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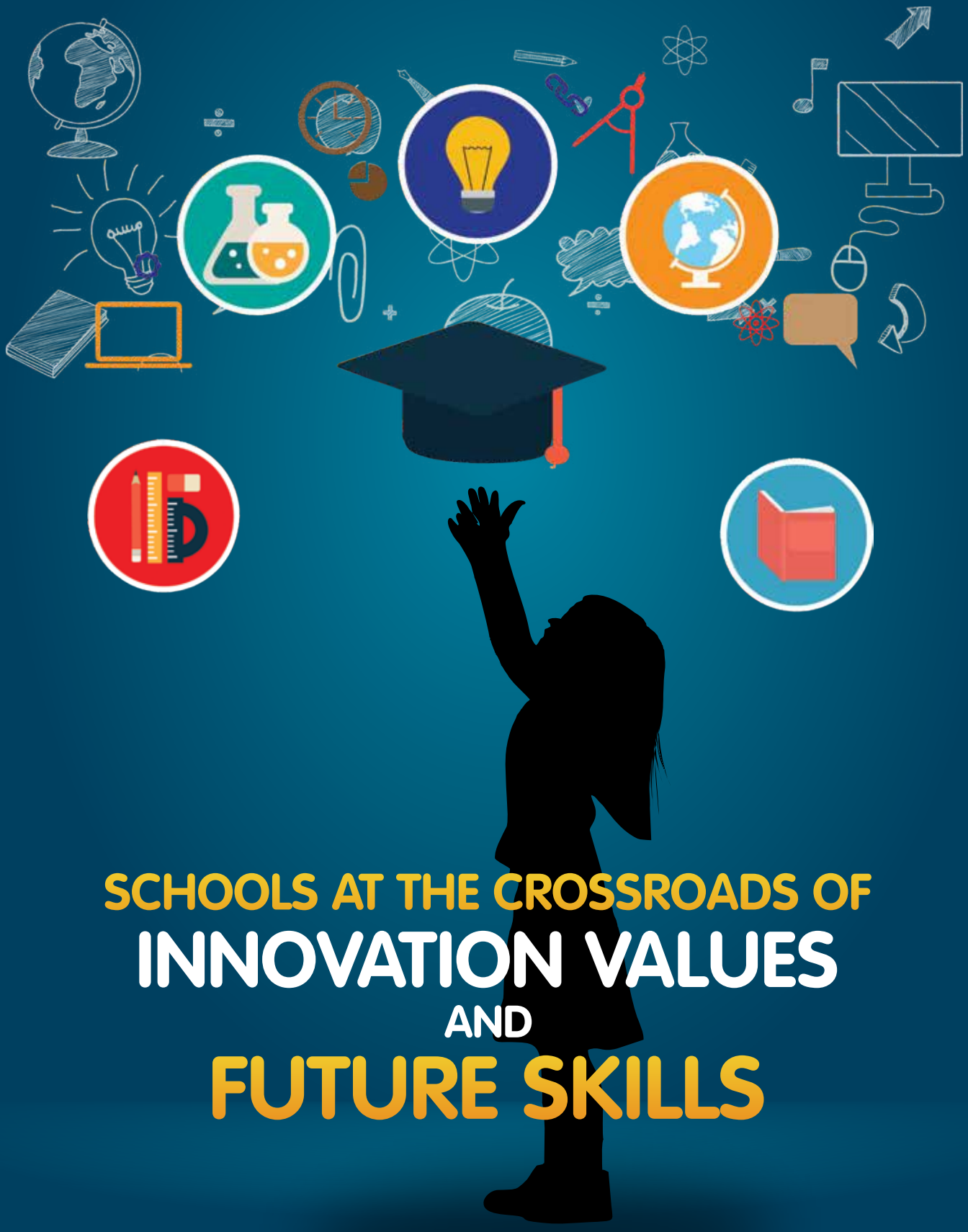
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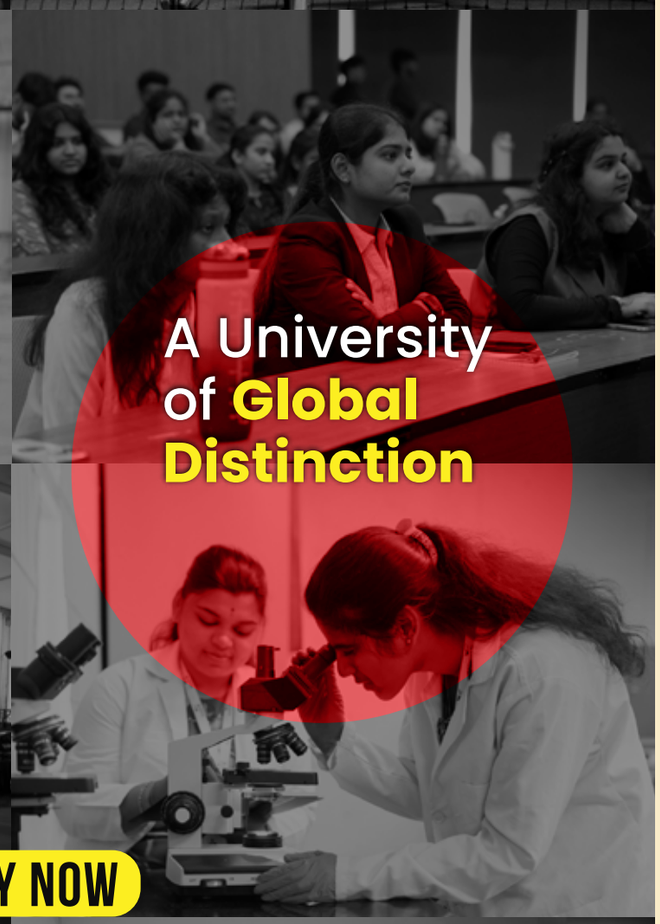
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DISSECTING BUDGET 2026

Let's be honest. Budgets usually sound like background noise. Politicians debating giant numbers on TV, words that feel miles away from homework, exams, and school buses.

Easy to Ignore

But the Union Budget 2026–27 is different. This one quietly reshapes what your classroom could look like over the next few years. And it's worth paying attention.

The government has earmarked ₹1.39 lakh crore for education, and the biggest chunk (about ₹83,500 crore) is going straight into school education. That's not a small signal. It says something important. Schools, especially government schools that a majority of Indian students attend, are still at the heart of the system.

The headline-grabber is the plan to introduce an AI curriculum from Grade 3, starting in the 2026–27 academic year. Before you imagine third-graders buried in code or building robots, relax. That's not the plan.

This isn't about turning kids into software engineers overnight. It's about helping students understand how technology works, how AI shapes daily life, and how to think logically, ethically, and responsibly in a digital world. In short, learning with technology, not being overwhelmed by it.

And honestly, it makes sense

AI is already everywhere — search engines, social media feeds, voice assistants, even the apps used for homework. Learning about it early can turn confusion into confidence.

Here's the part that really counts. The government plans to train over one crore teachers in AI-related skills. That number is massive and crucial. New subjects don't succeed because of fancy gadgets. They succeed because teachers feel confident and supported.

If this training is done right, classrooms will become lively and hands-on. Less rote learning. More problem-solving. More connections to the real world that students actually live in.

Not everything in the budget sounds flashy. Some of the most important decisions are the quiet ones. Continued funding for schemes like Samagra Shiksha, PM POSHAN (midday meals), and model schools may not trend on social media, but they keep students in school. For many families, a nutritious meal, safe classrooms, and basic facilities can be the difference between regular attendance and dropping out altogether.

There's also a continued push for girls' education — hostels, better infrastructure, and safer access to schools. This matters because even today, too many girls leave school early due to distance, safety concerns, or family pressure.

The budget isn't perfect. School education funding has increased, but it hasn't grown as fast as spending on higher education. Schools are being asked to adopt new ideas and new technology, but how smoothly this happens will depend on resources, teacher support, and follow-through.

There's also the issue of unequal access. It's a certainty that urban schools will get trained teachers and new tools faster than rural or remote schools. If this gap isn't handled carefully, the benefits of the budget could reach some students long before others.

So, what does it all add up to?

This budget won't transform classrooms overnight. But it clearly points in one direction: Learning that goes beyond textbooks, classrooms that use technology thoughtfully, and skills that matter in the real world.

For students, the message is simple. The classroom of the future will look different. Less memorizing. More understanding. Less fear of technology. More curiosity about how the world actually works.

The budget has opened the door. What comes next depends on how schools, teachers, and students choose to walk through it… together.

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EVERY REGULATION MUST ULTIMATELY SERVE THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD



Dr. Alka Kapur, Principal
Modern Public School, Shalimar Bagh

In an era where school education is increasingly shaped by layered regulations and evolving compliance frameworks, **Dr. Alka Kapur**, Principal of Modern Public School, Shalimar Bagh, offers a grounded yet forward-looking perspective. She underscores that safety mandates—ranging from structural certifications and transport protocols to HD CCTV surveillance and trained counsellors—have strengthened the protective ecosystem of schools. At the same time, she calls for a unified apex regulatory body to reduce overlaps, streamline implementation, and bridge the persistent gap between policy intent and classroom realities.

In this insightful conversation taken by Education Post's **Prabhav Anand**, Dr. Kapur reflects on balancing compliance with creativity, ensuring teacher accountability without overburdening educators, and sustaining holistic, student-centric learning amid constant regulatory change. Her guiding philosophy remains unwavering: every decision must ultimately serve the best interests of the child.

Q School education today operates under multiple regulatory frameworks—CBSE norms, state rules, RTE provisions, and safety compliances. From a principal's perspective, which regulations genuinely strengthen schooling, and which ones need urgent rethinking to better reflect classroom realities?

- **Regulations that genuinely strengthen schooling**

Regulatory requirements for building safety, fire safety compliance, transportation safety, and periodic review of safety certificates provide a structured baseline to students' security. These requirements are the prerequisites of any learning environment. In addition, the recent mandate for high-definition CCTV cameras with real-time audio-visual recording across school premises with at least 15-day footage storage has further fortified the protection against harassment, abuse, and infelicitous incidents. In the wake of recent cases of untoward incidents, mandating trained socio-emotional and career counsellors has successfully addressed rising concerns about stress, mental health challenges, and life skills beyond academics. These regulations align with national child rights safeguards, NCPCR recommendations, DOE, and CBSE with the sole purpose of enhancing the overall safety climate of schools, providing structural, emotional and accountability frameworks vital for holistic development.

Regulations Needing Urgent Rethinking

- Tight deadlines around infrastructure upgrades (e.g., CCTV upgrades or compliance reporting on different portals by the regulatory authorities can strain school resources, especially in under-funded institutions leading to defeat of the main purpose to provide safety and security to every stakeholder of the school. Considering rural-urban fringe, the Central and State government must collaborate together to ensure effective implementation of the child centered policies.
- I firmly believe that if regulatory authorities work in sync and the guidelines pertaining to students' well being are issued under a single apex body, the outcomes will be transformative enough to ensure clarity and consistency in implementation.

Q Regulations often aim at standardisation, while schools strive for innovation. How do you balance compliance with regulatory mandates while still allowing teachers and students the freedom to experiment, think creatively, and learn beyond prescribed structures?

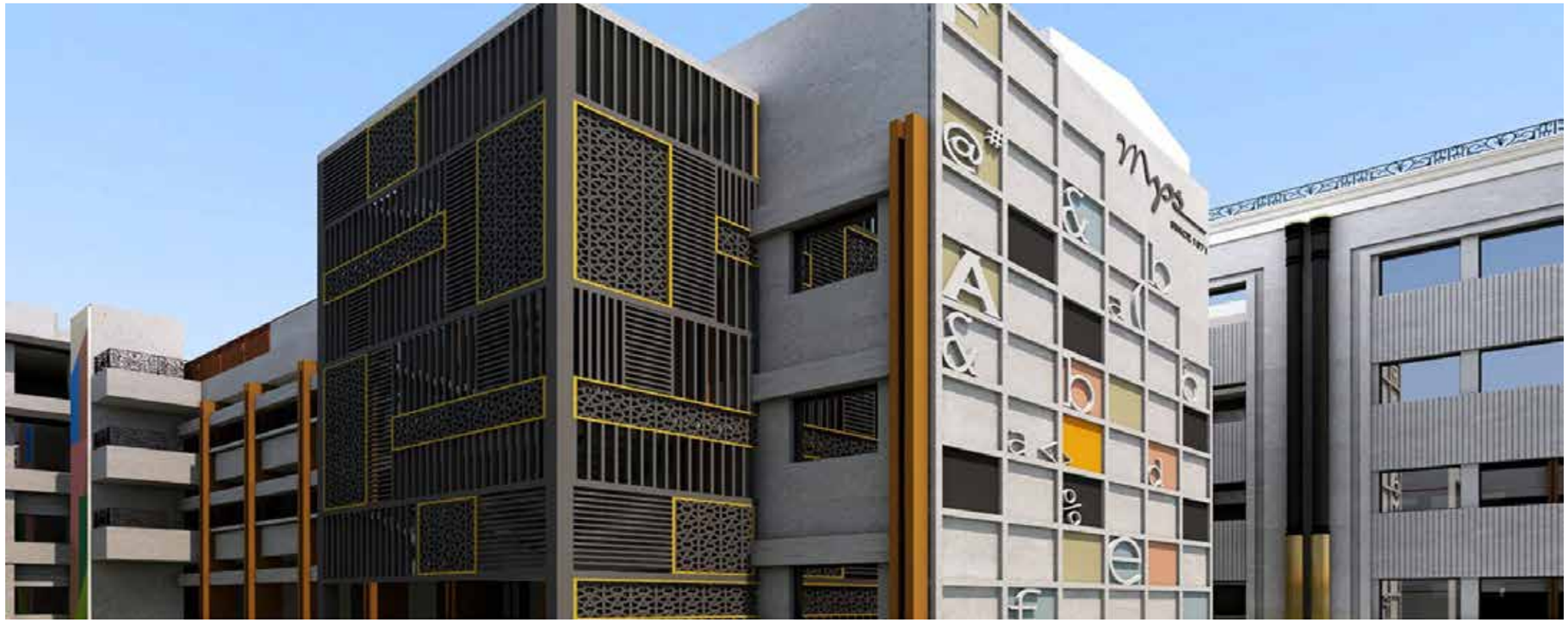
While regulatory frameworks are essential to ensure safety, accountability, and equity, their true value lies in how thoughtfully they are executed within schools. At Modern Public School, regulations are viewed not as restrictive mandates but as facilitative frameworks that provide teachers and students with a secure and well-defined platform to explore, experiment, and innovate while remaining within clearly defined thresholds. Robust safety protocols create physically and psychologically safe learning environments, empowering students to question, create, and take intellectual risks with confidence. For instance, safety drills are transformed into experiential learning opportunities through role-plays, simulations and outdoor visits as well.

I believe that regulatory documentation and compliance are necessary but instructional practices are not rendered rigid. Teachers are encouraged to adopt project-based learning, interdisciplinary approaches, and inquiry-driven classrooms that extend learning beyond prescribed syllabi.

Q One recurring concern among schools is the gap between policy intent and implementation. In your experience, where do school regulation laws fall short at the execution level, and how can policymakers involve school leaders more meaningfully in the process?

As a school leader, I ensure that every step taken by the institution aligns with these directives and remains firmly rooted in the best interests of students. However, despite the sincerity of intent on all sides, implementation is often influenced by practical realities beyond policy design.

At times, academic calendars, timelines, and mandates issued by different authorities intersect or even collide, leading to fragmented or diluted implementation. Factors such as student absenteeism, unforeseen weather conditions, and other external constraints further impact the effectiveness of well-intentioned regulations. In such situations, even the best-laid plans can go awry.



