Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity

School Dropouts or Pushouts?
Overcoming Barriers for the Right to Education

Anugula N. Reddy
Shantha Sinha

CREATE PATHWAYS TO ACCESS
Research Monograph No. 40

July 2010



National University of Educational Planning and Administration
NUEPA

Consortium for Research on
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Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Acronyms

DISE	District Information System for Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
G. O.	Government Order
MEO	Mandal Education Officer
MVF	MV Foundation
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
PROBE	Public Report on Basic Education in India
SC	Scheduled Castes
ST	Scheduled Tribes
UEE	Universal Elementary Education
VEC	Village Education Committee

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Preface

India has made significant strides in enhancing initial access to schooling and even enrolment of all children in primary schools. This has happened mainly during the recent years due to unprecedented expansion of schooling infrastructure across the country, even ignoring the traditional framework of population size and distance norms. However, even as the enrolments have surged survival and completion rates have remained quite unimpressive. Official figures indicate that around 30% children leave the school drop out before completing even five years of schooling and over all around 50% children leave schools without completing the 8 year compulsory schooling period. The present paper by Shantha Sinha and A.N. Reddy explores data and research literature related to this issue. The authors examine in this phenomenon in greater depth analysing the multiple factors that cause children to leave school. They particularly illustrate how situations within the schools tend to compel the children to withdraw from school participation. The paper also highlight the need for transforming school management and involving the community in order to increase children's participation, with the help of different initiatives taken by an NGO in Andhra Pradesh in India.

Professor R. Govinda
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Summary

Persistently high dropout rates are one of the biggest challenges to fulfilling the right to education in India. This paper attempts to assess the magnitude of the problem of dropout. The paper critically reviews the evidence on some of the commonly cited reasons for dropout, including poverty, limited to access to credit, child labour, and children's and parents' lack of interest in education. The paper argues that the literature rarely looks at the role of procedures and rules in schools and the wider education system in terms of pushing children out of school. It is the contention of this paper that the reason a persistently high dropout rate should be located in the absence of a social norm in terms of children's right to education; and that this is reflected in the lack of systemic support available for children at risk of dropping out. The paper also documents an experiment initiated by MV Foundation in Shankarpalle Mandal, Ranga Reddy district, Andhra Pradesh, where procedures, rules and practices relating to various aspects of school were changed to ensure that every child stayed in school and completed elementary level.

School Dropouts or Pushouts?
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1. Introduction

Demand for education has been growing explosively in India. From about 3 million children being enrolled each year in the 1980s, there was a spectacular increase during the early 2000s, and particularly in 2002-2003 and 2003-2004. In 2002-2003 alone, more than 10 million additional children were enrolled in school in India and another 7.77 million children added to this in 2003-2004 (see Table 1).

There are a number of options available to children. Poor parents are willing to make enormous sacrifices to send their children to school. In fact, many spend more than they can afford to get what they consider a proper education in English medium private schools. Several studies report that poor children attend fee charging private schools because of dissatisfaction with the quality and functioning of government schools (De et al., 2002, Härmä, 2010). Those who cannot afford private schooling often send their children to government schools.

India has let down large numbers of its children by pushing them out of the system. We argue that these children do not *drop out* of school voluntarily, but are *pushed out* of schools. A variety of social, economic, and cultural factors, as well as pedagogical practices, routines and administrative procedures are responsible for this. There is a mismatch between the expectations of parents and the system's capacity to respond with equal seriousness, resulting in the children losing the battle to gain a formal education. These children then return to a routine of drudgery, exploitation and suffering, leaving their parents' desire for freedom for their children unfulfilled.

This paper looks at the data on school 'dropouts' in India to understand the factors responsible for children being pushed out of schools. The paper unpicks some of the frequently advanced explanations for dropouts such as poverty, quality of education, lack of interest in education and examination failure. It locates the explanation in terms of an absence of the social norm which promotes a child's right to education, as well as the often hostile administrative practices and procedures adopted by schools.

In section two we examine the data on dropouts in India, describing the scale of the problem and disaggregating the data by state and socio economic groups in society. We also examine some of the problems with data and data collection on dropouts in India. In section three we unpick some of the common reasons why children drop out of school and show the structural reasons for them. Section four outlines a case study which demonstrates ways that some of these problems can be addressed and the lessons we can learn from an experiment in facilitating access. This is followed by a concluding section which argues that in the light of the systemic failures of access to education, the responsibility for children dropping out of school lies with the state and education system rather than with the children and families of the poorest sections of society.

Table 1: Enrolment (in Millions) in School Education by Stages

	Enrolment			Increase by year			Percentage Increase Per Year, Elementary
Year	Primary	Upper Primary	Elementary [1]	Primary	Upper Primary	Elementary	
1980-1981	72.7	19.8	92.5				
1981-1982	73.6	21.1	94.6	0.88	1.21	2.09	2.25
1982-1983	77.0	22.2	99.3	3.48	1.16	4.63	4.90
1983-1984	81.1	25.0	106.1	4.06	2.78	6.84	6.89
1984-1985	83.9	26.2	110.1	2.84	1.16	3.99	3.76
1985-1986	86.5	28.1	114.6	2.53	1.97	4.50	4.09
1986-1987	90.0	28.8	118.8	3.53	0.66	4.18	3.65
1987-1988	92.9	29.9	122.9	2.95	1.13	4.08	3.44
1988-1989	95.7	30.9	126.7	2.80	1.03	3.82	3.11
1989-1990	97.3	32.2	129.5	1.58	1.25	2.83	2.23
1990-1991	99.1	33.3	132.4	1.80	1.10	2.90	2.24
1991-1992	101.6	34.4	136.0	2.46	1.16	3.62	2.74
1992-1993	105.4	38.7	144.1	3.79	4.26	8.06	5.92
1993-1994	108.2	39.9	148.1	2.83	1.21	4.04	2.80
1994-1995	109.0	40.3	149.3	0.84	0.37	1.22	0.82
1995-1996	109.7	41.0	150.7	0.69	0.73	1.42	0.95
1996-1997	110.4	41.1	151.5	0.66	0.05	0.71	0.47
1997-1998	108.8	39.5	148.3	-1.61	-1.58	-3.19	-2.11
1998-1999	111.0	40.4	151.3	2.20	0.87	3.07	2.07
1999-2000	113.6	42.1	155.7	2.63	1.71	4.34	2.87
2000-2001	113.8	42.8	156.6	0.21	0.74	0.96	0.62
2001-2002	113.9	44.8	158.7	0.06	2.02	2.07	1.32
2002-2003	122.4	46.8	169.2	8.51	2.02	10.53	6.64
2003-2004	128.3	48.7	177.0	5.87	1.90	7.77	4.59
2004-2005	130.8	51.2	182.0	2.50	2.50	5.00	2.82
2005-2006	132.0	52.3	184.4	1.29	1.08	2.37	1.30

Source: Authors' calculations based on the Ministry of Human Resource Development's annual report, *Selected Educational Statistics*, for the relevant years.

[1] Elementary education in India is the combination of primary and upper primary education.

2. Examining the Data on 'Dropouts'

In this section we examine Indian data on 'dropouts' in order to describe the scale of the problem and regional and social variations that exist. We also describe some of the limitations of the data presented and show how problems with data and research on dropouts misrepresent both the number and nature of dropouts.

2.1 Estimates of Dropouts

Of the more than 27 million children in India who joined in Class I in 1993, only 10 million of them reached Class X. This is about 37% of those who entered the school system. In more than half the states, only 30% of children reached Class X (see Table 2). As many as 17 million children in just one cohort were pushed out and many of the remaining 10 million children would have completed the cycle but would be called '10^{th} class failed', which is a euphemism for all school dropouts after middle school. In almost all the states, girls fared worse than boys.

Table 2: Sixth and Seventh All India Education Survey – State Enrolment Figures (1993 and 2002)

