

Education Update



1. New Act to regulate private school fees.

TNN | Apr 15, 2011.

HYDERABAD: The state government has decided to come out with a new Act that would prevent private schools from increasing their fees every academic year. K Parthasarathi, minister for secondary education, announced that following the example of Tamil Nadu, the state government was thinking of enacting an Act that would regulate the fees in private institutions in the state.

The Act will also lay out rules that will have to be followed by the secondary education department while granting recognition to private schools. The state's initiative for the new Act is part of the mandate of the Right to Education (RTE) Act that stipulates new legislation to control private schools. Also, a high court order issued in 2010 had directed the department to come up with fresh rules of fee regulation.

The government had a year ago issued an order (GO Ms No: 91) regulating the fee structure. However, private schools secured the high court stay on the GO. The court, however, in August last year directed the school education department to form new rules from 2011-12 academic year.

"The court had directed the school education department to come out with new rules as the old GO was issued in a hurry and had several flaws. If the government is planning to come out with new regulations before the commencement of the next academic year, many parents will be relieved," said Kamal Malliramani, member, Hyderabad School Parents Association (HSPA). According to HSPA records, several city schools have already hiked their fee structure by 10 per cent to 50 per cent for the coming academic year. "If a new legislation is put in place, there will be some amount of fear among private schools and unjustified fee-hike might stop," said Malliramani. HSPA said the state government should force the schools to make their fee structure a public document like in Tamil Nadu.

Meanwhile, private school managements said that they would welcome the move only if fee regulation is introduced across the board. "No schools including international and corporate schools should be exempted from regulation," said Srinivas Reddy, convener, Recognized Schools' Managements' Association.

Some child rights NGOs, however, said the government should also introduce provisions regulating the salaries of teachers in the new Act.

"The Act should be aimed at regulating private schools and not just focus on fee structure," said Achuyta Rao, president, child rights NGO, Bala Sangham .

2. Andhra Pradesh CM approves proposal for rationalization of School: Student : Teacher ratio Apr 26, 2011.

Hyderabad: The Chief Minister N. Kiran Kumar Reddy today approved a proposal for rationalization of School: Student : Teacher ratio throughout the State followed by teachers transfers and Teacher Eligibility Test (TET).

The Chief Minister reviewed in detail the activities of Primary, Secondary School Education and Intermediate Education with the Ministers and Officials at Secretariat. It is decided at the meeting that the rationalization and Teachers Transfers to be completed before June 10th and the TET is likely to be held in July 2011. The Chief Minister has also agreed for taking up limited recruitment of the vacant Urdu Teacher posts in all categories which could not be filled up due to lack of S.C., S.T., B.C., Women candidates. The limited recruitment would be held after TET results are declared. After this limited recruitment are completed, the posts still vacant and which could not be filled, shall be de-reserved for open categories. The Chief Minister said that the Mid day meals programme will be put on a green channel and funds will be released for the programme on a regular basis without any hindrance.

Primary Education: The Chief Minister asked the officials to give focus on girl child education, special strategy for enrolment and retention of girl children in women trafficking-prone mandals. He also asked the officials for time bound completion of all civil works including additional class rooms, toilet blocks, drinking water facilities etc. in the schools with quality. The Chief Minister directed the officials to appoint the sanctioned 23,401 contract staff of school education by June end without fail. He also asked the School Education Department to see that all the text books should be printed and be ready latest by 31st May.



3. Putting schooling to the test.

Indian Express, Apr 26, 2011, R Govinda.

Amendments to the Indian Constitution are not unusual, but a change in the Fundamental Rights section is a rare, momentous occasion. In August 2002, the basic character of the Constitution was amended to make free and compulsory education a fundamental right of every child. It took seven long years after that for the Parliament to adopt the Right to Education (RTE) legislation, and the law became operational little over a year ago.

Recently, the government of India released a report on the progress made. Clearly, consequential action has begun to gather pace in most states. However, very little is known about how the law takes tangible shape at the ground level, in schools and classrooms.

