Teacher Truancy

According to the Economic Survey 2009-10, during the decade after the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA, primary education for all) programme was initiated in 1999, the government has promoted 309,727 new schools, constructed 254,935 school buildings, 1.16 million new classrooms, 190,961 drinking water facilities, and 347,857 toilets. Alas, bricks and mortar are insufficient for developing the reading, writing and math skills of children. This massive initiative to provide primary education to all has failed because in many rural schools there is a severe deficiency of teachers present in classrooms and teaching.  
Study after study has shown that teacher truancy is very high in schools throughout rural India. The most recent of them is the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2010, published by the Mumbai-based NGO Pratham, which indicates that more than a third of the teachers were absent on the day its survey teams visited rural primary schools.  
Pratham has been conducting ASER surveys since 2005 and has found that teacher absenteeism is rising steadily. The percentage of teacher attendance on the day of their surveyors visit was 73.7 in 2007, 69.2 percent in 2009 and 63.4 percent in 2010. Despite the now widely documented evidence of teacher absenteeism, there is little action by the education departments of state governments to curtail or eliminate the phenomenon.

Survey Results

Why is teacher truancy so high and rising? The simple explanation is that absenteeism doesnt cost teachers their jobs or adversely affect promotions. Teacher truancy has also proliferated because education departments, village communities and parents are indifferent to it. Perhaps, many individuals who are hired as teachers dont really like teaching or teaching in rural areas. Perhaps some teachers face problems in commuting to the village or feel their salaries are too low. A proactive community concerned about the education of children should be able to ascertain the causes and address them. Studies show that when parents get involved with the functioning of a school, the learning outcomes of children improve automatically.  
The power structure of Indias villages is such that children become hapless victims when the education system fails to deliver. There is too much corruption in state and local education departments, with teachers jobs often purchased by bribing local politicians. In such an environment, job retention and promotions are dependent on bribe amounts and not on the learning outcomes and skills development of students. Perhaps thats the reason why enrolments in private schools which levy fees are rising, since they provide better quality education. According to ASER 2010, the reading and math ability of children in private rural schools is about eight-ten percentage points higher than of children in government schools.  
Unfortunately, since less than a quarter of rural primary school-going children are in the private sector, any significant improvement in national learning outcomes will have to happen in government schools. In many countries, teacher remuneration is linked to childrens learning outcomes and progress. Its high time the Union human resource development ministry introduces such policies to abate the unacceptable incidence of teacher truancy in the countrys government schools.