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OXFAM
India

Status report on education during the pandemic- Government and private schools

- * लान्हे का बुका
घर रखाय
- * गली-गली दुई जौगी जय
बिलमा हाथ डारत जय
- * देखो आदगर का हल
बाले हल निकले लाल

मेरे बिना जोर बजार
बुसा और मे मेरे भाजा
दुनों के घर से मे भाजा

एक लाली ही सुबो कहनी
इसमे देसा है सौदा लाली

लाला दुई हरी बिलवाई
इसहा कला हलवाई

नये लुकी डाल जई
डाल दे फल लाल जई
जई लाल जई लाल
बिलमा बाले फल देसा



Status report on education during the pandemic- Government and private schools

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About Oxfam India

Oxfam India is a movement of people working to end discrimination and create a free and just society. We work to ensure that Adivasis, Dalits, Muslims, and women and girls have safe violence-free lives with freedom to speak their mind, equal opportunities to realize their rights, and a discrimination-free future.

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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the worst shock to India's education systems in a century. India's 32 crore students in the world's second largest education system have also faced the world's second longest school lockdown.

Oxfam India's second rapid survey of government and private schools captures the experiences of the three most important education stakeholders- viz. teachers, parents and children at the moment of reopening of schools before they began closing again as part of the government reaction to the Omicron variant. As such, it captures the extent of which children were able to return to school, whether the school environment is responsive to their learning and pedagogic needs and how well teachers have been to deal equipped with resulting problems.

In addition, the private school survey looks at key concerns of private school parents and instances of violations by private schools as well as recommendations by private school parents to ensure effective regulation of private schools.

A total of 3,876 respondents participated in the government survey, including 1,406 parents, 1,557 children and 913 teachers, from across 11 states. Data from parents and children was collected offline in six states – Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Jharkhand, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh. Boys and girls are equally represented in the survey.

In the private school survey, a total of 3440 respondents across 36 states and union territories constitute the sample, for whom the data was collected through a self-administered online questionnaire.

Key Findings of Government schools:

Return to school

Schools had reopened: 80% teachers, children and parents across the states said so.

Children had returned to school: on average only 9% children weren't going to school post school reopening. However, this return is unequal. 12% girls were not attending school after reopening as compared to 7% boys. 41% Muslim children were not attending school. However, 27% of parents in private schools were not sending their children to school after they reopened.

Concerns about attendance; less than 50% children were attending school six days a week.

Online classes: 49% for those in schools that had not re-opened or not attending school rely on live online classes. However, only 11% of those whose schools were open and children were attending school continued to use digital modes.

Role of tuition Classes: Over 40% parents whose children were not attending school say that they accessed learning through a physical class led by a tuition teacher; the corresponding figure was 25% for those whose schools have reopened. Tuition centres were a temporary measure to support learners who access to teacher-led educational opportunities were lost. We may be returning to pre-pandemic levels.

Reason for not going to school:

Fear of the pandemic remains: Fear of getting infected biggest reason for not going to school reported by 59% of children and 71% parents.

Waning interest and changed life circumstances of children. Two in five children share that they have lost interest in studying and don't want to go back to school. Alarming, 29% children say that they have been married off during this time, and therefore can't go to school.

Child work and labour: 40% and 38% of children who are not attending school say that they need to help with household chores and support the family financially respectively. Interestingly, only around 10% of the parents admit that their children are not going to school because they are working.

Inadequate adaptation of the education ecosystem to a post-pandemic world. A significant share feels schools have not been sanitized and social distancing is not followed. 33% of children report that no safe transportation is available in COVID context.

What is happening in school after reopening

Adherence to COVID protocols remains patchy: Half the parents and children report everyone is wearing masks and sanitizing hands; only 20% parents and children report temperature checks being done on entering school. 39% classes operate with reduced capacities to ensure social distancing (a level higher than reported for private schools)

Not enough focus on dealing with educational consequences of the lockdown: Over two in five parents and children report regular curriculum is being followed. Only 27% parents said that assessment of children's learning levels was being undertaken to refine teaching and 23% of parents said that revision of the last year's syllabus was being done. While these levels are low, they are more than twice the levels prevalent in private schools.

Midday-meals had only resumed in only 39% schools.

Children are struggling, but enjoying time spent with classmates after over a year spent apart:

Two in three children report struggling to follow what is being taught in class; three-fourth of children whose schools are closed/not attending physical classes are struggling to follow what is being taught. However, 50% of children report enjoying interacting with their classmates and 32% report getting learning support from their peers. A third of children are anxious about being infected.

Online learning- continued absence of devices and pedagogic challenges: Over half the children who are not attending physical classes in school, face the challenge of not having the right device or having to share the phone with other family members. One-fifth of the students reportedly struggled to ask questions in online classes; compulsion to receive information passively online, is not conducive to active learning.

Challenges faced by teachers

Impact of closed schools: Over 70% teachers say that children have forgotten what they learnt previously and 73% that attendance of children is irregular.

Teachers feel under-equipped: Two in five teachers report not trained/equipped to address a full year's learning loss of students. Over two in five teachers also face challenges in ensuring adherence of children to COVID protocols because of teacher shortage. 54% said that their school is equipped with adequate resources to ensure COVID protocols are met. Only 48% teachers said that they have access to doctors/medical facilities to provide emergency care.

Inadequate training: over 50% teachers believe they have not been trained adequately to address the learning deprivation of students; in Madhya Pradesh, 66% teachers report this as compared to 24% in Jharkhand. Close to half the teachers did not receive any training on supporting emotional needs of children and getting children back to school. Over 60% teachers reported not received training on maintaining hybrid teaching- with some students offline and others online.

Inadequate support from the government: 36% teachers argue that the government has not sanctioned adequate budgets to ensure that the school adheres with COVID guidelines. Less than half of the teachers said that they received adequate monitoring and support to ensure compliance with COVID protocols.

Teachers' deaths during the pandemic: 9% teachers reported that their colleague/s passed away while on special government duty, such as election duty, during the pandemic. Only 10% said that compensation had been sanctioned and received by the family while 24% said that it was still in

process, 23% were not aware and the remaining (43%) said that no compensation had been received. 70% of the teachers were not satisfied with the compensation provided to families.

Teachers' recommendations to support effective re-opening and recover lost instructional time

Teachers are the ones with the most grounded, in-depth experience of what it would take to improve learning in India's schools.

74% of teachers want the government to run an enrollment campaign to get children back to school

73% want the school premises to be sanitized and all teachers and staff to be vaccinated

71% want the government to develop a restructured curriculum to address the learning deprivation

68% want the government to ensure availability of textbooks as well as additional materials for children to take home

62% want resumption of all entitlements such as mid-day meals, textbooks, uniforms and scholarships

62% want availability of masks/PPE/sanitizers for teachers, school staff and children

48% want training of community volunteers to support learning after school

45% want additional funds and support for socio-emotional needs of children

Key Findings of Private schools:

Exploitation of parents, harassment of children and violation of norms by private schools

84% parents report that government has been unable to regulate private schools effectively

Illegal charges during admission: 38% parents had to pay capitation fees at the time of admission

Screening of students: 56% children had to appear for a test/interview prior to seeking admission in the school, for any grade below 8th

Excess fees and hidden charges: 60% parents forced to buy school supplies from a specific vendor; 57% parents had to pay additional charges that were not part of declared official break-up of fees

Quality of education and child rights: 53% parents report that they are concerned about the excessive focus on marks in their child's school; 36% said there were too many children in one class resulting in inadequate individual attention. Fifth of parents face corporal punishment, bullying.

Harassment and abuse by school staff and students- 37% children from Scheduled Castes and 30% girls have faced harassment and abuse by either the school staff or their fellow students.

Parental voice and experiences with complaint resolution

Parents voiceless: 51% parents say they have no voice and agency around key decisions

Inadequate action in school: Less than 5% satisfied by action taken by school; 60% parents report that no action was taken on the complaint, instead, 36% children harassed over complaint.

Inadequate action by education department: Only 15% of parents complained to education department; half the parents feel complaint process is too complex, lack of faith in redress. Less than 10% parents satisfied by action taken by education department over complaint; 39% children harassed over complaint

Absence of collective spaces: Under 20% parents report that their school has a parent teacher association. Where a PTA exists, four in five parents *not consulted* over decisions taken by the school

Accessing learning and challenges faced in online classes

Limited opportunities for organized teaching-learning: Almost half of private school students were not involved in any form of teacher-led learning activity during the preceding two months (September-November '21)

Drastically reduced time on learning; less than a quarter of private school children were involved in teacher-led learning for a full-working day on average

Reduced interaction: 2 in 3 children found it difficult to get doubts cleared in online classes

Parents had stepped up, but capacity to do so is unequal: 40% parents tried to ensure children involved in some form of learning, but only 33% of those earning under 20,000 per month reported doing so compared to 53% of those above 80,000 per month

Beyond academic learning: 56% parents complain that no alternative was provided by schools to physical education and sports and 22% say no support was provided for psychosocial needs of children

Fee hikes and access to education blocked for children

Hiked fees: 52% parents report having to pay hiked fees for the AY 2021-22

Access to education blocked for 35% children over non-payment of fees, despite clear guidelines by NCPCR to the contrary

Experiences of school reopening

80% parents want schools to reopen

Adherence to COVID-protocols slipping up: Around half the parents reported that COVID protocols were being followed

Inadequate attention on addressing learning deprivation: Only 14% parents reported that their child's school assessed his/her current learning level as they returned to school. Fewer than 10% parents shared that their child's school was revising last year's syllabus to help children catch up

Children enjoying spending time with peers, but finding it difficult to adapt: 2 in 5 children are finding it difficult to follow what is being taught in class. Around half of parents report children have reduced attention span.

Failure of government regulation and recommendations for effective regulation

84% parents felt that the government has been unable to regulate private schools effectively.

They made the following recommendations for effective regulation of private schools:

91% parents want the government to regulate school fees and ensure that private schools comply

84% parents want private school finances to be made more transparent by giving parents access to audited accounts of the school

80% parents want a formal say in fixation of school fees by creation of fee regulation committees at school and district level

80% parents want the government to prevent schools from forcing purchase of textbooks, uniforms from specific vendors

78% parents demand that the complaint processes to be made easier and complainants' children to be protected from harassment

77% parents demand protection of children from discrimination, bullying, or other harassment based on parents' income, class, caste, gender, disability, and other forms

77% parents demand that all private schools must meet minimum norms of infrastructure, safety and quality to remain open

Part 1- Rapid survey of government schools

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the worst shock to India's education systems in a century. India's 32 crore students in the world's second largest education system have faced the world's second longest school lockdown¹.

