This requires separately designed Certificate or Diploma Courses representing different levels of the SQF. This is very different from finishing, say, the first year of a 4-year course for a Certificate or two years of the 4-year course for a Diploma. Such a schema will not enable obtaining the requisite upgraded qualification for mid-career learners, and on the other hand will destroy the integrity of the 4-year Bachelor's degree.

Some of the affiliating Colleges would be granted autonomy based on their grading in a ranking system and declared as Autonomous Colleges empowered to grant their own degrees. Experience with Autonomous Colleges so far, for instance in Delhi, has shown that it only means privatization of such Colleges, de-regulation as regards higher fees and poor working conditions for teachers, and the freedom to offer tailor-made short-term courses, all for further commercialization of higher education.

Indeed, the NEP2020's intent of commercialization of education is clearly reflected in the corporate structures suggested for HEIs. Each HEI is to independently form its own Board of Governors (BoG) which would then take full control over all affairs of the University/HEI. Teachers are likely to be major victims of the NEP2020's corporate-style governance of HEIs, since Teachers' pay, type, tenure of employment, promotions etc will all be decided internally by each HEI BoG with no uniform standards or norms prescribed by government. Performance assessment would also be subjective and free from any oversight or regulation.

Within this neo-liberal landscape of privatized and corporatized HEIs, foreign universities are proposed to be invited to operate in India. Since they are being invited as "centres of excellence," they would implicitly set a standard or act as role models for Indian universities to follow, including corporate styles of

governance, market-oriented course structures, casual or contract employment of teachers, and high fees.

A centralized National Research Fund (NRF) is proposed to be set up in addition to the many agencies that already provide research funding. Only NRF will provide public funds for research to both public and private Universities.

Again, as in other neo-liberal corporate sectors of the economy, there is no space at all in NEP2020 for democratized governance of HEI. Teachers and Students have no role to play in Universities, other than as “consumers”.

The heavy hand of the Central Government is visible in the NEP2020 proposal to constitute multiple Central Institutions such as a Higher Education Council (HECI) at the apex accompanied by NHERC for regulation, NAC for accreditation, HEGC for grants, and GEC to frame outcome standards. Assessments of outcomes would also be done centrally, which may well determine ratings, accreditation and funding. While there is much talk of educators and persons of eminence being selected for these institutions, given experience with the present ruling dispensation in different sectors, the dominant role of the political executive is obviously to be expected.

A national examination for entrance to HEIs will also be conducted by a Central Agency, even though the value of this exam is open to question since, according to NEP2020, *“It will be left up to individual universities and colleges to use NTA assessments for their admissions (NEP2020 Para 4.42)”*. The relevance of Central and State Boards, and exams conducted by them are also therefore open to question. How State Universities and other State-level HEIs are expected to function is not separately addressed by NEP2020, clearly implying that all HEIs in the country will be governed by these Central agencies operating under the Central Government.

7. Adult Education and Lifelong Learning

The whole concept of Adult Education is diluted as regards both purpose and delivery. Firstly, there is no focus on basic literacy, and life-long education is treated in a very casual manner. Secondly, focus is again on on-line transactions through digital primers and supplementary books.

Even earlier there was a shift away from the mass campaign approach pioneered by AIPSN/BGVs to a convergence-based approach during earlier Saakshar Bharat programme, bringing together different government schemes to facilitate adult education. Now, despite acknowledging that the mass campaign approach had yielded substantial dividends, NEP2020 goes back to outdated concepts of the 1980s emphasizing school-based approaches,

“each one, teach one,” or by involving student volunteers for basic literacy and dependence on linkages with other programmes for life-long learning. These activities are supposed to take place in school buildings after teaching hours, which again will limit access to basic literacy and life-long education

There is also a systematic dismantling of the 4-decades old academic and professional institutions like Department of Adult Education (DAE) and State Education Resource Centres (SERCs) by locating resource support in NCERT and SCERTs, which have academic and technical capabilities for formal education rather than non-formal education, thus losing institutional memories and decades long proven experience of alternative approaches.

Draft Backgrounder for AIPSN NEP Campaign Phase-2

The All India Peoples science Network (AIPSN) is deeply concerned at the on-going implementation of the New Education Policy (NEP) and at the manner in which it is being done. AIPSN had itself submitted a detailed critique of and response to the Draft NEP 2020 circulated by the Union Government for public comments expressing serious disagreement with many of its provisions. The Union Government ignored these critiques and alternatives suggested, yet re-drafted the Draft NEP 2020 and finalized a redrafted NEP without explaining either the reasons for rejecting the suggestions offered or the rationale for the changes made without any further public consultations. A detailed critique of the revised NEP was published as a booklet by AIPSN, which also conducted seminars and workshops with organizations of school and college/university teachers, non-teaching staff and students, besides numerous experts, educationists and civil society organizations, which expressed similar criticisms and suggestions.

It is well known that NEP was also not placed before Parliament for its consideration, yet was approved by the Cabinet. The Union Government has also not discussed the NEP with State Governments prior to its finalization, and has not given States an opportunity to consult their Assemblies, even though Education is a Concurrent subject under the Constitution. This completely non-transparent and centralized process of formulation of the NEP, a favoured mode of governance of the present ruling dispensation, is unfortunately now being replicated in the process of implementing NEP. Again, neither the States nor other stakeholders are being consulted, and the NEP is being unilaterally imposed on the country and pushed through by the Union Government.

