New Education Policy 2020: Evolution Key Milestones, and Prominent Features

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant shift in the Indian education system, aiming to transform it to meet the evolving needs of the 21st century. This study explores the NEP 2020, tracing its roots from previous educational policies, and highlights its provisions, with a specific focus on School Education, including the establishment of Cluster Schools. Additionally, it examines the Standard Setting and Accreditation of schools (SSSA) as a key aspect of the NEP 2020, discussing its implications and provisions.

The study begins by analysing the historical context of the NEP 2020, comparing it with previous educational policies to identify the evolution of key principles and ideologies. It identifies the NEP 2020 as a comprehensive and transformative policy framework designed to address the multidimensional challenges faced by the Indian education system.

One of the significant provisions of the NEP 2020 in the area of School Education is the establishment of Cluster Schools. These schools aim to promote collaborative learning, resource sharing, and increased efficiency by clustering multiple schools under a common administrative and academic framework. The study explores the concept of Cluster Schools, delves into their benefits, challenges, and potential implementation strategies, and provides relevant state examples that have successfully implemented this model.

Furthermore, the study investigates the Standard Setting and Accreditation of schools (SSSA) as a vital component of the NEP 2020. SSSA is envisioned to ensure quality education by setting standards, evaluating schools, and promoting continuous improvement. The research examines the provisions and guidelines related to SSSA, discussing the impact on school infrastructure, curriculum development, teacher training, and assessment practices.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the understanding of the NEP 2020 and its provisions, with a specific focus on School Education, Cluster Schools, and Standard Setting and Accreditation of schools. It provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers interested in educational reforms, highlighting the opportunities and challenges associated with the implementation of the NEP 2020.

Introduction

The National Education Policy 2020 is a pathbreaking educational programme which aims to combat the problems hindering India's educational prosperity and adapt to the growing demands of the 21st century. The NEP 2020, thus envisions itself to be a one of a kind, 21st century educational policy seeking to provide the highest quality, equity and integrity in order to fulfil the United Nations Sustainable development Goal 4 and bringing universal and quality education before 2030. The policy is therefore, designed to engage in the developmental imperatives of the country by revamping the educational structure, and aligning the system more towards India's traditions and value systems.

NEP 2020 builds upon the pillars of strengthening the foundational capacity and numeracy along with higher order cognitive capacities which include logical/critical reasoning along with emotional well being. The policy directs itself at empowering the children and the youth, to become leaders of tomorrow. Its main focus is on uplifting the children belonging to the disadvantaged and marginalised groups, in order to achieve socio-economic equality, inclusivity and progress. The NEP 2020 finally, opines itself to be representative of India's rich cultural diversity and unity and positions itself to be the engine of India's rise as a global power having an all-round, holistic and self empowered population.

Previous Policies

After gaining independence, the Ways and Means (Kher) Committee, which was established in 1947, investigated strategies to achieve Universal Elementary Education within a decade with reduced expenses. In that same year, the subcommittee on fundamental rights within the Constituent Assembly included free and compulsory education as part of the fundamental rights. However, the Advisory Committee of the Constituent Assembly dismissed the inclusion of free and mandatory education as a fundamental right in April 1947. Instead, they categorised it under "non-justifiable fundamental rights," eventually known as Directive Principles of State Policy.[1]

Several developments occurred between 1950 and the Unnikrishnan case ruling in 1993. Aiming to bridge educational disparities, the Indian Education Commission (also referred to as the Kothari Commission) conducted an assessment of the education landscape in India from 1964 to 1966. This commission recommended the establishment of a uniform school system. The initial official affirmation of the Indian Government's commitment to elementary education came with the release of the National Policy on Education in 1968, which tackled the challenge of ensuring equal educational opportunities.[2]

Primary education was added to the "Concurrent List" in the 42nd amendment to the constitution in 1975, during the Emergency, transferring primary education from the state to the federal government. In 1986,

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[1] Mondal, Ajit. "Free and Compulsory Primary Education in India under the British Raj: A Tale of an Unfulfilled Dream." *SAGE Open* 7, no. 3 (2017): 215824401772703. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017727037.

