Theme 5th CS Conference: Human Capital for Viksit Bharat

Concept Note: Schooling – Building Blocks

Introduction

The vision of "Viksit Bharat," articulated by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, aims to transform India into a developed[1] nation by 2047, coinciding with the 100th year of its independence. This ambitious goal necessitates continuous goal setting and achievement across all sectors. The strategy is built upon four pillars of human development- Shishu (Infant), Balya (Child), Yuva (Youth), and Vyaska (Adult), specifically encompassing Mahilaye (Women) and Annadata (Farmers). Achieving Viksit Bharat demands a holistic approach, integrating economic growth with social equity, global competitiveness, environmental sustainability, industrial modernization, good governance, and India's emergence as a global knowledge superpower. Crucially, a "whole of government" approach is essential to foster a unified, resilient, and future-ready ecosystem for India's human resources, from infancy to a skilled adult workforce. At the very foundation of this human capital formation lies quality school education, serving as the essential "building block."

India stands at a pivotal moment to harness her demographic dividend, defined by the United Nations Population Fund as the economic growth potential arising from a larger working-age population relative to non-working ages. With 48.43% of its population in the 3 to 29 age group[2] and a median age[3] of 28.7 years- significantly lower than that of the USA, China, and many other nations, India possesses a substantial window of opportunity. Over 60% of its population is currently in the working-age group (15 - 59 years), projected to peak at 68.9% by 2030[4], presenting an unparalleled demographic advantage for becoming Viksit Bharat. However, realizing this potential is contingent upon ensuring accessible, quality education and skilling opportunities for every child aged 3-18 years across the country.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a transformative shift in the 21st century's educational landscape. This path breaking policy envisions a radical transformation in school education, aiming for "an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high quality education to all, thereby making India a global knowledge superpower." Accordingly, NEP 2020 advocates for an evolved pedagogy that is experiential, holistic, integrated, inquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centred, discussion-based, flexible, and, critically, enjoyable. It is designed to equip India's youth to navigate the diverse national and global challenges of the present and future.

Furthermore, the NEP 2020 emphasizes the paramount importance of quality education across all stages of school education. Quality education is not merely a life-changing experience; it is a mind-crafting and character-building endeavour that profoundly impacts citizenship. Therefore, ensuring every child has access to quality education is the foundational step in empowering them to acquire fundamental skills, progress to advanced learning, and ultimately contribute to the creation of a "Viksit Bharat."

Current Situation: A robust and high-quality schooling system is fundamental for India to realize its vision of a 'Viksit Bharat'. Schooling is the initial and most critical stage in nurturing the cognitive, social, and emotional capabilities of India's future workforce and citizens. To this end, a wide range of interventions and initiatives have been undertaken across all levels of school education. These include:

1) **Improving Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratio (NER):** India boasts one of the world's largest school education systems, encompassing 14.72 lakh schools, over 98

[1] By World Bank Standards, this implies reaching Gross National Income per capita of USD > 18,220 by 2047
[2] UN Population Division
[3] United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2024
[4] UN Population Statistics 2022

lakh teachers, and 24.80 crore students from pre-primary to higher secondary levels. This vast system caters to students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, with government schools constituting the majority at 69.14%, followed by private (22.5%), aided (5.5%), and other schools (2.86%). Substantial advancements have been made in ensuring universal access to elementary education, primarily attributed to sustained government initiatives such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan, which were subsumed under the Samagra Shiksha scheme in 2018 to provide an integrated framework for school education from pre-primary to senior secondary. This is evidenced by a Gross Access Ratio (GAR)[5] of 97.83% for primary and 96.57% for upper primary schooling facilities. The current strategic imperative is to realize the NEP 2020's objective of attaining a 100% GER from pre-school through secondary levels by 2030. Furthermore, improving the NER is crucial, as age-appropriate admissions optimize learning outcomes by ensuring children are developmentally ready for the curriculum, leading to more effective instruction and reduced learning difficulties.