Last year, at the peak of the pandemic, 64% of children in rural India feared they will drop out without additional support². Those absolutely worst fears may not have been borne out, but the educational scenario has been grim.

Last year, Oxfam India's survey showed that 80% of parents in government and 59% in private schools reported that education was effectively not delivered during the pandemic³. Schooling moved online despite the fact that barely 15% of rural households had an internet connection at the start of the pandemic, and 96% of SC and ST households lacked a computer⁴.

The result was psychological trauma, loss of psychosocial support for those already vulnerable and unaddressed classroom hunger and learning deprivation. 92% of children lost at least one specific language ability from the previous year⁵. It is estimated that school lockdowns would cost India in future earnings⁶. The likelihood of dropout increased with decreasing wealth quintile and hit Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims worst. 52% of girls felt that their time for studies decreased and 42% experienced an increase in domestic workload⁷; during the pandemic the odds of reported higher levels of perceived learning decreased by about 20 % for every additional hour of time spent by children on domestic chores⁸.

Schools had reopened briefly before the third wave of the pandemic had set in. As such, this, Oxfam India's second school survey, focusses on the experience of teachers, parents and children at the moment of reopening of schools. These are the most critical stakeholders in the education system and it would be particularly significant to ensure that all their views enter the educational discourse. It is particularly critical to reflect on the perspectives of teachers at this point in time who have been silent Covid warriors- teaching students, serving as frontline workers to combat the pandemic and facing their own challenges on the home front.

While the previous year's survey focussed on the experiences during the course of the lockdown, this round includes the experiences both during the preceding year and during the two months since schools have reopened. Given easing of movement restrictions, we have been able to interview children this time to capture their experiences directly, instead of relying only on the perspectives of their parents.

1 <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse#durationschoolclosures>

2 <https://theprint.in/india/64-kids-in-rural-india-fear-they-have-to-drop-out-if-not-given-additional-support-survey/625146/>

3 <https://www.oxfamindia.org/knowledgehub/oxfamindia/status-report-government-and-private-schools-during-covid-19>

4 https://d1ns4ht6ytuzzo.cloudfront.net/oxfamdata/oxfamdatapublic/2021-01/The%20Inequality%20Virus%20-%20India%20Supplement%20%28Designed%29.pdf?RrFsF8iTFt.g_PfT0H7HLpMvSTrb.M__

5 <https://azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/field-studies-in-education/loss-of-learning-during-the-pandemic>

6 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/education/school-closure-may-cost-over-400-billion-to-india-cause-learning-losses-says-world-bank/articleshow/78618189.cms?from=mdr>

7 <https://www.younglives-india.org/sites/www.younglives-india.org/files/YL-WP173-Singh%2520%2525281%252529.pdf>

8 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0738059321000924>

Like last year, this survey is accompanied by another survey of private schools which covers some similar questions. As such, these twin surveys are among the very few pieces of research that capture evidence from both government and private schools. Some comparison of the two systems has been done, where relevant.

The survey also draws some recommendations in terms of what the government should do to address the pandemic, particularly from teachers.

Methodology and Demographics of study

A total of 3876 respondents participated in the survey, including 1406 parents, 1557 children and 913 teachers, from across 11 states. Boys and girls are equally represented in the survey. Data from parents and children was collected offline in six states – Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Jharkhand, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh. This was done to understand and compare the perspectives of parents and children regarding reopening and reasons for not attending school, which might differ across these two groups. Different sets of parents and children participated in the survey. That is, if a child was interviewed then their parents were not interviewed and vice-versa.

Broadly, convenience sampling was applied to select respondents. However, an effort was made to include the most marginalized groups in the survey, to understand their experiences with reopening after over 500 days of school closure. 89% of the sample belongs to rural areas, and 71% earn less than Rs. 10,000 per month. As such, the data has not been disaggregated based on rural-urban and family income. The break-up by social groups is 30% Scheduled tribes, 30% Scheduled Castes, 27% Other Backward Castes, 8% Muslim and 4% General.

Government teachers participated in the survey by filling the form online, which affects the representativeness of the sample given that only teachers with the technical know-how and motivation to fill the form, participated in the survey. Responses from teachers were received across 11 states including Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Haryana, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Punjab, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

Status of school reopening and children's attendance in physical classes in school

80% teachers, children, and parents across 11 states said that their school had reopened (in October-November 2021). Of the six states where parents and children were interviewed, only 9% children weren't going to school even after reopening. In most states, over 90% children were attending school after reopening, with Delhi being an outlier, with two in three children not attending school despite reopening. This was because schools in Delhi were closed again due to pollution, after reopening, at the time data was collected.

Name of state	Percentage of children not attending school after reopening
Delhi	64%
Bihar	8%
Jharkhand	6%
Chhattisgarh	5%
Uttar Pradesh	4%
Odisha	4%

Interestingly, a sister analysis of private schools undertaken by Oxfam India during the same period found that 27% percent of parents in private schools were not sending their children to schools that had reopened. This trend could be at least partly explained as a result of rural-urban differences in the two samples. Rural schools from which the sample is drawn, are closer to children's homes and are easier to maintain social distancing which could be one reason why parents are less reluctant to send their children. However, further qualitative analysis is needed to understand this trend.

Fewer girls returned to schools after reopening as compared to boys. Combining the responses of parents and children, 12% girls did not return to school after reopening as compared to 7% boys. **41% Muslim children did not return to school after reopening.** Marginalized communities are lagging in terms of their participation in education.

Attendance of children	
0-25%	4%
25-50%	35%
50-75%	46%
75% and above	15%

Furthermore, there are **continued concerns about attendance of children.** Less than 50% children were attending school six days a week. Majority of the teachers report that average attendance on any given day is less than 75%. This appears to be below the average pre-pandemic rates (68.5% and 75.7% in primary and upper primary levels respectively)⁹. Children seemed to be slowly returning to government schools. However, this is not fully consistent across states. While states like Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand which focused on reaching out to children through *Mohalla* classes during school closure have over 70% children attending school all six days a week, the figures are much lower for other states, with it being 46% for UP and 34% for Bihar.

Name of state	Percentage of children attending school six days a week
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⁹ <http://www.educationforallindia.com/study-on-students-attendance.pdf>

Chhattisgarh	74%
Jharkhand	71%
Uttar Pradesh	46%
Bihar	34%

As schools close again due to concerns over the Omicron strain, it is important to learn from the experience of reopening of schools after the second wave, which shows that attendance remains irregular and fewer girls and Muslims are returning to school once they reopen.

Forms through which learning was accessed between October-November 2021

In cases where schools had reopened, physical class in school was the main mode through which children were accessing learning, as reported by around 75% of the parents.

Close to 50% children whose schools have not reopened, were still dependent on learning through digital means, as compared to 11% for whom schools have reopened. For children in Jharkhand whose schools have not reopened, learning through digital means was relatively lower than the average, at 23%. A mere **11% children** whose schools were not open reported accessing education through **Mohalla classes**. As schools close again, it is crucial that the government increases delivery through non-digital modes such as Mohalla classes, which have the potential to reach every child rather than a continued reliance on digital modes, that have a limited reach.

Given the prolonged school closure, parents appear to have hired tuition teachers to ensure learning continuity for their children. **Over 40% parents whose children are not attending school say that they accessed learning through a physical class led by a tuition teacher.** However, the figure is less than half (17%) for Scheduled Caste children, indicating that while more privileged social groups have been able to purchase additional learning support during the pandemic, much fewer marginalized children could access the same support, which is likely to increase educational inequalities.

The percentage of children who get tutored dips to 25% overall, for those who attend school physically; the figure for girls is marginally lower at 23%. This is close to the figure reported in NSSO 2017-18 which pegged the number at 21%. One can, therefore, see the reliance on tuition teachers as a temporary coping mechanism on the part of parents to address the absence of teacher-led learning opportunities. However, the fact that a quarter of the sample continues to send their children to tuition centres even when schools reopen, brings into sharp relief the prevalence of tuition centres as an area requiring regulation.

Only 7% of the sample reported not accessing any learning during the preceding months. This is a drastic reduction over last year when 80% of parents reported that education was not delivered during the lockdown. The educational system has stepped up to provide children with some learning opportunities. However, **even if children are accessing learning in some form, parents, children and teachers all report that children are struggling what is being taught in class; accessing learning in some form is obviously not enough.**

In what form did your child access learning in the past one month? (November 2021)			
Form of learning	In all schools	School open and attending	School not open/not attending
Physical class in school	-	74%	-
Live online class/resources sent on WhatsApp	23%	11%	49%
Small group physical class by tuition teacher	30%	25%	42%
Lesson delivered through radio/TV	12%	9%	18%
Govt run Mohalla class	12%	12%	11%
NGO run Mohalla class	12%	12%	11%
Physical worksheet given by government	7%	6%	10%
Physical worksheet given by NGO	8%	8%	9%
Did not access learning in any form	7%	5%	10%

Why are some children not going to school?

In this section, a comparison is provided between children's own reasons of not attending school versus parents' reasons of not sending their child to school. For this question, the responses of children and parents haven't been merged because of two key reasons- the options were slightly different, and there are huge variations in importance attached to different reasons by parents and children.

The single biggest reason for both parents and children for not going to school is **the fear and anxiety of getting infected**, with 59% children and 71% parents reporting this. However, beyond the fear of the infection, lie issues that have emerged due to prolonged school closure. Over **two in five children share that they have lost interest in studying and don't want to go back to school**, a concern that various surveys during the pandemic have raised.

Around **40% children who are not attending school say that they need to help with household chores and support the family financially**. Interestingly, less than 10% of the parents admit that their children are not going to school because they are working, as opposed to 38% children saying this; this figure is 47% for children from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward groups.

The lack of COVID preparedness (no sanitization of school), non-vaccination of all teachers and staff, and social distancing not being followed in school is listed as a reason for not attending school by over a third of the children. This is a critical consideration that would require action if education is to continue uninterrupted during what appears to be COVID induced cycles of closure and re-opening.

A third of the children not attending school said that their school is far away and they lack access to safe transportation to go to school while **29% parents say that their children have been married off during this time, and therefore can't go to school**. The latter is an alarmingly high share, especially given that this only includes children in grades 1-8. While this could be a relic of a small sample (only 76 children were not going to school in the sample), the trend is probably still indicative of a larger problem.

With respect to comparison between government and private schools, what stands out is the **similarity of the concerns of parents in both systems**. Parents remain concerned about the infection and are concerned about the extent to which schools may be able to maintain COVID protocols. A fractionally higher percentage of children in government schools have been pulled into household chores and care work (6% in private schools), but that too is a minor difference.

