

talented and meritorious students from all SEDGs on a larger scale, especially at the secondary stage of education, to facilitate their entry into higher education.

6.17. Under the aegis of the Ministry of Defence, State Governments may encourage opening NCC wings in their secondary and higher secondary schools, including those located in tribal dominated areas. This will enable harnessing of the natural talent and unique potential of students, which in turn would help them to aspire to a successful career in the defence forces.

6.18. All scholarships and other opportunities and schemes available to students from SEDGs will be coordinated and announced by a single agency and website to ensure that all students are aware of, and may apply in a simplified manner on such a 'single window system', as per eligibility.

6.19. All the above policies and measures are absolutely critical to attaining full inclusion and equity for all SEDGs - but they are not sufficient. What is also required is a change in school culture. All participants in the school education system, including teachers, principals, administrators, counsellors, and students, will be sensitized to the requirements of all students, the notions of inclusion and equity, and the respect, dignity, and privacy of all persons. Such an educational culture will provide the best pathway to help students become empowered individuals who, in turn, will enable society to transform into one that is responsible towards its most vulnerable citizens. Inclusion and equity will become a key aspect of teacher education (and training for all leadership, administrative, and other positions in schools); efforts will be made to recruit more high-quality teachers and leaders from SEDGs in order to bring in excellent role models for all students.

6.20. Students will be sensitized through this new school culture, brought in by teachers, trained social workers and counsellors as well as through corresponding changes to bring in an inclusive school curriculum. The school curriculum will include, early on, material on human values such as respect for all persons, empathy, tolerance, human rights, gender equality, non-violence, global citizenship, inclusion, and equity. It would also include more detailed knowledge of various cultures, religions, languages, gender identities, etc. to sensitize and develop respect for diversity. Any biases and stereotypes in school curriculum will be removed, and more material will be included that is relevant and relatable to all communities.

7. Efficient Resourcing and Effective Governance through School Complexes/Clusters

7.1. While the establishment of primary schools in every habitation across the country-driven by the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), now subsumed under the Samagra Shiksha Scheme and other important efforts across the States - has helped to ensure near-universal access to primary schools, it has also led to the development of numerous very small schools. According to U-DISE 2016–17 data, nearly 28% of India's public primary schools and 14.8% of India's upper primary schools have less than 30 students. The average number of students per grade in the elementary schooling system (primary and upper primary, i.e., Grades 1–8) is about 14, with a notable proportion having below 6; during the year 2016–17, there were 1,08,017 single-teacher schools, the majority of them (85743) being primary schools serving Grades 1–5.

7.2. These small school sizes have rendered it economically suboptimal and operationally complex to run good schools, in terms of deployment of teachers as well as the provision of critical physical resources. Teachers often teach multiple grades at a time, and teach multiple subjects, including subjects in which they may have no prior background; key areas such as music, arts, and sports are too often simply not taught; and physical resources, such as lab and sports equipment and library books, are simply not available across schools.

7.3. The isolation of small schools also has a negative effect on education and the teaching-learning process. Teachers function best in communities and teams, and so do students. Small schools also present a systemic challenge for governance and management. The geographical dispersion, challenging access conditions, and the very large numbers of schools make it difficult to reach all schools equally. Administrative structures have not been aligned with the increases in the number of school or with the unified structure of the Samagra Shiksha Scheme.

National Education Policy 2020

7.4. Although consolidation of schools is an option that is often discussed, it must be carried out very judiciously, and only when it is ensured that there is no impact on access. Such measures are nevertheless likely to result only in limited consolidation, and would not solve the overall structural problem and challenges presented by the large numbers of small schools.

7.5. These challenges will, by 2025, be addressed by State/UT governments by adopting innovative mechanisms to group or rationalize schools. The objective behind this intervention would be to ensure that every school has: (a) adequate number of counsellors/trained social workers and teachers (shared or otherwise) for teaching all subjects including art, music science, sports, languages, vocational subjects, etc; (b) adequate resources (shared or otherwise), such as a library, science labs, computer labs, skill labs, playgrounds, sports equipment and facilities, etc.; (c) a sense of community is built to overcome the isolation of teachers, students, and schools, through joint professional development programmes, sharing of teaching-learning content, joint content development, holding joint activities such as art and science exhibitions, sports meets, quizzes and debates, and fairs; (d) cooperation and support across schools for the education of children with disabilities; and (e) improved governance of the schooling system by devolving all finer decisions, to Principals, teachers, and other stakeholders within each group of schools and treating such a group of schools, which range from the foundational stage through the secondary stage, as an integrated semi-autonomous unit.