Moreover, the wide disparity in school contexts across regions, resources, and learner needs means that a single, uniform circular does not always address ground realities. What works seamlessly for one school may present genuine challenges for another.

This once again highlights the need for a unified apex body through which regulatory guidance is streamlined, with central and state authorities work in close coordination. Such convergence would not only reduce overlap and ambiguity but also enable school leaders to implement policies with greater clarity ultimately ensuring that regulations truly serve their purpose bringing out the best in every child.

How Policymakers Can Involve School Leaders

When Principals are treated as co-creators in the regulatory process, policies are more likely to be realistic and effective in serving the holistic development of students. Before issuing guidelines or circulars, structured consultations with practising principals can help identify overlaps, feasibility concerns, and contextual challenges related to timelines, academic calendars, and local conditions. Creating online portal for formal feedback mechanisms at the district, state, and national levels would allow school leaders to share ground-level insights on factors like absenteeism, climatic constraints, infrastructure disparities, and student diversity. Sustained dialogue between central and state authorities, with school leaders as active partners rather than end-point implementers, would help align intent with execution.

Q Modern Public School has consistently focused on holistic development alongside academic excellence. How have regulatory guidelines influenced—or at times restricted—your school's initiatives in areas like life skills, student well-being, and experiential learning?

Modern Public School is built on a strong and well-defined learning ecosystem, where holistic development and academic excellence go hand in hand. Every directive and guideline issued by statutory and regulatory authorities is taken up diligently and implemented with due seriousness, keeping student safety and well-being at the core. The school's academic and co-curricular calendar is thoughtfully designed by a dedicated core team, in close collaboration with facilitators, to ensure a balanced integration of life skills education, student well-being initiatives, and experiential learning opportunities.

That said, even with state-of-the-art infrastructure and a robust support system, regulatory guidelines can at times influence or inadvertently restrict certain initiatives. Outdoor engagements such as educational visits, excursions, sports days, and exhibitions are occasionally postponed or cancelled due to regulatory advisories, safety considerations, or unforeseen external constraints. While the school's infrastructure allows many of these learning experiences to be adapted and conducted indoors without compromising their intent, certain activities particularly large-scale sports events which inevitably require open spaces and favourable conditions.

Recognising these challenges, Modern Public School has responded with foresight and flexibility. The school now designs its annual calendar strategically, building in contingencies and alternative learning pathways to ensure continuity. This adaptive planning allows experiential learning and student well-being programmes to continue meaningfully, even when external regulations necessitate adjustments.

Q Teacher accountability and administrative documentation have increased significantly in recent years. Do you feel current regulatory expectations risk overburdening teachers, and what reforms could ensure accountability without compromising teaching quality?

There is no denying that teacher accountability and administrative documentation have increased significantly in recent years, and at times this does place an added burden on teachers. However, when it comes to the safety and security of learners, there is not a single committed educator who would wish to compromise. Teachers inherently recognise that accountability in these areas is integral to their professional responsibility.

That said, the manner in which compliance is structured can be refined to reduce unnecessary workload without diluting its purpose. The introduction of a uniform, centralised digital portal, where student data is entered once at the time of admission and updated only when required, would significantly ease repetitive documentation. Allowing additions or corrections during clearly defined windows such as summer or winter breaks would further streamline processes. Additionally, introducing accountability measures, including penalties for avoidable errors, would encourage

accuracy while reducing repeated follow-ups and revisions.

It is important to remember that teachers shoulder the most critical responsibility of nation-building by shaping young minds. Their primary strength lies in teaching, mentoring, and nurturing values, and regulatory frameworks must protect this core role. Alongside structural reforms, recognition, both monetary and non-monetary, plays a vital role in motivating teachers to adapt to evolving expectations. When efforts in compliance, innovation, and student welfare are acknowledged meaningfully, teachers are far more willing to step beyond their comfort zones.

Q With evolving laws around safety, inclusivity, and digital practices in schools, how is Modern Public School adapting its systems to remain compliant while ensuring that students' learning experiences remain humane and student-centric?

With the continuous evolution of laws and guidelines related to safety, inclusivity, and digital practices, Modern Public School has adopted a proactive, systems-driven approach to compliance while remaining firmly anchored in humane, student-centric education. Every directive issued by statutory and regulatory authorities is carefully examined, contextualised, and implemented through clearly defined institutional mechanisms, ensuring that compliance strengthens rather than disrupts the school's learning ecosystem.

To translate policy into practice, the school has constituted multiple statutory and functional committees, each thoughtfully structured to ensure shared responsibility and transparency. These committees comprise student representatives, teaching staff members, parents, and members of the School Managing Committee, thereby ensuring that diverse stakeholder perspectives are represented. The committees function with diligence and accountability, vigilantly monitoring implementation and strictly adhering to the guidelines issued by regulatory authorities.

Through these committees, Modern Public School has established robust safety systems covering physical infrastructure, disaster preparedness, surveillance, transport protocols, and counselling support, all aligned with national and board-level mandates.

By empowering well-structured committees to oversee implementation, the school ensures that compliance is collective, continuous, and deeply aligned with its commitment to holistic student development.

Q As an education leader navigating constant regulatory change, what guiding philosophy helps you take firm decisions especially when rules, parents' expectations, and students' best interests don't always align?

As an education leader navigating constant regulatory change, my guiding philosophy is anchored in a simple yet unwavering principle: the child remains at the centre of every decision. At Modern Public School, rules, policies, and procedures are never viewed in isolation; they are carefully interpreted through the lens of what best serves the holistic well-being of the learner. When regulatory mandates, parental expectations, and students' needs do not fully align, decisions are guided by balance, empathy, and professional judgement. Regulatory frameworks provide essential guardrails for safety, equity, and accountability, while parental aspirations are acknowledged as valuable partnerships in a child's growth. This child-centric philosophy enables firm yet compassionate decision-making. Policies are implemented with flexibility and contextual understanding, ensuring that compliance does not become mechanical but remains purposeful.

At Modern Public School, leadership is ultimately about stewardship in creating systems and cultures where regulations are honoured, voices are heard, and every child is empowered to thrive.

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CONSISTENCY, CALMNESS, AND CONCEPTUAL CLARITY DEFINE TRUE BOARD EXAM SUCCESS



Ms Nishi Dhanjal
Principal, Dharav High School, Ajmer Road, Jaipur

*In an insightful conversation with **Ms. Nishi Dhanjal,** Principal of Dharav High School, Ajmer Road, Jaipur, the focus remained firmly on preparing students not just academically, but holistically for board examinations. She emphasized that the final weeks before exams should be dedicated to consolidation rather than new learning, encouraging structured revision plans, mock tests, and disciplined routines. Highlighting practical time-management strategies like focused study blocks and adequate rest, she underlined the importance of mental wellness through counselling, parental support, and positive communication. During the interaction with Education Post's **Prabhav Anand,** she also spoke about evolving assessment patterns that demand conceptual clarity over rote learning, the role of consistent habits in student success, and the responsible integration of technology to enhance exam readiness. Her perspectives offer a balanced blueprint for confident and mindful preparation.*

Q With pre-board examinations acting as a crucial rehearsal for board exams, how do you guide students at Dharav High School to utilize the final 2–3 weeks effectively, and what are the key dos and don'ts students should keep in mind during this critical period?

The final 2-3 weeks before board exams should be completely used for consolidation, not new learning. At Dharav High School, we usually advise students to focus completely on revising the core concepts, strengthening weak areas, and solving question papers from previous years under timed conditions. Mock exams help to simulate the real pressure and improve the presentation of answers. Students should create structured daily revision plans to ensure that equal attention is given to all subjects. Retention can be improved through an adequate amount of sleep, balanced meals, and short breaks as well. Students should avoid last-minute cramming, negative comparisons, or overloading themselves with the new resources. During this particular period discipline and calm consistency also make a significant difference.

Q Time management often becomes a major challenge for students preparing for board examinations. Based on your experience, what practical time-management techniques have proven to be most effective for students to balance revision, practice papers, and rest?

During board exam preparation time management becomes very critical. We also encourage students to create a realistic timetable that divides the day into focused study blocks, prioritizing the difficult subjects first. Some techniques, like the 50–10 rule—50 minutes of focused study followed by short breaks—also play a good role in maintaining concentration. Weekly practice papers also help to improve the speed and accuracy. Proper time should be allocated for proper revision, writing practice, and reflections on the mistakes as well. 7-8 hours of sleep is completely non-negotiable, as rest plays a good role in improving the consideration of memory as well. A student should also avoid doing any kind of multitasking and excessive exposure to screens as well. A well-planned routine reduces stress and ensures steady and confident preparation as well.

Q Board exam preparation can be emotionally demanding. How does Dharav High School support students' mental wellness during this phase, and what strategies do you recommend to help students cope with pressure and performance anxiety?

A student can face many emotional challenges during board exams. At Dharav High School, we usually prioritize mental wellness through counselling sessions, regular teacher mentoring, and motivational interactions. Students should discuss their academic concerns in an open way and always discuss their problems of self-anxiety with their parents or teachers. Some practices such as breathing exercises, short walks, meditation, and structured routines also play a good role in maintaining emotional balance. Parents and teachers should work together in order to reduce pressure and maintain positivity as well. A calm mindset improves concentration, confidence, and performance as well. When emotional well-being is safeguarded, academic outcomes naturally improve.

Q Parents play a significant role during exam season. In your opinion, how can parents create a supportive environment at home, help set realistic academic goals, and ensure they motivate their children without unintentionally adding stress?

During exam season, parents play an important role. Creating a calm and supportive home environment is also very much essential. Rather than completely focusing on marks, parents should encourage the consistent effort and progress as well. Setting a good realistic expectation and avoiding constant comparisons with peers also reduces pressure. Maintaining a routine with nutritious meals, an adequate amount of rest, and minimal distractions supports better performance. Open communication also allows students to express their stress without any kind of fear. Gentle motivation and reassurance build confidence. When parents balance their guidance with emotional support, then students feel secure and perform better under pressure.

Q Assessment practices and board examination guidelines are evolving over time. From an expert's perspective, what key changes should students be aware of, and how can they effectively adapt their preparation strategies to align with these updated evaluation patterns?

The board examination pattern is highly competitive, putting more emphasis on application,



analysis, and critical thinking rather than rote memorization. Students should focus more on conceptual clarity and regularly practice case-based and situation-based questions as well. To align preparation with the current expectations, a student should review official sample papers and marking schemes as well. Presentation of answers, well-structured writing, and time-bound boundaries are equally significant. Staying well updated with official circulars ensures students understand the revised formats. At Dharav High School, we mainly guide students to shift from passive reading to active problem solving. Adapting early to evolving patterns also enhances confidence and exam readiness as well.

Q Dharav High School has likely witnessed inspiring student success stories over the years. Could you share insights into the journeys of high-achieving students from your institution and the important lessons aspirants can learn from their experiences?

Certain consistent habits are shared by high-achieving students at Dharav High School. They begin preparation on an early basis, revise regularly, and maintain a disciplined study schedule as well. Rather than studying for long hours occasionally, they mainly focus on daily consistency. They also practice writing answers, analyze mistakes, and seek clarification promptly. Most importantly, they maintain balance—engaging in physical activity and maintaining healthy routines as well. They always consider setbacks as learning opportunities rather than failures. Their success completely reflects clarity on goals, a well-structured planning

Q Technology has become an integral part of modern education. How is Dharav High School integrating blended learning tools and digital resources into exam preparation, and how can students use technology wisely to enhance their performance without getting distracted?

Ans – Technology has become an important tool in the preparation of exams. Dharav High School mainly integrated digital platforms for mock tests, recorded lessons, performance analytics, and interactive quizzes as well. These tools also help students to track progress and identify weak areas as well. Blended learning enables revision beyond the classroom hours. However, disciplined use is very essential. Students should definitely use technology purposefully for study and avoid distractions from social media or the entertainment platforms. When it is used wisely, technology automatically enhances efficiency, reinforces concepts, and supports smart preparation as well.

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ETHICS FIRST, SKILLS SECOND
THE TRUE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL EDUCATION

Vinay Arya
General Secretary, Delhi Arya Pratinidhi Sabha
Deputy Secretary, Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha

In a time when India's school education system stands at a transformative crossroads under the vision of NEP 2020, **Vinay Arya** offers a perspective deeply rooted in both reform and tradition. Emphasising that infrastructure gaps, examination-centric learning, and the erosion of value-based education remain critical concerns, he advocates for an integrated model where modern pedagogy coexists with Vedic wisdom. Drawing inspiration from institutions such as Gurukul Kangri and the wider Arya Samaj educational network, he underscores the need for character-building, teacher empowerment, ethical digital integration, and community service as pillars of holistic development. During this insightful conversation, conducted by Education Post's **Prabhav Anand**, he further outlines a future where technology strengthens—not replaces—the guru–shishya bond, and where education nurtures not just skilled professionals, but compassionate and responsible citizens of Bharat.

Q India's school education system is at a crucial transition point, with reforms like NEP 2020 aiming to reshape learning outcomes. From your perspective, what are the most pressing gaps that still need attention to ensure quality, inclusive, and value-driven education at the school level?

India's schools are changing through NEP 2020. Budget 2026-27's record allocation of Rs1.39 lakh crore to education, with Rs 83,562 crore for schools, up 8.2% year-on-year, signals sincere intent toward inclusivity via schemes like Samagra Shiksha and girls' hostels

India's school system faces three pressing gaps despite NEP 2020's vision for holistic, inclusive education. First, many rural schools lack basic facilities like toilets and electricity. This blocks NEP's hands-on learning goals. Second, exams still focus too much on marks, not overall growth. This kills creativity. NEP emphasizes character but curricula ignore Vedic truths like satya (truth) and selfless service (seva). Children gain skills but lack humility (vidya dadāti vinayam, Taittiriya Upanishad), producing technicians, not ethical citizens.

We now have fine models that show how Vedic values and contemporary curriculum can coexist. Both Gurukul Kangri in Haridwar and Gurukul Kurukshetra were founded by Swami Shraddhanand ji in early 1900s as powerful responses to Macaulay's Anglicising policy. These and many other gurukuls under Arya Samaj not only blend modern education but also focus on vedic teachings, learning Sanskrit, daily Prarthana, yoga and Yajya for a holistic development of children.

Q Value-based education has re-emerged as a key national conversation, alongside academic excellence and skill development. How can Indian schools strike a meaningful balance between modern pedagogical practices and moral–ethical grounding for students?

Value-based education fits seamlessly into today's national push for well-rounded growth, complementing NEP 2020's innovative spirit and budget 2026-27's skill-building focus. The harmony exists naturally when schools reverse priorities: ethics first, skills second. Arya Samaj offers a tested blueprint drawn from Swami Dayanand's call to 'hear the Vedas daily'.

Schools can achieve this by integrating Vedic principles of self-discipline and compassion into experiential learning, as various Arya Samaj institutions do through daily Prarthana, yoga and Yajna alongside academics. This synergy fosters professional excellence rooted in dharma and universal brotherhood.

Outside the city centres, value-based education needs to start with access itself. Akhil Bharatiya Dayanand Sewashram Sangh under the aegis of Arya Samaj offers complete ecosystem – free boarding, schooling in good local institutions, and after-school coaching, while consciously fostering self-respect, moral values and self-reliance as a means of turning vulnerable children into confident learners. Balwaadi and pre-school initiatives associated with such efforts ensure that even the youngest children from poor families experience a holistic environment of play, stories, songs and basic ethics before entering formal school, making it easier to sustain value-based learning later. Parallelly, Arya Veer Dal's youth camps equip adolescents with discipline, self-defence, teamwork and social responsibility, ensuring that values are not confined to moral science periods but reinforced through lived experiences and peer-learning. When Gurukul-style value frameworks, rural and tribal outreach, early childhood interventions and systematic teacher formation converge, Indian schools can genuinely integrate modern pedagogy with moral-ethical grounding.