Why aren't you going to school/ Why aren't you sending your child to school?		
Reason	Children	Parents
Anxious about infection	59%	71%
Parents do not allow me to go	51%	-
Lost interest in studying and do not want to go to school	43%	16%
Helping with household chores and care work	40%	12%
Working to support family financially	38%	8%

School hasn't been sanitised	37%	12%
Social distancing is not being followed in the school	36%	17%
Teachers themselves are not coming to school	36%	
Teachers and staff haven't been vaccinated	36%	9%
No safe transportation in COVID context	33%	4%
Got married	29%	4%
Waiting for vaccination to start for children		19%

What was happening in school after reopening?

The survey sought to understand what is happening in schools after reopening, in terms of COVID protocols being followed, status of learning and non-learning activities, as well as to understand children's experiences of attending physical classes after over 500 days of school closure.

Status of COVID protocols being followed in schools after reopening

Roughly half parents and children report that everyone was wearing masks and being asked to sanitize their hands before entering school. Two in five parents and children report that children/teachers with symptoms were asked to go back, teachers provided orientation on COVID protocols and classes are operating with reduced capacities.

Less than **20% parents and children reported that temperature check was being done of everyone entering school**, which could possibly be due to a lack of equipment to measure temperature.

With respect to comparison with private schools, it would appear that a **higher percentage of government schools have stepped up to ensure classes operate with reduced capacities to meet COVID protocols** (30% in private schools). Private schools are, however, better able to undertake temperature check of those entering school (33% in private schools), possibly a relic of them being able to rapidly purchase necessary devices.

What is happening in school after reopening?	% of parents and children reporting this
Related to COVID protocols	
Everyone is wearing masks	50%
Everyone is being asked to sanitised their hands	52%
Children/teachers with symptoms asked to go back	44%
Teachers orienting students on rules to be followed to prevent infection	42%
Classes operating with reduced capacities	39%
Temperature check of everyone entering school	17%

Status of learning, sports and entitlements after reopening

Over two in five parents and children reported that regular curriculum was being followed in the school. This is problematic given that multiple studies¹⁰ have pointed out the large-scale learning deprivation of students due to prolonged school closure.

Various experts and the Ministry of Education's own guidelines have pointed out the need to assess children's learning levels after resumption of school and to adapt the curriculum accordingly. However, in less than a third of the schools were children's current learning levels assessed after reopening. Further, **fewer than 30% parents and children reported that last year's revision** was being done to help children catch up. 27% and 23% of parents respectively said that assessment and revision were being done.

Name of state	Percentage of parents and children reporting revision being done in school
Jharkhand	41%
Odisha	34%
Bihar	30%
Chhattisgarh	25%
Uttar Pradesh	18%

There is some variation across states, in efforts made to respond to learning deprivation. In Jharkhand, two in five parents and children reported that their school started with revision of last year's curriculum as schools reopened, while in Uttar Pradesh, fewer than one in five reported this.

Interestingly, **government schools in the sample appear to be doing better in taking the first steps on the road to responding to the situation of learning deprivation.** Only 14% of parents in the private school sample report that assessment of children's learning is being done and 8% of them feel that revision has been undertaken. Private schools' failure to undertake learning assessment after such a long absence, despite government orders in this regard, is unfortunate since this is essential for adapting instruction.

Mid-day meals had also resumed in only 39% schools, despite the Centre's guidelines to states asking them to resume provision of hot cooked meals for children attending schools¹¹. **Physical games and outdoor activities** had also resumed in only 33% schools

What is happening in school after reopening?	% of parents and children reporting this
Related to learning	
Regular curriculum being followed	44%
Serving mid-day meal has resumed	39%
Revision of previous year being done	28%
Assessment of children's learning levels done when schools first started	31%
Physical games and outdoor activities are taking place	33%

¹⁰https://cdn.azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/apuc3/media/publications/downloads/Field_Studies_Loss_of_Learning_during_the_Pandemic.f1622994202.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/centre-asks-uts-states-to-resume-mid-day-meals-101637258163300.html>

Children's experiences with reopening- *Enjoying interaction with classmates but struggling to follow what is being taught*

Given that schools had resumed after over 500 days of closure, it would have been crucial to implement an accelerated learning program to help recover the learning deprivation suffered by children. However, the previous section shows that a catch-up program/revision was happening in less than a third of the schools. **As a result, two in three children report that they were struggling to follow what is being taught in class.** Failure to capture learning levels and needs and revise the curriculum would be contributing towards this trend.

According to a survey by CRY¹² released after a year of the pandemic, two in five children reported experiencing trauma and missing interactions with their friends in school. Given the mental health needs of children, particularly vulnerable children, it is heartening to see that **over 50% children report that they were enjoying interacting with their classmates in school after reopening.**

The fear of being infected is still prevalent with over **a third of the children saying that they are anxious about being infected.** This could be one of the reasons behind the irregularity of attendance reported by teachers, parents and children alike.

In addition to interacting with classmates, there are three clear positives related to learning that have emerged due to reopening- children are getting learning support from peers, they are able to get doubts cleared much easier now and they are also finding it easier to get access to new learning materials.

How has your experience been with school reopening?	Percentage of children reporting this
Finding it difficult to follow what is being taught	68%
Enjoying interacting with classmates	54%
Anxious about being infected	37%
Getting learning support from peers	32%
Difficult to sit for long hours	30%
Able to ask questions and get doubts cleared better than online classes	28%
Feeling shy to interact with teachers	22%
Easier to get access to new learning materials	20%
Missing home	11%

Comparison between government and private schools is not simple, since the respondents are parents in the private school sample and children in the government school one. However, it would appear that newly returned children in government schools are more likely to find it difficult to follow what is being taught (39% for private school parents). The rest of the experience is fairly similar for both systems.

Accessing learning- *How did children access learning and what were the challenges they faced in doing so?*

This section of the report looks at the different forms through which children accessed learning in October and November 2021, and the related challenges they faced in doing so. It

12 <https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2021/03/24/60-kids-happy-during-covid-19-period-but-missed-going-to-school-cry-study.html>

also includes a comparison of the learning modes and challenges for children who are attending physical classes versus those that aren't.

Challenges faced in accessing learning between October-November 2021

The biggest challenge being faced by children who are attending school as well as those who are not, is that they are struggling to follow what is being taught in class, an implication of the prolonged school closure during which children's access to learning has been interrupted; **three-fourth of children whose schools were closed/not attending physical classes are struggling to follow what is being taught.**

Over **half the children** who are not attending physical classes in school, face the challenge of **not having the right device** or having to share the phone with other family members, a finding that various other studies such as SCHOOL and ASER have highlighted. A related challenge is that of not having internet access or having internet that is too slow to learn online, which was faced by over a third of the students who are not attending school physically.

One-fifth of the students struggled to ask questions in online classes, indicating that the issues with digital learning are not restricted to access alone but also with pedagogy. Given the limitations of the digital medium, children are forced to receive information passively, with little opportunity to get doubts cleared. This could be one of the key reasons as to why children are struggling to follow what is being taught.

Around half of the students not attending school were not getting time to access education because they have to help with household chores. For students who are attending physical classes in school, this figure is much lower, at 25%. This highlights the importance of the school as a dedicated space for children where they can learn and interact with teachers and friends without being interrupted to help with household chores and care work.

Similar challenges were reported to be experienced by children in both government and private schools including, difficulty in understanding what is being taught (65%) and accessing a device (44%). Children in government schools were more likely to be expected to help with household chores. Interestingly, private school children are reported to have been experiencing problems with internet access/speed (34%) and cost (35%), possibly because of more intensive use of online learning.

What challenges did your child face in accessing education during the past month?			
Challenge	In all schools	School open and attending	School not open/not attending
Finding it difficult to understand/follow what is being taught	68%	65%	74%
Did not have the right device/Had to share phone with other family members	39%	29%	59%
Did not get time because had to help with household chores	33%	25%	49%
Did not have internet access/Internet was too slow	27%	23%	36%
Data pack too expensive	20%	23%	14%

Found it difficult to ask questions and get doubts cleared in online classes	21%	21%	21%
Did not have conducive space in house to study	19%	19%	19%
Did not face any of these challenges	7%	7%	8%

Challenges being faced by teachers and preparedness for school reopening

This section explores key challenges being faced by teachers, reviews their preparedness for these challenges and whether they have received any orientation/training from the government to face challenges arising out of reopening.

Challenges faced by teachers after reopening

Over 70% teachers say that children have forgotten what they had learnt previously; in Bihar and Jharkhand this figure is 77%. This is consistent with various surveys during the pandemic, including SCHOOL and ASER which have pointed to learning deprivation. In addition, prolonged school closure has also reduced the attention span of children, an issue flagged by 73% teachers. A related finding is the challenge flagged by **two in five teachers of not being trained/equipped in addressing a full year's learning loss of students.**

73% teachers say that attendance of children is not regular, a finding that is consistent with parents and children's own responses and requires attention from the government to bring all children back to school and ensure that they attend regularly.

Over two in five teachers claim that they are having to do twice the work- teach online as well as offline; in Haryana, this figure is substantially higher at 68%. Since various states have made physical classes only optional, this means that teachers have to continue delivering classes online for those not attending school physically.

Over two in five teachers are facing challenged in ensuring adherence of children to COVID protocols because of teacher shortage. Further, 36% teachers argue that the government has not sanctioned adequate budgets to ensure that the school adheres with COVID guidelines.

What challenges are you facing after re-opening?	Percentage of teachers reporting this
Children have forgotten what they had learnt previously	77%
Children are not coming regularly	73%
Attention span of children has reduced	73%
Children are finding it difficult to follow what is being taught	53%
Having to do double the work- both teaching online and offline	45%
Teacher shortage makes it difficult to ensure that children follow COVID protocols	43%
Not trained/equipped how to address a full year's learning loss of students	40%
Government has not sanctioned adequate budget to ensure school adheres with COVID guidelines	36%
Teacher salaries have still not been paid	11%

Preparedness of teachers on ensuring effective reopening of schools and addressing learning deprivation

Preparedness on ensuring adherence to COVID protocol and access to emergency care- Only 54% said that their school is equipped with adequate resources to ensure COVID protocols are met. Further, less than half of the teachers said that they received adequate monitoring and support to ensure compliance with COVID protocols. In addition, only 48% teachers said that they have access to doctors/medical facilities to provide emergency care.

