



## Launch of Delhi School Choice Campaign India's First School Voucher Programme

Centre for Civil Society launches campaign to secure quality education for the poor

Activists demand **Fund Students, Not Schools**

### School Choice Ambassadors

Narayana Murthy, Madhav Chavan, P V Indiresan, Anu Aga,  
Gurcharan Das, Jerry Rao, T K Mathew, Nandan Nilekani

### New Delhi, Wednesday, March 28, 2007:

**Centre for Civil Society, an independent think-tank** launched its innovative School Choice Campaign in the capital today.

While addressing the press, Dr. Parth Shah, President of the Centre for Civil Society said "The poor are getting left behind due to lack of access to quality education. They have no place to go but the government school. We have given them a Right to Education; we must make it meaningful by giving them a Right to Education of Choice. School vouchers give the poor the choice that the rich enjoy today. To send a message to the government we will award 400 school vouchers in Delhi."

He reminded that the UN Declaration on Human Rights, Article 26, recognizes prior right of parents to choose the education of their children.

### About School Choice Campaign

School choice means that parents' should be able to choose the school they think is right for their child. School vouchers, cash stipends, and tuition reimbursement are instruments which government can use to increase school choice for parents.

### Highlights of the campaign:

#### **Vote for Vouchers, Voice Your Choice!**

- Demand the right to quality education for all students, especially those from economically weaker sections.
- Create an army of parents demanding school choice.
- Advocate with elected representatives, from members of Panchayats to Assemblies to the Parliament, the ideas of school choice and the ways to implement them.
- Give school vouchers to 400 students to demonstrate the power of choice.
- Massive parallel campaign in tandem with MCD elections.
- Reaching out to 2.5 million people in four districts of Delhi.
- Multi-tier campaign involving manifesto committees of different political parties, ward councilors, parents of Government school going students, members of legislative assembly, ministers, educationists and prominent citizens.

Today school choice exists for the upper class parents. Given the poor quality of government schools many low income parents spend large proportion of their meager income on their children's education in tuitions, coaching classes, and private schools. In several states of India, more than 50% of children are already in private schools, in Haryana and Punjab, it's above 70%. The experts keep debating; the poor are voting with their feet. The private schools cater not just to the elite but to the children of bus drivers and street hawkers.

However there are still poorer parents who, in spite of their aspirations, cannot afford to choose the best education that their children. For them the government school is the only option.

Parental choice can help make government schools more accountable and efficient, by allowing parents to make the most basic decision about which school their children will go to. This is the best way to achieve the twin goals of delivering the child's right to education (now enshrined in the Constitution), and the **parents' right to choose what is best for their child.**

### **About School Voucher:**

A school voucher is an instrument, which allows eligible parents to put their child in any school of their choice. The parents pay for the school fees in the form of the voucher. The school then deposits the voucher in a bank account and government credits the school's account with equivalent money. No cash changes hand in the whole process.

### **How to implement school vouchers:**

The support for vouchers is not anti-government schools. The government can continue funding government schools at the current level. However the any extra money that is put into the education budget should be used towards vouchers given to the most underserved areas or communities in the state. Until we are able to improve the existing government schools, let's not put more money into opening more of the same non-functioning schools. Don't be blinded by sheer optimism that they would improve next year, if only we give them a little more money and a little more time. We have been doing this for long enough to know better.

### **About the Centre for Civil Society**

The Centre for Civil Society is a non-profit, research, education, and outreach organization dedicated to improving every Indian's right to prosper. It develops innovative community and market based solutions for advancing education, increasing economic freedom, and improving public governance. Its Board of Scholars include **Gurcharan Das, Swaminathan Aiyar, Jagdish Bhagwati, Meghnad Desai, Isher Judge Ahluwalia and Deepak Lal.**