AIPSN is of the firm opinion that NEP represents a significant withdrawal of the Union Government from its obligation to provide free and universal public education at school level and severely shrinks opportunities of the large masses of students for obtaining quality higher education suitable for the 21st century at reasonable cost. This is inevitable due to the NEP promoting commercialization and privatization of education at all levels and, through other additional means, reducing access to education. NEP over-emphasizes virtual or distance learning, perpetuating the digital divide in an already unequal society, and further marginalizing students from lower-

income and under-privileged households from the education system. Government schools are being closed, while new so-called vocational courses are being introduced in colleges/universities with exorbitant fees. NEP centralizes syllabi, numerous entrance and periodic examinations, and even school text books, ignoring the diverse socio-cultural contexts in different parts of the country which all educators agree should shape teaching-learning. NEP also gives primacy to agencies of the Union Government to oversee all crucial aspects of both school and higher education. Rights and service conditions of teachers and non-teaching staff are being curtailed, and corporate managerial systems and culture are being introduced into institutions of higher learning. Concerns have also been expressed throughout the country at efforts to impose Hindi, Sanskrit and supposedly Hindu culture on all the diverse states, regions and communities of the nation through revised syllabi and curricula.

Against this broad background, NEP is now being implemented all over India directly by the Union Government and by-passing State Governments. This implementation has several common features and also some differences in modalities and in emphasis and prioritization of different aspects.

The broad trends in implementation, based on feedback from AIPSN/BGVS activists from different States, are noted below.

1. In **Overall** terms, NEP is being implemented and pushed by the Union Government all over the country, even though at different pace, with differing scope, and using different methods, all varying from State to State. Main trend is that BJP-ruled States are implementing NEP vigorously, but even among these, while there are some common features, different States are placing emphasis on different aspects. Non-BJP ruled States are by and large not pushing NEP, with some States even having written to the Union Government expressing their disagreement with NEP or refusal to implement it. However, the Union Government is making determined efforts to implement NEP in non-BJP ruled States as well by using various central Agencies, working directly through bureaucrats especially IAS officers and through other means.

- 1.1 BJP-ruled or BJP-allied States are going full-steam ahead with NEP implementation, although at different speeds and with some difference in emphasis. Common features are closure of many “unviable” government schools, initiation of 4-year Vocational Courses with year-wise exit options in Colleges with high-fees, and privatization of schools and colleges in different forms. Karnataka has drawn up a 10-year road-map, with State Education Commission and legislative measures planned, and a State Implementation

Task Force with quarterly reviews headed by the Education Secretary. Madhya Pradesh has constituted has formed a State-level Committee for implementation, although its composition is not yet in the public domain. Tripura too is vigorously implementing NEP.

- 1.2 In Opposition/non-BJP ruled States, for example in West Bengal, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Maharashtra, NEP is by and large not being implemented fully, although there is considerable difference in the extent of resistance or compliance. Status of implementation of NEP in Rajasthan and Odisha is not fully known. Some States such as West Bengal and Kerala have even submitted written and categorical NO to the Centre regarding implementation of NEP (WB, Ker). However, full efforts are being made by Centre even in these States to push implementation of NEP through various means. A key method is that the Union Government, especially through the Ministry of Education (MoEd), works with and through select senior bureaucrats particularly IAS Officers in States, even though these officials are supposed to work under instructions of the State Government. In some cases, these interactions between MoEd and select officials in States are conducted confidentially.
 - 1.3 All States are being told to form Committees, mostly of bureaucrats, which work non-transparently directly with the MoEd. States have also been told to appoint a Nodal Officer who is then given confidential instructions by MoEd, this single-point contact being used to prevent leak of these instructions. Several States have reported that spreadsheets of tasks and responsibilities have also been issued to States so as to monitor progress of NEP implementation. Andhra Pradesh is pursuing its own unique policy frame in education. AP is implementing NEP in some ways, but departs from NEP in many other ways, contradicting several its major recommendations. For instance, AP uses English, rather than the mother-tongue, as compulsory medium of education from primary school onwards. Far from closing schools, AP is incurring substantial expenditure on infrastructure in government schools, focusing on 10 priority issues, and is also giving Rs.15,000 to each BPL (below poverty level) student towards school uniform, school bag, text books etc. As a result, enrolment in Government schools has increased substantially.
 - 1.4 At the present stage of NEP implementation, several common features are notable.
2. In **School Education**, closure of “unviable” government schools on a large scale is being witnessed in many States as per the NEP’s vision, along with creation of

“cluster schools.” Tens of thousands of schools have been closed across Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura etc. This can only reduce educational access, particularly among lower-income rural households and those in remote areas, whereas these sections are precisely those who require increased access. In Karnataka, for example, where it is estimated that 40% rural students have poor access, schools being closed will clearly worsen this situation. Evidence is already accumulating of increase in school drop-out rates, made worse by the Covid-19 pandemic. Closure of numerous Government Schools is also resulting in a fall in teachers’ employment, emoluments and working conditions. However, there is also evidence that this is being resisted by several States such as Jharkhand which is even re-opening previously closed schools.

