

# **Public Spending on School education in Delhi: The Gaps that Covid-19 Highlights**

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## Executive Summary

This report critically analyses the gaps in the public financing of school education in Delhi. While the Covid-19 pandemic is the entry point, it looks at the structural issues of public provisioning of school education, as the pandemic brings into relief these pre-existing gaps. The issues are discussed within specific contexts of the lived reality of the stakeholders, rather than only as quantitative analysis of budgets. In addition to the macro budgetary perspective, the analysis integrates issues that emerged from the field, narrated through the experiences of government school teachers. The voices of teachers describe the experiences and problems in the design and implementation of the policies and programmes and their financing. There needs to be a deliberative element in policy making and the view from below has an important role to play. The key questions raised in this study are: What were the pre-existing gaps in school education? What happened to school education expenditure and its components during the pandemic? How well did the State protect the education of the marginalised children? And, most important, what is the way forward?

### Background

Delhi with one of the highest per capita incomes in the country is imagined as a prosperous and developed state. However, the headline picture hides many uneasy details. A closer look reveals the various fault lines of Delhi's development. The growth of Delhi as a metropolitan city has been marked by unequal access to basic services. There is an outward spatial expansion and growing density of population in peripheral zones of the city. As scholars studying the various "cities" of Delhi note, "it is a deeply divided city marked by layers of exclusion". Less than a quarter of the population in Delhi live in "planned colonies". The less privileged areas of the city where the majority of the working class live are poorly serviced. Access to these basic services is characterised by a "differentiated citizenship", hampering the development of even the most basic capabilities. Spatial location, intersecting with socio-economic background, hence, influences access to school education for Delhi's children. A substantial part of the demand for schooling in these urban fringe areas in the last twenty years is being met by the low-fee private schools (LFPSs), the majority of these being unrecognised schools. A lot of the demand for LFPS is essentially a market response to excess demand for well-functioning government schools (GSs). *Amongst government schools, often the situation of schools that service the poor are the worst. The school system has reproduced the inequalities and hierarchies of the existing social structure.* 75% of those possessing higher education degrees in Delhi belong to the general category. SCs and Muslims constitute 27% and 12% of the total population in Delhi, but their share of those with higher education qualifications is only 12% and 4%, respectively.

### Public Financing of school education in Delhi

As a proportion of GSDP, Delhi's education budget is smaller than the educationally advanced states of India. Measured against its revenue potential/ income, the public spending on education is comparatively less. Delhi spends about 1.4% of GSDP on education (1.3% on school education) (2018-19) compared to 2.6% in Kerala and 2.3% in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra for the 2015-20 period. Moreover, these Southern states have maintained a high level of spending across several decades. The widespread perception of high levels of public spending on education in Delhi is overstated and incorrect.

The inadequacy of present levels of public spending on school education in Delhi can be more accurately established when measured against normative standards. Public finances on school education are in no way adequate vis-a-vis the required (normative) expenditure. There are

large pre-existing gaps in resources. As per official statistics, there are more than 17,000 vacancies in teaching positions in government schools (GSs) in Delhi (2020-1). In teacher training institutions and administration, against sanctioned academic posts, many are unfilled.

The greatest shortfalls in Delhi are in the number of government schools. A large proportion of government schools (GSs) face shortages of classrooms. 89% of the Directorate of Education schools and 70% of MCD schools need additional classrooms. According to our estimate (2019-20), more than 100% expansion in capacity in public schooling is necessary to meet the shortage of public schools in Delhi. 632 composite (K-12) GSs and 275 primary GSs, separately, need to be established, besides the addition of classrooms to existing schools. A proper supply response entails a very substantial addition to the existing number of GSs and the recruitment of teachers. It requires additional investments of up to 0.71% of GSDP of Delhi, i.e., a 50% increase on the present level to cover both infrastructure and teacher gaps.

The gaps in resources underline a deeply unequal structure of school education for the poor and marginalized children, a system that was already overwhelmed and was relying heavily on the expansion of the private sector, especially low-fee private schools, to offload the growing pressure of enrolment. These gaps in financing increased with the pandemic as both the pressure of enrolments in government schools rose (15.4% rise in enrolment between 2019-20 and 2021-2) and the need for individual attention, remedial sessions and therefore smaller cohorts of learners became necessary. Simultaneously, the decline in expenditure, as discussed below, pushed up the financing gaps.

### **The decline in expenditure during the pandemic**

The growth in expenditure on school education in the two to three years before the pandemic varied from year to year but showed a rising trend. It had risen by a very moderate 6% between 2017-18 and 2018-19, and by another 10.3% between 2018-19 and 2019-20 (in nominal terms). The higher growth in expenditure between 2018-19 and 2019-20 came from the higher growth in capital expenditure, which jumped up by 2.3 times in a year. It led to a rise in the share of capital expenditure in overall expenditure on education to 10.6% in 2019-20, an acknowledgment of the massive shortage in capacity. The spurt in capital expenditure needed to be sustained for expansion of capacity of the public school system.

The pandemic brought a sharp dip in overall public expenditure on school education, which declined by 12% in 2020-1, with huge cutbacks in centrally sponsored schemes as well as state schemes. It affected the general schemes as well as the schemes targeting the marginalised sections. Scheduled component plan heads on education and scholarships for the marginalised witnessed a severe squeeze in expenditure. The impetus on capital expenditure, which is extremely crucial for Delhi, was lost. Faced with a fiscal squeeze, governments prioritised salary payments over other expenditures.

Like the union budget, education was treated as a residual and an adjusting sector in Delhi government's budget. New programmes on school education announced during the pandemic (2021-2 budget) turned a blind eye to the emergency.

### **Delhi Education Budget: A closer look**

Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SMSA), the main CSS with a mandate for universalisation of education, has been supply-constrained over the years. Like most other states, the approved budget for SMSA in Delhi is only a fraction of what is proposed by GNCTD, indicating the supply-constrained nature of school financing. SMSA saw drastic cuts, with the expenditure in 2020-1 standing at only 58% of the expenditure in 2019-20. It adds to the pre-existing inadequacy of funding plaguing SMSA. One of the important interventions under SMSA, particularly relevant in the context of the pandemic is the special training centres (STCs) for

out of school children (OSC). It addresses the imminent need to re-enrol children in schools. Though there are no official statistics yet, it is not difficult to predict that the OSC numbers are likely to rise sharply with the pandemic. The STCs, most of which are housed in the existing GSs, provide a space for learning and catching up within the school. During field visits, we found that the absorption of OSC is more probable where STCs are running. Several localities couldn't get an STC, however, due to the lack of physical space and extra classrooms in government schools even though there is an acute need. It is of concern that the approved budget for STCs went down, rather than going up in 2020-1. Whereas the unit cost remains at a paltry Rs 6,000 per child, the number of OSC was estimated at a level lower in 2021-2 than two years back (PAB, SMSA, 2021-2). Another intervention, skill training for OSC received an allocation of only Rs10 lakhs under SMSA. Incomplete coverage, low unit costs and underfunding important interventions are major drawbacks of SMSA, which in turn are a fallout of low overall allocations.

Accompanying the shortfalls in allocations, there are also unutilised balances, particularly in the secondary education budget of SMSA.

Teachers shared their problems related to the flow of funds for SMSA (and other money flows), even as the scheme provided valuable liquidity to schools for expenditure under various heads. "Schools cannot use the money as per their needs", a problem that has persisted through several rounds of restructuring of the programme. Second, the different channels of fund flow to the schools mean separate accounting and reporting formats which are administratively challenging, particularly so, when schools often have no extra hands for administrative tasks. The burden of administrative work has gone up continuously over the years, as every teacher without exception complains. Third, there are issues of predictability in fund flows.

A significant point, often missing from the policy discussions, is the absence of school mapping in Delhi, a responsibility that falls under SMSA. SMSA doesn't recognise the shortage of schools in Delhi, a crucial blind spot in policymaking.

Mid-day meal (MDM), another crucial entitlement, has suffered from the same under-allocation problem as witnessed for SMSA. There is a substantial difference between the proposed and actual budget over the years. The GNCTD has been unable to implement its own budgetary announcements of expansion of MDM made a few years back, which can be attributed to the same under allocation of budgets. Moreover, the distribution of MDM since the first lockdown – as told by the teachers and experienced by the students – has been irregular and delayed. It needs to be stressed that there has not been any social audit of MDM in any of the districts ever.

Grant-in-aid from the state government is the major source of funding for the local body schools. There was a steep decline in grant-in-aid to local body schools in the state budget in 2020-1, amidst an already sliding trend over the years. The contract teachers in MCD schools were laid off in 2020-1 to squeeze the wage bill. The livelihoods of a large body of teachers were impacted, as a result. Besides this pandemic-induced measure, the problem of timely payment of salaries for MCD teachers is an old one. It may be noted that in per-student terms, the average expenditure by the GNCTD on students of local body schools is only Rs 21,150.<sup>2</sup> Not only is it nowhere comparable to the expenditure per student in Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs), but it is also lower than the per child cost that the DoE announces for reimbursement to private schools.

Scholarships for the marginalised groups are the main arm of the compensatory policies in Delhi. Several state scholarship schemes faced severe cutbacks in spending in 2020-1; the

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<sup>2</sup> Per student assistance to local bodies for school education (including GIA for MDM) calculated for 2018-19.

overall allocation on scholarships in 2020-1 was about 10% of the 2019-20 level. The contraction is visible also from the beneficiary data. Several of the scholarship schemes had faced a squeeze in expenditure before the pandemic. Alongside the contractionary tendencies, there is a shift underway towards reallocation of budgets across scholarship schemes, in recent years. It marks a movement away from broad-based scholarships for marginalised communities in favour of financing private coaching for meritorious students, a policy shift of questionable value.

Problems of exclusions emerge from the macro data and the field data about scholarships. The National Scholarship Portal (NSP) data on scholarships presents a startling picture of the meagre numbers who apply and the small percentage of scholarship applications (mainly CSS) that are verified. The NSP portal is opaque and the school is not directly involved, neither in application/ nor in disbursement, teachers noted. The application process for scholarships is cumbersome, time taking and involves a lot of documents. An obvious gap is the lack of accessible grievance redressal mechanisms or information about the same if it exists. The implication is that the system of scholarships has become more centralised and remote, and money flows erratic from the student's point of view.

A related set of experiences of delays in payments, non-payment, irregular payments and exclusions emerged in the context of entitlements under RTE, such as school uniforms. Again, parents have no recourse to any grievance redress mechanism since the nearest point of contact - the school - is bypassed. The school administration cannot help. In addition, the shift towards full-scale DBT has happened before full coverage of the population through Aadhar, banking services, and Aadhar-linked bank accounts. For instance, as per official data, around 25% of the students enrolled in government schools in Delhi did not have an Aadhar card. Top-down administrative changes in the delivery mechanisms without adequate preparation and consideration of ground reality have led to a system characterised by significant exclusions.

To sum up, the broad conclusions are the following: (i) as the UNESCO's early warning sounded, expenditure compression was adopted across a whole set of low-income countries and Delhi's experience was no exception. General schemes and schemes for the marginalised communities witnessed contraction in expenditure. Contractual teachers were laid off to reduce the wage bill. The adverse shock rippled through a system, where the spending levels were significantly below the requisite levels to begin with. (ii) Financing across all dimensions of school education programs has been supply-constrained over the years. Low/ under-allocations are manifest in unreasonably low unit costs of expenditure heads and incomplete coverage. It is manifest in the large vacancies in teaching positions. It is also manifest in the governments turning a blind eye to certain dark spots, such as school mapping exercises. As a result, the massive shortage of capacity in GSs in Delhi is pushed under the carpet. It is manifest in the state being unable to implement its own budgetary announcements like the expansion of the mid-day meal scheme. It is manifest in huge gaps between the demand for scholarships and the supply of scholarships. (iii) Even as the dominant problem remains the supply-constrained nature of financing, under-utilisation of resources and ineffective delivery of schemes leaves scope for improvement, within the existing expenditure frontier. The distribution of mid-day meals during the pandemic left a lot to be desired. In cash transfer schemes, top-down administrative changes in the delivery mechanisms without adequate preparation and consideration of ground reality have led to significant exclusions.

Strengthening of the public finances towards greater adequacy, effectiveness and equity of expenditure is crucial. This would allow the public system to cope with the present shocks and develop resilience for adverse shocks in the future. To build back better, a range of steps are proposed.



## Key recommendations

- (1) A central recommendation is to adopt and implement a medium-term plan for the expansion of the supply of public schools in Delhi. This should be based on an assessment of needs through school mapping. Well-defined time-bound targets for infrastructure creation and recruitment of teacher and non-teaching staff should be part of the plan. It would involve a substantial step up in public investment, and not incremental changes in budgets.
- (2) For resource planning and financing there is a need to recognise urban fringe areas in Delhi as a special category and provide more resources to government schools (GSs) in these areas. Since spatiality and socio-economic marginalisation intersect to a large extent, this would translate to more resources for schools with a substantial presence of marginalised groups and create better teaching-learning opportunities for them.
- (3) For a significant section of children - the numbers yet unknown - continuation of schooling is endangered. It is important to (i) examine and recognise the true extent of out-of-school children (OSC); (ii) track these children, with the help of the community, schools and NGOs; (iii) ensure special training of OSC through an expansion and strengthening of STCs, among other things; (iv) introduce incentives for retention, so that the risks of dropout may be minimized. A substantial chunk who are on the brink of drop-out need special attention "*some students have lost complete touch with the school,*" said teachers. Our estimates suggest that a significant 30% of students on average will be those without any contact, even perfunctory, with the curriculum. There is a need for a plan to retain them, along with sound practices for coping with the various losses suffered, academically and otherwise. This would be dependent on adequate resources, to a large extent.
- (4) There is a need for regular social audits of the MDM scheme and this should be implemented at the earliest. There is also a need to enhance allocations on MDM for its expansion and enrichment as per the government's (yet to be implemented) budgetary announcements of 2017-18.
- (5) Allocations on scholarships for marginalised groups need to be demand-based since these are closely linked to basic human rights. It requires a substantial step up in allocations on scholarships both for CSSs and state schemes. Reallocation of budgets away from broad-based scholarships for marginalised communities, as part of recent policy changes, should be reconsidered. With the worsening of financial conditions, especially at the bottom, there is a crucial need for broadening the scholarship net to more students. The pending scholarship money, accumulated during the pandemic and otherwise, should be released at the earliest.

Besides, the gaps in processes in the distribution of scholarships should be addressed so that these schemes are inclusive and benefit the maximum number of students. Teachers have responded to the difficulties faced in scholarship schemes through a well-drafted set of recommendations. (i) There is a need for dissemination of information, training, and orientation to overcome the lack of information about scholarships among teachers and parents. (ii) The government should ease the condition for applying and provide the needed support by setting up a help desk and having additional staff in schools. Applications both offline and online via the PMS portal should be allowed. (iii) There is a need to institute a grievance redressal mechanism and conduct regular evaluations, internal and independent so that the schemes can become more effective and have elements of the bottom-up approach. The overall point is that local conditions should be reflected in the design of expenditure policies.

- (6) Several hurdles were identified around the working of DBT that need solutions. The government should advise the banks to open zero-balance accounts and ensure a non-discriminatory attitude towards students' accounts. An alternative of cash for those without bank accounts should be allowed. A real-time digital interface with each student's details in terms of benefits due and benefits received, scheme-wise, should be available to schools. The problems, such as non-linking of Aadhar, or back-end issues, if any, should be reflected in the portal. A logical solution to many of the problems of accessing scholarships and entitlements would also be to appoint a finance manager or officer for (large) schools (or a cluster of small schools). They can be responsible for (1) providing the necessary information and creating awareness on the various benefits dues, among students and parents (ii) organising support through help desks for application and documentation in case of scholarships; and (iii) acting as the window for grievance redressal, when money is delayed/ not received. Complaints can be formally lodged. The need for a dedicated staff member for this work is crucial if all students are to receive the benefits that are due to them. This would take care of many problems of arm's length method of DBT.
- (7) The primary schools run by local bodies are the base of the schooling system and need assured and adequate resources. All too often the running of these schools has been the victim of an unpleasant political slugfest between the different levels of government. Specifically, an independent Court-appointed committee to investigate the problems of regular payment of salaries to MCD school teachers can be set up.
- (8) The issue of teachers' school time and teachers' control over that time from the perspective of professional autonomy needs serious rethinking. As a senior vice-principal teacher shared *"I am asking my teachers, what preparation are you doing for the next class? What can you do with the child? We are not post offices where we get the worksheets and pass them onto the children."* There is a need to consciously increase the effective teaching time by reducing the numerous non-essential elements that are consuming the teaching-learning space, as suggested by the teachers and the independent evaluation commissioned by the GNCTD. Among other things, resources are needed to reduce the administrative workload on teachers, by appointing more non-teaching staff.

### **How can additional resource requirements be financed?**

The additional financial requirements are steep, but imminently doable, especially if the three levels of government join hands in the process. To reverse the growing financing gap, Delhi must raise taxes – both state and local government taxes. GNCTD must also seek from the Centre: (i) its rightful share in the divisible pool of central taxes; (ii) cooperation on the land issue as the DDA is the major land-owning agency in Delhi and land is an important factor in the expansion of schools; (iii) proper implementation of the CSSs – without the Centre slashing the state proposals - and the state, in turn, utilising the resources well.

