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LEARNING EQUITY DURING AND POST COVID

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The pandemic has cast a vast majority of children out of the learning fold. Urgent and sustained measures will need to be taken to address the challenges of access and learning. Based on the work done by CEQUE in pre and post pandemic period, the report gives short and long term measures to address the challenges.

Immediate Term

- Create a student enrolment database
- Campaign to bring children back to school
- Create a learning baseline
- Reduce curricular load and create supporting teaching-learning materials
- Coach teachers and KPs using a blended approach

Longer Term

- Data driven plan for learning
- Curriculum for accelerated learning
- Teachers to be upskilled in accelerated education and multi level teaching
- Build a data literate eco system for teacher learning support



INTRODUCTION



The pandemic has cast a vast majority of children out of the learning fold. The most vulnerable are facing challenges with respect to:

- Access to learning (Lack of devices, limited access to the internet, limited or no contact with the teacher)
- Quantum and quality of learning

Through its Teacher Innovator Program (TIP) covering 300+ teachers in 6 districts across Maharashtra, CEQUE estimated a mere 35% of students had access to education in the early months of the pandemic. However, with a focus on data based student tracking and improving remote learning access, TIP's teachers have 82% of children in the fold of learning.

Based on its work pre and during the pandemic this note provides recommendations for improving access and quality of education in the immediate and longer term.





SECTION ONE

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMMEDIATE TERM

With the announcement of the schools reopening in most parts of the country, it is likely that the return of all the students to the schools will be a slow and gradual process. This will further exacerbate the learning loss due to the school closures. This section gives recommendations on the measures that can be taken in the short term to address the issues of access and learning.



Create a student enrollment database

1. Physical closures of schools due to COVID will likely exacerbate the drop out rate, once schools reopen physically . ASER* reports an increase in the number of unenrolled children of school going age from 1.8% (2018) to 5.3% (2020). Among all children upto 16 years, this number has gone up from 4% to 5.5%. According to another study** coordinated by Nobel Laureate, Kailash Sathyathi, nearly 20% of under privileged rural households reported they would consider withdrawing their children from schooling due to economic reasons.
2. A statewide initiative to assess the real enrollment will be a critical first step. Using the pre-covid enrollment data, surveys will need to be undertaken to assess how many children residing in the particular geographies are not attending school, as also the new in-migrations have taken place.

Creating a database to improve student retention

CEQUE used a data driven approach to respond to the challenge of potential student drop outs on account of limited student online reach. First, granular details of students within and outside the fold of learning were gathered, using a 3-step process that involved :

- Finding the total enrolled students under the teachers
- Tracking student-wise those who the teachers were in contact with via Online classes, Whatsapp Groups and Phone Calls
- Finding the reasons for those who were not in contact

Across the 6 districts, the data showed us that 35% students were online. Reasons for those who were not connected were:

- No Internet connectivity: 72%
- No Smartphone Available: 20%
- Migration: 9%

- Monitoring the frequency with which children were attending online classes, responding to whatsapp messages sent by teachers

Based on the above, students were categorized along the frequency with which they were in contact with their teachers:

- Three or more times
- Once a week
- Once in two weeks
- The above data drove the subsequent solutions that were discussed collaboratively with teachers.

*Chaturvedi, B.K. (2020). COVID-19 Impact: Six Million Children Out of School. *The Leaflet*, Dec 10, 2020. <https://www.theleaflet.in/covid-19-impact-six-million-children-out-of-school-in-india/#>

**Nandula, R. (2020). Will COVID-19 Led to More Drop Outs? *The Hindu Businessline*. Nov 13, 2020. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/data-stories/data-focus/will-covid-19-lead-to-more-school-drop-outs/article33095912.ece>



Campaign to bring children back to school

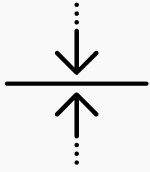
1. Based on the database hard-to-reach child populations will need to be identified.
2. Campaigning to bring children to school will need to involve informational campaigning and door-to-door campaigning. This will require efforts not only of the KP and teacher workforce, but also gram panchayats, local bodies and local NGOs

Drawing on local community support during school closures

The local community played a critical role in helping teachers reach students who could not be reached due to lack of devices, money for recharge and internet connectivity. For instance Babu Munghate, teacher fellow in ZP school Mahvada, Gadchiroli approached the local gram panchayat leaders and together they held a meeting with the parents and other village community members.