State/U.T.	Enrolment in Class I (1993)			Enrolment in Class X (2002)			Percentage of children who have not reached Class X from cohort that entered Class I in 1993		
	Boys	**Girls**	**Total**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**
Bihar	1,836,181	1,092,002	2,928,183	244,069	108,320	352,389	87	90	88
Assam	614,986	523,751	1,138,737	109,647	9,9251	208,898	82	81	82
Meghalaya	50,640	50,297	100,937	9,419	9,833	19,252	81	80	81
Nagaland	20,322	18,281	38,603	4,657	4,040	8,697	77	78	77
West Bengal	1,337,910	1,187,240	2,525,150	306,672	230,251	536,923	77	81	79
Mizoram	20,039	18,238	38,277	4,607	4,732	9,339	77	74	76
Sikkim	9,658	8,162	17,820	2,236	2,198	4,434	77	73	75
Tripura	65,783	56,099	121,882	16,943	14,421	31,364	74	74	74
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	3,226	2,363	5,589	881	665	1,546	73	72	72
Rajasthan	1,211,450	700,935	1,912,385	331,227	132,079	463,306	73	81	76
Orissa	594,892	499,282	1,094,174	172,266	136,982	309,248	71	73	72
Arunachal Pradesh	21,869	17,036	38,905	6,524	4,500	11,024	70	74	72
Madhya Pradesh	1,169,663	907,333	2,076,996	372,700	196,601	569,301	68	78	73
Andhra Pradesh	1,172,340	1,022,622	2,194,962	382,660	298,852	681,512	67	71	69
Manipur	39,442	35,435	74,877	15,019	14,525	29,544	62	59	61
Karnataka	800,917	746,712	1,547,629	315,040	270,883	585,923	61	64	62
Gujarat	739,643	619,005	1,358,648	301,691	203,473	505,164	59	67	63
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	5,342	4,754	10,096	2,594	2,318	4,912	51	51	51
Jammu & Kashmir	104,541	80,327	184,868	51,969	38,491	90,460	50	52	51
Maharashtra	1341,772	1,223,558	2,565,330	684,621	545,418	1,230,039	49	55	52
Punjab	264,021	229,313	493,334	135,157	121,314	256,471	49	47	48
Tamil Nadu	716,970	674,183	1,391,153	377,802	362,317	740,119	47	46	47
Uttar Pradesh	2,345,274	1,482,422	3,827,696	12,44,315	652,610	1,896,925	47	56	50
Delhi	143,242	137,438	280,680	78,960	69,278	148,238	45	50	47
Daman & Diu	1,486	1,255	2,741	835	666	1,501	44	47	45
Goa	14,598	13,592	28,190	8,732	8,272	17,004	40	39	40
Himachal Pradesh	85,874	80,617	166,491	61,189	55,442	116,631	29	31	30
Lakshadweep	882	813	1,695	657	629	1,286	26	23	24
Chandigarh	7,865	6,776	14,641	6,034	5,401	11,435	23	20	22
Pondicherry	10,393	9,612	20,005	8,006	7,667	15,673	23	20	22
Haryana	212,470	183,281	395,751	165,061	115,372	280,433	22	37	29
Kerala	273,908	264,476	538,384	228,118	240,797	468,915	17	9	13
Uttaranchal	0	0	0	91,331	66,864	158,195	0	0	0
Chhattisgarh	0	0	0	114,341	68,513	182,854	0	0	0
Jharkhand	0	0	0	81,488	46,402	127,890	0	0	0
TOTAL	**15,237,599**	**11,897,210**	**27,134,809**	**5,937,468**	**4,139,377**	**10,076,845**	**61**	**65**	**63**

Source: NCERT (1998) and NCERT (2005)

Table 3: Educational Status of Children – Compiled over various years

Year and Survey	Age Group	Indicator	Male	Female	Total
			%	%	%
5-14 / 6-14Years					
1992-1993 (NFHS-1)	6-14 (Total)	Attending School	75.5	58.9	67.5
1998-1999 (NFHS-2)	6-14 (Total)	Attending School	83.1	73.7	78.6
1999-2000 (NSSO 55th)	5-14 (Total)	Attending Educational Institution	76.3	67.7	72.3
2004 (NSSO 60th)	5-14 (Total)	Attending Educational Institution	82.0	76.0	79.1
2006 (NFHS-3)	6-14 (Total)	Attending School	82.6	76.4	79.6
5-9 / 6-10 Years and Classes I-V					
1992-1993 (NFHS-1)	6-10 (Total)	Attending School	75.0	61.3	68.4
1995-1996 (NSSO 52nd)	I-V (Total)	Gross Attendance Ratio	92.0	77.0	85.0
1995-1996 (NSSO 52nd)	6-10 (Total)	Age-specific Attendance Ratio	73.0	63.0	72.0
1995-1996 (NSSO 52nd)	I-V (Total)	Net Attendance Ratio	71.0	61.0	66.0
1998-1999 (NFHS-2)	6-10 (Total)	Attending School	85.2	78.3	81.9
1999-2000 (NSSO 55th)	5-9 (Total)	Attending Educational Institution	72.7	66.5	69.8
2004 (NSSO 60th)	5-9 (Total)	Attending Educational Institution	78.6	74.8	76.7
2006 (NFHS-3)	6-10 (Total)	Attending School	84.6	81.0	82.9
10-14 / 11-14 Years and Classes VI-VIII					
1992-1993 (NFHS-1)	11-14 (Total)	Attending School	76.3	55.3	66.2
1995-1996 (NSSO 52nd)	VI-VIII (Total)	Gross Attendance Ratio	74.0	56.0	65.0
1995-1996 (NSSO 52nd)	11-13 (Total)	Age-specific Attendance Ratio	78.0	64.0	72.0
1995-1996 (NSSO 52nd)	VI-VIII (Total)	Net Attendance Ratio	48.0	38.0	43.0
1998-1999 (NFHS-2)	11-14 (Total)	Attending School	80.2	67.0	73.9
1999-2000 (NSSO 55th)	10-14 (Total)	Attending Educational Institution	80.1	69.1	74.9
2004 (NSSO 60th)	10-14 (Total)	Attending Educational Institution	85.6	77.2	81.6
2006 (NFHS-3)	11-14 (Total)	Attending School	79.9	81.9	75.3

Source: NSSO (2005, 2001 & 1998), IIPS (2007, 2000 & 1995)

Available data suggests that most children drop out of school between Classes I and II. Over one-fifth of children enrolled in Class I in 2005 did not proceed to Class II[2]. However, data for 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 report a substantial reduction in dropout rates between Class I and Class II. The dropout rates from Classes II to III and from III to IV are found to be lower than 10% and have further declined during the last few years (see Table 4). Interestingly, the dropout rates between Classes IV and V have been be negative over the last few years. This may be because of the re-entry of dropout children into these classes through bridge courses. Dropout rates remain very high between Classes V and VI, indicating difficulties in transition from primary (Classes I-V) to upper primary (Classes VI-X) level. There is a variation in the dropout rates in Classes VI and above. Significantly, there is a critical bottleneck between Classes IX and X (see Table 4).

[2] This dropout rate is estimated by apparent cohort method using grade data reported in the Ministry of Human Resource Development's annual report, *Selected Educational Statistics*.

Table 4: Class Dropout Rates

Year	Class I[3]	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V	Class VI	Class VII	Class VIII	Class IX	Class X
Boys										
1998-1999		21.7	8.6	10.0	3.9	7.3	2.4	4.9	13.7	12.6
1999-2000		22.0	7.7	10.0	2.5	4.4	7.8	3.0	16.9	14.9
2000-2001		23.0	9.2	10.4	4.8	7.4	10.9	6.9	18.3	11.4
2001-2002		22.6	10.3	10.7	2.8	4.6	8.9	6.5	14.7	8.7
2002-2003		19.4	6.0	6.4	0.1	10.5	11.1	6.7	12.0	8.0
2003-2004		15.5	2.9	4.1	-2.5	7.9	6.9	4.3	9.3	5.8
2004-2005		16.3	6.4	6.7	2.3	9.4	6.2	3.6	9.0	8.0
2005-06		17.2	7.4	8.4	2.4	9.4	9.4	6.5	11.7	8.9
Girls										
1998-1999		22.8	10.0	11.3	8.6	10.9	21.2	9.3	17.4	9.3
1999-2000		22.2	9.0	10.4	5.4	9.7	9.0	8.7	17.3	10.8
2000-2001		23.6	9.2	9.6	5.8	11.3	8.4	11.5	19.0	13.6
2001-2002		20.7	7.7	8.6	4.5	8.6	6.3	7.8	15.5	7.7
2002-2003		7.7	-2.8	-1.4	-5.4	6.7	3.4	2.8	9.6	2.0
2003-2004		16.3	4.5	5.3	0.0	14.0	6.4	7.5	14.4	9.9
2004-2005		15.6	6.8	6.9	3.4	13.4	4.0	7.2	14.7	9.4
2005-06		15.4	8.5	9.3	4.8	13.6	8.5	8.9	16.1	9.3
Total										
1998-1999		22.2	9.2	10.6	5.9	8.8	11.0	6.7	15.1	11.4
1999-2000		22.1	8.3	10.1	3.7	6.6	8.3	5.3	17.0	13.3
2000-2001		23.3	9.2	10.0	5.2	9.1	9.9	8.8	18.6	12.3
2001-2002		21.7	9.2	9.8	3.5	6.3	7.9	7.1	15.1	8.3
2002-2003		14.2	2.1	2.9	-2.3	8.9	7.9	5.0	11.0	5.6
2003-2004		15.9	3.6	4.7	-1.3	10.7	6.7	5.7	11.5	7.5
2004-2005		16.0	6.6	6.8	2.8	11.2	5.2	5.2	11.5	8.6
2005-06		16.4	7.9	8.9	3.5	11.3	9.0	7.6	13.6	9.0

Source: Authors' calculations using data from the Ministry of Human Development's annual report, *Selected Educational Statistics*, for the relevant years.

The 1991 Census data shows that out of 209 million children in the 5-14 age group, about 104 million attended schools and the remaining 105 million children (50%) did not. In the 2001 Census, the total population of children in the 5-14 year group had risen to 253 million, of whom 166 million attended schools and 87 million (34.4%) did not. This is an improvement from the 1991 Census data, yet a very large number of children remain out of school (see Tables 5 and 6).

