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# SCHOOL

*Unique Education Journal*


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**Build Your Own Curriculum**
**Simple steps any school can start today**

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# SCHOOL REFORMER

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# Beyond the syllabus: The case for a school's own curriculum

If all schools teach from the same books and prepare for the same exams, what makes one school "premium"?

One often wonders what truly distinguishes the so-called "premium" schools of India—those branded, high-fee institutions—from the regular, government-aided or modest private schools that serve most of our children. On the surface, both follow the same prescribed syllabus, set either by the state or national boards. Both are judged by the same public examinations. And both proudly advertise their results as proof of excellence.

If that is so, where exactly does the distinction lie? Shouldn't elite schools, which charge parents so much more, be doing something beyond what every ordinary school is required to do?

It is high time our educators faced this uncomfortable question. Teaching to the syllabus and producing good exam results is the minimum obligation of any school. It is the foundation—but it cannot be the ceiling. Every school, especially those that call themselves "premium," should design and nurture its own core curriculum: a distinctive body of learning experiences, values, and exposures that shape students beyond the exam hall.

The idea is not new. Columbia University in the United States has, for over a century, required every student—regardless of major—to complete a unique "Core Curriculum" that emphasizes reading, debate, and exposure to great ideas in literature, science, philosophy, and the arts. Each year, the curriculum evolves; yet its purpose remains the same—to produce thoughtful citizens, not just trained specialists.

Why should Indian schools not do the same? Imagine each school in India—public or private—having the freedom and courage to create its own curriculum that complements the official syllabus. One school might design a reading-based core where students read a dozen carefully chosen books each year, drawn from world literature and Indian writing. Another might focus on environmental exploration, local heritage, or the art of scientific inquiry. The possibilities are endless.

Yes, it requires more work. Teaching from a ready-made textbook is easy; crafting a living, evolving curriculum demands creativity, collaboration, and conviction. It means finding teachers who are curious themselves—teachers who read, who think, who can invite guest speakers and plan projects that expand students' horizons.

Parents, too, must begin to ask this question when choosing schools for their children: What is your school's own curriculum? What will my child learn here that they would not learn elsewhere? When schools can answer that confidently, they will have earned the right to call themselves "premium."

In the end, education is not about marks—it is about meaning. The best schools will be those that prepare young people to think, question, and grow in mind and spirit. It is time we built schools that stand for something more than their board exam results—and reclaimed the true purpose of schooling: to awaken the intellect, enlarge the imagination, and build character through ideas that last a lifetime.

## LETTERS TO EDITOR

### THE UNREAD TEACHER: A NATION AT RISK

Dear Editor,

Your editorial "The Unread Teacher: A Nation at Risk" has provoked much thought — and, I must admit, a degree of discomfort among teachers like me. I agree that teachers must remain intellectually alive, but I take issue with the sweeping assumption that we do not read or that we treat teaching merely as a salaried occupation.

The reality of a schoolteacher's life today is far removed from the idealistic portrait that society still clings to. Teaching is no longer confined to imparting lessons and inspiring young minds; it has become a demanding profession laden with paperwork, administrative duties, and continuous assessment responsibilities. A typical day begins before 8 a.m. and extends late into the evening, filled with online reporting, lesson plans, exam preparation, and co-curricular supervision. Amidst all this, where is the time or energy left for leisurely reading?

Moreover, the definition of "reading" itself has changed. Many of us are constantly reading — though not necessarily books. We read lesson plans, research articles, news updates, and online resources to stay relevant. The modern teacher must navigate digital platforms, new curriculum frameworks, and evolving pedagogies. Reading, in this sense, has become functional rather than reflective. To accuse teachers of being "unread" because they do not read Tagore or Sagan seems unfair.

Another overlooked factor is the lack of institutional support. How many schools provide libraries accessible to teachers? How many allocate even an hour a week for professional reading? Instead, we are judged by results, paperwork, and compliance. A school that genuinely valued teachers' intellectual growth would give them time, space, and incentives to pursue it.

Finally, we must recognize that today's young teachers enter a very different cultural environment. The attention span of both teachers and students is fragmented by digital distractions. Expecting every teacher to read "serious books" every month may sound noble, but it risks sounding moralistic rather than practical.

Yes, we need to revive the culture of reading — but not by shaming teachers or romanticizing a bygone era. Let us instead create realistic systems: shorter readings, shared summaries, digital reading circles, and institutional recognition. The teacher of today is not unread — merely overworked, undersupported, and constantly adapting.

Sincerely,
*A Teacher from a Government Senior Secondary School, Rajasthan*

Dear Editor,

Your editorial "The Unread Teacher" resonated deeply with me, not as criticism, but as a painful reminder of what we teachers are losing — time to read, to think, and to grow. I have been teaching English for over fifteen years, and I often feel a quiet hunger to read more. Yet, I must confess, it is getting harder every year.

The difficulty is not unwillingness. Most teachers I know want to read. But between school schedules, home responsibilities, and the endless clerical work demanded by education departments, reading becomes a luxury. We spend our evenings updating online marks registers, filling performance data, or planning activities for "competency-based learning." By the time we finish, our minds are too fatigued for sustained reading.

In smaller towns, access itself is a barrier. School libraries cater mainly to students. Teachers rarely have a collection of books for their own development. Buying new books is expensive, and online deliveries are unreliable. Even digital reading is difficult — not everyone is comfortable with e-books, and distractions on phones make deep reading impossible.

Another issue is cultural. In most schools, teachers who spend time reading are often viewed as "not practical" or "too theoretical." The system rewards compliance and paperwork, not curiosity or scholarship. There are no book clubs, no staff discussions, no professional reading hours. We are trained to complete tasks, not to question or explore.

Despite this, some of us persist. I try to read one book a term — sometimes a classic novel, sometimes a teacher's memoir. I discuss it with students or share short passages in class. The excitement in their eyes reminds me why it matters. If schools institutionalized such habits — say, by allowing one hour a week for reading, or by sharing good books through a common pool — the impact would be remarkable.

Your editorial is a wake-up call, not a condemnation. Teachers do not need sermons; we need systems that make reading part of our professional rhythm. Give us libraries, time, and respect — and you will see how eager we are to learn again.

Warm regards,
*An English Teacher, Private School, Tamil Nadu*

## TAUGHT TO COMPETE, NOT TO LEARN: THE COST OF INDIA'S ENTRANCE EXAM CULTURE

A recent Scroll.in Common Ground report by Johanna Deeksha, "How Indian schools' focus on entrance tests is stunting education," exposes how India's obsession with competitive exams like NEET and JEE is damaging the purpose of schooling. Many schools now operate as coaching centres or "dummy schools," where students skip regular classes, attend test-prep sessions, and have their attendance marked automatically.