# Public Spending on School education in Delhi:

## The Gaps that Covid-19 Highlights

### I. Introduction

Across the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a damaging impact on people's health and well-being, education and learning, livelihood, and the economy, affecting especially the most marginalized and vulnerable groups. Reports indicate that nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries, or 94% of the world's student population, were affected by school closures at the peak of the crisis.<sup>3</sup> India, a low-middle income country with a massive school-age population, went through **the fourth longest school closure spanning more than 500 days, directly affecting learners.**<sup>4</sup> **The crisis is widening the pre-existing education disparities by reducing the opportunities for poor and marginalised children.** The pandemic's economic impact alone would cause many more children to drop out of school. The impact extends far beyond learning. Closures of educational institutions hamper the provision of essential services to children and communities, including access to nutritious food, affect the ability of many parents to work, and increase the risks of violence against women and girls. It is estimated that for the first time since its conception, the Human Development Index, of which the education dimension accounts for a third, will show a striking decline.<sup>5</sup>

**State response to the pandemic has played an important role in the way people have experienced and coped with it.** International comparisons show for most high-income countries additional financing for education has been provided.<sup>6</sup> There has also been increased government support to households through conditional cash transfers and scholarships. Countries with high human development indicators have been able to limit the amount of time when schools were closed compared to other countries of the Global South.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, the financing of education could face major challenges, exacerbating massive pre-COVID-19 education funding gaps in low-income countries. As per UNESCO (2020) estimates, the annual funding gap to meet the SDG-4 to ensure inclusive and quality education for all by 2030 in low and lower-middle-income countries stood at US\$148 billion annually projected in 2020 (pre-Covid). This financing gap has gone up significantly. By the second quarter of 2020, estimates were suggesting that the financing gap for low-income countries and lower-middle-income countries could increase by up to one-third. With nearly two years of disruption in schooling, the financing gap would have risen by a much larger extent.

An important message from UNESCO's policy paper is that investing now in remedial and re-enrolment programs could reduce additional costs by as much as 75%. **Taking early action could help to prevent the worst outcomes from emerging.**<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> UN, 2020

<sup>4</sup> See UNESCO (2021)

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO (2020)

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank (2020).

<sup>7</sup> For instance, during the second quarter of 2020, 86% of children in primary education have been effectively out of school in countries with low human development – compared with just 20% in countries with very high human development United Nations (2020).

<sup>8</sup> The revised estimate in UNESCO (2020) is based on cost escalation on four alleviation strategies: (i) remediation to address the laws of learning especially for disadvantaged students who were more likely to lack the means to follow classes from a distance or to have an appropriate learning environment at home; (ii) re-enrolment strategies consisting of national campaigns and incentive targeted at encouraging marginalised students to return to school and higher more public school teachers to observe students leaving private schools while keeping the Pupil teacher

## Outline of the Report

This report looks at trends and patterns in budgetary spending on school education in the state of Delhi in terms of the systemic issues that the public education system is facing and the state's response to the unparalleled education disruption in the wake of Covid-19.

While the Covid-19 pandemic is the entry point, it looks at the structural issues of public provisioning of school education, as the pandemic brings into relief these pre-existing gaps. The issues are discussed within specific contexts of the lived reality of the stakeholders, rather than only as quantitative analysis of budgets. In addition to the macro budgetary perspective, the analysis integrates issues that emerged from the field, narrated through the experiences of government school teachers, students and members of civil society. These voices describe the experiences and problems in the design and implementation of the policies and programmes and their financing. There needs to be a deliberative element in policy making and the view from below has an essential role to play. Field-based observations may interrogate the macro narratives and the overall budgetary trend, which are important reasons to integrate the field component and the view from the bottom.

The key questions raised are: *What were the pre-existing gaps? What happened to school education expenditure and its components during the pandemic? How well did the state protect the education of the marginalised children? How well were the existing systems able to adapt to the new conditions? And, finally, what is the way forward?*

Two kinds of policies/ schemes - generic schemes (tied to the objective of equality of opportunity for all) and those that cater to specific groups to compensate for their disadvantages and discriminations, past and present, constitute the framework of analysis. The focus is on issues of adequacy, equity and effectiveness of expenditures.

Three essential aspects of the analysis involve: (i) review of budgetary allocations and other macro-data/ research; (ii) relevant experiences of teachers and other respondents/ own observations from the field/ data from teacher surveys; and (iii) recommended action points. The field evidence is presented in the form of case studies, interspersed with discussions on the budget for education and connecting to it. Fieldwork in Delhi is done through physical visits, field observations, and some telephonic conversations.<sup>9</sup>

The major domains of focus here are: teachers, infrastructure and schools; out-of-school children; scholarships and inclusion; mid-day meal and its implementation during the pandemic; grant in aid to local bodies; digital infrastructure; entitlements, DBT and fund flows, etc. A caveat is in order here. We do not claim that the analysis presented here cover all the relevant issues, or that the issues raised here as the only valid selection possible. Many important areas have not been covered such as the education of special needs children, who are particularly affected by the pandemic, or the crucial sector of teacher training. The workings of the SMC as a governance instrument on the one hand and a tool of democratic participation on the other have not been studied. The issue of learning gaps has only been touched upon. We invite more rigorous treatment of the issues flagged in this research, in addition to many areas that were left out. Also, the emphasis on gaps is not to undermine some of the improvements that are taking place, but to draw attention to the areas that need the right kind of policy focus.

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ratio constant; (iii) second chance education solutions for those who may not return to school; and (iv) new infrastructure and equipment in schools and classrooms to be able to function in line with Public Health protocols.

<sup>9</sup> Sample schools are drawn across different school districts of Delhi, and include both MCD and DoE schools (Appendix Table A1). The field evidence also draws on the interviews and surveys done for a recently concluded study (Bose et al, 2021b).

This report is organised as follows. Section II provides a background on the school education sector in Delhi focusing on its structural aspects. Public spending on education is discussed in section III, first presenting a broad picture before going into the period of the pandemic. Section IV zooms in on specific schemes and issues integral to children’s right to education (RTE) and their overall wellbeing. Section V looks at the changes in the scholarship schemes, an essential part of the compensatory policies of the state and crucial for the continuation of education of students from marginalised sections. The ecosystem of payments has witnessed major shifts in the last decade. We explore direct benefit transfers and its attendant challenges as articulated by the stakeholders in Section VI. The last section (VII) reiterates the different aspects of educational financing discussed here, in terms of a set of actionable agendas.

## II. Status of school education in Delhi: Structural bottlenecks to be addressed

Delhi with one of the highest per capita incomes in the country is imagined as a prosperous and developed state compared to the much lower economic and social indicators of the people of Bihar.<sup>10</sup> However, the headline picture hides many uneasy details. A closer look reveals the various fault lines of Delhi’s development.

### Unequal Structure of schooling and outcomes

The growth of Delhi as a metropolitan city has been marked by unequal access to basic services. There is an outward spatial expansion and growing density of population in peripheral zones of the city. As scholars studying the various “cities” of Delhi note, “it is a deeply divided city marked by layers of exclusion”.<sup>11</sup> Less than a quarter of the population in Delhi live in “planned colonies (Table 1). The less privileged areas of the city where the majority of the working class live are poorly serviced. Access to these basic services is characterised by a “differentiated citizenship”, hampering the development of even the most basic capabilities.<sup>12</sup> **A substantial part of the demand for schooling in these urban fringe areas in the last twenty years is being met by the low-fee private schools (LFPSs), the majority of these being unrecognised schools.** A lot of the demand for LFPS is essentially a market response to excess demand for well-functioning government schools (GSs).<sup>13</sup> Spatial location, intersecting with socio-economic background, hence, influences access to school education for Delhi’s children.

**Amongst government schools, often the situation of schools that service the poor are the worst.**<sup>14</sup> A study on the conditions of education of the five most deprived communities of children in Delhi – de-notified and nomadic tribal children, Muslim children, children of waste pickers, construction workers, and sewage workers – finds that all five communities of children studied in extremely congested schools with high pupil-teacher ratios (PTR), far above the norms set under the RTE Act.<sup>15</sup> The implications are inadequate numbers of teachers, teachers who are unable to give adequate attention to each child, especially many of these children who are weaker in their studies as first-generation learners, and teachers who struggle to maintain discipline in classes so that children can learn. Other implications are the lack of adequate classroom space and furniture to cater to a large number of children in the schools. While it would be fallacious to imagine that adherence to these norms alone can bring about satisfactory

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<sup>10</sup> For the companion report covering union finances and public financing of school education in Bihar, refer to Bose and Sharma (2022).

<sup>11</sup> CPR, 2015: p.1

<sup>12</sup> Heller and Mukhopadhyay, 2015

<sup>13</sup> See Bose et al (2020b)

<sup>14</sup> See Banerji, 2000; De et al, 2005; Menon, 2017. Also, see Bose et al (2023) for a review of the literature and critical analysis of the policies determining supply of GSs in Delhi.

<sup>15</sup> Mangubhai (2013)

education for these learners facing multiple challenges and discriminatory behaviour, these are no doubt necessary minimum conditions.

**Table 1: Different Settlement Types in Delhi**

Settlement Type	Estimated Population (2000) in Lakhs	Percentage of total Estimated Population %
Clusters	20.72	14.8
Slum Designated Areas	26.64	19.1
Unauthorised Colonies	7.40	5.3
Resettlement Colonies	17.76	12.7
Regularised-Unauthorised Colonies	17.76	12.7
Rural Village	7.40	5.3
Urban Village	8.88	6.4
Planned Colonies	33.08	23.7
Total	139.64	100

Source: DUEIIP (2001) cited in Categorisation of Settlement in Delhi, May 2015, Cities of Delhi (citiesofdelhi.cprindia.org)

Table 2 presents the dropout rates for the two most vulnerable social groups, SCs and Muslims in Delhi. Drop-out rates at the secondary and senior-secondary levels are very high for both these communities (17% and 24.6% for Scheduled Castes and Muslim communities, respectively, compared to 14.94% for all children in the secondary classes).

**Table 2: Dropout Rates among school students in Delhi**

	Secondary	Higher Secondary
Scheduled Castes	17.0%	14.7%
Muslims	24.6%	15.2%

Source: SSA, PAB Minutes Delhi, 2020-1, p 7.

75% of those possessing higher education degrees in Delhi belong to the general category.<sup>16</sup> SCs and Muslims constituted 27% and 12% of the total population in Delhi, but their share of those with higher education qualifications was only 12% and 4%, respectively.<sup>17</sup> **The school system has reproduced the inequalities and hierarchies of the existing social structure.**

The GSs in Delhi are of two kinds. Those that are managed by the local bodies or the third tier, and those that are managed by the state government (GNCTD). The former would be referred to as Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) schools and the latter as Directorate of Education (DoE) schools.<sup>18</sup> The schooling structure of Delhi comprises 1670 MCD primary schools and 1027 DoE schools some of which are composite, whereas the rest extend from Class 6<sup>th</sup> onwards (UDISE, 2020-1). A large proportion of GSs operate in shifts, which implies that the number of GSs would be lesser if school sites are considered. More than half of all the GSs are running in shifts.<sup>19</sup> Two-third of the government school enrolment is in schools that operate in shifts. Among GSs, there are a small number of well-endowed GSs (Rajkiya Pratibha Vikas Vidyalaya, RPVVs and School of excellence, SoEs), and a large number of ordinary GSs, a policy-determined division. In 2014-15, 81% of children attending GSs belonged to the two

<sup>16</sup> Government of NCT of Delhi, 2013

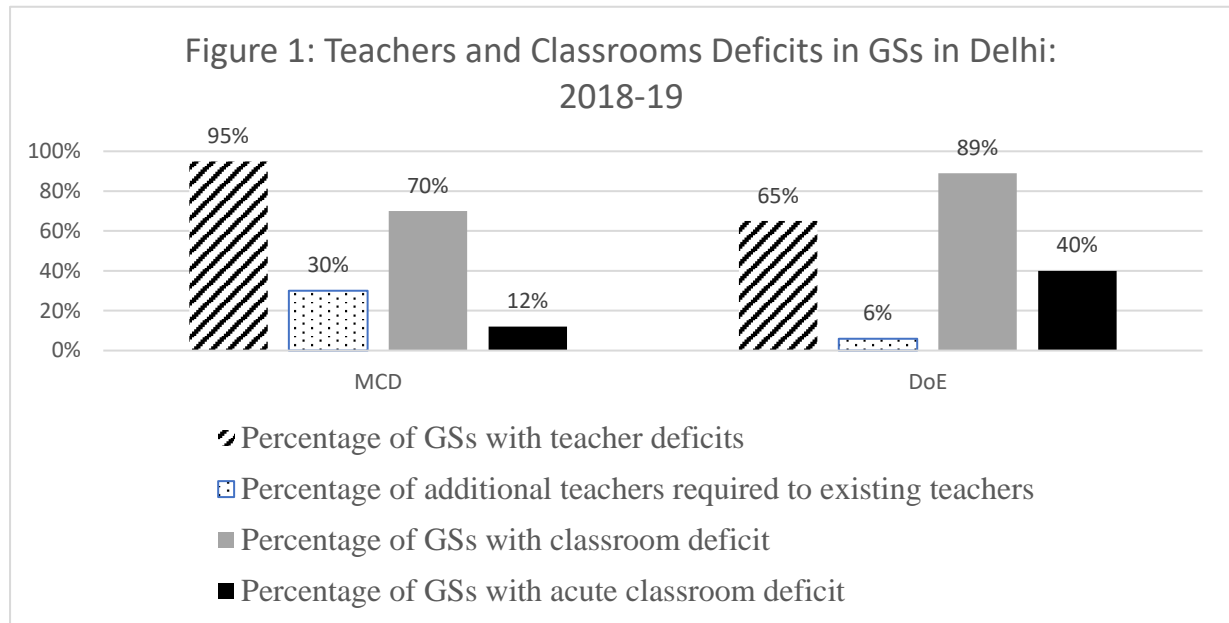
<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Apart from MCD, there are also a small number of schools run by other municipal corporations New Delhi Municipal Corporation and Delhi Cantonment Board.

<sup>19</sup> UDISE, 2011-12. This data is no longer reported correctly for Delhi, in subsequent UDISE rounds.

lowest quintiles of households in Delhi, reflecting the deep-rooted phenomenon of social streaming.<sup>20</sup>

In the private sector, there are 253 private aided schools and 2666 private (recognised) schools. The large underbelly of unrecognised schools that operate in the informal sector does not figure in the official statistics. It is estimated that 50% of children studying in private schools in Delhi, study in LFPSs of some kind, most of which are outside the regulatory purview.<sup>21</sup> Delhi's schooling structure is thus characterised by high levels of fragmentation and privatisation.



Source: Ghosh and Bose (2022) Calculations are based on UDISE, 2018-19.

Note: \* Existing teachers include contract teachers.

Estimates of deficit teachers are calculated using a required PTR norm of 35:1 *for each grade in each school* (30:1 for pre-primary). That is, there should be one teacher for every grade and more than one section if the enrolment exceeds 35 in a particular grade. This is a more desirable norm than the minimal PTR norm of the RTE Act. Schools with a shortfall of at least 7 classrooms for MCD schools and 15 classrooms for DoE schools are considered schools with acute deficits.

**There are shortages of teachers, even after including guest teachers. 95% MCD schools and 65% of DoE schools have shortages of teachers, using some reasonable norms** (Figure 1). The extent of the teacher gap is more for MCD schools, which require 30% more teachers. Contractualisation is high. 36% of existing teachers in DOE schools and 13% in MCD schools are contract teachers, working temporarily against vacancies. **As per PAB, SMSA (2020-1) there are more than 17,000 vacancies in teacher positions in GSs in Delhi.** In teacher training institutions, against 208 sanctioned academic posts in DIETs and DRC, 132 are filled (37% vacancy). For SCERT, against a sanctioned strength of 44, only 11 academic posts are filled (75.6% vacancy). During our interactions with MCD officials, we found large gaps in administrative strength at the school level and system level (School inspectors, District Education officers, etc) in the Education department of the MCD.<sup>22</sup> The positions of many school principals are also lying vacant.

<sup>20</sup> See Bose et al (2020b)

<sup>21</sup> See Bose et al (2020b) and Bose et al (2021)

<sup>22</sup> As narrated by officials, after the trifurcation of MCD in 2012, there hasn't been adequate recruitment of personnel; the existing strength was spread thinly across the MCDs, and many among these positions are today lying vacant as the concerned person retired.

Turning to infrastructure deficits, a large proportion of GSs have shortages of classrooms. **89% of the DoE schools and 70% of MCD schools need additional classrooms (Figure 1). The extent of the deficit is more in the DoE schools, with 40% having acute deficits.** The figure is 12% for MCD schools. As the CAG (2017) notes, these deficits are indicative of poor planning and execution of projects resulting in the failure of the government to ensure requisite infrastructure and to maintain standard student- classroom ratio (SCR) in schools.

### **Shortages of Schools: Recent Estimates**

While Delhi has a high density of primary and upper primary schools per unit area, the number of schools per 1000 child population is one of the lowest in India. It represents the relative shortage of primary and upper primary schools in the city.<sup>23</sup> **In the absence of school mapping,<sup>24</sup> the extent of the deficit is pushed under the carpet.** A recent estimation of the excess demand for GSs presents startling figures on the magnitude of the deficit (Box 1). The deficit cuts across levels - from pre-primary, primary to post-primary levels.