[3] Drop outs are calculated by year hence the figures for Class II indicate those from Class I who fail to reach Class II

Table 5: Census 1991 – Children Attending and Not Attending Educational Institutions by State and Gender (age 5-14 years)

States	Population 5-14 years			Population Attending School (5-14 years)			Population Not Attending School (5-14 years)			% Population Not Attending School		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
										%	%	%
Bihar	12,546,869	11,038,940	23,585,809	5,369,232	2,862,694	8,231,926	7,177,637	8,176,246	15,353,883	57	74	65
Uttar Pradesh	19,838,075	17,182,973	37,021,048	8,856,600	4,811,808	13,668,408	10,981,475	12,371,165	23,352,640	55	72	63
Meghalaya	235,875	232,685	468,560	89,894	89,911	179,805	145,981	142,774	288,755	62	61	62
Rajasthan	6,345,134	5,647,187	11,992,321	3,304,626	1,427,450	4,732,076	3,040,508	4,219,737	7,260,245	48	75	61
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	17,072	16,342	33,414	8,219	5,048	13,267	8,853	11,294	20,147	52	69	60
Arunachal Pradesh	113,855	105,625	219,480	52,302	38,039	90,341	61,553	67,586	129,139	54	64	59
Madhya Pradesh	8,692,120	8,048,527	16,740,647	4,613,163	3,044,212	7,657,375	4,078,957	5,004,315	9,083,272	47	62	54
West Bengal	8,735,186	8,370,337	17,105,523	4,357,404	3,541,676	7,899,080	4,377,782	4,828,661	9,206,443	50	58	54
Assam	3,056,460	2,946,014	6,002,474	1,524,565	1,280,307	2,804,872	1,531,895	1,665,707	3,197,602	50	57	53
Andhra Pradesh	8,536,934	8,118,722	16,655,656	4,780,263	3,411,831	8,192,094	3,756,671	4,706,891	8,463,562	44	58	51
Orissa	3,890,521	3,814,240	7,704,761	2,215,566	1,644,985	3,860,551	1,674,955	2,169,255	3,844,210	43	57	50
Nagaland	159,365	151,942	311,307	84,101	75,290	159,391	75,264	76,652	151,916	47	50	49
Manipur	223,973	219,239	443,212	121,291	108,204	229,495	102,682	111,035	213,717	46	51	48
Tripura	366,620	352,732	719,352	207,940	177,865	385,805	158,680	174,867	333,547	43	50	46
Karnataka	5,602,033	5,481,798	11,083,831	3,470,163	2,795,077	6,265,240	2,131,870	2,686,721	4,818,591	38	49	43
Gujarat	5,175,888	4,776,906	9,952,794	3,266,418	2,488,046	5,754,464	1,909,470	2,288,860	4,198,330	37	48	42
Sikkim	54,650	53,325	107,975	33,982	30,067	64,049	20,668	23,258	43,926	38	44	41
Haryana	2,312,596	1,995,627	4,308,223	1,523,677	1054,093	2,577,770	788,919	941,534	1,730,453	34	47	40
Punjab	2,494,166	2,208,710	4,702,876	1,623,062	1,306,846	2,929,908	871,104	901,864	1,772,968	35	41	38
Mizoram	87,622	87,002	174,624	56,397	54,227	110,624	31,225	32,775	64,000	36	38	37
Maharashtra	9,637,599	9,012,466	18,650,065	6,646,616	5400,442	12,047,058	2,990,983	3,612,024	6,603,007	31	40	35
Daman & Diu	12,337	11,827	24,164	8,611	7,427	16,038	3,726	4,400	8,126	30	37	34
Tamil Nadu	6,112,308	5,867,075	11,979,383	4,484,593	3,880,232	8,364,825	1,627,715	1,986,843	361,4558	27	34	30
Delhi	1,138,784	1,006,497	2,145,281	817,846	695,214	1,513,060	320,938	31,1283	632,221	28	31	29
Himachal Pradesh	633,234	608,449	1,241,683	485,055	413,832	898,887	148,179	194,617	342,796	23	32	28

Andaman & Nicobar Islands	35,627	33,983	69,610	26,755	24,246	51,001	8,872	9,737	18,609	25	29	27
Chandigarh	71,421	62,184	133,605	55,520	46,929	102,449	15,901	15,255	31,156	22	25	23
Pondicherry	88,024	85,586	173,610	71,725	66,899	138,624	16,299	18,687	34,986	19	22	20
Goa	121,623	117,106	238,729	100,775	92,552	193,327	20,848	24,554	45,402	17	21	19
Lakshadweep	6,598	6,089	12,687	5,450	4,900	10,350	1,148	1,189	2,337	17	20	18
Kerala	3,024,225	2,959,701	5,983,926	2,585,830	2,531,803	511,7633	438,395	427,898	866,293	14	14	14
TOTAL	**109,366,794**	**100,619,836**	**209,986,630**	**60,847,641**	**43,412,152**	**104,259,793**	**48,519,153**	**57,207,684**	**105,726,837**	**44**	**57**	**50**

Source: Census of India (1991)

Note: Jammu & Kashmir is excluded from the list as according to Census 1991

Table 6: Census 2001 – Children Attending and Not Attending Educational Institutions by State and Gender

States	Population 5-14 Years			Population (5-14 Years) attending educational institutions			Population (5-14 Years) not attending educational institutions		
	Total	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**	**Boys**	**Girls**
Bihar	23,868,079	12,675,464	11,192,615	10,213,038	6,098,225	4,114,813	13,655,041	6,577,239	7,077,802
Jharkhand	7,439,049	3,853,573	3,585,476	3,942,296	2,249,831	1,692,465	3,496,753	1,603,742	1,893,011
Meghalaya	656,311	332,354	323,957	364,812	180,988	183,824	291,499	151,366	140,133
Arunachal Pradesh	304,982	156,007	148,975	171,653	93,021	78,632	133,329	62,986	70,343
Uttar Pradesh	47,201,660	25,130,545	22,071,115	27,289,515	15,624,597	11,664,918	19,912,145	9,505,948	1,0406,197
Assam	6,936,344	3,556,202	3,380,142	4,118,764	2,160,468	1,958,296	2,817,580	1,395,734	1,421,846
Jammu & Kashmir	2,653,422	1,367,317	1,286,105	1,633,207	907,513	725,694	1,020,215	459,804	560,411
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	48,337	24,839	23,498	30,226	17,252	12,974	18,111	7,587	10,524
Orissa	8,634,215	4,411,995	4,222,220	5,551,554	3,008,193	2,543,361	3,082,661	1,403,802	1,678,859
Madhya Pradesh	15,883,680	8,322,224	7,561,456	10,275,094	5,738,462	4,536,632	5,608,586	2,583,762	3,024,824
West Bengal	19,029,144	9,765,877	9,263,267	12,416,847	6,490,981	5,925,866	6,612,297	3,274,896	3,337,401
Rajasthan	15,310,011	8,089,925	7,220,086	9,997,421	5,928,978	4,068,443	5,312,590	2,160,947	3,151,643
Chhattisgarh	5,239,700	2,663,945	2,575,755	3,540,829	1,902,805	1,638,024	1,698,871	761,140	937,731
Nagaland	540,749	281,301	259,448	366,711	193,313	173,398	174,038	87,988	86,050
Gujarat	11,355,498	6,024,700	5,330,798	7,922,570	4,423,452	3,499,118	3,432,928	1,601,248	1,831,680
Karnataka	11,903,007	6,082,710	5,820,297	8,365,944	4,399,572	3,966,372	3,537,063	1,683,138	1,853,925
Tripura	781,092	399,057	382,035	554,874	290,323	264,551	226,218	108,734	117,484
Haryana	5,306,241	2,866,083	2,440,158	3,858,762	2,155,739	1,703,023	1,447,479	710,344	737,135
Andhra Pradesh	17,713,764	9,078,873	8,634,891	13,078,287	6,985,076	6,093,211	4,635,477	2,093,797	2,541,680
Punjab	5,489,138	2,981,863	2,507,275	4,130,976	2,271,241	1,859,735	135,162	710,622	647,540
Manipur	501,425	256,004	245,421	380,546	197,830	182,716	120,879	58,174	62,705
Mizoram	212,924	108,443	104,481	162,443	83,304	79,139	50,481	25,139	25,342
Uttaranchal	2,164,891	1,123,713	1041,178	165,8963	882,949	776,014	505,928	240,764	265,164
Sikkim	136,638	69,171	67,467	106,081	54,061	52,020	30,557	15,110	15,447
Delhi	3,115,078	1,665,719	1,449,359	2,439,713	1,311,550	1,128,163	675,365	354,169	321,196
Maharashtra	21,567,532	11,248,450	10,319,082	17,072,099	9,020,718	8,051,381	4,495,433	2,227,732	2,267,701
Daman & Diu	28,237	14,717	13,520	22,758	12,037	10,721	5,479	2,680	2,799
Chandigarh	181,963	98,843	83,120	147,506	80,878	66,628	34,457	17,965	16,492
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	72,803	37,234	35,569	59,515	30,644	28,871	13,288	6,590	6,698
Tamil Nadu	11,612,412	5,962,197	5,650,215	9,737,027	5,039,255	4,697,772	1,875,385	922,942	952,443
Goa	227,403	116,300	111,103	193,097	99,484	93,613	34,306	16,816	17,490
Himachal Pradesh	1,324,203	684,315	639,888	1,125,602	587,477	538,125	198,601	96,838	101,763
Lakshadweep	14,266	7,398	6,868	12,708	6,633	6,075	1,558	765	793
Kerala	5,531,381	2,819,521	2,711,860	4,936,611	2,511,983	2,424,628	594,770	307,538	287,232
Pondicherry	178,069	90,831	87,238	159,524	81,638	77,886	18,545	9,193	9,352
TOTAL	**253,163,648**	**132,367,710**	**120,795,938**	**166,037,573**	**91,120,471**	**74,917,102**	**87,126,075**	**41,247,239**	**45,878,836**

Source: Census of India (2001)

The states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh are amongst the states with the largest percentage of children not attending schools both in 1991 and 2001. Some states, including those of significant concern in the past, have improved their ranking (see Table 7). Rajasthan, for example, was ranked the fourth worst performing state in 1991, but improved its position to twelfth in 2001. Similarly, Madhya Pradesh has moved from seventh worst to tenth, Andhra Pradesh from tenth to nineteenth, and Maharashtra from twenty-second worst to twenty-sixth. Some states, such as Karnataka, Gujarat, Haryana, and Mizoram maintained approximately the same position relative to other states. Significantly, Pondicherry became the best performing state in the year 2001 (fourth in 1991), displacing Kerala, which moved to second best.