Parents, hoping for integrated programs, often discover that these schools neglect board exam syllabi and eliminate subjects such as English and humanities. Students, divided into academic "batches," are pressured to perform in constant mock tests, with public rankings that humiliate low scorers. Teachers prioritize top performers while others are sidelined. The emphasis on rote learning and problem-solving leaves students without conceptual understanding or social skills. Several students told Scroll.in that this system destroyed their confidence and mental health, forcing some to seek therapy or take gap years. They described joyless school lives with no libraries, sports, or arts—just endless tests.

Despite Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) regulations forbidding coaching institutes on school premises, such tie-ups persist. In 2024, CBSE even de-affiliated several schools found violating norms, yet the trend continues.

Education activists like Prince Gajendra Babu and VP Niranjanaradhya argue that this commercialization of learning "dehumanises education" and widens inequality, since only wealthy families can afford such coaching. The report concludes that unless India rethinks its entrance-exam-driven system, schools will keep producing test-trained students ill-equipped for creative, professional, and social life.

*Source: Scroll.in, by Johanna Deeksha. Read the full scroll.in report at this link: http://bit.ly/439cr2T*

## SCHOOL EYE TESTS COULD BOOST INDIA'S ECONOMY BY ₹3.6 LAKH CRORE A YEAR, SAYS GLOBAL REPORT

A new global study has found that simple vision care measures in schools—such as regular eye tests and providing ready reading glasses—could add ₹3.6 lakh crore every year to India's economy. The findings come from the Value of Vision report by the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), Seva Foundation, and Fred Hollows Foundation.

According to the report, these interventions would bring wide-ranging benefits: ₹2.27 lakh crore through improved productivity, ₹78,700 crore through higher employment, and ₹40,800 crore through reduced caregiving needs. For students, this would translate into the equivalent of 9.6 lakh additional years of schooling each year, showing how closely education and vision care are linked.

The report estimates that nearly 70 crore Indians live with avoidable sight loss—most of which could be prevented with simple, low-cost steps

such as vision screenings and cataract surgeries. Poor eyesight not only reduces learning outcomes but also affects future job prospects, mental health, and safety.

The authors recommend six key priorities for policymakers: early vision screening in communities and schools, on-the-spot provision of glasses, training more eye-care professionals, improving cataract surgery outcomes, reducing cost and distance barriers, and setting higher post-surgery care standards.

"Sight loss is a universal problem that can be prevented with simple and affordable measures," the report notes—reminding schools that good vision is central to good learning.

## INDIA CROSES ONE CRORE TEACHERS — BUT CAN NUMBERS ALONE FIX LEARNING GAPS?

India's school education system reached a milestone in 2024–25, with over one crore teachers, according to the UDISE+ report. This marks a 6.7% rise from 2022–23 and an improved pupil-teacher ratio—10 at foundational, 13 at preparatory, 17 at middle, and 21 at secondary levels—well below the NEP 2020 benchmark of 30:1.

However, as the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report 2024–25 warns, more teachers do not automatically mean better learning. Foundational learning gaps persist—less than half of Class V students can read a Class II-level text or solve basic division problems. Access to digital tools remains uneven, with only 78% of schools having computer labs and 65% of teachers trained in digital pedagogy.

Gender disparity also remains stark: while 62% of primary teachers are women, only 42% of secondary principals and 29% of higher secondary heads are female. Southern states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka outperform others, while Bihar and Uttar Pradesh continue to lag.

Experts say that to turn this numerical growth into real progress, India must strengthen teacher training, promote women's leadership, and bridge regional inequalities. The one-crore milestone, they note, is not the destination—it's a reminder that quality, inclusion, and equity in classrooms matter more than numbers.

## A KASHMIRI TEEN'S STORY REVEALS HOW EDUCATION REFORMS FAIL ON THE GROUND

In Srinagar's downtown, a 15-year-old girl named Masrat Jan, once a government school student, now sells vegetables by the roadside after failing her Class 9 exams. Her story, reported by The Wire, symbolises a wider collapse in the promise of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which guarantees that no child should drop out due to academic failure.

Masrat and two classmates, all of whom failed their exams, never returned to school — unaware that NEP 2020 mandates remedial support and personalised learning plans to prevent such outcomes. The case exposes how Jammu and Kashmir's education system continues to operate through outdated and exclusionary practices, including the obsolete "golden test" that determines whether students can appear for board exams. This decades-old system, retained from the 1968 education policy, directly contradicts NEP 2020's emphasis on flexibility, continuous assessment, and inclusion.

Educators interviewed by The Wire describe a bureaucracy still governed by seniority and administrative control rather than educational expertise. Frequent leadership changes, lack of coordination among departments, and symbolic "NEP celebrations" have replaced meaningful implementation. Institutions like the Directorate of School Education, SCERT, Samagra Shiksha, and JKBOSE remain fragmented — many schools lack laboratories, computer access, or even proper classrooms.

The 2025 PARAKH National Survey revealed that Jammu and Kashmir now trails behind national averages in both language and mathematics at every level of schooling, a reversal from 2021 when it performed better than the national mean.

Officials attribute this decline to weak local governance and untrained teachers — including thousands of regularised "Rehbar-e-Taleem" instructors lacking formal qualifications or refresher training.

The story concludes with Masrat's lost opportunity as a measure of systemic failure. The NEP's vision of "equitable, inclusive, and joyful education" remains distant, undermined by poor infrastructure, unqualified leadership, and bureaucratic inertia. For students like Masrat, government promises have meant little — her school bench replaced by a vegetable stall on Srinagar's streets.

*Source: The Wire, by Farooq Shah. Read full report at: http://bit.ly/4h6OsHl*

## DELHI HIGH COURT: GOVERNMENT CANNOT IMPOSE RIGID FEE CONTROL ON PRIVATE SCHOOLS

The Delhi High Court has ruled that the government cannot exercise blanket control over the fee structures of unaided private schools. The court clarified that the Directorate of Education (DoE) has authority only to prevent commercialisation, profiteering, or charging of capitation fees—not to rigidly fix or freeze school fees.

A Division Bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela observed that under the Delhi School Education Act (DSEA), 1973, and the Delhi School Education Rules (DSER), 1973, private unaided schools have autonomy to determine their own fees, subject to the two restrictions of "no profiteering" and "no capitation fee."

The Bench dismissed appeals filed by both parents' groups and the DoE challenging an earlier single-judge order that had struck down government directives restraining two private schools from raising their fees.

Reiterating that the DoE's oversight must remain limited, the Court noted:

"The scope of interference of DoE with the fixation of fees charged by an unaided recognised school is restricted to cases involving profiteering or capitation fees."

However, the court added that the DoE may initiate fresh proceedings—after providing the schools an opportunity to be heard—if it finds violations of the DSEA or DSER provisions.

The judgment reaffirms the delicate balance between school autonomy and government oversight in maintaining fairness without stifling private education institutions.