- 2.1 Privatization of the school system is being pushed in a big way. Many schools being closed supposedly due to non-viability are being handed over to private entities, for example in Haryana and Tripura, exposing the real motivation for the closures. Obviously, these and other new private schools are charging high fees, further widening the inequity in access to education. In Haryana, even Government Sanskriti Schools are now charging huge fees in the name of ‘model schools’ visualized in the NEP.
- 2.2 Centralization of school education, another key idea of NEP, is being promoted in many new and subversive ways, especially through select officials in States. State Education Boards are being weakened in many ways in favour of CBSE, for instance in Haryana. The Samagra Shiksha Scheme is another vehicle being used to promote centralization and uniformity in school education across the country, negating the autonomy of States and their desire for an education system more reflective of the social and cultural context, which would also be a recognition and celebration of diversity in India.
- 2.3 Another serious aspect of centralization is that the concept of “one India, one syllabus” is being pushed, for example in Tripura. This runs contrary to the recommendation of most expert educationists who emphasize the importance of school education rooted in local contexts and culture. It also reflects an intention to suppress the remarkable and valuable diversity of India in favour of an imagined homogenous culture. The emphasis given to ancient Hindu culture, to Sanskrit and to Hindi in the NEP documents drew heavy criticism. Now educationists in Kolkata have recently complained of “too much Hindi-Sanskrit” in textbooks.

- 2.4 As per reports from States, all the above are resulting in increased school drop-outs, accelerating privatization, and a fall in quality of education, possibly except for the elite.
- 2.5 In **Higher Education**, the Union Government is similarly pushing key elements of the NEP in States. Centralization is a running thread in this sphere as well. Here the Union MoEd has been using the mechanism of a series of circulars issued by UGC, MoEd itself and other such Central agencies, all of which have dubious legitimacy but are nevertheless being pushed using the weight of the Union Government. Questionnaires are being sent to College Teachers, School Principals etc asking their opinions on how to implement NEP, thus seemingly making them “stakeholders” of NEP directly linked with MHRD, even though many provisions of NEP go against their interests.
- 2.6 The Union Government is vigorously pushing for adoption of Common Entrance Tests for HEI through a central Testing Agency. These efforts are ongoing and advancing, despite resistance from some States such as Tamil Nadu which continues to oppose NEET. Some States are adopting similar models at the State level through common entrance mechanisms for Colleges and State Universities such as in Haryana and Tripura.
- 2.7 NEP requires that Universities should not be affiliating institutions, but should be stand-alone, preferably campus, Universities and former affiliated Colleges should either become autonomous degree-awarding Colleges as per standards set by central agencies and as recognized by them, or should wind-up. This process has been set in motion using funding various other levers of pressure. While the model, following US or European models, appears to be reasonable, it is totally unrealistic in India in practical terms, where Colleges in rural and semi-urban areas affiliated to major Universities provide a large proportion of access to higher education especially to lower-income rural and semi-urban youth, and to SC/ST communities in such areas.
- 2.8 Corporatization and commercialization of higher education is also being driven by the Union Government, using the kinds of pressure tactics discussed earlier, along with the incentive of policies enabling Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to become money-spinners. In terms of HEI governance structures, University Senates or Academic Councils are being replaced by corporate-style Governing Bodies consisting of government nominees. This removes the academic community from HEI governance, works against democratic and participatory HEI governance with involvement of the University community,

and introduces a style of management that is interested in commercial more than academic aspects.

- 2.9 The NEP push for 4-year “vocational” degree courses with yearly exit options with certificates, diplomas etc (and yearly lateral entry options as systems evolve for credits for different types/levels of education and work experience) has been a major attraction, with the incentive clearly being the high fees Colleges and Universities can charge without any regulation governing the same. Already many educational institutions, including schools and colleges, had been using their premises and facilities for conducting coaching classes and similar short-term courses, often skirting municipal and other regulations. NEP now gives HEIs an opportunity to make money openly, exploiting the unregulated market. 4-year BA/BSc Courses in private, government or aided Colleges/Universities are being started even without AICTE approval and with high fees. For instance in Tripura, many private Vocational Colleges now being affiliated with Tripura (Central) University, and many other Colleges and Universities, have all started such Courses with fees of Rs.4.5 lakhs, even without AICTE accreditation. Again in Tripura, even State Univ MBB has started various paid courses. Even in Tamil Nadu, which after the change of government, is resisting NEP implementation, many aided Colleges and Universities have started 4-year Vocational Education courses, tempted by the unregulated environment and the higher fees they can charge. It needs to be emphasized that employer acceptability, market demand for such VocEd qualifications, or what remuneration graduating students may expect, are all currently unknown. This exposes students to uncertain futures despite the high investments they are required to make. And the concept of lateral entry at different levels of the 4-year course is completely untested too.
- 2.10 Commercialization in other ways too, and privatization of HEI, are proceeding rapidly under NEP. Huge fees in professional colleges and for courses in medicine, engineering etc of Rs.15-20 lakhs are spreading wide. In Haryana, for instance, Government Medical Colleges have witnessed fees ranging from Rs.25 to Rs.50 lakhs, and even ITIs have witnessed jumps in fees. Quality of education and facilities in many of these HEI are below par. Fees are so high that Indian students are going abroad for higher studies in China, Russia and other places where they say quality of education is also better. Apart from new private Colleges opening up for high-fee vocational or professional courses, privatization even of existing colleges is also picking up speed. For example, government colleges in Tripura are being handed over to private entities or

being placed in PPP mode with private partners. The practice of student loans from banks and other financial institutions is also becoming widespread due to high fees, following the US model over the past few decades where students find themselves trapped in debt traps for a decade or more.

2.11 With all these changes, higher education in India is poised for big changes, mostly for the worse. Students from lower-income families will find it increasingly difficult to obtain higher education due to high fee structure. Even Vocational courses which were supposedly aimed at those sections that needed to enter the employment market early will increasingly cater to the better-off due to commercialization and the inevitable rise in fees. Even if the changes envisaged in NEP, including privatization, result in better quality of education as promised, their benefits will be available only for the privileged few.