The two states which have seen the highest jump in educational attendance ratios are Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh, followed by Manipur, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Sikkim, Tripura, Meghalaya and Nagaland. With regard to the increase in attendance of girls, Rajasthan has fared the best with a 31% increase, followed by Andhra Pradesh (29% increase) and then Manipur, Uttar Pradesh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Sikkim and Tripura (see Table 7).

Table 7: States with Larger than Average Percentage Increases in School Attendance, 1991-2001

State	Increase in School Attendance (%) 1991 to 2001
Rajasthan	**26**
Andhra Pradesh	**25**
Manipur	**24**
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	**23**
Uttar Pradesh	**21**
West Bengal	**19**
Madhya Pradesh	**19**
Sikkim	**18**
Tripura	**17**
Meghalaya	**17**
Nagaland	**17**
All India	**16**

State	Increase in Girls' School Attendance (%) 1991 to 2001
Rajasthan	**31**
Andhra Pradesh	**29**
Manipur	**25**
Uttar Pradesh	**25**
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	**24**
Madhya Pradesh	**22**
West Bengal	**22**
Sikkim	**21**
Tripura	**19**
All India	**19**

Source: Authors' calculations based on data in Tables 5 and 6

The issue of overestimation or over-reporting of data on the number of children 'attending' schools in recent times by Departments of Education, however, is cause for serious concern. As a result, school dropout has become a non-issue. Several states in the country are

reporting Gross Enrolment Ratios of around 90% to 95% in various districts. The Government of India too has shown only 8-10 million children in the entire country are not attending schools[4]. Even assuming that there are some children of lower age groups included in this figure, this implies that very large numbers of children are in schools. But is this really correct? The census figures above, therefore, while they claim to report attendance, might actually more accurately reflect enrolment.

Using Andhra Pradesh as an example, DISE data shows that of the 2,487,910 children who joined Class I in 1996-1997, only 1,455,607 reached Class V and only 1,153,899 reached Class VII. The figures for Class VII are generally considered to be more reliable because examinations are held, hall tickets are issued and marks memos are sent to every child. This figure, cannot be disputed but does include uncertain numbers of repeaters. In Andhra Pradesh, there should be twice as many children taking Class VII exams as there are today (Vinayak, 2006).

A reliable estimation of the total number of children of school-going age is difficult to arrive at in the present context. There are many contradictory figures from different sources. However, an attempt has been made here using DISE data for Andhra Pradesh for the period 1996-1997 to 2005-2006 to illustrate the magnitude of the problem of dropout. Tracing the progress of the cohort that joined school in Class I in the 1996-1997 school year reveals the extent and pattern of dropout. A total of 2.49 million children joined Class I in 1996-1997. Out of this group, only 1.78 million children reached Class II with the remaining 0.71 million dropping out of school. Only 1.45 million children reached Class V in 2000-2001, and by the time they reached Class X only 0.9 million children remained. In short, the data from DISE relating to Andhra Pradesh confirms the widely acknowledged fact that the largest numbers of children dropout before they reach Class II. This figure swells as one moves up the school ladder, with nearly 50% of children leaving the system without completing Class V and over 60% dropping out before entering Class X. The data further confirms that the crucial grades in which children are pushed out are Class V and Class VII – i.e. when children move from one school to the next. Thus, while governments produce reports indicating enrolment rates above 90%, the reality is that dropout rates are so high that it impossible for this to be the case. The irony is that it is DISE data collected to monitor the progress of *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (the national EFA programme) that corroborates this point (Vinayak, 2006).

It is difficult to draw any conclusions of a similar kind at the national level because the transition classes between primary and upper primary schools as well as high schools are not uniform across the country. Furthermore, the examinations held by State Boards are also conducted at different levels. For example, while in Andhra Pradesh the first board examination the child takes is in Class VII, in Madhya Pradesh it is Class V. At the same time, evidence suggests that the most crucial year for children to dropout all over the country is Class I, which accounts for more than 20% between 1998 and 2002 (see Table 4). It appears that some improvement has taken place over the last few years (with dropout declining to 16% in 2004-2005 compared to over 20% in earlier years), but the sustainability of this remains uncertain in the context of initiatives such as para-teachers and alternative

[4] Based on notes distributed by the Government of India in its meeting of the National Resource Group for the Education Guarantee Scheme / Alternative & Innovative Education Scheme held on 25 February 2005. The following is the number out-of-school children in each state as of 31 December 2004 as submitted by the respective State Project Directors: Andhra Pradesh – 0.21 million; Chhattisgarh – 0.11 million; Gujarat – 0.22 million; Haryana – 0.12 million; Jharkhand – 0.40 million; Karnataka – 0.04 million; Madhya Pradesh – 0.32 million; Maharashtra – 0.05 million.

schools that may result in progressive deterioration of the infrastructure of public schooling. The comparable figures for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children are much higher. These children face far more formidable challenges to stay in school when compared to children in the general category[5].

2.2 Problems with Data on Children Attending Schools

In India the standardisation of data on the retention of children in schools is difficult because of the size, complexity and lack of uniformity of the state education systems. School records are not satisfactorily maintained. Names of children have been included and excluded from school attendance records in India. In some cases the names of children who are not in school and are actually attending private schools are included in attendance registers of government schools (Aggarwal, 2000). In some circumstances schools have the names of children enrolled who have migrated away from the area or have moved onto different classes. In addition some students are not on the register, even though they attend school. For example, in some cases girls who are over 12 and have reached puberty, do not appear on the attendance register or on the out of school children's list. When pursued on this subject, the teachers have promptly responded that such girls are 'over aged' and that it would be 'a waste to include their names because they would not come to school in any case'. Young girls who are married and below 14 years of age are also seldom mentioned on the lists as if they do not exist[6].

There is also a dynamic movement of children in and out of school (MVF[7]). At times children are absent from school for 2-3 months or more when they migrate with their parents for work. In many instances children who are shown as being in school have not in fact been attending school regularly. Therefore, calculations of children in school and out of school should be done in a nuanced manner.

Studies have often relied on responses given by parents to queries on the efficacy of the education system[8]. However, few conclusions can be drawn from these responses – that parents talk of the need to supplement family income or the irrelevance of education may have much more to do with the manner in which these claims have been elicited, the circumstances of the parent, rather than their actual preferences. Even parents who send their children to school find it easier to explain why children should be sent to work rather than to school. The inability on their part to articulate their desire to send their children to school is more a reflection of their incapacity to grapple with what has been fed to them as conventional 'logic' often propounded by those who would not think twice about sending

[5] Class wise data on enrolment of SCs and STs is beginning to be given only recently making it difficult to trace the movement of a cohort of children. MHRD provides data on dropout by stages (i.e. between classes I-V and I-VIII) SCs and STs along with general population in its annual publication 'Selected Educational Statistics'. The figures for SCs and STs are much higher than general population.

[6] For example, many such instances were reported in a drive undertaken by MVF volunteers, school children's committee and others to verify school registers to assess the number of out-of-school children objectively. See annual reports for years 2003-04 of MVF, Ranga Reddy District, Andhra Pradesh (pp. 20) and 2004-05 (pp.8)

[7] See MVF Annual Reports for the years 2001-2002 to 2004-2005 on monitoring of regularity of attendance of children in schools.

[8] The large scale surveys conducted by NSSO, NFHS that provide data on reasons for dropout and also never enrolment best represent these kinds of studies/surveys. In these surveys parents are usually asked questions with multiple responses on why their children dropout. The parents unable to articulate reasons in a more nuanced way may simply nod to reasons like not interested in studies, not able to cope academics, costs too much, etc. Even several individual researchers also deploy almost similar methodologies. See Kumar (1988) for a general critique of these studies.

their own children to school. Drawing any conclusions from this would be to deny them the ability to think and act in the interest of their children.

Not listing names of children in any list of those enrolled is tantamount to abdication of the state's responsibility towards children and in the worst case, akin to declaring them dead. It is a serious issue and cannot be rectified unless the system learns to accept the truth without underestimating the number of un-enrolled or out of school children. It is important to create structures that encourage schools to provide accurate information. Schools are close to the ground and should have accurate information. This is necessary for policy makers to improve possibilities of educational access and reduce drop outs.

3. Barriers to School Enrolment and Attendance and reasons for Dropping Out

In this section we focus on several common reasons why children are not enrolled in school, do not attend regularly or drop out of school. In each case rather than the responsibility resting with the poorest and most disadvantaged in Indian society, we argue, the state and central government bears much of the responsibility for low levels of enrolment and attendance among some groups and in some areas.

3.1 Poverty and Child Labour

Many children either dropout or never join school because they are poor and the survival of their family depends on the children's earnings. Basu and Van (1998) propose the luxury axiom for child labour, where parents send their children to work as a response to poverty. In other words, they argue that if parents were able to earn above subsistence levels of income, there would be no need to send their children to work.

It is also argued that in subsistence economies, where poor families do not have collateralizable assets in order to overcome income shocks, parents use child labour as collateral (Beegle et al, 2002). There is evidence to show that lack of access to credit perpetuates poverty because children in households with borrowing constraints are withdrawn from schools earlier than those with access to credit. Alleviating credit constraints thus reduces child labour and increases educational opportunities (Jacoby, 1994; Jacoby and Skoufias, 1997; Dehejia and Gatti, 2002 quoted in Beegle et al, 2002). These findings imply that easy access to credit would help reduce child labour and improve school attendance.