Structure	**GER**	**NER**
Foundational[6]	77.7	74.0
Preparatory	96.5	71.4
Middle	89.5	64.4
Secondary	66.5	50.9

UDISE+ 2023-24

2) **Basic Schooling Facilities:** Over the past decade, substantial progress has been made in saturating schooling facilities. Through centrally sponsored schemes like Samagra Shiksha and various initiatives at the State and UT level, efforts are underway to provide essential amenities in government schools. The focus is on strengthening existing schools, facilitating new openings, and ensuring critical infrastructure, including toilets, drinking water, ramps, handrails, boundary walls, etc. The strategic objective is to attain 100% saturation of these basic facilities by 2025-26.

Schooling Facility	**2013-14**	**2023-24**
Total Government Schools	**10,95,374**	**10,17,660**
Drinking Water	83.2	98.4
Girls Toilet	90.6	97.1
Boys Toilet	85.7	94.8
CwSN friendly toilets	-	34.4
Hand wash	39.3	94.8
Library	77.9	92.7
Electricity	48.9	92.4
Ramps	65.2	85.1
Play ground	61.6	79.3
Medical checkups	65.86	75.16

Source: UDISE+

3) **Saturation of aspirational facilities in schools:** Realizing the NEP 2020's objective of a 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) across all educational strata necessitates robust aspirational infrastructure at the secondary level. Although considerable advancement has been achieved over the past six years, UDISE+ data indicates persistent gaps in facility saturation. For example, functional computers are available in only 50.9% schools. Accordingly, a targeted outlay of Rs. 5,989.91 crores have been sanctioned to furnish 91,456 Secondary/Senior Secondary schools with essential ICT laboratories, Smart Classrooms, and Science laboratories (including integrated labs). In a further push, and aligning with the Budget 2025 announcement, fifty thousand new Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs) are slated for establishment in government

[5] Samagra Shiksha AWP&B 2025-26

[6] GER & NER at Foundational stage is calculated using both Pre-Primary enrolments in formal and enrolments in Anganwadi's from MoWCD

schools over the next five years, aimed at cultivating curiosity, innovation, and a scientific temper. Currently, only 33,155 out of 302,864 secondary schools have ATLs. Furthermore, the BharatNet project will provide broadband connectivity to all government secondary schools in the rural areas.

Facility (Figures in %)	2018	2024
Lab facilities for Higher Secondary Schools (Total No. 69,041)		
Physics Lab	31.49	76.26
Chemistry Lab	31.09	76.53
Biology Lab	28.65	74.61
Mathematics Lab	8.79	43.10
Lab facilities for Secondary/Higher Secondary Schools (Total No. 1,22,247)		
Integrated Science Lab	37.39	50.17
ICT Lab (Grade VI and above)	-	30.25
Computer Lab	51.65	60.32
Smart Classroom (Grade VI and above)	-	38.62
Internet	6.5	46.2

Source: UDISE+

4) **Special emphasis on Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs):** To facilitate learning for all students, the scope of school education has been broadened to facilitate multiple pathways to learning involving both formal and non-formal education modes. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Programmes is being implemented by the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and State Open Schools[7] for meeting the learning needs of young people in India who are not able to attend a physical school. Additionally, different government and state initiatives significantly broadens educational access vital for Socio-Economic Disadvantaged Groups. The Samagra Shiksha scheme significantly expands educational access beyond traditional schooling by providing crucial residential facilities. This includes Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Awasiya Vidyalaya (NSCBAV), which are vital for children from Socio-Economic Disadvantaged Groups. Currently, 5,133 KGBVs are enrolling 712,986 students, and 1,126 NSCBAVs accommodate 106,045 students. A decision has also been taken to saturate all KGBVs with ICT and Smart Classrooms. Further, in a collaborative effort with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Samagra Shiksha has significantly expanded hostel facilities for tribal students, sanctioning 243 hostels across 16 states under the PM JANMAN scheme and an additional 604 hostels across 22 states under the DAJGUA scheme.