7.6. One possible mechanism for accomplishing the above would be the establishment of a grouping structure called the school complex, consisting of one secondary school together with all other schools offering lower grades in its neighbourhood including Anganwadis, in a radius of five to ten kilometers. This suggestion was first made by the Education Commission (1964–66) but was left unimplemented. This Policy strongly endorses the idea of the school complex/cluster, wherever possible. The aim of the school complex/cluster will be greater resource efficiency and more effective functioning, coordination, leadership, governance, and management of schools in the cluster.

7.7. The establishment of school complexes/clusters and the sharing of resources across complexes will have a number of other benefits as a consequence, such as improved support for children with disabilities, more topic-centred clubs and academic/sports/arts/crafts events across school complexes, better incorporation of art, music, language, vocational subjects, physical education, and other subjects in the classroom through the sharing of teachers in these subjects including use of ICT tools to conduct virtual classes, better student support, enrolment, attendance, and performance through the sharing of social workers and counsellors, and School Complex Management Committees (rather than simply School Management Committees) for more robust and improved governance, monitoring, oversight, innovations, and initiatives by local stakeholders. Building such larger communities of schools, school leaders, teachers, students, supporting staff, parents, and local citizens would energize and empower the schooling system, and in a resource-efficient manner.

7.8. The governance of schools will also improve and become far more efficient with school complexes/clusters. First, the DSE will devolve authority to the school complex/cluster, which will act as a semi-autonomous unit. The District Education Officer (DEO) and the Block Education Officers (BEO) will interact primarily with each school complex/cluster as a single unit and facilitate its work. The complex itself will perform certain tasks delegated by the DSE and will deal with the individual schools within it. The school complex/cluster will be given significant autonomy by the DSE to innovate towards providing integrated education and to experiment with pedagogies, curriculum, etc., while adhering to the National Curricular Framework (NCF) and State Curricular Framework (SCF). Under this organization, schools will gain in strength, will be able to exercise greater freedom, and will contribute towards making the complex more innovative and responsive. Meanwhile, the DSE will be able to focus on the aggregate level goals that need to be achieved, improving overall system effectiveness.

7.9. The culture of working to a plan, both short-term and long-term ones, will be developed through such complexes/clusters. Schools will develop their plans (SDPs) with the involvement of their SMCs. These plans will then become the basis for the creation of School Complex/Cluster Development Plans (SCDPs). The SCDP will also involve the plans of all other institutions

associated with the school complex, such as vocational education institutions, and will be created by the principals and teachers of the school complex with the involvement of the SCMC and will be made available publicly. The plans will include human resources, learning resources, physical resources and infrastructure, improvement initiatives, financial resources, school culture initiatives, teacher development plans, and educational outcomes. It will detail the efforts to leverage the teachers and students across the school complex to develop vibrant learning communities. The SDP and SCDP will be the primary mechanism to align all stakeholders of the school, including the DSE. The SMC and SCMC will use the SDP and SCDP for oversight of the functioning and direction of the school and will assist in the execution of these plans. The DSE, through its relevant official, e.g., the BEO, will endorse and confirm the SCDP of each school complex. It will then provide the resources (financial, human, physical, etc.) necessary to achieve the SCDPs, both short-term (1-year) and long-term (3-5 years). It will also provide all other relevant support to the school complexes to achieve the educational outcomes. The DSE and the SCERT may share specific norms (e.g., financial, staffing, process) and frameworks for development of the SDP and SCDP with all schools, which may be revised periodically.

7.10. To further enhance cooperation and positive synergy among schools, including between public and private schools, the twinning/pairing of one public school with one private school will be adopted across the country, so that such paired schools may meet/interact with each other, learn from each other, and also share resources, if possible. Best practices of private schools will be documented, shared, and institutionalized in public schools, and vice versa, where possible.

7.11. Every State will be encouraged to strengthen existing or establish “Bal Bhavans” where children of all ages can visit once a week (e.g., on weekends) or more often, as a special daytime boarding school, to partake in art-related, career-related, and play-related activities. Such Bal Bhavans may be incorporated as a part of school complexes/clusters if possible.

7.12. The school should be a point of celebration and honour for the whole community. The dignity of the school as an institution should be restored and important dates, such as the foundation day of the school, will be celebrated along with the community and the list of important alumni may be displayed and honoured. Furthermore, the un-utilized capacity of school infrastructure could be used to promote social, intellectual, and volunteer activities for the community and to promote social cohesion during non-teaching / schooling hours and may be used as a “Samajik Chetna Kendra”.

