

# A LONG ROAD: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Education and related issues

The [National Education Policy 2020](#) announced by the Ministry of Human Resource Development sets for itself the goal of transforming the system to meet the needs of 21st Century India. In a federal system, any educational reform can be implemented only with support from the States, and the Centre has the giant task of building a consensus on the many ambitious plans. The policy, inter alia, aims to eliminate problems of pedagogy, structural inequities, access asymmetries and rampant commercialisation. The NEP 2020 is the first omnibus policy after the one issued in 1986, and it has to contend with multiple crises in the system. It is no secret that primary schools record shockingly poor literacy and numeracy outcomes, dropout levels in middle and secondary schools are significant, and the higher education system has generally failed to meet the aspirations for multi-disciplinary programmes. In structural terms, the NEP's measures to introduce early childhood education from age 3, offer school board examinations twice a year to help improve performance, move away from rote learning, raise mathematical skills for everyone, shift to a four-year undergraduate college degree system, and create a Higher Education Commission of India represent major changes. Progress on these crucially depends on the will to spend the promised 6% of GDP as public expenditure on education. The policy also says that wherever possible, the medium of instruction in schools until at least Class 5, but preferably until Class 8 and beyond, will be the home language or mother tongue or regional language. This is a long-held view, and has its merits, although in a large and diverse country where mobility is high, the student should have the option to study in the language that enables a transfer nationally. English has performed that role due to historical factors.

There are some good elements to the NEP 2020 that will generate little friction, and need only adequate resourcing. Provision of an energy-filled breakfast, in addition to the nutritious mid-day meal, to help children achieve better learning outcomes, is one. Creation of 'inclusion funds' to help socially and educationally disadvantaged children pursue education is another. Where the policy fails to show rigour, however, is on universalisation of access, both in schools and higher education; the Right to Education needs specific measures to succeed. Moreover, fee regulations exist in some States even now, but the regulatory process is unable to rein in profiteering in the form of unaccounted donations. The idea of a National Higher Education Regulatory Council as an apex control organisation is bound to be resented by States. Similarly, a national body for aptitude tests would have to convince the States of its merits. Among the many imperatives, the deadline to achieve universal literacy and numeracy by 2025 should be a top priority as a goal that will crucially determine progress at higher levels.

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