Q The Arya Samaj has historically contributed to education through institutions like DAV schools. What core educational philosophies of the Arya Samaj do you believe remain most relevant for today's school education ecosystem?

Maharshi Dayanand's distilled eternal principles are based on his philosophy of 'Back to Vedas'. To further explain, he took the core principles of religion, ethics, and social reform directly from the Vedas and rejected distortions: superstition, idol worship, caste by birth, ritualism without reason, and priestly monopoly. Four pillars shine brightest in today's context:

a) **Vedas as Supreme Authority:** No intermediaries, no blind faith, direct access to knowledge. Today's misinformation age demands teaching children to test every claim with logic, not blind belief, creating discerning citizens immune to fake news and cult leaders.

b) **'Paropkarartham Idam Shariram',** 'This body exists for others' welfare'. Make certain hours of annual service mandatory across classes. Primary students can plant trees (prithvi sukta) and seniors can organize health camps or other important services. Lakhs of DAV graduates yearly immerse in this karma yoga.

c) **Soul Equality:** 'Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti', one truth, many paths. Caste-free admission, merit-only scholarships dismantle barriers NEP seeks to erase.

d) **Rational Worship:** Yajna over idols cultivates scientific temper. Budget 2026's tinkering labs gain soul when prefaced by Agni-sadhana. These aren't relics; they're rocket fuel for 21st-century Bharat.

These philosophies are common across Arya Samaj's network, from Gurukuls integrating Vedic ethos with modern engineering and management, to Arya Pratibha Vikas Sansthan's merit-based scholarships that prioritise character alongside academic excellence.

Q With rapid digitalisation and technology entering classrooms, what opportunities and challenges do you see for school education in India—especially in ensuring that technology enhances learning without diluting human values and teacher–student relationships?

Digital transformation offers tremendous promise for school education, particularly as NEP 2020 and Budget 2026-27 expand platforms like DIKSHA to 35 million users and 120,000 virtual classrooms. From Arya Samaj's perspective, rooted in Maharshi Dayanand's Vedic rationalism, technology should amplify eternal wisdom rather than overshadow the human spirit.

The opportunities are inspiring. Augmented reality can recreate ancient Vedic rituals, bringing yajna and assemblies to life for city children distant from tradition, while affordable apps personalise Rig Veda study for rural students. Hybrid learning can connect schools across states for live satsangs where students from Northern India debating karma philosophy with peers in Southern India and virtual labs blend NEP skills with Vedic astronomy. This scales Maharshi Dayanand's dream of universal knowledge access.

Yet serious challenges threaten our civilisational core. A stark digital divide leaves 45% of government schools without computers and 36% without internet, risking permanent exclusion for rural Bharat and violating the Vedic principle of welfare for all. Screen addiction affects 54% of children with over five hours daily, eroding the focused discipline essential for mantra practice and discernment. Virtual classrooms weaken the guru-shishya bond where spiritual energy flows through personal guidance, not pixels, while unregulated EdTech raises ethical concerns over child data privacy. And all of this is proven with multiple researches across globe.

Arya Samaj proposes a practical five-part framework grounded in Vedic principles. First, ensure all digital content aligns with scriptures by asking if it promotes true knowledge over ignorance, reserving 20% of curriculum for guided self-study. Cap screen time at eight hours weekly, balanced by havans to restore inner calm. For every 20 hours/lessons delivered through digital tools (apps, online classes, videos), there must be at least one session led by a real, in-person teacher who has received special training in Veda-EdTech programs. Conduct annual digital audits to eliminate addictive features and prioritise regional languages. Finally, create secure online communities for authentic Vedic discussions that preserve the warmth of traditional gatherings.

Q Teacher preparedness and motivation remain central to school education outcomes. In your view, what systemic improvements are required to empower teachers—not just as instructors, but as mentors and role models for young learners?

Teacher effectiveness shapes India's 260 million schoolchildren's destiny, yet NEP 2020 grapples with 11 lakh vacancies by 2030 and 70% burnout amid administrative overloads. Arya Samaj's affiliated institutions serve over 60 lakh students every year and have demonstrated proven practices transforming instructors into gurus.

Teachers are the bridge between philosophy and classroom practice. To make it work, train teachers in Vedic values alongside NEP pedagogy and add short values & ethics lessons to classes and involve parents. The result: Children, who code with conscience, compete with compassion, Bharat's true demographic dividend.

In Delhi alone, more than 100 educational institutions under the Arya Samaj umbrella, including schools, Gurukuls and Sanskrit centres, draw on structured teacher-orientation and training support from bodies like Arya Vidya Parishad,

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which regularly organises residential teacher training camps to familiarise educators with both Vedic teachings and contemporary methods. Arya Vidya Parishad exposes educators to Vedic perspectives on child development, character-building and yoga while aligning them with current curricular and assessment reforms, effectively creating value-driven master trainers for entire school clusters.

Q Arya Samaj–run educational institutions have often focused on holistic development. How do these institutions adapt to contemporary academic demands while preserving their foundational principles, and what lessons can mainstream schools learn from this model?

Arya Samaj educational institutions have always aimed for complete growth of the child, mind, body, and spirit. They meet today's exam pressures and NEP changes while holding firm to Vedic values. Arya samaj schools blend the old and new naturally. Maharshi Dayanand wanted education that builds character first. So they keep morning prayer assemblies every day. Students chant mantras and hear one Vedic teaching. This sets a calm, focused tone before classes begin. It takes just 30 minutes but builds inner strength that helps with studies too.

Vedic Mathematics and Sanskrit alongside regular subjects have been beneficial to students. Not only they score better marks, they benefit from faster calculations and knowing ancient language. Our Vedas have all the possible knowledge. It's important current and future generations learn and they will have all the possible answers to their questions and curiosity. In fact this is the right time to 'go back to Vedas' as Maharshi Dayanand said. Children at various Arya Samaj institutes also have service projects where children visit villages and do social good services. This teaches selfless work, a core Vedic idea, without cutting study time.

These learnings from Arya Samaj institutions can be implemented in mainstream schools thus ensuring all our children are guided towards holistic development and have all the needed qualities for taking Bharat into next phase of growth.

Q On a personal note, as someone deeply engaged in both social reform and educational leadership, what continues to inspire you to work in the field of school education, and how do you see your role evolving in shaping the next generation of learners?

Arya Samaj today has emerged as a reformist movement built on a monotheistic philosophy and a strong commitment to truth, equality, and universal upliftment, Arya Samaj rejected ritualism without a Vedic foundation and placed education, rational thought, and social service at the core of its mission.

Today, when I see a Delhi slum girl's first Vedic recitation, faltering voice gaining strength, eyes ablaze with self-discovery, powers three decades of labour. That moment reveals education's alchemy: ignorance transmutes to illumination.

Widow remarriages celebrated after decades of social stigma. Sons rejecting caste superstitions after one Rig Veda class. Arya Samaj's today touches millions of lives yearly, these victories fuel the marathon.

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COUNSELING MUST BE CORE INFRASTRUCTURE, NOT A LAST-MINUTE INTERVENTION



Mr. Ganesh Kohli
Founder, IC3 Movement, India

As India strengthens its focus on holistic and future-ready education, the need to institutionalise career and college counseling has become more pressing than ever. In this focused conversation, ***Mr. Ganesh Kohli,*** *Founder of the IC3 Movement, global counseling initiative, highlights why guidance in many schools still begins too late and remains event-based rather than continuous. Drawing from the 2025 IC3 Institute's Annual Student Quest Report, he points to rising student anxiety, growing uncertainty around postsecondary choices, and the need to move beyond information-sharing toward decision readiness and self-awareness. In this interview with Education Post's* ***Prabhav Anand,*** *he also reflects on policy shifts, implementation challenges, and how structured counseling can become a measurable pillar of school quality.*

Q Career guidance in Indian schools often remains limited to board-exam years. From your perspective, what are the structural gaps in our school system that prevent career and college counseling from becoming an integrated, ongoing process?

Career guidance in India is still treated more as an event than a continuous developmental process. In many schools, structured counseling becomes visible only in Grades 10 to 12, when students are choosing streams or applying to universities. At that point they are expected to make high-stakes decisions without having had enough structured opportunities earlier to explore interests, strengths, and possible pathways.

A key structural gap is the mismatch between when students begin exploring career pathways and when schools introduce structured counseling. While academics progress through clear milestones from the early years, counseling interventions often begin much later, even though students today are exploring future options far earlier than before. Data from the 2025 IC3 Institute's Annual Student Quest Report shows that many students continue to engage with counselors only on a needs basis rather than through a sustained program. At the same time, the report documents rising uncertainty around postsecondary choices, which reinforces the importance of starting guidance earlier and maintaining it consistently.

There is also an over-reliance on information delivery instead of decision-readiness development. Information today is abundant and easily accessible through digital platforms and AI tools. What students need is guided interpretation that helps them connect information to their personal context, values, and long-term goals. For counseling to become truly integrated, it has to be seen as a core part of education, not a late-stage admissions function.

Q Despite growing awareness, many schools still lack trained counselors. What are the key barriers—policy, perception, or resources—that hinder the institutionalization of professional counseling in Indian school education?

It is a combination of perception, policy execution, and prioritisation.

At a perception level, counseling is still misunderstood in many schools. It is often associated only with crisis management rather than recognised as a preventive and developmental part of education. When counseling is framed as remedial support instead of a structured process that builds decision-making skills over time, schools are less likely to institutionalise it.

Policy recognition is improving, which is encouraging. Over the past decade, the IC3 Movement has consistently advocated for counseling to be institutionalised as a professional function within schools, not treated as an informal or peripheral role. The recent CBSE mandate for dedicated counselors for career guidance and mental health support reflects an important systemic shift in that direction — one that aligns with what we have long championed.

The challenge now is implementation. Schools still face questions around role clarity, hiring standards, training quality, and how to measure counseling outcomes in a meaningful and sustainable way.

Resources are a visible constraint, especially outside major cities, but the deeper barrier is prioritisation. The 2025 IC3 Institute's Annual Student Quest Report shows a sustained rise in demand for counseling, with 83 percent of counselors reporting increased pressure driven by student anxiety around careers and academic transitions. At the same time, many students still meet counselors only on a needs basis rather than through a continuous program. This gap highlights that counseling is not yet treated as essential infrastructure within most school systems. Until it is integrated as a core educational function, expansion will remain uneven.

Q The IC3 Movement aims to train 100,000 counselors and impact 175,000 high schools globally. How can India realistically scale quality counseling practices across urban and rural schools without compromising standards?

Scaling counseling in India cannot follow a one-size-fits-all model because the school ecosystem is deeply diverse across regions. A realistic path forward is layered capacity-building, where professional counselors, trained teacher-mentors, and school leadership operate within a shared framework. This shifts counseling from being a single-person function to a collective school responsibility.

Not every school, especially in rural or resource-constrained areas, will scale in the same way or at the same pace. The opportunity lies in building flexible, shared models where schools and educators work together to create structured systems that ensure continuity, early exposure to future-readiness conversations, and safe referral pathways when students need deeper support. The emphasis is not on identical staffing models, but on consistent access to quality guidance.

Quality at scale depends on continuous professional development. Counseling evolves alongside student behaviour, technology, and changing higher education and work landscapes. The 2025 IC3 Institute's Annual Student Quest Report shows that students are rapidly adopting digital and AI tools for decision-making, while counselor readiness is still catching up. This highlights the importance of ongoing training, peer-learning communities, ethical standards, and updated practice frameworks.

Technology can extend reach, particularly in underserved geographies, but it works best when it strengthens human relationships rather than replacing them. Digital platforms can support information access and efficiency, yet trust, judgment, and emotional safety remain fundamentally human. Sustainable scale will come from combining strong human capacity with thoughtful use of technology, so that counseling remains personal, credible, and accessible to every student.

Q In an era of rapidly evolving career landscapes driven by technology and globalization, how should schools redesign their academic and co-curricular frameworks to better prepare students for future pathways rather than conventional career tracks?

Careers are becoming less linear and more fluid, which means schools have to prioritise adaptability, transferable skills, and decision-making capacity alongside academic content. The 2025 IC3 Institute's Annual Student Quest Report shows rising uncertainty among students about postsecondary pathways, reflecting how complex and fast-moving the landscape has become. Preparing students for that uncertainty is now a core educational task.

Academic and co-curricular frameworks should therefore emphasise applied learning. Project work, interdisciplinary exposure, research, entrepreneurship, and real-world problem solving allow students to test interests early and build confidence in navigating unfamiliar situations.

Schools need structured spaces for exploration and reflection, guided conversations that help students understand their motivations, work preferences, and decision frameworks. Career education must expand from "what course should I choose" to "what kind of learning environment suits me," "what values guide my choices," and "how do I navigate uncertainty." This is where counseling becomes central to future readiness.

Q Through your Counseling Laboratory pedagogy, you have introduced a structured approach to career and college guidance. How does this model address the deeper issue of student self-awareness and informed decision-making within the school ecosystem?

A central challenge in student decision-making is that choices are often shaped by external pressures such as rankings, trends, peer comparison, or family expectations before students have had structured opportunities to understand themselves. A structured counseling model intentionally reverses that sequence. It begins with self-awareness rather than destination.

The Counseling Laboratory approach builds this through guided reflection, structured exercises, and repeated conversations that help students identify strengths, interests, values, and learning preferences. Over time, students develop an internal decision framework instead of reacting to external noise. The 2025 IC3 Institute's Annual Student Quest Report highlights growing uncertainty in postsecondary planning, which makes this kind of internal clarity even more critical.

This is especially important in a digitally saturated environment. Technology can expand access to information, but it cannot replace judgment or personal context. Counseling helps students interpret options in relation to who they are, not just what is available. When self-awareness becomes part of the school ecosystem, decision-making becomes more intentional, stable, and transferable across future transitions.

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Q From a journalistic lens, do you believe India's education reforms sufficiently recognize counseling as a critical pillar of school education? What policy-level interventions would you recommend to make counseling a mandatory and measurable component of school quality?

India's education reforms are moving in a constructive direction, with a clear shift toward holistic development, well-being, and future readiness. Recent steps, including the CBSE mandate for dedicated counseling roles, reflect growing recognition that career guidance and mental health support are essential pillars of school education. The policy intent is strong, and the momentum is visible.

The next phase is about deeper structural integration so counseling is embedded consistently across systems rather than dependent on individual school leadership. For counseling to become both mandatory and measurable, policy frameworks can focus on three reinforcing areas: access, standards, and accountability.

Access means ensuring predictable and regular engagement, not ad hoc support. Standards relate to qualifications, ethical frameworks, and continuous professional development. Accountability involves tracking indicators linked to student engagement, well-being, and decision readiness. The 2025 IC3 Institute's Annual Student Quest Report shows that demand for counseling is rising and that students benefit from sustained guidance, which provides a useful evidence base for strengthening these systems.

Taken together, these steps would not represent a shift in direction, but a strengthening of reforms already underway. The opportunity now is collaboration between policymakers, schools, and professional bodies to build counseling into the definition of school quality in a measurable and sustainable way.

Q With over two decades in education and a background in electronic engineering, what pivotal experiences shaped your transition into counseling leadership, and how do you stay motivated while driving a movement that spans over 90 countries?

My transition from engineering into education and counseling was driven by a defining realization: while students had increasing access to information and opportunities, there was no structured ecosystem helping them interpret those choices in relation to their own strengths and values. I saw early on that counseling in India was largely informal and fragmented, and that it needed to be professionalised, systematised, and embedded within schools.

That conviction led me not just into counseling practice, but into pioneering a structured movement to institutionalise it. The goal was never limited to individual guidance sessions; it was to build frameworks, training pathways, and global collaborations that would position counseling as a foundational pillar of education. What began as an observation evolved into a mission to create systems that enable students to make grounded, informed, and self-aware decisions at scale.