Getting children back to school- Close to half the teachers did not receive any training on supporting emotional needs of children and getting children back to school. Both these areas would be crucial to ensure educational recovery and help children attend school regularly. Further, less than half the teachers believe they are adequately prepared to address concerns of SMCs and communities about reopening of schools.

Addressing learning deprivation- While crucial, over 50% teachers believe they have not been trained adequately to address the learning deprivation of students; in Madhya Pradesh, 66% teachers report this as compared to 24% in Jharkhand. In this survey, children as well as teachers have flagged that the biggest challenge after reopening is that children have forgotten what they had learnt previously and are struggling to follow what is being taught in class.

Training and resources for teaching online- Over 60% teachers haven't received training on maintaining hybrid teaching- with some students offline and others online. Further, over 70% haven't been provided the necessary equipment and data to conduct online classes.

COVID deaths of teachers and status of compensation received

Teachers were in the frontline of the COVID response and were also involved in non-teaching work like elections during the pandemic. In the present survey, 9% teachers reported that their colleague/s passed away while on special government duty, such as election duty, during the pandemic. This figure comes amidst media report of over 1,621 teachers dying in UP¹³ during the Panchayat elections. In Karnataka lost 268 teachers to Covid in 2020¹⁴. Clearly defined measures are needed to protect teachers in emergency settings.

It is doubly unfortunate that with regard to compensation, a mere 10% said that compensation had been sanctioned and received by the family while 23% said that it was still in process, 23% were not aware and the remaining (43%) said that no compensation had been received. 70% of the teachers were not satisfied with the compensation provided to families.

¹³ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/many-teachers-died-of-covid-19-during-up-panchayat-polls-says-union/article34575965.ece>

¹⁴ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bengaluru/karnataka-lost-268-teachers-to-covid-since-march-20/articleshow/82593693.cms>

Recommendations of teachers to support effective re-opening and recover the lost instructional time over the past 18 months

There is already evidence to show that this prolonged school closure will lead to a rise in dropouts, increase learning deprivation and impact future earnings of children enrolled in school. Teachers are the ones with the most grounded, in-depth experience of what it would take to improve learning in India's schools. Given this context, teachers from 11 states had the following recommendations:

- 74% want the government to run an enrollment campaign to get children back to school
- 73% want the school premises to be sanitized and all teachers and staff to be vaccinated
- 71% want the government to develop a restructured curriculum to address the learning deprivation
- 68% want the government to ensure availability of textbooks as well as additional materials for children to take home
- 62% want resumption of all entitlements such as mid-day meals, textbooks, uniforms and scholarships
- 62% want availability of masks/PPE/sanitizers for teachers, school staff and children
- 48% want training of community volunteers to support learning after school
- 45% want additional funds and support for socio-emotional needs of children

Conclusion

As schools begin to close again across the country, the government must take this opportunity to mitigate the risks of dropout, learning deprivation and mental health issues that will arise due to the world's second longest school lockdown. As this study shows, while children returned to school, they continued to face anxiety issues and struggled to follow what is being taught. At the same time, a large percentage of children from marginalized communities including girls and Muslims did not come back to school.

Multiple studies have warned that this prolonged school closure will lead to large-scale dropout, affect future earnings and erode the educational gains made in the past decade. To prevent this from happening, the central government must listen to some of the recommendations made by Indian teachers and:

- Review effective practices taken across states to ensure learning continuity, particularly through use of non-digital modes such as Mohalla classes
- Provide additional resources to state governments to support effective reopening including enhancement of WASH facilities in schools and preparing teachers for support children after such a long period of absence
- Allocate additional funds to state governments for hiring requisite teachers, government officials and strengthening the infrastructure in government schools, given the rise in enrolment

At the state level, the government must:

- Train volunteers at village level and create a structured curriculum for use in small-group physical classes such that learning continuity is ensured during school closure
- Ensure availability of textbooks and additional learning materials for children to take home
- Ensure resumption of all entitlements such as Mid-day meals, textbooks, uniforms and scholarships
- Ensure all schools are sanitized and equipped with necessary equipment for thermal screening, teachers and staff are vaccinated
- Develop a restructured curriculum to address learning deprivation and take steps to support the socio-emotional needs of children and orient teachers on its delivery
- Assess extent of learning loss and implement a structured accelerated learning curriculum, to recover the lost instructional time
- Reopen small government schools that have closed down, to improve educational access, and make it easier for social distancing norms to be followed

Part 2- Rapid survey of private schools

Introduction

The last few decades have seen a significant rise of the private sector in education. Children enrolled in private schools (aided and unaided) now constitute nearly 50% of all school-going children. Despite this, there remains limited critical research looking at the experience of parents in private schools. Existing research has largely looked at the relative performance of students in private and government schools, triggering a somewhat sterile debate.

This study instead objectively looks at the experience of private schools; and it does so in the context of the pandemic. This has been a moment of unprecedented trauma for the nation and it would be critical to examine the extent to which private schools have stood in support of the needs of parents.

Last year's Oxfam India rapid survey of private schools was one of the first to generate data on scale covering dimensions of salience to parents like percentage of schools that hiked fees during the lockdown. This year's survey continues to explore the experiences of private school parents with accessing learning during the period of school lockdown in addition to looking at experiences of children with reopening.

However, the experiences of parents during the preceding year were not only about COVID and its immediate impact. This study also captures the overall experiences of parents including their experiences with the admission process, responsiveness of the school and administration to complaints and other issues which are of critical interest to parents, but which are often omitted from private school research in India.

This is particularly significant given the focus of the National Education Policy (NEP)¹⁵ which saw its first year during this period. The NEP recognizes commercialization of education as an issue and notes that the current regulatory regime has been unsuccessful in protecting parents from exploitation by private schools. It seeks to do so through putting in place transparent public self-disclosure of all the basic regulatory information for public oversight and accountability. This would be expected to operate by parents exercising their voice and agency in their interaction with schools. In the months since the NEP was finalized, calls have been made by lobby groups¹⁶ to ease regulatory frameworks as they apply to private schools and even end the legal mandate of keeping education as a not-for profit domain. It would be critical to examine the extent to which parents' voice can effectively be exercised in school settings at present.

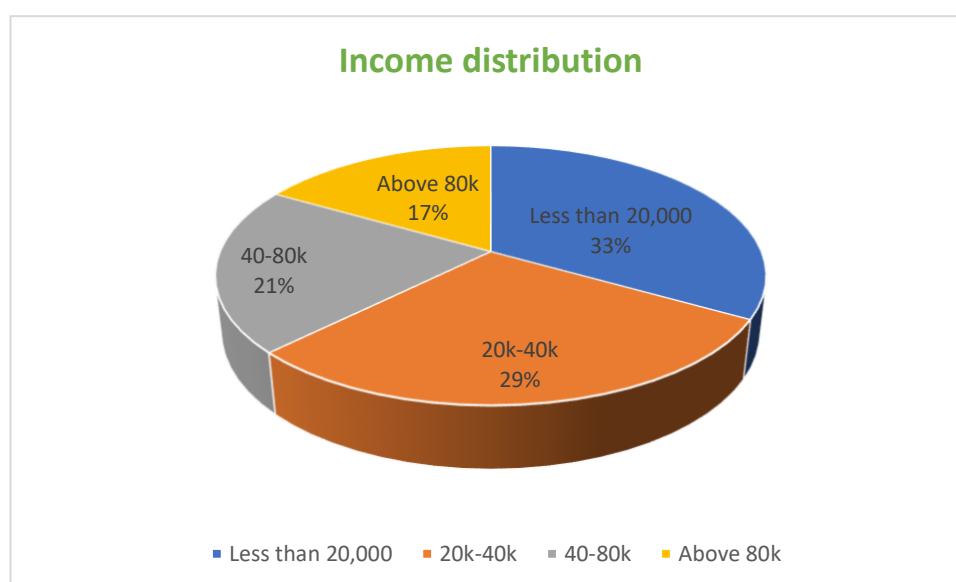
15 https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

16 <https://centralsquarefoundation.org/State-of-the-Sector-Report-on-Private-Schools-in-India.pdf>

Methodology and Demographics of study

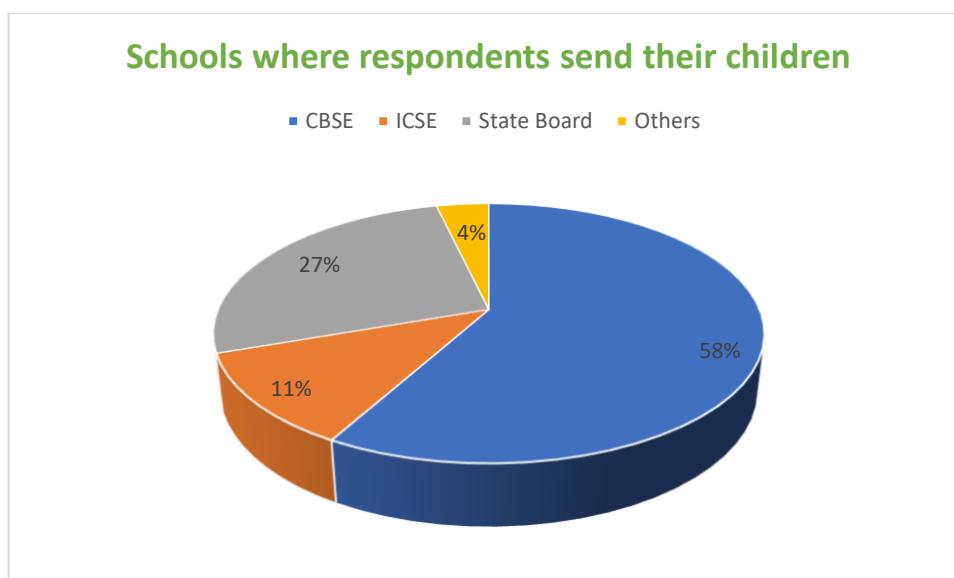
A total of 3440 respondents across 36 states and union territories of India constitute the sample for this study. The study was conducted between the months of September to November. It must be flagged that the sample is not representative, nor evenly distributed across states. Further, a large section of the data was collected through a self-administered online questionnaire, thereby limiting the representativeness of the sample given that these were people with a digital device, internet, motivation, and the technical know-how to fill an online questionnaire.

That being said, the sample has a decent distribution across different income groups, with those with a household income of less than 20,000 per month constituting almost 30% of the sample, indicating that the data does not reflect the opinions and experiences of only the elite and the rich.