#### **Box 1: More than 100% expansion in capacity in GSs Required (2019-20)**

Ghosh and Bose (2022) underline the very substantial expansions and investments necessary to accommodate the shortage of supply for GSs in Delhi. Their detailed empirical estimation takes into account various sources of excess demand for expansion from: (i) within the existing GSs that are facing supply shortages, often of an acute variety; (ii) arising from children now attending low-fee private schools (LFPSs) but given the choice of a reasonably well-functional “ordinary” GS will be willing to switch, and, (iii) from children in the relevant age group who are out of school. Population growth over the next five years, representative of future demand, is factored in.

**The authors estimate that the expansion required is a mammoth doubling of existing capacities in GSs (106% increase on existing capacity).** Whereas a portion of this demand could be met through building additional classrooms either by adding a floor or by horizontally extending present buildings, **a proper supply response entails a very substantial addition to the existing number of GSs. 632 composite (K-12) GSs and 275 primary GSs separately need to be established, based on estimated demand.**

*The (additional) financial requirement equivalent as a proportion of GSDP of Delhi, 2019-20, is 0.71%. It comprises annualised capital cost and recurrent cost in the ratio of 56:44. The present level of public expenditure on education, school, and higher education together, is 1.37% of GSDP for Delhi (2019-20). It means an increase in expenditure on education by more than 50% of the existing levels; i.e., a very significant push in public expenditure is necessary for meeting the excess demand for public schooling in Delhi, over the medium term. It must be reiterated here that the returns of a well-functional public education system in terms of private and public benefit would far outweigh the budgetary costs of such investments.*

For several decades in Delhi, the shortage of government schools has been met by running schools in shifts and adding more buildings to existing schools. The latter has created a phenomenon described as the slumming of schools, where the existing schools as they are built repeatedly become congested, and yet shortages persist. GSs in urban fringe areas especially where the working-class lives often have these characteristics. The other way in which the excess demand is being met is through unofficially allowing the informal sector to fill the

<sup>23</sup> GNCTD, 2013: p.81.

<sup>24</sup> This was an audit observation made by the CAG (2017) and the GNCTD admitted that there has been no school mapping.



demand-supply gap. The pandemic has brought into relief this demand-supply gap sharply (Box 2).

**Box 2: “When children start coming, where will they sit?”**

It is a common apprehension running through Principals of GSs. As many more children unable to afford the fees in LFPSs enrolled in the existing GSs, an acute shortage of school infrastructure is being felt. The following accounts from GSs in a typical urban fringe area of South East district provide a sense of the supply bottlenecks/ shortages of basic facilities.

In class 5 of the government primary school (boys), there are six sections and more than 350 children. As the school administration and teachers explained, *“We have six rooms in all for class 5, so each class has about 60 children. There is no way we can expand into another section. The department (MCD) says this year we have no funds and they are somehow paying the salaries. Last year, we were hearing that rooms have been sanctioned. We need 10 rooms in addition. We don’t have a staff room either. This is the office room cum staff room. It disturbs the school’s work, as everyone walks into the office.”*

What complicates the picture is the presence of parallel actors whom the government has roped in “to improve the GSs”. Like this MCD school, a significant proportion of MCD schools rely heavily on investments by NGOs in furniture, whitewashing/ face lifting of buildings, NGO-appointed teachers, volunteers, security guards, and extra-cleaning staff. While it eases the resource constraint somewhat, it creates a position of subordination for the school administration, which teachers generally do not like, but have no choice about. *“The NGO has bought furniture, colourful plastic chairs with individual sitting, and discarded the benches. Not more than 40 children can sit in a classroom now. Earlier what we used to do is that under such circumstances, we would set aside the benches and put a dari, but that cannot be done anymore.”*

RTE compliance is a distant dream under such supply conditions.

The government primary school (Girls) runs from the same premises during the morning shift and has a higher student strength than the boy’s shift. It has had a teacher-in-charge acting as Principal for several years now. In-charge is like a teacher with additional responsibilities. No principal is willing to continue in this school, we were told. As the school size increases, administrative challenges increase. In the past, when the department sent someone as Principal, they managed a transfer to a smaller school with lower student strength. Managing a large staff along with myriad other administrative responsibilities is an onerous responsibility. It becomes more so when the necessities of functional computers, printers, and support staff are absent. As schools across the country are pushed towards consolidation and mergers, the experience of these large GSs in Delhi is worth learning from.

The Higher Secondary school (6-12<sup>th</sup>) under DoE, about 100 metres apart, has an even higher pressure of enrolments. Amrita is a student of the girl’s shift in this school. After passing from MCD primary school (girls) she now studies in Grade 8 with 84 other girls in her section. She was part of the Nistha cohort (the low achiever group as per Chunauti), before the pandemic.<sup>25</sup> With the huge class-size in both schools Amrita attended, individual attention is a fantasy. She hardly speaks during class. In school, she doesn’t have teachers in some subjects. Then there are subjects like Mathematics – most children find it hard - where the allotted teacher is waiting

<sup>25</sup> Chunauti divides children into groups based on who can read and write Hindi, English and solve mathematical problems. See Chettri, S. (2016, September 9). Govt’s ‘Chunauti’ scheme to assess and divide students a mix bag. *Hindustan Times*. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi/govt-s-chunauti-scheme-to-slot-students-draws-mixed-reactions/story-HhEvoUI9WugajwADw3rLOI.html>

for transfer to a different school and doesn't engage with students. The "social distance" between teachers and students makes the situation worse.<sup>26</sup>

As with scores of children, Amrita's education has completely come to a standstill during the past two years. She must manage her education by herself. The dip in household income makes tuition unviable for poor working-class households. She and her three siblings share one mobile phone for online worksheets shared on the WhatsApp group. The motivation to continue is waning; her brother, a year older, has already been pushed into employment. Amrita's mother, the main force behind her education, is apprehensive about her imminent failure in Class 9<sup>th</sup>. Scores of children fail in the Class 9<sup>th</sup> examination every year in GSs and are pushed out of school. The school tells them to enrol in open school for class 10<sup>th</sup>. It marks the end of schooling journeys for most children in the area. Ironically, most Principals and policymakers blame the no-detention policy for the debacle in Class 9<sup>th</sup>, not recognising the deep-seated structural deficits that define the school system.

*(The above narrative is based on field work for researching school supply in an urban fringe area, Bose et al, 2021b)*

**To recap the discussion in this section**, the supply conditions of GSs in Delhi were described using macro data, macro estimates, and a case study **to bring home the problems in the supply conditions while emphasizing the marginalisation of urban fringes. These are pre-existing problems that the pandemic has brought into relief more sharply** (This general conclusion would hold for most of the analysis in this report). The inadequate supply conditions and inability to invest adequately not only show in high SCR and PTR but fundamentally affect teaching-learning, teachers' motivation, and the effectiveness of school administration, among other things. Its direct impacts include dropouts from schools, especially children from marginalised communities, who may be exploited in child labour or child marriage for girls, and bleak futures for many of these children, all of which can be summed as a denial of RTE. What is required is a massive increase in supply – **more than 100% expansion in capacity in public schooling – which would need additional investments up to 0.71% of GSDP, as per pre-pandemic estimates. During the pandemic (between 2019-20 and 2021-2), there has been a significant 15.4% increase in enrolments in government schools (UDISE), which means that the gap is wider and the financial requirements higher.** Having said that, it will not be incorrect to argue that the additional financial requirements, though steep, are imminently feasible, especially if the three levels of government join hands in the process, as we will discuss more in the following section.

### **III. Public Financing of Education in Delhi: A Broad View**

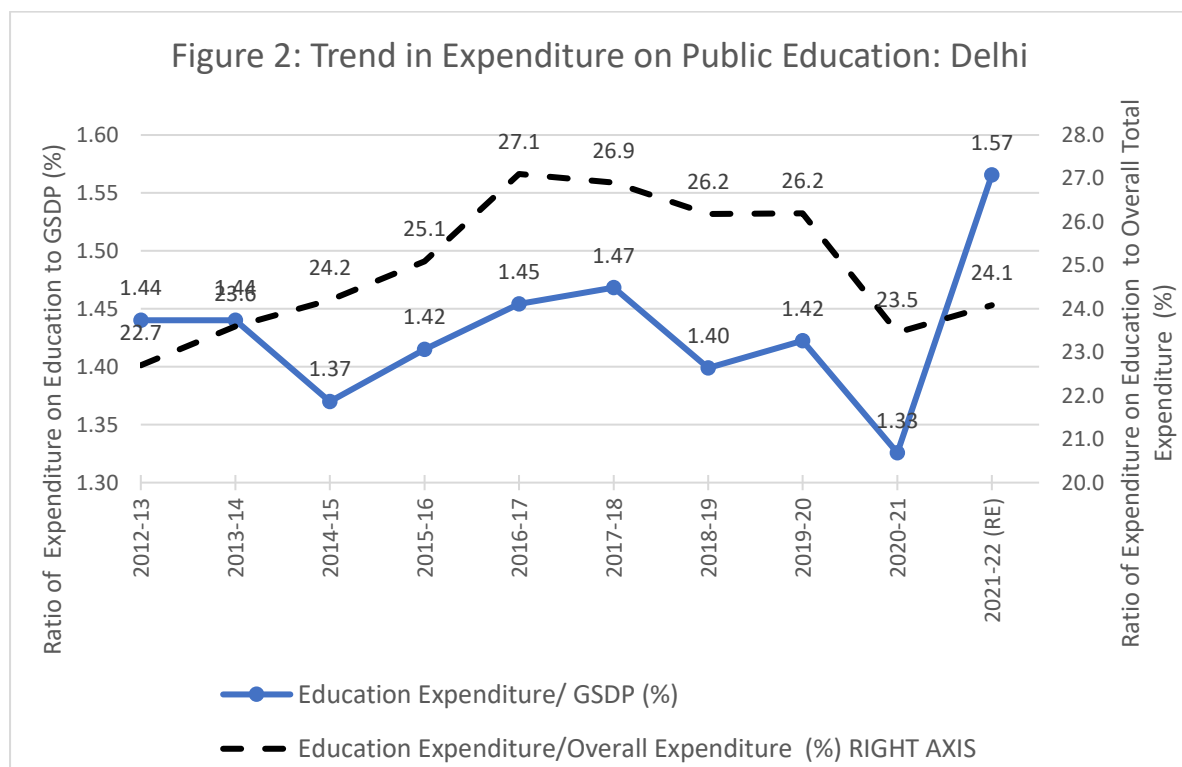
Public expenditure on school education is incurred by three levels of government in Delhi. The union government's intervention can be seen as expenditure through centrally sponsored schemes (CSSs). These expenditures are channelled through the state treasury in recent years and get reflected in the state budget. The major part of the education expenditure is incurred by the state government. A portion of the state expenditure goes as grants in aid (GIA) to the local bodies.<sup>27</sup> For the MCDs, these GIA cover more than 80-90% of their expenditure on education. Thus, an analysis of state budgets provides a reasonably comprehensive picture of public education expenditure in Delhi.

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<sup>26</sup> See Mooij, 2008.

<sup>27</sup> A part of the net tax revenues of the Delhi government is transferred to the local bodies as tax devolution (6% of net tax collected, presently) along with specific purpose grants (such as education grants). The devolution shares as well as the specific purpose grant is determined as per the recommendations of the State finance commissions (GNCTD, 2017).

The government of NCT, Delhi (GNCTD) spends a little over a quarter of the overall public expenditure on education (Figure 2). The present government projects this as an important indicator of its commitment to education financing. While it is true that the GNCTD has consistently devoted a quarter of its budget to education, the higher share is because of the comparatively limited expenditure responsibilities of GNCTD compared to many other state governments. That is, expenditure heads are far fewer. **As a proportion of GSDP, Delhi spends about 1.4% on education and 1.3% on school education (2018-19). This is much lower than the present levels in educationally advanced states such as Kerala (2.6%), Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra (2.3%) for the 2015-20 period. Moreover, these states have maintained a high level of spending across several decades.** This is not to deny that after 2014-15 there has been a reprioritisation of expenditure in favour of education (Figure 2), a trend that was hit by the pandemic. Rather what one is arguing for is the need to raise education expenditure, substantially.



Source: State Finance Accounts, CAG, and National accounts Statistics.

**Not only does Delhi need to increase its expenditure on education, but it also has the capacity to do so.** Delhi has one of the highest per capita incomes in India. Also, GNCTD has been running revenue surpluses for the major part of the 2010s decade, which shows that its fiscal situation was comfortable before the pandemic.<sup>28</sup> There is a scope for raising revenues and increasing expenditure on education. This holds for the local government as well, which has considerable unutilised taxation capacity.<sup>29</sup> One major revenue source, where Delhi loses out, is the share in central taxes. In the absence of full statehood, Delhi does not get the benefit of the dispensations recommended by the successive Central Finance Commissions to the States. The grants in lieu of share in central taxes from the Ministry of Home Affairs or grants under the provision of Article 275(1) of the Indian Constitution have remained constant for the entire decade of the 2010s at Rs 325 crore and continue to be the same in 2022-23 (BE). For a state that has a population as high as Kerala – and has one of the fastest growing populations

<sup>28</sup> RBI (2022)

<sup>29</sup> Government of NCT of Delhi (2017)

among states unlike the Southern states - there is no reason why Delhi should be deprived of its share in Central taxes and instead be limited to a fixed historical amount. The substantial urban local body grant recommended by the 15<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission eludes Delhi, though the need for expansion and improvement of public services is acute.

Another indicator, *per child spending on school education*, indicates resource availability for each school-age child. The per child (public) expenditure on school education in Delhi was between Rs 23,000-Rs 24,000 in 2018-19, which is almost half of the expenditure per student in Kendriya Vidyalaya (KV).<sup>30</sup> Because of the privatised nature of school education in Delhi, *per-student expenditure* in Delhi gets pushed up when seen against the number of students attending GSs. The average per-student (public) expenditure on school education stood at around Rs 34,600.<sup>31</sup> Compared to Rs 45,014 expenditure per student in KVs, the per-student expenditure on school education in Delhi was still lower by 23% in 2018-19.<sup>32</sup> This gap between a reasonably funded public school system (KV, being one example) and an ordinary GS is likely to have increased sharply with the shrinkage in the state budget during the past two years, as shown below.

### **The pandemic, lockdown, and drop in spending**

Among Indian states, Delhi perhaps had the longest period of school closure. Even when the schools reopened across states, schools in Delhi were closed due to pollution in the months following Diwali which further prolonged children's absence from school. Through the two years, government schools in Delhi were at the centre of Covid relief measures. They became physical sites such as Covid isolation centres, food distribution centres for cooked food and ration, and lastly, vaccination centres. Part of the wing / an entire wing is devoted to covid vaccinations, even towards the end of 2021-2. A significant proportion of teachers of GSs were deployed for numerous Covid related duties throughout school closures, which has not come to a halt after the schools reopened. Teaching learning in schools was managed mainly through centralised worksheets provided on WhatsApp groups and later through online classes. This material could, however, only be used by those children with resources, especially mobile devices, as discussed later.

**Public spending on school education contracted sharply during 2020-1, the first year of the pandemic.** Table 3 provides the expenditure on school education over the last five years and the allocations during 2021-2 (BE). Expenditure on school education had risen by a very moderate 6% between 2017-18 and 2018-19, and by another 10.3% between 2018-19 and 2019-20 (in nominal terms). The higher growth in expenditure between 2018-19 and 2019-20 comes from the higher growth in capital expenditure, which jumped up by 2.3 times in a year. It led to a rise in the share of capital expenditure in overall expenditure on education to 10.6% in 2019-20, an acknowledgment of the massive shortage in capacity. The spurt in capital expenditure needed to be sustained over a significant period for real expansion of the capacity of the public school system.

The budgeted expenditure for 2020-1, passed by the Delhi assembly in March 2020, was right before the first nationwide lockdown. It saw an increase in allocation by 20.7% compared to the 2019-20 level. However, **the actual expenditure on school education in 2020-1**

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<sup>30</sup> This calculation is based on recurrent expenditure on school education (Source: State Budget) and projected population (Census). Recurrent expenditure by KVs is taken from <https://kvsangathan.nic.in/>.

<sup>31</sup> Student enrolment data by management is obtained from UDISE+. The calculation factors in the children studying in private schools under Section 12(1) C of the RTE Act.

<sup>32</sup> We do not compare Delhi with other states as the pay scales of regular teachers in Delhi are comparable to KV rather than states such as Kerala or Tamil Nadu, which have their own pay scales as per the recommendation of their state Finance Commissions.

compared to 2019-20 is lower in absolute terms by 12%. For 2021-2, the budgeted expenditure is higher than the previous year's budgeted expenditure by less than 4%. It reflects the contraction underway in budgetary spending on education even in the richest states.

**The impetus on capital expenditure, which as we saw is extremely crucial for Delhi, has been lost with 2020-1 being lower than the 2019-20 level by 35%.** Faced with a fiscal squeeze, governments have prioritised salary payments over other expenditures. Expenditure related to capital creation has gone down in priority.

**Table 3: Expenditure on School Education in Delhi: 2017-18 to 2021-2 (in Rs Crores)**

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21 BE	2020-21	% Change 2020-1 over 2019-20 (Actuals)	2021-22 BE	% Change 2021-2 over 2020-21 (BE)
Revenue Expenditure	8453	9232	9919	12097	8986.3	-9.4	12696	5.0
Capital Expenditure	739	514	1181	1310	771	-34	1226	-6.4
Total Expenditure*	9192	9746	11100	13407	9757.5	-12	13922	3.8
Capital Expenditure in Total (%)	8.0	5.3	10.6	9.8	7.9		8.8	

Source: State Budget, Delhi.