In the light of the low wages in adult labour markets, Basu and Van (1998) suggest that governments focus on improving the adult labour market as this would have an impact on reducing the market for child labour. At the same time, they feel that this may not be realizable in poorer countries. Under such circumstances, they conclude that banning child labour would result in many families facing starvation. On the other hand, in growing economies, such as India and China, a ban on child labour would result in increasing demand for adult labour and consequently an increase in wages. This could eventually result in raising family incomes to a level at which there would be no need to send children to work (Basu and Van, 1998; Moss, 1998) but might also undermine competitiveness.

The pressure on children to pay school fees and other school charges (school uniforms, etc.) at the time of the opening of school and also during the academic session is immense. Poor parents can ill afford the costs involved in sending their children to school. Even when there are rules against school fees, school teachers frequently exercise pressure on children for resources for the maintenance of schools and classrooms, and to procure education materials, examination question papers, answer scripts and so on, instead of making demands on the department of education[9]. The inability to meet these demands may result in the overt or covert maltreatment of children.

The structural relationships between children's schooling and child labour have been studied in the context of Vietnam (Nguyen and Le, 2006) where it was noted that the increase in GDP

[9] *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* has allocated some amounts for such pecuniary expenses, but there are administrative problems in utilizing these amounts.

of 7% in Vietnam in the 1990s, was associated with a reduction in the incidence of child labour. Along with this, labour markets and community factors influenced the reduction in child labour. The study concludes that the economic condition of households, which is measured by household expenditure, is the most important factor contributing to child labour status along with ethnicity and geographical spatiality (Nguyen and Le, 2006).

Arguably, child labour will continue to exist so long as it is not inimical to the prevailing relations of production. It is therefore suggested that, rather than develop a blanket policy independent of context, the focus should be on specific relations of production such as bonded labour, which is usually a remnant of feudal forms of exploitation. Legislation would be effective only when child labour has actually become a marginal factor in the process of capitalist accumulation. Only those policies which aim to alter modes of exploitation and the division of labour directly would result in the reduction of child labour. Thus, policies which bring about greater employment security and pensions for agricultural workers, successful land reforms and greater scope for participation of marginalized adult labour force are factors that in the long run would reduce child labour. It is often argued that in developing countries the focus must be on the elimination of harsh forms of child labour like bonded labour or working in hazardous industries, rather than all forms of child labour.

Thus, children's participation in school cannot be improved significantly without changes in the wider socio-economic conditions. There is lack of literature on children's access to school in terms of rights within labour discourses. The policy outcomes focus on resolving structural deficiencies and in suggesting economic alternatives in terms of access to credit or improvement in the wage patterns for adults. They do not focus on policies that promote greater investments in education and legal frameworks that would enable children to withdraw from work or not to join the labour force.

3.2 Household Decisions, School Quality and Village Factors

An analysis of determinants of children's participation in school in rural India (Dreze and Kingdon, 1999) found that the situation in the child's household and the decision-making of the parents are the most influential factors in sustained schooling access. If parents are educated, children are more likely to be in school. However, if parents are illiterate, there is a greater risk to children's participation in schools. When children themselves do not want to attend school, parents may also find it difficult to make them continue. Neighbours and community members may also discourage children's participation in school, pressure which an illiterate parent may be unable to overcome.

The Dreze and Kingdon (1999) study also shows a decision to send a child to school is not just based on cost-benefit assessments in terms of future economic gain / job, but also by parental perceptions of benefits to achieving cognitive skills through literacy, numeracy and school knowledge. Household wealth also affects children's participation in school. Moreover, if a girl is the eldest child in the family, it often has a negative impact their education; elder girls are generally expected to take care of siblings and help in other domestic chores. Likewise it was noted that children from scheduled caste / scheduled tribe groups and other backward castes, especially girls, were less likely to go to school. It has been found that many Muslim children do not participate in school, often because of poverty and parental lack of education.

Among village variables, distance from nearest road, the village development index, and the presence of women's associations in the village were found to impact on school participation (Dreze and Kingdon, 1999). They did not find much significance in the presence of a village education committee (VEC) as they were often only nominally active.

The study (Dreze and Kingdon, 1999) also looked at a range of school quality indicators. It found that although school quality mattered a great deal, household variables had a greater impact on schooling access. It was also found that the provision of mid-day meals had a significant impact on attendance, especially in the case of girls. The study compared the impact of school quality variables with results from a study by Sipahimalani (1997 in Dreze and Kingdon, 1999). This study showed the presence of female teachers and trained teachers, the proximity of schools to the household, and the provision of school meals and other pupil incentives had a positive impact on initial enrolment and grade attainment in India. In this context it is observed by Dreze and Kingdon (1999:24) that school variables are invariably found to be jointly significant on a likelihood-ratio test but an in-depth analysis is called for to gauge the influence of specific school variables. This study suggests that there should be a pluralist view of the causes of educational exclusion in India, looking at relationships between and among household resources, parental motivations, returns to child labour and school quality.

3.3 Quality and Curricula

Poor quality education and irrelevant curricula can lead to irregular attendance and eventually to dropping out. According to the PROBE report (1999, cited in Raina, 2001), the main reason for school dropouts is disinterest or a feeling of irrelevance from the child about what she/he is learning. Hence it is often suggested that educational strategies, spending and curriculum need to be decentralized to the district level to make them more suitable to local needs. These strategies need to focus on equipping children to understand and grow in their local environments, rather than focusing on rote-learning (Raina, 2001).

The perceived poor quality of government schools drives many parents to seek costly private education in private schools (Härmä, 2010). Where school infrastructure is poor, teachers are poorly trained and motivated and classes too large in government schools, those who cannot afford private education will always be more at risk of exclusion.

When the curriculum is designed for children from urban contexts, rural children may experience difficulties in relating to the materials, which might result in low participation, high drop-out rates and under-education (Taylor and Mulhall, 1997). The solution lies in changing the curriculum to place an emphasis on contextualized teaching and learning. The curriculum should be relevant to the experience of learners with a focus on the development of knowledge, attitudes and skills identified on a national basis (Taylor and Mulhall, 1997).

In the rural context this could mean emphasizing agriculture in the curriculum where 'children can have repeated experiences which help them to master cognitive, physical and social skills' (Taylor and Mulhall, 1997:11). Agriculture is one activity with which the majority of children in rural areas are familiar, and so it has an important role to play in those areas; it can contribute to teaching and learning of languages, science, mathematics, food, nutrition, health and social studies (Taylor and Mulhall, 1997). The issue of relevant education and imparting of livelihood skills is primarily discussed with a presumption that a large segment of children remain out of school. The impression one gets from this strand of

studies is that children do not go to schools because the poor do not see the utility of education for their immediate environment and work.

The quality of the education on offer has implications for other reasons for non-attendance. If education is perceived to be of poor quality and limited use, parents and children will not be motivated to commit the time and resources to enrolling and attending, or be interested in school work once they are there.

3.4 'A lack of interest in studies'

In the NFHS-III survey (IIPS, 2007) households were interviewed about school attendance of children. Specifically they were asked about reasons for non attendance for children aged 6-17 who had dropped out before 2005-6. The most common reason given for dropping out was 'not interested in studies' (36% for boys and 21% for girls). For girls, the reason 'required for household work', accounted for a little over 15% of dropouts, while it was given for 7% of male dropouts. The need to provide 'outside work for payment in cash or kind' was cited by nearly 9% of boys and a little over 3% of girls. Around 7% of boys and 3% of girls gave the reason of 'required for farm and family business' for not attending school. An additional 15% of females had never attended school because it was felt that education for girls was not necessary by their parents. In the case of boys, almost 8% gave this reason. In total, 23.3% of boys and 22.3% of girls were not attending school because they were engaged in an activity like paid work, household work or taking care of siblings. Around 18% of children dropped out of school because it 'costs too much'. Many other reasons like school too far away, repeated failures, got married, etc. also cited by several parents as the reasons for dropout.

The NSSO Survey, 52nd Round (NSSO, 1998) similarly recorded a main reason for children dropping out of school as 'child not interested in studies' (24.4%), or 'unable to cope with or failure in studies' (22.5%). Other reasons given were financial constraints (12.4%), parents not interested in education of their children (9.4%) and participation in other economic activities (7.8%) (NSSO, 1998). Thus the PROBE Report, the NFHS survey and the NSSO surveys have indicated that a lack of interest in studies is one of the key reasons for school dropout, as indicated by parents.

These responses around interest in studies should be unpacked. They may relate to quality of provision, rather than a disinclination to attend school. Often, for example, school teachers with large classes are engage only with those children sitting at the front of the class and 'clever' students. Some of these students, who attend school but are not included, might become 'silently excluded'. They find it difficult to cope with indifference from teachers and little or no support for learning at home. Additionally, some children have difficulties understanding the languages spoken or written in the classroom, which are very different from the dialects used at home. Other children might have learning difficulties (Croft, 2010); suffer from malnutrition (Sood, forthcoming) or health problems (Pridmore, 2007). Thus the response 'not interested in studies' should be seen as a reflection of how the system is unable to inspire or include some students to study, rather than an indication of children's real lack of interest in education.

The fact that children continue to be pushed out of schools often has much to do with the way they are treated in schools (MVF, 2006). Beating remains common (Anitha, 2000:88; DPEP, 1999; MVF, no date; Nambissan, 2000), corporal punishment has become so much a part of schooling, that it is generally seen as acceptable. Children are often subjected to violence,

humiliation and insults, and many grow to fear going to school. Children are not dropping out of school, they are being literally pushed or beaten out of school. In this context it is not surprising that they manifest 'a lack of interest in studies'.