The head of the SMC offered to lend his vacant house to Babu Munghate so children could continue their education. On assurances of social distancing, parents agreed to send their children to the house. Villagers contributed to cleaning the house and buying essential cleaning supplies. The Police Patil contributed a big mat for children to sit on and the teacher himself put in money to create teaching learning materials.





Create a learning baseline

1. Assessing where students are vis-a-vis their learning should be prioritised before the start of teaching the curriculum.
2. Primary grades should focus on simple competency-based assessments in reading-writing and Math. Middle and High school could look at other subjects as well.
3. Using simple metrics, students will need to be categorised either at grade level or grouped at grade levels below.
4. As far as possible, learning assessments should be conducted physically or in the online presence of the teacher

Experience of conducting learning assessments remotely

At the start of its Teacher Innovator Program, baseline tests were administered to students to determine their learning levels in Math and Language.

However, since these tests could not be conducted physically by the teachers themselves, they had to send them via whatsapp.

This was only partially successful. On average, barely 3-4 students sent back their solved papers. In addition, teachers shared that the learning data they received seemed inaccurate as it appeared that someone at the child's home had intervened to solve the papers.

This experience revealed the futility of attempting to gauge and track student learning levels remotely as the authenticity of the data could not be vouched.



Reduce curricular load and create supporting teaching-learning materials

1. Learning loss during school closure will necessitate reducing the curricular load at least in the next academic year.
2. The first term after school reopening should focus on the previous year's curriculum and the latter term on the grade level curriculum.
3. An accelerated education curriculum will need to be created for children for whom the learning loss has been severe i.e. more than one grade level down.
4. Aside from textbooks, supplemental learning materials to aid with students' learning - at school and at home will need to be created. This is a need articulated by teachers, For instance, a rapid assessment survey conducted by OXFAM INDIA found that over half the teachers surveyed in the five-state study favoured the creation of low tech resources and physical learning materials to aid students' learning.*

Using Teaching-Learning Material to support learning

In order to improve the reach to students who could not access online learning, teachers suggested creating low tech resources and workbooks. To this end, the following steps were taken:

- Creation of Low tech resources and workbooks: 160 audio-visual low bandwidth resources were created that modelled teaching of textbook lessons online. In addition, workbooks in Math and Language were created, which were aligned to the students' textbooks.
- Distribution of resources to students: Teachers addressed the logistical challenge of distributing the workbooks through methods such as calling parents and students to school or distributing them to parents at ration shops.

Some took the help of local community volunteers (galli - mitras) to reach the children. Still others figured convenient locations to meet parents to hand over the books.

- Integrating resources into learning: CEQUE coached teachers on how to use the resources and workbooks through:
 - a. Small group teaching (online/offline);
 - b. Self-learning;
 - c. Assessment;
 - d. Parent Engagement
- Close Monitoring and Assessment: Teachers maintained close monitoring on children's access to learning through a record of their contact with previously unreached children. Children's learning was monitored through the assignments they submitted.

*Vyas, A. (2020). Status Report: Government and Private Schools During COVID-19. Oxfam India, <https://www.oxfamindia.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/Status%20report%20Government%20and%20private%20schools%20during%20COVID%20-%202019.pdf>



Coach teachers and KPs using a blended approach

1. Teachers and KPs will not only need to be trained, but also provided handholding support through coaching throughout the year to implement the new curriculum.
2. A blended approach to build capacities of teachers to teach the new curriculum could be followed.
 - a. The experience during COVID has provided ample scope for teachers to be familiarised with technology and receiving inputs via online means. Provision of online training inputs for large groups could thus be continued in the post COVID training scenario as well.
 - b. However, it should be recognised that there is value to face to face inputs. Small group PLCs with DIET faculty and KPs can be used to coach teachers on need-specific pedagogy challenges.