## ONLY ONE-THIRD OF BIHAR'S LOCAL BODY TEACHERS PASS COMPETENCY TEST: WHAT IT REVEALS ABOUT INDIA'S TEACHING CRISIS

In Bihar, a recent teacher competency test has exposed deep challenges in the state's education system. Only 32.3% of local body school teachers passed the Sakshamta Pariksha, a state-conducted assessment designed to determine eligibility for full government employee status. Out of 24,436 teachers from Classes I to XII who appeared for the exam, just 7,893 qualified, according to Bihar School Examination Board (BSEB) chairman Anand Kishor.

Performance was especially poor among primary-level teachers, where less than a third managed to clear the test. In comparison, middle and high school teachers fared somewhat better, with just over half passing. The test, held online across eight centres in Patna, was the third round of a series meant to regularize the employment status of contract teachers working under local bodies.

The low pass percentage highlights a serious gap in teacher preparation and ongoing professional development — an issue not limited to Bihar. Across India, large numbers of government school teachers lack regular training, digital literacy, or subject mastery, especially in rural areas. The test's results have reignited debates about whether assessment alone can improve quality, or if deeper systemic reforms — including better pre-service training, continuous professional development, and mentorship — are essential.

Meanwhile, the BSEB also announced results for the Diploma in Elementary Education,

where nearly 91% of candidates passed. The contrast between trainee teachers' success and the poor performance of serving teachers suggests that India's teacher upskilling challenge lies not in entry-level training, but in sustained professional growth after joining service.

## GUJARAT TO REVIEW TEACHERS' CLASSROOM ROLE AFTER POOR NATIONAL RANKING

Following its low performance in a national education survey, the Gujarat government is set to rework its Gunotsav school assessment process to better align with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. A key focus will be to evaluate teachers' actual involvement in classrooms and how effectively they apply training from Continuous Professional Development (CPD) sessions.

Under NEP-2020, teachers are required to complete 50 hours of professional development annually, but the new framework will also check whether this training is being meaningfully used in daily teaching. "We need clear criteria to identify good teachers and ensure they evolve with NEP goals," said Jayendrasinh Jadav, chairman of the expert committee revising Gunotsav.

The move follows the PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024 report, which ranked Gujarat among the 10 least performing states in school education. Two committees—comprising educationists and government teachers—have been asked to frame new guidelines within a month.

The revised Gunotsav is also expected to integrate elements of SARTHAQ (Students' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement through Quality Education) and SQAAF (School Quality Assessment and Assurance Framework) to make school accreditation more transparent.

Launched in 2009 and updated several times since, Gunotsav earlier increased the weightage of state scholarship schemes, reducing focus on teaching and learning. The upcoming revision seeks to restore classroom quality and teacher engagement at the heart of Gujarat's school improvement efforts.

## MAHARASHTRA ORDERS ALL-BOYS AND ALL-GIRLS SCHOOLS TO CONVERT TO CO-EDUCATION

In a major policy shift, the Maharashtra government has directed that all government and aided schools in the state transition to a co-educational system, effectively ending the era of single-gender schools. The order follows a recommendation from the Bombay High Court, which had urged the state to promote gender equality and inclusivity in education.

Under the new directive, existing boys' and girls' schools will be merged or converted into co-educational institutions, depending on local conditions and student strength. The state's education department has asked district authorities to prepare detailed implementation plans and timelines for the transition.

Officials said the move is in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes equal access and opportunities for all students, regardless of gender. The government believes that co-education will foster better social understanding, mutual respect, and gender sensitivity among students from an early age.

While the policy has been widely welcomed for promoting inclusivity, some administrators and parents have sought clarity on infrastructure adjustments and teacher deployment during the transition. The education department has assured that adequate resources and guidelines will be provided to ensure a smooth changeover.

With this move, Maharashtra becomes one of the first states in India to mandate a complete shift to co-education across all levels of schooling.

## ANDHRA PRADESH ACHIEVES 'ONE TEACHER – ONE CLASS' IN 9,600 SCHOOLS

In a significant milestone for public education, Andhra Pradesh has become the first state in India to ensure a "One Teacher – One Class" system across 9,600 primary schools, Education and IT Minister Nara Lokesh announced in the Legislative Council. The initiative, previously limited to 1,200 schools, marks a major expansion under the coalition government's education reforms.

Minister Lokesh said the programme aims to improve teaching quality, ensure stronger teacher accountability, and achieve Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) goals across the state's government schools. "No other state in the country has achieved this scale," he said, highlighting that the initiative is part of a broader effort to motivate teachers and raise learning outcomes.

He also acknowledged the contribution of scholar Chaganti Koteswara Rao, who designed new high-quality textbooks for students entirely without remuneration. These textbooks, Lokesh said, are now being printed and distributed across schools as part of the state's curriculum reform.

Responding to concerns about fee regulation in private schools, the minister clarified that the AP School Education Regulatory and Monitoring Commission (APSERMC) Act of 2019 remains un-

der judicial review, but reaffirmed the government's focus on strengthening public education.
Lokesh further stated that 66.5 lakh students have benefitted from the state's Talliki Vandanam scheme, which provides financial assistance to schoolchildren, continuing the eligibility framework of the earlier Amma Vodi scheme.

## HOW VOLUNTEER TEACHERS ARE TRANSFORMING BENGALURU'S GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Volunteer groups across Bengaluru are quietly improving the city's under-resourced government schools — from teaching English and Maths to reviving classrooms and playgrounds. As Citizen Matters reports, these citizen-led efforts are not only boosting enrollment but also changing the atmosphere of learning.
One such initiative, Acharyas for a Better Community (ABC), began informally in 2016 and now works with around 20 schools. Supported by CSR funding and local citizen groups like Whitefield Rising, ABC has helped rebuild schools, hire teachers, create libraries and labs, and even provide daily breakfast. In one Whitefield school, enrollment rose from under 10 to nearly 100 students after ABC's involvement.
In Malleswaram, a Facebook-based volunteer group led by Anupama Harish has been teaching Mathematics and Social Studies in a local boys' school since 2015, improving students' exam results. Similarly, One Billion Literates Foundation (OBLF) has placed trained volunteers to teach English in Sarjapur Road schools using structured lesson plans and progress tracking.
Despite the successes, volunteer groups face persistent challenges — teacher shortages, irregular infrastructure, language barriers, and difficulties coordinating schedules with schools. Sustaining the impact depends heavily on committed volunteers and steady funding.
Still, the report notes, these local interventions show how citizen action and corporate support can meaningfully strengthen public education, even if long-term reforms remain essential for system-wide change.
*Source: Citizen Matters, by Navya P K. Read more at: http://bit.ly/46Xlchx*

## FROM DROPOUTS TO DREAM CAMPUS: KARNATAKA HEADMASTER TRANSFORMS VILLAGE SCHOOL WITH ₹3 CRORE CSR SUPPORT

In Bashettihalli village near Doddaballapura, headmaster Narayanaswamy R. has turned a once-struggling government school into a model campus through vision and persistence. Concerned that students—especially girls—were dropping out after Class 7 due to the absence of a high school, he persuaded the government to start one in 2007. What began with just three classrooms and 120 students has since evolved into a thriving hi-tech school with 22 classrooms, smart boards, STEM and computer labs, and an auditorium—thanks to over ₹3 crore in CSR funds

he mobilised from companies and donors.
CSR contributions, including support from Musashi Auto Parts, Bharti Airtel Foundation, Rittal Pvt. Ltd., and Anil Kumble's family, also helped improve sanitation and build new facilities. Rotary-funded bicycles and sanitary pad vending machines encouraged greater attendance among girls. Today, the school serves over 530 students from diverse backgrounds, including migrant families from across India. It also hosts an Atal Tinkering Lab under the Union government's Atal Innovation Mission, sparking students' interest in robotics and innovation.
Narayanaswamy's next goal is to use a new ₹16 lakh CSR grant to introduce IAS, IPS, and KAS coaching within the school. His efforts demonstrate how a committed educator, backed by corporate and community support, can transform a rural government school into a centre of excellence and opportunity.