[2] B G Tilak, Jandhyala. "The Kothari Commission and Financing of Education :" Economic and Political Weekly, March 10, 2007. https://www.epw.in/journal/2007/10/special-articles/kothari-commission-and-financing-education.html.

the then-prime minister Rajiv Gandhi made the decision to launch "Operation Blackboard," in which the state and the centre would share the responsibility for joint implementation.

Although the objective of achieving universal elementary education was reaffirmed in the national education policy of 1986, the concept of the "Right to Education" was not formally recognized at that point. The Acharya Rammurti Committee, which assessed the 1986 policy in 1990, recommended the inclusion of the right to education as a fundamental right in part III of the constitution. However, this recommendation was not immediately put into action.

A significant legal milestone occurred in 1992 with the verdict of the Indian Supreme Court in the case of Mohini Jain v. State of Karnataka. The court established that every citizen possesses a constitutional entitlement to education and that this "Right to Education" aligns with the fundamental rights outlined in part III of the constitution.[3] Around the same time, India also signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which mandates that countries recognize a child's right to education.

In the subsequent J.P. Unnikrishnan v. State of Andhra Pradesh case, the Supreme Court revisited the earlier ruling. Even though the right to education wasn't explicitly mentioned as a fundamental right, the court's majority opinion asserted that it is implicit in and derived from the right to life guaranteed by Article 21 of the constitution. This right must be understood within the context of the Directive Principles of State Policy.[4] As part of the "National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education," the Indian government introduced the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) on August 15, 1995.

Numerous petitions concerning public interest were submitted in different High Courts with the aim of enforcing the Unnikrishnan judgment and securing school admissions. This effort resulted in a constitutional amendment in 1996, incorporating the right to education as a fundamental right. As a response, the constitution (83) Amendment Bill was presented to the Rajya Sabha in July 1997. However, due to shifts in governmental leadership, the necessary political determination to enact the amendment was lacking from 1997 to 2001. The 83rd Bill, initially withdrawn, was subsequently reintroduced as the 93rd Bill in November 2001.

Rather than completely revoking Article 45, the 93rd Bill suggested its modification to encompass provisions for early childhood care and education. Ratified in 2002, this bill became the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act. In 2001, prior to this, the Indian government had established the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) to ensure education for children aged 6 to 14.

Subsequently, the Right to Education Act of 2009 was formulated. The Cabinet approved this Bill on July 2, 2009. Both the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha passed the bill in 2009, on July 20 and August 4 respectively. Following presidential assent, the Children's Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act was enacted on September 3, 2009. Effective from April 1, 2010, this law was implemented across all of India, except for the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

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[3] Miss Mohini Jain vs state of Karnataka and Ors on 30 July, 1992. Accessed August 26, 2023. https://indiankanoon.org/doc/40715/.

[4] Unni Krishnan, J.P. and Ors. etc. ... Vs State of andhra pradesh and ... Accessed August 26, 2023. https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1775396/.

In 2020, the National Educational Policy was introduced to enhance the overall educational framework. It aimed to cultivate scientific curiosity, critical thinking skills, empathy, and holistic extracurricular requirements for children and young individuals. Emerging nearly a decade after preceding education policies and acts, the National Educational Policy of 2020 was driven by the growing demands for quality, innovation, and research in education, leading to the formulation of the New Education Policy, 2020.

Provisions of the New Education Policy 2020
The draft of the New Education Policy was submitted to the ministry of education on 31st May 2019, which was reviewed adequately and put up on the website of Ministry of Education and on MyGov portal, encouraging suggestions and opinions from the relevant stakeholders, including the citizens. Further, the State governments/UTs were also asked to submit their views regarding the draft. Moreover, meetings with the State education secretaries, CABE, Standing Committees of the Parliament culminated in the month of November, 2019. Finally, the New Education Policy came into existence from 29th July 2020 which also led to the creation of the Ministry of Education, as was earlier the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