2.12 Virtual learning also continues to be pushed by the Union Government in various ways despite the known pedagogical problems associated with it, and regardless of the digital divide involved which can only further increase inequity of access in higher education.

3. **Pre-School Education** is suffering from considerable confusion since introduction of NEP, which had envisaged starting or shifting Pre-School Education to Anganwadis. In some States, Pre-school education continues to be conducted in school premises, and in some like Haryana it has been shifted to Anganwadis, while the situation is swinging between the two models even within some States. With regard to Anganwadi Workers, there is lack of clarity about qualifications required, training through remote means such as Apps etc. Anganwadi Workers are also legitimately concerned about appropriately increased remuneration, more stable or permanent employment conditions, a new job title appropriately conveying the new responsibilities and social status etc that should go along with these this new position and tasks. Additional and appropriate infrastructure and facilities in Anganwadis that would be needed for pre-school activities are further unanswered question.

4. In **Non-Formal Education**, despite the proven success of earlier community-based educational models involving community mobilization as witnessed in the Total Literacy Programme and linked post-literacy activities including State Education Resource Centres (SERCs), the Union Government is pushing for each-one-teach-one or distance learning models. Himachal Pradesh for example is conducting adult education in schools through student volunteers. The former has been shown to be ineffective and leaves much to chance. Effectiveness of the latter is again highly

uncertain as it de-personalizes and de-contextualizes teaching-learning which is known to be very useful if not essential.

(Note drafted by D. Raghunandan)

Anexure-3

Joint Statement draft on the NEP implementation

Joint Forum for Movement on Education (JFME)

Say NO to the implementation of NEP!

Say NO to privatization and commercialization of Education!

The JFME demands that the National Education Policy-2020 not be implemented as it will pave the way for further privatization and commercialization of education without any accountability to society and signals the withdrawal of the Government from its responsibility to provide accessible and quality education for all citizens. The fact that the document has been passed by Cabinet without a discussion in Parliament shows how pernicious conditions are being introduced to dismantle public-funded education in the country. The JFME further demands that the NEP 2020 be subjected to wider scrutiny and debate and not be implemented and thrust upon State Legislatures in this insidious manner.

Education is the key to social progress and economic transformation. Since the announcement of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP), many sections of civil society, educationists, democratic organizations and individuals have been expressing their apprehension about the proposed policy changes and its effect on the national education system on several counts. There has been a widespread understanding that the Union Government should not renege on the requirement of adhering to a balance of power between Centre and States provided by the Indian Constitution. It is unfortunate that the Government has been proceeding with the implementation of many provisions of the NEP in a big way without consulting the state legislatures or considering the concerns expressed by many educationists. The NEP is being imposed on the state administrations through the administrative orders of Ministry of Education.

Although some States have submitted their objections in writing, but the state administrations are succumbing to the pressure of the Union Government. In spite of the fact that the state governments as well as the state legislatures are on record to have asked the Centre to reconsider the NEP, the strategy adopted

for the implementation of NEP in these states is to rush the changes in the national system of education through administrative orders. While there are exceptions like the Government of Jharkhand is even re-opening previously closed schools, full efforts are being made by the Centre even in these States to push NEP through MHRD, UGC and other such Central agencies, especially through select bureaucrats in States.

In Tamil Nadu (TN), where the opposition to NEP was a major issue in the recently concluded state elections, the outgoing government had got the aided-Colleges/Universities to start 4-year Voc Ed courses with year-wise Certificates/Diplomas and very high fees. In Kerala, huge and subversive push is being given through bureaucracy, focusing for now on School Education with “Samagra Shiksha” as main vehicle. All States have been told to form Committees (mostly of bureaucrats) which would work directly with MHRD, often confidentially through selected IAS/Joint Secretary-level officers.

Each State has been told to appoint a Nodal Officer who is given often confidential instructions by MHRD. Spreadsheets with tasks, responsibilities have been issued to the bureaucrats. A lot of work is being done through a series of UGC circulars.

The BJP-ruled States are going full-steam ahead although at different speeds and in different ways with common features being (apart from above): Closure of schools, getting started with 4-year Vocational Education courses in Colleges & Universities with huge fee hikes, Privatization in different forms. In Haryana, even Government “Sanskriti Schools” are charging huge fees in the name of ‘model schools’. Karnataka seems to be a front-runner. The government is ready with a 10-year roadmap with administrative and legislative measures. The Government has proposed to go ahead with the formation of State Education Commission and the enactment of State University legislation. The Government is going ahead with the implementation task force (headed by Education Secretary) with quarterly review. The Government is looking into institutionalizing the “school complex” idea. The Government is going ahead with school closures even though 40% rural students don’t have access. There are changes in pre-primary education (3.5 yrs in schools) with Anganwadis being given the role of implementation.

The MP government is also going ahead and the State-level Committee has been formed for the purpose by the State Administration. Questionnaires are being sent to College Teachers, School Principals in Madhya Pradesh asking them how to implement NEP, thus making them “participants” directly linked with MHRD. The Government has formed Subject level Teams for School Education in Science, Mathematics and Language with experts from Maharashtra, Delhi, and also from abroad. Tripura is vigorously implementing,

even before NEP declaration. Many schools (961) closed and 840 handed over to private bodies. Colleges are being handed over or put in public private partnerships (PPP) mode. Private Vocational Colleges are being affiliated with Tripura (Central) University. Many College/Universities have started Vocational Education Courses started with huge fee hike. “One India, one syllabus” is being implemented in schools. 4-yr Vocational Education Courses with Rs.4-5 lakh fees in colleges have been started in Tripura University even without AICTE accreditation in related courses. State University has started paid Master of Business Administration. 4-yr courses with Common admission to colleges have been proposed.

