

आओ,  
बातचीत जारी रखें

चला,  
संवाद सुरू ठेवूया

17TH, 18TH MAR 2021  
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Saajha  
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## आओ, बातचीत जारी रखें

A series of conversations with  
parents, government leaders and  
stakeholders in public education  
system

## Preface

Saajha works with parents by supporting their efforts to create an environment for effective learning for children across home, schools, and the community. We started our work with schools of Delhi Municipal Corporation in 2014 and since then we have been able to work with schools of the Department of Education, Government of Delhi, Ashram shalas of Tribal Development Department, Govt of Maharashtra, and schools in Jharkhand.

The outbreak of Covid19 brought the focus on the involvement of parents in education. It also created various challenges and hurdles for them, right from ensuring financial security to the accessibility of education. We felt that it was important to listen to their experiences, understand different perspectives of parenting in the pandemic, and the efforts taken by the state to support parents and children.

A virtual dialogue was organized, considering the intensity of the pandemic to achieve the above objective. It was panned over two days and four sessions. Every session had experts from various fields as speakers, ranging from parents, teachers, researchers, and policymakers. The consultation brought the experiences of parents dealing with the pandemic, different perspectives on the challenges of parents in ensuring early childhood education, and also touched upon efforts taken by the state to make education accessible during the lockdown.

This report shares important takeaways from every session. We hope that it becomes a medium to amplify the need for parental involvement in education.

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## Listen to Parents

### Parents share how they overcome challenges with children's education amidst a pandemic



**MODERATOR**  
**Rukmini Banerji**  
*Pratham*

#### SPEAKERS



**Darshana**  
**Parent,**  
**Delhi**



**Anil Valvi**  
**Parent,**  
**Maharashtra**



**Shahida**  
**Begum**  
**Parent, Delhi**



**Dnyaneshwar**  
**Mali**  
**Parent,**  
**Maharashtra**

Over the last year, we have seen a major shift in learning. Schools remained shut for the most year and parents assumed the responsibility of educators as students had to study from home. It was a challenging year for all parents. Hence we invited four of them from Delhi and Maharashtra to share their experiences. Darshana and Shahida's children study in schools of Delhi govt and Municipal corporation of Delhi respectively. Anil's daughter studies in Govt Ashram school, Kothali in Nandurbar district of Maharashtra. Unfortunately, Dnyaneshwar could not be present. All three of them are SMC members in their respective schools.

The parents shared their experiences of dealing with the lockdown, the challenges they faced during this period specifically concerning ensuring accessibility of education.

## Challenges faced by parents

1. Financial hardships- Parents were suffering from a financial crunch as they lost their jobs. Their children's education was affected because of this as it had moved online and children needed phones to study which parents could not provide.
2. Dividing screen time between the kids- Having only one phone created a struggle for parents to divide screen time between kids as they all had their classes online and had to study through the phone.
3. Question of prioritizing children from higher classes- Parents had to make tough decisions of prioritizing one child's education over others as they were in higher classes.
4. Helping them in their school work- Parents were not able to help children in their studies as the syllabus was advanced and the parents were unfamiliar with it.
5. Increased screen time for children- Children started using phones not only to attend classes but also to play games and watch YouTube videos. The excessive use of phones and increased screen time worried parents.
6. Distraction created due to phone use- Games, videos acted as a distraction. Children insisted on playing games, watching a video before or while studying. Parents had to check now and then to ensure that children were focusing on learning.

## Key takeaways from the session

1. Teacher parent relations are important -
    - a. Children spend most of their time with parents and teachers hence these two stakeholders need to be connected well. The need for this strong connection was felt during the lockdown. This connection has been built and should continue. SMCs are best placed to achieve this.
    - b. A good relationship between parents and teachers is important for bringing teachers and students closer.
    - c. Parents of older kids should be oriented about their syllabus on regular basis. This will enable them to help children with learning difficulties effectively.
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## 2. Promotion of students to higher classes -

- a. The past year has disrupted the learning process. Hence schools should check the learning levels of students. Parents opined that there should be a revision of the previous year's syllabus once schools reopen.

## 3. Facilities at school -

- a. All schools should have equal resources and equal access to resources.
- b. Schools should have regular health check-ups, especially in areas like the Nandurbar district in Maharashtra where sickle cell anemia is prevalent. Good health will lead to improved learning.
- c. Anganwadis are the most important stakeholder in getting children school ready. Hence they need to be well equipped.