The major tenets of the New Education Policy 2020 are as follows :[5]
● recognising, identifying, and fostering each student's unique abilities by educating parents and teachers about the importance of fostering each student's holistic development in both academic and extracurricular areas;
● Emphasis on reaching Foundational Literacy and Numeracy by all students by Grade 3;
● flexibility, so that students can choose their learning trajectories and programmes and, in turn, choose their own paths in life based on their talents and interests;
● absence of rigid divisions between the arts and sciences, curricular and extracurricular activities, between vocational and academic streams, etc.
● In order to ensure the unity and integrity of all knowledge, education should be multidisciplinary and comprehensive across the social sciences, arts, humanities, and sports.
● Emphasis should be placed on conceptual understanding rather than memorization and studying for exams.
● Creativity and critical thinking should also be encouraged to foster logical decision-making and innovation.
● Ethics and constitutional values such as empathy, cleanliness, and respect for others should also be emphasised.
● Inculcating life skills like communication, cooperation, teamwork, and resilience;
● focus on regular formative assessment for learning rather than the summative assessment that encourages today's "coaching culture";
● extensive use of technology in teaching and learning;
● removing language barriers;
● expanding access for Divyang students;

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[5] Salient features of NEP 2020: Higher Education 1. the fundamental ... - UGC. Accessed August 26, 2023. https://www.ugc.gov.in/pdfnews/5294663_Salient-Featuresofnep-Eng-merged.pdf.

- educational planning and management; and respect for cultural diversity.
- a 'light but tight' regulatory framework to ensure integrity, transparency, and resource efficiency of the educational system through audit and public disclosure;
- teachers and faculty as the heart of the learning process; their recruitment, continuous professional development, positive working environments, and service conditions;
- Inculcating a sense of rootedness and pride in India, with its rich, diverse, ancient and modern culture, knowledge systems, and traditions;
- education is a public service; access to quality education must be considered a basic right of every child; and
- significant investment in a strong, vibrant public education system, as well as encouragement and facilitation of true philanthropic private and community participation.

Main Focus Areas in-lieu of School Education

In Part 1 of the National Education Policy's Official document highlighting School Education, eight major categories have been included. The first category includes early childhood care and education, second includes Foundational literacy and numeracy, third category involves curtailing drop out rates and increasing universal access to education, fourth states curriculum and pedagogy in schools, fifth section includes details about teacher training, sixth has inclusive and equitable education as its focus areas, seventh category emphasises on the creation of school clusters and finally, the eighth and the last category involves standard setting and Accreditation of schools.

In this paper, however, we will focus on the seventh and the eighth category, namely, creation of school clusters and accreditation and standard setting of schools.

Efficient Resourcing and Effective Governance through School Complexes/Clusters

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, now operating within the framework of the Samagra Shiksha Scheme introduced in 2018, marked a significant step towards achieving universal enrollment in public schools. Nevertheless, this initiative gave rise to a notable drawback, manifesting as the emergence of extremely small schools lacking adequate teachers, resources, and funding.

Consequently, these undersized schools became an impediment to India's educational objectives. Data from U-DISE 2016-17[6] vividly illustrates that almost 28% of India's public primary schools and 14.8% of its upper primary schools cater to fewer than 30 students. The mean student count per grade within the elementary education system (encompassing primary and upper primary levels, i.e., Grades 1-8) is approximately 14, with a considerable proportion having less than 6 students. In 2016-17, there were 108,017 schools with only one teacher, the majority (85,743) serving Grades 1-5.

The official NEP report highlights that the isolation of small schools adversely affects both education and the teaching-learning process. Similar to students, teachers flourish within communities and collaborative environments. Small schools also present substantial governance and management challenges.

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[6] U-DISE reports 2016-17 - rashtriya madhyamik shiksha abhiyan. Accessed August 26, 2023. https://rmsa.uk.gov.in/files/U-Dise_Report_2016-17.pdf.

Geographical dispersion, challenging accessibility conditions, and a high number of schools create an imbalance in equal access. Administrative structures have lagged behind the expansion of schools and the integrated structure of the Samagra Shiksha Scheme.

The report further indicates that State/UT governments aim to tackle these challenges by 2025 through innovative strategies for school grouping or rationalization. The primary objective of this intervention is to ensure that each school possesses: (a) a suitable number of counselors, trained social workers, and teachers (shared or otherwise) proficient in teaching all subjects, including arts, music, science, sports, languages, vocational subjects, etc.; (b) ample resources (shared or otherwise), such as libraries, science labs, computer labs, skill labs, playgrounds, sports equipment and facilities, and more; (c) a sense of community development; (d) support and collaboration for the education of disabled children; and (e) enhanced school system governance by delegating key decisions to principals, teachers, and other stakeholders within each group of schools, treating these clusters as autonomous units.[7] This integrated approach enables progression from foundational to secondary stages of education.