What motivates me today is seeing this idea gain traction. When counseling is understood as a space for reflection, exploration, and meaning-making, it changes the way students relate to their own journeys. I see students approach decisions with less anxiety and greater confidence. I see families engage in more constructive conversations. I see schools evolve cultures of support rather than compliance. That shift, small step by small step, is the real fuel that keeps this work alive.

Across 90+ countries where the IC3 Movement is active, the contexts may differ, but the core need is the same: students want to be seen and supported as individuals, not reduced to test scores or narrow expectations. When we help them develop self-awareness and independent thinking, the impact extends beyond a single choice or milestone. It shapes their confidence, agency, and resilience in a world that will continue to change in ways we cannot fully predict. EP

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EDUCATION MUST SCALE WITH SYSTEMS, BUT GROW WITH SOUL AND PURPOSE

Mr. Nirvaan Birla
Managing Director, Birla Open Minds

As India's school education landscape rapidly redefines itself under the influence of NEP 2020, blended learning, and evolving global benchmarks, **Mr. Nirvaan Birla** presents a perspective that is both progressive and deeply human. For him, future-ready schooling is not limited to technology adoption or curriculum upgrades; it is about building emotionally resilient, critically aware, and purpose-driven learners.

In this exclusive interaction with Education Post's **Prabhav Anand**, he elaborates on Birla Open Minds' commitment to "scaling with soul" — integrating structured academic frameworks with social-emotional learning and well-being practices. He highlights how flexible academic models, strong teacher development systems, and personalised digital tools are enabling the organisation to balance excellence with accessibility across diverse communities. At its core, his vision reinforces a simple yet powerful idea: sustainable educational transformation begins with empowered educators, supported students, and institutions that grow without losing their ethos.

Q Over the past decade, India's school education ecosystem has seen rapid shifts — from integrating technology to redefining pedagogy. How do you envision Birla Open Minds' role in shaping a more inclusive and future-ready education system across diverse communities in India?

Over the past decade, India's education landscape has evolved at a remarkable pace, and Birla Open Minds is uniquely positioned to play a catalytic role in shaping the global citizens. Our vision of a future-ready education system rests on three interlinked pillars: inclusion, relevance, and adaptability.

First, inclusion is not treated as an add-on but as a design principle. Birla Open Minds works across diverse geographies and socio-economic contexts, ensuring that quality education is not limited by location, language, or learning ability. By blending national and international curricula, integrating life skills, and embedding social-emotional learning, the ecosystem supports students with varied learning needs and aspirations. The focus is on nurturing every child's potential, not standardising outcomes.

Second, in terms of future readiness, Birla Open Minds actively bridges the gap between traditional pedagogy and emerging realities. This is done through inquiry-based learning, competency-driven frameworks, digital integration, and strong emphasis on career guidance and exposure. Students are encouraged to think critically, collaborate meaningfully, and apply learning to real-world contexts skills that are essential in an uncertain and rapidly changing world.

Third, the organisation plays a crucial role in empowering educators and school leaders. Continuous professional development, structured processes, and data-driven decision-making ensure that schools are not just adopting new practices, but sustaining them effectively. This creates resilient institutions capable of evolving with policy shifts such as NEP 2020 and global educational benchmarks.

Ultimately, Birla Open Minds envisions itself as an enabler, building scalable, inclusive, and high-quality education models that respect local contexts while preparing learners to participate confidently in a global future.

Q Many educators talk about ensuring both quality and accessibility in schooling. In a country as diverse as India, what are some practical strategies you have championed to balance academic excellence with broader access for learners in both urban and rural settings?

Balancing quality with accessibility in a country as diverse as India requires moving beyond one-size-fits-all solutions and focusing on scalable, context-sensitive strategies. In my experience, a few practical approaches have made a meaningful difference across both urban and rural settings.

One key strategy is the use of flexible academic models. By offering curriculum pathways and blended learning options, schools are able to maintain academic rigour while adapting delivery to local realities such as varying levels of digital access, language diversity, and learner preparedness. This flexibility allows schools to uphold standards without excluding students who may need additional support or alternative learning routes.

Another important focus has been teacher empowerment. Consistent investment in teacher training, mentoring, and instructional support ensures that quality does not remain limited to well-resourced urban schools. When educators in semi-urban and rural schools are equipped with strong pedagogical tools and clear academic frameworks, student outcomes improve significantly regardless of geography.

Affordability and resource optimisation have also been central. Shared academic resources, structured SOPs, and centralised content development help reduce costs without compromising quality. At the same time, partnerships with local communities and organisations enable schools to contextualise learning and increase enrolment, especially in underserved areas.

Finally, student support systems such as academic scaffolding, counselling, and career guidance—play a critical role in access. When learners feel supported academically and emotionally, retention improves and excellence becomes attainable for a wider group of students.

Together, these strategies help ensure that academic excellence and accessibility are not competing goals, but mutually reinforcing ones within India's diverse schooling ecosystem.



Q You have spoken about "scaling with soul" — expanding educational reach while maintaining core values. How do you ensure that the spirit and ethos of Birla Open Minds remain consistent as the organization grows its footprint?

"Scaling with soul" for us also means consciously integrating soul science into the educational experience because growth without inner balance is incomplete. As Birla Open Minds expands its footprint, we ensure that the spirit and ethos of the organisation are preserved not only through systems and processes, but through a deep commitment to the well-being and happiness of both children and teachers at large.

Soul science, in our context, is about nurturing emotional balance, self-awareness, empathy, and purpose alongside academic excellence. These principles are woven into the curriculum, classroom practices, and daily routines through mindfulness, reflective practices, value-based discussions, and social-emotional learning. This creates learning environments where children feel safe, grounded, and motivated, and where teachers feel supported, valued, and emotionally resilient.

To ensure consistency at scale, these practices are embedded into structured frameworks, teacher training programmes, and leadership orientations. Educators are not only trained to deliver content, but also to model calm, compassion, and balance—recognising that a regulated, fulfilled teacher is central to a thriving classroom.

Regular reflection, feedback, and well-being reviews help us assess how effectively soul science principles are being lived in schools, not just implemented. This allows us to scale with sensitivity honouring local contexts while maintaining a shared culture of happiness, balance, and holistic growth.

In essence, by integrating soul science with strong academic systems, Birla Open Minds ensures that as the organisation grows, it continues to create joyful, balanced, and purpose-driven learning communities for children and educators alike.

Q How is Birla Open Minds evolving its curriculum and teaching practices to help students not only succeed academically but also develop critical thinking, resilience, creativity, and interpersonal skills needed for tomorrow's world?

Birla Open Minds approaches curriculum and pedagogy with a clear understanding that academic success, while essential, is only one part of preparing children for tomorrow's world. Our evolution has been guided by the belief that education must develop thinking minds, resilient individuals, and empathetic citizens.

At the curriculum level, there is a deliberate shift from content-heavy learning to concept-based, inquiry-driven approaches. Students are encouraged to question, analyse, and apply knowledge rather than memorise information. Real-world contexts, interdisciplinary projects, and experiential learning are integrated across subjects, helping learners make meaningful connections and develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Teaching practices are equally focused on building resilience and creativity. Classrooms promote a growth mindset where mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities. Through project work, design thinking activities, and collaborative tasks, students learn perseverance, adaptability, and creative expression. These experiences help them navigate uncertainty with confidence, an essential skill in a rapidly changing world.

Interpersonal and communication skills are strengthened through structured group work, discussions, presentations, and leadership opportunities. Social-emotional learning and soul science principles are embedded into daily school life, enabling students to develop self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation. This not only supports personal well-being but also enhances collaboration and respect for diverse perspectives.

Finally, continuous teacher upskilling ensures that educators are facilitators of learning rather than mere transmitters of content. With ongoing training, reflective practices, and data-informed feedback, teachers are empowered to create engaging, inclusive, and future-ready classrooms.

Together, these curricular and pedagogical shifts ensure that Birla Open Minds students are academically strong, emotionally balanced, creatively confident, and equipped with the life skills required to thrive in tomorrow's world.

Q Strong schools are built on strong teachers. Can you share your approach to teacher training and professional development, and how this contributes to building a thriving learning culture in your schools?

Absolutely, strong teachers are the cornerstone of strong schools, and our approach to teacher training and professional development at Birla Open Minds is both structured and deeply human.

We view professional development as a continuous journey rather than a one-time intervention. Teachers are supported through a layered model that includes robust onboarding, ongoing pedagogical training, subject enrichment, and leadership development. This ensures that every educator, whether new or experienced, is aligned with our academic philosophy, quality benchmarks, and child-centric approach.

A key focus is empowering teachers as reflective practitioners. Regular workshops, classroom observations, peer learning communities, and mentoring encourage educators to analyse their own practice, experiment with innovative strategies, and continuously improve. Training goes beyond content delivery to include inquiry-based teaching, assessment literacy, inclusive education, classroom management, and integration of technology.

Equally important is our emphasis on well-being and soul science. We consciously integrate social-emotional learning, mindfulness, and self-awareness into teacher development programmes. When teachers feel emotionally balanced, valued, and supported, they bring greater empathy, creativity, and resilience into the classroom—directly impacting student engagement and learning outcomes.

Data and feedback play a critical role as well. Through structured reviews, appraisals, and academic audits, teachers receive constructive, actionable feedback that supports growth rather than compliance. This creates a culture of trust, accountability, and shared ownership of learning.

Ultimately, by investing in teachers as professionals and as people, Birla Open Minds nurtures a thriving learning culture—one where educators feel empowered to lead learning, students feel inspired to grow, and schools evolve as dynamic communities of practice.

Q With the rise of blended and hybrid learning, what innovations – whether in pedagogy, technology, or learning platforms – are you most excited about

implementing or scaling at Birla Open Minds to enhance student engagement?

The rise of blended and hybrid learning has been a powerful catalyst for reimagining how students engage with learning, and at Birla Open Minds, this is an area of both excitement and thoughtful innovation.

Pedagogically, we are most excited about scaling models that shift classrooms from content delivery spaces to hubs of exploration and application. Flipped classrooms, inquiry-based tasks, and project-led learning allow students to engage with core concepts at their own pace and use classroom time for discussion, collaboration, and deeper thinking. This not only increases engagement but also strengthens ownership of learning.

On the technology front, we are focused on platforms that support personalisation rather than passive consumption. Adaptive learning tools, digital assessments, and analytics dashboards help teachers understand student progress in real time and tailor instruction accordingly. These insights enable timely intervention, enrichment, and differentiated support, making learning more inclusive and effective.

Learning platforms are also being leveraged to extend learning beyond the classroom. Integrated LMS environments provide access to curated content, assignments, reflections, and feedback, enabling continuity across physical and virtual spaces. When combined with guided teacher facilitation, these platforms enhance consistency while preserving the human connection that is central to learning.

Equally important is how we embed soul science and well-being into blended models. Structured screen breaks, reflective practices, and mindful use of technology ensure that digital learning enhances focus and curiosity without overwhelming students. Teachers are trained to balance engagement with emotional and cognitive well-being.

Ultimately, the innovations we are scaling are those that deepen engagement, personalise learning, and preserve joy and balance—ensuring that blended and hybrid learning at Birla Open Minds remains purposeful, inclusive, and learner-centric.

Q You have a global academic background and a strong commitment to education. Looking back, what principle or experience has most shaped your leadership philosophy in education, and how does it influence the way you lead change at Birla Open Minds today?

Looking back, the principle that has most deeply shaped my leadership philosophy in education is the belief that education is a human endeavour before it is an institutional one. My global academic exposure, across diverse systems, cultures, and classrooms, made one truth very clear: sustainable change in education does not begin with policies or structures alone, but with people, purpose, and trust.

One defining experience was witnessing how different education systems achieved excellence in very different ways, yet those that truly thrived shared a common thread, strong relationships, respect for teachers as professionals, and a deep understanding of the child as a whole person. This reinforced my conviction that context matters, and that meaningful reform must be empathetic, inclusive, and grounded in local realities.

This principle strongly influences how I lead change at Birla Open Minds today. We focus on building clarity of vision while allowing flexibility in execution. Change is introduced through collaboration, capacity building, and reflection rather than top-down mandates. Teachers and school leaders are treated as partners in transformation, not merely implementers of frameworks.

It also shapes our emphasis on soul science, ensuring balance, well-being, and purpose alongside ambition and growth. Leading change, for me, means creating environments where people feel safe to innovate, supported through uncertainty, and connected to a larger purpose.

Ultimately, my leadership approach is guided by the idea that when we lead with empathy, integrity, and long-term intent, change becomes not just scalable, but sustainable, and that is the kind of impact Birla Open Minds strives to create every day. EP

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EDUCATION MUST BE ACCESSIBLE, AFFORDABLE, AND HONEST



Sadashiba Mishra
Founder & CEO of Testquest E-learning and Chairman of Swabalambi Odisha

In an era where education is rapidly turning digital but access remains uneven, **Sadashiba Mishra** stands out as a grounded, grassroots entrepreneur who understands India beyond metro boardrooms. In conversation with **Prafull Pandey,** Mishra—Founder & CEO of Testquest E-learning and Chairman of Swabalambi Odisha, Mishra has spent years working at the intersection of education, entrepreneurship, law, and ecosystem building.

In this wide-ranging conversation, he speaks candidly about EdTech price hikes, rural internet challenges, startup failures, mentorship gaps, investor myths, and what it truly takes to build sustainable ventures in India. More than a success story, this is a reality check for aspiring entrepreneurs.

Q Today, EdTech platforms are becoming expensive. How do you view this trend, especially in states like Odisha?

As someone who has worked closely with the education ecosystem for many years, I find this trend deeply concerning. EdTech was meant to democratize education, not commercialize it to the point where it becomes inaccessible. In a state like Odisha, this challenge is even more pronounced. A significant percentage of learners do not have access to high-speed internet, and many families operate within limited financial means. When platforms increase prices aggressively, they unintentionally exclude a large section of deserving students. Education, especially digital education, must be built on the principles of inclusion, affordability, and social responsibility. If EdTech solutions are not grounded in ground realities, they risk becoming elite products rather than mass enablers of learning.

Q How does Testquest E-learning address these ground realities?

Testquest E-learning was conceived with a clear understanding that meaningful education must be built around real-world challenges rather than ideal digital conditions. Recognising that large parts of India—particularly states like Odisha—still struggle with limited connectivity and affordability, the platform was intentionally designed to function effectively even on low-bandwidth networks such as 2G. This technological inclusivity ensures that learning is not restricted to urban or well-connected regions alone. Affordability remains another cornerstone of Testquest's philosophy, with pricing models crafted to suit middle- and lower-income families, reinforcing the belief that quality education should never be a privilege of the few. Beyond access and cost, Testquest reimagines assessment through game-based learning, transforming examinations from a source of anxiety into an engaging and confidence-building experience. By also offering parents clear insights into students' learning behaviour, the platform encourages informed participation in a child's educational journey. Together, these elements position Testquest E-learning not merely as a digital tool, but as a thoughtful bridge between aspiration and opportunity—where technology serves learners with empathy, equity, and purpose.

Q How do you view the recent price hikes in the EdTech sector?

The recent surge in pricing across the EdTech sector reflects a growing disconnect between commercial ambitions and the lived realities of learners on the ground. What began as a movement to democratise education is increasingly drifting towards exclusivity, particularly in regions where digital infrastructure and household incomes remain limited. In states like Odisha, where stable internet access is still uneven and many families struggle with basic connectivity, premium-priced digital learning platforms often remain out of reach. This trend risks widening educational inequality rather than addressing it, creating a divide between those who can afford technology-driven learning and those who cannot. Education technology should function as an equaliser, not a barrier, and its success must be measured by learning impact and accessibility rather than profit alone. For EdTech to truly fulfil its promise, pricing models and platforms must be designed around real-world conditions—ensuring that innovation remains inclusive, affordable, and rooted in the diverse needs of India's learners.