8. Standard-setting and Accreditation for School Education

8.1. The goal of the school education regulatory system must be to continually improve educational outcomes; it must not overly restrict schools, prevent innovation, or demoralize teachers, principals, and students. All in all, regulation must aim to empower schools and teachers with trust, enabling them to strive for excellence and perform at their very best, while ensuring the integrity of the system through the enforcement of complete transparency and full public disclosure of all finances, procedures, and educational outcomes.

8.2. At present, all main functions of governance and regulation of the school education system - namely, the provision of public education, the regulation of education institutions, and policymaking - are handled by a single body, i.e., the Department of School Education or its arms. This leads to conflict of interests and excessive centralized concentration of power; it also leads to ineffective management of the school system, as efforts towards quality educational provision are often diluted by the focus on the other roles, particularly regulation, that the Departments of School Education also perform.

8.3. The current regulatory regime also has not been able to curb the commercialization and economic exploitation of parents by many for-profit private schools, yet at the same time it has all too often inadvertently discouraged public-spirited private/philanthropic schools. There has been far too much asymmetry between the regulatory approaches to public and private schools, even though the goals of both types of schools should be the same: to provide quality education.

National Education Policy 2020

8.4. The public education system is the foundation of a vibrant democratic society, and the way it is run must be transformed and invigorated in order to achieve the highest levels of educational outcomes for the nation. At the same time, the private/philanthropic school sector must also be encouraged and enabled to play a significant and beneficial role.

8.5. The key principles and recommendations of this Policy regarding the State school education system, the independent responsibilities within that system, and the approach to its regulation are as follows:

- (a) The Department of School Education, which is the apex state-level body in school education, will be responsible for 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, in order to ensure due focus on the improvement of public schools and to eliminate conflict of interests.
- (b) The educational operations and service provision for the public schooling system of the whole State will be handled by the Directorate of School Education (including the offices of the DEO and BEO, etc.); it will work independently to implement policies regarding educational operations and provision.
- (c) An effective quality self-regulation or accreditation system will be instituted for all stages of education including pre-school education - private, public, and philanthropic - to ensure compliance with essential quality standards. To ensure that all schools follow certain minimal professional and quality standards, States/UTs will set up an independent, State-wide, body called the State School Standards Authority (SSSA). The SSSA will establish a minimal set of standards based on basic parameters (namely, safety, security, basic infrastructure, number of teachers across subjects and grades, financial probity, and sound processes of governance), which shall be followed by all schools. The framework for these parameters will be created by the SCERT in consultation with various stakeholders, especially teachers and schools.

Transparent public self-disclosure of all the basic regulatory information, as laid down by the SSSA, will be used extensively for public oversight and accountability. The dimensions on which information has to be self-disclosed, and the format of disclosure will be decided by the SSSA in accordance with global best practices for standard-setting for schools. This information will have to be made available and kept updated and accurate by all schools, on the aforementioned public website maintained by the SSSA and on the schools' websites. Any complaints or grievances from stakeholders or others arising out of the information placed in the public domain shall be adjudicated by the SSSA. Feedback from randomly selected students will be solicited online to ensure valuable input at regular intervals. Technology will be employed suitably to ensure efficiency and transparency in all work of the SSSA. This will bring down significantly the heavy load of regulatory mandates currently borne by schools.

- (d) Academic matters, including academic standards and curricula in the State will be led by the SCERT (with close consultation and collaboration with the NCERT), which will be reinvigorated as an institution. The SCERT will develop a School Quality Assessment and Accreditation Framework (SQAAF) through wide consultations with all stakeholders. The SCERT will also lead a "change management process" for the reinvigoration of CRCs, BRCs, and DIETs which must change the capacity and work culture of these institutions in 3 years, developing them into vibrant institutions of excellence. Meanwhile, certification of competencies of students at the school-leaving stage will be handled by the Boards of Assessment/Examination in each State.

8.6. The culture, structures, and systems that empower and provide adequate resources to schools, institutions, teachers, officials, communities, and other stakeholders, will also build concomitant accountability. Each stakeholder and participant of the education system will be accountable to perform their role with the highest level of integrity, full commitment, and exemplary work ethic.

Each role of the system will have explicitly articulated role expectations and rigorous assessment of their performance vis-à-vis these expectations. The assessment system will be objective and developmentally oriented, while ensuring accountability. It will have multiple sources of feedback and assessment, to ensure a full view of the performance (and will not just be linked simplistically, e.g., to 'marks' of students). The assessment will recognize that outcomes such as educational attainment of students have multiple intervening variables and extraneous influences. It will also recognize that education requires teamwork, particularly at the level of the school. Promotion, recognition, and accountability of all individuals will be based on such performance assessment. All functionaries will be responsible to ensure that this development, performance, and accountability system is run with high integrity, and systematically, within their span of control.