## 50 YEARS OF IB IN INDIA: PREPARING STUDENTS FOR A GLOBAL FUTURE

The International Baccalaureate (IB) marks 50 years in India this year, having first arrived in 1976 at Kodai International School. In an interview with The Free Press Journal, Mahesh Balakrishnan, IB's Development Senior Manager for India, reflected on how the programme has evolved from a niche international curriculum to one of the fastest-growing education systems in the country — expanding by 44% in the last five years.
Balakrishnan highlighted IB's student-centric and inquiry-based approach, which focuses on critical thinking, research, and real-world problem-solving rather than rote memorisation. Students engage in projects like the Extended Essay (4,000 words) and Theory of Knowledge (1,600 words), which build skills valued by universities worldwide.
He noted that IB is now expanding beyond metropolitan cities, aligning closely with India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which also promotes experiential and holistic learning. With more international universities opening campuses in India, IB is increasingly seen as a strong pathway not just for studying abroad, but also for Indian higher education. While newer boards such as the Western Australia Certificate of Education offer competition, Balakrishnan said IB's global recognition, academic depth, and adaptability ensure its continued relevance. "IB doesn't just teach facts—it teaches students how to think, question, and apply knowledge," he said, underscoring the board's mission to prepare learners for both national and global futures.

*Source: The Free Press Journal. Read more at: http://bit.ly/3KHXAGm*

## HOW CHATGPT AFFECTS STUDENT LEARNING — WHAT TEACHERS SHOULD KNOW

A 2025 meta-analysis of 51 research studies examined how ChatGPT influences student learning across schools and universities worldwide. The study found that using ChatGPT in education has a strong positive impact on learning performance, and a moderate positive effect on both learning motivation and higher-order thinking (critical, creative, and analytical skills).
Students using ChatGPT performed better (effect size g = 0.87) because the tool gives instant feedback, helps explain difficult ideas, and supports self-paced learning. It works best when used regularly for 4–8 weeks and as part of problem-based or inquiry-based learning, rather than in short or unstructured use.
However, ChatGPT's impact on thinking skills (g = 0.46) was smaller, since it tends to supply answers quickly rather than push students to reason deeply. The study suggests teachers should use ChatGPT alongside structured guidance, such as Bloom's taxonomy, to help students analyse, evaluate, and create rather than just recall information.
For classroom use, researchers recommend:
- Treat ChatGPT as a learning partner or tutor, not a replacement for teachers.
- Use it in STEM, writing, and skill-based courses where feedback and exploration matter.
- Encourage students to ask good questions and reflect on ChatGPT's responses.
- Maintain teacher involvement to prevent over-reliance and ensure accuracy.
Overall, the research concludes that ChatGPT can enhance learning outcomes and engagement when teachers use it deliberately and with clear learning goals — blending technology with thoughtful pedagogy rather than letting the tool lead the lesson.

*Based on: Wang & Fan, 2025, Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, Nature Group*

## WHEN PROMISE FADES: WHAT INDIA CAN LEARN FROM THE UK'S "LEAKY MATHS PIPELINE"

A recent study by researchers at University College London has revealed a troubling pattern in how early mathematical talent among disadvan-

taged children often fails to translate into long-term success. The study, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, tracked more than three lakh students in England who showed high mathematical ability at age eleven. Despite early promise, only a small fraction of these children from lower-income backgrounds went on to study advanced mathematics in high school or university.

Just nine per cent of these talented but disadvantaged students achieved top grades in A-level mathematics, compared with twenty per cent of their better-off peers. By the time they reached university, only three per cent had chosen maths-related degrees, less than half the rate of students from more privileged backgrounds. The researchers described this as a "leaky mathematics pipeline," where students fall away at three critical stages—GCSE performance, A-level subject choice, and university enrolment.

Although the research was conducted in England, its findings resonate strongly with India's own education system. In India too, children from rural or low-income families often show early aptitude in mathematics but lose momentum due to weak school infrastructure, shortage of qualified teachers, and limited exposure to problem-solving beyond textbook learning. Many students drop out of the maths stream after Class 10, opting for "easier" subjects due to a lack of mentoring or guidance on career pathways in STEM.

The UCL researchers suggest making mathematics compulsory until age eighteen and providing targeted mentoring and academic support to sustain students' confidence. For India, this underscores the urgent need to strengthen mathematics teaching at the secondary level, identify promising students early, and provide sustained encouragement through scholarships, bridge programmes, and teacher training. Without such interventions, the country too risks losing much of its home-grown mathematical talent long before it reaches its full potential.

*Based on a UCL Social Research Institute working paper, 19 September 2025 (Nuffield Foundation–funded).*

## HELPING EVERY CHILD FIND THEIR VOICE: LESSONS FOR INDIA FROM A NEW UK REPORT

A new UK government report, Supporting Stammering, Speech and Language Needs in the Early Years (October 2025), highlights the vital role of nurseries, preschool teachers, and childminders in identifying and supporting children with speech and language difficulties.

The study stresses early detection, teacher training, and collaboration between educators, therapists, and families.

The review found that many children miss timely support, affecting their confidence and long-term learning. It also pointed to gaps in early screening tools and a lack of proven interventions, especially for bilingual children.

The most effective models were those where speech and language therapists worked directly with early years educators, helping them use practical classroom strategies and involve parents. These findings are highly relevant for India. Many preschool and anganwadi workers receive limited training in language development, and speech difficulties often go unnoticed until primary school.

Adopting similar practices—regular screening, teacher training, and partnerships with speech therapy experts—would help build a more inclusive early years system and ensure every child has the opportunity to communicate confidently.

*Source: Department for Education (UK) report, October 2025 – University of Oxford, Newcastle University, and The Michael Palin Centre for Stammering.*

*Ahana Mitra*

# STEM in education

Ahana Mitra is a biology teacher in Carmel Convent School, Durgapur, who talks about why STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths) is important in today's education. She explains how it helps students think better, be creative, and become leaders. She also shares how teachers can use simple, everyday things to make STEM fun and easy for everyone to learn.