3.5 Examination Systems

The assessment of children at regular intervals through monthly, quarterly, half yearly and annual examinations can be quite intimidating for children whose families do not understand the rigors of assessment. If children miss exams they are not promoted to the next class. There has been no attempt to stagger examinations to keep pace with children's adjustment and induction into the education system. The entire evaluation system and final examination process is designed to push out rather than keep the child in school. Failure in exams results in repetition, frustration and a lack of progression. The purpose of exams should be to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the child and try and rectify any faults. If a child does badly in mathematics in the quarterly examination, teachers should try to help him/her in the next quarter. Annual examinations are exactly the same. In fact, by following a non-detention[10] (i.e. no repetition of a grade) policy, the logic of the quarterly exams is extended to the entire primary section. In a sense we are viewing all classes up to the 5th as a single class with the final exam treated like any other quarterly exam, not to detain but to assess the areas of weakness so that remedial teaching can be undertaken. As Nagarjuna (2002a) states:

> Actually the concept of a YEAR has very little biological significance and is purely an astronomical phenomenon, being the time taken for the earth to go around the sun. So to use the cycle of a year, as some kind of a benchmark to measure achievement is somewhat senseless. The policy of non-detention, therefore, recognizes that different children learn at different pace especially at the primary level, given the fact that they come from varying backgrounds. The fact that they pick up slowly in the beginning may have very little to do with their mental abilities… There is evidence to show that a child who is detained is more likely to drop out than one who is not. In the context of UEE [Universal Elementary Education] this is very significant and detention, therefore, has to be discouraged to the extent possible.

Further, due to delay in the distribution of free text-books and the lack of school teachers for some subjects, the syllabus remains incompletely covered in many schools, and especially in classes 6 and above (MVF, 2006). This results in children failing in the board examinations in classes 7 and 10. What is required is an evaluation system that is sensitive to the needs of the situation, flexible and uncompromising in its endeavour to bring all children to school.

3.6 Lack of Systemic Support for First Generation Learners

Most rules governing educational institutions have been framed around the needs and interests of parents and children who already attend school and are second or third generation

[10] Under the Non-detention policy, children are promoted from one class to next class irrespective of their performance in examination and learning. This policy was introduced with a view to reduce repetition and dropout. It is commonly assumed that making children repeat a class may eventually lead dropout. It is contended that as children grow and mature, they may likely to learn faster and makeup for backlog in their academic performance. The applicability of non-detention policy, classes/stage at which it is applicable varies by states. In Andhra Pradesh the non-detention policy is being implemented at elementary stage of education. In Andhra Pradesh, children are automatically promoted to next class every year till they reach class VII irrespective of their academic performance. At the end of class VII, a public examination shall be conducted and only those who secure minimum marks are declared as passed and are eligible to move to next class.

literates. Providing access to schools in areas of high dropout, large numbers of working children and large numbers of illiterate parents, requires more effort. The rules, procedures and administrative set up need to be sensitive to the requirements of illiterate parents and first generation learners.

One aspect that is often forgotten is how difficult it is for an illiterate parent to break with convention and send their child to school even when they are financially capable. What is crucial is to work out a mechanism that enables a smooth transition for the child from a home or work situation to school. This means not only enrolling children at the entry level in Class I, but also enrolling the backlog of older out of school children. There are a large number of hurdles that the education administration itself has created and embedded within the rules governing the functioning of schools. For instance, schools have deadlines for admission in order to ensure that there is not too much dislocation of the academic calendar with children joining at different times and disturbing the class schedule. However, such a rule can be disastrous in a situation where a working child and his parents have been motivated to enrol the child in school and when they go to school sometime in September are told to go home and come back in June next year because the last date for admission has passed.

Where children drop out of school but then seek re-admission, the local education department asks for a transfer certificate. There are other situations where caste certificates, income certificates and so on are required. While the production of such certificates is not beyond the means of parents who are familiar with this process, parents who have never been to school or who have never sent anyone to school might find the process difficult. This is in contrast with processes of finding children employment, which requires no certificates and many parents find easier. In some cases accessing work is easier than accessing school.

It is important that local education departments look at schooling access from the point of view of first generation learners, in order to increase initial access and reduce push outs. While the education sector is not responsible for the cultural aspects surrounding children's attendance in schools, it should be conscious of the circumstances in which children come to school for the first time and the barriers first generation learners face. The admission rules should be framed in such a way that it is simple and easy to enrol. Teachers should understand circumstances surrounding children's behaviour, i.e. children may wear the incorrect uniform because they cannot afford the full uniform; they may not have a pencil because there is no background of literacy within the home. Children should not be berated for being from poor families with no history of schooling.

4. The Shankarpalle Experiment

Drop outs can be reduced by addressing social norms around educational access and improving school responsiveness. An NGO called M. V. Foundation worked alongside schools and communities to do this in Shankarpalle Mandal, Ranga Reddy District of Andhra Pradesh[11]. Here we explain the processes involved in this work.

In Shankarpalle Mandal, Ranga Reddy district, Andhra Pradesh, a campaign to ensure every child attended school impacted on the way schools were governed. The campaign was started by MV Foundation, it called for a total abolition of child labour and the enrolment of every child in full time formal schooling, as a matter of right. There were many existing problems with governance, which inhibited schooling access for children. For example, when older never-enrolled children or drop outs were motivated to join school in the middle of an academic session, up till then, the schools had not been able not accept them. Moreover problems with accommodating older children in lower classes was raised. As a result in 1994-1995, the admission of children was allowed at any time during the academic session, with this becoming an AP State policy. Also attendance was calculated from the time the child started (rather the beginning of the academic year) meaning these children could be promoted to the next grade, rather than have to repeat.

Even though there had been an automatic promotion policy in place in Andhra Pradesh since 1972, many children were not being promoted to Class II. In the year 1995-1996, for example, there were 3,380 children in Class I in Shankarpalle Mandal, while the total number of children in Classes I-V was 6,680, and only 2,383 children were in Classes VI-X (see Figure 1). Children who were detained in Class 1 were often labelled by teachers as dull and blamed for not having achieved the appropriate level[12]. Yet teachers often failed to take responsibility for the child's failure. Teachers also admitted that Class I enrolment figures were inflated because of under-aged children, parental pressure because of the rice scheme[13], and worry over loss of teaching posts[14]. As a result a programme called *class one khali karo* (clear class one) was taken up for three consecutive summers to prepare older children who were stuck in Class I to go into classes according to their age and to have children only in the 5-6 age group in Class I[15]. Around this time the government of Andhra Pradesh also issued a Government Order for another non-detention policy[16]. This has resulted in the elimination of inflated enrolments, and in 2005 only 1,391 children were in Class I. This is almost equivalent to the number of children in the 5+ age group category.

[11] The first author as Secretary Trustee of MVF is deeply involved in this work.

[12] This coincides with Nagarjuna (2002b) who states: 'In fact in some cases teachers have gone to the extent of taking written requests from parents that their child should be detained in the same class! If as members of a teaching community we cannot enforce moral and ethical values then how can we teach anything to children? If we go on wrongly marking children as enrolled or as attending class when they are actually not in school or absent then how do we know who is actually in school and who isn't?'

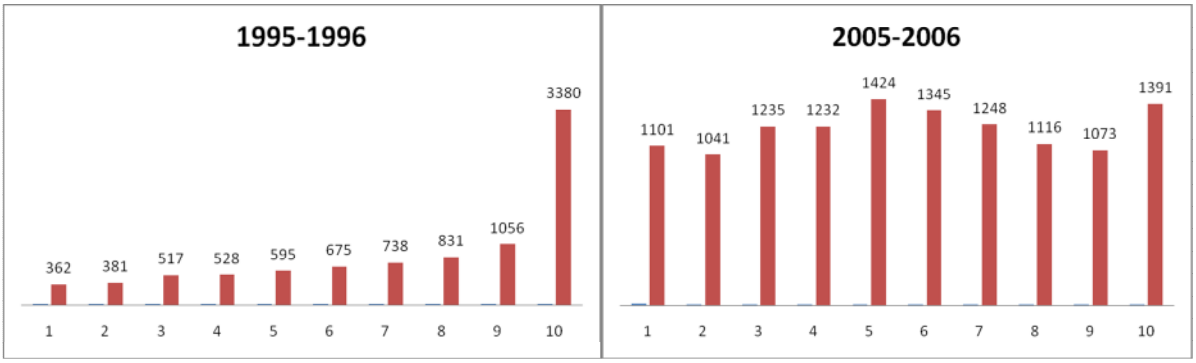
[13] An incentive programme linked with enrolment and attendance of children

[14] The number of teaching posts in schools is linked with enrolment of children. If the enrolment goes below a threshold level it is likely that the teaching post may be withdrawn. This is considered be one of the reasons for over reporting of enrolment by teachers.

[15] This programme was also implemented in 1997-98 with the help of UNICEF in Andhra Pradesh.

[16]: GO No. 272/B4-1/2001Dated 20/4/2001

Figure 1: Distribution of Children by class in 1995-1996 and 2005-2006, Shankarapalle Mandal



Source: Data collected from the Official Records of Shankarapalle Mandal

There was also the issue of large drop outs in classes 5 and 7. It was observed that most children dropped out after completing five years of education, at around 10-11 years of age. This could be because these children were getting older and perceived to be old enough to join the labour market. In many cases in Shankarpalle Mandal children were actually leaving because children were unable to access upper primary schools. In many cases, (often poor) parents had to make various trips to the school, providing transfer certificates, progress reports, income, caste and birth certificates from other departments. By the time these had been gathered, admission into the new school was often closed. Sometimes transfer certificates had not been supplied because the school had run out of stationary. Unable to make the transition to upper primary, many children dropped out of the schooling system. As a result of these difficulties, moves were made to make institutions rather than parents responsible for issuing certificates. Moreover, the decision was made by the AP State government not to deny a child their right to education because they didn't have the correct certificate[17]. The state government also allowed primary schools with grades up to Class V, be allowed to continue to Class VII in order to prevent girls, in particular, from dropping out. As documented in Table 8, the demand for schools due to community pressure and systemic reforms had an impact on the increase in supply.