The government envisions the establishment of a grouping framework known as the school complex, which would comprise a secondary school along with other schools offering lower grades in the nearby vicinity, including Anganwadis, within a radius of five to ten kilometers. This proposal was originally put forth by the Education Commission (1964-66) but remained unimplemented due to political considerations. The primary aim of these school complexes/clusters is to enhance resource efficiency and improve the overall functioning, coordination, leadership, governance, and management of the grouped schools.

Moreover, the creation of school complexes/clusters and the sharing of resources among these clusters would yield several other advantages. These include enhanced support for children with disabilities, the promotion of specialised clubs and academic/sports/arts/crafts events across the school complexes, and better integration of subjects such as art, music, language, vocational courses, and physical education through the sharing of specialised teachers. The introduction of such broader communities of schools, educational leaders, teachers, students, support staff, parents, and local residents would invigorate and empower the educational system in an efficient manner.

The implementation of school complexes/clusters would also lead to advancements in school governance, rendering it more effective. Operating as semi-autonomous entities, the school complexes or clusters would receive initial authority delegation from the District School Education (DSE) department. These complexes or clusters would primarily interact with the District Education Officer (DEO) and Block Education Officers (BEO) as unified entities, streamlining their work.

The complex would manage both the constituent schools and some of the responsibilities delegated by the DSE. The school complex/cluster would have considerable autonomy to experiment with teaching

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[7] National education policy 2020 - Ministry of Education. Accessed August 26, 2023. https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English.pdf.

methods, curricula, etc., while adhering to the guidelines set by the National Curricular Framework (NCF) and State Curricular Framework (SCF).

In collaboration with their School Management Committees (SMCs), individual schools would devise their School Development Plans (SDPs). Based on these individual plans, School Complex/Cluster Development Plans (SCDPs) would be formulated. The SCDP would be prepared by the principals and teachers of the school complex, incorporating input from the School Complex Management Committee (SCMC), and would be made accessible to the general public. This plan would also encompass the strategies of all other institutions associated with the school complex, such as vocational education institutions.[8]

The plans would encompass areas like human resources, educational materials, physical infrastructure, improvement initiatives, financial resources, efforts to foster a positive school culture, teacher development plans, and educational outcomes. Detailed strategies would be outlined to establish active learning communities using teachers and students from various schools

The School Development Plan (SDP) and the School Complex/Cluster Development Plan (SCDP) will serve as tools for monitoring and guiding the functioning and trajectory of the school and school complex respectively, aided by the School Management Committee (SMC) and School Complex Management Committee (SCMC). The SCDP for each school complex will undergo validation and approval from the District School Education (DSE) department through relevant officials, like the Block Educational Officer (BEO). Subsequently, the DSE will allocate the necessary resources (financial, human, physical, etc.) to implement the SCDPs in the short- and long-term (spanning one to three years). Moreover, the DSE will provide any other pertinent assistance required by the school complexes to achieve the desired educational outcomes. Specific guidelines encompassing various aspects, including finances, staffing, and the framework development for SDPs and SCDPs, which might be periodically updated, will be disseminated to all schools by the DSE and the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT).[9]

The practice of twinning or pairing one public school with a private school will be adopted nationwide. The objective of such pairing is to facilitate interaction, mutual learning, and, if feasible, resource sharing between the paired schools. This collaboration aims to enhance cooperation and foster positive synergy among schools, irrespective of their public or private nature. Where possible, successful practices from private schools will be documented, shared, and incorporated into the operations of public schools.

The report further states that each state will be encouraged to enhance existing "Bal Bhavans" or establish new ones. These facilities would allow children of all ages to visit once a week (such as during weekends) or more frequently, functioning as specialized day boarding schools. The focus would be on engaging in activities related to play, career exploration, and arts. If feasible, these Bal Bhavans could also become part of school complexes or clusters.