The world our children are stepping into demands more than memorised facts — it demands thinkers, innovators, and problem-solvers. STEM education blends Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics into real-world learning that sparks curiosity and creativity. When we introduce STEM early, we give students the confidence to question, explore, and build solutions for tomorrow's challenges. This article discusses how, as parents and teachers, we have the power to ignite this spark and shape a generation ready to lead.

STEM, the modern curriculum, is not a new concept, as it has existed since 2006 in various parts of the world. Now it is unfolding in India. I would like to explain the scopes and how we, as educators, can use them to cater to 21st-century students with the required skills right from the beginning, as education is undergoing tremendous changes in the course of time. We have shifted to online mode post-COVID apart from homeschooling.

To define STEM, it is an interdisciplinary approach to learning Science, Technology, Math, and Engineering to develop critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, analytical thinking, etc. These are the 21st-century skills expected of the students. Analytical thinking is the processing of the data, of getting the input of correct data received, and accordingly, the students have to identify, understand the problems, and get correct information to arrive at possible solutions. Many solutions may not work, and so they have to find the best-suited solution for the problem. This is how analytical thinking and innovation happen for a given problem through learning STEM. Active learning comes in to bring in critical thinking and creativity in students, which is the need of the hour, and thus bring out the leadership qualities in them so that they can be good social influencers.

STEM was introduced in 2001 by the National Science Foundation, USA, and the name was given by American biologist J. Ramale to mean the integration of all technologies. Under Science, we have biochemistry, biophysics, environmental science, hydrology, geoscience, medicine, etc. When we come to the Technology aspect of STEM, we have computer science, industrial design, and information technology. Under E of STEM, Engineering, we have biomedical, aerospace, and electrical engineering subjects, with more subjects coming up. We have Math, where we have applied mathematics, data science, and statistics.

NEP 2020 is already creating a new trend in the educational system in India. STEM focuses on competency and a shift from traditional teaching methods, and online methodologies are being used. We give more importance to a competency-based curriculum, which will be a shift from traditional teaching methods. We have homeschools and online teaching methodologies that are being used. We find education nowadays as more interactive and holistic to help students cope with future challenges and develop problem-solving skills. We can get the knowledge in a passive way, in a more interactive and holistic method. This will make the students face their future challenges with better vision and clarity of thought. So, we can start STEM right from the Montessori level, develop observational skills, and give them small challenges to solve by brainstorming. According to the grade, we can check their observational skills and give them small projects. Plenty of job opportunities are available for STEM degree holders across the globe.

*Read the full length article on SchoolReformer.com Blog.*

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*Girija Sridhar*

# Guiding children towards confidence

Girija Sridhar, a master trainer in communications, explains how self-esteem is an important factor in a child's growth and personality.

It develops through experiences and interactions with parents, teachers, and peers. As adults, we can support children in building confidence and recognising their abilities. With the right guidance, every child can thrive and realise their full potential.

The ingredient that can change the personality of the child, which is very critical, is self-esteem. It means what we think about ourselves. It comes through our childhood. All these things, such as interpersonal relationships with parents or teachers, matter a lot, and in such situations, the child becomes what he is now. The question arises, what can we as parents or teachers do, since we have the power to do it? There are many methods to cater to different types of children, such as slow ones or quick ones. But God has given us all a gift, and when opened, there are good things for the children that will help them.

So, self-esteem refers to the individual's overall sense of self-worth, a personal value. When we constantly tell a child that he is not capable of doing things, this has an impact on the child's mind, and he starts thinking that he is not good at things. Personal success is very important for a child, and when he is constantly told that he cannot do it, he starts thinking strongly that he cannot do it. We have to change the world from "I can't" to "I can." We are the instruments and well-wishers connected with the child. The relationship comes in various ways, such as how we interact with people, how we take things, etc. If his self-esteem is low, he will not understand anything properly and will negatively interpret everything.

Tom's story

To cite an example, the story of Mrs. Anderson and her student Tom, who was not doing his homework, did not have any friends, and did not dress properly. His notebooks were filled with red marks. When the principal, a sensible lady, got to see his notebook, she asked Mrs. Anderson about it, and she narrated all the negative points about Tom. The principal asked Mrs. Anderson if she had ever tried to find out the cause of it. Mrs. Anderson said she did not. So, the principal advised her to go to the lower classes and find out about him. In the previous two lower classes, the teacher said that he became dull after his mother passed away due to illness. The Grade 1 teacher said that the child was one of the best students in the class, and she missed Tom. These details made Mrs. Anderson feel very bad about what she had done to the child till then. From the next class onwards, she started talking to him more, and it had a good impact on him. He even presented her with a gift on Teachers' Day. Mrs. Anderson appreciated the gifts and started to use them immediately. The boy was in full smiles. After he left the school, he became a well-known doctor in New York, and Mrs. Anderson was also invited to his wedding. During the function, he explained how Mrs. Anderson changed his life and was almost his mother. She said his association was an eye-opener for her and taught her what she should have done as a teacher. The story goes to show what we can do to make the children feel self-esteem.

Power of positive talk

Factors like genetics, brain, and chemistry play a role as children grow. So, the brain, which was empty when the children were born, gets filled with positive thoughts and appreciation. Often, the way we talk can be terrible, and when it goes on for a long time, the children cannot be happy, as they are constantly being told they are not good enough. Due to family dynamics and peer influence, when they reach college or school, they get bullied. We have seen in parents that when a child does not perform well like another child, they start telling him that they are not good enough.

*Read the full length article on SchoolReformer.com Blog*

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*Mary Vinodhini*

# Universal design for learning

Mary Vinodhini, Curriculum developer, describes how Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a teaching approach that helps all students learn by removing barriers in the classroom.

Our core focus this year was simple but profound: to make every teaching and learning experience impactful and successful for every single learner in our school. The vehicle for achieving this goal is the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework.

I anticipate the question from my team: 'What is UDL, and is this another new program? And it gets right to the heart of what we'll be exploring. While UDL stands for Universal Design for Learning, the name only hints at its profound impact.

Instead of thinking of UDL as another program, let's think of it as a transformative framework. The goal of this framework isn't just to help students overcome barriers; it's to design our learning environments so those barriers don't exist in the first place.

It is not an approach only for students who have exceptional abilities or learners with special needs, but it addresses the requirements of all students in the classroom. This concept was basically developed by the National Centre on Universal Design for Learning and the Centre for Applied and Special Technology.

Ronald Mass designed the concept from North Carolina, envisioning the idea with reference to architecture. It started with building architectural designs. The designs in architecture offer accessibility, such as a ramp in front of a building, which is useful not only for people in wheelchairs but also for people who find it difficult to climb stairs, parents pushing strollers, or travellers with heavy baggage. In the same way, automatic doors should be designed for people with mobility or motor issues, as well as for those who carry a lot of baggage or those who do not want to touch the knob during flu season. We all must have observed the captions on the TV to meet the needs of people with auditory difficulties, as well as for people in places like restaurants and airports where the noise is high. They can follow the instructions easily. All these are meant to reduce the difficulties people may face in order to reach an object or a place. The same concept can be applied in the learning environment in the classrooms, too.

