

LITERACY, NUMERACY MISSION DEADLINE PUSHED TO 2027

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A step forward: So far, the goal has simply been to ensure children finish Class 10. Picture for Representation MURALI KUMAR K

The Centre's new mission to ensure that every Class 3 child has foundational literacy and numeracy within five years will be rolled out on Monday. Although the National Education Policy had included a 2025 deadline to achieve the goal, the Centre has pushed back the target date to 2026-27, given that COVID-19 has already disrupted two academic years.

The School Education Department says no additional funding is being allocated for the National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN Bharat). Instead, money is being allocated from the flagship Samagra Shiksha scheme, which actually saw a 20% drop in its budget this year.

"The vision of NIPUN Bharat Mission is to create an enabling environment to ensure universal acquisition of foundational literacy and numeracy, so that every child achieves the desired learning competencies in reading, writing and numeracy by the end of Grade 3, by 2026-27," said an Education Ministry statement, adding that a five-tier implementation mechanism will be set up at the national, State, district, block and school levels. NIPUN Bharat is likely to emphasise goal setting and accountability for State governments, and provide guidelines for teacher training, assessment and the creation of printed resources, according to people who helped develop the mission.

"It will be funded through Samagra Shiksha itself," said a senior official of the School Education Department, confirming that there is no additional allocation being made. "Samagra Shiksha is an umbrella scheme, and this year it has been revised. According to that revision, a provision has been kept for FLN (foundational literacy and numeracy)," added the official. For 2021-22, the budget estimate for Samagra Shiksha was Rs. 31,050 crore, a 20% drop from the previous year's estimate of Rs. 38,750 crore, although the revised estimate for 2020-21 was just Rs. 27,957 crore, with poor utilisation due to COVID-19 disruptions.

Central Square Foundation, a non-governmental organisation with a focus on foundational literacy and numeracy, has provided inputs and technical support to the Centre in the development of this mission. "We estimated that achieving the goal would cost about Rs. 500 per child per year, amounting to an annual cost of about Rs. 2,200-2,300 crore nationwide," said CSF's co-managing director Bikkrama Daulet Singh.

Rukmini Banerji, CEO of the Pratham Education Foundation, also provided feedback on the Centre's draft plan. She emphasised that money would not be the decisive factor, but rather a mindset change.

"So far, the goal has simply been to enrol children in school, and then to ensure that they finish Class 10. This mission specifies stage-wise learning goals to ensure that students are acquiring the necessary building blocks," she said.

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