

PRESS RELEASE

The eighth Annual Status of Education Report (ASER 2012) released In New Delhi, 17 January 2013

The Annual Status of Education Report, ASER 2012 was released in New Delhi today by the Honourable Minister of Human Resource Development, Dr. M. M. Pallam Raju. This is the eighth annual report.

ASER is the largest annual household survey of children in rural India that focuses on the status of schooling and basic learning. Facilitated by Pratham, in each rural district ASER is conducted by local organizations, institutions and concerned citizens. ASER 2012 reached 567 districts, more than 16,000 villages, nearly 3.3 lac households and about 6 lac children in the age 3-16.

Every year, ASER finds out whether children in rural India go to school, whether they can read simple text and whether they can do basic arithmetic. Since 2009, ASER has also included a visit to one government school in each sampled village. Since the implementation of the RTE Act in 2010, school visits in ASER have included indicators of compliance with those norms and standards specified in the Right to Education Act that are easy to measure. In 2012, ASER visited almost 14,600 government schools.

ASER 2012: KEY FINDINGS

OVERALL, ENROLLMENT IN AGE GROUP 6-14 REMAINS ABOVE 96%. PRIVATE SCHOOL ENROLLMENT RISING IN ALMOST ALL STATES.

Enrollment levels for the 6-14 age group continue to be very high in rural India. In 2012, 96.5% of all children in this age group in rural India were enrolled in school. This is the fourth consecutive year that enrollment levels have been 96% or more.

Nationally, the proportion of children (age 6-14) who are not enrolled in school has gone up slightly, from 3.3% in 2011 to 3.5% in 2012. This increase is largest for girls in the 11-14 age group, going from 5.2% in 2011 to 6% in 2012. In Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, the percentage of girls (age 11-14) not enrolled in school has risen from 8.9% and 9.7% respectively in 2011 to more than 11% in 2012.

Nationally, private school enrollment has risen year after year for the 6-14 age group, from 18.7% in 2006 to 28.3% in 2012. In the last 3 years, the rate of growth of private school enrollment has been nearly 10% per year. If this trend continues, by 2018, India may have 50% children attending private schools even in rural areas.

Increases in private school enrollment are seen in almost all states. In 2012, more than 40% of children (age 6-14 years) in Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Goa

and Meghalaya were enrolled in private schools. This percentage was 60% or more in Kerala and Manipur.

Whether enrolled in government schools or private schools, across rural India about a quarter of all children in the elementary grades (Std. I-VIII) also go to paid private tutors. Usually, children receiving this additional support have better learning outcomes than those who do not. In 2012, of all children enrolled in Std. I-VIII, close to 45% were going to private school and/or private tuition.

BASIC READING AND ARITHMETIC CONTINUE TO BE A CAUSE FOR VERY SERIOUS CONCERN.

In 2010 nationally, more than half (53.7%) of all children in Std. V were able to read a Std. II level text. This proportion fell to 48.2% in 2011 and further to 46.8% in 2012. The decline in reading levels is more visible among children in government schools as compared to those in private schools. The percentage of Std. V children in government schools who were able to read Std. II level text has fallen from 50.7% in 2010 to 41.7% in 2012.

For all children in Std. V, major decline in reading levels (of 5 percentage points or more) between 2011 and 2012 is seen in Haryana, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Kerala. Even private schools in Maharashtra and Kerala, with a large proportion of aided schools, show a decline in reading ability for Std. V.

2012 was designated as the year of mathematics in India. But it has been a bad year for basic arithmetic for Indian children. In 2010, seven out of ten (70.9%) children enrolled in Std. V were able to solve simple two-digit subtraction problems with borrowing. This proportion declined to 6 out of 10 (61%) in 2011 and further to 5 out of 10 (53.5%) in 2012. Barring Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala, every major state shows signs of a substantial drop in arithmetic learning levels.

Comparing the cohort of children who were in government schools in Std. V in 2011 with the cohort in Std. V in 2012, there is evidence of a more than 10 percentage point drop in the ability to do basic subtraction in almost all states. Exceptions are Bihar, Assam and Tamil Nadu where the drop is less; and Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala where there has been either improvement or no change since 2011.

OBSERVATIONS FROM SCHOOL VISITS

The proportion of small schools is rising in India. A total of 14,591 schools were visited during ASER 2012. The proportion of government primary schools with enrollment of 60 or fewer students has increased over time, from 26.1% in 2009 to 32.1% in 2012.

The proportion of children in primary grades who sit in multi-grade classrooms is also rising. For Std. II, this number has gone up from 55.8% in 2009 to 62.6% in 2012. For Std. IV, it has risen from 51% in 2010 to 56.6% in 2012.

Based on RTE norms, the pupil teacher ratio (PTR) shows improvement over time. In 2010, the proportion of schools meeting PTR norms was 38.9%. This number has risen to 42.8% in 2012.

Nationally, school facilities also show improvement over time. Improvement is visible in basic facilities available in schools: in 2012, 73% of all schools visited had drinking water available. The proportion of schools with useable toilets has increased from 47.2% in 2010 to 56.5% in 2012. Approximately 80% of schools visited had separate provision for girls' toilets. The midday meal was observed being served in 87.1% schools that were visited.

Learning outcomes were low but steady in the years leading to 2010. But across the country, children's ability to read simple text and do basic arithmetic has declined since then. Although compliance with norms and standards specified by RTE has improved since 2010, most children in school today are at least three grade levels behind where they should be. Learning deficits from primary school influence learning outcomes at the secondary school level too.

The Twelfth Five Year Plan targets include "improved learning outcomes... at all levels of the school education, with special focus on mastery of basic reading and numeracy skills by class 2." In line with the Twelfth Plan document, phase wise learning outcome goals need to be immediately articulated for the 2013-14 school year. All systems – teacher training, monitoring and assessment need to be aligned to help schools achieve these goals. Concrete and implementable goals and plans for addressing these learning issues should be visible in plans made by states for the coming school year for all elementary schools.

The guarantee of education is meaningless without satisfactory learning. There are serious implications for India's equity and growth if basic learning outcomes do not improve soon.