Inclusive and flexible classrooms

The Universal Design framework has three different principles – engagement, representation, and action and expression. The goal is to make use of different teaching methods to give all the students equal opportunities to succeed and to remove any obstacles during the process. Teachers can fruitfully help diverse groups of learners by following flexible methods and helping them access information and showcase their knowledge. The teachers can bring in flexibility for every student's strengths and requirements. In this way, UDL helps students in the classroom.

Talking about the first among the three principles, engagement, UDL encourages educators to find out various ways to motivate the students, such as letting them make choices, giving assignments relevant to life, and in this way, they can kindle the interest in the students and sustain the same. Skill building and creating opportunities for students to move around the class, providing the information in more than one format, such as textbooks, which are the primary visual source, etc. Providing text, audio, video, and hands-on learning offers all the students a chance to reach out to the material in any way best suited to their learning strengths. UDL encourages students to collect materials and to show what they prefer. They can opt for a pen and paper test, or oral presentation, or group research work.

It was encouraging to hear colleagues say, "We already do this." It shows they recognize the core goal of supporting diverse learners.

*Read the full length article on SchoolReformer.com Blog*

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*Kiran Bhaskaran*

# School gardens teaching health and climate awareness

Kiran Bhaskaran, Chief Consultant, Indian Farm School, Bangalore, shares his views on how school gardens are a fun and practical way to teach students about health and the environment.

By planting and caring for gardens, children learn about nutritious food, healthy habits, and practices. They also gain awareness of climate change and how their actions can help protect the planet. These experiences make learning interactive, meaningful, and enjoyable for students.

I am the founder and chief consultant of Indian Farm School, an organic agriculture consultancy, training, and school gardening organisation. We promote a sustainable way of living and farming through school gardening projects across India. Our team visits schools, helps them set up organic gardens on their premises, and teaches children how to grow vegetables. Despite limited space and resources, students can develop organic gardens that provide them with healthy and nutritious produce.

Throughout the year, our small team visits schools to educate children about organic gardening. They learn how to care for plants, manage pests and diseases organically, harvest the produce, and share it with others.

Quite often, we find that children are not very receptive in classroom settings. But when we take them to the garden, their learning transforms, and it has a unique impact. At one school, for instance, we created a terrace garden using discarded packaging wood sourced from the market to build vegetable beds. We guided the children in

mixing potting materials like cocopeat, soil, and compost, and they filled the beds themselves. It was a natural way of developing a terrace garden, without using any advanced tools. The children even produced compost using locally available resources. We made vegetable beds measuring 2.5 feet in width and 4 feet in length, providing about 10 sq. ft. of cultivation space per bed. Some beds were made taller for certain crops, while others were shallower. We grew carrots, radish, and beetroot — vegetables commonly consumed in households- to help children understand how to manage different crops within a small area.

The kitchen garden model follows a similar approach. We turn soil into raised vegetable beds to grow crops. Some schools have ample space, so we recommend developing gardens directly on the ground. However, in urban areas where space is limited, we introduced the kitchen garden model for terraces. In these gardens, we grow spinach, exotic vegetables, kale, beans, lady's fingers (okra), and more — all within compact spaces.

Both the terrace and kitchen garden concepts are nearly identical in structure. Once the setup is complete, the teaching process for organic vegetable gardening remains the same. We typically create groups of around eight children. If there are more beds, we conduct batches per vegetable crop cycle, which usually ranges from 45 to 90 days. As the garden expands, we can engage three to four classes at a time, assigning dedicated spaces for each group.

We begin by teaching the fundamentals of gardening — the essential components, awareness of soil ingredients, and the preparation of the potting mix. Students learn what is needed to maintain a successful organic or kitchen garden, whether at home or in school. Once they grasp the basics, we move on to seeding various vegetables. Seeds are sourced from organic farmers or seed banks and are either sown directly into the soil or started in nursery trays. Root crops, in particular, are sown directly in the beds. Each team is given a specific bed or growing space to manage, and they take full responsibility for it — from spacing and pest management to nurturing what they've sown, guided by the knowledge gained from our sessions.

*Read the full length article on SchoolReformer.com Blog*

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*Rajlakshme Bhattacharya*

# Smart libraries go virtual

Rajlakshme Bhattacharya, a passionate educator and academic coordinator, discusses how in today's world of rapid technological growth, libraries are transforming to keep up with modern needs.

Smart libraries blend traditional features with advanced technologies like AI, IoT, and digital tools. They make learning more engaging, interactive, and accessible for everyone. This shift is helping both students and teachers enjoy a smarter library experience. Libraries are considered the source of knowledge, information through written books. But, in this age of fast technological developments and digital evolution, the traditional libraries face the challenge of meeting the demands of modern society. Smart libraries are a combination of traditional libraries infused with the latest technologies. The libraries come with automation, artificial intelligence, IoT, and digital resources to bring in a brilliant library experience. They can create more interactive and better spaces and access for the users. The traditional libraries have the limitation in accessibility, while smart libraries come with information in as many formats as e-books, audiobooks, and digital archives, so that a wider spectrum of audience can use them. Also, automation can help reduce the time spent by the librarian for various tasks like cataloguing, check in and check-outs as seen in traditional libraries. The librarians can interact better with the readers. The smart libraries are known to reduce human errors and improve inventory management. The smart libraries, with the help of AI systems, can provide better recommendations to the users based on their reading habits, which will improve user satisfaction and the learning experience. With impressive illustrations, the technologies will give better insight into the topic. When we digitise the resources and reduce dependence on physical materials, there is higher sustainability with less paper usage and better energy consumption. The libraries can also arrange for interactive workshops to bring people closer, and they can also enable remote participation so that everyone will be involved.

Role of virtual reality and augmented reality

Virtual reality is a technology to create a simulated environment, mostly in three dimensions, that looks real. This is made possible by way of special hardware, such as headsets, which make everything real. When people wear the virtual reality headset, they can go around to pick the books of their choice as they did in traditional libraries and join others in reading sessions. Augmented reality is something that overlays images, videos, and sounds into the real world. This can be achieved through devices like tablets or smartphones for real-time interaction. In the case of libraries, when we integrate these two technologies, the user experience is enhanced and making the library more engaging. To start with, we can take some steps. We have to assess what the needs are for such a change, and then we have to find out which one is more useful to everyone. With virtual reality, a virtual tour of all the library facilities can be done. A reader can get an immense reading experience in this, apart from interactive learning sessions with other readers from across the globe. With augmented reality, better cataloguing and navigation can be done easily. Displays of resources and interactive books can be seen here. There will be higher user participation, engagement, and make use of it.