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[8] National education policy 2020 - Ministry of Education. Accessed August 26, 2023. https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English.pdf.

[9] *ibid*

The school is envisioned to become a source of pride and esteem for the entire community it serves. Efforts will be made to reinstate the institution's dignity, and significant occasions like the school's foundation day will be celebrated in conjunction with the community. Notable alumni could be recognized and honored, and the untapped potential of school infrastructure could be harnessed to promote community involvement, intellectual stimulation, social cohesion, and serve as a "Social Awareness Center" during non-school hours.

State Wise Consolidation of Cluster Schools

Rajasthan emerged as one of the initial Indian states to undertake extensive school consolidation efforts. The first phase of school consolidation in Rajasthan was introduced by the Government of Rajasthan (GoR) during 2014–15. This initiative led to the integration of 14,600 elementary schools with secondary schools, and approximately 2,000 elementary schools were merged with other elementary schools. Further consolidation took place in 2016–17, where 3,000 elementary schools were combined with other elementary schools, and another 2,000 elementary schools were transformed into secondary schools as part of an ongoing process.[10]

The Rajasthan Education Directorate reported that around 22,000 schools underwent consolidation between 2014–15 and 2018–19. However, a portion of this consolidation (2,500 schools) was reversed, resulting in a net total of 19,500 consolidated schools by 2018–19. Additionally, around 50 secondary schools were merged with either secondary or senior secondary schools during the same period.[11]

To tackle issues of infrastructure, teacher shortages, and enhance educational opportunities, the Maharashtra school education department will introduce "cluster schools" across the state. This move will impact over 4,500 schools with enrollments of fewer than 20 students each. Following a successful pilot program in the Panshet area of Pune district, the education department is considering expanding the implementation of 'cluster schools' statewide.[12]

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[10] Bordoloi, and Shukla. School Consolidation in Rajasthan: Implementation and Short Term Effects, August 2019. https://accountabilityindia.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/School_Consolidation_Rajasthan_Final-.pdf.

[11] Shoeb Khan / TNN / Updated: Oct 14, 2019. "School Mergers Brought down Enrolments: Study: Jaipur News - Times of India." The Times of India. Accessed August 26, 2023. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/jaipur/school-mergers-brought-down-enrolments-study/articleshow/71572089.cms.

[12] "State Plans Cluster Schools with Less than 20 Students." Hindustan Times, May 3, 2023. https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/mumbai-news/mumbai-to-implement-cluster-schools-to-improve-education-infrastructure-and-facilities-for-students-in-low-enrollment-areas-101683140069329.html#:~:text=Maharashtra's%20school%20education%20department%20plans,better%20education%20with%20modern%20facilities.

In November 2022, the government of Karnataka took steps to implement the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in 20,000 anganwadis/schools that offer early childhood care and education (pre-primary stage). The state's proposal for NEP implementation suggested a modernised approach to school complexes, with a focus on its successful Karnataka Public Schools.[13]

Tamil Nadu also stands out as an innovative state in the development of cluster schools. The model introduced by the Tamil Nadu government has been regarded as a prototype for the NEP 2020 model for cluster schools.[14]

States such as Uttar Pradesh have decided to implement the NEP in a phased manner by 2022, and have created eight committees to look into its foundational aspects. A district-level survey was already conducted for this using a mobile app and in-person interactions. As part of this initiative, an overall blueprint will be created in the following phase, covering early childhood care and education, school education, teacher preparation, and adult education. A education commission in UP is also set to oversee the implementation of NEP for the same.[15]

Thus, it can be stated that the need for school complexes arose from the urgent need to address issues of equity and access in supplying resources for Indian schools' quality improvement. School complexes were historically created in various parts of the nation based on recommendations made by the Education Commission (1964-66) and later by the Janardhan Reddy Committee (1992). It is well understood that access to well-resourced schools does not appear to be adequately supported by the current structure of schools and complexes. The analysis of domestic and foreign literature, as well as the general opinion of state-level administrators regarding the current configuration of school complexes in India, provide the foundation for the paper's understanding of how school complexes function.

