



Right to Education Forum

ANNEXURE: THE DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following are the specific recommendations on how the NCF should approach these dimensions.

A. Concerning rights framing

1. **Include RTE in the framing of the NCF** as part of Parts A, D and E of the NCF in terms of how they shape the overall approach and the framing of individual schools and the overall ecosystem. Thus, part E (Section 1.1) which covers the infrastructural requirements of schools should highlight that the school infrastructure for the elementary education stage will align with the stipulated requirements outlined in the Right to Education Act.
2. **Focus more clearly on strengthening the education system:** The draft NCF includes a single page on the role of academic and administrative functionaries for its realization. A process of pedagogic renewal across 1.5 million schools needs a stronger focus on how the process of change will be handheld for not just individual schools as a unit, but the system. The document should spell out how the roles of the concerned officials will be supported to change to ensure a robust process of rollout. This should include a process of strengthening the backbone of the education administration and curriculum support including the CRCs and BRCs and its staff. This is particularly needed to address Informal practices that have become normalized in education settings that, while not part of stated policy, have become mainstream- e.g., streaming girls away from science and maths.
3. **Strengthen provisions for community participation.** This should include both the engagement with the statutory structures for community participation and the need to strengthen the organic connection between home and school in the educational process.
 - a. Section 1.3.3.5 of Part D, engaging with parents and community section emphasizes the importance of community and parental engagement and highlights the necessity of keeping parents informed about their children's progress and achievements. It is crucial to acknowledge the significance of School Management Committees (SMCs) in this context. The Right to Education (RTE) Act mandates the establishment of SMCs to involve parents and the community in the holistic functioning of schools. However, there exists a noticeable gap between teachers and SMC members; this section should highlight the need for strengthening this relationship.
 - b. The concept of school committees and forums (section 2.1.4 under Part D) is commendable. However, it would be worth mentioning that these committees and forums should be established in a way that ensures the inclusion of children from diverse social, cultural, and gender backgrounds.
 - c. The section could be stronger if it, in addition to the involvement of parents in school activities, also emphasized the need for wider and deeper and connected relationships, as parents and the community play essential roles in enriching the curricular process by sharing knowledge, providing practical examples, supporting children's learning, promoting democratic participation, monitoring rights, addressing constraints, and actively engaging with schools to create a supportive and



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inclusive learning environment. Secondly, parents and the community support children in exploring and creating knowledge by actively engaging in the educational process. They can participate in information generation, planning, monitoring, and evaluation, collaborating with local governments and schools to ensure children's rights are realized and address any constraints they may face.

4. **A stronger focus on child rights.** The NCF could have reiterated the need to address the comprehensive rights of the child, including child participation. The Section on School Culture and Processes (page 545) The “School Culture” does not explicitly mention the “participation of children” in school culture. The section does touch upon the importance of student-student relationships and collaboration, which can be seen as elements of student participation and emphasizes the need for inclusive practices, where all students have ensured participation in classroom activities and other school processes. Recognizing education as the foundation of a democratic society, the curriculum framework should aim to provide each Indian child with a positive experience of democratic functioning. It stresses the importance of enabling children to not only participate in a democracy but also learn how to interact and collaborate with others to preserve and enhance democratic values. We understand that children are influenced by the socio-cultural paradigm they are exposed to, including their homes, communities, and media, which shape their perceptions of caste, class, gender, democracy, and justice. To transform these perceptions, a counter-experience must be strong enough to challenge and reshape their values. The participation of children is seen to preserve and revitalize a culture of egalitarianism, democracy, and equality. The school culture should emphasize students’ identities as learners and create an inclusive environment that enhances each child’s potential and interests. Enabling democratic participation should be viewed to empower the weak and marginalized segments of society. Thus, Child Participation should be integrated into all learning processes and subject areas and given utmost importance in the development of curricula and syllabi.

B. Concerning flexibility to address state contexts:

1. The final NCF document will need to be shorter and prioritize the most essential characteristics while leaving space for state governments to shape the curriculum in line with their own culture, local knowledge, and language.
2. The curriculum framework needs to give ample opportunity for the states to shape their curricula and materials. Thus, it is important to maintain diversity and inclusion as important principles in the choice of content for textbooks. Even within States, there are regional variations and these need to find adequate representation in textbooks. Balanced gender and community representation must be ensured (pg. 65 – principles of textbook design).