Smart libraries will handle information from magazines, newspapers, unlike traditional libraries, which have restricted access. The virtual libraries get the direct information from channels and provide up-to-date information. They also help in developing critical thinking as they have access to vast data, interact with many people in the world, and are not restricted to specific areas. People have to be trained first to handle the software and hardware.

*Read the full length article on SchoolReformer.com Blog*

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# The Columbia Core: What Indian schools can learn from a century-old idea

The dream of every good school is simple to state but difficult to realise: to help young people become thoughtful, well-read, scientifically literate and ethically aware citizens who can reason across disciplines. One of the most enduring attempts to achieve this at scale is Columbia University's Core Curriculum, launched in 1919 and still central to undergraduate education there today. This article introduces the Core—its origins, evolution, debates and structure—and explores how its spirit can inspire Indian schools that wish to go beyond exam preparation and curriculum compliance.

## WHERE THE CORE BEGAN—AND WHY

The Core Curriculum at Columbia College, according to Wikipedia, "was originally developed… in 1919" as a response to the civic and intellectual challenges that followed the First World War. It was conceived as a foundation for responsible citizenship and independent thinking during a time of social uncertainty. The very first course, Contemporary Civilization, grew out of a wartime training course titled "War Issues," but was transformed in peacetime into a broader inquiry that encouraged students to examine political, economic and philosophical questions shaping the modern world. Dean Herbert Hawkes described its purpose memorably when he said that "an understanding of the worth of the cause for which one is fighting is a powerful weapon in the hands of an intelligent man."

Columbia's own official history calls the Core "the first college general education program in the United States," praising it as a bold experiment in what educator John Dewey called progressive education. It was not designed merely to transmit knowledge but to build a space in which students could understand complex ideas through dialogue and reflection and "develop their own ideas" through collective learning.

## A CURRICULUM THAT EVOLVES

From its earliest years, the Core has continued to evolve with changing academic priorities and student concerns. Literature Humanities was introduced in 1937, followed by Art Humanities and Music Humanities a decade later. In 1947, Columbia added Asian Humanities—an early acknowledgment that great works and intellectual traditions extended far beyond Europe—which later grew into today's Global Core requirement. The curriculum underwent sig-

nificant revision from the 1990s onward, driven by student activism and scholarship that challenged the Eurocentric bias of earlier reading lists. These debates opened the door to postcolonial and non-Western authors. In the 2000s, the Core expanded again with Frontiers of Science, a foundational science course intended to develop scientific reasoning in non-science students through short, analytical learning units.

Even the reading lists changed over time. Once dominated by Greek and Roman classics alongside European philosophy, the Core gradually embraced a wider canon. Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice was introduced in 1985 and Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon in 2015, signalling an openness to women writers and voices from African American literature. The result today is neither a fixed canon nor a fashionable syllabus but a curated body of works that invite deep thought about human experience.

## A CENTURY OF DEBATE

The Core has been celebrated for giving generations of students a rigorous common intellectual foundation. At the same time, it has faced sustained criticism. In the late twentieth century, critics argued that the curriculum privileged a narrow, Eurocentric perspective, favouring "dead white men" and excluding other civilizations and cultures. Student protests and faculty debates challenged the underlying assumptions behind the idea of a universal tradition. These critiques eventually led to one of the most important transformations in the Core—the introduction of the Global Core (initially called Major Cultures) in 2008, which broadened the curriculum to include texts from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Global South. In effect, the Core moved from presenting a single tradition to encouraging dialogue among many traditions.

## WHAT COLUMBIA STUDENTS STUDY

All Columbia College undergraduates are required to complete a common set of Core courses, taught in small seminar-style classes that prioritise reading, writing and discussion. Literature Humanities and Contemporary Civilization, both year-long courses, anchor the programme. They are complemented by one-semester courses in Art Humanities, Music Humanities, University Writing and Frontiers of Science. Alongside these, students must fulfil Global Core requirements, study a foreign language and complete science and physical education requirements.

Columbia describes this shared journey as a formative intellectual experience. Students read closely, debate ideas and are encouraged to "experiment with ideas, pursue their own inquiries, develop their own perspectives, and critique shared opinions and social practices." The Core is not only a curriculum but a culture—one that unites every student who passes through Columbia College.

## LESSONS FOR INDIAN SCHOOLS

Most Indian schools operate within rigid, exam-driven syllabi prescribed by boards such as CBSE, ICSE or State Boards. Columbia's model demonstrates that it is possible to build a school-defined "core" that coexists with external exam requirements. Such a core curriculum would not replace the official syllabus but would give identity and depth to a school's educational mission by cultivating reading habits, debate, civic reasoning, scientific thinking and cultural literacy.

Three ideas from the Columbia Core stand out as especially relevant to India. First is the idea of a shared foundation of learning—the belief that every student, regardless of future specialization, deserves exposure to formative ideas and habits of inquiry. Second, the Core is taught through seminar-style small classes where students speak as much as they listen. Third, the Core remains a living, revisable curriculum. It adapts to new knowledge, new voices and new questions without losing its essential purpose.

## TRANSLATING THE IDEA TO THE SCHOOL LEVEL

The spirit of the Core can be implemented even in modestly resourced schools in India. A school could begin by defining five central pillars for its own core programme—perhaps reading and discussion, scientific inquiry, art and aesthetics, music and listening, and civics and ethics. Short, high-quality modules of four to six weeks could be woven into the timetable parallel to existing classes. For example, a reading circle could explore two short novels or essays with weekly discussions and reflective writing. A science module could explore everyday questions—like air quality or food science—using simple investigations. Art and music appreciation could connect students with local artists, while a civics module could explore constitutional values through neighbourhood issues.

These modules could be conducted in groups of 20–25 students and assessed through journals, essays and presentations rather than tests. Most importantly, the school core

should evolve each year, inviting students and teachers to recommend new books, local themes or cultural experiences to include.

### ADDRESSING PRACTICAL CONCERNS

Schools often hesitate to add new programmes due to academic pressure, teacher capacity or parental expectations. Yet these challenges can be managed. A school could start with just one period every week dedicated to the core. Texts and resources are widely available through public-domain books, licensed excerpts and open education platforms. Teachers can be supported through short internal workshops on leading discussions and assessing reflective writing. Parents, meanwhile, can be engaged by showcasing student work publicly in an annual "Core Portfolio."

### FINAL THOUGHT

A core curriculum is not just a list of topics but a statement of purpose. It is a school's promise that every student, regardless of background, will encounter ideas that shape character and stretch the mind. Columbia's hundred-year journey shows that such a shared intellectual foundation is not only possible but worth pursuing. Indian schools—rural or urban, private or government—can adapt this idea in simple but powerful ways. Beyond marks and exams lies education; the Core reminds us of that promise.