It has been brought to light that all types and sizes of schools need to be improved overall. The National Education Policy 2020 acknowledged the need to create a school complex or cluster in a specific geographic area so that all children can have equitable access to a quality education. In the current structure, the complex is only seen as including primary schools as feeder schools; however, the NEP 2020 expands the complex's boundaries to include anganwadis. In order to maximise resource efficiency, the

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[13] Reporter, Staff. "NEP to Be Implemented in Pre-Primary Education in Karnataka from November." The Hindu, August 25, 2022. https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/bangalore/nep-to-be-implemented-in-pre-primary-education-in-karnataka-from-november/article65810980.ece.

[14] Julie Mariappan & A Ragu Raman / TNN / Updated: Aug 23, 2019. "Tamil Nadu Mulls New Cluster Model to Check Dip in School Admissions: Chennai News - Times of India." The Times of India. Accessed August 26, 2023. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/tn-mulls-new-cluster-model-to-check-dip-in-school-admissions/articleshow/70795518.cms.

[15] PTI / Sep 4, 2022. "'NEP Implementation in UP Will Lead to Better Coordination among Educational Institutes' - Times of India." The Times of India. Accessed August 26, 2023. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/education/news/nep-implementation-in-up-will-lead-to-better-coordination-among-educational-institutes/articleshow/93980329.cms.

New Education Policy envisions school complexes as decentralised units that are situated as independent units. This will enable effective school management, governance, and coordination as well as the igniting of academic rigour within a complex.

Standard-setting and Accreditation for School Education

Currently, one body, namely the Department of School Education or its arms, is in charge of all major aspects of governance and regulation of the school education system, including the provision of public education, the regulation of educational institutions, and policymaking. Because of the focus on the other roles, particularly regulation, that the Departments of School Education also play, there are conflicts of interest and an excessive concentration of power at the centre. This also results in ineffective management of the school system.

The report further states that the current regulatory system has also failed to stop many for-profit private schools from commercialising education and taking advantage of parents financially, while all too frequently unintentionally discouraging schools with a public-spirited mission. Even though both public and private schools should aim to provide high-quality education, there has been far too much inequity in the regulatory frameworks for them.

Regarding the State school education system, the independent responsibilities within it, and the method of its regulation, the main principles and suggestions of this Policy are as follows:[16]

A. In order to ensure proper focus on the improvement of public schools and to avoid conflicts of interest, the Department of School Education, which is the top state-level body in charge of school education, will be in charge of overall monitoring and policymaking for continual improvement of the public education system. It will not be involved with the provision and operation of schools or with the regulation of schools.

B. The Directorate of School Education (including the offices of the DEO and BEO, etc.) will oversee educational operations and service provision for the public schooling system of the entire State. It will operate independently to carry out policies pertaining to educational operations and provision.

C. To ensure adherence to fundamental quality standards, an efficient system of quality self-regulation or accreditation will be established for all levels of education, including pre-school education, in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. States/UTs will establish an independent, State-wide organisation called the State School Standards Authority (SSSA) in order to guarantee that all schools adhere to a set of minimal professional and quality standards. All schools must adhere to a minimum set of standards that the SSSA will establish based on fundamental criteria (namely, safety, security, fundamental infrastructure, number of teachers across subjects and grades, financial probity, and sound governance processes). The SCERT will develop the framework for these criteria after consulting with a variety of parties, particularly educators and educational institutions.

For extensive public oversight and accountability, transparent public self-disclosure of all the fundamental regulatory information, as prescribed by the SSSA, will be used. The SSSA will determine the dimensions

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[16] National education policy 2020 - Ministry of Education. Accessed August 26, 2023. https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English.pdf.

on which information must be self-disclosed and the format of disclosure in accordance with international best practises for setting standards for schools. On the aforementioned public website maintained by the SSSA as well as the schools' websites, this information must be made available, updated, and accurate by all schools.

The SSSA will decide on any complaints or grievances from stakeholders or others resulting from information that has been made public. Online feedback from a sample of randomly chosen students will be requested in order to ensure useful input on a regular basis. The use of information and communication technology will be used effectively to guarantee effectiveness and transparency in all SSSA work.