RTE is the only Central legislation in school education that continues to be controlled and supervised by the states. The Centre and various states have yet to agree on their respective roles, with sensitive federal questions at stake. Though many state governments have vouched for their commitment to RTE, they seem to be still gauging the level of their direct responsibility for implementing a Central Act. And without the full ownership and active interest of state governments, the law is unlikely to get implemented at all.

RTE expects every school to maintain a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:30. For this to happen, the country needs to appoint more than a million teachers in the next couple of years. Where do we find so many of them? Further, this shortage of qualified teachers is a problem mainly in eight states. As a human resource development ministry report identifies, these states not only have a high percentage of untrained teachers but also a low capacity for teacher preparation. Further, the Act demands that the teacher-pupil ratio be maintained by every school, implying that mere state-level and district-level averages will not suffice. Irrational deployment is a problem in almost all states, but it is not an easy issue to tackle, as transfers and postings are highly politicised in most states.

RTE expects that every school be equipped with certain minimum infrastructure. As the specifications are so basic, that should not create any issue. But there are simply too many government schools that currently fail to meet the benchmark, despite enormous investments made in recent years under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. This clause is also likely to pose a challenge to non-governmental organisations and small private schools which invariably function with subminimal facilities using scarce resources from charity or relatively small school fees. Can we afford to push them out altogether? What would happen to children attending these schools? Should the government provide supplementary resources? While many NGOs are agitated over this question, state governments appear barely concerned.

The Act envisages major de-centralisation of school management by mandating the constitution of a school management committee in every school with a significant representation of parents. In addition, the monitoring of the Act's implementation at the local level is vested with panchayati raj bodies. This demands high levels of involvement from parents and teachers as well as the local political leadership.

But unfortunately not much has been done to develop awareness and capabilities among teachers, headmasters and school management committee members or panchayati raj representatives. As of now, most of these people are unaware of the implications of RTE to their work. The task is staggering, with around 1.3 million schools and around 6 million teachers. There is yet no established mechanism to reach out on such a large scale within the state system. This can be done only through mass mobilisation, possibly with civil society

support. It is urgent that civil society agencies as well as the government (state and Central) engage in an exercise of re-drawing their roles in the implementation of the Act.

Despite the regulatory framework, teacher preparation in the country is in total chaos. It should be recognised that all external measures for implementing the Act come unstuck if the teacher in the classroom fails to protect the interests of the children. The Act has several specifications on what should happen in the schools and the classrooms. Though notifications have been issued by many states banning corporal punishment, no detention policy, continuous and comprehensive evaluation and so on, serious attention has not been paid to ensuring the rights of the children in the school. This should include the right of every child to be treated properly without discrimination and facilitated to learn as per the curriculum. Without protecting these rights, large assurances will lead us nowhere, and teachers are the prime actors in this regard. The country must invest more in ensuring that teachers are better prepared not only in terms of pedagogy, but also the values that must be upheld. Much has been written about the issue of 25 per cent seats for economically weaker sections in private schools. Considering that the issue concerns only around 5 per cent of the high-end private schools, this is not likely to significantly impact the implementation and the achievement of the goal of universalisation. Nevertheless, it is a crucial clause for making our schools more inclusive places. There is mounting empirical evidence on the long-term benefits of diverse classrooms. Many scholars consider inadequate financial allocations a major constraint for the implementation of the Act. It is true that the current levels of resource allocation would not suffice to effectively achieve the RTE goals. But the immediate challenge is not so much that of inadequate finances; it is about the effective use of the existing resources and monitoring of the implementation of the provisions of the Act. One should assume that with faster growth and increased availability of resources, finances will not be the real hurdle. Further, one should hope that with the Census figures indicating drastic reduction in the population growth rate, the demand for school places will begin to shrink faster, giving greater scope to focus on quality.

The RTE Act gives a five-year window to achieve all these components of the law, and one is already behind us. If we are to keep to the 2015 deadline for full implementation, we must see a far greater sense of urgency on the parts of both the Centre and the state governments.



About us

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