Table 8: Increase in the Number of Classrooms, Teachers and Schools in Shankarapalle between 1997-1998 and 2005-2006

Year	Classrooms	Teachers	School	
			Upper Primary School	High School
1997-1998	198	124	6	7
2005-2006	246	214	17	11

Source: Data collected from the Official Records of Shankarapalle Mandal

It is clear that there was a substantial improvement in the retention of children in schools at appropriate grades for their age by 2005-2006. There were 1,391 children in Class I, and 1,345 in Class V (see Figure 1). Since the movement of children from one class to the next has been institutionalized, the variance in the number of children in Class I to Class X has reduced significantly. Further, the total number of school-going children increased to 12,206

[17] GO No. 272/B4-1/2001Dated 19/4/2001

in 2005-2006 as compared to 9,063 in 1995-1996 (Figure 1). This was possible with the reform of the school governance system accommodating local contexts.

After four to five years in school, some parents felt that their children had not learnt sufficiently and began questioning the schools. Many parents, even those who were illiterate, saw their children were not able to do simple mathematical calculations or read simple notices. They began holding schools to account which lead to tender a public apology for not performing. As a result of this, schoolteachers agreed to give learning guarantees on the condition that children attended school regularly. Thus, a dialogue between parents and school teachers began. Consequently, school teachers regrouped children according to their levels of learning. Class 1 children at times sat alongside Class V students. Parents were consulted at every stage. Teachers reached out to children who had returned to school after long absences. Teachers began to plan for every child, used local materials and resources, shared children's achievements with parents and began to teach.

The Department of Education, Government of Andhra Pradesh did not take kindly to these changes and insisted teachers change back. They asked why unit tests were not being held and who had authorized teachers to break the classes into groups. There was some discussion that this was only a transitional arrangement and once the children reached the appropriate levels of learning they would be regrouped according to their respective classes. Some Mandal Education Officers were convinced, allowed the process and even encouraged it, while many others opposed it. Over a period of one year children got back to their appropriate classes and the schools stabilized.

In the process several lessons were learnt about the schooling system. Firstly, teachers are often blamed for being disinterested in teaching properly, but it was found here that teachers needed a lot of support from the authorities and the correct environment to be creative. They also needed the flexibility to decide how each child was taught in the best way. The learning guarantee program required the full support of the education bureaucracy. With such diversity in children and the backlog of material that had to be covered, teachers needed autonomy in deciding what they should teach, how they should teach, and to assess children to bring them on par with others. In the process of protecting the children's right to education, teachers also realized how to be professionals.

The 'learning guarantee' programme was subsequently scaled up by the government of Andhra Pradesh. However, it failed to capture the essence of the programme and did not trust the school teacher. In order to monitor them, the Department of Education, Government of Andhra Pradesh devised complicated formats which the teacher had to fill every day. Teachers did so in a mechanical fashion, and precious time was lost. Instead of being an attempt at encouraging teachers with strong elements of decentralized decision-making, it became a top-down programme that teachers resented. The essence of teacher empowerment was therefore absent.

The programme in Shankarpalle began with community mobilization and helped make schooling a social norm. A synergy between civil society and public institutions was seen as indispensable. In the process of attempting to increase children's access to school, gaps in the system were noticed and rectified.

Much of what was noticed in Shankarpalle Mandal in terms of class retention rates, was true of the entire state of Andhra Pradesh. An analysis of the data for the years from 1996-1997 to

2005-2006 shows that there were certain crucial years in which children dropped out of school. For example, 28.5% of children discontinued school between Class I and Class II in 1996-1997 (Table 10). After removing the prospect of repetition, dropout rates between Class I and II were reduced to 10.1% in the year 2004-2005. High levels of dropout were also apparent when children moved from Class VII to Class VIII (the dropout rate was 21.3% in 1996-1997), but had decreased to 12.6% in 2004-2005. In Class VII children take school board examinations for the first time. School dropout here are therefore an indication of the failure of students in public examinations. Another precarious move is from Class V to Class VI as students move from primary to upper primary, the point at which 19.7% of students dropped out of schools in 1996-1997. This too was reduced to 11.4% in the year 2004-2005 after changes were made. The largest percentage of children leaving school, happens when they reach Class X, the dropout rate was 43.3% in the year 1996-1997. This was reduced to 27.5% in 2004-2005. This is the percentage of children who fail the SSC Board examination. Changes in school governance could have helped keep these children in school.

Table 9: Enrolment Data by class in Andhra Pradesh, 1996-1997 to 2005-2006

Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1996-1997	2,487,910	1,616,554	1,406,229	1,241,855	1,145,841	888,711	796,024	619,029	558,350	497,030
1997-1998	2,624,248	1,780,155	1,472,416	1,290,678	1,198,595	920,020	826,923	626,134	549,816	497,380
1998-1999	2,657,745	1,863,330	1,635,120	1,375,434	1,265,530	977,850	867,312	674,446	577,539	505,912
1999-2000	2,594,755	1,929,440	1,720,561	1,522,825	1,344,480	1,039,521	922,171	720,014	628,253	547,103
2000-2001	2,289,220	1,860,561	1,733,326	1,567,239	1,455,607	1,092,855	978,606	751,891	669,156	583,540
2001-2002	1,953,581	1,919,690	1,685,989	1,571,567	1,495,414	1,220,297	1,040,598	829,056	712,799	642,607
2002-2003	1,935,871	1,746,207	1,752,489	1,569,562	1,529,502	1,305,725	1,153,899	904,489	784,698	682,809
2003-2004	1,664,932	1,649,476	1,589,359	1,582,680	1,489,212	1,301,798	1,200,332	1,000,339	849,070	747,791
2004-2005	1,570,421	1,491,928	1,559,096	1,513,223	1,557,743	1,331,660	1,244,524	1,066,846	950,951	817,376
2005-2006	1,631,554	1,412,387	1,423,787	1,454,154	1,470,040	1,379,616	1,263,689	1,087,713	999,584	903,865

Source: Vinayak (2006)

