

Opening Remarks
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School Choice National Conference
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Good morning! It is my great honor to welcome you to the School Choice National Conference. It's hosted by the School Choice Campaign of the Centre for Civil Society. CCS practices Social Change through Public Policy! We are a think tank that uses research and advocacy to review and recommend changes in policy in the areas of education, livelihood, and governance and also engages India's youth through our New Ideas, New Leaders programs.

Almost to this week in 2001, we first brought together educationists, policy makers and national and international experts to explore problems and possible solutions for our education system. The outcome was Education Choice Campaign! In 2007 we began to focus fully on school education through the **School Choice Campaign**. The mission of this Campaign is to ensure the **Right to Education of Choice to every child** by promoting the efficient use of public funds and encouraging equity and quality through diversity and liberalization rather than uniformity. We follow a three pronged approach: **School vouchers, Regulatory Reforms** and **Encouraging Edupreneurs**.

The mantra of the **Campaign** is Fund Students, Not Schools! It means full choice and open competition: Choice not just for richer students and competition not just among elite private schools for these richer students. But choice for all students, rich and poor, and competition among all schools, government, elite private and budget private. School vouchers empower poor parents to exercise choice and compel schools to compete even for their children.

The core concern now is quality of education. Quality and choice are two sides of the same coin. Given the tremendous diversity among children, particularly in the ways they learn, only diversity and not uniformity in education delivery system can meet the needs of each child. So quality is intrinsically linked to choice. Without parental choice, it's difficult to define or attain quality.

The recent passage of the **Right to Education Bill 2009** is a momentous event. The RTE Bill endorses the idea of school choice by reserving 25% seats in all private schools for government sponsored students from economically weaker and socially disadvantaged sections. Ironically, having given choice to 25% of the poor, it threatens to take away choice from the remaining 75% of the poor by closing down budget private schools. With these internal contradictions, proper implementation of RTE is a monumental challenge. That is the challenge we are taking up in this conference.

I really hope that before the end of the day we would have shared best practices and experiences, ideated on innovative solutions and finally, formulated a strategy to improve educational outcomes in India.

For the Right to Education of Choice!