5) **Focus on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN):** Significant progress toward universal Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) by Grade 2 is being driven by initiatives like the NIPUN Bharat Mission (launched July 5, 2021), redefined NEP 2020 Lakshyas, and the annual Vidya Pravesh School Preparation Module (since 2022-23). This focus is further strengthened by the inclusion of Balvatika/pre-primary sections in nearly 6 lakhs of 12.29 lakh primary schools with a focus on having at least one year of pre-primary education in a school-based pre-school class/balvatika for the age group 5 to 6, alongside the extension of PM POSHAN to Balvatikas. ASER 2024 confirms NIPUN Bharat's positive impact, showing significant improvement in foundational literacy and numeracy skills, particularly strong in government schools, which underscores the critical need to extend these efforts into higher grades.

6) **Formulation of new curriculum and textbooks:** Adhering to the principles of NEP 2020, the National Curriculum Frameworks (NCFs) for the Foundational Stage and School Education

[7] State Open Schools are in 11 States i.e., Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Telangana and West Bengal.

have been developed, with States and UTs currently in various stages of adoption and contextualization. A notable innovation to emphasize experiential learning is the Learning Teaching Material, Jadui Pitara and its digital version, which states are adopting or contextualizing. Moreover, new textbooks for Grades 1 to 8 have been developed aligned with these NCFs, specifically incorporating local content and flavour.

State Curriculum Framework	Status of Implementation
SCF- Foundational Stage	• 11 States Published/contextualized: Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Goa, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand & Uttar Pradesh • 2 State/UT- Translation of NCF-FS: Ladakh in Bhoti language; West Bengal in Bengali • 6 States/UT in process: Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Jammu & Kashmir, Mizoram, Odisha & Tripura
SCF- School Education	• 2 States prepared SCF-SE: Maharashtra & Rajasthan • 2 State/UT- Translation of NCF-SE: Ladakh in Bhoti language; West Bengal in Bengali • 13 States in process: Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Goa, Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Manipur, Nagaland, Odisha, Tripura & Uttarakhand

7) **Promoting multilingualism in schools:** Multilingual education is gaining widespread adoption across the country, with 56% mandating teaching of local languages, and 67% adopting regional languages as the first language. To support this, the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) has been translated into nine languages. In alignment with NEP 2020, the primary language for the foundational stage will also be the home language/mother tongue/local language. Additionally, primers have been developed in 117 regional languages**,** and textbooks for Grades One and Two are now available in twenty-two scheduled Indian languages. Digital platforms like PM e-Vidya, along with initiatives such as the Tamil TV Channel, ULLAS Channel, and Bhasha Sangam on DIKSHA, are actively promoting language learning through accessible, multilingual content. Furthering these efforts, the Bharatiya Bhasha Summer Camp, a nationwide festival celebrating multilingualism, was launched across all schools on May 19 2025.

8) **Integration of Skilling:** NEP 2020 aims to integrate skill education programmes into mainstream education in a phased manner, beginning with exposure to skilling at an early age i.e., in the middle and secondary school. The centrally sponsored schemes of the government such as the Samagra Shiksha, PM SHRI and STARS[8] schemes are significantly enhancing skill education by incorporating practical provisions. These include provisions such as tools and equipment, hands-on student training, pre-skill exposure at the middle school level, internships with local artisans, and 10 bagless days. The goal is to provide rich, practical learning experiences. Currently, 28,342 schools offer skill education to 31.94 lakh students across 101 job roles in 25 different sectors. Moreover, National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF)-compliant skill modules are available as an additional subject for students in Grades 9 and 10, becoming a compulsory elective for those in Grades 11 and 12.

9) **Continuous Professional Development of Teachers:** To ensure the sustained professional growth of teachers, multiple initiatives have been undertaken. Prominently, National Initiative for School Heads and Teachers Holistic Advancement (NISHTHA) program delivers integrated training across all school stages effectively leveraging the DIKSHA online platform.

[8] STARS implemented in 6 States i.e., Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Rajasthan

Concurrently, 613 District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) are undergoing phased upgrades to Centres of Excellence to innovate teacher training through modern pedagogy, continuous professional development, and ICT integration. Furthermore, State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs) are being transformed into model centers of innovation and research, equipped with aspirational resources for infrastructure, digital technology, curriculum review, skill education, and collaborative research.