Q What is the reality of internet penetration in Odisha and similar regions?

In regions like Odisha and other comparable parts of the country, the narrative of seamless digital connectivity often contrasts sharply with ground realities. While urban pockets benefit from relatively stable 4G networks and the promise of 5G, vast rural and semi-urban areas continue to grapple with weak signals, frequent disruptions, and limited access altogether. For a significant section of students and families, reliable internet remains a luxury rather than a given. This digital divide goes beyond the availability of smartphones or data packs—it reflects deeper infrastructural and socio-economic gaps that directly influence access to education and opportunity. When digital learning platforms are designed assuming uninterrupted, high-speed connectivity, they inadvertently leave behind learners who need them the most. As a result, online education risks reinforcing inequality instead of reducing it. Meaningful impact, therefore, lies in reimagining digital education solutions that are lightweight, inclusive, and adaptable to low-bandwidth environments—only then can technology truly democratise learning across regions like Odisha.

Q What role should technology play in parental involvement in education?

Technology, when used thoughtfully, can become a powerful bridge between parents and a child's learning journey. Rather than acting as a distraction or a replacement for guidance, it should empower parents with visibility and control. Digital platforms can help parents understand how much time their children spend studying, what kind of content they consume, and where they are progressing or struggling. This transparency builds trust and enables timely intervention, especially in households where parents may not be academically equipped to guide their children directly.

More importantly, technology should simplify parental engagement, not complicate it. Simple dashboards, progress alerts, and meaningful performance insights can help parents stay involved without feeling overwhelmed. In regions where parents are busy or lack digital literacy, tools must be intuitive and language-friendly. Ultimately, technology's role is not to take over parenting, but to support it—ensuring that education remains a shared responsibility between institutions, students, and families.

How does mobile phone usage impact students' learning behavior today?

Mobile phone usage has fundamentally changed the way students engage with learning, bringing both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, smartphones provide instant access to information, learning apps, and digital classrooms, making education more accessible than ever before. On the other hand, unchecked usage often leads to distraction, reduced attention spans, and a tendency to consume content passively rather than engage in deep learning. Many students spend significant time on social media and entertainment platforms, which can dilute focus and disrupt study routines if not guided properly.

The real concern lies not in the device itself, but in how it is used and monitored. When mobile phones are integrated purposefully into the learning process—with structured content, time tracking, and clear learning objectives—they can enhance curiosity and self-paced learning. However, without supervision from parents and educators, students may confuse screen time with productive study time. Therefore, mobile phones should be positioned as learning tools under guidance, not as unchecked companions, to positively shape students' learning behavior in today's digital age.

How does game-based learning improve student engagement?

Game-based learning significantly improves student engagement by transforming the learning process from a passive activity into an interactive and immersive experience. When lessons are designed in the form of challenges, levels, rewards, and real-time feedback, students become active participants rather than mere listeners. This approach taps into natural human motivations such as curiosity, competition, and achievement, making learning feel enjoyable instead of obligatory. As a result, students are more willing to invest time and effort, leading to higher attention spans and better concept retention.

Beyond motivation, game-based learning also encourages problem-solving, critical thinking, and collaboration. Students learn to apply concepts in simulated real-life scenarios, make decisions, and learn from mistakes without the fear of failure. This experiential style of learning builds confidence and nurtures a growth mindset. When thoughtfully implemented, game-based learning not only sustains engagement but also deepens understanding, making education more meaningful and outcome-oriented.

What lies ahead for Testquest and your broader vision?

Looking ahead, Testquest is envisioned as more than just an EdTech platform—it aims to become a holistic learning ecosystem that bridges aspiration with opportunity. The immediate focus is on strengthening affordability, accessibility, and relevance, particularly for students from semi-urban and rural regions who are often left out of the mainstream digital education wave. By combining adaptive technology with strong academic mentoring, Testquest seeks to ensure that quality learning is not a privilege, but a right.

At a broader level, the vision extends to nurturing self-reliant learners and future-ready professionals. This includes expanding skill-based and assessment-driven learning models, deeper integration with schools, colleges, and community institutions, and creating pathways for employability and entrepreneurship. Ultimately, Testquest aims to contribute to a stronger educational ecosystem—one that empowers students to think independently, adapt confidently, and succeed in a rapidly evolving world.

You also lead Swabalambi Odisha. What problem does it solve?

Swabalambi Odisha was born out of a very practical need—to create sustainable livelihood opportunities at the grassroots level. While education is a powerful enabler, many capable individuals still struggle due to lack of guidance, skill mapping, and access to structured ecosystems that can help them become self-reliant. Swabalambi Odisha addresses this gap by working closely with youth, women, and local entrepreneurs to promote entrepreneurship, skill development, and community-led economic growth.

The initiative focuses on mentoring, capacity building, and connecting people with the right institutional and market support. By fostering a culture of self-employment and local enterprise, Swabalambi Odisha aims to reduce dependency, curb migration, and strengthen the regional economy. At its core, the movement is about dignity of work and empowerment—helping individuals realise that with the right support system, they can create opportunities not only for themselves but also for others in their communities.

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Q You've worked deeply in the startup ecosystem. Why do nearly 90% of startups fail?

Startup failure is often discussed in terms of funding shortages, but in reality, the problem runs much deeper. Nearly 90% of startups fail because many founders begin with an idea but lack a clear understanding of how that idea will translate into a sustainable business. Having a concept is only the first step; without a well-defined business model, revenue logic, and execution roadmap, even the most innovative ideas struggle to survive.

Another major reason is the absence of financial and analytical preparedness. Many entrepreneurs do not know how to build a financial model, conduct proper market research, or interpret analytical reports that guide decision-making. This leads to unrealistic expectations, poor scaling decisions, and inefficient use of resources. Additionally, startups often fail due to limited manpower, weak mentorship, and a lack of long-term vision. Successful ventures require either strong capital support or a committed, skilled team—ideally both. Without these foundations, startups find it difficult to withstand market pressures, adapt to change, or compete sustainably, ultimately leading to early closure.

Q What are the most common mistakes made by first-time entrepreneurs?

First-time entrepreneurs often make the mistake of falling in love with their idea without validating it against real market needs. They assume that a good idea will automatically find buyers, but in reality, understanding the target audience, their pain points, and their willingness to pay is far more important. Many founders invest heavily in building a product before testing whether the market is ready or even interested, which leads to wasted time, money, and energy.

Another common mistake is underestimating the importance of business fundamentals. New entrepreneurs frequently lack clarity around pricing, financial planning, marketing strategy, and operational sustainability. They focus too much on product creation and too little on customer acquisition, branding, and cash flow management. Additionally, many first-time founders hesitate to seek mentorship or expert advice, believing they must do everything independently. This reluctance, combined with unrealistic growth expectations and poor risk assessment, often results in burnout or failure. Successful entrepreneurship requires patience, learning from experienced voices, and the ability to adapt continuously rather than chasing quick success.

Q What advice would you give to aspiring entrepreneurs and students?

For aspiring entrepreneurs and students, my first advice would be to focus on building strong fundamentals before chasing big dreams. Education, skill development, and practical exposure should go hand in hand. Don't rush into entrepreneurship just because it sounds glamorous or trendy. Take time to understand how businesses actually work—learn about finance, marketing, operations, and human behavior. Most importantly, develop the habit of problem-solving. Real businesses are built by identifying genuine problems and offering simple, sustainable solutions, not by copying ideas that are already overcrowded in the market.

Secondly, I would strongly encourage young minds to be patient and resilient. Failure is not the end; it is part of the learning process. Use technology wisely—as a tool, not a shortcut—and avoid depending solely on online information without critical thinking. Seek mentors, ask questions, and remain open to feedback. Whether you choose a job, a startup, or higher studies, integrity, discipline, and continuous learning will define your long-term success. Believe in your journey, stay grounded, and remember that meaningful impact takes time to create.

In an age defined by rapid digital acceleration, this exchange serves as a timely reminder that sustainable progress cannot be built on hype alone. It requires a genuine understanding of people, consistent nurturing of skills, and the creation of systems that are designed to serve society at large. As educators, policymakers, and young leaders chart the road ahead, voices like Mishra's offer both direction and reassurance—grounded in lived experience, guided by empathy, and firmly focused on long-term impact rather than fleeting success.

As the conversation draws to a close, one message emerges with unmistakable clarity: the future of education and entrepreneurship must be firmly anchored in reality, inclusivity, and purpose. Through his measured yet deeply insightful reflections, Sadashiba Mishra underscores the pressing need to bridge long-standing gaps—between technology and accessibility, ambition and preparedness, and ideas and their real-world execution. His journey with Testquest E-learning and Swabalambi Odisha stands as a testament to his commitment to grassroots empowerment, where students, parents, and aspiring entrepreneurs are not just participants, but active stakeholders in change. EP

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THE SHADOW EDUCATION SYSTEM

WHY INDIAN PARENTS ARE PAYING TWICE FOR SCHOOL

> Private tutoring was meant to help struggling students. Instead, it has become a parallel education system, funded by anxious families, encouraged by schools, but barely reflected in learning gains, Education Post's Managing Editor **Rohit Wadhwaney** finds.

It's 10 o'clock on a school night in Patna, and 14-year-old Anjali Kumar is still awake.

Her school day ended at 3pm. At 5pm, she attended a neighborhood maths tuition. At 7pm, an online science class streamed on her father's phone. Homework came last, squeezed into whatever time was left.

Anjali does not describe herself as ambitious. She doesn't talk about topping exams or cracking competitive tests. What she talks about is fear. "If I stop tuition, my marks will fall," she says.

That sentence explains more about India's education system than most policy documents.

Across the country, private tutoring has quietly shifted from being a safety net to becoming a default. Families enroll children in coaching not because schools have failed completely, but because they cannot trust schools to be enough. The result is a shadow education system that runs alongside formal schooling. It's expensive, exhausting, and surprisingly ineffective at improving learning.

India's education economy has never been bigger. Yet its learning outcomes have barely budged.

Normalization of extra school

Government data now confirms what parents have known for years. The Comprehensive Modular Survey (NSS 80th Round) shows that nearly 27 percent of Indian students receive private coaching — over 30 percent in urban areas and more than a quarter in rural India. This is not limited to exam classes or elite cities. It cuts across income levels, school types, and regions.

Private tutoring is no longer remedial. It is routine.

In government schools, where fees are minimal, coaching often costs more than the school itself. In private schools, it adds a second education bill, one that families absorb quietly, month after month.

Parents are paying as much as ₹95,000 a year for a single tutor covering science subjects, while others spent ₹9,000 a month on online classes that continue even after schools reopened. One parent describes tuition as unavoidable. Fees are non-negotiable, and expectations are clear. No coaching means falling behind.

This is not consumer choice. It is pressure.

Ankur Sarin, professor at IIM Ahmedabad, says: "The extent and magnitude of private tutoring is something that came as a big surprise to us," adding, "Education has become such a marker of status among lower income groups that if children are sent to a government school, it is seen as bad parenting."

Tutoring has become both academic support and social signaling — a way to prove you are doing "enough" as a parent.

Spending doesn't buy learning

If coaching delivered strong learning gains, this dependence might be defensible. The evidence says otherwise.

Data from the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) shows no consistent link between tutoring prevalence and student proficiency. States like West Bengal and Tripura report high participation in paid coaching but modest reading and arithmetic levels among middle-school students. Haryana, Kerala, and Maharashtra perform better with only moderate tutoring use.

Plot the two together and the trend line is almost flat.

This pattern is not unique to India. Global research on what scholars call "shadow education" shows that tutoring often substitutes for classroom learning rather than strengthening it. In exam-driven systems, coaching trains students to predict questions, memorize formats, and reproduce answers. These are skills that raise scores without deepening understanding.

As one international review notes, families turn to tutoring to compensate for what they perceive as inevitable gaps in schools, not because tutoring is inherently superior, but because schooling feels unreliable.

India's experience fits this exactly.

Parallel industry built on anxiety

The tutoring economy has expanded to meet that fear. Estimates place the size of India's coaching market at ₹50,000–60,000 crore, with projections suggesting rapid growth driven by online platforms and exam preparation services. The sector now provides large-scale employment, from tutors and test designers to digital content teams.

But this growth comes almost entirely from household spending.

Pre-pandemic estimates suggest coaching accounts for over 40% of private education expenditure for families that use it. With online tutoring expanding since COVID 19, the real share is likely higher. That money does not come from surplus. It is diverted from nutrition, healthcare, savings, and digital access.

Parents know this and still pay.

In Hyderabad, one father told reporters that children today "cannot prepare on their own" because academic demands have risen while classroom support has not.

Tuition, he said, was not a luxury. It was survival.

This quiet acceptance has consequences. When tutoring becomes universal, schools begin to rely on it. Teachers assume students will cover content outside class. Exams become tougher. Coaching becomes indispensable. Opting out feels reckless.

"Many schools conveniently push the ball back to parents, telling them to engage private tutors for their kids. This is a serious failure in the education system," says Assocham secretary general DS Rawat.

Why schools have lost trust

At the heart of the tutoring boom lies a simple problem. Parents do not know how to judge whether schools are doing their job.

Report cards offer marks, not mastery. School inspections track infrastructure and enrollment, not whether students can read fluently or solve basic problems. For families navigating a competitive system, tutoring becomes the only visible intervention with a clear signal: pay more, try harder.

This is why tutoring thrives even in private

schools, and even among students who are already performing well.

Researchers at IIM Ahmedabad found that once tutoring becomes widespread, it creates its own logic. Reetika Khera, professor of economics, observes: “As tuitions become a widespread practice, parents begin to feel that their child will be penalized if the child is not sent.”

The fear is not academic failure alone. It is relative disadvantage.



Can policy break the cycle?

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is the first official document to confront this reality head-on. It calls for changes to board exams, a reduction in high-stakes testing, and a renewed focus on conceptual learning. It also commits, at least on paper, to raising public education spending to 6% of GDP.

One key bet is on early learning. The NIPUN Bharat mission aims to ensure that every child can read and do basic maths by Grade 3 through structured teaching, teacher training, and regular assessment.

The logic is straightforward. If children don’t fall behind early, the need for later correction through tutoring drops sharply.

Another effort, One Nation One Subscription, seeks to make high-quality learning resources freely available across states. The challenge, as always, is not access but use. Content does not replace teaching unless it enters classrooms in meaningful ways.

Equally important is transparency. Tools like NITI Aayog’s School Education Quality Index (SEQI) show how public reporting on outcomes can change conversations. Extending such measures to district- and school-level learning indicators, if updated annually and made accessible to parents, could reduce the uncertainty that fuels defensive spending.

Beyond marks, toward work

Tutoring dependence is also tied to a deeper problem. That problem is the narrow link between schooling and opportunity.

When exams act as the single gateway to higher education and employment, families chase marks relentlessly. Expanding credible alternatives matters.

Since 2014, India’s skilling architecture — through the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, PMKVY, and the Skill India Mission — has tried to build public pathways from education to work. Some schools are now being positioned as skill hubs, offering vocational modules and apprenticeship-linked training after hours.

Digital platforms like the Skill India Digital Hub and PM e-Vidya offer structured learning support at low cost, the kind tutoring claims to provide, without the price tag.

These efforts will not replace academic education. But they can loosen the grip of marks as the only currency that matters.

Paying once for education

Private tutoring will not disappear. Nor should it. Some students need extra help. Some exams will always demand focused preparation.

The problem is scale and compulsion.

When nearly one in three students relies on coaching, tutoring is no longer a supplement. It is a system failure financed privately.