One of the limitations of the study is the under-representation of experiences of private school parents of girl children- only 28% of the responses are from such parents. This could in part be because overall representation of girls in private schools is lower than boys, although not by such a large margin. The distribution of respondents across social groups isn't proportionate to their representation in the population but there are enough responses per social group to conduct a disaggregated analysis wherever relevant. The representation of marginalized groups in the sample is – 3% Scheduled Tribes, 10% Scheduled Castes, 18% Muslims and 25% Other Backward Castes.

A large percentage of parents (58%) who responded to the survey, send their children to CBSE schools, while a quarter (27%) send their children to state board schools. The rest of the sample is made up of those in ICSE (11%) and other schools. In terms of the break-up across grades, roughly a quarter of the respondents have children studying in grades 1-2 and 3-5 respectively while around half the respondents have children enrolled in grades 10-12.



Movement to different schools – 21% children moved schools during the pandemic

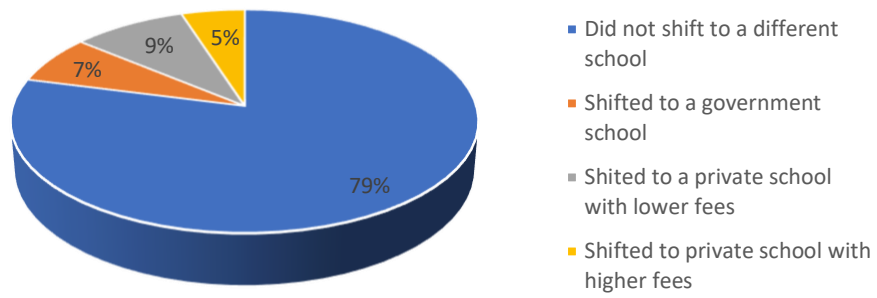
Question in survey- Did your child shift schools during the pandemic?

There have been multiple media reports of children moving from private to government schools during the pandemic. In Andhra Pradesh, [2 lakh](#) children have moved from private to government schools while Karnataka has seen a similar shift- of [1.5](#) lakh children moving to government schools. The survey found 7% of private school parents shifted their child/children to a government school, which is in line with findings in ASER¹⁷ which show that private school enrolment reduced by 8% over the past year.

However, the movement has also happened across private schools- those with lower fees and those with higher fees. Given the financial repercussions of the pandemic (at the peak of the pandemic, 84% households suffered a loss in income), it is understandable that 9% private school parents moved their children to a private school with lower fees. However, somewhat counterintuitively, 5% private school parents moved their children to a school with higher fees. Interestingly, this is broadly consistent across different income, wherein 7.5% parents earning more than 80,000 per month shifted their child to a more expensive private school, as compared to 4.5% parents earning less than 20,000 per month. One potential explanation for this finding could be parents' disappointment with education delivery by their child's private school during the pandemic, and the assumption that paying a premium might mean a better quality of education. Further qualitative research is needed to understand this phenomenon.

¹⁷ http://img.asercentre.org/galleries/pressrelease_aser2021_english_final1.pdf

Shifting schools during the pandemic



Part 2.1

Key concerns of private school parents and experiences of exploitation, commercialization and discrimination

Introduction

This section focuses on experiences of parents and children with private schools overall and not just restricted to the time-frame of the pandemic. This analysis is critical in the context of the NEP which has rolled out while the country has been in the grip of the pandemic.

The survey looks at the extent to which private schools have been able to adhere to child rights focussed provisions and the extent to which parents have had a say in the functioning of schools. The report finds that a large percentage of private schools continue to screen students through interviews prior to the admission process as well as denying admission on grounds of social identity. It also finds that profiteering and lack of transparency by private schools continues to be a major challenge with around 60% parents reporting that they were forced to buy textbooks from a specific vendor and had to pay hidden charges throughout the year that were not disclosed previously.

Parents also expressed that they lacked a voice in key decisions taken by the school, and in cases where they complained to the education department or the school, adequate action was taken in less than 10% of the cases. To ensure effective regulation of private schools, promote transparency and protect rights of parents and children, the respondents were of the view that private school accounts should be made public, grievance redress processes be strengthened and ensure that parents have a formal say in all key decisions at school level, including fee fixation. These findings would be significant at a time when states start down the road of implementing the NEP in earnest.

Violations by private schools at the time of admission

This section reviews experiences of private school parents and children at the time of seeking admission. The survey finds that 13% children were denied admission on the grounds of their gender/social identity. Further, close to 60% parents had to pay capitation fees at the time of admission despite the existence of norms preventing this.

Denial of admission on grounds of gender, caste, religion, language, background- 19% Muslim parents report denial of admission

The Right to Education Act clearly lays out that private schools can't deny admission to children on grounds of gender, caste, religion, language, background etc. Despite this, 13% private school parents report that a private school denied admission to their child on one or a combination of these grounds. For Muslims, the rate of denial of higher, at 19%. This finding is consistent with a study¹⁸ of nursery admissions in Delhi, which found that only 3% Muslim students got admission in a private school. Of the schools that denied admission to students, 70% were neither co-ed, nor minority institutions, meaning that they had no grounds on which to deny admission.

38% parents had to pay capitation fees at the time of admission; in Karnataka, the figure was 57%

State RTE rules clearly prohibit schools from demanding donation/capitation fees at the time of admission. Despite this, the practice of charging capitation fees by private schools appears to be rampant, with close to two in five parents reporting that they were asked to pay capitation fees. While regulation exists, this finding indicates that its enforcement has been poor and ineffective, allowing private schools to continue this exploitative tactic. Although this violation is a widespread phenomenon across the country, there is some variation, as evidenced in the table below. For instance, in economically better off states, a much greater percentage of parents reported having to pay capitation fees as compared to parents from poorer states, which could be due to the relatively higher ability of parents to pay in states such as Karnataka, Maharashtra and Delhi.

State-wise breakup of % parents who had to pay capitation fees at the time of admission	%
Karnataka	57
Maharashtra	48
Delhi	46
Bihar	35
Odisha	34
Jharkhand	34
Uttar Pradesh	28

18 <https://thewire.in/communalism/watch-only-3-of-muslim-students-get-admission-in-a-private-school-in-delhi-research>

56% children had to appear for a test/interview prior to seeking admission in the school, for any grade below 8th

While RTE rules explicitly prohibit any form of screening including tests and interviews of parents and children, private schools continue to blatantly violate these norms. Over half the parents reported that their child had to appear for a test/interview prior to seeking admission in the school. While there have been multiple media reports¹⁹ highlighting this issue across various states, this study serves to highlight the scale of the problem. The violation of the norm related to not screening children through tests/interviews is consistently broken across states, regardless of their economic status and governance ability, from 58% in Karnataka and Haryana to over 60% in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

¹⁹ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/bangalore/private-schools-conduct-online-admission-tests/article31844802.ece>

What concerns do private school parents have?

This section looks at key concerns of private school parents including issues of profiteering by private schools, quality of education and lack of voice in key decisions taken in the school.

60% parents forced to buy school supplies from a specific vendor

Two of the biggest concerns that private school parents have, are to do with the rising commercialization of education promoted by private schools. Around two in three parents report that they were forced to buy books/uniform/stationery from a specific vendor despite this being a punishable offence in multiple states, including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Karnataka. Unfortunately, a large percentage of parents in these states continue to be pressurised into buying school supplies from a specific vendor, indicating that poor enforcement of existing private school regulation is at the heart of the issue of rising commercialization. This issue exists across the country, regardless of the existence of private school regulation, governance ability and economic status of the state.

State-wise breakup of % parents who were forced to buy supplies from a specific vendor	%
Karnataka	65
Bihar	65
Delhi	64
Uttar Pradesh	59
Maharashtra	56
Jharkhand	55
Odisha	53

57% parents had to pay many additional charges throughout the year, which were not part of the break-up of fees shared by the school at the beginning of the year

Various state private school legislations, such as Bihar, Punjab and Chandigarh clearly lay out that the school is required to display details of all types of fees on its notice board and on its official website. The UP Fee Regulation Act clearly states that private schools need to disclose the fees and their break-up at the time of admission. Even the National Education Policy 2020 stressed the importance of transparency and disclosure by private schools.

Despite this, close to 60% parents in the survey stated that they were asked to pay additional charges throughout the year, which were not disclosed by the school at the beginning of the year. As a result of these hidden charges, private schools are increasingly becoming an unaffordable burden for parents. Two in three parents in the survey stated that private school fees (including all charges) constitute over 15% of their household income, which is consistent with data from the NSSO 75th Round. There is a need for state governments to regulate private schools such that they comply with these basic norms of transparency and disclosure as part of their functioning, rather than institutions that focus on exploiting parents and making profits through hidden charges.

A state-wise analysis shows that existence of a private school fee regulation doesn't necessarily help in preventing private schools from exploiting parents and taking additional/hidden charges throughout the year. For instance, in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, both

of which have private school fee legislations, a higher percentage of parents (66% and 59% respectively) reported having to pay additional fees throughout the year as compared to 55% in Odisha which does not have a private school legislation in place. This does not mean that having a private school legislation is meaningless but it does indicate that without enforcement of regulation, private schools will continue to exploit parents with/without a legislation.

State-wise breakup of % parents who had to pay additional/hidden charges throughout the year	%
Bihar	66
Delhi	64
Jharkhand	60
Uttar Pradesh	59
Odisha	55
Maharashtra	53
Karnataka	51

Issues with quality of education- 53% parents report that they are concerned about the excessive focus on marks in their child's school; 36% say that there are too many children in one class

The concerns of private school parents extend beyond profiteering by private schools. There are also serious concerns about the quality of education delivered. The National Education Policy 2020²⁰ clearly states that pedagogy must move towards being inequity-driven and education itself must be more holistic in nature. However, private schools don't appear to believe in the concept of holistic education. Over half the parents believed that there is an excessive focus on marks in private schools, and not on the overall needs and development of their child. In addition, over a third of the parents are concerned that there are too many children in one class, as a result of which, their child does not get enough individual attention and support from the teacher.

51% parents say they have no voice and agency around key decisions

Various state legislations explicitly mention that parents must be consulted by the management before key decisions are taken. For instance, the Chhattisgarh fee regulation mandates the school management to make a presentation to parents before hiking/changing the fee structure. According to the Jammu & Kashmir legislation, schools must consult and appraise parents on matters pertaining to academics and co-curricular activities. Despite the ethical and legal obligations of schools involving parents in key decisions, over half the parents report that they have no voice and agency in important decisions that are taken in the school. Once again, having explicit norms in place does not appear to help in increasing parental voice. In Maharashtra for instance, there is a specific private school fee regulation that requires private schools to seek approval from a school level fee committee consisting of parents. Despite this, 46% parents in Maharashtra say that they have no voice and agency around key decisions as compared to 44% parents in Odisha, which does not have a comparable norm in place related to parental participation.