A Blended Approach to Coaching Teachers

Through the pandemic, teachers were provided extensive coaching support to understand innovative teaching methods to build student competency in numeracy and reading comprehension. They were further guided on how they may teach students effectively using the resources provided. For the above, CEQUE followed a 4 step approach

- Creation of highly interactive webinars where teachers are participating in response to specific questions based on the topic being covered. Webinars had several opportunities for polls, feedback and experience sharing on part of the teachers.
- Coach teachers through
 - Group coaching (Groups of 6 to 7)
 - Individual coaching (Offline where possible)
- Each coaching session focused on discussions based on assignments given to teachers as well student learning artefacts. On an average each teacher has received 15 hours of coaching support.
- Involving DIET team members as collaborators as well as teacher fellows during cascade to larger cohort of teachers in a block.
- The blended mode of teaching-learning, where teachers participated in webinars, worked on assignments at home and then received coaching support has proved effective in keeping them engaged as well committed to the program.



SECTION TWO

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE LONG TERM

Inequities in learning outcomes are likely to continue as the impact of the pandemic will be felt over a longer term by the most vulnerable. Hence, educational policy will need to be designed to keep learning equity as its focus. This sections gives recommendations for the same.



Data Driven Planning for Learning

In the recent past there has been much push given to data driven planning that focuses on student learning and its outcomes. NEP 2020 too, talks about recalibrating the assessment framework with several suggestions such moving away from rote questions to testing for application of knowledge. National Assessment Centre (PARAKH) has been entrusted to create structures that align to the new approach detailed in the NEP. Yet, simply testing student learning (both summative and formative) and providing access to this data to teachers and educators is of little use. As a Harvard study* states:

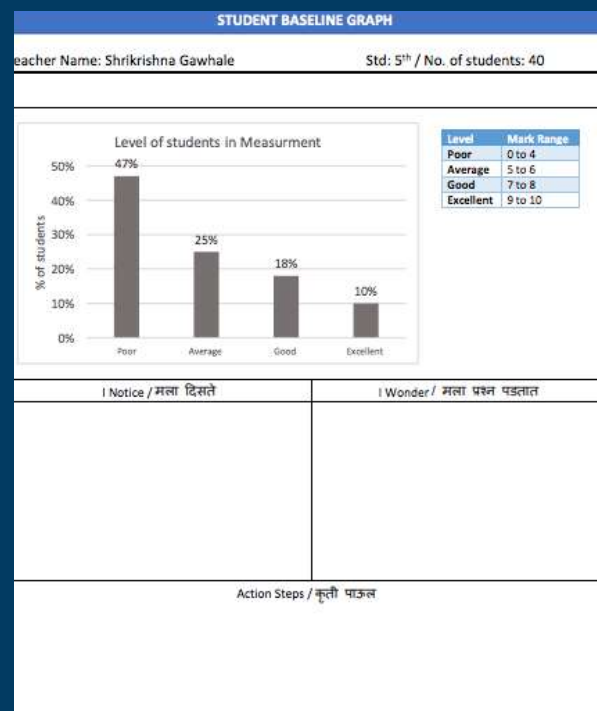
*Understanding students' weaknesses is only useful if it changes practice. And, to date, evidence suggests that it does not change practice—or student outcomes. Focusing on the problem has likely distracted us from focusing on the solution.**

For data to be meaningful in the change of teacher practice we recommend the following:

- Assess student learning on agreed learning indicators for selected competency
- Discuss the data with teachers, headmasters and parents
- Create and agree on the action plan forward
- Monitor the progress

Using a Learning Report Card for pedagogic change

CEQUE uses a Learning Report card with principals and teachers to share their analyses of students' baseline assessments. Teachers are coached to understand and interpret the results and formulate a 12- week action plan based on the learning gaps identified. This action plan is shared with the principles enabling them to understand where the teachers efforts would be directed and track progress. Endline assessments enable the teachers and principles to measure achievement of learning goals against the plan.



Sample Learning Report Card used in the Teacher Innovator Program. The report shows the levels of the students in the competency of 'Measurement' in Math



Curriculum for Accelerated Learning

The learning loss as a result of school closures since the pandemic requires the curriculum to be adapted. Focus will need to be on basic skills and competencies with a condensed syllabus. Effective teaching and learning approaches that match the cognitive maturity of the learners will be the cornerstone of such an adapted curriculum.