The pandemic has created a scope of parental involvement in education. Going ahead we need to learn from this experience and expand the role of parents in school beyond just attending parent-teacher meetings. There is a need to realize the potential parents have.

# Understanding the Perspective of Early Childhood and Parenting

## Understanding parent's role and interventions to support them



**MODERATOR**

**Reshma Agarwal**  
*Education Specialist,*  
**UNICEF**



**SPEAKERS**

**Dr. Venita Kaul**  
*Professor Emerita (Education)*  
**Ambedkar University**



**Farida Lambay**  
*Co-founder, Pratham*

Early childhood education and care are crucial for equipping students for school. The unprecedented situation of the pandemic led us to realize the gaps in response to ensuring support to parents and children in terms of education, health, and nutrition. The speakers- Dr. Vinita Kaul and Farida Lambay shared their thoughts on challenges faced by parents, the response of the state, and required policy changes to equip us to deal with a similar situation.

### Challenges faced by parents

1. Parents did not receive any support in terms of ensuring nutrition, education, access to health services at the beginning of the pandemic.
2. The parents were expected to act as a teacher to their children but they were not prepared for it.

3. Parents would have been comfortable in participating in activities known to them.

### Key takeaways from the session

1. **Response of the govt to ensure the continuation of early childhood practices and best practices observed**
    - a. Supply of nutrition to children through Anganwadis was ensured. Textbooks were given to all students immediately.
    - b. The response in Maharashtra was localized. Decisions to support parents were taken in a decentralized manner because of which the response was quick and effective.
    - c. Learning content was disseminated immediately. In areas where connecting with parents virtually was not possible, teachers and other officials visited them physically.
  2. **Gaps in the response and policy**
    - a. There was no established procedure to support parents in this situation.
    - b. There was inadequate data to design interventions and support families which was reflected in the response of the Govt too.
    - c. While families and children got access to books and learning content, it was not as per the learning level of the child and there was not enough support on ensuring its usage at home.
    - d. There was a lack of coordination between government agencies and civil society. In such challenging situations, civil society plays an important role in aiding the government. But in the pandemic, the role of civil society was restricted.
    - e. Schools became an extension of homes. More focus should have been on students engaging in home-based activities.
  3. **Suggestions for the future course**
    - a. There is a need for creating a standard operating procedure for the pandemics at this scale especially for protecting young children.
    - b. As we move towards aligning New Education Policy with our education systems we need to take into account learnings from the COVID experience.
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- c. We have to emphasize the activities parents can do with their children instead of putting them in the role of teachers.



The difficult time of covid saw schools, parents, and the community coming together to collaborate. Parents became educators. Moving forward we have to plan activities that have strong components of socio-emotional learning. That should be our learning from the experience of the pandemic. The pandemic also highlighted the importance of parent-child interaction. It should become a part of the curriculum. As a stepping stone in early childhood education, home needs to be brought into class.



# Explore Building Bridges to Connect Homes and Schools

**How can the state involve and engage parents in the mission to reform public education in India?**



**Dr. Manisha Priyam**  
Associate Professor,  
NIEPA



**Ishrat Jahan**  
State Head, Foundational  
Literacy and Numeracy Mission,  
The Education Alliance



**KS Upadhyay**  
Regional director,  
Education,  
(East) Delhi



**Leena Bansod**  
IAS, Chief Executive  
Officer, Zilla  
Parishad, Nashik

The pandemic made the state, policymakers, and academia think about the importance of parental involvement in education. To discuss this we invited officials and policymakers from three different states who shared their experiences and thoughts. Ms. Leena Bansod and Mr. KS Upadhyay shared the efforts taken by their respective education departments to tackle the problem of access to education during the pandemic. Ms. Ishrat Jahan shared the innovative ways through which the Tribal Development Department of Govt of Maharashtra increased the role of parents. They also expressed their views on how the govt can engage with parents.

### Challenges in ensuring accessibility of education in pandemic

1. Many parents did not have smartphones which created a hurdle in accessing online education for many students.
2. Lack of a streamlined process to ensure accessibility of education in the lockdown led to the administration searching for innovative solutions.

3. Parents could not connect with schools physically since there were restrictions on movement and many parents had gone to their native places.

### Key takeaways from the session

#### 1. Challenges of Connecting with students

- a. The administration had to rely on various innovative ways to connect with students. These included having a show on Akashvani about learning, enabling life skill education at homes, creating worksheets, and physically distributing them.