“Eliminating tutoring is neither possible nor desirable,” says a private tutor in Delhi NCR without wanting to be named. “Reducing dependence should be the goal,” she admits.

That reduction will come only when schools are strong enough to stand on their own, when classroom teaching is reliable, learning progress is visible, and alternate pathways are credible. That’s when tutoring will shrink back to its proper place. Optional. Limited. Supportive.

For students like Anjali, that day can’t come soon enough.

“If school was enough, I would really like to stop tuitions, she says, smiling shyly. “I will have more time to play with my friends.”

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ATAL TINKERING LABS (ATL)

A DECADE OF DEMOCRATIZING INNOVATION IN INDIAN SCHOOL EDUCATION

Dr. Prashant R. Nair
Associate Director, Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC), Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Coimbatore
Regional Mentor of Change (RMoC), Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) {Honorary Position}

India's Climbing rank in Global Innovation Indices

India has been steadily climbing up the global innovation trajectory demonstrated by its ranking in the Global Innovation Index (GII) released by World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). It may be interesting to note that there has been steep climb for India over the last decade from 81st position in GII 2015 to 38th in 2025. This also coincides with the setup of Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) by the Indian government's policy think-tank, NITI Aayog (formerly Planning Commission). Several governmental & non-governmental agencies at both central and state-level as well as industry & industry associations have also contributed to this innovation boost. Visionary national and state-level programs like Startup India, Smart India Hackathon, and NASSCOM Product conclave have also reinforced efforts towards creating knowledge capital and enriching the national innovation ecosystem.

Atal Innovation Mission (AIM)

Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) was set up a decade ago by the NITI Aayog to promote a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation in India. Its objective is to create a conducive ambience and atmosphere for transformation of ideas into innovative solutions at schools, universities, research agencies, startups and industry including MSME. In other words, move from idea to product and product to startup with the help of seamless public-private partnerships. AIM also provides policy inputs to various government bodies, create awareness and provide knowledge inputs in creating innovation challenges and funding mechanism to government; and also develops new programs and policies for fostering innovation in different sectors of economy. The AIM report card in the last 10 years has been nothing short of spectacular:



- 10000+ Atal Tinkering Labs (ATL) operationalized in 722 districts across 35 states in India benefiting 1.1. Crore school children all over India. 60% of these ATLs are in government and government-aided schools.
- 100 Atal Incubation Centers (AIC) fostering over 3500+ Startups of which 1000+ are women-led Startups with 32,000+ jobs created.
- 14 Atal Community Innovation Centers (ACIC) to spur community centric-innovations addressing rural India, Tier2, Tier3 city's needs.
- 24 Atal New India Challenge (With Government Ministries) & 15 Atal Research & Innovation for Small Enterprises {ARISE} (MSME challenge).
- 40+ international and national partners including innovation collaborations with Australia, Sweden, Russia, Israel, Singapore, Denmark, USA & France.
- Mentor India volunteer network with over 6500+ mentors, who are successful professionals from civil society including university professors, entrepreneurs, startup founders and industry professionals, have now been on boarded and associated as Mentors of Change (MoCs) on a pro-bono basis. Around 100 of them have been recognized as regional mentors of change as a honorary position for their contribution by AIM

Atal Tinkering Labs (ATL)

❖ The Indian education system both tertiary and school education has been facing diverse challenges and gaps with respect to access, accreditation, employability, equity, faculty, funding, research, quality, innovation and creativity. It is imperative that the school education in India must be redefined with innovation to be able to plug these gaps.

❖ The flagship program of AIM, the Atal Tinkering Lab (ATL) is the one of the answers; a smart workspace of 1000-1500 square feet with state-of-the-art facilities & cutting-edge technologies meant for school children enrolled in schools from 6th standard to 12th standard.

- ❖ ATL's objective is to develop a culture of neoteric innovation in India. It enables democratization of innovation by facilitating access to technologies to the grassroots especially the children in government schools.
- ❖ Tinkering lab activities are designed to spur the spark of problem-solving, curiosity, imagination & creativity, and go beyond regular curriculum and text book learning. Tinkering develops the aptitude to explore, experiment and learn. Tinkering refers to an attempt to inculcate the "Let's Try Something New" attitude among students of all age groups with the help of technology.
- ❖ ATL is equipped with cutting-edge equipment like robotics kits, sensors, IoT, 3D printer, miniaturized electronics, space technology, drone technology and other tools for tinkering, which are perhaps not seen even in majority of higher educational institutions and universities engaged in STEM education.
- ❖ ATL promotes innovation independence as all the equipment and infrastructure in the lab is vendor-agnostic and schools have full freedom to procure equipment of their choice from any vendor subject to guidelines.
- ❖ The ATL has a structured curriculum towards 21st century skills such as ideation,

Computational Thinking, Design Thinking, 3D design & printing, Physical Computing (IoT & sensors), Robotics, electronics development tools & IPR. It is a 4 stage tinkering curriculum with adequate flexibility. And usually works with a monthly mentoring theme.

- Other activities include competitions, seminars, workshops, tinker marathon, tinkerfest, community day with recognitions and rewards for the top performers like ATL school of the month, ATL wall of fame etc.
- More than 16 lakhs+ student projects have been created as part of various regular ATL activities as also innovation challenges like ATL marathon, ATL Tinkerpreneur, School Innovation Marathon, ATL space challenge etc.
- ATL Marathon 2023-2024 edition, the national ATL innovation challenge, saw an amazing 19,500 ideation entries from school children pan-India.
- School Innovation Marathon 2024-2025, the national innovation challenge for schools by Ministry of Education with theme, 'Viksit Bharat 2047', saw 6.7 lakh students from 54,000 schools participated nationwide with over 1 lakh project submissions.

The ATL is no doubt a disruptive innovation which can equip students with tools needed to succeed in higher education and in the workplace like collaboration, team work, innovation, creativity, imagination, tinkering and presentation skills. No doubt, a stable, multi-stakeholder, scalable and foundational framework has been created by AIM through these ATLs. The need of the hour is to scale up this ATL model of AIM to include every school in India.

Startups, entrepreneurs, industry & industry bodies as well as universities and colleges can also render support this program by motivating their employees, faculty and members to enroll as mentors of change (MoC) for ATLs as also adopt the ATLs in their community and neighborhood and support them through collaboration, partnerships, funding, opportunities and mentoring. A cluster-based approach called ATL Sarthi is in development pan-India.



As part of this, a nodal organization adopts and mentors the schools with ATLs in a district so as to enable them to adopt best practices and run the ATLs, through co-learning, co-creating and co-adapting with the support of local authorities/organizations, known as ATL clusters. The nodal agency can be the state government education departments, private organizations, high performing school, innovation councils in universities and colleges, NGOs, and civil society organizations. Interestingly, the Ministry of Education of Government of India has now mandated that every Institution's Innovation Council (IIC) in all colleges and universities in India needs to adopt at least three ATLs each. The best performing as well as maximum number of IICs are in the state- of Tamil Nadu and most of these innovations councils are adopting the ATLs as well as leading the ATL Sarthi cluster in their respective districts. Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham Coimbatore's IIC is the one of the lead nodal organizations for the district of Coimbatore since 2024, providing leadership in the cluster with 67 schools with ATLs in the district.

A fresh call for Atal Tinkering Labs (ATL) has secured cabinet approval with the next wave of 50,000+ ATLs in the pipeline for government schools pan-India. Private schools can secure industry funding to set up the ATL and AIM will provide the guidance and mentoring support.

Truly, sky is the limit for this ATL program. So watch the space, https://aim.gov.in/ for more updates.





ARE WE OVER-HYPING BOARD EXAMS?

REFRAMING THE CONVERSATION DURING EXAM SEASON

Pallavi Mishra
COO of Radcliffe Schools

March brings back the season of board exams. As those years pass, board exams will remain the true measure of a student's value i.e., the key to the future. For years now board exams have become the sole measure of value placed upon higher education institutions on how many students continue on to their next stage after completing their board exams and how high do they achieve. Should we reconsider the significance or weight we place on our board exams? Do we have enough proof to substantiate our understanding about how heavily we regard the board exam?

It is generally understood that when a student succeeds at one type of examination they will also continue to succeed in their other academic endeavors.While this is somewhat true, the reality is that doing well gives certain students an opportunity to do even better as compared to others who will achieve only average results. The significant emphasis the educational system places on exam performance have caused a testing effect that favorsmemorization and recall over genuine, in-depth understanding of the material. When students spend 18 months preparing not only to "beat the test" but also to learn subject matter, by the time they arrive at the university level, they will have a high grade-point average but a low ability to create questions and solutions on their own. These students will be excellent at locating answers; however, they will often struggle to solve open-ended, messy problems in real-life situations where no marking criteria or guiding principles exist.

Through all this hype about board exams, we confuse the effects from board



exams on our child's education with board exam as we continue to reward privilege without recognizing this is not meritocracy. The obsession over board exam scores cloud our perception of larger social injustices. While standardized testing attempts to be a common measure amongst students, it really measures the availability of resources made available to students. While there are many reasons for many problems associated with standardized examinations, the way we hype these exams continues to create a system that rewards privilege without recognizing it's a merit-based system.

Being competitive in today's economy requires mind flexibility and this is measured by tests in a way that creates the opportunity for flexibility in a student through a method of setting clear expectations for students on how to solve problems but only if that method is correct in each case; otherwise, students develop the inability to create new ideas or change when they need to due to their development of a belief system that they must use under pressure to solve problems only in one specific way.

When we look at the future, with AI and automation playing an increasing role in everything we do, we have to find new skills that will create meaningful value for society but which are not assessed using standardized tests. Creativity, ethical judgment, and teamwork are becoming the most sought-after currencies today. Therefore, if the education system continues to overemphasize testing as the primary means to assess real-life skills, it will ultimately create a labor force that is overly qualified based on expectations of what are relevant to the past but completely underqualified concerning future expectations.

To change the discussion regarding the board exams, there needs to be collaboration between the parents, teachers and the government. Parents should separate the child's identity from their grades. Government should move decisively to shift from summative assessments to ongoing and continuous assessment models

where learning and the learning process are viewed equally as being of value, and that this is reflected in the assessment of student learning throughout the school year using project-based assessments that allow students to demonstrate their learning through methods of assessment that do not depend solely on using pen and paper.

The function of the home must move from being a typical cram school, to being a supportive place for a developing mind outside of school. When parents value their child's sleep, nourishment, and mental sanity more than staying up late to learn more triangles, they are investing in their child's long-term brain function. A brain under stress is much less effective than a brain that is not under stress; by lowering stress levels, parents will facilitate the optimal functioning of the prefrontal cortex which allows for retention of knowledge and greater clarity of thought during the board exam itself.

Teachers should not feel pressured into teaching to the test, but rather should be encouraged to create opportunities for students to inquire and cultivate the same type of curiosity that motivated them to become educators. This process will require developing strategies and techniques that support all three types of learners helping to ensure that creation is going to be added to the exploratory nature of the classroom rather than being considered only a rehearsal period for end-of-year finals. Using formative assessment on a project-design basis throughout the year will create more opportunities for students to express their understanding than a simple pen/paper test.

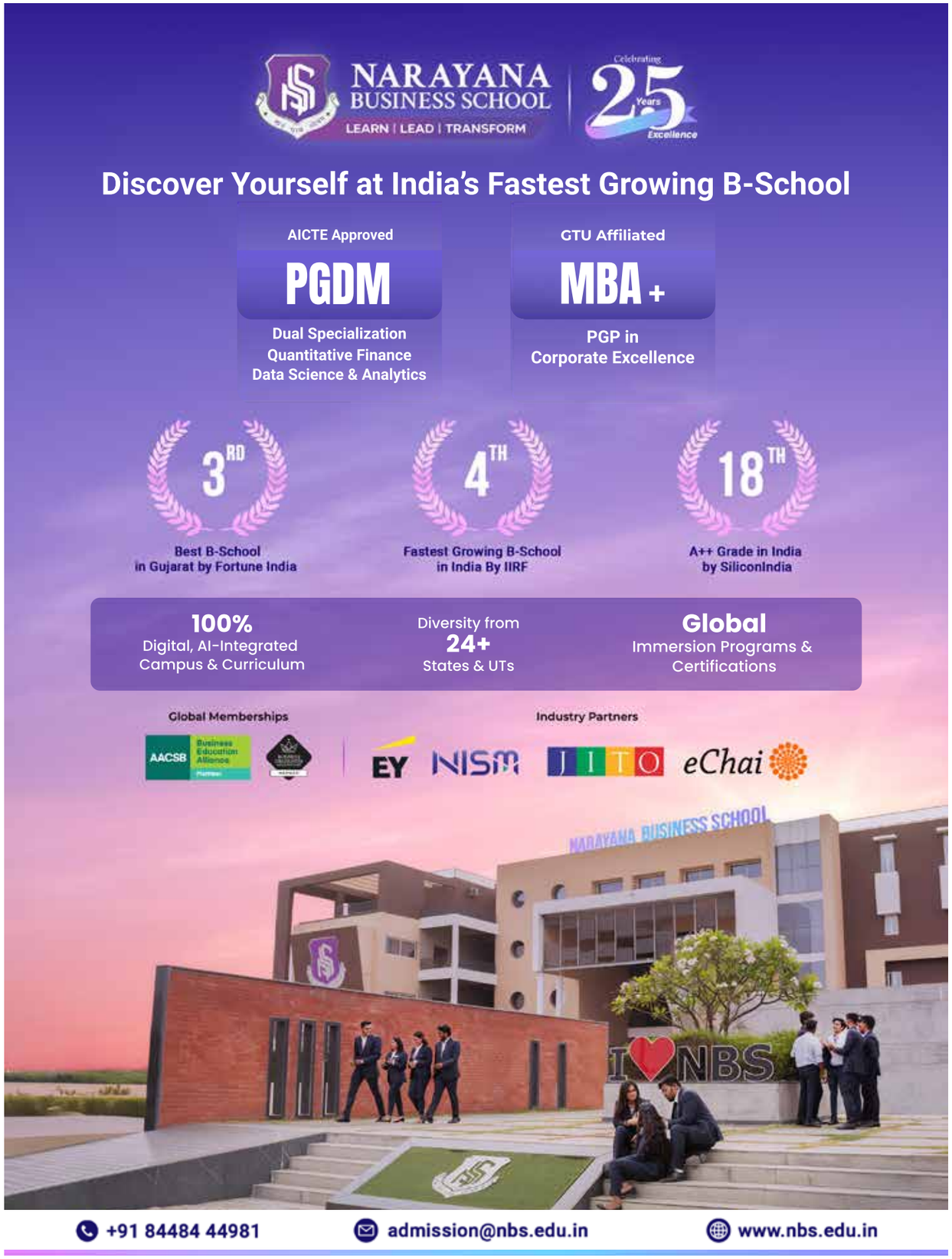
Assessments must be re-evaluated for both their timing and how much they count towards passing. Educators can provide much clearer and more accurate information about student progress with assessment over the course of an extended period than if they assess students' learning in a week-long, marathon period. The student's academic potential will be demonstrated without having to compete against the fear of having a bad day lead to the demise of several years of their academic effort and achievement due to performance anxiety.