Note:\* Includes budgetary codes 2202 01, 2202 02, 2202 80, 2225 01 277, 2225 01 789, and 4202 01 minus 4202 01 203.

Similarly, **the expenditure on (plan) schemes has undergone drastic cuts.**<sup>33</sup> This is true for various CSSs and state schemes (see next section). **Under the Scheduled component plan (education) – especially focussed on the socio-economic development of children from SCs - there has been a cutback in expenditure by 63% in 2020-1 compared to 2019-20** (Table 4).<sup>34</sup> *The squeeze in expenditure on the marginalised groups, in a situation where the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on the poor and marginalised sections – would have serious adverse consequences. It shows that from the Central government to state governments, poor and rich, the fiscal squeeze in school education budgets is all pervasive.*

**Table 4: Growth in Revenue expenditure on School Education under Special component Plan for Scheduled castes, Delhi**

	2018-19 Actuals	2019-20 Actuals	2020-21 BE	2020-21 Actuals	2021-22 BE
Change over the previous year (%)	-0.03	19.24	20.22	-63.1	10.23*

Source: State Budget, Delhi.

Note: It covers the budgetary codes 2202 01 789, 2202 02 789, 2202 80 789, and 2225 01 789.

<sup>33</sup> In the recent budgets, expenditure is classified under two heads establishment and committed, on the one hand, and schemes, on the other, replacing the plan and non-plan classification.

<sup>34</sup> The Planning Commission in 1979 came up with the strategy of Special Component Plan (SCP) for SCs in order to expedite their socio-economic development. It is an umbrella under which schemes implemented by State and Central Governments are dovetailed by apportioning funds exclusively for SCs for addressing their needs.

\* % Change 2021-2 (BE) over 2020-21 (BE).

It may be noted here that *the 2021-2 budget, the first budget during the pandemic, fails to address the public education emergency that is unfolding, even in terms of rhetoric.* The 2021-22 budget speech (GNCTD) side-lined the systemic issues that face the public-school systems in Delhi and the unfolding emergency for Delhi's children. Instead, it contains announcements that could have easily been proposed, if at all, when the situation improved.<sup>35</sup> Budget speeches are important political statements and reflect the priority of governments.

## IV. Delhi Education Budget: A Closer Look

In this section, we look at the disaggregated picture of the budget, in terms of specific schemes (and heads of expenditure). Alongside noting the patterns of allocations and expenditure and shifts across time (and the impact of the pandemic as reflected in these variables), interwoven are issues that the teachers, students, communities, and administrators raised about the design and implementation of schemes and programmes. The feedback not only indicates the gaps in the present system but possibilities for improvement.

### IV.1 Samagra Shiksha Abhiyaan

Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SMSA) has suffered drastic cuts in expenditure in the first year of the pandemic.<sup>36</sup> Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan includes Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the vehicle for implementation of the RTE. The expenditure on SMSA, Rs 299 crores in 2020-1 (Actual) is only 58% of the expenditure in 2019-20 and 44% of the budgeted level, 2020-1 for Delhi (Table 5). It adds to the pre-existing inadequacy of funding plaguing SMSA.

Like most other states, the approved budget for SMSA is only a fraction of what is proposed by GNCTD, indicating the supply-constrained nature of school financing. **In 2020-1, the approved budget was 52% of the proposed budget of Rs 913 crore, whereas, in 2021-2, the approved budget is 48% of the proposed, Rs 1002 crore.**

Even as there are shortfalls in allocations, there are also unutilised balances, particularly in the secondary education budget.<sup>37</sup> The reasons for the low utilisation could be several as studies on centrally sponsored schemes have detailed.<sup>38</sup> Efforts at better utilisation require better implementation capacities, greater coordination between the centre and states, addressing aspects like the timely release of grants, adequate unit costs, and flexibility of spending across various heads of expenditure, within an overall accountability framework.

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<sup>35</sup> For instance, there is an announcement of a new Sainik School and a Delhi Armed Forces Preparatory Academy in Delhi to prepare children for the security of the country's borders (Rs 20 crores). Deshbhakti Pathakram has rolled out in DoE schools (Rs 2 crores). Introduction of Delhi's own examination board was announced at Rs 30 crores. There is an allocation of Rs 50 crores for conduct of education conference.

Creation of Schools of Excellence (SoE) continues with an announcement of 100 SoEs, but with a rider that some of the existing RPVVs will be converted to SoE. Rather than major additions to capacity of schools both in terms of numbers, resources and quality, which is the dire need of the hour, what one is likely to see are these few islands of excellence whereas the school system for the masses continues to suffer and the inequalities in the education system continue to grow. (Some schemes related to digital education are discussed in the respective section).

<sup>36</sup> A discussion of central budget on school education is included in Bose and Sharma (2022).

<sup>37</sup> See PAB, SMSA (2021-2) f

<sup>38</sup> Bose et al (2020) Chapter 5 provides a summary of the issues around utilisation of grants.

**Table 5: Key Schemes on School Education in Delhi Budget (in Rs Crores)**

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21 (BE)	2020-21	2021- 22(BE)
<b>Schemes</b>						
MDM	129.3	150.4	143.6	164.0	148.0	164.0
SSA	168.3	447.5				
Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan	13.0 (RE)					
Samagra Siksha Abhiyan			513.2	670	298.6	670
Integrated Education of the Disabled at the Secondary Stage	17.9	16.4	43.3	101.6	56.7	80.7
GIA to SCERT and state award to teachers	20.9	29.4	41.0	61.2	7.3	62.2
Assistance to local bodies for primary education <sup>@</sup>	1805.5	1542.3	1444.4	1625	1280	1460
Assistance to Govt. aided schools	554.4	548.7	625.9	650	626.3*	773
Reimbursement of Tuition Fee for EWS admission under RTE	58.3	79.7	167.8	150	218.8	300
Textbooks	266.0	213.0	208.6	211	149.3	211.4
Subsidy/ Aid for school uniforms to the students	233.6	245.2	246.0	250	0	250

Source: Delhi state budgets.

Notes: The list of schemes is not exhaustive. \* 2020-1 (RE), @includes assistance for secondary education in a few local body schools.

The issue of out-of-school children (OSC) and their inclusion, crucial in the context of the pandemic, and a key component of SMSA, is discussed below.

### **Inclusion of Out of school children**

The high drop-out rates among marginalised groups especially in the post-elementary grades were highlighted in Table 2. There is a small but significant cohort of out-of-school children (OSC) even at the elementary level in Delhi. One of the strategies for the inclusion of OSC is through Special training centres (STCs), a scheme that was introduced in 2012, as part of SSA. The STCs, most of which are housed in the existing GSs, provide a space for learning and catching up within the school.<sup>39</sup> Identification of children and bringing them to school is a complex task. Generally, a majority of out-of-school children belong to disadvantaged communities: i.e., Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Muslims, OBCs, Migrants, Children with Special Needs, Urban Deprived Children, working children, etc. In general, the STC teacher has community links and therefore greater knowledge plus physical and social access to the local communities. During field visits, we found that the absorption of OSC is more probable where STCs are running. There are, however, several curricular and administrative issues, including the problem of the excess burden on the lone STC teacher, which need attention.<sup>40</sup> **Several localities couldn't get an STC due to the lack of physical space and extra classrooms in government schools, even though there is an acute need. It is necessary to strengthen the programme and extend it to many more schools that require such interventions.**

<sup>39</sup> Refer to Section 4, RTE Act.

<sup>40</sup> There is dearth of detailed evaluation of STC programme. Ratti (2017) is one study we came across.

The approved budget for STCs has gone down by more than Rs 10 crores in 2020-1.<sup>41</sup> Whereas the unit cost remains at a paltry Rs 6,000 per child (@Rs 500 per month), the number of OSC is estimated at a level lower in 2021-2 than two years back (PAB, SMSA, 2021-2)! Another intervention, skill training for OSC has an allocation of only Rs10 lakhs. Against the proposed unit cost per student of Rs 68,381 by GNCTD, the approved cost is Rs 2000 per student per annum for skill training. The number of students for whom skill training has been approved is only 500! While these ideas are worth pursuing, without adequate resources such schemes lose meaning. The poor allocations for children with disabilities, who constitute a significant share of OSC, have been a constant source of concern.<sup>42</sup>

### Box 3: Pandemic and the out of school children in Delhi

It is feared that the pandemic has caused many children to drop out even as the vast majority remain locked out of school. What is the extent of dropout from school is a question to which nobody has a definite answer. It is difficult to say unless the schools are fully open and are in operation for some time. We attempted to draw up a picture based on the information provided by teachers in our survey. The objective is not to be accurate but to flag the issues by obtaining a rough sense of the situation that is emerging, through some proxy indicators.

**Table 6: How many children have dropped out?**

Based on responses from 16 teacher surveys

	Untraceable* (%)	Students who didn't access MDM (%)	Students not attending (on the basis of WhatsApp / Worksheet responses) (%)
Range	0.6-25	1.3-30	2-60
Average	6	11.6	31.4
Median	3.5	8.7	30

\*Based on the information that schools provide to the department.

In Table 6, the proportion of untraceable children is based on information furnished by the school to the education departments regularly. The proportion of untraceable children reported averages around 6% (median 3.5%) in the sample. As an MCD school teacher from the North-West district informed, “*Some students have lost complete touch with the school. These are children who are not in touch with the class teacher through any means. Around 70 students (10% of the total strength in her school) remained untraceable to us. They probably are dropouts but we can't strike down their names from the school without orders.*”<sup>43</sup> Another way of gauging the number of dropouts can be the proportion of enrolled students who do not take MDM dry-ration. This proportion is nearly 12%, on average (median 8.6 %). The students who are not studying and following the regular curriculum disseminated through WhatsApp messages and in certain cases through photocopied worksheets is a larger proportion, above 30%. Thus, **a significant 30% of students on average will be those without any contact, even perfunctory, with the curriculum.** When it comes to online classes, teachers reported that more than 60% of students did not attend online classes on average, in a sample of 16 schools. **It implies that a majority of students in GSs found the online classes**

<sup>41</sup> From Rs 26.28 crores (@ Rs 6,000 per child for 43,793 children) in 2019-20 to Rs 15.81 crores (@ Rs 6,000 per child for 26,346 children) in 2021-2.

<sup>42</sup> See Kundu and Bhuta (2021)

<sup>43</sup> The number of children who have taken TC could be another indicator of the dropout rate, except that the children would also take a TC to move to another district. We couldn't get this information from all teachers.



**unaffordable/ out of reach. It provides a sense of the gaps in learning to be expected for most children in average GS cohorts.**<sup>44</sup>

One should note that there is a flow of new enrolments to GSs, even as some other children drop out (the increase in net enrolment is 7% (median) and 19% (mean) for the sample schools in 2020-1/2021-2). Thus, the net effect will be dwarfed by the shift from private schools to GS.<sup>45</sup> But those who are coming are not the same as those who are dropping out. For instance, some teachers observed that the children attending online classes in GSs were the ones who had exited from private schools and were relatively better off and aware.

RTE demands that each child must count. **It calls for a comprehensive survey of OSC with schools reopening.** Official surveys have routinely underestimated the number of OSC.<sup>46</sup> Genuine efforts at the identification of OSC, especially among the marginalised communities and vulnerable populations most of whom are concentrated in the urban fringes are required. Community-level surveys should be used to identify OSC, while those at risk of dropout are to be identified via schools.

There are a few things worth stressing. The dropout rates, of course, vary from area to area, as the head of a DoE school with long years of experience explained. In commercial areas and in other places where children come from households with less unstable livelihoods/ occupations, the dropout rates are lower. Whereas places such as Jehangirpuri and Wazirabad (North East District especially) have seen a lot more migration - those that are close to industrial belts and where production units are closed. Again, where there are more informal workers in the service sector, the trend would be more pronounced. These are areas with more precarious livelihoods and more vulnerable populations. Schools, in many parts of Delhi, where the working poor live had an extremely high level of drop-out rate even before the pandemic. Our field work, in the urban fringe area among poor households, finds the proportion of OSC students – never enrolled plus dropout - to be as high as 30%.<sup>47</sup> The literature suggests an inverse relationship between income and dropout, especially in the adolescent years. Such schools require additional attention and resource support, which is a contrast to the present situation of scarcity and neglect in these areas. **The state should recognise the urban poor areas/ the urban fringe areas as a special category from the point of view of education policy. Expansion and strengthening of public schools in these localities, which are overcrowded and poorly resourced, posting experienced teachers and counsellors in these schools should be the utmost priority so that the unequal distribution of resources may be corrected.**

It is worth pointing out that SMSA's plan documents for Delhi, do not recognise the massive shortage of schooling infrastructure and the attendant problem of access to functional GSs with basic facilities in Delhi as described in Section II. There has been no school mapping exercise for Delhi. **The SMSA administration, MCD, and DoE shift responsibility on each other, and therefore, no data on how many schools are necessary figure in any of the state plan documents and neither in PAB minutes of SSA/SMSA in the last several years.** It hides the real extent of supply shortages. It hides the financing gaps and dwarfs the demand for public finance. Because of the substantial exodus of students from the private schools, especially LFPSs into the GSs, the need for school mapping and proper expansion plans backed by adequate finances has increased. There must be an urgent response to this crucial blind spot in policymaking.

<sup>44</sup> Also see Bakhla et al (2021)

<sup>45</sup> There is 15.4% rise in enrolment between 2019-20 and 2021-2 in government schools (UDISE).

<sup>46</sup> Very often the departmental counts of OSC grossly underestimate the numbers, and there are various estimates of OSC existing simultaneously (UNICEF, 2016).

<sup>47</sup> Refer to Bose et al (2021b).

During the pandemic, adolescents have taken up a variety of jobs. *“We do not have large dropouts perhaps but many girls from our schools were working through the pandemic. Parlour sweeping, working in the parlour, many working in shops, shop assistants at chemist shops, going to others’ houses for cleaning, besides the massive amount of unpaid work that they must do,”* we were told. The pressure of earning outside the household is higher for many boys, because of gendered perceptions. Parents send their boys for training/apprenticeship or petty jobs so that they do not pick up bad habits or fall under what they consider as wrong influences. **It means that survival is a bigger challenge than before, and adolescents especially from marginalised groups would need a combination of support and incentives to continue.** It is the right time to debate whether one needs a universal scholarship scheme/ one with sufficiently large coverage for students in classes 9-12<sup>th</sup> or 6-12<sup>th</sup> in GSs of Delhi.<sup>48</sup>

### Issues of Fund Flows to Schools

Teachers shared a host of problems related to the flow of funds for SSA (and other money flows), even as the scheme provided valuable liquidity to schools for expenditure under various heads. The composite grant of SMSA was particularly useful for MCD schools as maintenance grants from the local administration had not reached the schools even by the last quarter of FY 2020-1. Schools said they had received SSA money by October 2020 and the money is helpful to cover costs of sanitation and hygiene-related expenditure, stationery, and printing of worksheets. School administrators, however, pointed to **three major issues. SSA grants are tied to various small subheads which prove to be a handicap.** Schools cannot use the money as per their needs, a problem that has persisted through several rounds of restructuring of the programme. For instance, in many cases, the personnel requirement (the greatest constraint) could not be met as the SSA money had come under some other head, besides being inadequate. Second, **the different channels of fund flows to the schools mean separate accounting and reporting formats which are administratively challenging.** One must remember that teachers have to do all the paperwork as there are often no extra hands for administrative tasks. The burden of administrative work has gone up continuously over the years, every teacher without exception complains. Third, **there are issues of predictability in fund flows.** For example, we found that the head of the schools (mostly, the school in charge in the absence of Principals), were left guessing why the Swachhata Funds did not come. It implied that the schools were not only in a tighter situation than before as regards the funds available at their disposal but there was also **a great deal of uncertainty and lack of information** regarding the flow of funds.

### IV.2 Mid-day meal programme

Mid-day meal programme (MDM) is the other important CSS, related closely to children’s nutrition and food security along with their education.<sup>49</sup> Teachers were unanimous, in their responses, about the benefits of MDM. A teacher in an MCD school added that she had not seen any girl fainting in the morning assembly in recent years whereas earlier - about two decades back - girls used to faint regularly. The burden on parents has also been reduced as one meal is provided by the school. Quite naturally, the importance of MDM is expected to rise during the pandemic for income-poor households. Estimates show that the value of a school

<sup>48</sup> The reason for proposing a universal scheme is to overcome the issues of exclusion of current schemes (see Section V, Scholarships)

<sup>49</sup> As per the latest NFHS data (2019-2021) on Delhi, the percentage of children under 5 years of age, who are stunted and under-weight are 31% and 21.8%, respectively. Prevalence of anaemia in this age group is also very high and increasing, 60% from 57% in 2015-16 (GoI, 2021).

meal can be equivalent to about 10% of a household's monthly income for poor households (WFP, 2020). It follows that the economic impact of cuts in the budget on MDM could be dire, and the nutritional impact irreversible.