8.7. Public and private schools (except the schools that are managed/aided/controlled by the Central government) will be assessed and accredited on the same criteria, benchmarks, and processes, emphasizing online and offline public disclosure and transparency, so as to ensure that public-spirited private schools are encouraged and not stifled in any way. Private philanthropic efforts for quality education will be encouraged - thereby affirming the public-good nature of education - while protecting parents and communities from arbitrary increases in tuition fees. Public disclosure on the school website and on the SSSA website - for both public and private schools - would include (at the very least) information on the numbers of classrooms, students, and teachers, subjects taught, any fees, and overall student outcomes on standardized evaluations such as the NAS and SAS. For schools controlled/managed/aided by the Central government, the CBSE in consultation with the MHRD shall prepare a framework. All the education institutions will be held to similar standards of audit and disclosure as a 'not-for-profit' entity. Surpluses, if any, will be reinvested in the educational sector.

8.8. The standard-setting/regulatory framework and the facilitating systems for school regulation, accreditation, and governance shall be reviewed to enable improvements on the basis of the learnings and experiences gained in the last decade. This review will aim to ensure that all students, particularly students from underprivileged and disadvantaged sections, shall have universal, free and compulsory access to high-quality and equitable schooling from early childhood care and education (age 3 onwards) through higher secondary education (i.e., until Grade 12). The overemphasis on inputs, and the mechanistic nature of their specifications – physical and infrastructural – will be changed and requirements made more responsive to realities on the ground, e.g., regarding land areas and room sizes, practicalities of playgrounds in urban areas, etc. These mandates will be adjusted and loosened, leaving suitable flexibility for each school to make its own decisions based on local needs and constraints, while ensuring safety, security, and a pleasant and productive learning space. Educational outcomes and the transparent disclosure of all financial, academic, and operational matters will be given due importance and will be incorporated suitably in the assessment of schools. This will further improve India's progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) of ensuring free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education for all children.

8.9. The aim of the public-school education system will be to impart the highest quality education so that it becomes the most attractive option for parents from all walks of life for educating their children.

8.10. For a periodic 'health check-up' of the overall system, a sample-based National Achievement Survey (NAS) of student learning levels will be carried out by the proposed new National Assessment Centre, PARAKH with suitable cooperation with other governmental bodies- such as the NCERT– that may assist in assessment procedures as well as data analysis. The assessment will cover students across government as well as private schools. States will also be encouraged to conduct their own census-based State Assessment Survey (SAS), the results of which will be used only for developmental purposes, public disclosure by schools of their overall and anonymized student outcomes, and for continuous improvement of the school education system. Until the establishment of the proposed new National Assessment Centre, PARAKH, NCERT may continue to carry out NAS.

8.11. Finally, the children and adolescents enrolled in schools must not be forgotten in this whole process; after all, the school system is designed for them. Careful attention must be paid to their safety and rights- particularly girl children - and the various difficult issues faced by adolescents, such as substance or drug abuse and forms of discrimination and harassment including violence, with clear, safe, and efficient mechanisms for reporting and for due process on any infractions against children's/adolescents' rights or safety. The development of such mechanisms that are effective, timely, and well-known to all students will be accorded high priority.

Part II. HIGHER EDUCATION

9. Quality Universities and Colleges: A New and Forward-looking Vision for India's Higher Education System

9.1. Higher education plays an extremely important role in promoting human as well as societal well-being and in developing India as envisioned in its Constitution - a democratic, just, socially-conscious, cultured, and humane nation upholding liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice for all. Higher education significantly contributes towards sustainable livelihoods and economic development of the nation. As India moves towards becoming a knowledge economy and society, more and more young Indians are likely to aspire for higher education.

9.1.1. Given the 21st century requirements, quality higher education must aim to develop good, thoughtful, well-rounded, and creative individuals. It must enable an individual to study one or more specialized areas of interest at a deep level, and also develop character, ethical and Constitutional values, intellectual curiosity, scientific temper, creativity, spirit of service, and 21st century capabilities across a range of disciplines including sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities, languages, as well as professional, technical, and vocational subjects. A quality higher education must enable personal accomplishment and enlightenment, constructive public engagement, and productive contribution to the society. It must prepare students for more meaningful and satisfying lives and work roles and enable economic independence.

9.1.2. For the purpose of developing holistic individuals, it is essential that an identified set of skills and values will be incorporated at each stage of learning, from pre-school to higher education.