²⁰ https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

41% parents say quality of infrastructure is inadequate compared to fees paid

On average, expenses on private schooling cost 10 times that of public education. The current survey shows that parents spend a substantial part of their household income (15% and above) on private school fees. Despite paying such large sums, two in five parents feel that the quality of infrastructure in their school is inadequate compared to the fees paid. This is borne out by UDISE data²¹ as well, which shows that a mere 8.1% of private unaided schools meet all the 10 RTE infrastructural norms, as compared to 14.6% government schools.

Children don't receive enough individual attention, face corporal punishment and bullying

In line with parents' concerns that there are too many children in one class, they are also concerned that their children don't receive enough individual attention, with around half the parents reporting this. There are also issues of corporal punishment and bullying with over a fifth of the parents reporting that their child faced corporal punishment by a school staff or teacher, a similar number reporting that their child was bullied by other children in the school.

²¹ 2017-18

Experiences of complaint resolution- at school and education department level

Less than 5% parents satisfied by action taken by school on complaint; 36% children harassed over complaint

Over half the parents reported that they had complained the school over the problems and issues listed above. Unfortunately, 60% parents report that no action was taken by the school based on the complaint. 36% report that the school took some action, but it was not adequate and did not lead to the complete resolution of the issue at hand. A mere 4% said that they were satisfied by the action taken by the school in resolving the issue. These findings indicate a skewed power dynamic between the school and parents, where parents have little choice to defer to the school's decision in case of complaints and issues, even if they are dissatisfied with the action taken, a trend that is prevalent across the country, as evidenced by the table below.

State-wise breakup of % parents who were satisfied with action taken by school	%
Karnataka	1
Bihar	2
Jharkhand	2
Delhi	3
Uttar Pradesh	3
Maharashtra	3
Odisha	5

An unfortunate pitfall of parents complaining to the school is harassment of children – of the parents who complained, over a third report that their children were insulted and harassed over the complaints. Existing media reports²² also show that that is one of the main reasons parents are reluctant to complain in the first place.

Complaint to education department- only 15% parents have complained to education department

A mere 15% parents reported having ever complained to the education department over issues with the school. The main reason parents were reluctant to complaint was the fear of their child getting harassed over the complaint (58%), a finding that is line with existing media reports as well as a rapid survey by Oxfam India of private school parents in Delhi²³. The other key reason behind the low level of complaints to the education department, relates to the lack of faith in the grievance redress mechanism, where over half the parents are not confident of their complaint getting resolved.

Lastly, there are issues with the design of the education department's complaint mechanism itself, wherein around half the parents believe the process of complaining is too complex and a similar number don't even know where to complain. These findings indicate the need for

²² <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/fee-dispute-parents-reluctant-to-give-written-complaints/article33814800.ece>

²³ <https://www.oxfamindia.org/knowledgehub/oxfaminaction/rapid-survey-challenges-private-school-parents-delhi>

state governments to simplify existing complaint mechanisms and make them parent friendly, such that a larger percentage of parents feel confident that their issues will be heard and thus, come forward to file complaints against their child's school.

Less than 10% parents satisfied by action taken by education department over complaint; 39% children harassed over complaint

Of the parents who complained, less than 10% were satisfied by the action taken by the education department. For those who were not satisfied by the complaint resolution, around 60% said that they tried complaining but got no response, and a similar number reported that no action was taken against the school. Around a third of the parents said that the education department ruled in favour of the school over the complaint.

The other issues pertain to the design of the grievance redress mechanism, wherein parents found the process too complex to follow up, or their faced challenges in getting their complaint accepted by the education department. The actual experiences and challenges of parents who have tried to engage with the education department are quite aligned with the perceptions of those parents who haven't ever complained to the education department, indicating that unless the government takes concrete measures to simplify and strengthen the grievance redress process, parents will lose faith in the process altogether.

Parent participation and voice in school- less than 20% schools have a Parent teacher association

Multiple state legislations make it compulsory for all schools to have a parent teacher association (PTA). Having such a body would be the first step in ensuring that decisions in the school are taken in a consultative and participative manner with parents, teachers and school management, thereby reducing possibilities of conflict. Unfortunately, less than 20% parents report that their school has a parent teacher association. In Uttar Pradesh, law mandates that all private schools to setup a PTA. Despite this, a mere 11% parents reported that their school has a PTA setup. Even in cases where a PTA exists, four in five parents are *not consulted* over decisions taken by the school, signifying that many PTAs exist on paper but not in practice.

State-wise breakup of % parents who said that their child's school has a PTA	%
Jharkhand	7
Bihar	9
Uttar Pradesh	11
Delhi	16
Karnataka	17
Odisha	18
Maharashtra	36

Parents and children are amongst the most important stakeholders in the school but their role in school management and decision-making remains limited. **An overwhelming 95% of the parents surveyed are of the opinion that every school should have a parents' group that is empowered to review all key decisions** by the school that concern parents and children. In states such as Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, there already exist legislations which

require schools to consult and seek approval from parents prior to hiking/changing the fee structure of the school. However, there is a need to go beyond fee fixation and involve parents in all key decisions concerning children, including issues of child safety, academics, and co-curricular activities.

Failure of government regulation and recommendations for effective regulation

84% Parents report that the government has been unable to regulate private schools effectively

There is overwhelming consensus amongst parents about the failure of private regulation by the government, with 84% parents saying that the government has been unable to regulate private schools effectively. Interestingly, these findings are consistent with a survey of over 20,000 parents conducted in 2018 where over 80% parents had shared the same belief over the government's inability to regulate private schools.

Given the failure of the government to regulate private schools effectively, parents suggested the following recommendations for effective regulation of private schools:

91% parents want the government to regulate school fees and ensure that private schools comply

First, state governments need to ensure that there are fee regulation legislations in place that clearly lay out how fees should be fixed and by how much, and mandate approval of parents. In addition, there should be clear mechanisms for ensuring compliance of private schools to the regulations and norms laid out, including punitive measures for schools who fail to comply.

84% parents want private school finances to be made more transparent by giving parents access to audited accounts of the school

Private schools claim that the majority of funds generated through fees are used for paying teacher salaries and meeting other expenses. However, the Delhi government's petition in the Supreme Court, argued that private schools have large surpluses, ranging between INR 1 to 48 Crores. To ensure greater transparency in private school accounts, parents are asking for the school's expenditure data to be available in the public domain. The demand for audit of school accounts has come from other states as well, with the India Wide Parents Association in Maharashtra calling for an audit of school accounts.

80% parents want a formal say in fixation of school fees by creation of fee regulation committees at school and district level

Parents believe that they should have formal say in the fee fixation process by being part of fee regulation committees at school level. Such committees already exist in a few states including Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra. Ensuring involvement of parents in fee fixation at school level would help in resolving fee related issues at the level of the school itself. For issues that are not resolved at school level, there should be district level fee regulation committees, which should also include representation of parents.

80% parents want the government to prevent schools from forcing purchase of textbooks, uniforms from specific vendors

The survey shows that the majority of parents were forced to purchase textbooks, uniforms from specific vendors. Certain states such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar already have regulations in place, which disallow schools from forcing purchase of textbooks, uniforms and other materials from specific vendors. To put an end to this rising commercialization, parents believe that the government must ensure regulation and enforcement of norms around preventing schools from forcing purchase of school materials from specific vendors.

78% parents demand that the complaint processes to be made easier and complainants' children to be protected from harassment

Given the low complaint rate and dissatisfaction of parents who have complained to the education department, parents want complaint processes to be made easier and more effective. Additionally, the processes must make sure that complainants' children are protected from harassment.

77% parents demand protection of children from discrimination, bullying, or other harassment based on parents' income, class, caste, gender, disability, and other forms

While guidelines and laws exist to prevent discrimination, a more parent friendly grievance redress mechanism would be needed that makes parents and children feel comfortable about sharing such instances of violation. SARTHAQ , NEP's implementation plan recommends a social audit of schools led by Parent Teacher Associations and students. This would be crucial to strengthen social accountability of private schools, ensure participatory governance and make private schools safe and child-friendly spaces.

77% parents demand that all private schools must meet minimum norms of infrastructure, safety and quality to remain open

Less than 10% of private unaided schools meet the ten RTE parameters currently. Parents are demanding that all private schools meet minimum norms of infrastructure, safety and quality to remain open. The SSSA (State School Standards Authority) proposed to setup under the NEP, is set to play this role, of monitoring all schools on a set of basic minimum standards to run a school. Ensuring that schools meet these standards should be tied to the recognition of the school, failing which, their right to remain open should be revoked.

Part 2.2

Access to learning during the pandemic, experiences of reopening and fee hikes by private schools

Access to education and learning experiences over the past two months (September-November'21)

This section seeks to understand the experiences of children with regard to their access to learning, types of school/teacher led activities they were a part of, support provided by family and the challenges faced in learning over the past months. Despite schools reopening in multiple states, over 50% parents report that their child was not involved in any teacher-led learning activity over September-November 2021. Live online classes continued to be the main mode of education delivery during time, albeit not an effective form of delivery given that two in three parents stated that their child struggled to get their doubts cleared in online classes.

Almost half of private school students were not involved in any form of teacher-led learning activity during the past two months (September-November '21)

Questions in survey-

- Was your child involved in any form of teacher-led learning activity during the past two months?
- In what form did your child access teacher-led learning in the past two months?

Almost 50% parents report that their child was not involved in any form of teacher-led learning activity during the past two months. This is only a slight increase from Oxfam India's study in September 2020 where 40% private school parents reported that their child accessed education in some form.

In instances where parents reported that their child was involved in some form of teacher-led learning, **live online classes were the main mode of delivery with over 80% parents reporting this**. This is a significant increase from Oxfam India's 2020 survey where only 22% parents had reported education delivery through online classes. While the samples across the two surveys are not comparable, the increase in live online classes could be due to private schools and teachers adapting better to digital modes of delivery over the course of the pandemic, which would explain the increase in use of live online classes as the main mode of education delivery over the course of a year (the duration in between the two Oxfam India rapid surveys).

The second main form of education delivery was through resources shared on WhatsApp (47%), a decrease from last year's survey where WhatsApp was the main mode of education delivery (57%). This finding indicates that WhatsApp is now being used more a supplementary

mode, possibly to share resources and assignments, as compared to last year where it was the main mode of delivery.