#### 2. Importance of Involvement of parents in education and its best practices

- a. In the lockdown, parents filled in the responsibilities of teachers. They became co-learners with their children.
- b. During the pre-Covid time, the engagement of parents in the schools of Delhi and Ashram schools of Maharashtra saw positive outcomes. Parents took the initiative to bring positive changes in schools. The DBT scheme in Ashram schools enabled parents to make critical decisions. This led to higher social accountability.

#### 3. Future course for involving parents in education

- a. The Delhi government is working on a concept of School Mitras. 50 parents from the community will volunteer with schools to reach out to other parents and understand their needs. Along with SMCs and other flagship programs, this will further enhance parental engagement. Such outreach to parents will create a support system for schools to tackle any unprecedented situation like Covid19.
  - b. Parental involvement has to be an agenda for every department of the government because no developmental agenda can be fulfilled unless there is large-scale community participation and ownership.
  - c. The state can engage with parents in two ways- by leveraging local resource groups such as SHGs and through technology. SHGs can act as a pressure group to ensure every child is going to school whereas technology will enable communication with parents.
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At beginning of the pandemic, the state had a limited understanding of parental involvement and the ways parents could facilitate learning at home. Covid has ended up teaching the state new and innovative ways to connect with parents. The state needs to make it a habit to keep engaging and connecting with parents. Empowered parents will bring in transformative changes in schools and education.



# Understand The Power of The Collective

**Exploring the potential of School Management Committees in driving change for the public education system.**

**SPEAKERS**



**MODERATOR**  
**Mittali Sethi**  
*IAS, Assistant Collector, Dharni, Maharashtra*

**Atishi**  
*MLA & Former Education Advisor, Delhi Govt.*

**Yamini Aiyar**  
*President, Centre for Policy Research*

**Manisha Verma**  
*IAS, Managing director, MFSCDCL, Govt. of Maharashtra*

The speakers brought along different perspectives to this section. Atishi was the force behind changing the education system and SMCs reforms when she was an advisor to Mr. Manish Sisodia, the then Minister of Education, Govt of Delhi. Manisha Verma brought significant changes in the functioning of SMCs of Ashram schools when she was working as the principal secretary of Tribal Development Department, Govt of Maharashtra. Yamini Aiyar brought her experiences of working with Pratham and schools on mobilizing parents-teacher associations. Their rich experiences helped the audience understand the importance of SMCs, challenges, and their solutions in detail.

### Challenges in the empowerment of SMCs

1. In Delhi, there was a lack of faith in the potential of parents to contribute and participate in the bureaucratic system. This led to a lack of consensus among its stakeholders regarding designing SMC elections, the process of drafting its

circular, and communicating it to parents, teachers, and schools.

2. In Maharashtra, SMCs of Ashram schools found it difficult to connect with parents as they stayed in far-off villages.
3. The power dynamics between teachers and parents affect the functioning of SMCs.
4. SMCs are empowered on paper but there is a gap in policies and their implementation on the ground.
5. SMCs have rigid structures of fund utilization and SMC work requires tedious paperwork.

### Key takeaways from the session

1. **Why are SMCs important**
    - a. SMCs push all stakeholders to think collectively and bridge the communication gap between the school and parents. It has also led to a considerable reduction in the class divide and strengthen the relationship between parents and teachers.
    - b. SMCs act as everyday monitoring bodies closest to the schools, which leads to increased accountability of stakeholders and timely action to address challenges.
    - c. Building leadership capacities of SMCs balance the decision-making power between the bureaucracy and the community. It also creates ownership towards the schools.
  2. **Solutions and best practices**
    - a. Empowerment of SMCs in Delhi required work on multiple levels-
      - i. A dedicated education minister and allocated budget.
      - ii. Simplifying communications on elections and meetings and making it accessible.
    - b. SMC members create awareness about SMCs in their community.
  3. SMCs in Ashram schools were given more powers. SMC fund management was made decentralized. The appointment of parents as chairperson and vice-chairperson of SMCs became mandatory.
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4. In Ashram schools, SMC members were given training on financial planning and leadership skills to manage and utilize SMC funds effectively. This ensured an increase in the utilization of funds (from 17% to 70%).



SMCs are essential for parents' involvement in school processes. There is a need of crafting policies sensitive to the needs of the communities the schools serve. Policymakers need to keep in mind the challenges of the region. Localized solutions have worked most effectively in areas where SMCs have been proactive. There is also a need for a cultural shift here. The state needs to understand the power of discretion and allow accountability to foster at local levels. A willing state will create empowered SMCs.