In Haryana, State Education Board has been weakened. The state government has started with Centralized admissions to Colleges/University through Department of Higher Education. There is a huge fee hike in Government Medical Colleges (Rs.25-50 lakhs). Fees have been raised even in it is. Reservation seats are being kept vacant with support from groups known for their public hostility to reservation policy. Pre-primary has been shifted to Anganwadis. Anganwadi workers (AWs) are being trained as per the change recommended in the NEP by the Union government. Concerted campaign for the implementation of NEP is underway among the college/university teachers. In Himachal Pradesh (HP), the State government is fully committed to the implementation of NEP at the state level. It has started Adult Education in Schools through student volunteers. In Andhra Pradesh (AP), in the implementation of NEP contradictory tendencies exist. The State Government is going ahead with the implementation of Compulsory English-medium primary onwards. Investment in government school infrastructure with 10 issues identified. Rs.15, 000/BPL student including uniform, bag, books etc is under implementation. Government school enrolment has increased.

There is as yet not enough awareness of the consequences of NEP for the system of education within the general population. Mass organizations are trying to reach all the stakeholders. Opposition to NEP is weak except among political leadership. Main opposition, wherever it exists, is from Left/progressive groups, so risk of being seen only as “political opposition”. At same time, active joint struggles have started against the steps being taken under the NEP in many states namely Haryana, Kerala and West Bengal. In West Bengal, active Students-Teachers Forum has been formed for strengthening the struggles around the Right to Education. In Kerala, Joint Platforms of Left/Progressive Teachers and Students organizations with KSSP as “Resource Person/Group” have started campaigning against the implementation of NEP. In Tripura, 13 left and progressive mass organizations have become active.

The JFME is concerned that in the implementation of the NEP the Centre is on the path to wipe out the Indian Constitutional values and mandates from the national system of education. In its latest policy move, the Centre has cleared the decks for Ramdev's Patanjali Yogpeeth Trust, a private religious body, to establish the "Bhartiya Siksha Board" as a national school board for "Vedic Education". The Bharatiya Shiksha Board is conceived to be the country's first private national school board, which has been given the mandate to standardize "Indian traditional knowledge" and "blend it with modern education" by way of drafting curriculum, affiliating schools, conducting examinations and issuing certificates. This so-called blending of traditional knowledge, with modern education is a retrograde move, to take our society back into the dark ages with systems based on belief rather than reason and evidence-based enquiry. Rather than fostering a scientific temper and independent thinking, it will promote uncritical acceptance and blind belief. Young minds will be molded accordingly, and the ground prepared for conservative and fanatical mindsets, unable to question status quo or to meet the challenges of a fast-changing modern world. The JFME constituents have been publicly communicating their strong opposition to this move of the Union government.

The JFME believes that the Centre's official sanction for a private school education board is a highly objectionable move. The objections received from the public have been ignored. It has been pointed out that it is not appropriate to standardize "Indian traditional knowledge". It obliterates the diversity that exists within the traditional texts of "Hindus" and presents the traditions in a homogenized manner which is unscientific. Further it opens the doors for similar requests from other unrecognized school boards. Take the announcement made by the Rajasthan government to go ahead with the setting up of a separate public board for "Vedic Education", namely "Vedic education and Sanskar" Board. It is also aiming to revive the knowledge of Sanskrit scriptures and Vedas. The Board will be formed in next five months.

The JFME is concerned that the Union government has disempowered the State governments and legislatures and reduced the state administration to rubber stamping the decisions taken by the Centre. The NEP has become a blueprint for privatization of all streams of education. There is widening of disparities in educational facilities and opportunities. There is a reduction in access to education for rural and urban poor, SC/ST and other disadvantaged sections. The NEP is responsible for the reduction in quality of education. It has weakened the policy of reservations. It has increased the costs of education across the board. It is unable to meet the aspirations of India's children and youth. It is creating parallel streams of non-formal school education. It has

announced vocational skills from Class 6 onwards. The NEP does not consider education from 3 to 18 years as a Fundamental Right of India's children and youth.

The JFME notes with concern that the rate of student drop out from the schools is rising. The Centre and States are failing to prevent the students from the marginalized sections from dropping out of schools. According to the recently released "Unified District Information System for Education Plus" (UDISE+) report, more boys dropped out of school at the secondary level as well as in primary classes (1 to 5) in 2019-20. The number of girls dropping out of school in the upper primary classes (6-8) was even higher than that of the boys in 2019-20. The overall dropout rate at the secondary level in the country is over 17 per cent. The dropout rate for boys was higher in secondary classes (18.3 per cent) than girls (16.3 per cent).

The latest report is that over 12.5 lakh students of private schools in Haryana have not enrolled for the current academic session almost three months after it began. This prompted the Directorate of School Education in Haryana to send out a directive to district officials expressing "apprehensions" that they might have dropped out. The data submitted by private schools to the Haryana Education Department shows that 17.31 lakh students had enrolled for the 2021-22 academic session as of June 28, against 29.83 lakh last year.