9.1.3. At the societal level, higher education must enable the development of an enlightened, socially conscious, knowledgeable, and skilled nation that can find and implement robust solutions to its own problems. Higher education must form the basis for knowledge creation and innovation thereby contributing to a growing national economy. The purpose of quality higher education is, therefore, more than the creation of greater opportunities for individual employment. It represents the key to more vibrant, socially engaged, cooperative communities and a happier, cohesive, cultured, productive, innovative, progressive, and prosperous nation.

9.2. Some of the major problems currently faced by the higher education system in India include:

- (a) a severely fragmented higher educational ecosystem;
- (b) less emphasis on the development of cognitive skills and learning outcomes;
- (c) a rigid separation of disciplines, with early specialisation and streaming of students into narrow areas of study;
- (d) limited access particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, with few HEIs that teach in local languages
- (e) limited teacher and institutional autonomy;
- (f) inadequate mechanisms for merit-based career management and progression of faculty and institutional leaders;
- (g) lesser emphasis on research at most universities and colleges, and lack of competitive peer-reviewed research funding across disciplines;
- (h) suboptimal governance and leadership of HEIs;
- (i) an ineffective regulatory system; and
- (j) large affiliating universities resulting in low standards of undergraduate education.

9.3. This policy envisions a complete overhaul and re-energising of the higher education system to overcome these challenges and thereby deliver high-quality higher education, with equity and inclusion. The policy's vision includes the following key changes to the current system:

- (a) moving towards a higher educational system consisting of large, multidisciplinary universities and colleges, with at least one in or near every district, and with more HEIs across India that offer medium of instruction or programmes in local/Indian languages;
- (b) moving towards a more multidisciplinary undergraduate education;
- (c) moving towards faculty and institutional autonomy;
- (d) revamping curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and student support for enhanced student experiences;
- (e) reaffirming the integrity of faculty and institutional leadership positions through merit-appointments and career progression based on teaching, research, and service;
- (f) establishment of a National Research Foundation to fund outstanding peer-reviewed research and to actively seed research in universities and colleges;
- (g) governance of HEIs by high qualified independent boards having academic and administrative autonomy;
- (h) "light but tight" regulation by a single regulator for higher education;
- (i) increased access, equity, and inclusion through a range of measures, including greater opportunities for outstanding public education; scholarships by private/philanthropic universities for disadvantaged and underprivileged students; online education, and Open Distance Learning (ODL); and all infrastructure and learning materials accessible and available to learners with disabilities.

10. Institutional Restructuring and Consolidation

10.1. The main thrust of this policy regarding higher education is to end the fragmentation of higher education by transforming higher education institutions into large multidisciplinary universities, colleges, and HEI clusters/Knowledge Hubs, each of which will aim to have 3,000 or more students. This would help build vibrant communities of scholars and peers, break down harmful silos, enable students to become well-rounded across disciplines including artistic, creative, and analytic subjects as well as sports, develop active research communities across disciplines including cross-disciplinary research, and increase resource efficiency, both material and human, across higher education.

10.2. Moving to large multidisciplinary universities and HEI clusters is thus the highest recommendation of this policy regarding the structure of higher education. The ancient Indian universities Takshashila, Nalanda, Vallabhi, and Vikramshila, which had thousands of students from India and the world studying in vibrant multidisciplinary environments, amply demonstrated the type of great success that large multidisciplinary research and teaching universities could bring. India urgently needs to bring back this great Indian tradition to create well-rounded and innovative individuals, and which is already transforming other countries educationally and economically.

10.3. This vision of higher education will require, in particular, a new conceptual perception/understanding for what constitutes a higher education institution (HEI), i.e., a university or a college. A university will mean a multidisciplinary institution of higher learning that offers undergraduate and graduate programmes, with high quality teaching, research, and community engagement. The definition of university will thus allow a spectrum of institutions that range from those that place equal emphasis on teaching and research i.e., Research-intensive Universities, those that place greater emphasis on teaching but still conduct significant research i.e. Teaching-intensive Universities. Meanwhile, an Autonomous degree-granting College (AC) will refer to a large multidisciplinary institution of higher learning that grants undergraduate degrees and is primarily focused on undergraduate teaching though it would not be restricted to that and it need not be restricted to that and it would generally be smaller than a typical university.

10.4. A stage-wise mechanism for granting graded autonomy to colleges, through a transparent system of graded accreditation, will be established. Colleges will be encouraged, mentored, supported, and incentivized to gradually attain the minimum benchmarks required for each level of