Like the SSA, **there is a large gap between the proposed and approved budget on MDM, showing the supply-constrained nature of the scheme.** Besides, the number of students approved for MDM in Delhi is only 64% and 66% of the proposed numbers in 2017-18 and 2018-19, respectively (MDM, PAB Minutes).<sup>50</sup> In 2017-18, the GNCTD announced that it has decided “to supplement the existing nutrition content by providing banana / boiled egg to each student from our resources. It is also proposed to expand the coverage of MDM to all students of class 9-12<sup>th</sup> of girl schools.” The additional expenses would be met from their revenues. These steps, announced in the budget speech, however, were not implemented. **Rather, in recent years, expenditure on MDM decreased by Rs 7 crore in nominal terms between 2018-19 (Rs 150 crore) to 2019-20 (Rs 143 crore) (Table 6).** It was budgeted at Rs 164 crore for 2020-21, whereas **the expenditure in 2020-21 is Rs 148 crore.**

**Moreover, the distribution of MDM since the first lockdown – as told by the teachers and experienced by the students – has been minimal and not reflective of the spending on MDM** that is found in the budget document (see Box 4). It is difficult to reconcile the budgetary expenditure, the statements made by the GNCTD in the PAB meetings on MDM, and the picture emerging from the field.<sup>51</sup> It needs to be stressed that there hasn't been any social audit of MDM in any of the districts ever.<sup>52</sup>

#### **Box 4: Irregular Deliveries of MDM ration during the Pandemic**

Amrita and her three siblings all study in the neighbourhood GSs. During 2020-1, MDM ration came twice to the DoE school (girls shift) where Amrita studies. The kit consisted of rice, wheat, and chana daal/chana, each 1.5-2 kg packet, and a vegetable oil packet, she showed. In the boy's shift, the ration came only once during 2020-1 (in higher quantities). Such differences aren't uncommon in the distribution of entitlements and incentives.<sup>53</sup> None of the four children have received any money on account of cooking costs and/or food security allowance (instead of MDM) in their account till Dec 2021. (Only one child, out of the four, had a bank account in 2020, two managed to get it in 2021 with help, and still one is left). We found some other children, studying in primary school, had received Rs 94 (once) in their account through NEFT for MDM in the initial months of the lockdown in 2020. This roughly sums up the situation of MDM in the GSs during the pandemic years across Delhi, as also obtained from teachers' surveys and interviews. From 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 onwards dry ration was started, but it was not distributed every month. The MDM in-charge in a senior secondary school explained that two lots of ration were distributed in 2020-1 – first, covering four months and the second covering another set of months. This was provided by the MDM supplier to schools. It essentially covers the period from July to December 2020. Beyond this, there is no information with the schools on MDM. Newly admitted students were not given ration, we noted.

<sup>50</sup> This information is no longer available for the recent years.

<sup>51</sup> “GNCT of Delhi informed that in lieu of hot cooked meal dry ration kits (Wheat/Rice, Pulse and oil etc.) was provided to all the eligible students of Govt. and Govt. Aided Schools during the closure of schools as Food Security Allowances for 220 days (Primary) and 256 days (Upper Primary) including summer vacation of 42 days. Payment of cost of food grains and cooking cost as Food Security Allowance was paid through DBT into the Bank Account of beneficiaries. Thereafter dry ration kits have been provided to all the eligible students through empanelled NGO Service Providers” (Minutes of PAB meeting, MDM, 2021-2 Delhi p.11).

<sup>52</sup> Minutes of PAB meeting, MDM, 2021-2 Delhi

<sup>53</sup> CAG (2017)

**Table 7: For how many months did children receive MDM during the 2020-1 session?**  
Based on responses from 16 teacher surveys

	Responses from Teachers (%)
All	26.7
Some	66.7
Did not receive	6.7

The unsatisfactory implementation of MDM during the pandemic led to public action. In the last two years, there were several PILs in the Delhi High Court, with the Court ordering GNCTD to implement the MDM programme, distribute rations and provide allowances. Financing of MDM is the collective responsibility of the centre and the state by design, and they have traded charges.<sup>54</sup> Grassroots organisations have filed PILs against the irregularity in MDM (dry ration) delivery, and the reluctance of the government to start cooked meals even after schools reopened.<sup>55</sup>

Going forward, **there is a need for a comprehensive social audit of the MDM scheme in Delhi.** Social Audit is the collective monitoring of a scheme by people's active involvement. Along with expenditure, it is supposed to address issues of equity in programme implementation. Field data and news reports point to the possibility that children have not received MDM covering the entire year, and cooking costs have not been disbursed. Based on the findings of the social audit, equivalent FSA should be provided to students for 2020-1 and 2021-2. Regular social audits of MDM, among other schemes, must be institutionalised.

National education policy (2020) suggests increased coverage to pre-school classes along with increased food allocations per child incorporating the breakfast meal (either in dry or cooked format) (GoI, 2020). **GNCTD should take this opportunity to implement the announcement made in 2017-18, regarding supplementary nutrition, and extend it to cover all children in GSs.** The state government should demand support for this intervention from GoI. The pre-primary segment has to be covered well. As per the latest NFHS data (2019-2021) on Delhi, the percentage of children under 5 years of age, who are stunted and underweight are 31% and 21.8%, respectively. The prevalence of anaemia in this age group is also very high and increasing (60%, from 57% in 2015-16). An assessment of a student's nutrition and health status through BMI and other nutritional standards should be undertaken in partnership with the health department. Distribution of iron, folic acid supplement, and sanitary napkins, again, was not been regular during the pandemic, as per field reports, and needs to be restored along with health check-ups. Attention to children's nutrition and overall health would be essential for recovery.

<sup>54</sup> Can't delay mid-day meals: Delhi High Court. (2020, July). *The Indian Express*. <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/cant-delay-mid-day-meals-delhi-high-court-6484196/> and Upadhyay, A. (2020, August 5). How Are the Children In India Receiving Their Mid-Day Meals Amid The COVID-19 Pandemic? *Swachh India, NDTV*. <https://swachhindia.ndtv.com/how-are-the-children-in-india-receiving-their-mid-day-meals-amid-the-covid-19-pandemic-47940/>

<sup>55</sup> 'Midday Meals In Schools Only After 100% Attendance': Delhi Govt Responds To Legal Notice. (2022, Feb, 21) *The Wire* <https://thewire.in/rights/as-schools-reopen-delhi-govt-gets-legal-notice-for-not-resuming-midday-meals>

### IV. 3 Per child spending on municipal schools versus reimbursement to private schools

As discussed earlier, grants-in-aid from the state government cover most of the expenditure on MCD primary schools in Delhi. **Expenditure under this head was falling in nominal terms before the pandemic** (see trends in Assistance to local bodies for primary education in Table 5). **This trend was heightened during the pandemic, with the sharpest cuts in expenditure.** In comparison, government expenditure on private schools, be it the aided schools or the reimbursement of fees to private unaided schools under Section 12 1(C), RTE Act, did not witness a squeeze (refer to Table 5). Allocation on the latter has shown a steady increase over the years and this has been sustained during the pandemic, with a higher budget in 2021-2. **In per-student terms, the average expenditure by the GNCTD on students of local body schools is only Rs 21,150.<sup>56</sup> Not only is it nowhere comparable to the expenditure per student in KVs, but it is also lower than the per child cost that the DoE announces for reimbursement to private schools (Rs 28,000 per student in 2018-19).<sup>57</sup>**

This underspending has a relationship with the way the primary school system would be allowed to function. During the pandemic, MCD teachers went on strike, forced by the prolonged non-payment of salary (East and North MCDs were faced with this issue). We found teachers performing their numerous administrative roles (former roles and new roles assigned to them for COVID), attending to children and parents regarding their queries on admissions, textbooks, etc., and some also taking the initiative to teach the children in safe spaces, as well as organising demonstration and protests at the headquarters.

**The issue of timely payment of salaries for (permanent) MCD teachers is an old one and needs to be resolved professionally** without the unpleasant political slugfest and intervention of the Court, every time.<sup>58</sup> Besides, there are a large proportion of teachers who are on contract for less than a year. They are appointed for 10 months and then terminated before the summer vacations. **To squeeze the wage bill, the contracts of such teachers in MCD schools were not renewed during 2020-1. The livelihood of a large body of teachers teaching in MCD schools was impacted, as a result.**

An independent committee should be set up to look into the issue of regular salaries of MCD teachers, and the overall social security of all teachers. Teachers' safety concerning their health, regular income & social security, and privacy issues which were compromised during the pandemic, needs to be prioritised.

#### Box 5: Teachers and the Administrative Burden

The centralised and top-down architecture of the school system allows little agency and creativity for the teachers. "Teachers are not free to teach" is a complaint that we heard again and again, during fieldwork, both in MCD and DoE schools. Teachers are constantly updating information. During the pandemic, teachers are supposed to compile information on how many worksheets are coming, how many are distributed, and then how many responses come. This information has to be filled in every week and sent. There are three kinds of worksheets: one set is as per the NCERT syllabus, one for the entrepreneurship mindset curriculum, the 9-12<sup>th</sup> class, and one for the happiness curriculum. For each of these, the same routine has to be followed, a vice-Principal of a senior secondary school pointed out in exasperation "*I am*

<sup>56</sup> Per student assistance to local bodies for school education (including GIA for MDM) calculated for 2018-19.

<sup>57</sup> Per month Rs 2242 + cost of uniform Rs 1100 per year (in PS) and per month Rs 2225 + cost of uniform Rs 1400 per year (in UPS) <http://delhiplanning.nic.in/sites/default/files/12-153-203.%20General%20Education.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> Pushkarna, V. (2021, February 4). Betrayed, cheated, angry: Delhi's municipal school teachers not paid since August. *Citizen Matters*. <https://citizenmatters.in/delhis-municipal-school-teachers-not-paid-since-august-23503>

*asking my teachers, what preparation are you doing for the next class? What can you do with the child? We are not post offices where we get the worksheets and pass them onto the children.”*

**The administrative work is overwhelming the teachers**, leaving very little time for any creative imagination and thinking. The administrative burden for teachers has become a structural feature of the school system. *“If teachers are not there, the school administration cannot function.”* Then there are directives from various Ministries, DCPCR, in addition to the numerous DoE programmes. Schools are supposed to sensitise children. *“Every month we take several pledges. There is a pledge, there is a poster, then we have to record and make videos of the activity, and send compliance records. The action taken has to be sent urgently. These Ministry prompts are nothing but tokenism and checking boxes. At least 50% of this is deadwood. If schools could get rid of it, they can function better,”* noted a senior teacher.

As per a research study on teachers’ time allocation and work perception, commissioned by the GNCTD, 66% of the teachers said that non-teaching duties are the major hurdle in teaching in school.<sup>59</sup> 93% of all respondents felt that paperwork took up a lot of time. About half of the time was spent on non-academic activities. In DoE schools, teachers complained about the lack of or quality of the clerical staff in their schools. They felt the clerical staff either lacked training in managing administrative records related to the school and using computer applications effectively or showed less interest in doing their job. In MCD schools, IT or clerical staff positions have not been sanctioned. Heads of schools are thus frequently deputing teachers in both MCD and DoE schools to administrative tasks.

The research suggests some steps on how to address this. The first is to **ensure better coordination across various government departments** so that they are cognisant of the time available to teachers per week to finish routine school management tasks, as well as meet the data needs of various Education Department branches. Education Departments should consider setting a norm to ensure teachers do not spend beyond say, 30% of their time in school, per day, on "School Management" tasks, in any circumstance. **The second step is to reduce teachers’ time spent on recordkeeping-related tasks such as recording information, analysing, retrieving, and managing school-related data. It can be done by hiring data operators in MCD schools and filling the vacancies in clerical posts in the DoE schools.** Streamlining the data requirements and processing at the higher levels of administration is suggested. Adequate financing is one of the key enabling factors for all such measures.

#### **IV.4 Textbooks and Uniforms: RTE Entitlements**

As per Delhi RTE rules, children studying in GSs (including aided) as well as those students admitted to the private schools against 25% seats for the economically weaker sections and deprived groups are entitled to free textbooks and uniforms. In the elementary grades, students receive free textbooks in kind from the school, whereas the money for the uniforms is transferred through direct benefit transfers. At the secondary and higher secondary level, instead of textbooks and uniforms direct benefit transfer is offered to all students.

**Between 2017-18 to 2019-20, there’s been a decline in overall expenditure on textbooks in nominal terms, with a further decline of 28% in 2020-1** (Table 5). Within overall head “textbooks”, expenditure on free supply of books and stationery to SC students registered a decline from Rs 91 crores (2017-18) to Rs 26 crores (2019-20). There was no expenditure in 2020-1 on the free supply of textbooks and stationery to SC students, and only Rs 1 crore was allocated in 2021-2 (BE). The reason behind this decline remains to be explored.

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<sup>59</sup> Government of NCT of Delhi (2019)

### Box 6: Free Uniform is an RTE entitlement

For uniforms, there has been a shift to direct benefit transfer (DBT) replacing in-kind transfers across all grades. During our conversations with parents, we found that many students did not receive money for uniforms in their accounts (for the pre-pandemic period).<sup>60</sup> Some in the class receive it, whereas some do not. Far too many instances of arbitrariness in the flow of funds and delays emerged from the field data. **Transfers to students' accounts usually take place towards the end of the academic year which means that there is a lag of one whole year in receiving the money meant for school uniforms. Schools have no intimation of when the money would come and no explanation on why it has not come.** This was confirmed across schools. The school adopts a hands-off approach and there are no mechanisms available to parents to complain and pursue the matter further. The public has been kept at an arm's length. In addition, the shift towards full-scale DBT has happened before full coverage of the population through banking services, as we shall see below.

In 2020-1, GNCTD did not incur any expenditure on uniforms for students, arguably, because schools were closed (Table 5). However, with the schools now beginning to reopen (October/November 2021), the need for school uniforms including winter wear, school bags, shoes, and socks is weighing on parents. On average, the cost of uniforms including winter wear (plus bag, etc.) is about Rs 1500, at the minimum.<sup>61</sup> For a family of four school-going children (like Amrita's case, referred to earlier) - the amount becomes roughly Rs 6,000, which is 30-33% of a monthly income of a poor working-class family, where both parents are earning. In a usual year, this expenditure at least would be spread across many months or years, but now when the schools are about to reopen after 20-22 months of closure, the expenditure has to be incurred at once and it is imposing an enormous burden on parents. It could even lead to students not re-joining school. It indicates a violation of the RTE Act which guarantees free education to students in the elementary age group.

There is a need for a sensitive approach to school reopening that releases these expectations and just allows children to come back to school, without any conditions. Equally important, children's entitlements regarding these basic requirements have to be honoured and paid timely. For classes beyond 8<sup>th</sup>, children receive the money as DBT instead of textbooks and writing material in GSs. This money is inadequate to pay for textbooks as teachers and students share, and some may not even receive it. Others may not spend it on textbooks. A legitimate demand that should and can be easily implemented is to provide books (not bank transfers) along with writing material for students of classes 9-12<sup>th</sup>.

## IV.5 ICT in School Education

With the growing digital divide as witnessed during the pandemic, ICT in education becomes a crucial aspect of education policy. Table 8 presents the allocations on schemes related to ICT in school education. Adding across various schemes, the ICT budget in 2021-2 stands at Rs 580 crores, which is almost five times that of 2019-20 levels, and reveals the government's intention of improvements and expansion in this area. The digital classroom scheme was announced during the Feb 2020 budget, proposing to upgrade the classrooms of all its schools (9-12<sup>th</sup> classes) into digital classrooms within the next five years. There was no expenditure in 2020-1, however. In response to the pandemic, the 2021-2 budget announced an online assessment scheme with an allocation of Rs 150 crore. Another new scheme mentioned in the

<sup>60</sup> This was verified by the research team.

<sup>61</sup> In 2017-18, there was an upward revision of unit cost of uniforms by the state, from Rs 500 to Rs 1100 for the class Nursery to V, from Rs 700 to Rs 1400 for upper primary, and from Rs 900 to Rs1500 for secondary and higher secondary, in the State budget of 2017-18.

budget speech is the virtual Delhi model school, with an allocation of Rs 10 crores in 2021-2 (BE). Meanwhile, the only scheme that has received consistent allocation over the years is the introduction of computer science at the +2 stage. Pratibha fellowship for digital learning for class 11 and 12 students of RPVVs and SoEs – the elite sector within the public schools – allocated money for tablets to meritorious students to be used to access digital learning material. It has allocations only in one year, 2019-20.

**Table 8: ICT and allied Interventions (in Rs Crores)**

Schemes	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21 (BE)	2020-21	2021-22 (BE)
ICT	18					
Digital Classroom						250
Online Assessment						150
Virtual Model School						10
Introduction of Computer Science at +2 stage	28.1	119.4	70.6	170	70.3	170
Pratibha Fellowship for Digital Learning			16.9			

Source: State Budgets, GNCTD

ICT in school education is an emerging area, which would call for substantial investments in the public sector in the years to come.<sup>62</sup> The design of these investments is crucial. An oft-cited example is the Kerala model. In 2002, Kerala initiated a programme driven by its teachers. The teachers were trained to use a variety of FOSS (free and open-source software) generic and educational applications for integrating ICTs in teacher professional development and subject teaching. Technology training was co-ordinated and managed by the state inhouse, using the cascade model, resulting in state-wide training of all teachers.<sup>63</sup> **The Kerala model is considered an effective integration of ICT in education today.**

In India, the digital education space has seen a great deal of private sector activity picking up in the last two years. The global Edtech giants have swiftly moved into the large Indian market.<sup>64</sup> The pandemic is forcing education institutions and school systems towards digital and online education, amid the hype about the potential of digital technologies to “break through” the physical school model. **This space needs urgent regulation to preserve the public good nature of education, and to ensure that the digital content and its delivery are in line with the broader aims of education.** Besides, as has been suggested, there is a need to establish public digital infrastructure in public spaces like community halls, and public libraries, for individual and community access by students. **During the pandemic, public digital infrastructure could have benefited many more students.** Universalising digital education must be a systemic program to improve the educational prospects of all students over the long term.