According to the Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG)* the following will need to be kept in mind while developing such a curricula:

- Acceleration rate needs to be decided keeping in mind what will be challenging and appropriate for learners. For e.g. the transition from primary to upper primary will need more time
- Overlaps and repetition of content is removed while ensuring that subject matter is mutually reinforcing.
- Flexible timetabling to accommodate a condensed curricula
- Focus on mother-tongue-based multilingual education
- Intensive support to learners since the topics are covered more rapidly
- Support older learners to learn with peer-to-peer approaches
- In addition to textbooks, learners will need plenty of additional learning materials – such as readers, activity or exercise books and exam books – especially for building literacy.
- Focus on inclusive practices since older and younger learners are learning together

Finally:

Accelerated Learning is not only about learning faster or omitting subject matter (although this is one aspect of accelerated curricula). It is about how learners learn best, using a variety of methodologies that enable them to learn more effectively and at an accelerated pace.

(Baxter & Bethke, 2009, cited in AEWG (2017), p. 26).

*Accelerated Education Working Group (2017). Guide to the Accelerated Education Principles. UNHCR. <http://orange.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Accelerated-Education-Programme-Implementation-Guide.pdf>



Teachers to be upskilled in accelerated education and multi level teaching

- Coach teachers in mastering skill-based pedagogies rather than teaching the textbook

Skill based pedagogies help teachers focus their teaching on building skills of critical thinking, logical reasoning and problem solving. The strategies cut across textbook chapters and give teachers the 'how' of building selected competencies in their students.

- Focus on longer-term skill building rather than short trainings

Teacher skill building needs to be an ongoing process, planned with a longer term vision and aligned to professional teaching standards. Focusing on collaborative learning and building a growth mindset will help teachers stay invested in the process.

- Consider hybrid models of teacher capacity building

Teacher capacity building needs to move away from one-size fits all model. Training programs should be contextualized to need-specific challenges. An effective model of teacher capacity building should consider providing on-demand online training options along with on-site coaching support.

- Closely monitor growth

in teacher competencies/ performance tracking of teachers Establish a review cycle with clear metrics for measuring skill improvement. This needs to be shared with the teachers upfront for them to stay invested.

A focus on pedagogy skills with the Reading Comprehension module

Best practice on teaching students to read with comprehension focus on five central skills: Vocabulary, Inference, Questioning, Fact-Retelling and Summarizing. These skills are across the curriculum and agnostic of textbook chapters..

CEQUE coaches teachers to understand these skills and how these need to be taught using each textbook chapter. It also provides a curricular plan to guide teachers on how and where to use these skills. Students practice and hone these skills over several chapters to develop their skills in reading comprehension.



Build a data literate eco system for teacher learning support

Teachers need a supportive ecosystem to change their practices and bring change in student learning. For this is crucial that school leaders are trained in tools for analysing data to drive improvements and on how to formulate an action plan collaboratively with teachers. This requires the following:

- Cohesive strategy for building leadership with a focus on student learning
- Longer term coaching for building academic leadership for teacher support
- Close monitoring of growth in academic leadership competencies

The bedrock of a longer term strategy of building a supportive school leadership ecosystem is data and ensuring that all education functionaries are literate in the use of data for decision making.

However, for functionaries to work effectively, what is required is not just the *tools* and *training* to use them, but also the appropriate *culture* that fosters a data driven approach to planning and implementation.*

Creating a culture of data-driven planning

Kendra Pramukhs play an important role in the ecosystem of a school.. Entrusted with providing academic mentorship support to teachers in their cluster, their guidance and support enables teachers to work on specific action plans to improve student learning.

So far, KPs have used data to simply for purposes of reporting. Through the KPALP program KPs learnt *how* to analyse student learning and classroom observation data to understand the gaps in learning and problems of practice. This has enabled them to go beyond reporting, and to use data to drive improvement.

For example, in Palghar, KPs met regularly as part of professional learning communities, to understand the the gaps in student achievement based on PSM assessments. Detailed analysis revealed that students were lagging behind in the ability to write independently based on a picture prompt.

Using this information, KPs led the implementation of a module that focused on building independent writing skills in children.

*Hoonuit. [White Paper: Sketching an Administrator's Role in Fostering Data Literacy.](https://hoonuit.com/resource/white-paper-sketching-an-administrators-role-in-fostering-data-literacy/)
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