10) **Leveraging technology for educational management:** Significant strides have been made in using technology for data and evidence-based management within India's education system. The Rashtriya Vidya Samiksha Kendra (RVSK) serves as a central hub, aggregating and analyzing school education data from VSKs nationwide to inform policy and program decisions. VSKs are now operational across the CBSE, NCERT, and nearly all States and Union Territories (excluding Bihar, Kerala, and West Bengal), with RVSK integrating 30 States/UTs to track attendance for approximately 884,000 schools, 4.15 million teachers, and 102.6 million students. This technological advancement also supports the implementation of the APAAR ID, with 13.70 crore (55%) IDs already generated. Furthermore, 3.73 lakh e-content pieces are available on DIKSHA in 126 Indian and 7 foreign languages.

11) **PM ScHool for Rising India (PM SHRI):** The scheme's core intent is to prepare over 14,500 PM SHRI Schools by comprehensively strengthening them to embody all NEP 2020 initiatives. These schools are envisioned to emerge as exemplar institutions over time, providing vital leadership and guidance to other schools in their vicinity. Currently, 13,076 schools have been selected from 33 States, UTs, and KVS/NVS/NCERT, comprising 1,305 Primary, 3,102 Elementary, 3,135 Secondary, and 5,534 Senior Secondary schools.

12) **Ensuring equitable education for Children with Special Needs (CwSN):** Significant progress is underway to ensure equitable and accessible education for all, including children with special needs (CWSN), aligning with NEP 2020. Under Samagra Shiksha, provisions for CWSN cover 18.53 lakh children, with an approved outlay of Rs. 699.11 crores for 2025-26. This includes separate stipends for CWSN girls, annual block-level camps for early identification with mandated data maintenance by States/UT data under the RPwD Act, and equipped Block-level Resource Centers for rehabilitation and training. These efforts are further bolstered by digital initiatives like PM e-Vidya's DTH ISL channel (Channel 31), the PRASHAST Mobile App for disability screening, and audiobooks/ISL content on DIKSHA.

Issues and Challenges:

1) **Educational Disparity:** India faces a significant human capital challenge, starkly highlighted by the gap between its low Mean Years of Schooling (7.33 years) and high Expected Years of Schooling (13.3 years). Compounding this imbalance is a notably low Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), particularly evident at the Secondary level (66.5%). To attain the NEP 2020 goal of 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) from pre-school to secondary level by 2030, available capacity of secondary/senior secondary schools needs to be considerably upgraded if all children in upper primary schools are to be accommodated. For this purpose, a comprehensive school, block, and district-level analysis needs to be conducted to accurately determine actual gaps in intake capacity across various grades.

2) **Bridging the NER gap:** The consistently lower NER across all levels, notably at 50.9% for Secondary education, indicates that a substantial number of age-eligible children are either out of school or enrolled in grades not corresponding to their age. This widespread age-grade disparity, whether due to late entry, grade repetition, or early dropouts, creates heterogenous classrooms, making it challenging for teachers to deliver age-appropriate curriculum effectively. Consequently, this leads to suboptimal learning outcomes, exacerbates existing

learning gaps, and contributes to increased dropout rates as students feel disengaged or out of place. So far, 30 States and UTs have taken out notifications for age of admission in grade 1 as 6 years.

3) **Student Dropout challenges:** A significant number of children, unfortunately, drop out across various levels, particularly during transitions between schools and in instances of migration. UDISE+ indicates approximately 1.54 crore potential dropouts nationwide in 2023-24. The National Sample Survey (2023-24) has also revealed that there are 1.90 crore out of school children in the country i.e., 48.9 lakh never enrolled in schools and 1.42 crores dropped out of school. Further, as per UDISE+ the dropout rate at the Foundational, Preparatory and Secondary stage is 3.7%. 5.2% and 10.9%, respectively. The dropout rate for girls at the foundational and secondary stage is much lower than the boys while it is slightly higher than the boys in the middle stage. A contributing factor to this challenge is the fragmented school system, which leads to around 1.07 crore students leaving school due to the unavailability of admission at higher levels.