## V. Scholarships for Marginalised Social Groups: Diminishing allocations and widening exclusions

For students from marginalised groups and other low-income groups, the financial costs of education are insurmountable. Because of historical exclusion, there is already a large difference in the educational achievements (plus cultural capital, social networks, and

<sup>62</sup> Refer to Bose and Sharma (2022) for further discussion on ICT investment requirements.

<sup>63</sup> Kasinathan and Ranganathan (2018)

<sup>64</sup> Kasinathan, G. July 12, 2021 [Online education is not the solution | Deccan Herald](#)



economic capacities) of the marginalised groups in comparison to the rest of the population, which persists in surprisingly large measure till today.<sup>65</sup> Despite special provisions in the Indian Constitution (Article 46), the gap between the upper castes and the marginalised groups remains very significant. One of the barriers to education is the lack of financial resources to sustain their education. Even though the RTE Act (2009) mandates compulsory and free education, education is hardly free even at the elementary level, and costs increase progressively in higher grades. Financial resources prove a major bottleneck and are one of the key factors responsible for higher dropout rates among marginalised communities. State scholarships, along with well-functioning public systems have a crucial role in raising enrolment and completion of education work as a social safety net during the pandemic. It becomes essential to look at scholarships in some detail, therefore.

**Delhi has seen drastic cutbacks in scholarships, both in terms of expenditure and coverage.** Table 9 reflects the squeeze in coverage of scholarships relating to school education in Delhi during 2020-1. Furthermore, the targets for 2021-2 are below the achievements for 2019-20. Important scholarship and fee reimbursement schemes for the marginalised sections have shrunk severely, which is reflected in expenditure on scholarships (Table 10). Summed across the listed scholarship schemes, **the expenditure on scholarships in 2020-1, is less than a tenth of the budgeted amount** (and one-tenth of the expenditure incurred in 2019-20).

**Table 9: Cutback in Scholarships during the Pandemic: Coverage of Students**

Scholarship	Achievements 2019-20	Achievements 2020-21	Target 2021-22
Reimbursement of tuition fees to students belonging to SC/ST/OBC studying in private schools <sup>66</sup>	25,414	5,916	20,000
Mukhyamantri Vidyarthi Pratibha Yojana for marginalised sections	NIL	NIL	1,00,000
Pre- Matric Scholarship for SC Students (CSS)	14,643	NIL	14,500
Post-Matric Scholarship for SC Students [CSS]	19,537	NIL	15,000
Pre-Matric Scholarship to the OBC students (CSS)	11,205	6,666	7,000
Post Matric Scholarship for OBC Students [CSS]	8,948	6,713	7000
Jai Bhim Mukhyamantri Pratibha Vikas Yojna (SCSP)	NIL	941	48000
CM scholarship for meritorious students	29,508	Not disbursed*	subject to approval
Welfare of Educationally/Economically Backward Minorities	2.75 lakh	NIL**	Approx 2.50 lakh, subject to re-opening

Source: <http://delhiplanning.nic.in/content/plan-document-2021-22>

Note: The plan document lists the reasons as: \* Financial restriction due to covid-19 \*\* Not implemented due to covid-19

<sup>65</sup> See Deshpande (2013).

<sup>66</sup> This scheme is separate from those admitted under Section 12 (1)(C) of the RTE Act.

**Table 10: Scholarship Schemes for the Marginalised Communities (Rs Crores)**

		2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21 (BE)	2020-21	2021-22 (BE)
	<b>State Schemes</b>						
1	Scholarship/Merit Scholarship to SC/ST/OBC and Minority students - Class I to XII	74.1	54.4	33.5	1	0.18	1
2	Financial assistance for the purchase of stationery and merit scholarships to SC/ST/OBC /Minority Students			97.7		10.86	
3	Reimbursement of Tuition Fees in Public Schools to SC/ST/OBC Students	38.4	39.9	50.5	48	14.6	33
4	Scholarships of educationally backward minority (EBM) students	12	11.5	18.8	20		20
5	Mukhyamantri Pariksha Fees Sahayta Yojana for class X and XII student			62.12			1
6	Chief Minister's Scholarship for Meritorious Students			7.4	8		8
7	Lal Bahadur Shastri Scholarship to the Meritorious Students	3.0	2.8				
8	Chief Minister super talented children coaching scheme	0.4		0.3	0.4	0.0	20
9	Ambedkar Pathshala				1	0.2	0.5
10	Jai Bhim Mukhyamantri Pratibha Vikas Yojna (SCSP)*		14.6	9.1	100	1.5	50
11	Mukhyamantri Vidhyarti Pratibha Yojana for the marginalised sections				150		150
	<b>Pre-Matric Scholarships</b>						
12	Pre-Matric scholarship to SC Students (CSS)			4.4	4.2	1.6	4.2
13	Pre-Matric Scholarship to OBC Students (CSS)	0.6	0.6	1.7	1	1	1
	<b>Post-Matric Scholarships</b>						
14	Post Matric Scholarship for SC Students (CSS)	3.1	7.3	2.3	10		10
15	Post Matric Scholarship for OBC Students (CSS)	1.0	1.8	2.8	2	2	2
16	Post Matric Scholarship Scheme	7.0	7.9	12.1	10	-	9.7
	SUM	139.6	140.8	302.7	355.63	31.9	310.5

Source: Delhi state budgets.

If one looks at individual scholarship schemes, there are several scholarship schemes for the marginalised sections (Table 10). Many of the schemes, however, have small allocations and are meant for a narrow niche. The two main state schemes on scholarships with higher allocations and wider coverage, till recently, are listed at the beginning of Table 10. This includes scholarships or merit scholarships to SC, ST, OBC, and minority students (classes 1 to 12).<sup>67</sup> Children belonging to the above communities with household annual income not

<sup>67</sup> For details on the scheme see Government of NCT of Delhi. (2016). *Online Entry of student beneficiaries under different scholarship schemes of 2016-17*. Directorate of Education. [http://www.edudel.nic.in/upload\\_2015\\_16/382\\_386\\_dt\\_13052016.pdf](http://www.edudel.nic.in/upload_2015_16/382_386_dt_13052016.pdf)

exceeding Rs 2 lakhs and school attendance not less than 70% are eligible for these scholarships. The allocation under this head has, however, continuously fallen from Rs 74 crore in 2017-18 to Rs 33.5 crore in 2019-20, and then further to less than Rs 1 crore in 2020-1. Teachers informed that this scheme has been merged with the stationery scheme (Serial No. 2 in Table 10), with the same eligibility conditions, and the money for the two schemes was to come under the same head to the children's accounts. For the year 2020-1, around Rs 11 crores have been spent under the two heads combined. As per the annual plan document GNCTD (2018-19), about 4 lakh students were proposed to be covered under these two schemes, indicating the substantial coverage these schemes had.<sup>68</sup> Note that there are no fresh allocations on these two schemes (2021-2). While there's been no formal announcement of the closure of the scheme, teachers shared that money for the scheme has not come to children's accounts for the past two to three years. Teachers and parents were not informed about this. A similar fate awaits a scheme meant as an "incentive Scheme for girls" in primary classes.<sup>69</sup> Money for the scheme has not come for the last few years, teachers said. No teacher knows for sure whether the scheme is continuing. **Thus, even before the pandemic, important scholarship schemes for marginalised groups/ girls were, de facto, discontinued. What is also noteworthy is the lack of information about the schemes with teachers.**

During the pandemic, **scholarships for educationally backward minority (EBM) students stopped for 2.75 lakh students** (Table 9). This again meant a lack of support for students who were to continue their studies through the pandemic, albeit in a different mode, which needed greater investments. Mukhyamantri Pariksha Fees Sahayta Yojana for class X and XII students (Serial no. 5 in Table 10) had an expenditure of Rs 62 crores in 2019-20. During 2020-1, however, no funds were provided for this scheme. This scheme is designed to bear the cost of CBSE Board fees of class X & XII students of all GS (including aided schools) in Delhi. The state government, citing the financial crunch, didn't pay the CBSE fees for 2020-21, causing great hardships for the financially distressed sections of the student community. The pandemic, also, saw a sharp drop in allocations on reimbursement of tuition fees in private schools to SC/ST/OBC students, with household annual income not exceeding Rs 2 lakhs, and Rs 3 lakhs for minorities (S.No. 3 in Table 10).<sup>70</sup>

A couple of schemes relate to merit scholarships with very little allocations (Serial no. 6-7 Table 10), and a few more schemes are designed to provide coaching facilities, especially for competitive exams to meritorious children from marginalised sections with low household income (Serial no. 8-11). **Since 2020-1, there's been a clear shift in favour of funding these coaching schemes for meritorious students where high volumes of money flow to the coaching industry, by reallocating expenditure away from schemes that have a wider coverage.** For instance, Jai Bhim Mukhyamantri Pratibha Vikas Yojana and Mukhyamantri Vidyarthi Pratibha Yojana for the marginalised sections together have a budget of Rs 250 crores (2020-1, BE) and Rs 200 crores (2021-2, BE). The actual expenditure remains tiny, however, which means that the schemes remain on paper so far.

For most marginalised students, pre-matric (PREMS) and post-matric scholarship (PMS) schemes are crucial lifelines for education. Demand exceeds supply by a wide margin. As per data provided on the website of the Ministry of Minority Affairs, there were a total of 25,867 applications from students in Delhi for the pre-matric scheme for minorities (24,831 fresh and 1036 renewals) on NSP portal, of which scholarships was disbursed to 6988 (fresh) and 435

<sup>68</sup> Government of NCT of Delhi (2019b)

<sup>69</sup> This scheme is implemented by the local government and hence doesn't figure in the state budget.

<sup>70</sup> This is different from reimbursement against Section 12 (1C) of the RTE Act.

(renewals) at a total expenditure of Rs 0.79 crores.<sup>71</sup> That is, 29% of those who applied received scholarships.

Similarly, there were a total of 40,449 applicants for scholarships (via NSP) in 2020-1 for Delhi, of which 15,980 were verified (40%), that is, their application was verified and found eligible for scholarship (see Table 11). The proportion of SC-ST among the overall numbers verified is less than 5%. This demand-supply gap and inadequacy of spending are masked under more and more complex systems in terms of access to entitlements (see Box 7).

**Table 11: Student Scholarship via National Scholarship Portal: Delhi**

	2020-21	Applied					Verified to Applied %			
		Gen	SC	ST	OBC	Total	Gen	SC	ST	OBC
<b>Male</b>	Pre-matric	10,874	333	57	2,321	13,585	36.7	46.8	40.4	33.6
	Post Matric/Top Class/MCM	3,733	424	88	1,481	5,726	42.2	52.6	31.8	40.6
<b>Female</b>	Pre-matric	11,248	424	63	2,258	13,993	40.1	61.6	23.8	34.2
	Post Matric/Top Class/MCM	5,447	275	64	1,347	7,133	43.6	47.3	26.6	38.7
<b>Total</b>		31,312	1456	272	7,409	<b>40,449</b>	39.8	52.9	30.5	36.1
<b>Share of Social Group*</b>		<b>77.4</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>18.3</b>		<b>78</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>16.7</b>

Source: <https://nsp.gov.in/dashboard/statepage#>

\*The first four columns represent the share of the social group in overall applications while the last four columns represent the share of the social group in application verified.

### **Box 7: “Children are being excluded systematically”: Bottlenecks in accessing Scholarships**

In the context of pre-matric and post-matric scholarships, a senior teacher in a DoE school shared her experience. *“About one and a half months back, I had announced in the classes that students should apply for pre and post-matric scholarships, but I don’t think even a single student has applied so far. The application process is cumbersome, time taking, and involves a lot of documents. It is a tedious and difficult process. The national scholarship portal (NSP) is opaque and the school is not directly involved, neither in application/ nor disbursal. Besides, there are different mechanisms/ gateways for various scholarships. NSP is used for minority scholarships whereas, for SC, ST, and OBC pre and post-matric scholarships, one has to access the e-district portal of the Delhi government. This was not the case earlier, where teachers would upload the information onto the edudel website.”* As was observed for Bihar, the stakeholders complained that the schemes are becoming more remote, confusing, and devoid of a feedback mechanism from the students/parents. If the objective was greater transparency, what one finds on the ground is in effect exclusions and a lack of accountability.<sup>72</sup>

In Delhi, the exclusions are particularly staggering, given that a large section of the poor do not have the required certificates (caste, OBC, and income) that officially establish that they are deserving. A majority of those who are “actually” eligible are left out. A teacher from an MCD school narrated, *“many students in the school come from the Valmiki community. But in comparison to their numbers, only a few have SC certificates. Therefore, only 7 to 8 of those students receive scholarships.”* She added that *“there is no OBC student in our school with a certificate. For many years in our school no OBC student has got a scholarship since only the OBC certificate of Delhi is considered.”* It is very difficult to get an OBC certificate in Delhi, the family needs to live in Delhi, since 1993. For making an income certificate, the costs may

<sup>71</sup> GoI. (2021b)

<sup>72</sup> Also see NCDHR (2021) cited in Bose and Sharma (2022)

outweigh the benefits. *“It takes money to get the income certificate made. A girl was charged Rs 4000 for it whereas the scholarship money was much less than that,”* added another teacher.

To sum up, the pandemic saw a severe squeeze in scholarships for students from marginalised communities during 2020-1. Even before the pandemic, certain scholarship schemes for marginalised groups/ girls were, de facto, discontinued. There seems to be a shift happening in favour of funding coaching schemes for meritorious students by reallocating expenditure away from schemes that had wider coverage. **The demand-supply gap in scholarships and inadequacy of spending has accompanied more complex systems in terms of access to scholarships, from students' viewpoint. The stakeholders complained that the scholarship schemes are becoming more remote and arbitrary, confusing, and devoid of a feedback mechanism. The verification of scholarships application is a meagre 40% of the very limited numbers who applied for scholarships via NSP.** There is a noteworthy lack of information about the schemes with teachers. The majority of these issues are arising from faulty designs, lack of attention to detail in schemes, unfamiliarity with the realities on the ground, and centralised decision-making. How to restore accountability in the system is an important challenge and requires manifold efforts, and stakeholder consultations (see Box 8).

### **Box 8: How can Scholarship Schemes be made more effective?**

#### ***An Open letter from Teachers***

Lok Shikshak Manch, an association of progressive teachers, in an open letter to the education minister, GNCTD summarises the problems that GSs in Delhi are facing on the issue of scholarships. The letter pithily articulates the views and suggestions of the most experienced functionaries in the school system and provides feedback on the translation of the policy and its shortcomings.

#### **Dissemination of information, training, and orientation**

- Today there is a lack of information about scholarships among teachers and parents. Teachers should be trained regularly in the seminars organised by the SCERT and the department. Teachers should be given detailed information so that they can reach the correct information to the parents in time and there is no mistake in any child's case.
- Through systematic orientation, the system of scholarships can be strengthened, doubts of the teachers cleared and they can be familiarised with the socio-historical context of scholarships in India and its relationship with social justice and equality. This training will be meaningful only if it can address the experiences and doubts of the teachers, otherwise, this training will also become a cumbersome formality in the list of training, that is getting longer.
- At the beginning of the session, teachers should orient the parents in parent-teacher meetings about which scheme their child will be benefited from and what are its conditions so that they can prepare the necessary documents in time and be aware of the rights of their child. Along with this, information related to caste certificates, income certificates, etc. should also be provided to the parents.
- At the beginning of the session, parents should be provided with the timetable for the allocation of various schemes and scholarships so that they know which benefits are allotted and when. Without knowledge, they neither know their rights nor can make efforts to get them. The website of DoE should also have detailed information related to all the schemes and scholarships so that parents can have various schemes and scholarships, their application conditions, process, the process of making necessary documents, post application status, maximum time for receipt of the amount, complaint mechanism, etc. to know about.

#### **Appropriate advice to the Banks**

- To check whether the money has reached the accounts of the children or not, the children are asked to get the passbook updated from the bank. Often students come to school and tell that they have to

make many rounds of the bank for this work. For some reason or the other, the passbook is not updated in the bank. The Education Department should issue appropriate advice to the banks. Also, teachers should be informed about this information through the website of the Education Department.

### **Grievance Redressal Mechanism**

- Teachers are not aware of any mechanism where children can lodge complaints that money has not been credited to their account despite being linked with Aadhaar. Teachers and students should be made aware that in case of non-receipt of money, the grievance redressal mechanism to approach. This system should work in a transparent and time-bound manner.
- Those children whose money for the last session has not come should be paid along with interest.

### **Cash for those without Bank Accounts**

- A rule should be made those children whose money will not reach their account will be given cash. If DBT was brought to help the public then who is responsible for depriving a single child of his scholarships due to technical limitations?

### **Ease the Condition for Applying and Provide the needed Support**

- Merit and stationery scholarships for students from SC/ST/OBC/Minority backgrounds should be allotted as two separate scholarships as before. Every child requires stationery, so it is unfair to link it with exam results. After merging the scholarships, those children stopped getting stationery money whose marks are less than 50% in class IX-X and 60% in class XI-XII. Therefore, these two scholarships should be separated again.
- For PREMS and PMS, students should be helped with the online application by setting up a help desk and keeping additional staff and the central government must accept applications both offline and online via the PMS portal.
- After the introduction of the Income Certificate in PMS, the number of applicants has decreased. Most of our student's parents work in the informal sector. They are unable to collect the documents which are required to get the income certificate made. The government should clarify why this condition has been kept and what efforts are being made to help the students who are unable to get the income certificate.
- A large number of children studying in Delhi government schools are from SC / ST / OBC / Minority backgrounds, but most of these parents do not even know what a caste certificate is, how to make it, etc. The requisite support needs to be provided. In the case of income certificates, either the SDM office should help the students to get income certificates by organizing camps in the schools, or else the condition of income certificates should be removed from various scholarships as the demand for this document has become the cause of unjust exclusion.