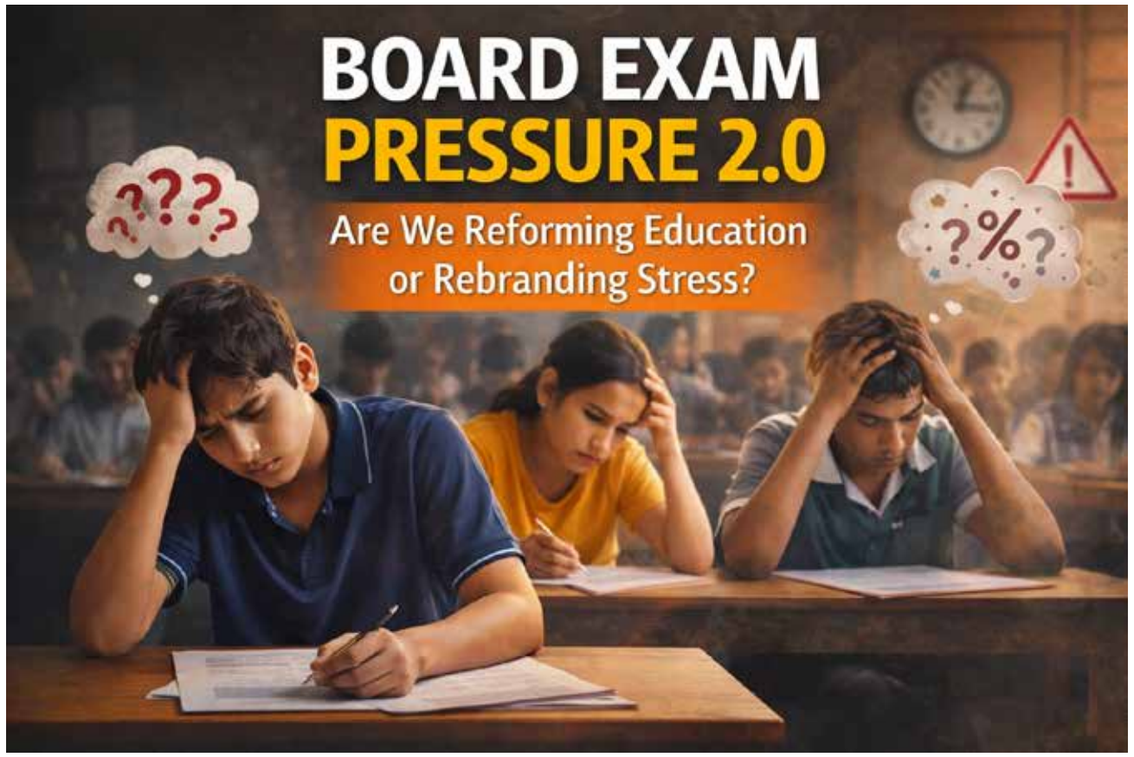
Policymakers are encouraged to promote a faster transition to an ongoing assessment system where learning and final outcomes are weighted equally. To achieve this, there needs to be more opportunities for teachers to obtain training or revise national standards based on quality rather than just quantity.

In addition to reviewing the assessment model there is a need for a national conversation about the different ways we define success. The government and business leaders should join together to promote job skills training and the development of artistic skills as equally valued and respected career paths. When students view the board exam as one of many possible pathways to adulthood, instead of the only way, the false bottleneck that produces so much anguish throughout society will begin to loosen.

Exams have always been regarded as something very serious.Therefore, it is important that we teach students to work hard during those stressful times, develop their self-discipline and succeed when under pressure. We also need to stop viewing exams as being the end.They are simply a little speed bump along an ongoing road. If we can reduce pressure and reinforce that students should work hard to achieve their best result on an assessment not just on achieving a good score, they will experience an improvement in performance, increased cognitive levels, and perhaps most importantly, maintain their passion for learning and personal growth.

Ultimately, we need to answer the question, "What kind of citizen do we want?" Are we going to create a generation of individuals who can efficiently take tests and follow the directions given to them yet struggle to handle the unknown?Or do you want to see a generation of people who create, dream and provide leadership and view any challenge, not as an obstacle to their grade but as an opportunity to carry out a thought? If you choose the latter, you must start rethinking exam time from being a test of endurance to being an example of growth.





BOARD EXAM PRESSURE 2.0

ARE WE REFORMING EDUCATION OR REBRANDING STRESS?

Prabhav Anand

Every year, as winter recedes and spring approaches, India enters a season unlike any other. It is not marked by festivals or elections, but by examination timetables pinned to refrigerators, by late-night study lamps glowing in millions of homes, and by a quiet tension that travels from classrooms to coaching centres to kitchen tables. February and March have long belonged to the board exams. In 2026, that ritual feels both familiar and fundamentally different. Policies have changed. Formats have evolved. Counselling helplines are active. Circulars speak the language of "well-being," "flexibility," and "second chances." And yet, beneath the reform narrative, a pressing question lingers: are we truly reducing academic pressure, or simply redesigning it?

This year, over 43 lakh students are appearing for the Class 10 and Class 12 examinations conducted by the Central Board of Secondary Education. The scale alone is staggering. Each number represents a young person negotiating ambition, comparison, uncertainty, and expectation. For decades, board exams have been described as life-defining milestones. They determine subject streams, influence college admissions, and often shape how families measure success. The emotional ecosystem around them is intense and deeply cultural. In many households, exam performance is not just academic assessment; it is validation.

The reforms introduced under the vision of the National Education Policy 2020 were meant to challenge precisely this high-stakes culture. Among the most talked-about changes is the proposal to allow board exams to be conducted twice a year, offering students an opportunity to improve their scores. The logic is simple and compassionate: no single day should decide a student's future. By providing a second attempt, the system signals flexibility over finality.

But in practice, the psychology of the second chance is complex. Students preparing this year describe a different kind of pressure — one that stretches the exam cycle instead of compressing it. "It feels like the exam season never really ends," a school counsellor shared during a discussion on exam stress. "Earlier, it was one intense phase. Now, students worry about whether they should attempt improvement, whether colleges will prefer first scores, and whether taking the second attempt signals weakness." Instead of one high peak of anxiety, some students experience a prolonged plateau.

The board has also emphasised psycho-social support. Dedicated counselling services have been made available during the exam period. Tele-helplines operate to guide anxious students and concerned parents. Schools have been directed to adopt social-emotional learning practices and create calmer examination environments. In cities such as Delhi, even logistical measures — including smoother transportation coordination for students travelling to exam centres — have been highlighted as part of a student-friendly approach.

These are not cosmetic gestures. They reflect a genuine shift in administrative thinking. For the first time, the language of mental health sits formally within exam guidelines. Yet implementation tells a more uneven story. In well-resourced private schools, counsellors hold group sessions weeks before the exams. Mindfulness activities and stress-management workshops are organised. Parents receive advisories about maintaining a supportive home atmosphere. In many government schools and smaller towns, however, the reality is different. Teachers handling large class sizes double up as emotional anchors, often without formal training. Counselling exists on paper, but time constraints and resource limitations dilute its depth.

"Awareness has increased," a senior educator remarked recently, "but awareness is not the same as systemic support." The distinction matters. Stress during board exams does not emerge solely from syllabus volume. It stems from accumulated expectations — family aspirations, peer competition, social media comparison, and the belief that marks define identity.

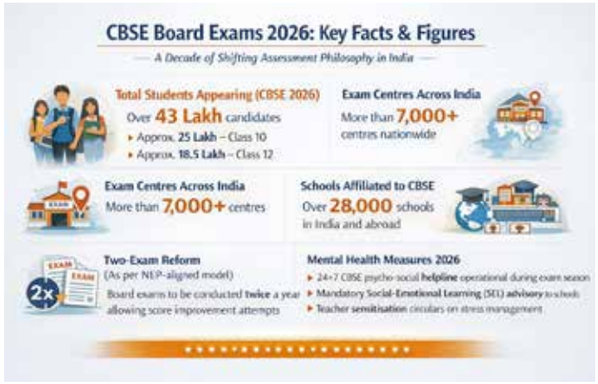


Adding to this ecosystem is the digital layer. Even before the first paper is written, rumours about leaked question papers circulate on messaging platforms. This year was no exception. The CBSE issued advisories cautioning students and parents against misinformation and fake news during the exam cycle. Each viral message triggers a wave of panic, only to be debunked hours later. For students already navigating anxiety, such episodes amplify uncertainty.

Security concerns, too, have entered the examination narrative. In one alarming instance this season, multiple schools in Gujarat received hoax threats on the eve of examinations, prompting security checks and parental alarm. Though authorities confirmed the threats were unfounded, the psychological disruption was real. Board exams are meant to test academic preparation, not emotional resilience against crises. Yet students increasingly find themselves negotiating both.

What complicates the reform debate further is the contradiction between policy intention and societal mindset. The NEP envisions competency-based assessment, reduced rote learning, and a more holistic evaluation framework. But competitive college admissions still hinge heavily on numerical scores. Coaching centres thrive on percentile calculations. Merit lists continue to dominate headlines. The system may speak the language of flexibility, but opportunity structures remain intensely marks-driven.

"Until admissions change, pressure won't," a school principal commented during an interaction on assessment reforms. The remark captures a structural truth. Boards do not operate in isolation. They are intertwined with entrance examinations, scholarship criteria, and employment pipelines. Reforming one layer without synchronising the others risks creating confusion rather than clarity.



Students, meanwhile, occupy the centre of this transition. Conversations with examinees reveal a generation that is more articulate about mental health than ever before. Many acknowledge the benefits of counselling and appreciate the recognition of stress as legitimate. At the same time, they describe the invisible weight of comparison. Social media feeds fill with posts about revision schedules and mock test scores. Performance becomes public narrative. Even celebration carries competitive undertones.

One Class 12 student put it candidly: “We are told not to stress, but everything around us says this is the most important exam of our lives.” That contradiction defines Board Exam Pressure 2.0. The messaging has softened. The stakes have not.

Parents, too, are recalibrating their roles. Workshops now advise them to avoid unrealistic expectations, to prioritise well-being over marks. Yet generational memory lingers. Many parents grew up in systems where board performance directly shaped career possibilities. For them, urging calm while fearing consequence is a delicate balancing act. In urban centres, conversations about alternate career pathways and skill-based futures are gaining ground. In semi-urban and rural contexts, traditional streams — science, commerce, humanities — continue to carry hierarchical perceptions.

There is also a broader economic undercurrent. As India positions itself as a knowledge economy, academic excellence is often framed as national progress. Board results are celebrated as indicators of institutional performance. Schools advertise top scorers. Rankings influence admissions and funding. Within such a competitive ecosystem, dismantling stress is not merely an emotional exercise; it is a structural challenge.

And yet, something is undeniably shifting. The fact that exam pressure itself is now a cover-story subject reflects evolution. A decade ago, the conversation centred primarily on syllabus completion and pass percentages. Today, it includes burnout, resilience, and socio-emotional growth. Policymakers acknowledge that learning cannot flourish under chronic anxiety. Teachers increasingly discuss differentiated instruction and formative assessment. The discourse has expanded.

The question is whether expansion translates into transformation. True reform would require a cultural shift where marks become indicators rather than determinants. It would mean universities diversifying admission metrics beyond board percentages. It would demand investment in school-level counselling infrastructure across regions, not just metropolitan clusters. It would also call for transparent communication whenever new formats or policies are introduced, ensuring students are not navigating change mid-stream.

Board exams in 2026, therefore, stand at an inflection point. They are no longer untouched relics of a rigid past. Nor are they fully reimagined instruments of holistic evaluation. They exist in transition — carrying forward old expectations while experimenting with new frameworks. For students sitting in examination halls this month, the reform narrative is both visible and intangible. They see counselling posters on notice boards. They hear about improvement attempts. But when they open their answer sheets, the fundamental task remains unchanged: perform well, because performance still matters.

Perhaps the most honest assessment lies somewhere between optimism and scepticism. India is not merely rebranding stress, but neither has it eliminated it. The system is acknowledging pressure more openly than ever before. It is attempting to humanise assessment. Yet societal metrics of success evolve slower than policy documents.

As the final papers conclude and result anticipation begins, the cycle will repeat in another form — anticipation replacing anxiety, comparison replacing preparation. For now, millions of students write their answers under fluorescent lights, carrying with them both the promise of reform and the persistence of expectation.

Board Exam Pressure 2.0 is not just about exams. It is about how a nation defines achievement, how families interpret potential, and how institutions balance rigour with empathy. The reforms underway may well lay the foundation for a gentler academic culture. But until structural incentives align with psychological well-being, pressure will adapt rather than disappear.

The challenge before Indian education is not simply to offer a second attempt at exams. It is to offer a first attempt at redefining success.

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MARKS, MASTERY, AND MERIT

INDIA'S UNEVEN JOURNEY TOWARD COMPETENCY-BASED LEARNING

From gurukul learning to NEP 2020 reforms, India's education system is redefining merit, moving beyond rote memorization toward competency-based classrooms that challenge exam culture and career pathways, writes **Pragya Kumari.**

"Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school."
– Albert Einstein (theoretical physicist)

For generations of Indian students, success in school meant one thing: memorizing textbooks well enough to reproduce answers in an examination hall. Marks, ranks, and percentages defined merit, while understanding, creativity, and curiosity often took a back seat.

This deeply entrenched culture of rote learning is now facing its biggest challenge yet. Under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, India's school education system is being asked to pivot toward competency-based learning, a model that prioritizes conceptual understanding, critical thinking, and real-world application over recall.

Around five years into the policy's rollout, the shift is visible but uneven. Classrooms, assessments, report cards, and teacher training frameworks are all in flux, raising important questions about how far schools have come and how much further they need to go.

Learning in Ancient India: Understanding Before Examinations

Ironically, the idea of competency-based learning is not new to the Indian subcontinent. Ancient systems of education, particularly the gurukul tradition, emphasized mastery through lived experience rather than written examinations.

Students learned philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, warfare, and ethics through dialogue, observation, debate, and practice under the guidance of a teacher, or "The Guru."

Knowledge was assessed informally, through a student's ability to apply learning in daily life, teach others, or demonstrate skill and judgement. There were no standardized exams, rankings, or marksheets. Education was deeply contextual, holistic, and closely linked to social and professional life.

Over time, particularly during the colonial period, this approach was replaced by a formalized, examination-driven system designed to produce clerks and administrators. Memorization, uniform curricula, and written testing became central to schooling. What was once learning for understanding gradually evolved into learning for assessment.

NEP 2020, in many ways, attempts to reconnect modern schooling with this older philosophy while adapting it to contemporary classrooms, scale, and accountability.

From Memorization to Mastery

Competency-based learning is built on a simple idea: students should be evaluated on what they can do with what they know. Instead of testing how accurately a child can reproduce definitions or solved examples, the focus moves to applying concepts in unfamiliar situations, analyzing information, solving problems, and communicating ideas clearly.





NEP 2020 formally recognizes this approach, calling for a "paradigm shift" from content-heavy syllabi and high-stakes summative exams to continuous, formative assessment.

Learning outcomes are framed in terms of competencies such as logical reasoning, creativity, collaboration, and ethical understanding. In theory, this represents a fundamental break from India's exam-centric tradition.

The Policy Push Behind the Change

NEP 2020 mandates several structural reforms to support competency-based education. These include reducing curriculum load, integrating subjects, and aligning teaching, learning, and assessment practices. The policy also emphasizes experiential learning through projects, discussions, fieldwork, and real-life case studies.

Education boards have responded with varying degrees of urgency. CBSE has steadily increased the proportion of competency-based questions in its board exams, introducing case-study formats and application-oriented multiple-choice questions.

ICSE has similarly revised assessment patterns, while many state boards have begun pilot initiatives to redesign question papers and teacher handbooks.

However, the policy also acknowledges a central challenge: unless assessments change meaningfully, classroom practices will remain largely unchanged. For a system conditioned to "teach to the test," exams still hold enormous power.

How Exams Are Being Redefined

One of the most visible outcomes of the shift is the gradual transformation of school examinations. Traditional questions that reward direct recall are being replaced with those that require interpretation, reasoning, and multi-step problem-solving.

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Case-based questions present students with short scenarios drawn from everyday life, asking them to apply concepts across subjects. Open-ended questions allow for multiple correct approaches rather than one fixed answer. Internal assessments now carry greater weight, encouraging teachers to evaluate learning over time rather than through a single annual test.

