**1.1 WHAT IS A BAD SCHOOL**

There seems to be an un-usual pandemic of poor academic performance in Urdu medium schools in Delhi. The number of ***failing schools***has increased gradually. Much of this may be attributed to the lack of accountability of the principal/HOI and the administrators who use to hegemonies the schools, or lack of interest for improvement on the part of our students’ learning skill or both. There may have been some other factors too.

The scenario attracts our contemplation for reformation to explore and identify the ways and means in order to counter the odds that are being faced by these schools. As we are aware of the fact by our experience that no school fails from one day to the next; the reasons for school failure must have been manifested for some time. The quarry remains staring at us for our failure in taking remedial measures at the initial stage before the rot started.

In recent times a school’s failure is defined by the students’ test/examination results, i.e. how many students are below grade level. The management of the school is considered to be serious only when it identifies and admits about the failing of the school at the earliest stage. A rapid turn-around is possible only when the problems are first identified and a remedial action is taken as early as possible. But, once it is allowed to fester, the turn-around is not easy to take place rather it is rarely achieved. Every ***falling school*** exhibitsthe warning signs that require action on the part of educators of the concerned school to immediately start the remedial action.

***Warning signs;***

1. Absence of head of school for a considerable time due to any reason.
2. The school’s principal fail to include the staff members in the process of strategic planning.
3. The principal shows or behave in authoritarian style of leadership. The teachers feel apprehensive to approach and talk to him.
4. The school principal is afraid of confrontation and avoids making decisions on issues that are, or appear to be controversial.
5. In-effective teachers are tolerated and no action is taken against them.
6. It is considered to be the duty of principal to visit classrooms in order to gauge the quality of teaching. If the principal fail to perform his duty, constructive feedback may not be provided to the teachers.
7. Students and the teachers who are good performers require appreciation for their motivation and encouragement. The act may generate positive energy to do more quality work.
8. When students fail to respect their teacher, classroom gets noisy and out of control. Naturally quality of teaching-learning process gets plunged.
9. Teachers have low academic and behavioral expectations of their students.
10. Teachers have a high rate of high rate of absenteeism, both excused and un-excused.
11. Teachers and the staff exhibit a low level of confidence, and rarely arrive more than a few minutes before their students in the morning or stay more than a few minutes after their students have been dismissed for the day.
12. Teachers shout at their students as a means of maintain order and discipline in the classroom.
13. Teachers fail or casual in making contact with their parents.
14. Teachers are required to revive the knowledge.
15. Lesson plans are to be prepared always in advance. Teaching without it may not draw the desired results.
16. If teachers wear inappropriate attire, it attracts disrespect from the students.

**Warning signs directly related to school’s culture**

1. The school building is in bad shape and in a poor state of cleanliness, needs a repair or an urgent repair, both indoors and outdoors.
2. There is poor lightning in the hallways and classrooms.
3. The school is noisy during the school hours due to reasons of traffic or otherwise.
4. Students roaming outside the classroom without purpose or permission.
5. If there is high rate of absenteeism, excused and un-excused both.
6. There is little regard for authority of principal of teachers.

**Warning signs associated with strategic planning**

1. The school’s leadership does not understand the value of **strategic planning** that is a must for success of the school.
2. The school either does not have a strategic plan or no one can remember when the plan was last discussed.
3. The school’s staff and teachers do not know the school’s mission and they do not have a vision for the future.
4. The school’s principal does not pay any attention to the budget and has little or understanding of how it was developed or has to be developed.

**Warning signs related to a school’s communication network.**

1. There is no formal mechanism for teachers to either collaborate on best practices or discuss school’s wide concerns.
2. There are few or no staff meetings.
3. Staff meetings are disorganized and used by the staff as a time to complain about the school.
4. The school does not keep the parents informed through news letters or other forms of communications about what is happening in the school.
5. Parents are not expected to meet with teachers face-to-face at least twice in a month to discuss their children’s overall progress.
6. The school fails to provide parents with ample time left (at least 3 or 4 months) that their children may be at risk of academic failure.