### **Survey**

- The Education Department in collaboration with the DCPCR and the Social Welfare Department should survey schools to find out how the change of conditions of various scholarships from year to year has affected applications – both qualitative and quantitative. If the application and allotment have decreased, then after studying its reasons, the report should be made public and action should be taken to redress the problems found in the process.

Teachers also demand that a statutory legal basis should be created for the scholarships so that their allocation does not fall prey to the arbitrariness and uncertainty of the scheme.

Source: [पत्र: विद्यार्थियों के वजीफों संबंधित समस्याओं के निवारण हेतु](#)

## VI. Challenges of Direct Benefit Transfers

Any report on public financing of education in the present context cannot be complete without referring to the far-reaching changes that were brought in for public service delivery, and the DBT system, within the larger framework of e-governance. The effectiveness of schemes, be it the scholarship scheme or the uniform scheme will depend on how well-oiled the system of payments is, especially at the last mile. Digitalization of government payment is theoretically supposed to bring about both improved efficiency and effectiveness leading to increased government savings and improved service delivery. One crucial aspect is better targeting through the de-duplication of beneficiaries and removing ghost beneficiaries thus reducing leakages. It is also expected to lower the number of intermediaries in the fund flow system thereby reducing the time taken for funds to flow from the central or state government to the beneficiaries again eliminating corruption and reducing delay in payment. Towards this end, **a FastTrack digitalization approach combining the Aadhar program and financial inclusion was brought in.** It was not as if problems were not expected as a result of the shift to the new system (and therefore e-preparedness was measured and different models of last-mile connectivity were discussed), but the proponents of this e-governance reform didn't anticipate the high costs to the individual or the lingering nature of the problems, which as we shall see below continue in significant measure.

The problems with the system are very well documented for a large set of government programs especially in the case of MNREGA and the PDS, but also a whole range of other schemes.<sup>73</sup> Essentially, **leakage-reducing mechanisms have resulted in the exclusion of many deserving financially distressed households who could not access the money on time because of backend failures.**<sup>74</sup> There are plenty of cases of failure of payment, rejected payments, blocked payments, diverted payments, etc.<sup>75</sup> What the evidence from the field shows is that delays have continued. Those who reported non-payment were unable to state the reason for such failure and could only speak about the problem they experienced. As a result, beneficiaries have reported running from pillar to post to ascertain the nature of errors and then resolving these.

In the school context, we observed that **many students are excluded from receiving their entitlements as they don't have a bank account.** Money comes according to the strength of the students in the school, but it goes back since children do not have bank accounts. A major issue relates to the problem of opening a bank account with an Aadhaar and initial deposit of money. In our field area, one MCD school reported that *“Out of 150 children, only 45 have received the money for MDM.<sup>76</sup> Whereas everyone deserved to receive it, they were regularly coming to school. Children's accounts are in different banks, as banks refuse to open accounts beyond a point. Aadhaar is a big hurdle. The department puts pressure on us to get the accounts opened. We also want the children to receive the benefits that are due to them. But where is Aadhaar? The lockdown has made the situation worse. Children are taking admissions but they are unable to get either an Aadhaar card made or open a bank account. Rs 1000 deposit to open an account has become next to impossible in the present conditions.”* Other schools may have better coverage of students with bank accounts but are plagued with the same issues. *“Bank asks for a Delhi Aadhaar card. We try from our side to help children to open bank accounts. We fill out the forms. Before banks used to open zero*

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<sup>73</sup> See Drèze (2022).

<sup>74</sup> Khera (2017)

<sup>75</sup> See Dvara Research (2021) and Gupta, A. & Hussain, S. (2022, May 4). A Tale of Trade-offs: The Anatomy of the Direct Benefit Transfers System. *The Wire*. <https://thewire.in/political-economy/a-tale-of-trade-offs-the-anatomy-of-the-direct-benefit-transfers-system>

<sup>76</sup> MCD schools received Rs 94.60 per child towards MDM in the summer of 2020.

account balances, then Rs 500 became the minimum balance, now the bank asks for Rs 1,000 to open a bank account.” **To have an Aadhar card of Delhi and an initial deposit, securing a bona fide from the school plus finding a willing bank is an uphill task for parents, who often have to lose more than one day’s wages for account opening.** Whereas the credit in the account is few and far between, and parents may not have the resources or the incentive to open an account. Instances of banks deducting money for non-maintenance of minimum account balance were reported by parents.

Then, there are small banks such as Cooperative Banks that are ready to open student accounts but these banks cannot receive most of the scholarship money, which is directly credited through the public financial management system (PFMS) to the beneficiary account only in a scheduled commercial bank, an acting head teacher shared.

**Table 12: Percentage of students who are Aadhaar enrolled, 2020-21**  
(as a percentage of total enrolment)

	Number of Schools	Number of Children Enrolled	Number of children having Aadhar	Percentage of Children having Aadhar to total enrolled children
MCD	1670	985214	629559	63.9
DoE	1027	1954365	1590997	81.4
Overall	2697	2939579	22,20,556	75.5

Source: UDISE, 2020-1.

Table 12 presents data on the percentage of students having Aadhar. The percentage with Aadhar as a proportion of overall enrolment, is 81% in DoE schools and 64% in MCD schools. In other words, **one out of four students do not have Aadhar and are therefore not eligible for Aadhar-linked bank payments.** Even for those who have Aadhar, there would be a significant number who will not have a bank account.<sup>77</sup> And as discussed previously, those who have bank accounts may still not receive the money for backend failures of payments.

Teachers are supposed to single-handedly deal with all the hurdles and ensure that the children open a bank account, but their role ends there. They are not taken into confidence about what money is flowing into the bank account or provide any redressal to the children, in case they have not received the money. “*The rules that we receive change frequently, in some years they give money, whereas in some others they do not*”, shared several teachers. Teachers in another primary school with massive enrolment in the girl's shift remarked, “*The department has given a website where we can register our problems. However much we complain, we do not get a response. They sent us a link but no progress was made. The department saw that out of 1200 children, we could send money (MDM) to 747 children, but they did not act on it. They did not ask why this is the case or what are the problems & why this is happening.*” Not only is there no grievance redressal mechanism, but what the teachers are saying is that though the government is aware of the problem, it has chosen to turn a blind eye to it. If there has been efficiency gains and savings for the government because of DBT, it has come with exclusion and growing uncertainties. These need to be addressed urgently. It is essential that the payment method is streamlined and made inclusive (refer to recommendations in Box 8 and 9).

<sup>77</sup> We could not access any statistics in this regard.



### **Box 9: Need for information and personnel at the school level to address the gaps in cash transfer schemes**

Across cash transfer schemes, there is a **noticeable information gap on the number of eligible students, actual beneficiaries, and therefore the extent of exclusion and reasons for it**. We could not collect this data even after contacting the concerned departments. This data should be made publicly available at two levels. At the macro-level state-wide/ district-wise/ zone-wise aggregate numbers should be presented. Moreover, each school should have this information at the micro-level. **A real time digital interface with each student's details in terms of benefits due and benefits received, scheme-wise, should be available to schools.** The problems, such as non-linking of Aadhar, or back-end issues, if any, should be reflected in the portal. A logical solution to many of the problems of accessing scholarships and entitlements would also be **to appoint a finance manager or officer for (large) schools (or a cluster of small schools)**. They can be responsible for (1) providing the necessary information and creating awareness on the various benefits dues, among students and parents (ii) organising support through help desks for application and documentation in case of scholarships; and (iii) acting as the window for grievance redressal, when money is delayed/ not received. Complaints can be formally lodged. The need for a dedicated staff member for this work is crucial if all students are to receive the benefits due to them. This would take care of the large number of problems with the arm's length method of direct benefit transfers.<sup>78</sup>

## **VII. Summary and Recommendations**

Delhi with one of the highest per capita incomes in the country is imagined as a prosperous and developed state. However, the headline picture hides many uneasy details. A closer look reveals the various fault lines of Delhi's development. The growth of Delhi as a metropolitan city has been marked by unequal access to basic services. There is an outward spatial expansion and growing density of population in peripheral zones of the city. As scholars studying the various “cities” of Delhi note, “it is a deeply divided city marked by layers of exclusion”. Less than a quarter of the population in Delhi live in “planned colonies”. The less privileged areas of the city where much of the working class live are poorly serviced. Access to these basic services is characterised by a “differentiated citizenship”, hampering the development of even the most basic capabilities. Spatial location, intersecting with socio-economic background, hence, influences access to school education for Delhi's children. A substantial part of the demand for schooling in these urban fringe areas in the last twenty years is being met by the low-fee private schools (LFPSs), the majority of these being unrecognised schools. A lot of the demand for LFPS is essentially a market response to excess demand for well-functioning government schools (GSs). *Amongst government schools, often the situation of schools that service the poor are the worst. The school system has reproduced the inequalities and hierarchies of the existing social structure.* 75% of those possessing higher education degrees in Delhi belong to the general category. SCs and Muslims constitute 27% and 12% of the total population in Delhi, but their share of those with higher education qualifications is only 12% and 4%, respectively.

### **Public Financing of school education in Delhi**

As a proportion of GSDP, Delhi's education budget is smaller than the educationally advanced states of India. Measured against its revenue potential/ income, the public spending on education is comparatively less. Delhi spends about 1.4% of GSDP on education (1.3% on school education) (2018-19) compared to 2.6% in Kerala and 2.3% in Tamil Nadu and

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<sup>78</sup> The need for a dedicated position at the school level emerged during a discussion with officials on this issue.

Maharashtra for the 2015-20 period. Moreover, these Southern states have maintained a high level of spending across several decades. The widespread perception of high levels of public spending on education in Delhi is overstated and incorrect.

The inadequacy of present levels of public spending on school education in Delhi can be more accurately established when measured against normative standards. Public finances on school education are in no way adequate vis-a-vis the required (normative) expenditure. There are large pre-existing gaps in resources. As per official statistics, there are more than 17,000 vacancies in teaching positions in government schools (GSs) in Delhi (2020-1). In teacher training institutions and administration, against sanctioned academic posts, many are unfilled.

The greatest shortfalls in Delhi are in the number of government schools. A large proportion of government schools (GSs) face shortages of classrooms. 89% of the Directorate of Education schools and 70% of MCD schools need additional classrooms. According to our estimate (2019-20), more than 100% expansion in capacity in public schooling is necessary to meet the shortage of public schools in Delhi. 632 composite (K-12) GSs and 275 primary GSs, separately, need to be established, besides the addition of classrooms to existing schools. A proper supply response entails a very substantial addition to the existing number of GSs and the recruitment of teachers. It requires additional investments of up to 0.71% of GSDP of Delhi, i.e., a 50% increase on the present level to cover both infrastructure and teacher gaps.

The gaps in resources underline a deeply unequal structure of school education for the poor and marginalized children, a system that was already overwhelmed and was relying heavily on the expansion of the private sector, especially low-fee private schools, to offload the growing pressure of enrolment. These gaps in financing increased with the pandemic as both the pressure of enrolments in government schools rose (15.4% rise in enrolment between 2019-20 and 2021-2) and the need for individual attention, remedial sessions and therefore smaller cohorts of learners became necessary. Simultaneously, the decline in expenditure, as discussed below, pushed up the financing gaps.

### **The decline in expenditure during the pandemic**

The growth in expenditure on school education in the two to three years before the pandemic varied from year to year but showed a rising trend. It had risen by a very moderate 6% between 2017-18 and 2018-19, and by another 10.3% between 2018-19 and 2019-20 (in nominal terms). The higher growth in expenditure between 2018-19 and 2019-20 came from the higher growth in capital expenditure, which jumped up by 2.3 times in a year. It led to a rise in the share of capital expenditure in overall expenditure on education to 10.6% in 2019-20, an acknowledgment of the massive shortage in capacity. The spurt in capital expenditure needed to be sustained for expansion of capacity of the public school system.

The pandemic brought a sharp dip in overall public expenditure on school education, which declined by 12% in 2020-1, with huge cutbacks in centrally sponsored schemes as well as state schemes. It affected the general schemes as well as the schemes targeting the marginalised sections. Scheduled component plan heads on education and scholarships for the marginalised witnessed a severe squeeze in expenditure. The impetus on capital expenditure, which is extremely crucial for Delhi, was lost. Faced with a fiscal squeeze, governments prioritised salary payments over other expenditures.

Like the union budget, education was treated as a residual and an adjusting sector in Delhi government's budget. New programmes on school education announced during the pandemic (2021-2 budget) turned a blind eye to the emergency.

## **Delhi Education Budget: A closer look**

Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SMSA), the main CSS with a mandate for universalisation of education, has been supply-constrained over the years. Like most other states, the approved budget for SMSA in Delhi is only a fraction of what is proposed by GNCTD, indicating the supply-constrained nature of school financing. SMSA saw drastic cuts, with the expenditure in 2020-1 standing at only 58% of the expenditure in 2019-20. It adds to the pre-existing inadequacy of funding plaguing SMSA. One of the important interventions under SMSA, particularly relevant in the context of the pandemic is the special training centres (STCs) for out of school children (OSC). It addresses the imminent need to re-enrol children in schools. Though there are no official statistics yet, it is not difficult to predict that the OSC numbers are likely to rise sharply with the pandemic. The STCs, most of which are housed in the existing GSs, provide a space for learning and catching up within the school. During field visits, we found that the absorption of OSC is more probable where STCs are running. Several localities couldn't get an STC, however, due to the lack of physical space and extra classrooms in government schools even though there is an acute need. It is of concern that the approved budget for STCs went down, rather than going up in 2020-1. Whereas the unit cost remains at a paltry Rs 6,000 per child, the number of OSC was estimated at a level lower in 2021-2 than two years back (PAB, SMSA, 2021-2). Another intervention, skill training for OSC received an allocation of only Rs10 lakhs under SMSA. Incomplete coverage, low unit costs and underfunding important interventions are major drawbacks of SMSA, which in turn are a fallout of low overall allocations.

Accompanying the shortfalls in allocations, there are also unutilised balances, particularly in the secondary education budget of SMSA.

Teachers shared their problems related to the flow of funds for SMSA (and other money flows), even as the scheme provided valuable liquidity to schools for expenditure under various heads. "Schools cannot use the money as per their needs", a problem that has persisted through several rounds of restructuring of the programme. Second, the different channels of fund flow to the schools mean separate accounting and reporting formats which are administratively challenging, particularly so, when schools often have no extra hands for administrative tasks. The burden of administrative work has gone up continuously over the years, as every teacher without exception complains. Third, there are issues of predictability in fund flows.

A significant point, often missing from the policy discussions, is the absence of school mapping in Delhi, a responsibility that falls under SMSA. SMSA doesn't recognise the shortage of schools in Delhi, a crucial blind spot in policymaking.

Mid-day meal (MDM), another crucial entitlement, has suffered from the same under-allocation problem as witnessed for SMSA. There is a substantial difference between the proposed and actual budget over the years. The GNCTD has been unable to implement its own budgetary announcements of expansion of MDM made a few years back, which can be attributed to the same under allocation of budgets. Moreover, the distribution of MDM since the first lockdown – as told by the teachers and experienced by the students – has been irregular and delayed. It needs to be stressed that there has not been any social audit of MDM in any of the districts ever.

Grant-in-aid from the state government is the major source of funding for the local body schools. There was a steep decline in grant-in-aid to local body schools in the state budget in 2020-1, amidst an already sliding trend over the years. The contract teachers in MCD schools were laid off in 2020-1 to squeeze the wage bill. The livelihoods of a large body of teachers were impacted, as a result. Besides this pandemic-induced measure, the problem of timely

payment of salaries for MCD teachers is an old one. It may be noted that in per-student terms, the average expenditure by the GNCTD on students of local body schools is only Rs 21,150.<sup>79</sup> Not only is it nowhere comparable to the expenditure per student in Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs), but it is also lower than the per child cost that the DoE announces for reimbursement to private schools.

Scholarships for the marginalised groups are the main arm of the compensatory policies in Delhi. Several state scholarship schemes faced severe cutbacks in spending in 2020-1; the overall allocation on scholarships in 2020-1 was about 10% of the 2019-20 level. The contraction is visible also from the beneficiary data. Several of the scholarship schemes had faced a squeeze in expenditure before the pandemic. Alongside the contractionary tendencies, there is a shift underway towards reallocation of budgets across scholarship schemes, in recent years. It marks a movement away from broad-based scholarships for marginalised communities in favour of financing private coaching for meritorious students, a policy shift of questionable value.

Problems of exclusions emerge from the macro data and the field data about scholarships. The National Scholarship Portal (NSP) data on scholarships presents a startling picture of the meagre numbers who apply and the small percentage of scholarship applications (mainly CSS) that are verified. The NSP portal is opaque and the school is not directly involved, neither in application/ nor in disbursement, teachers noted. The application process for scholarships is cumbersome, time taking and involves a lot of documents. An obvious gap is the lack of accessible grievance redressal mechanisms or information about the same if it exists. The implication is that the system of scholarships has become more centralised and remote, and money flows erratic from the student's point of view.

