

# STUDENT FIRST!

SCHOOL CHOICE BULLETIN | ISSUE 01

## CAMPAIGN LAUNCH

On 29 January 2007, the Centre for Civil Society launched its School Choice Campaign. We have given each child the right to education; we must make it meaningful by taking it a step further: The Right to education of Choice! Each child and the parent must be empowered so that they can truthfully say: My Right, My Choice!

Can poor women (urban, rural or tribal), armed with funds - corporate, bank or micro-finance - own the school where their children study? Can we attract entrepreneurs of the caliber like Narayana Murthy or Sunil Bharti Mittal to open 200, may be 2000, schools and replicate the IT revolution in education? Can venture capital-for profit or philanthropic - help improve the infrastructure and quality of existing budget private schools in our slums and villages? Can good teachers of government schools be given an opportunity to manage schools and improve their quality and reach millions?



We feel the answer to these exciting questions is a resounding YES! It is time to think bold, outside the box of the current education system.



## WHAT IS SCHOOL CHOICE?

As you know, we at CCS have done considerable amount of research and advocacy work in the area of education. We have collected a wealth of data and analysis from around India and the rest of the world. And we are convinced that quality education for all can be achieved only by adopting a different strategy: School Choice!

School choice, particularly for the poor, can be achieved through education vouchers, cash stipends (like in Bangladesh), or tuition fee reimbursement schemes (like in Delhi), basically by schemes where funds follow students and not schools. It can be enhanced through broader measures like deregulation and delicensing of private schools, legalizing for-profit schools, and microfinance and venture capital for budget private schools. (Today it is virtually impossible to start a legally recognised school without political connections and navigating the endless bureaucratic barriers and corruption. Also, since many of the schools for the poor are unrecognised, they cannot get a bank loan to improve their infrastructure like any other enterprise).



School Choice can be taken to government schools through decentralization of decision making and transfer of accountability to local governments, by tying state grants to enrolment and learning achievements, through management contracts, and charter schools. The funding for education in general can be increased by tuition tax credits to individuals and corporate scholarship tax credit programs.

We have set five measurable goals. They would give you a good idea of the scale and scope of our efforts. By the end of the campaign, 29 January 2008, we intend to achieve the following:

1. At least 50% of **parents with children in state schools** should know the ideas of school choice.
2. All state **education ministers and secretaries** should be briefed about school choice individually or in groups.
3. All **elected representatives** across all levels of the government (Members of Parliament, Legislative Assemblies, Corporations, and Village Panchayats) should receive persuasive material on the ideas of

school choice and specific ways to implement them.

4. At least 1912 of the elected representatives should receive a **delegation of citizens** demanding school choice.
5. Establish or help **establish at least 5**

**projects** (including changes in education policies) that demonstrate the power of choice in school education. One of the projects would be a **private school choice fund** that would support at

least 9400 students.

All good campaigns depend on good people, planning and execution. We have already reached out to many of the best in the field and the response is refreshing. We are in the process of adding good women and men to the team and refining the details of our strategy

Let's create an education system that puts Students First! Together let us make quality education and a good future a reality for millions of our children.

*Parth Shah*

Parth J Shah,  
National Coordinator, School Choice Campaign



## SCHOOL CHOICE RAP

*Now I'm walking on the Street  
With My feet on the beat  
And I look real cool  
Cos I ain't no fool  
I get to choose my school*

*Don't wanna be a loser  
Or a street corner boozier  
A bum for rum  
Or a no hope-dope*

*Now I'm going all places  
I hold all the aces  
I got smart  
Cos I know in my heart  
I got a good start*

*I'm ahead of the pack,  
No looking back  
I'm going up  
I'll earn a good buck*

*Cos I ain't no fool  
I get to choose my school*





## MAKING IT THE OLD FASHIONED WAY *By Gurcharan Das*

Last year I got a call from the board member of one of the world's largest consulting companies, who invited me to come and speak to them about why so many Indians were making it in the global knowledge economy. My distinguished caller spoke about innovations emerging from General Electric and Microsoft's R&D centers in Bangalore; advanced avionics installed by India's Air Force on Russian fighter aircraft that had caught the U.S. defense establishment's attention; sophisticated research on global capital markets outsourced by Wall Street to India; finally, he rattled off a dozen Indian leaders' names in global multinational corporations.

He asked if there was something in India's education system that might help explain India's recent economic success. The answer is yes and no. Although India does a miserable job of educating its masses, the best in India do get a decent education. Aside from the famed Indian Institutes of Technology and the Indian Institutes of Management, there are around twenty other centers of excellence in science, engineering, medicine, and even the liberal arts. Their success lies mostly in the high quality of their students, not teachers. The real victory may be with parents and their middle class insecurities. Indian parents, night after night, insist on overseeing their kids' homework - it's a rare mother who accepts a dinner invitation during exam season. By age 15, the young are packed off to coaching classes to prepare them for entry into the competitive colleges.

Indians send their children to private schools because government schools have failed. A national study by Harvard University faculty members and the World Bank shows that one out of four teachers in government primary schools are absent and of those present one out of two is not teaching. As a result, even the poor have begun to pull their kids out of government schools and enrol them in indifferent private schools, which charge \$1 to \$3 a month in fees and are spreading rapidly in slums and villages across India. NIEPA, an official education think tank, confirms that two-thirds of the children in urban Maharashtra, U.P. and Tamil Nadu, three of India's largest states, are now in private schools. The economist, Jean Dreze, predicts that government schools in Indian cities will soon be history.

