

— THE MANIFESTO

ONE NATION, ONE LEARNING.

A Citizens' Manifesto for Indian Education Reform

India runs dozens of education boards that produce wildly different outcomes for students whose only real difference is the postcode of their birth and the bank balance of their parents. This manifesto names every fracture, demands every fix, and calls every Indian student, educator, parent, and citizen to endorse it.

13

Structural Failures

8

Reform Demands

1

Unified Vision

Evidence drawn from ASER 2024 · UDISE+ 2024-25 · NEP 2020 · EPW Research

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ONE BOARD. THREE LAYERS. BUILT TO EVOLVE.

A single, unified national framework — not rigid uniformity, but a strong spine with deliberate flexibility. A living curriculum with an industry feedback loop. Equal quality for every student, regardless of where they were born or what their parents earn.

"Every child in India deserves the same quality of education — not the same school, not the same teacher, not the same building — but the same standard, the same expectation, and the same chance."

THREE LAYERS OF THE FRAMEWORK

Core (80%)	Identical across every school, every board, every state. Non-negotiable. The foundation every Indian student shares regardless of postcode or income.
Regional (15%)	State-specific content — language, history, ecology, culture. Managed by state bodies within nationally defined quality standards.
School (5%)	Local elective space. Schools choose enrichment programmes, specialist subjects, or community-relevant content within approved parameters.

THIRTEEN STRUCTURAL FAILURES.

This manifesto does not charge every teacher, every school, or every board with failure. There are educators across India working with genuine dedication against significant odds. What follows is a critique of the systemic norm — the structural pattern that governs most students' experience.

Inequality · Board Prestige · Class Stratification

01

The board you attend becomes your social rank — before you have proven a single thing.

India's multiple boards do not merely differ in curriculum — they have been quietly ranked into a social hierarchy. An ICSE or IB student is automatically perceived as more refined, more employable, more valuable than a State Board student — regardless of actual ability, character, or intelligence. This differentiation is not coincidental. It is the direct product of a system that allows wealthy families to purchase more prestigious credentials. The board a student attends is decided by the bank balance of their parents. The consequence is a status hierarchy built into Indian childhood itself — invisible, unspoken, and deeply damaging.

Assessment · Rote Learning · Skill Blindness

02

Academic performance is measured only by paper marks. Skills, character, and development are invisible.

Every board reduces the entire enterprise of education to a single instrument — the written examination on paper. Skills, creativity, problem-solving, emotional intelligence, collaboration, and character are not tested and therefore not developed. A student with a perfect marksheet may be incapable of writing a coherent email, managing a disagreement, or building anything that exists outside an answer booklet.

— ASER 2024: ~50% of Class V students in rural India cannot read a Class II-level text — yet most are passed forward, marksheet intact.

03

The same curriculum, year after year — with no live connection to the world students will actually enter.

Boards revise their syllabi once a decade, through government committees insulated from the industries, technologies, and realities of the outside world. Students today are prepared for jobs that existed in the year 2000, by a curriculum that has no mechanism to learn from the present. There is no formal industry input channel, no biennial review process, no feedback loop between what schools produce and what employers actually need.

04

Moving between a central and state board punishes the student for the movement of their family.

When a family relocates across state lines — as millions of Indian families do each year for work, transfer, or circumstance — the student walks into an administrative nightmare. Different textbooks. Different languages of instruction. Different exam formats. Different academic calendars. In a single nation, a student's continuity of learning should not depend on whether their parents stayed in one place.

05

Twelve years of school. No instruction on taxes, money, law, health, or how to live in the real world.

Indian students spend twelve years in formal education and graduate without knowing how to file a tax return, read a salary slip, understand a loan agreement, recognise a consumer right, or manage their own mental health. Financial literacy, legal literacy, digital citizenship, climate awareness, and basic health education are absent from every board's core curriculum. The system produces students who are technically educated but practically helpless at the threshold of adult life.

06

Extra-curricular activities are treated as decoration — not as education.

In most Indian schools, extra-curricular activities exist on paper and in annual reports. In practice, sports periods are consumed by academic subjects during exam season, arts programmes are underfunded, and debate clubs are a privilege of elite urban schools. A student who is a gifted painter, a natural athlete, or a born performer is offered no meaningful pathway to develop that gift within the school system.

07

There is no system to identify, recognise, or uplift the individual talent inside each student.

Every student is measured against an identical yardstick — the marksheet. A future engineer, a future artist, a future entrepreneur, and a future athlete sit in the same classroom, take the same test, and are ranked on the same scale. There is no formal mechanism to identify what a particular student is uniquely capable of. Talent that does not fit the syllabus is invisible to the system — and invisibility, at the formative stage of a young life, is a form of erasure.

08

No one in the school system is responsible for hearing what the student carries inside.