D. The SCERT, which will be revitalised as an institution, will be in charge of academic matters, including academic standards and curricula in the State (with close consultation and collaboration with the NCERT). Through extensive consultations with all stakeholders, the SCERT will develop a School Quality Assessment and Accreditation Framework (SQAAF). The SCERT will also oversee a "change management process" for the revitalization of CRCs, BRCs, and DIETs, which must transform these institutions' capabilities and work cultures in three years to transform them into thriving institutions of excellence. The Boards of Assessment/Examination in each State will be in charge of certifying students' competencies at the point of school graduation in the interim.

The evaluation process will be impartial and developmentally focused while maintaining accountability. To ensure a complete picture of the performance, it will have multiple sources of feedback and assessment (and won't just be connected simply, like with students' "marks"). The evaluation will acknowledge that outcomes like student educational attainment have a number of intervening variables and outside influences. It will also acknowledge the necessity of teamwork in education, especially at the school level. Such performance evaluation will serve as the basis for all individual promotions, recognition, and accountability. Each functionary will be accountable for making sure that the development, performance, and accountability system is operated within their sphere of influence in a highly ethical and methodical manner.[17]

In order to ensure that public-spirited private schools are encouraged and not in any way stifled, public and private schools (aside from those managed, aided, or controlled by the Central government) will be assessed and accredited using the same criteria, benchmarks, and procedures, with an emphasis on online and offline public disclosure and transparency. While guarding against arbitrary tuition fee increases, private philanthropic efforts for high-quality education will be encouraged, affirming the public-benefit nature of education. For both public and private schools, information about the number of classrooms, students, and teachers, the subjects taught, any fees, and overall student outcomes on standardised evaluations like the NAS and SAS would all be made publicly available on the school website and on the SSSA website.

The CBSE shall develop a framework in consultation with the MHRD for schools controlled, managed, or assisted by the Central government. As a "not-for-profit" organisation, all educational institutions will

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[17] Governance standard setting in schools - ministry of education. Accessed August 27, 2023. https://www.education.gov.in/shikshakparv/Infographics/Governance_Standard_Setting_in_Schools.pdf.

be held to the same audit and disclosure standards. Any profits, if any, will be put back into the education industry.[18]

The standard-setting/regulatory framework as well as the supporting systems for school regulation, accreditation, and governance must be reviewed in order to make improvements based on the knowledge and experiences gathered over the previous ten years. This review will work to ensure that all students, especially those from disadvantaged and underprivileged backgrounds, have universal, free, and required access to equitable, high-quality education starting at age 3 and continuing through grade 12 (higher secondary education). The overemphasis on inputs, the mechanistic nature of their physical and infrastructural requirements, and others will be changed to make them more responsive to the realities on the ground, such as those relating to land areas and room sizes, the viability of playgrounds in urban areas, etc.[19]

These requirements will be modified and loosened, giving each school the flexibility it needs to decide how best to meet its unique needs and constraints while maintaining safety, security, and a comfortable and effective learning environment.

The proposed new National Assessment Centre, PARAKH, will conduct a sample-based National Achievement Survey (NAS) of student learning levels for a regular "health check-up" of the overall system in appropriate cooperation with other governmental bodies, such as the NCERT, that may aid in assessment procedures as well as data analysis. Both government and private schools will have students participate in the assessment. States will also be urged to carry out their own State Assessment Surveys (SAS) based on census data, the results of which will only be used for research, public disclosure by schools of their overall and anonymized student outcomes, and ongoing reform of the educational system. NCERT may carry on as usual up until the proposed new National Assessment Centre, PARAKH, is established.[20]

In particular, girl children's safety and rights, as well as the many challenging issues that teenagers face, need to be carefully considered. Clear, safe, and effective reporting and due process procedures must be in place for any violations of children's or adolescents' rights or safety, such as substance or drug abuse, as well as for forms of discrimination and harassment, including violence. It will be given top priority to create these systems that are efficient, timely, and well-known to all students.

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[18] *ibid*

[19] *ibid*

[20] Pti. "India's First National Assessment Regulator to Bring Uniformity across School Boards: Educational Testing Service CEO." The Hindu, February 26, 2023. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/indias-first-national-assessment-regulator-to-bring-uniformity-across-school-boards-educational-testing-service-ceo/article66556616.ece.