*Source:*

*This article paraphrases and adapts material from Wikipedia's "Core Curriculum (Columbia College)" and Columbia University's Core Curriculum pages.*

# How schools can design their own unique curriculum


Every school dreams of standing out—for its quality of teaching, its culture, its values, and the character of its students. Yet most schools, even those charging high fees and boasting impressive infrastructure, end up looking almost identical in practice. They follow the same board-prescribed syllabus, teach from the same textbooks, and prepare students for the same examinations. There is nothing wrong with the official syllabus; it is necessary, but it is not complete. True education must go beyond textbooks and tests. It must shape minds, character, curiosity, and capability. That is why every school—government, private, rural or urban—must design its own distinctive curriculum that reflects its educational philosophy and prepares students not only for exams, but for life.

Creating such a curriculum need not be complicated. It is not about importing foreign programmes or adopting expensive models. It is about giving your school a strong academic identity—a thoughtful, well-integrated framework of learning that grows from your context and values. Here is a simple, step-by-step guide for school leaders who want to begin this meaningful journey.

### 1. START WITH A CLEAR VISION

Every great curriculum begins with clarity of purpose. The headmaster and senior faculty must reflect on a fundamental question: What kind of student do we want to develop? Academic scores alone do not define education. Schools should aim to cultivate qualities such as curiosity, confidence, resilience, empathy, discipline, and ethical awareness. Do you want your students to be independent thinkers? Fluent communicators? Community-minded citizens? Global learners rooted in Indian values? Write down these aspirations. They will become the guiding principles of your school's curriculum.

### 2. IDENTIFY YOUR SCHOOL'S STRENGTHS AND CONTEXT

No two schools are the same. Every school has something unique to offer—its location, its teachers, its history, its culture, or its community. A hill-school might focus on ecology and mountain life; a school in a farming village may build learning around agriculture and sustainability; a city school might highlight entrepreneurship, public speaking, and dig-

ital literacy. Identify what gives your school its character, and build your curriculum around it. When a school embraces its identity, learning becomes more connected to life.

### 3. COMPLEMENT, DON'T REPLACE, THE OFFICIAL SYLLABUS

A school's own curriculum is not a rival to the board syllabus—it is a healthy extension of it. Think of the board syllabus as the foundation and your curriculum as the soul of education. For example, if the history textbook teaches the freedom struggle, your curriculum could include reading autobiographies of freedom fighters or staging a classroom debate on constitutional values. If the science syllabus covers plants and soil, your curriculum could add a school garden or field study on local biodiversity. The aim is not to add pressure but to deepen learning.

### 4. MAKE READING YOUR ACADEMIC BACKBONE

Reading is the single most powerful tool for intellectual growth. A school that does not invest in reading cannot claim academic excellence.

Build a strong reading programme with age-appropriate book lists—classics from India and the world, biographies, essays, science writing, travel, and history. Introduce a weekly reading hour, author-of-the-month discussions, and student book reviews.

Replace summary-based reading with reflective reading—students must respond to a text, not just memorise it. A reading culture sharpens language skills, imagination, thinking, and empathy across subjects.

### 5. INVOLVE TEACHERS IN CURRICULUM DESIGN

A curriculum will succeed only when teachers believe in it. Do not design it in the principal's office and circulate a memo. Involve teachers actively. Conduct workshops where each teacher shares what they wish their students learned beyond the textbook.

You will be surprised by how many meaningful ideas come from your staff—heritage walks, life skills workshops, financial literacy sessions, theatre labs, and storytelling lessons.

When teachers contribute, they take ownership. When they take ownership, they deliver with passion.

### 6. BRING LEARNING CLOSER TO LIFE THROUGH COMMUNITY LINKS

Learning must never remain trapped within classroom walls. Invite guest speakers—parents, professionals, retired teachers, soldiers, doctors, lawyers, scientists, local artisans. Organise visits to farms, factories, universities, museums, courts, or municipal offices. Partner with local organisations for service projects—cleanliness drives, tree planting, literacy tutoring, or health awareness campaigns. When students engage with real people and real problems, education becomes meaningful and memorable.

### 7. THINK SMALL, START SIMPLE, GROW NATURALLY

A unique curriculum is not built in a week. Start with three core themes for the first year—perhaps Reading, Environment, and Community Work. Develop simple weekly or monthly modules around these themes. Test them, refine them, and add new ones only when the school is ready. Many schools fail because they try to do too much at once. Begin small, stay consistent, and let the curriculum evolve step by step.

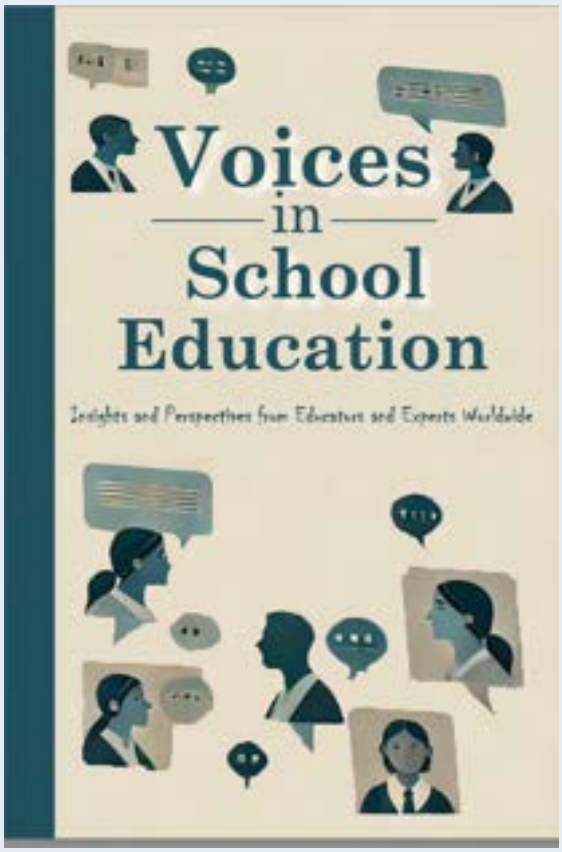
### 8. DOCUMENT, SHOWCASE, AND CELEBRATE

A curriculum gains strength when it is visible. Publish a School Curriculum Handbook that explains your goals and approach. Share it with parents so they understand the bigger purpose beyond exam results. Display student work—essays, journals, science models, art, or civic projects—on a "Learning Wall" or in an annual exhibition. Celebrate achievements not just in marks, but in effort, creativity, teamwork and leadership. When students and parents see the impact, your curriculum earns trust and respect.

### THE IDENTITY OF A SCHOOL

A unique curriculum is not an academic luxury. It is the identity of a school. It conveys its values, its purpose, its belief in education as a force for personal growth and national progress. It tells parents, teachers and society: This is who we are. This is what we stand for. This is how we shape the future.

Every school can build such a curriculum—quietly, patiently, and purposefully. The journey begins not with money or fancy programmes, but with clarity, commitment and courage.

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# Voices in School Education

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The **real struggles and triumphs of teachers.**

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