**Warning signs related to the use of student performance data**

1. School leaders and staff do not use data to support their instructional strategies.
2. Teachers do not understand the value or proper use of formative evaluations or summative assessments.
3. There is limited or no use of bench mark testing to identify each student’s academic starting point for the school year and his or her progress throughout the year.
4. Teachers cannot determine if a child has made progress or the extent of that progress.
5. The school is using assessments to measure academic progress but teachers do not know how to interpret the associated diagnostic tool.

**Other important warning signs**

1. The teachers, who are teaching in the school, don’t admit their children because the know the school is not worthy or good.
2. Existence of groupism or sycophancy rule.
3. Basic amenities like sports equipments, labs and its equipments, potable water are in scarcity.
4. The students are taught what to think and not “how to think”.
5. Marks take the precedence and not the talent in any other field.
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**Conclusion**

* a school’s failure should not be seen as surprising or inevitable.
* The warning signs are neither difficult to recognize nor difficult to correct.
* The biggest question facing the community is the willingness of the management to realize the failing signs and act accordingly.
* There are no excuses for school failure.
* Waiting until the end of academic year or consequent years to realize that the school has failed simply means that we have consciously allowed our children to be left behind.

**Remedial steps to check a failing school**

There is magic bullet to turn around the failing schools. A series of remedial steps need to be taken. Each step’s impact depends and builds on the previous step in the sequence, because the later determines the access to good leaders, teachers and students.

1. **Don’t improve the teaching first**

This is a very common mistake. It is not worthwhile to improve teaching while still struggling badly behaving students or having a poor head of school in charge. We cannot expect teachers to sort out all the problems themselves—we need to create right environment first.

1. **Do improve governance, leadership, and structure first**

Otherwise we are putting great teachers in a position where they fail—they will waste time doing or managing the wrong things**.**

1. **Don’t reduce class sizes**

While reducing class size works, it is not the best use of reduces. It is expensive and we can create the same impact by improving students’ motivation and behavior, which fewer resources. Class size of 30 may perform well as the class size of 15. Hence there is no use of reducing the class size.

1. **do improve students’ behavior and motivation level**

The best way to create the right environment for good teachers is to improve students’ behavior and motivate them. Conversely we will find that the fastest way to do this is to exclude poorly behaved students. Move these poorly behaving students into another pathway, so that they can be managed differently and reintegrated into the main pathway once their behavior is improved.

1. **Avoid the zero tolerance policy**

Schools which tried to come down hard on poor behavior with a “zero tolerance” policy to bring positive impact may get success but for a short term. Students may revolt and even indulge in riots.

1. Keep the students from the nursery to class X under the cultural umbrella. In this way the, school leaders can create the right culture early on and ensure that poor behavior never develops. It also makes teaching at senior secondary level much easier.
2. **No super head policy**

Avoid to bring a super head from other successful institutions. It didn’t create the right foundations for sustainable long term improvement. Exam results may dip after they left.

1. **Do improve all your groups**

Although schools can improve short term performance by cutting and reallocating resources, they will not create sustainable improvement unless they invest in all age groups and subjects.

1. **Don’t expect spending more money to solve your school’s problem any faster**

More resources can help to overcome specific challenges, such as attracting good leaders and teachers, but what matters the most to the overall speed of improvement is the right changes in the right order.

But at the same time, don’t expect to improve without spending more, at least in the short term. To improve students’ learning, schools must have the basic resources they need to improve students’ behavior, pay higher salaries to attract good teachers, and employ staff to manage parents so teachers can spend more time at academic matters.

**Conclusion**

**First:** we need to create the right environment before improving teaching standards. Great teaching is wasted without the right governance, leadership and structure with well behaved students.

**Second:** the most significant improvement occurs when the schools change their students by excluding poor behavior students by creating multiple pathways for students with differing needs and keeping students of Nursery to X separate.

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