Structure	Overall Dropout Rate	Dropout Rate	
		Boys	Girls
Preparatory	3.7	3.9	3.5
Middle	5.2	5.2	5.3
Secondary	10.9	12.3	9.4

UDISE+ 2023-24

4) **Multiple Category of Schools:** India is also home to the largest and most complex education system with ten different school categories running parallelly i.e., Primary (1-5)- 50%; Upper Primary (1-8)- 23.3%; Upper Primary (6-8)- 6.1%; Secondary (1-10)- 5%; Secondary (6-10)- 2.9%; Secondary (9-10)- 1,9%; Higher Secondary (1-12)- 5.2%; Higher Secondary (6-12)- 2.7%; Higher Secondary (9-12)- 1.8%; and Higher Secondary (11-12)- 1.1%. This structural complexity means approximately 73.4% of students undergo an admission process at least three times during their schooling, potentially adding significant disruption to their educational journey.

5) **Single Teacher and Zero Enrolment Schools:** UDISE+ data reveals that within government schools, 4302 primary schools and 543 upper primary schools have zero enrolment, and a substantial number are single-teacher schools (86470 primary schools and 10548 upper primary schools). These conditions create suboptimal learning environments and represent a significant inefficiency in resource allocation, particularly in remote areas. It would serve students better to have multi-grade and multi-teacher schools, as this will lead to better learning experiences and improvement of Learning Outcomes.

6) **Infrastructure and resource gap:** A significant challenge to achieving educational goals, especially the widespread implementation of NEP 2020 initiatives and the scaling of programs like PM SHRI, is the pervasive infrastructure and resource gap across many schools. As per UDISE+ 2023-24, only 50% schools have integrated labs while 30% have ICT labs and 38% have Smart Classrooms. This would require raising of resources both at the state and national level.

7) **Learning Outcomes:** While the PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024 indicates a positive recovery trend from the learning losses evidenced in the National Achievement Survey (NAS) 2021, significant foundational learning gaps persist across key subjects. In NAS 2021, language proficiency in Grades 3, 5, and 8 stood at a concerning 62%, 55%, and 53% respectively, with Mathematics even lower at 57%, 44%, and 36%. Although PARAKH 2024 shows improvement with language reaching 64%, 57%, and 54% for Grades 3, 5, and 9, and Mathematics at 60%, 46%, and 37% for the same grades, these levels still indicate a substantial proportion of students

lacking adequate proficiency in fundamental skills as they progress through the schooling system. Further corroborating this, recent ASER 2024 results highlight the improvement in performance of students in Grades 3, 5 and 8, who are enrolled in government schools, in reading levels as well as basic arithmetic. With a focus on Competency Based Assessment for Holistic Development, the focus is on implementing Holistic Progress Card at all levels.

8) **Teacher Vacancies and Capacity Gaps:** A notable challenge is the number of vacant teaching positions across government schools, with 15.11% at the elementary level, 13.13% at the secondary level, and 11.99% at the senior secondary level. These vacancies lead to an increased burden on existing staff, compromised student-teacher ratios, and often, a detrimental impact on the quality and continuity of instruction. Compounding this, there are also significant vacancies of teacher educators in State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs) and District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs), presently at 35.48% and 41.31% respectively, which critically undermines efforts to provide quality pre-service and in-service professional development for teachers nationwide. Other systemic issues are also adding to this challenge such as: limited rollout of the 4-year Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP), Quality concerns in Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs), lack of linkages between in-service training and career progression, etc.

9) **Low coverage of Skilling at the Secondary level:** Presently, only 2.5% of the total students enrolled in Grades 6 to 12 are covered under Skill Education. There is need to expand the reach and to make the skill education option more acceptable through integration of skill education programmes into mainstream education, beginning with exposure to skill education from the middle stage. This would lead to emphasizing the dignity of labour and importance of various vocations involving /Indian arts and artisanship.

10) **Low coverage of Children with Special Needs:** Despite overall enrolment gains, a critical challenge persists in providing comprehensive and inclusive schooling for Children with Special Needs (CWSN), reflected by their mere 0.85% enrolment. This limited coverage stems from inadequate accessible infrastructure, insufficient specialized teacher training, a dearth of assistive devices, and limited individualized support within mainstream schools. Overcoming this requires targeted efforts to cultivate truly inclusive learning environments, ensuring every CWSN not only accesses but also receives quality, tailored education. Special efforts are required to reduce the high dropout rates of CwSN at upper primary and secondary levels.