Although teacher salaries are a third in private schools, Prof. James Tooley of the University of Newcastle found that even unrecognized schools delivered 22% points higher mean score in mathematics in his study of 918 schools in Hyderabad's slums. A national study led by the NGO, Pratham, confirmed last month that even in villages 16% of the kids are now in private primary schools and they achieved 10% points higher scores in verbal and math. This upsets the Left establishment, which trashes these 'mushrooming private schools' and wants to close them down. The lower bureaucracy takes advantage of this prejudice and extracts bribes in exchange for licences, which typically average 5% of the private school's running cost.

Private schools in India range from expensive boarding schools for the elite with large campuses to low end teaching shops in the bazaar. NIIT, a private sector company with 4000 'learning centres', trained 4 million students and helped fuel India's IT revolution in the 1990's, and yet was not accorded recognition by the government. Ironically, even the children of government school teachers go to private schools. Members of Parliament finally recognized the state's failure to deliver education when they pushed through parliament a legislative act a few months which would make it mandatory for private schools to reserve seats for backward castes.

The good news is that 93 % of India's children are now in school as the SRI survey shows. However, digging deeper into the SRI data, one finds that 53 % of all children in urban India are in private schools. In some states the ratio is much higher, but urban India overall has amongst the highest levels of private primary education in the world. Chile

privatised education in 1981, and after 25 years its private sector has achieved only 46.5 % share of enrolment. Even Holland, which has always believed in giving choice between private and public schools to its children as a matter of state policy, has only got a private school share of 68 %. This Dutch level has already been exceeded in six states of India. Whereas in Chile and Holland the government pays parents to send their children to private schools, it has happened accidentally in India because government schools have failed, and even the poor are exiting from them.

The de facto privatisation of schooling in urban India is confirmed by the government's own District Information System for Education website, which shows that 66.9% of children in urban Maharashtra are in private schools, 66.3% in Tamilnadu, and 65.1% in U.P. to name only three of India's largest states. This is supported by Samuel Paul's studies on people's satisfaction with public services. The states with the highest level of privatisation give the lowest rating to government schools. For example, only 1% of the parents in Punjab are satisfied with teachers' behaviour in state schools. Thus, Indians are solving their problems in the old fashioned way by depending on themselves and not waiting for the state. When the government fails to provide schools, people start their own schools. And they do it against all odds for the government makes it very difficult to start a school. In Delhi, for example, you require 13 licenses to start a school and each license comes with a bribe. It is a tribute to India's people that they are succeeding despite the state. This is also why India's success is likely to be more durable.

*[Adapted from a guest column which the author wrote for Newsweek magazine in February 2006.]*

### QUICK FACTS

- 40% children in age group 6-14 were still out of school in 2005, after 4 years of implementation of SSA and an expenditure of Rs. 11133.57 crore.
- In 11 states, Rs. 99.88 crore was spent on items not permitted under SSA.
- In 14 states financial irregularities of Rs. 472.51 crore from money sanctioned for SSA were noticed
- There were delays ranging between one and nine months in supplying free textbooks in seven States/UTs.
- 7531 CTVs in Andhra Pradesh purchased under SSA could not be utilized for want of supporting facilities. Some schools where these sets were supplied did not even have electricity.
- In two districts of Jharkhand, school grant of Rs. 47.88 lakh was released to 2369 schools, which were non-existent.

*(Source: Comptroller and Auditor General Report for SSA, 2006)*



**CAMPAIGN UPDATES**

*Delhi*

The first ever School Voucher Program of India was launched in Delhi on 28 March 2007. Thousands of parents have been coming out and demanding their children's right to the education of their choice ever since.

The Delhi Campaign is a multi-tier campaign involving different political parties, ward councilors, parents of Government school going students, members of legislative assembly, ministers, educationists and prominent citizens.

To demonstrate the power of choice, CCS will give school vouchers to 400 students in Delhi. 2.5 million People would be contacted and briefed about the School Choice Campaign. Out of all the filled forms, 400 students chosen through a public lottery would each be given a voucher of Rs. 300 per month, to study in a school of their choice.

Coordinators are getting mobbed by enthusiastic people everywhere they go, people running behind the Campaign Vans to get more information and campaign collaterals is a common sight. Apart from the target population, some other people like local leaders, journalists, retired officials are also coming up with queries. The launch of the campaign has been covered by 16 newspapers in various languages!



*Top: School Choice Campaign Coordinators Filling Scholarship Forms for Parents Bottom: Campaign coordinators distributing scholarship forms getting mobbed by eager parents*

*Jharkhand*

Jharkhand started the School choice campaign with a workshop organized for the volunteers of the campaign by Parth J Shah and Swati Chawla on 6 March 2007.

Mr. Harivansh, the chief editor of Prabhat Khabar and Dr. V P Sharan - Head of Department, Political Science, St Xavier's College Ranchi, are some of the prominent people supporting the Jharkhand Campaign. There has been overwhelming support from almost every body that we have met. Thousands of people have already signed letters to their Minister in support for the School Choice Campaign and many thousands are being contacted everyday!

The campaign has got positive support from Ex CM Mr. Babulal Marandi and two other local MLAs. The campaign is on full swing in Garhwa, Sonthal Pargana, Chibasa and Ranchi.



*Slum children showing off their scholarship forms*

*Bihar*

Our coordinators in Bihar have met Panchayat members in the villages of Sarsi, Champawati, Bhawanipur and briefed them about the School Choice Campaign. After a lot of Discussions, meetings and debates with parents and panchayat members, representative committees have started being formed in Bihar.

Our coordinators are meeting more people everyday and engaging in a lot of public debate about the ideas of school choice. As in the other states, the response in Bihar too has been positive and enthusiastic.



*Mothers of children going to government schools meet to discuss School Choice*



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*“There is an urgent need for the government to provide vouchers to parents from the economically backward section. That way they can choose to enroll their children in private schools instead of the government-run schools, which are in a pathetic state.”*

- Nandan Nilekani  
CEO, Infosys

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