With more than 15 lakh schools, nearly 97 lakh teachers and over 26.5 crore students from the pre-primary to the higher secondary level, the Indian school education system is one of the largest in the world. There are over 3.8 crore students enrolled at the secondary level, of whom 44.3 per cent are only enrolled in government schools. A little over 20 per cent are enrolled with government-aided private schools. Nearly 35 per cent are enrolled with private-unaided schools. The reports coming out on the school enrolment from the states should be a matter of great concern. It should make the Centre to have a fresh look at the NEP.

The JFME believes that the Centre and states need to implement the policy of "common schools" to prevent the students from dropping out of the schools. Evidence building suggests that rather than strengthening the Right to Education (RTE) act and moving towards the implementation of the policy agenda of "common schools" the Centre and states are on the path to dilute the Right to Education (RTE) Act. After the amendments to Right to Education (RTE) in 2019-20, the Vijayapura district in Karnataka has witnessed a 90 percent reduction in RTE applications. The district authorities used to receive at least 10,000 applications every academic year since RTE was enforced. As the government amended the act, this year the Department of Primary and Secondary Education of Vijayapura has merely received 1,385 applications.

The JFME suggests that this is a consequence of the new rules requiring that students seeking admission under RTE in unaided schools should not have any government school within 3km of their residence. If the candidate applies for admission even after the presence of a neighborhood government school, then the application would be rejected immediately. It is a matter of grave concern that the authorities are mapping the locations of government, aided and private unaided schools of the area together, the poor households from taking advantage of the RTE Act.

The JFME is concerned that the NEP is aggravating the problems of access to school education for the poor and resulting in an inconsistent quality of education. Several states in the country face challenges in school education due to reduced funding. The challenges include low learning levels among students; poor student strength in government schools; increased enrolment in inadequately-regulated English medium private schools; mushrooming of poor-quality private teacher training colleges; lack of integrated and quality school/student data, and a large number of legal cases. Teacher education is under-resourced. Serious government investment is lacking in the area in government universities. 90 per cent of teaching institutes in the country are substandard private institutions. The government is not willing to support the teacher education department in Central universities with better academic resources so that we can bring out qualified teachers.

The JFME believes that the Credit Framework for Online Learning Courses through Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM) Regulations 2021 and the proposed Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) model and Blended mode of Learning (BL) model, if implemented, will redefine the entire paradigm of Higher Education. These intend to reduce the role of teachers and universities by reducing association between students with them. The UGC Concept Note on BL turns students into customers and uses fancy clauses like "pick teachers and timings", "frame your courses", "design your degree", "student centric" and so on and so forth. However, such dubious and meaningless clauses mask the ulterior reality of the move towards dismantling public education in the country. In reality, these aim at reducing expenditure towards public funded higher education in the garb of "students' choice".

The JFME believes that the proposed ABC model will facilitate the credit recognition and credit redemption process for students who may choose all the 100% courses as per their choice. Evidence suggests that the four years undergraduate (UG) degree course of "Bachelor of Liberal Education" in place of prevailing specialized Honors Degree will turn out to be a retrograde step. It will damage our capacity for knowledge production. Throughout the world specialization rules the roost in the form of subject selected as major or minor.

Specialization and collaborative work are required for path breaking research and our abilities to comprehend crisis like the pandemic which we face today.

The latest proposal of the Union Government on 'blended learning' suggests that forty (40) % of the course offered can be in virtual mode. It reinforces our apprehension that the plan is to dispense with a large number of teachers. The NEP was silent on the role of teachers and student unions in the governance of India's educational system. The Modi government is bent on curtailing the democratic rights of students, teachers and parents. Democratic rights include the right of have elected unions for collective raising of issues, can be practiced only in a structure where service and working conditions, including security of service, are regulated by an independent body outside of the local management, so that any violations thereof can be challenged.

The NEP envisages that the federal and affiliating system shall end, each HEI will function as an autonomous unit with its management, called the Board of Governors (BoG) having the freedom and power to make all regulations concerning service and working conditions, apart from all academic decisions such as number of students and teachers, qualifications prescribed, courses offered, fees charged, salary fixed etc. (these were hitherto regulated by the UGC), which shall not be open to scrutiny by any other body. Less than a third of the BoG will comprise members from within the HEI, who shall not be chosen by any democratic process such as election or even rotation on the basis of seniority. They will therefore be handpicked by the other two-thirds, who will comprise representatives of the relevant Government, representatives of the primary funders, and "public-minded individuals" (who will presumably be hand-picked by the relevant Government agency such as the Shiksha Ayog). With the removal of all democratic representation in the management, coupled with the hire and fire power of the BoG, teachers are not expected to have the confidence to exercise their academic freedom, leave alone form associations and participate in other democratic activities. With the fragmentation of Universities into autonomous units, each with its own set of rules, the existing teachers' and employees' associations would become toothless and unable to protect the service conditions of their erstwhile members. Added to this, institutions will face a tremendous financial burden when, through the NEP-2020, the government shirks its responsibility of funding institutions and says that "...any public institution can take initiatives towards raising private philanthropic funds to enhance educational experiences." This will undoubtedly promote private take-over of our HEI's.

The specific mention of conditions for award of tenure-track, a minimum of five-year probation, quantum of "compensation"(presumably on termination of services), "merit" rather than seniority being the criteria for promotions and

emoluments, will only encourage sycophancy, rather than independent thinking and expression and the forging of collective solidarities. Needless to say, this will also strike a body-blow to the quality of teaching and research. Nor will it foster an atmosphere of free debate and discussion in the institution, which is a prerequisite for any meaningful education. The top down, corporate style, all-powerful management dominated by non-academic elements aligned to ruling parties and corporate interests will lead to unbridled commercialization, exclusion of marginalized sections and steep decline in quality. Without the protective umbrella of UGC/ University Regulations, the danger of non-academic elements interfering in course content, admissions, fees, selections, service conditions etc is obvious. Already there is, on one hand, a concerted attempt to smuggle in pseudo-science, and on the other to distort and re-write history, both of which have been widely criticized by eminent scholars and faculty across the country.