11) **Private Schools:** While governments focus on education reforms in government schools, a large number of students study in self-financed private and government aided schools, where, beyond the 5 to 10% schools, there is much to be desired in terms of quality holistic education. No nation-wide school education reform can be complete without including these schools in its scope.

Way Forward: Possible Solutions/ Issues for Deliberation

- **Boosting Education Investment:** To fully realize India's demographic potential and foster a globally competitive workforce, achieving NEP 2020's 6% GDP target for education investment is crucial. This necessitates increased funding for school education, exploring innovative financing and PPPs. Further, Central government funding to States/UTs must be linked to performance and demonstrable outcomes for efficient resource utilization.

- **Capacity development for spending:** Past trends indicate that States and UTs frequently do not fully utilize their approved financial outlays, with expenditure ranging from 50 to 90% of the allocated budget under Samagra Shiksha. Hence, there is a need to enhance their fund utilization capabilities to ensure expenditure is in closer alignment with the allocated budget.

- **Improve Education Index and HDI Ranking:** To significantly improve India's Education Index score (currently 0.372) and rank in the Human Development Index, all States and UTs must prioritize: maintaining high age-specific enrolment ratios, promoting continuous reskilling/upskilling, and critically, demonstrably enhancing learning levels across all educational stages. While the Expected Years of Schooling (EYS) has commendably risen to 13.3 over the last four years, significant ground still needs to be covered to reach the 2030 target of 15 years and eventually reach the 18-year EYS benchmark, which is characteristic of developed nations.

- **Enhance Infrastructure for 100% GER:** To achieve 100% GER by 2030, upgrading existing schools and construction of additional classrooms are imperative. States and UTs must urgently plan sufficient higher secondary infrastructure, necessitating a comprehensive analysis of intake capacity gaps at school, block, and district levels.

- **School availability and Continuity:** Simplify the existing ten parallel school categories to reduce admissions-related disruption and improve student transitions. An analysis of school enrolment and drop out data indicates lower dropouts in areas where students have access to composite schools offering a continuum of education from grades 1 to 12.

- **Developing secondary/higher secondary schools on the lines of PM SHRI schools:** Drawing on the experience of PM shri Schools in saturating facilities under the identified 22 parameters, the States and UTs may explore various funding opportunities duly dovetailing Government of India schemes to saturate all the remaining government secondary and higher secondary schools on similar lines.

- **Strengthen Identification & Re-enrolment:** Enhance existing efforts like house-to-house enumeration, based on UDISE+ data, APAAR ID, etc., to identify school drop outs and never enrolled children and effective utilization of resources under various schemes/initiatives to ensure all children in the 6 to 18 age group are enrolled in age-appropriate classes.

- **Sustaining and Extending FLN Efforts:** Building on NIPUN Bharat's success, development of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) must be vigorously sustained and extended into preparatory and middle grades. This requires continuous monitoring, targeted remedial support for lagging students, and adaptive teaching methods to consolidate foundational skills as students advance.

- **Strengthening the Middle Stage:** The middle stage of education (Grades 6-8) needs special attention. These critical years bridge foundational learning and secondary education, directly impacting India's 2047 Viksit Bharat goals. The future of today's 10-year-olds hinges on their experiences in the next 3-5 years. Investing in this stage is crucial for securing their trajectory and, by extension, the nation's future.

- **Address Teacher and Teacher Educator Vacancies and capacity gaps:** Urgently fill all vacant teaching and teacher educator positions in schools, SCERTs, and DIETs. This requires streamlined, time-bound recruitment, rational deployment for equitable distribution, and avenues for career progression, to retain qualified teacher/educators, especially in remote areas. Simultaneously, strengthen SCERT and DIET capacity and infrastructure to enhance teacher preparation and continuous professional development. The capacity of teachers needs to be mapped against the standards prescribed by NPST and effectively utilized the platform of NMM to enhance the same.