Figure 2: Enrolment Data by Class in Andhra Pradesh, 1996-1997 to 2005-2006

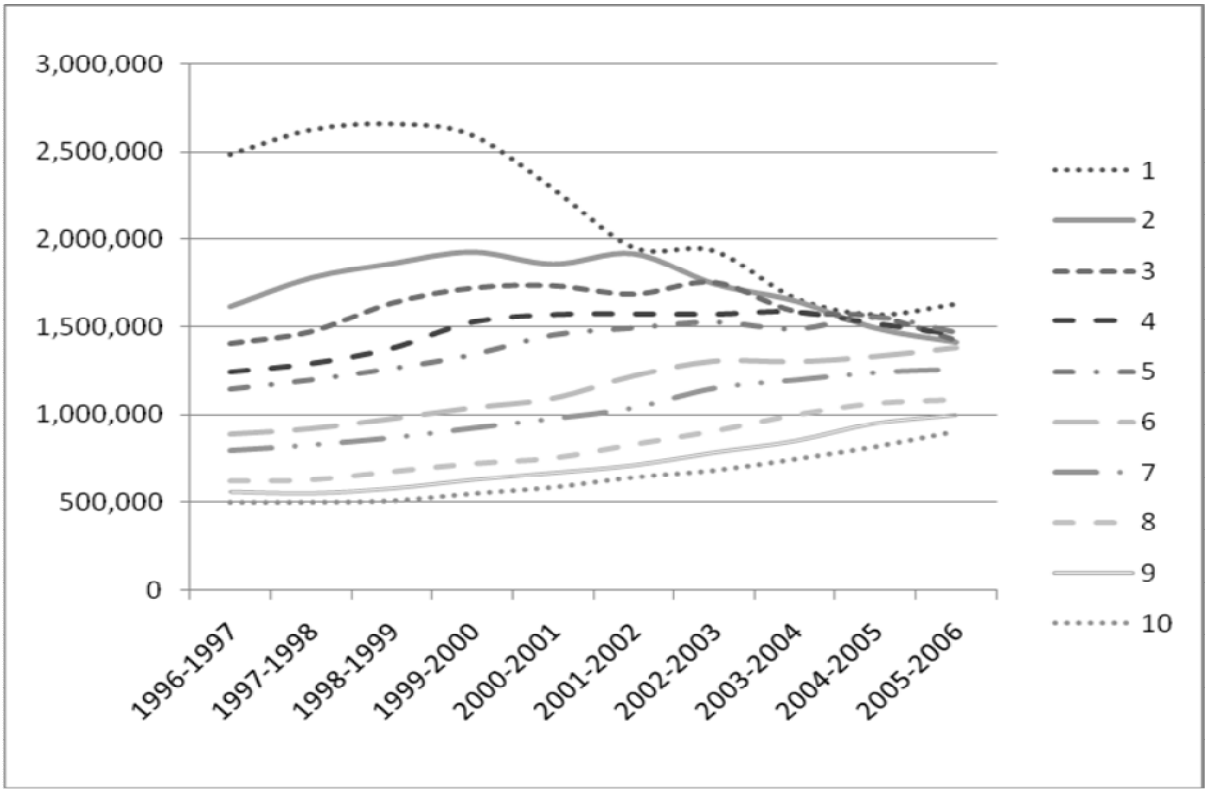
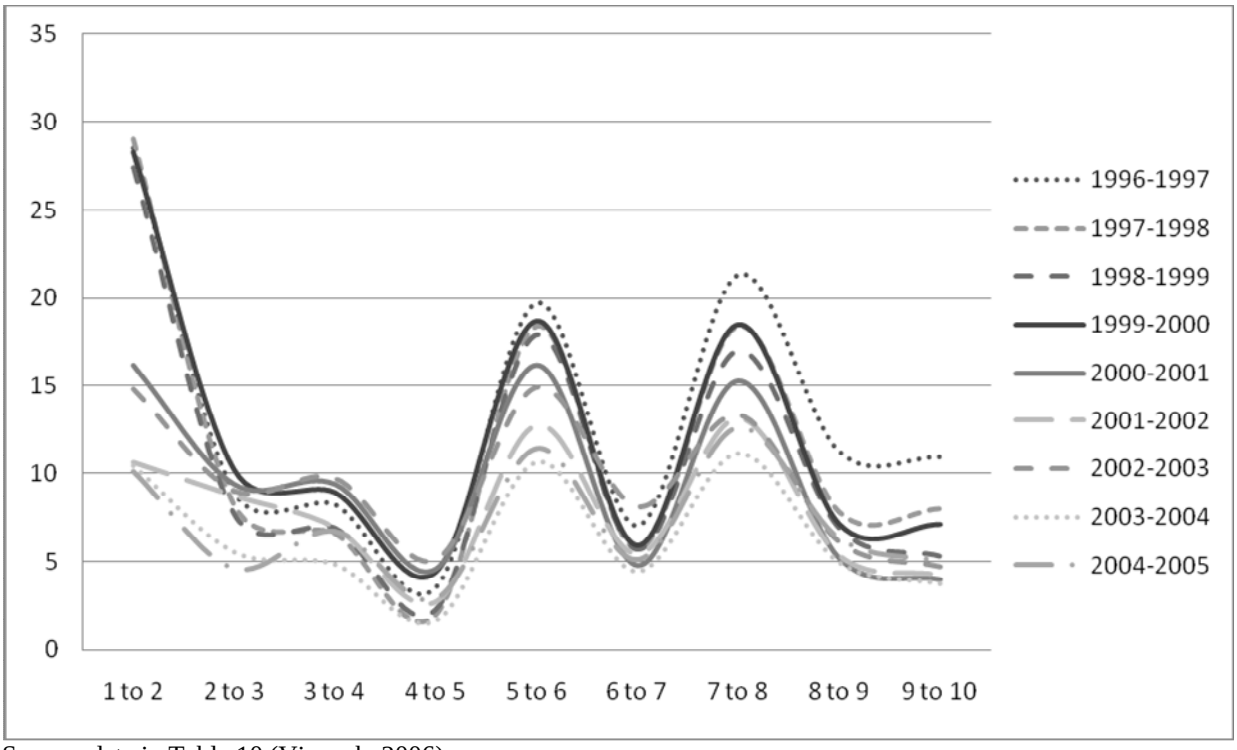


Table 10: Drop Out Rates (%) by Class, Andhra Pradesh 1996 to 2005 (as compiled from DISE data)

Year	1 to 2	2 to 3	3 to 4	4 to 5	5 to 6	6 to 7	7 to 8	8 to 9	9 to 10	Fail % in SSC
1996-1997	28.5	8.9	8.2	3.5	19.7	7.0	21.3	11.2	10.9	43.3
1997-1998	29.0	8.2	6.6	2.0	18.4	5.7	18.4	7.8	8.0	53.2
1998-1999	27.4	7.7	6.9	2.3	17.9	5.7	17.0	6.9	5.3	47.3
1999-2000	28.3	10.2	8.9	4.4	18.7	5.9	18.5	7.1	7.1	44.9
2000-2001	16.2	9.4	9.4	4.6	16.2	4.8	15.3	5.2	4.0	34.9
2001-2002	10.6	8.7	6.9	2.7	12.7	5.4	13.1	5.3	4.2	31.9
2002-2003	14.8	9.0	9.7	5.1	14.9	8.1	13.3	6.1	4.7	25.0
2003-2004	10.4	5.5	4.8	1.6	10.6	4.4	11.1	4.9	3.7	19.5
2004-2005	10.1	4.6	6.7	2.9	11.4	5.1	12.6	6.3	5.0	27.6

Source: Vinayak (2006)

Figure 3: Drop Out Rates (%) by Class, Andhra Pradesh 1996-2005



Source: data in Table 10 (Vinayak, 2006)

5. Conclusions: School Dropouts or 'Push Outs'?

Dropping out of school usually implies the inability of children to continue in school for some reason. Most often the child, his/her family circumstances or macro-economic factors are considered to be responsible for them dropping out. In perceiving it as such, the emphasis is on the inability of children to continue in school. On the other hand, if the issue is seen as children being 'pushed out' of school, then the onus of responsibility is on the system to ensure that they stay in school.

Evidence from many studies in different parts of India suggests that many children are not drop outs, but are rather pushed out of the school system through little fault of their own. As we have seen, in many cases the problem lies in the system's insensitivity to, for example, first generation learners, its lack of support in combating child labour, its lack of flexibility and a need to be more child-sensitive. Indeed, schools should be governed in such a way that children are comfortable and have a sense of belonging in the school. In many cases, it is the limitations of the system that result in children leaving school. A lack of capacity in facilities, training, administration, regulation and quality is meaning that many children are pushed out of school.

There is an unwillingness to accept that millions of children get pushed out of school and an underestimation of the numbers of such children by official sources. Many children, before leaving school, have irregular attendance, temporary withdrawals and many join the labour force as child labour. The categorization of children in terms of enrolment, retention and un-enrolled does not capture this dynamic movement of children from one stage to the other. It is difficult to identify how to track this movement of children. If data collection was decentralised and schools empowered to use their own information to help children, perhaps this would be a way forward.

In this regard, the collection of data must make sense to school teachers, for it is they who grapple with the realities of meeting demands and pressures on the ground. They can come up with specific strategies to keep children in schools. Therefore teachers need to be included in the process of data collection and encouraged to report correctly. It is only by focusing on the school and school data, that correct information about children in and out of school, can be identified. Data at the moment involves entering the names of children in the attendance register, rather than those children who actually attend school (MVF[18]). There is a need for a policy and data collection framework (including admissions, attendance, examinations, transitions, moving schools) that ensures children who have joined in Class I are kept track of and move from one class to the next each year, until he/she is able to take the Class X examinations without disruption.

Quality schooling and relevant education are important. For a family of illiterate adults sending a child to school is a major transformation and often involves considerable financial sacrifice. The government and education system must meet these parents half way and make the corresponding commitment of effort and financial investment. Education must be seen to be worth the sacrifices families must make. It must be of the highest quality possible, engaging, safe, accessible, and fair. Incentives must be put in place to discourage children

[18] See MVF Annual Reports for the years 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 for a description of a programme to clean attendance registers that included the names of children who were in private schools, were married and not in the village, migrant children, school dropouts and repetition of the name of the same child in two different classes.

from dropping out. At present, however, there are no legal instruments that make the state do everything necessary to keep children in school and to stop them working.

There must be a decentralization of the education system with autonomy to the schools to absorb older children and make arrangements for their education as part of the school system and not as a parallel activity; to cater to the demands of children of migrant labour, girl children, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and children in regions with fewer educational facilities. This would need support in terms of resources and infrastructure. At the moment it is expected that 50% of children enrolled in school will not reach Class X. Schools need to expect more from their children. Education is an intergenerational issue, which requires planning and anticipation of goals on a long-term basis. A holistic programme, with a long-term perspective and clear goals to protect children's rights to education is crucial.

There are a range of policy relevant conclusions that emerge from this analysis. These include:

- Reconceptualising the reasons for drop out to highlight factors that result in push out and which are susceptible to interventions at school and community level.

- Working to promote cultures of school going and normative expectations that all children will complete secondary schooling to grade X and encouraging community level action to strengthen demand and generate resources to ensure improved provision.

- Recognise that drop out is closely associated with poverty and that poverty reduction will of itself tend to reduce drop out. This may require action to reduce exploitative child labour sustained by poverty, reduce and eliminate direct and indirect costs of schooling for the poorest, and to improve relevance of curricula and learning outcomes for children from poor households.

- Review administrative arrangements that result in drop out and develop reforms that enhance progression and retention. These can include easier registration procedures for enrolment in school, automatic promotion to higher grades, regular monitoring of attendance and achievement, methods to reduce over age progression, special support for socially marginalised groups (e.g. girls, scheduled castes etc), and more flexible responses to seasonality and the learning needs of different groups of children.

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Report summary:
Persistently high dropout rates are one of the biggest challenges to fulfilling the right to education in India. This paper attempts to assess the magnitude of the problem of dropout. The paper critically reviews the evidence on some of the commonly cited reasons for dropout, including poverty, limited to access to credit, child labour, and children's and parents' lack of interest in education. The paper argues that the literature rarely looks at the role of procedures and rules in schools and the wider education system in terms of pushing children out of school. It is the contention of this paper that the reason a persistently high dropout rate should be located in the absence of a social norm in terms of children's right to education; and that this is reflected in the lack of systemic support available for children at risk of dropping out. The paper also documents an experiment initiated by MV Foundation in Shankarpalle *Mandal*, Ranga Reddy district, Andhra Pradesh, where procedures, rules and practices relating to various aspects of school were changed to ensure that every child stayed in school and completed elementary level.

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