With the NEP enabling the take-over of all public universities by such elements, the stated goals of public education, namely to promote Constitutional values of equality, fraternity, social justice, liberty, scientific temper and humanism, are in danger of being completely abandoned.

Arun Kumar

Rajib Ray

Nandita Narain

Gen Sec AIFUCTO

Pres FEDCUTA

Chairperson JFME

Amiya Kumar Mohanty

Convener, JFME

JOINT FORUM FOR MOVEMENT ON EDUCATION

All India Federation of University and College Teachers' Organizations, Federation of Central University Teachers' Associations, All India Federation of Retired University and College Teachers' Organizations, All India University Employees Confederation, School Teachers' Federation of India, All India Secondary Teachers' Federation, All India Federation of Elementary Teachers' Organization, Indian Public Service Employees Federation, All India Primary Teachers' Federation. (AIPTF), All India Federation of Educational Association, All India Forum for Right to Education, All-India Save Education Committee, All India People's

Science Network, Bharti Gyan Vigyan Samiti, Students' Organisations (AIDSO, AIMS, AIBSA, AGS, AIPSU, AISA, AISF, CYSS, DISHA, KYS, NEFIS, NSUI, SFI)

Signatories:

1. Arun Kumar, President AIFUCTO
2. Rajib Ray, President FEDCUTA
3. Amiya Kumar Mohanty, Convenor JFME
4. Nandita Narain, Chairperson JFME

Anexure-4

Addressing disruption in elementary education due to the pandemic

R Ramanujam

Tamil Nadu Science Forum
onlyjam@gmail.com

There are strident calls for re-opening schools. Since school closure has led to great loss of nutrition and schooling for the poorest sections of our society, there is some urgency to this need. However, the important question remains: if schools were to re-open tomorrow, are we prepared for resumption? Will it be merely business as usual? Are there challenges to be met, in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and systemic practices?

In this note, we argue that what lies ahead is nothing less than an educational crisis, and that the country's educational system is ill-prepared to address it right now. A locally realized national vision for educational action is needed, and it takes the spirit of a people's movement, we will again let down the voiceless, the children of the poorest sections of society, aggravating social injustice in our society even further.

The disruption

In perhaps unparalleled educational disruption in history since the mass education system took root in India, schools have been closed for 16 months now, with no clear calendar for resumption as yet. The country has seen online classes and connectivity as the solution, perhaps inevitably so, since physical contact between teachers and children has not been possible. The focus has been principally on secondary and higher secondary education, with most states ensuring some form of online classes for this segment. However, due to lack of connectivity as well as lack of access to devices, only a fraction of children even in this age group have had online education of any kind. When it

comes to children in primary and upper primary classes, even such access to online classes has been limited to a miniscule fraction of the population. Children of the poor, studying in government schools have been especially disadvantaged in this regard.

Further aggravating the situation, the quality of online education has been largely abysmal. As most studies show, the percentage of teachers in the country with capability in handling digital platforms for pedagogic purposes is very small. The educational material provided by them has also been a mere reproduction of that used in physical classrooms. Hence, even where online classes have taken place regularly, as in the case of urban schools with students largely from middle income groups, teaching - learning processes have been largely poor.

As has been well documented by now, all this has resulted in what commentators have termed nutrition loss and learning loss. In huge swathes of the country, the noon meal scheme (which has been the country's pride in affirmative action, and often hailed as a role model) has simply not reached a day's meal to children who would have got it during school days. It is well known that supply of dry rations to families does not always assure its reach to children.

The data on this disruption show great regional disparities in the country. We can (and indeed, must) take up these in detail elsewhere, since our focus in this note is on resumption of learning in schools.

Worldwide, many studies during the last year have documented loss of learning in children. In the Netherlands, despite a short lockdown, equitable school funding, and world-leading rates of broadband access, researchers found that among 8 to 11 year olds, "students made little or no progress while learning from home" and that "learning loss was most pronounced among students from disadvantaged homes". This was a study that covered 15% of the elementary schools in the Netherlands. A large multi-state study in the USA records that the pandemic "has also prompted some students to leave the public school system altogether". A survey of these findings is relevant for us, and we can take it up in detail later.

In India, the Azim Premji Foundation took up an impressive study in January 2021. This lateral study included 16067 children (8768 girls and 7299 boys) in 1137 public schools in 44 districts across 5 states (Chhattisgarh, Karnataka,

Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand). Notably the survey was conducted through teachers who knew these children personally, and recorded their pre-pandemic learning levels (to the best of their knowledge) as baseline data before the survey was conducted. The easing of the pandemic during January helped in meeting children personally. The survey was restricted to children in the age group 6 to 11, and tested only language and arithmetic skills.

According to this research team's report, 92% of children on an average have lost at least one specific language ability from the previous year across all class. These abilities include describing a picture or their experiences orally; reading familiar words; reading with comprehension; writing simple sentences based on a picture. Breaking this up by class, 92% of children in class 2, 89% in class 3, 90% in class 4, 95% in class 5, and 93% in class 6 have lost at least one specific ability from the previous year . 82% of children on an average have lost at least one specific mathematical ability from the previous year across all classes.