- **Leverage AI for Pedagogical Enhancement:** With established state digital education platforms and NCERT's DIKSHA Personalized Adaptive Portal, the immediate priority is a

collaborative effort to determine how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be effectively leveraged to support and improve pedagogical practices. This includes exploring AI for personalized learning, teacher support, content delivery, and adaptive assessments. Capacity building of teachers may be focus on innovative and world-class pedagogy that includes AI and other frontier technologies such as AR/VR among others.

- **Mainstream Skill Education:** Integrate skill education programs into mainstream education from the middle school stage, making them an integral part of the curriculum. This could include introducing short-term internships, local industry exposure days, and real-world, project-based modules in collaboration with MSMEs, rural enterprises, and district skilling centres.

- **Maximizing Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN) coverage**: Despite a reported enrolment of about 11 crores students in Balvatika and Grades 1 to 8 in 10.35 lakh government and aided schools under the PM POSHAN scheme, only 8.31 crore i.e., 76% are actually availing mid-day meals on any given school day. A concerted effort to boost daily meal uptake is essential to maximize the scheme's impact on student well-being and learning outcomes.

- **Equivalence of Boards:** PARAKH assessment centre is collaborating with 34 States Boards, CISCE and CBSE for reforming assessment as per NEP 2020. There is also need to achieve Equivalence of Boards with respect to curriculum and assessment to ensure comparability and consistency in educational standards across all recognized school boards in India to promote student mobility and parity in academic performance. Boards should also become awarding bodies and assessment authority for skilling so that National Credit Framework can be effectively harmonized with NCF-SE.

- **Life skills and holistic personality development:** Integrating holistic education aspects such as climate and lifestyles for the environment, human values, and social/national service with existing curricular frameworks will help nurture students with a balance of IQ, EQ and SQ, which are vital in the 21st century. This can be achieved by expanding the activities and improving the outcomes of Eco Club for Mission LiFE.

- **Involving families and communities for educational development:** Many of today's parents are beneficiaries of the last decade's efforts to universalize elementary education. Building on this and based on the context and age, locally appropriate efforts to bring parents, especially mothers, on to the education stage is needed. The School Management Committees (SMCs) provide a suitable platform for community involvement and need to be encouraged to more actively associated with the day to day functioning of the schools.

- **Creating robust mentorship and career advisory platforms and ecosystem for high school students:** This would address the issue of handling stress of competitive exams and entrance exams, thereby enabling students to opt for career pathways that are aligned with their innate interests rather than parental/peer/societal pressure.

- **Effective use of social media:** There is a need to prioritize digital literacy and guide students towards positive, purposeful content that fosters learning and creativity. This would also require implementing clear boundaries and monitoring, including age-appropriate platforms and screen time limits.

- **Include Private Schools in Reforms:** Develop policies and frameworks to bring self-financed and government-aided private schools into the ambit of nationwide education reforms, ensuring quality and holistic education standards across all school types. The focus should also be on

establishment and strengthening of State School Standards Authority (SSSA) for transparent affiliation and academic audits, as envisaged in NEP 2020.

- **Governance reforms for systemic transformation:** Effective governance is vital for improving education by optimizing instructional time, ensuring data-driven accountability, and achieving equitable teacher deployment. This means implementing reforms like digital timetabling and academic calendars to maximize teacher "Time-on-Task" and ensure efficient use of mandated instructional hours. Simultaneously, leveraging technology such as digital attendance and e-monitoring apps strengthens accountability and drives performance. Furthermore, governance reforms are crucial for equitable teacher deployment across districts, using data-driven models to address uneven distribution and ensure balanced workloads and adequate academic support in schools.

- **Effective coordination with Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD):** Children enter grade 1 from different streams ranging from pre-primary sections in schools to 3 years in Anganwadi or direct entry to grade 1 leading to a wide disparity in their learning levels at the entry stage. This necessitates effective coordination with the WCD to ensure an equivalence of learning levels for all students as they transition into Grade 1.

- **Convergence with Health Department:** The platform provided by School education, where children spend 12 to 15 years, can be leveraged for better health of children, including mental wellness, in collaboration with the Health Department for effective implementation of initiatives such as the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK), Anemia Mukt Bharat, National Deworming Day, etc.

*****