Of the parents who reported that their child was involved in some sort of teacher-led learning activity over the past two months, **only one in five parents reported that their child accessed learning through physical classes in school.** Further, there were significant differences across grade levels. While around 30% children in grades 10-12 accessed learning through physical classes in school, the figure for children in the primary section (1-5) was a mere 7%. This is because reopening of schools in most states has remained restricted to secondary and senior secondary sections, while school closure for children in grades 1-5 has now completed over 600 days in multiple states.

Less than a quarter of private school children were involved in teacher-led learning for a full-working day on average

According to norms²⁴, children in India are supposed to spend slightly more than 4 hours per day in school on average. However, the study finds that only a fifth of the children accessed teacher-led learning for over 4 hours a day on average. Over 50% children accessed education for even less than 3 hours a day. According to a study by Azim Premji University, over 90% children have lost at least one major language competency during the pandemic. As this study shows, this isn't just because of the lack of access to education, it is also of reduced teaching time for those who *could* access teacher-led instruction during the pandemic.

The reduced time of teacher-led instruction has also meant an increased burden on parents to follow up and support children's learning. While parental involvement was also expected in the pre-pandemic era, a separate survey showed that 80% parents²⁵ are spending more time with children since schools were closed. The same survey²⁶ also showed that 2 in 3 parents are not comfortable with teaching mathematics. The increased dependence on parents for providing instruction to children will lead to an increase in educational inequality since not all parents are equally equipped/qualified to support their child's learning. The burden for supporting children is also likely to fall disproportionately on mothers who are already primary caregivers for older people in the family.

On average, how many hours per day was your child involved in some school/teacher-led learning activity during the past two months?	%
Less than 1 hour	7
1-2 hours	21
2-3 hours	25
3-4 hours	26
More than 4 hours	21

²⁴ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/education/news/indian-kids-spend-too-much-time-at-school/articleshow/28452277.cms>

²⁵ <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/latest-studies/story/what-did-indian-parents-have-to-manage-in-the-covid-19-pandemic-survey-shows-key-concerns-in-major-cities-1748403-2020-12-10>

²⁶ Ibid

How did parents support children's learning during the pandemic?

Given that schools were closed, a lot of the burden on ensuring children's learning fell on parents. **Two in three parents supported their children's learning by purchasing a digital device**, which is in line with multiple media reports²⁷ of parents investing in digital devices during the pandemic. Interestingly, this figure was consistent across income groups, indicating that the pandemic forced even the poor to spend their meagre earnings on digital devices. According to ASER 2021, 28% of rural households reported buying a mobile phone for their child. However, the current survey is not restricted to rural households, which could explain a higher proportion of parents reporting that they purchased a digital device to support their child's learning.

40% parents said that they tried to ensure their child was involved in some form of learning activity every day. However, there was a difference across income groups- while 33% earning less than 20,000 per month reported this, the figure for those earning over 80,000 was 53%. The gap should be seen not in terms of intent to support children's learning but the capacity of the poor to do so. This is evidenced by the fact that over 20% of low income parents have said that they were not in a position to support their children as compared to only 4% high income parents.

37% parents reported that they had setup a special place in the house for the child to learn. While 50% parents earning more than 80,000 per month reported this, the figure was 25% for those earning less than 20,000, highlighting constraints faced by poor children in learning from home, which were not restricted to digital access alone, which much of the media coverage has focused on.

31% parents said they tried to engage with their child by asking them questions. For parents from Scheduled tribes (ST), the figure was much lower, at 17% while for parents earning over 80,000 per month, the corresponding figure was 38%. This must not be interpreted as ST parents being less concerned about their children's learning. Rather, it highlights the challenge faced by parents from marginalised groups to support children's learning due to constraints of time and their own educational disadvantages. This serves to show the need for teachers and schools to take the lead in supporting children's education, and providing additional support to children from marginalised groups, particularly Adivasis.

How did you/your family members support your child's learning during the pandemic?			
Ways of support	Income less than 20,0000 (%)	Income greater than 80,000 (%)	Overall (%)
Purchased a digital device	66	69	67
Hired a tuition teacher to support child's learning	20	31	29
Setup a special place in the house for the child to learn	26	50	37
Asked questions to the child based on what they had learnt	27	38	31
Ensured that the child was involved in some learning activity everyday	33	53	40
No one was in a position to support	22	4	13

²⁷ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/madurai/more-parents-ready-to-spend-on-devices-as-online-edu-continues/articleshow/78597813.cms>

Challenges faced in accessing learning- 65% found it difficult to get doubts cleared in online classes

Question in survey-

- What challenges did your child face in accessing education during the past two months?

While a lot of the literature on learning during the pandemic has focused on the issue of digital access, the survey finds that the biggest challenge faced by children in online classes, is the lack of opportunities for deeper engagement, with **two in three parents reporting that their children found it difficult to get their doubts cleared in online classes**. This finding is backed up by other surveys as well. In an Azim Premji University survey²⁸, more than 90% teachers reported that meaningful assessment of children's learning was not possible in online classes. In the same study, over 80% teachers said that establishing an emotional connect with children was impossible through this mode. It is, therefore, important to understand that the primary issue with digital learning is not simply of access to devices, but of pedagogical effectiveness. According to a teacher from Raipur²⁹, online classes mostly consist of one-way communication where it is difficult to understand how much children can follow.

Over one in three parents reported three types of challenges with accessing education, that pertain to issues of digital access and the internet. These include, expensive data, issues with internet speed and more importantly, the challenge of not having the right device or having to share a phone with family members. This was borne out by other studies as well, with the SCHOOL study³⁰ finding that smartphones were often used by working adults and not available for school children. Similarly, the ASER survey³¹ found that of children who had smartphones at home, less than one-third were able to access it all times.

35% parents also reported that children lacked a conducive space in the house to study. Interestingly, this challenge was faced across parents from different income groups, with some variation- while 41% parents earning less than 20,000 reported this, the figure for those earning over 80,000 was 26%. Research from across the world³² indicates that children the lack of conducive learning environment at home is one of the major deterrents for effective digital learning.

Digital access is only part of the enabling environment needed; the more crucial bits are teacher preparedness, participative pedagogy that allows children to ask questions and teachers to assess learning, and the availability of a dedicated space in the household for the child to learn digitally. This report clearly shows that none of these pre-conditions are being met, and even for children who are attending online classes, it remains a medium of passively receiving instruction, and not one of co-creation of knowledge based on children's lived experiences.

28 <https://azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/field-studies-in-education/myths-of-online-education>

29 Ibid

30 <https://counterviewfiles.files.wordpress.com/2021/09/locked-out-emergency-report-on-school-education-6-sept-2021.pdf>

31 http://img.asercentre.org/docs/aser2021finalreport_16.116.54pm1.pdf

32 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2347631120983481>

What challenges did your child face in accessing education during the past two months?	%
Found it difficult to get doubts cleared in online classes	65
Did not have the right device/had to share phone with other family members	44
Did not have conducive space in house to study	35
Data pack was too expensive	35
Did not have internet access/internet was too slow	34
Did not get time because of household chores	15
Did not face any challenge	11

56% parents complain that no alternative was provided by schools to physical education and sports; 22% say no support on psychosocial needs

It wasn't just children's access to learning that was impacted, it was also their physical and mental health. For many children, the school was a space that provided them space for playing sports and getting focused physical education. However, during the pandemic, as schools closed physically, private schools failed to support children's health needs during this time, with over 50% parents reporting that no alternative by provided by schools for physical education and sports. In addition to children's physical health, various studies have shown that that pandemic and prolonged school closure has had a detrimental impact on children's mental health. Over a fifth of the parents report that their child's school failed to provide any form of support for her/his/their psychosocial needs.

Exploitation of parents and children- Fees hiked and access to education blocked

52% parents report having to pay hiked fees during the pandemic

14 state governments had released notifications asking private schools to not hike fees during the pandemic. Despite this, over 50% parents report having to pay hiked fees during the pandemic. In the table below, there is a state-wise analysis of fee hikes reported by parents. It is evident that despite of notifications preventing fee hikes, private schools across the country continue to disregard norms and exploit parents. While lack of enforcement is certainly in issue, many states have issued conflicting orders and notifications during the pandemic, leading to litigation between the government, private schools and parents. This is why a clear law regulating private school fee hikes is required along with an effective grievance redress mechanism in place for parents to report violations by private schools.

Name of state	Existence of notification preventing fee hikes during the pandemic	Percentage of parents reporting fee hikes in AY 2021-22
Bihar	Yes	65%
Delhi	Yes	65%
Gujarat	Yes	45%
Haryana	Yes	66%
Jharkhand	Yes	59%
Karnataka	Yes	50%
Maharashtra	Yes	51%
Odisha	Yes	61%
Punjab	No	61%
Uttar Pradesh	Yes	57%

Access to education blocked for 35% children

Despite guidelines by NCPCR that the best interests of the child should be kept in mind while dealing with any conflict between the school and parents, 35% parents reported that access to online classes were blocked in their child's school for those children who were unable to pay fees. In addition, 22% shared that their child was insulted over non-payment of fees. These findings are indicative not only of poor enforcement of regulation but also of the regressive attitude of schools towards the very children they are supposed to nurture and support.

Experiences of children with reopening of schools

This survey was conducted in between October and November 2021 as schools had gradually started reopening across India, although with variations across states and grade levels. This series of questions sought to explore whether parents are sending their children to school if reopened, steps taken by schools for effective reopening and experiences of children attending school after a gap of over 500 days.

Reopening of private schools – Only 40% primary parents reported that their child's school had reopened (as on November 2021)

Overall, close to 60% parents reported that their child's school has reopened by November 2021. However, there are significant differences across states and grade levels. **While only 40% parents of children in primary grades (1-5) report that their child's school has reopened, the figure for children in grades 6-9 is 62% while for grades 10-12, it is 70%.** This finding is consistent with school reopening in most states which have prioritized reopening for older children. For instance, Odisha³³ has allowed reopening for classes 6-7 but not for junior classes. In West Bengal³⁴, physical classes have only started for secondary and senior secondary students while remaining closed for middle and junior sections. The table below offers a state-wise analysis of reopening. Only states with a significant number of responses have been considered for the analysis and the percentage of schools that have reopened has been calculated based on state wise notifications related to reopening that existed during the time of the survey.

Snapshot of state-wise reopening status (As on		
Name of state	Grades considered for analysis	Percentage of private schools that have reopened
Uttar Pradesh	All grades ³⁵	86%
Bihar	Grades 1-9 ³⁶	84%
Delhi	Grades 10-12 ³⁷	70%
Jharkhand	Grades 6-12 ³⁸	78%
Karnataka	Grades 10-12 ³⁹	78%

The table above shows that the percentage of private schools that have reopened (after official state notifications) range between 70% to 86%. Thus, broadly 15-30% private schools are still reluctant to reopen, despite government guidelines around the same. This could be a combination of the school's own lack of preparedness as well as anxiety amongst parents about sending children back to school, as evidenced by media reports⁴⁰.