These abilities include identifying single- and two-digit numbers; performing arithmetic operations; using basic arithmetic operations for solving problems; describing 2D/3D shapes; reading and drawing inferences from data. Separating in classes, we find that 7% of children in class 2, 76% in class 3, 85% in class 4, 89% in class 5, and 89% in class 6 have lost at least one specific ability from the previous year.

Summary data always tells only a small part of the story . It is harder to convey the sense of shock that many teachers expressed: these were children they knew well and had expectations of. Such forgetting and regression in learning among these children raised serious doubts among the teachers on the road ahead.

The road ahead

All this brings us to the big question. What is to happen on the day schools re-open? How do we resume business?

Even more importantly, we need to think this through from the viewpoint of political machinery, state education department machinery and civil society, especially the role of the PSM in this.

A question looming large in the minds of teachers, parents and even the children, is basic: will a child, who was in Class 4 in March 2020, and did not get to attend a single class during the academic year 2020-2021, be admitted into Class 6 now in (say) August 2021? In areas where this means admission in to a different school, is this automatic?

In many states this was already addressed and answered in June this year. Age appropriate enrolment, as guaranteed under the Right to Education Act, has been uniformly implemented. But this has not been ensured across India with many states not taking up enrolment for this year as yet.

Assuming that enrolment is not an issue, if we return to the child in the illustration above, she enrolls into Class 6, but will she start with Class 5 textbooks, or Class 6 textbooks, or some new material?

This is, of course, a decision to be taken by the state government, but has political implications and hence will be decided by the ministry. The main question is, what is the rationale for taking any specific decision, and what are the implications?

International experience

One way of addressing this crisis might be to repeat the entire academic year. The government in Kenya has already decided to do just this, believing that having students repeat the entire year puts them all on equal footing.

Some countries, like the Philippines, allow extended time for classes on resumption, both in duration of school hours and more calendar days of interaction.

Another approach is to reduce and synthesize the curriculum so that students are able to focus on a few subjects and learn them well. This is followed by the state of Ontario in Canada, which focuses only on language, mathematics and science. The state of Odisha has taken a similar stand as well.

One-to-one tutoring for the most disadvantaged learners has been taken up in many countries. Among the most prestigious such programmes is the National Tutoring Programme in the UK for which the government has announced funding to the tune of 350 million pounds. Ghana has also announced a national programme of tutoring. There are several such programmes in the USA in states like California and Mississippi.

In one of the most interesting support programs, university student volunteers in Italy are conducting one-one-one classes for middle school children. The response to this call has been remarkable. Teachers have attested to growth in students' academic performance due to this programme, especially among students from immigrant backgrounds.

Accelerated education programs or "bridge courses", which condense several months (or even years of schooling) into a few weeks/months, is another option. This has been taken up in Ethiopia, several states in the USA and in some European countries.

One strong voice emerging from all these experiences is "Acceleration not remediation". The advice is, go with exposure to age-level grade-level content, and plug holes where necessary. Many educators warn against a deficit model that starts with measuring "loss" and tries to "fill the void" before returning to the "normal".

Some have even asserted: "There is no such thing as learning loss", that students have learned a great deal about life, home economy, health and much else during the pandemic that cannot be measured by standardised tests, that learning should begin with acknowledging this and building on such informal learning.

In the words of Tony Cotton, renowned mathematics educator from the UK, "The curriculum should not be seen as a fixed list of content that must all be covered before the learner can leave school. If the curriculum can be seen as a map, as a landscape, there is always plenty of time to explore."

Agenda for us

All this suggests that we have a somewhat chaotic transitional phase ahead. Whatever be the decisions taken at state level by government machinery, it is very likely that children from the poorest sections will be the ones affected most, by having to race in accelerated learning programmes with no support at home. Teachers, without preparation for handling a new situation, can only fall back on "covering the syllabus", only leading to the alienation of already marginalised students. As we know, even as of March 2020, a good proportion of children had poor achievement relative to expectations based on their age and years of schooling. As we go further with age appropriate curriculum, they are likely to be left out, further accentuating social injustice.

We do need nothing less than a national rejuvenation programme for elementary education, with a vast body of volunteers engaging in small groups with children from the most disadvantaged sections, working in tandem with schools. While schools focus on safety measures and average performance, these volunteers will need to engage with individual children. However, we should not reduce such effort to addressing foundational literacy and numeracy, but treat children as they are, study the experiences they bring, address their nutritional, emotional and intellectual well-being as a whole. We have to find ways of identifying the potential strengths of children and enhancing them, while at the same time provide support to them in negotiating school assessment. This requires a curriculum rooted in local reality, working with physical material and pedagogy based on sound principles of psychology of learning.

The most likely event is that schools will simply revert to business as usual, with reduced syllabus, and no change whatsoever in overall curriculum or pedagogy , and accelerating through the syllabus for “catching up”. Children who cannot keep up would simply be left behind. This would be a great disaster.

A campaign for literacy at home accompanying such a drive will have tremendous impact, not only in sustaining efforts at improving quality of outcomes among children but also help adults. In a situation of contracting economy and a large population facing loss of livelihood, community learning programmes can be a major social investment towards long term economic opportunity as well.

The PSM has the capability and experience in organizing such large scale volunteer mobilization and carrying out grassroots educational activity. Indeed, there are very few organizations in the country that can lay claim to such capacity. It is not only our socio-political duty to take such action at this juncture, we would also be letting the children of the poor down badly if we do not act, deepening an already vast chasm of educational injustice in this country.