The SCERTs have been appointed as the SSSA by Punjab and Sikkim. The State School Examination Board has been named the SSSA for Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Uttarakhand.[21] In order to facilitate and regulate the assessment and accreditation of public and private schools using the same standards and benchmarks, JKSCERT is expected to establish SSSA and SQAAF as soon as possible.[22]

Approximately 50% of Indian school-age children are unable to read and comprehend a simple text by Standard 5 (age 10), according to an ASER Education Report from 2018.[23] According to a different education report, India's economically disadvantaged girls make up 30% of the population and lack of viable infrastructure prevents them from attending school. The definition of the infrastructure needs and accessibility for schools is greatly influenced by accreditation.

Building on the RTE, the NEP 2020 requires schools to publish accreditation information on public websites; state departments and authorities will be given a list of requirements to meet, and their capacity to do so will be made public; this will enhance the system's accountability.

The proposed measures to accredit schools can help monitor and build an ecosystem of transparency and accountability to ensure quality education in even the most remote areas of the country by introducing minimum quality standards for schools to follow. Additionally, it will help in establishing these minimal standards for educational quality, which will benefit schools, states, communities, and their respective stakeholders. However, it is yet to see whether implementation challenges such as Resources, Accessibility and Potential for uptake will be fulfilled.

Conclusion

The National Education Policy (NEP) stands as a significant achievement in our country's educational landscape. It takes inspiration from past policies while addressing crucial aspects of school education. By highlighting the importance of cluster schools and the implementation of Standard Setting and Accreditation of schools (SSSA), the NEP aims to bring about a comprehensive transformation that will be advantageous for students, educators, and the entire education system.

The NEP acknowledges the need to build upon past successes and lessons while also tackling their limitations. It recognizes the significance of a well-rounded education, encompassing both cognitive and non-cognitive skills, for the holistic development of students. Through the integration of global best

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[21] "School Governance and the Need for the State School Standards Authority." Central Square Foundation, April 28, 2022. https://www.centralsquarefoundation.org/articles/school-governance-and-the-need-for-the-state-school-standards-authority.

[22] "Department of Education,Government of Jammu and Kashmir ,India." Department of Education,Government of Jammu and Kashmir ,India. Accessed August 27, 2023. http://www.jkeducation.gov.in/.

[23] ASER: Annual status of education report. Accessed August 27, 2023. https://img.asercentre.org/docs/ASER%202018/Release%20Material/aser2018nationalfindingsppt.pdf.

practices and the latest research, the NEP aims to align our education system with international standards, preparing students to excel in a highly interconnected and competitive world.

An essential component of the NEP is the introduction of cluster schools. By forming groups of schools into clusters, the policy aims to encourage cooperation and the sharing of resources among institutions. This approach guarantees that schools, particularly those in remote or resource-constrained areas, can benefit from the combined expertise and facilities within the cluster. Moreover, it fosters collaboration among teachers, facilitating the exchange of effective teaching methods and professional growth.

Additionally, the NEP places significant emphasis on the process of Standard Setting and Accreditation of schools (SSSA) as a means of ensuring quality education. It acknowledges that well-defined standards and accreditation processes are crucial to ensure that schools meet established criteria for quality, infrastructure, and teaching practices. SSSA serves not only to identify areas that require improvement but also to reward and recognize schools that excel, promoting a culture of continuous enhancement and accountability.

Through these initiatives, the NEP strives to establish a more inclusive and equitable education system. It acknowledges the necessity of catering to diverse student needs, fostering interdisciplinary learning, and providing flexibility in curriculum options. By embracing technology and digital resources, the NEP also aims to enhance access to quality education and bridge the digital divide, particularly in marginalised communities.

In conclusion, the National Education Policy outlines a comprehensive vision for the future of school education in our nation. By building upon past policies, introducing cluster schools, and emphasising Standard Setting and Accreditation of schools, the NEP aspires to develop an education system that nurtures every child's potential, encourages innovation and critical thinking, and readies them to be responsible and active citizens of the future. The realisation of the NEP's goals hinges on effective implementation, collaborative efforts among stakeholders, and a sustained commitment to principles of fairness, quality, and lifelong learning.