33 <https://www.hindustantimes.com/education/news/odisha-government-allows-reopening-of-schools-for-classes-6-7-101636549831201.html>

34 <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/news/story/west-bengal-schools-reopen-for-classes-9-to-12-1877309-2021-11-16>

35 <https://www.india.com/education/up-schools-reopening-normal-classes-for-students-of-class-1-to-5-to-resume-from-september-1-4925801/>

36 <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/news/story/bihar-schools-reopen-for-classes-1-to-8-from-today-with-50-capacity-1841304-2021-08-16>

37 <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/delhi-schools-reopen-but-most-say-full-bus-services-are-not-feasible-7646454/>

38 <https://www.hindustantimes.com/education/news/schools-reopening-jharkhand-to-reopen-schools-for-classes-6-to-8-101631861084918.html>

39 <https://www.deccanherald.com/state/top-karnataka-stories/karnataka-schools-to-reopen-for-class-10-12-from-january-1-929172.html>

40 <https://theprint.in/india/education/parents-are-increasingly-anxious-about-sending-children-back-to-school-not-only-due-to-covid/767882/>

Experiences of children with resumption of physical classes in school

This section looks at how children's own experiences with reopening and their schools are preparing the school as well as children for safe and effective reopening. It finds that while there is some emphasis on following COVID protocols, there is very little attention over helping recover the learning deprivation of children through assessing their learning levels and leading remedial programs. The survey also finds that children are enjoying interacting their classmates after resumption of physical classes but at the same time, are struggling to follow what is being taught in class, an outcome of the prolonged school closure.

What are schools doing for resumption of physical classes?

Around half the parents reported that COVID protocols were being followed in their school, that the school was sanitized prior to reopening and teachers and staff had been vaccinated. However, only a **third of the parents reported that schools were conducting thermal screening of students at the time of entry and only 30% reported that classes were operating with reduced capacities.**

In schools that have reopened, the emphasis on following COVID protocols (while not very high), appears to be much stronger than addressing the learning deprivation that children have experienced due to prolonged school closure. UNICEF guidelines⁴¹ on effective reopening stress the need to conduct rapid assessments of children's learning levels as they return to school, in order to design effective remedial programs. Unfortunately, **only 14% parents reported that their child's school assessed their child's current learning level as they returned to school.**

Multiple studies⁴² have shown that children have suffered a learning deprivation due to the prolonged school closure, making it difficult for them to follow the current year's syllabus. Therefore, it would have been crucial for schools to help children catch-up through revising last year's syllabus. However, fewer than **10% parents shared that their child's school was doing such a revision, to help them catch up.**

It would have been imperative for schools to understand the current learning level of students and adapt the curriculum and teaching to help them get back on track. Given that fewer than 10% private schools are doing this, children are likely to struggle with following what is being taught in class, which will further increase the burden on parents to provide/pay for additional learning support. This will widen the already existing learning disparities between children from high income and low-income groups.

Which of the following did your child's school do/is doing for resumption of physical classes?	%
COVID protocols being followed	51
School was sanitised prior to reopening	46
Teachers and staff have been vaccinated	45
Thermal screening of students	33

41 <https://www.unicef.org/media/94871/file/Framework%20for%20Reopening%20Schools%20Supplement-From%20Reopening%20to%20Recovery-Key%20Resources.pdf>

42 https://cdn.azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/apuc3/media/publications/downloads/Field_Studies_Loss_of_Learning_during_the_Pandemic.f1622994202.pdf

Classes operating with reduced capacities	30
Assessment of children's learning	14
Revision of previous year being done	8
None of the above	5

What are children's experiences with attending physical classes after the prolonged school closure?

According to a survey by CRY⁴³, released after a year of the pandemic, Two in five children reported experiencing trauma and missing interactions with their friends in school. Given the mental health needs of children, particularly vulnerable children, it is heartening to see that around **half the parents in this survey report that their children were enjoying interacting with their classmates in school.**

At the same time, around half the parents report that their child has a reduced attention span to sit for long hours. With the pandemic-led shift to online modes of learning, there are concerns over the attention span of students⁴⁴. Furthermore, given the challenges that children faced in accessing digital learning and the lack of revision of last year's curriculum by the school, around **two in five parents report that their children are finding it hard to follow what is being taught in class.**

On the positive side though, parents also report that their children are finding it easier to get their doubts cleared better than during online classes. At the same time, over 20% parents report that their child is getting learning support from peers and finding it easier to get access to new learning materials. 19% suggest it is easier to get access to new learning materials in physical schools than it was during online learning. This offers some hope for catch up learning.

The fear of the virus remains prevalent with close to 40% of parents reporting that their children are anxious about being infected.

How has your child's experience been with school reopening?	Percentage
Enjoying interacting with classmates	48
Reduced attention span	47
Facing challenges in understanding	39
Able to ask doubts better than online classes	39
Anxious about being infected	37
Getting learning support from peers	24
Feeling shy	21
Easier to get access to new learning materials	19

Concerns of parents not sending their children to school- 27% parents not sending their child to school despite reopening

In cases where schools have reopened, 27% parents are still not sending their child to school. Of the parents not sending their children to school, the dominant concerns pertain to children getting infected and the fact that children haven't been vaccinated yet. Around one in three parents are concerned that social distancing norms are not being followed in

43 <https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2021/03/24/60-kids-happy-during-covid-19-period-but-missed-going-to-school-cry-study.html>

44 <https://www.thehindu.com/education/does-the-decrease-of-average-human-attention-span-have-an-impact-on-education/article34116513.ece>

school, and there are no safe transportation options. An additional concern of parents regarding COVID preparedness is that their child's school hasn't been sanitized yet. This is in line with multiple media reports that have highlighted that post-pandemic parental anxiety is keeping a rising number of children away from physical classes⁴⁵.

However, all concerns don't pertain only to the preparedness of the school in following COVID protocols. The prolonged school closure, which is now the 2nd longest in the world has had an impact on children's own interest and engagement with learning. Around one in five parents report that their child is not going to school because s/he has lost interest in studying. There is some variation across income and social groups --- while this figure is 9% for parents whose income is greater than 80,000 per month, it is over 20% for parents from Scheduled tribes, Other Backward Castes and those earning less than 20,0000 per month. The lack of interest could be due to a greater gap in learning for children from economically and socially marginalized groups, due to learning moving online during the pandemic.

Various reports have highlighted that prolonged school closure along with the economic impact of the pandemic is likely to lead to an increase in dropouts and a rise in child labour. This is borne out by this survey as well. Over one in five parents earning less than 20,000 per month report that they aren't sending their children to school because they have to help their family financially.

While this sample is fairly small, this finding contrasts with the ASER survey which shows no change in the proportion of children enrolled in schools⁴⁶. While children's names may potentially have remained enrolled in school, many appear to have, for all effects and purposes, dropped out.

Why aren't you sending your child to school?	%
Anxious about being infected	60
My child hasn't been vaccinated	54
Social distancing not being followed	34
No safe transportation	32
School hasn't been sanitised	20
Lost interest	17
Has to support family financially	12
Teachers and staff haven't been vaccinated	9
Helping with household chores	6

⁴⁵ <https://theprint.in/india/education/parents-are-increasingly-anxious-about-sending-children-back-to-school-not-only-due-to-covid/767882/>

⁴⁶ http://img.asercentre.org/galleries/asr2021_final.pdf

Opinion on reopening- 80% parents want schools to reopen

Of parents whose children's schools haven't reopened yet, an overwhelming majority (80%) want schools to reopen. While multiple states have reopened schools, reopening has been partial in nature wherein schools have opened only for specific classes and online classes have remained an option, for those who want to avail of them. The Omicron scare has also contributed to speculation about schools being closed again.

It is time for India to have a well thought through policy for disaster preparedness and have mechanisms in place to ensure uninterrupted education for its children. This is especially the case given the evidence that children and teachers have all struggled with learning and teaching virtually during the pandemic.

Conclusion

The pandemic has served to highlight that private schools, if left unregulated, will continue to profiteer and exploit parents. However, this survey shows that issues with private schools extend beyond commercialisation alone. There are issues of parental voice not being respected in decision-making, harassment of children, poor quality of education and a lack of transparency in functioning.

There were some positive measures around regulation of private schools that emerged from the pandemic. Himachal Pradesh introduced a [draft](#) bill for regulation of private school fees, which mandates the setting of a district level committee to regulate private school fees and The [Chhattisgarh](#) state government passed the Chhattisgarh private school fee regulation Act which requires private schools to take parents' consent before hiking fees. These measures illustrate that effective state regulation of private schools is possible if a critical mass of people hold the government accountable and demand regulation. Other states like Himachal Pradesh and Maharashtra are in the process of revising their legal framework related to private schools.

Now, as states begin planning implementation of the National Education Policy, they must use this as an opportunity to put in place measures for effective regulation of private schools. Specifically, this includes:

- Designing a consultative process involving parents, civil society organisations, academicians to develop an effective grievance and response mechanism at district and state levels related to regulation and malpractices of any school imparting school education
- Preparing a comprehensive regulatory framework for private school regulation, building on the existing legislations and the progressive orders issued during the pandemic

Overall Conclusion

The pandemic continues to threaten the educational gains made over the past decade. India children are now under the world's second longest school lockdown. As this survey and various other reports show, prolonged school closure has had a negative impact on children's mental health, attention span and learning levels. In the brief period that schools reopened, majority of the children reported that they were struggling to follow what is being taught in class. This was consistent across government and private schools.

This is a time for solidarity and empathy. Private schools must ensure that no child's access to education is blocked over non-payment of fees. As we enter the third wave of the pandemic, the government must design structured models for physical education delivery (with COVID safety protocols) to ensure learning continuity during this time. There is enough evidence to show the failure of digital modes in keeping children engaged and learning during this time. Instead, the government must learn from innovative modes of physical delivery, such as small-group Mohalla classes that have the potential to reach children in the remotest parts of the country. This is also a time to re-energise community institutions and involve them in training volunteers to ensure that every child gets access to learning materials, additional learning support and remains connected with learning.

The Upcoming Union Budget is a significant one for education in India. The government must ensure a substantial increase in allocation such that infrastructure is strengthened, teacher vacancies are filled and the education system is prepared to support India's recovery from this educational crisis.