Students carry confusion, anxiety, peer pressure, family expectations, identity questions, and fear through every school day. There is no professional in most schools whose role is to sit with a student and ask how they are actually doing. CBSE made school counsellors mandatory in 2022 for schools with over five hundred students — yet enforcement remains inconsistent, and the role is often reduced to exam stress management rather than genuine mentorship.

— CBSE Circular 2022: Mandatory counsellors for 500+ student schools — enforcement remains patchy.

09

School projects are a formality — they add no real value to the student's knowledge or development.

Across boards, mandatory project work has become an exercise in printing, pasting, and compliance. Students copy content from textbooks or the internet, decorate covers with crayons, and submit assemblies that neither they nor their teachers pretend to take seriously. The project exists to satisfy a marking requirement, not to develop genuine inquiry, original thinking, or practical skill.

10

The way students are taught is generic, old-school, and loses most of them during every class period.

The dominant pedagogy across Indian schools remains one-directional: a teacher speaks, students copy, students memorise, students reproduce on exam paper. There is no structured inquiry, no collaborative problem-solving, no space for the student's own questions to drive the lesson. Disengagement is not a student discipline problem. It is a design failure of the teaching method itself.

11

Some teachers withhold complete instruction in class — directing students to their private coaching centres.

A documented conflict of interest operates inside Indian classrooms: teachers who run private coaching centres have a financial incentive to leave classroom instruction strategically incomplete. Key explanations are reserved. Important exam tips are withheld. Notes that would make independent study possible are not distributed. Students who cannot afford the coaching fee fall behind.

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The classroom no longer suffices. Education has been quietly privatised — and the poor pay the steepest price.

Because in-class instruction is structurally incomplete, every serious student is pushed into private coaching, tuition centres, or test-preparation institutes simply to keep pace. Families spend lakhs each year buying back what should have been delivered inside the school gates. A student whose family cannot afford this shadow education is left to fall behind — not through any failure of their own intelligence, but through the accident of economic circumstance.

— Source: EPW Research 2024 — India's coaching industry valued at ■58,088 crore; projected ■1.3 lakh crore by 2028.

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A student is asked to choose the direction of their entire life at fifteen — with no professional to guide them.

At the age of fifteen, an Indian student is asked to commit to Science, Commerce, or Arts — a decision that quietly determines the shape of the next forty years of their life. There is no professional career counsellor in most schools. No aptitude assessment. No structured exposure to what each stream leads to. The choice is made under the weight of parental ambition, peer trends, and social prestige — never the student's own interests, strengths, or informed desire.

EIGHT DEMANDS. NON-NEGOTIABLE.

These are not suggestions. They are the minimum conditions under which Indian education can be called just, equitable, and fit for purpose.

DEMAND 01

Enforce a Single National Curriculum Framework

A legally mandated eighty-percent core curriculum across all schools, with twenty-percent flexibility for regional, cultural, and linguistic relevance. NEP 2020 proposed it in 2020. Six years later, it remains advisory. It must become enforceable law.

DEMAND 02

Constitute a Statutory Industry Curriculum Council

A formal body of educators, scientists, industry leaders, healthcare professionals, and students that reviews and updates the curriculum every two years. The connection between what schools teach and what the world needs must be a living system, not a decade-long bureaucratic event.

DEMAND 03

Create One National Assessment Body

A single standardised national examination to replace the multi-board chaos — credible, transparent, and comparable across every school in India. Universities and employers must be able to trust that a score means the same thing regardless of which board the student attended.

DEMAND 04

Mandate a Qualified Counsellor in Every School

A full-time, professionally trained school counsellor — not a part-time teacher assigned the role — in every school in India. Mandatory one-on-one check-ins for every student each term. Mental health and career guidance are not optional infrastructure. They are the prerequisite for all learning.

DEMAND 05

Regulate Fees of All Board-Affiliated Schools

If a board's qualification is recognised for public university admissions and government employment, its schools must be subject to fee regulation. A publicly validated credential cannot be the financial preserve of the wealthy. Access to a quality education board must not require a wealthy family.

DEMAND 06

Introduce a National Talent Portfolio for Every Student

Every student must graduate with a formally documented portfolio of demonstrated talents, interests, and original work — maintained from Class VI onward, published alongside the marksheet, and required to be considered by universities and employers. Talent that does not fit the exam format must not remain invisible.

DEMAND 07

Mandate Independent Textbook Audits Every Five Years

All board textbooks must be reviewed by an independent national panel every five years, with transparent revision processes and public consultation. Education must be protected from political interference. The factual accuracy and pedagogical quality of what students are taught must not depend on who is in power.

DEMAND 08

Establish a Unified National Teacher Qualification

One national standard for teacher certification, board-agnostic and portable across every state. A qualified teacher in Kerala must be a qualified teacher in Assam. Teacher talent must move freely across the country. Artificial walls between boards must not trap professional growth or dilute teaching quality.

JOIN THE MOVEMENT.

If you agree that India's students deserve better — sign the manifesto, share it, and demand these reforms from every institution, every policymaker, and every party that asks for your vote.

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