Despite these changes, implementation remains inconsistent. While some schools design assessments that genuinely test understanding, others simply repackage old questions in new formats.

Students often report confusion during the transition, especially in senior classes where board results continue to play a decisive role in college admissions.

What Students Think: Exams vs Life and Careers

While policy debates often focus on pedagogy and assessment, students themselves hold sharply divided views on competency-based learning, largely shaped by their stage of schooling and career aspirations.

Younger students and those in middle school tend to view the shift positively. Many say project work, discussions, and application-based questions make learning more engaging and reduce the pressure of memorization.

Senior students, however, are more cautious. For those preparing for board exams and competitive entrance tests, marks and ranks still dominate priorities.

There is also a growing perception among students that schools are preparing them for two parallel futures, one focused on life skills and careers and the other narrowly focused on exams.

While many acknowledge that critical thinking and communication will matter in the long run, immediate academic outcomes often take precedence in a highly competitive education ecosystem.

The New Report Card: Beyond Marks

Perhaps the most symbolic change under competency-based learning is the evolving nature of report cards. NEP 2020 recommends replacing marks-centric evaluation with holistic progress cards that provide a broader picture of a child's development.

These new formats assess subject-wise competencies alongside life skills, socio-emotional learning, attendance, participation, and work habits. Qualitative teacher feedback is meant to offer insight into strengths and areas for improvement, shifting the conversation from "How much did you score?" to "What have you learned?"

For parents accustomed to percentages and ranks, this transition can be disorienting. Many welcome the emphasis on well-being and skill development, while others worry about subjectivity and the lack of clear benchmarks for comparison. Schools, in turn, face the challenge of explaining these changes while maintaining transparency and trust.

Teachers at the Heart of the Transition

No education reform can succeed without teachers, and competency-based learning places unprecedented demands on them.

Teachers are now expected to move from being content deliverers to facilitators of learning, a shift that requires designing experiential lesson plans, developing assessment rubrics, offering individualized feedback, and continuously tracking student progress.

Highlighting how this transition is unfolding in classrooms, Manorama Karki, Vice Principal, Heritage Girls School, Udaipur, said, "For the 2025–26 academic session, the CBSE Class X board examinations will include 50% competency-based questions, marking a decisive shift away from rote learning. This change reflects India's broader transition towards understanding, application, and real-life skills."

"Indian classrooms are increasingly adopting subject-integrated and blended learning approaches. Aligned with NEP 2020, the focus is now on critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, making classrooms more learner-centric and better preparing students for higher education, careers, and a dynamic global future," Karki added.

Sharing insights from her experience at the school level, Karki said, "As an educator, I strongly believe, and also witness in my school, that competency-based education has become an integral part of classroom teaching. This approach goes far beyond memorisation."

"Regular integration of multiple subjects and the use of blended learning strategies are strengthening conceptual understanding and making learning more meaningful. These practices are positively influencing teaching outcomes and significantly enhancing the overall learning experience for students," she added.

At the policy level, NEP 2020 acknowledges the scale of this transition by calling for large-scale teacher professional development, with training modules increasingly focusing on pedagogy, assessment literacy, and classroom innovation.

Digital platforms and national initiatives have expanded access to such training, particularly in government schools. However, many teachers continue to point to practical constraints. Large class sizes, administrative workload, limited planning time, and uneven training quality often hinder meaningful adoption.

In some cases, educators are asked to implement competency-based assessments without adequate institutional support, resulting in superficial compliance rather than genuine pedagogical change.

Classroom Reality: Early Adopters vs Late Movers

The gap between early adopters and late movers is becoming increasingly evident. Urban private schools, particularly those with international exposure or flexible curricula, have embraced project-based learning, interdisciplinary teaching, and reflective assessment. Students in these settings are more likely to engage in discussions, presentations, and collaborative tasks.

In contrast, many government and rural schools face infrastructural and staffing challenges. Limited resources, multi-grade classrooms, and exam-oriented expectations make the transition more difficult.

Even within the same school, traditional teaching methods often coexist with competency-based assessments, creating a disconnect between how students are taught and how they are tested.

The Road Ahead

Competency-based learning is not a short-term reform but a long-term cultural shift. For NEP 2020's vision to succeed, alignment is essential across textbooks, teaching practices, assessments, and teacher training.

Board exams must continue evolving in ways that reward understanding rather than recall, while competitive examinations will eventually need to follow suit.

The transition will be uneven, and setbacks are inevitable. Yet, the direction is clear. In many ways, India is not inventing a new idea but rediscovering an old one, learning as understanding, not repetition.

If implemented thoughtfully and supported consistently, competency-based education has the potential to break India's decades-old exam obsession and prepare students not just to score well, but to think, adapt, and thrive in an increasingly complex world.

MONTHLY DIGEST

ISRO Launches YUVIKA 2026 for Class 9 Students



ISRO has opened registrations for YUVIKA 2026, a national space exposure programme for Class 9 students. Selected students will receive hands-on training in space science, with travel and accommodation fully sponsored to encourage scientific curiosity at school level.

Uttar Pradesh Increases Honorarium for Shiksha Mitras

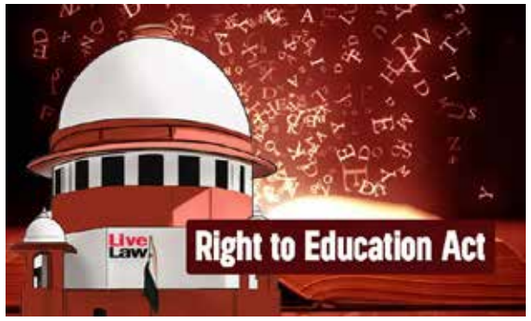


The UP government has significantly increased the monthly honorarium of Shiksha Mitras and part-time instructors. The move aims to improve teacher morale, financial stability, and overall classroom performance across government schools in the state.

Union Budget 2026 Boosts School Education Allocation

The Union Budget 2026 increased overall education allocation to ₹1.39 lakh crore, with a strong focus on school infrastructure, digital classrooms, girls' hostels, and foundational literacy programmes.

High Court Declares Right to Education as Lifelong



The Punjab and Haryana High Court ruled that the right to pursue education is lifelong. The judgment supports learners who wish to continue studies later in life, including through distance education, without losing academic opportunities.

Odisha Adopts NCET for Teacher Education Admissions



Odisha has announced that the National Common Entrance Test (NCET) will be the sole admission route for the four-year Integrated Teacher Education Programme from 2026–27, aligning teacher preparation with national standards.

Delhi Government Releases School Education Report Card

Delhi unveiled its one-year education report card highlighting fee regulation reforms, infrastructure improvements, and the launch of 75 new CM-SHRI schools aimed at strengthening public education quality.

MONTHLY DIGEST

Rajasthan Introduces Mental Health Support in Schools



The Rajasthan government has introduced structured mental health initiatives in schools, including yoga sessions, play-based learning modules, and digital counselling support to reduce exam stress and promote student well-being.

Bihar Announces Recruitment of 45,000 Teachers



The Bihar government will recruit 45,000 teachers under the TRE-4 drive, including 7,000 special educators for children with disabilities, significantly strengthening teacher availability in government schools.

Minority Scholarship Allocations See Budget Changes

Budget 2026 introduced major reallocations in scholarship funding, with some schemes expanded while others, particularly minority-focused scholarships, witnessed reductions, reshaping financial aid distribution patterns.

Goa to Fully Implement NEP 2020 Across All Classes



Goa's state board will implement the National Education Policy 2020 across all classes from 2026–27, introducing credit-based systems, multidisciplinary learning, and updated textbooks aligned with NEP reforms.

CBSE Begins Skill Education Workshops for Teachers



CBSE has launched nationwide capacity-building workshops to train teachers for mandatory skill education in Classes 6–8, promoting practical learning, vocational exposure, and industry-relevant competencies.

Recruitment Challenges Surface in CBSE-Affiliated Schools

Several states reported lower-than-expected teacher applications for CBSE-affiliated schools, highlighting recruitment challenges as more government institutions transition to CBSE curricula.

MONTHLY DIGEST

SBIF Asha Scholarship Open for School Students



The SBIF Asha Scholarship programme has opened applications for Class 6–12 students, offering financial assistance of up to ₹15,000 to support continuation of school education for deserving candidates.

AI in Education Highlighted at National Summit



At the India AI Impact Summit 2026, policymakers discussed expanding artificial intelligence integration in school education, focusing on adaptive learning tools and improved administrative efficiency.

RTE Phase-2 Admissions Begin in Uttar Pradesh Districts

The second phase of admissions under the Right to Education (RTE) Act has begun in several UP districts, providing free private school seats to eligible students from economically weaker sections.

Bihar Strengthens Scholarship Monitoring Mechanism

The Bihar Education Department has issued strict directives to district officials to ensure timely processing of post-matric scholarship applications, addressing delays affecting thousands of students.

Bihar Allocates 20% of State Budget to Education



Bihar has allocated nearly 20% of its state budget to education, with officials highlighting improved female literacy rates and expanded access to schooling across districts.

National Scholarship Portal Continues One-Time Registration

The National Scholarship Portal has kept its One-Time Registration system active for the 2025–26 academic year, enabling students to apply for multiple central scholarship schemes through a streamlined digital process.

Special Residential School Admissions for SC/ST Students



Entrance examinations were conducted for admission into Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Residential Schools, offering free education and hostel facilities to eligible SC/ST students.

Integrated BA-BEd and BSc-BEd Programmes Expanded

New four-year integrated teacher education programmes will allow students to pursue dual degrees immediately after Class 12, streamlining entry into the teaching profession.

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TAPMI offers a diverse portfolio of postgraduate management programs, including MBA, MBA–Banking & Financial Services, MBA–Human Resource Management, MBA–Marketing, MBA–International Business, MBA – AI&DS and MBA in Technology Management. The institute is committed to fostering a vibrant, student-centred learning environment that nurtures ethical, competent, and future-ready business leaders.

The programs at TAPMI blend strong theoretical foundations with hands-on managerial practice, supported by continuous curriculum innovation. A strong emphasis on experiential learning is reflected through investments in world-class simulations, case-based pedagogy, and platforms such as Bloomberg and Reuters terminals. Key academic initiatives include extended industry engagement, and leadership development programs.

TAPMI's pedagogy promotes analytical thinking, creativity, and social responsibility. Innovative approaches such as design thinking are embedded into the academic process, encouraging students to explore, experiment, collaborate, and learn from experience. Students are motivated to broaden their perspectives and develop qualities such as resilience, courage, vision, and ethical judgment. TAPMI's Alumni Mentorship Program further enriches the learning ecosystem by fostering meaningful connections between past and present students. Through one-on-one mentoring, alumni provide invaluable career guidance and industry insights, helping students navigate challenges, refine their career aspirations, and build essential skills for professional success. This initiative reinforces TAPMI's enduring culture of collaboration and excellence, further strengthened by a robust global alumni network of over 8,000 members, with nearly one-fifth serving in CXO-level roles across leading organizations in India and abroad

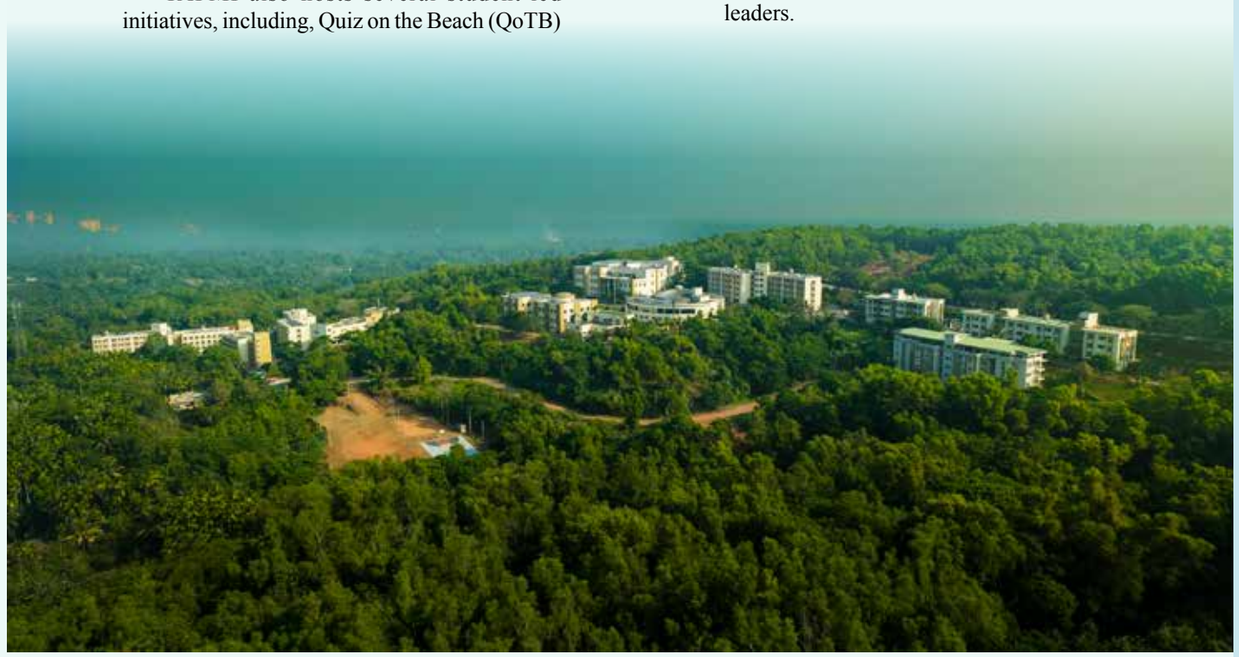
TAPMI brings learning to life through a dynamic portfolio of experiential courses that go far beyond the classroom. The Summer Internship Program (SIP) offers students a chance to immerse themselves in the complexities of real-world business environments, Student Managed Investment Course (SMIC) immerse students in hands-on equity research, portfolio management, and risk analysis by managing a close-ended fund under faculty and alumni supervision, Leadership Assessment and Development Centre (LADC) enables students to understand themselves, build essential leadership capabilities, and transform into confident, effective, and visionary leaders through a structured development process, Young Leaders Program (YLP) select students to work closely as executive assistants to CXO-level leaders in reputed organizations, gaining valuable exposure to strategic decision-making and leadership. BrandScan - one of India's most prestigious student-run market research forums which makes students ready for real world challenges from procuring paid live projects, conducting the market research till presenting to the clients. and in Society, Environment, Values and Attitudes (SEVA) course students spend 75–100 hours engaging with small and micro-entrepreneurs, NGOs, and local government bodies, co-creating solutions focused on economic empowerment. As an advanced signatory of UNPRME, TAPMI embeds sustainability across curricula, research, and industry engagement, aligned with the six PRME principles—Purpose, Values, Method, Research, Partnership, and Dialogue.

TAPMI also hosts several student-led initiatives, including, Quiz on the Beach (QoTB) - Asia's largest quizzing event, Atharva - one of India's longest-standing student-run B-school festivals that blends management rigor, cultural expression, and social impact—entirely driven by students, Meraki – a literary and art conclave.

Strong academic processes and industry relevance naturally translate into excellent placement outcomes. TAPMI has redesigned its MBA programs with flexible and industry-aligned learning models, including advisory panels, a dynamic basket of electives, increased co-teaching by industry experts, and extended internships. Over 300 organizations visit the campus annually for placements and internships.

Admissions to TAPMI's MBA programs are based on performance in nationally and internationally recognized tests such as CAT, XAT, GMAT, and NMAT by GMAC™. Applications open in October, with interviews conducted during February and March for the batch commencing in June. While test scores and academic consistency are important, the institute adopts a holistic selection process, valuing work experience, entrepreneurial mindset, diversity, leadership potential, integrity, and achievements in sports and social initiatives.

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CMT-2020/72:

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