A related set of experiences of delays in payments, non-payment, irregular payments and exclusions emerged in the context of entitlements under RTE, such as school uniforms. Again, parents have no recourse to any grievance redress mechanism since the nearest point of contact - the school - is bypassed. The school administration cannot help. In addition, the shift towards full-scale DBT has happened before full coverage of the population through Aadhar, banking services, and Aadhar-linked bank accounts. For instance, as per official data, around 25% of the students enrolled in government schools in Delhi did not have an Aadhar card. Top-down administrative changes in the delivery mechanisms without adequate preparation and consideration of ground reality have led to a system characterised by significant exclusions.

To sum up, the broad conclusions are the following: (i) as the UNESCO's early warning sounded, expenditure compression was adopted across a whole set of low-income countries and Delhi's experience was no exception. General schemes and schemes for the marginalised communities witnessed contraction in expenditure. Contractual teachers were laid off to reduce the wage bill. The adverse shock rippled through a system, where the spending levels were significantly below the requisite levels to begin with. (ii) Financing across all dimensions of school education programs has been supply-constrained over the years. Low/ under-allocations are manifest in unreasonably low unit costs of expenditure heads and incomplete coverage. It is manifest in the large vacancies in teaching positions. It is also manifest in the governments turning a blind eye to certain dark spots, such as school mapping exercises. As a result, the massive shortage of capacity in GSs in Delhi is pushed under the carpet. It is manifest in the state being unable to implement its own budgetary announcements like the expansion of the mid-day meal scheme. It is manifest in huge gaps between the demand for scholarships and the supply of scholarships. (iii) Even as the dominant problem remains the supply-constrained nature of financing, under-utilisation of resources and ineffective delivery of schemes leaves

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<sup>79</sup> Per student assistance to local bodies for school education (including GIA for MDM) calculated for 2018-19.

scope for improvement, within the existing expenditure frontier. The distribution of mid-day meals during the pandemic left a lot to be desired. In cash transfer schemes, top-down administrative changes in the delivery mechanisms without adequate preparation and consideration of ground reality have led to significant exclusions.

Strengthening of the public finances towards greater adequacy, effectiveness and equity of expenditure is crucial. This would allow the public system to cope with the present shocks and develop resilience for adverse shocks in the future. To build back better, a range of steps are proposed.

### **Key recommendations**

- A central recommendation is to adopt and implement a medium-term plan for the expansion of the supply of public schools in Delhi. This should be based on an assessment of needs through school mapping. Well-defined time-bound targets for infrastructure creation and recruitment of teacher and non-teaching staff should be part of the plan. It would involve a substantial step up in public investment, and not incremental changes in budgets.
- For resource planning and financing there is a need to recognise urban fringe areas in Delhi as a special category and provide more resources to government schools (GSs) in these areas. Since spatiality and socio-economic marginalisation intersect to a large extent, this would translate to more resources for schools with a substantial presence of marginalised groups and create better teaching-learning opportunities for them.
- For a significant section of children - the numbers yet unknown - continuation of schooling is endangered. It is important to (i) examine and recognise the true extent of out-of-school children (OSC); (ii) track these children, with the help of the community, schools and NGOs; (iii) ensure special training of OSC through an expansion and strengthening of STCs, among other things; (iv) introduce incentives for retention, so that the risks of dropout may be minimized. A substantial chunk who are on the brink of drop-out need special attention “*some students have lost complete touch with the school,*” said teachers. Our estimates suggest that a significant 30% of students on average will be those without any contact, even perfunctory, with the curriculum. There is a need for a plan to retain them, along with sound practices for coping with the various losses suffered, academically and otherwise. This would be dependent on adequate resources, to a large extent.
- There is a need for regular social audits of the MDM scheme and this should be implemented at the earliest. There is also a need to enhance allocations on MDM for its expansion and enrichment as per the government’s (yet to be implemented) budgetary announcements of 2017-18.
- Allocations on scholarships for marginalised groups need to be demand-based since these are closely linked to basic human rights. It requires a substantial step up in allocations on scholarships both for CSSs and state schemes. Reallocation of budgets away from broad-based scholarships for marginalised communities, as part of recent policy changes, should be reconsidered. With the worsening of financial conditions, especially at the bottom, there is a crucial need for broadening the scholarship net to more students. The pending scholarship money, accumulated during the pandemic and otherwise, should be released at the earliest.
- Besides, the gaps in processes in the distribution of scholarships should be addressed so that these schemes are inclusive and benefit the maximum number of students. Teachers have responded to the difficulties faced in scholarship schemes through a well-drafted set of recommendations. (i) There is a need for dissemination of information, training, and

orientation to overcome the lack of information about scholarships among teachers and parents. (ii) The government should ease the condition for applying and provide the needed support by setting up a help desk and having additional staff in schools. Applications both offline and online via the PMS portal should be allowed. (iii) There is a need to institute a grievance redressal mechanism and conduct regular evaluations, internal and independent so that the schemes can become more effective and have elements of the bottom-up approach. The overall point is that local conditions should be reflected in the design of expenditure policies.

- Several hurdles were identified around the working of DBT that need solutions. The government should advise the banks to open zero-balance accounts and ensure a non-discriminatory attitude towards students' accounts. An alternative of cash for those without bank accounts should be allowed. A real-time digital interface with each student's details in terms of benefits due and benefits received, scheme-wise, should be available to schools. The problems, such as non-linking of Aadhar, or back-end issues, if any, should be reflected in the portal. A logical solution to many of the problems of accessing scholarships and entitlements would also be to appoint a finance manager or officer for (large) schools (or a cluster of small schools). They can be responsible for (1) providing the necessary information and creating awareness on the various benefits dues, among students and parents (ii) organising support through help desks for application and documentation in case of scholarships; and (iii) acting as the window for grievance redressal, when money is delayed/ not received. Complaints can be formally lodged. The need for a dedicated staff member for this work is crucial if all students are to receive the benefits that are due to them. This would take care of many problems of arm's length method of DBT.
- The primary schools run by local bodies are the base of the schooling system and need assured and adequate resources. All too often the running of these schools has been the victim of an unpleasant political slugfest between the different levels of government. Specifically, an independent Court-appointed committee to investigate the problems of regular payment of salaries to MCD school teachers can be set up.
- The issue of teachers' school time and teachers' control over that time from the perspective of professional autonomy needs serious rethinking. As a senior vice-principal teacher shared "*I am asking my teachers, what preparation are you doing for the next class? What can you do with the child? We are not post offices where we get the worksheets and pass them onto the children.*" There is a need to consciously increase the effective teaching time by reducing the numerous non-essential elements that are consuming the teaching-learning space, as suggested by the teachers and the independent evaluation commissioned by the GNCTD. Among other things, resources are needed to reduce the administrative workload on teachers, by appointing more non-teaching staff.

### **How can additional resource requirements be financed?**

The additional financial requirements are steep, but imminently doable, especially if the three levels of government join hands in the process. To reverse the growing financing gap, Delhi must raise taxes – both state and local government taxes. GNCTD must also seek from the Centre: (i) its rightful share in the divisible pool of central taxes; (ii) cooperation on the land issue as the DDA is the major land-owning agency in Delhi and land is an important factor in the expansion of schools; (iii) proper implementation of the CSSs – without the Centre slashing the state proposals - and the state, in turn, utilising the resources well.

## Detailed recommendations (Sector-wise)

### Out of School Children ([Section IV.1](#))

Official surveys have routinely underestimated the numbers of out of school (OSC). Genuine efforts at identification of OSC are required. Community-level surveys should be used to identify OSC, while those at the risk of dropouts are to be identified via schools.

Provide adequate budget for special training of OSC. The present unit cost of Rs 500 per child monthly does not allow more than one teacher volunteer for 30 children. There needs to be an urgent revision of the unit costs for special training of OSC to at least Rs 1000 per child per month. Similarly, the allocations on skill training of OSC are minimal, and need to be raised substantially.

Expand Special Training Centres (STCs) to more schools in the urban fringe areas; Appoint adequate staff to work in these centres. Raise the budget on STCs.

Issue of dropouts is closely related to conditions of schools. The government should try to create the right environment and conditions with adequate teachers and infrastructure, for children to come back to school.

Rebuild school-community linkages through school programmes, meeting of SMCs & PTAs, campaigns for returning to schools. Involvement of CSOs is essential.

Bring back the No Detention Policy in order to encourage children to come back to school without fear of failing.

Full attempt should be made to re-enrol OSC in schools. For those unable to re-enrol in schools after 10th, facilitate admission to National Open Schools and pay their fees, so that education till class 12th is free.

Rigorous implementation of labour laws in the states will discourage dropouts.

### Access to schools ([Section II](#))

Conduct school mapping as a tool for planning and for determining the necessary investments. It should involve the community and all stakeholders. Unrecognised schools should be a part of school mapping.

Given the huge shortage of government schools (GSs) in the urban fringe areas, the option of busing children to GSs where the student classroom ratio is low can be considered. This could be a strategy for classes beyond primary level. Students in the congested schools are presently being called only twice a week, when schools have reopened after an interval of two years.

As a short-term expedient, consider using private school premises and their infrastructure for the afternoon shifts, so that more children can be accommodated in GSs, and the class strength can be brought down to reasonable levels.

### Infrastructure ([Section II](#), [Section III](#))

Propose a medium-term plan with yearly targets for capacity creation for new government schools and expansion in existing GSs. There needs to be very substantial increase in the number of GSs, whereas a limited share of excess demand can be met through increases in classrooms in existing schools.

Slowdown in capital investments during the past two years needs to be made up with accelerated investments from 2022-3 onwards.

### Teachers ([Section II](#), [Section IV.3](#))

Teacher shortage is acute in MCD schools, with high levels of contract teachers in DoE schools. Announce a medium term-plan along with a time path for recruitment of teachers and other personnel, to be implemented in a time bound manner.

Fill up vacancies for (i) teachers, (ii) SCERTs & state teacher training institutions; (iii) administrative and supervisory positions; (iv) non-teaching staff in schools.

Consciously provide more teachers - skilled, specially trained and experienced - in the congested schools of urban fringe areas. Reduce the effective PTR to 35:1/ grade, which means going beyond the RTE teacher norms.

Set up an independent committee in consultation with the MCD to look at the issue of payment of salaries to MCD school teachers.

Teachers' safety issues (with respect to their health, regular income & social security and privacy) that were particularly compromised during the pandemic, need to be prioritised.

Reduce the administrative workload on teachers by appointing extra staff. **Consciously increase the effective teaching time by reducing the numerous non-essential elements that are consuming the teaching-learning space. Provide autonomy to teachers. And, teachers' experiences are to be heard and integrated in policy decisions through participatory forums.**

Teachers' capacities to deliver through offline and online modes and handle the large gaps in learning (as well as differential levels across children in the same class) must be enhanced. Continuous sensitisation of teachers on issues of marginalisation and exclusion is necessary.

#### **Textbooks and Uniforms ([Section IV.4](#))**

Textbooks (with writing material) and uniforms should be provided in kind and not cash. This will take care of the problem of inadequacy of money to cover the cost/ delayed payment/ unwillingness to buy, etc, besides being cost effective. Ensure timely delivery of textbooks and uniforms.

Extend free textbooks (with writing material) and uniforms to all students till 12<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Mid-day Meals (MDM) ([Section IV.2](#))**

Restart cooked MDM in schools immediately.

Implement the announcements, state budget, 2017-18, "to supplementing the existing nutrition content by providing banana / boiled egg to each student...(and) expand the coverage of MDM to all students of class 9-12<sup>th</sup> of girl schools".

Reverse the stagnation in MDM expenditure in order to (i) enhance coverage to all students in GSs, including pre-primary age group; (ii) enhance nutritional standards (iii) include breakfast as suggested in NEP, 2020.

The field data says that children have not received the full quota of MDM entitlements during 2020-1 and the first part of 2021-2. There is a need for a comprehensive social audit. Based on audit observations, arrears in the form of food security allowance should be given to students.

**Institutionalise mandatory social audit in all districts as per the MDM guidelines.**

**Assess children's nutritional and health standards through BMI and other indicators, as children return to school.**

#### **Scholarships ([Section V](#))**

Prioritise scholarships for the marginalised groups as per the Constitutional mandate. The allocations on scholarships must be demand determined, with regular and timely disbursements. **A legal safeguard can be considered to guarantee the scholarships for the marginalised.**

In recent years, money for scholarships in Delhi has flown to select merit-based scholarships, whereas the socio-economic situation demands that the principle of equity and social justice be upheld.

- Bring back the two schemes "Scholarship/Merit Scholarship to SC/ST/OBC and Minority students - Class I to XII" and "Financial assistance for purchase of stationery and merit scholarship to SC/ST/OBC/Minority Students" that had substantial coverage of marginalised groups.
- Reinstate Mukhyamantri pariksha fees yojana so that examination fees for GS students can be waived for public examination.
- Pay arrears for scholarships for 2020-1 (and for other pending years, if any) since students have incurred expenditure on education during the pandemic.
- A universal scholarship scheme for students studying in grades 9-12<sup>th</sup> in GSs may be considered.

The system of scholarships has become more centralised and remote, and money flows erratic. **Suggested steps for improved delivery from the point of view of the students, are: (i) setting up calendars with timelines for announcement of scholarship schemes and when the money will be received, and implementation of these timelines; (ii) orientation of school teachers, who will in turn orient parents with full information on scholarships; (iii) availability of complete information on the state website so that parents are aware of the various schemes and scholarships, their application conditions, process of making necessary documents, post**



application status, maximum time for receipt of amount, complaint mechanism etc; (iv) share information on the DBTs to students with schools; (v) setting up accessible and responsive grievance redressal mechanism (with phone lines) (vi) both online and offline forms should be accepted; (vi) help desks in schools for assistance on filling scholarship forms and support from the administration on banks accounts, caste and income certificates. This would resolve some of the issues of timeliness, access, paperwork, and process.

#### **Direct benefit transfers (Section VI)**

The government should pass an order to commercial banks to open zero-balance accounts with no requirement of minimum balance for the students. It should be mandatory for banks to open student's bank accounts and students should not be turned back.

Students should be notified through SMS about credit/debit transactions to avoid repeated trips to banks. SMS charges to be waived for students.

Proper line-item description in bank passbooks for the DBTs via PFMS to inform parents what the money is for is necessary.

Allow money to be transferred to the parents account in case the children do not have a bank account, especially in primary grades (as practiced in Bihar).

Schools should be instructed to pay cash to students/ parents who do not have bank accounts.

A real time digital interface with each student's details in terms of benefits due and benefits received, scheme-wise, should be available to schools. The problems, such as non-linking of Aadhar, or back-end issues, if any, should be reflected in the portal.

Appoint a finance manager or officer for (large) schools (or a cluster of small schools) who can be responsible for (1) providing the necessary information and creating awareness on the various benefits dues, among students and parents (ii) organising support through help desks for application and documentation in case of scholarships; and (iii) acting as the window for grievance redressal, when money is delayed/ not received. Complaints can be formally lodged.

Note: The recommendations in blue relate to non-monetary aspects.

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## Appendix

**Table A1: Delhi Survey Sample Table**

<b>S/No</b>	<b>School District</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>School Grade</b>
1	North-West Delhi	NMCD	Nursery-5
2	North-West Delhi	NMCD	Nursery-5
3	North-West Delhi	NMCD	Nursery-5
4	North-West Delhi	NMCD	Nursery-5
5	South Delhi	SDMC	Nursery-5
6	North-West Delhi	NMCD	Nursery-5
7	Central Delhi	MCD	Nursery-5
8	South Delhi	SDMC	Nursery-5
9	South-West Delhi	SDMC	Nursery-5
10	Central Delhi	MCD	Nursery-5
11	North-West Delhi	Directorate of Education	Class 1-10
12	New Delhi	MCD	Nursery-5
13	New Delhi	Directorate of Education	Class 6-10
14	North-West Delhi	NMCD	Nursery-5
15	Central Delhi	SDMC	Nursery-5
16	East Delhi	Directorate of Education	Nursery-12

## Acronyms

AWP&B	Annual Work Plan and Budget
BE	Budget estimates
CAG	Comptroller and Auditor General
CSS	Centrally Sponsored Scheme
CWSN	Children With Special Needs
DBT	Direct Benefit Transfer
DIET	District Institute of Education & Training
DCPCR	Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights
DoE	Directorate of Education
GIA	Grant in Aid
GoI	Government of India
GNCTD	Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi
GS	Government school
GSDP	Gross State Domestic Product
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
KV	Kendriya Vidyalaya
LFPS	Low Fee Private School
MCD	Municipal Corporation of Delhi
MDM	Mid-Day-Meal
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NCDHR	National Council for Dalit Human Rights
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NEP	National Education Policy
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NSP	National Scholarship Portal
NSS	National Sample Survey
OSC	Out of School Children
PAB	Project Approval Board
PIL	Public Interest Litigation
PMS	Post Matric Scholarship
PREMS	Pre-Matric Scholarship
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
PTR	Pupil Teacher Ratio
RE	Revised estimates
RMSA	Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan
RPVV	Rashtriya Pratibha Vikas Vidyalaya
RTE	Right to Education
RTI	Right to Information
SCERT	State Council of Educational Research and Training
SCR	Student Classroom Ratio
SMC	School Management Committees
SMSA	Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan
SoE	School of excellence
SS	State Schemes
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
STC	Special training centre
TGT	Trained Graduate Teacher
UDISE	Unified District Education System for Education
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene