



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Annual Status of Education Report West Bengal (Rural) 2021 was released in Kolkata on 9th February 2022

ASER West Bengal 2021 was released this morning in Kolkata. The report was released by Nobel prize winner Prof. Abhijit Banerjee. Dr. Rukmini Banerji, CEO of Pratham Education Foundation and Dr Abhijit Chowdhury from the Liver Foundation, ASER's survey partner in West Bengal, were among those present at the release.

Despite the disruptions caused by COVID-19 to ASER Centre's trajectory of ASER surveys, since the pandemic began in 2020 field surveys have been conducted in Karnataka (March 2021) and Chhattisgarh (November 2021). West Bengal is the third state in this series. The survey was conducted in December 2021, almost two years after the onset of the pandemic.

ASER West Bengal 2021 was conducted in 17 districts and reached a total of 10,141 households and 11,189 children in the age group of 3-16 years.

Key Findings from ASER West Bengal 2021

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

- **Rise in government school enrollment:** There has been an increase in government school enrollment from 88.1% in 2018 to 91.5% in 2021 for children in the age group of 6-14 years. This increase is seen across all age groups and among both boys and girls.
- **Drop in children aged 6-14 currently not enrolled in school:** Despite nearly two years of the pandemic, enrollment rates in 2021 are higher for all age groups as compared to 2018. In 2021, the proportion of children aged 6-14 not enrolled in school stands at 1%.
- **More older children in school than ever before:** Among older children in the age group of 15-16, there has been a substantial rise in government school enrollment, from 84.1% in 2018 to 93% in 2021. This is driven by a sharp decline in the proportion of out of school children in this age group, from 11.7% in 2018 to 3.5% in 2021.

LEARNING LEVELS

Children in early primary grades (Std I, II and III) show sharp drops in foundational reading and arithmetic ability.

Reading

The ASER reading test assesses whether a child can read letters, words, a simple paragraph at Std I level of difficulty, or a 'story' at Std II level of difficulty. The test is administered one on one to all children in the age group 5 to 16. The child is marked at the highest level that she or he can reach.

- **Std I and Std II:** A clear drop is visible in the reading ability of children in Std I and Std II in government schools. The percentage of children in Std I in government schools who can read at least letters has fallen from 73.2% in 2018 to 66.3% in 2021. In Std II, the proportion of children



in government schools who can read at least words has declined by over 13 percentage points in the same period.

- **Std III:** The percentage of children in Std III in government schools who can read a Std II level text (or read at grade level) has decreased from 36.6% in 2018 to 27.7% in 2021.

Arithmetic

The ASER arithmetic test assesses whether a child can recognise numbers from 1 to 9, recognise numbers from 10 to 99, do a 2-digit numerical subtraction problem with borrowing, or correctly solve a numerical division problem (3-digit by 1-digit). The tasks are administered one on one to all children in the age group 5 to 16. The child is marked at the highest level that she or he can reach.

- **Std I and Std II:** The proportion of children in Std I in government schools who can at least recognise single-digit numbers fell by 9.3 percentage points, from 77.8% in 2018 to 68.5% in 2021. Similar drops are visible among children in Std II as well, where this proportion fell from 92.6% in 2018 to 86.4% in 2021.
- **Std III:** One out of four children in Std III in government schools in West Bengal can do at least subtraction, a drop of over 8 percentage points over the 2018 levels.

SUPPORT FOR LEARNING

- **Almost two thirds of all children have smartphones available at home (65.5%),** and more than half have televisions (56.4%). However, there are significant gaps between children enrolled in government and private schools.
- Seven out of ten children in West Bengal take paid tuition classes to supplement their studies.
- **Two out of three children in government schools receive help from family members while studying at home,** but this proportion is much higher for young children in Std I-II as opposed to older children.
- **One in ten children in government schools did some learning activity online in the week prior to the survey:** While most children engaged in learning activities that involved the use of traditional materials like textbooks and worksheets, about 10% children took an online class, recorded or live, in the week prior to the survey.
- **One in five children in government schools had some contact with school teachers:** Around 20% children in government schools were in contact with their teacher via calls or visits in the week prior to the survey to discuss learning materials or the child's progress. About 18% received some learning materials/activities in the same time period.
- **Almost all children received mid-day ration:** 95.3% children in Std I-VIII in government schools received ration or funds for mid-day meal at least once in the three months before the survey.

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