C. Concerning equity

The NEP in Chapter 2 (page 503) names the broad categories of children who belong to socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs), recognizes existing programmatic interventions, details the various dimensions of inclusion, and reiterates the need for affirmative strategies and actions. However, it would have been more



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effective if the specific challenges faced by marginalized communities were mainstreamed across the document and not been substantially restricted to a single chapter.

1. **Introducing choice without ensuring universal standards of quality in all schools:** India experiences inadequacy of basic school Infrastructure, shortage and weak training of teachers, and limited support for learning from the administration, particularly when it comes to the poor and marginalized communities. A significant increase in the budget allocation to education, despite being part of the NEP, has not materialized. The prioritization of curriculum choice in such unequal educational contexts risks exacerbating inequality. Given the shortage of staff and facilities and the continued under-investment in education, most schools, particularly those in rural areas, are unlikely to offer the same choice of disciplines available to rich students in elite schools. Implementing such a flexible system will require the intake of a huge number of teachers and a significant upgrading of the education infrastructure. In contrast, a recent Parliamentary Standing Committee report found that over 9.8 lakh teaching positions are vacant in government schools across the country, which includes more than 2.5 lakh vacancies at the secondary level alone. Even in the current policy context of constrained curriculum choice, the choice of arts, commerce or science stream is highly constrained in terms of how systems are set up. Accordingly, the current school education system has neither the teaching force nor the infrastructure, to implement these changes.
2. **Address risks arising from increased segmentation in India's already unequal education system through the heavy emphasis on vocational education.** Nothing in the NEP or the NCF addresses the differential status between vocational and academic education in India's society or the job market. Prioritizing vocational streams for students in rural areas will restrict opportunities for students from marginalized communities and poor families to get a chance to be admitted to academic courses that offer career paths to students; most of these in academic streams will likely be those from relatively privileged backgrounds. More specifically, when it comes to Chapter 9,
 - a. The Chapter should be sharper in defining and building strategies for employment-related vocational education and not overlap it with life skills. While building life skills to deal with day-to-day realities in life is a welcome dimension in education and needs to be incorporated at different levels in the school curriculum, there are concerns about the early introduction of employment-related vocational education.
 - b. The chapter tries to force-fit vocational education from foundational stages in schooling and suggests Prevocational stages in the foundational and preparatory stages (preschool to class 5). This is unnecessary and artificial incorporation of the concept of vocational education at such an early age. The Forum does not support the introduction of vocational education from early ages; and certainly not before class 11-12 standards.
 - c. **Subject-specific challenges override institutional feasibility:** The chapter outlines subject-specific challenges in introducing vocational education under section 9.3. Introducing vocational education without addressing the challenges will not provide the necessary skills to children who opt for the course. Some of these challenges outlined include the lack of



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resources to set up practical workshops in schools, the absence of exposure centres for hands-on training, the lack of teacher education courses in vocational education, the lack of assessment systems and others. It is unclear how these will be addressed. At the same time, the social perception that places a low value on vocational skills as a last resort in education and the absence of clear pathways for higher education after class 11-12 will push the majority of those who opt for vocational education into low-skilled casual employment, not very different from the informal sector employment they currently access.

- d. **Unclear Strategies:** On one hand the curriculum talks about 'localizing vocational education as much as possible', and engaging community master craftsmen and on the other of 'making them aspirational and as much town/cities oriented'. It talks about not siloing children into their historical and traditional occupations. The suggestion that "for many students, it may offer a glimpse of future professions while for others it would at the very least help teach and reinforce the dignity of labour for all" suggests the persistence of the traditional divide between vocational education and higher education – (para 4.6.6 on pg. 426).
- e. **Vocational education will promote child labour:** The Child Labour Amendment Act, 2016 allowing children to work in family occupations combined with the provision of vocational education in early classes will further promote child labour pushing them into caste and gender-based work and employment.

In conclusion, **vocational education** as outlined in the chapter risks further pushing girls and children from marginalised communities out of school before they even explore their interests or potential and deepen the existing caste-class-gender bias and inequalities in education and be a step away from the progressive steps that have been taken since independence to promote education access in school and higher education and reduce educational inequalities. Even as the approach recognizes the existence of '**equity considerations**' (9.2 Pg 429) and states its intention to be to not push children into caste and gender-based vocations, there are no strategies to prevent this from happening.

3. **Address inequality in inputs provided.** The section on school culture and processes need to also spell out how inequality in terms of infrastructure, facilities and faculty will be addressed if the constitutional goal of equality is to be ensured. At the same time, it would be important to address how the differential resourcing of schools affiliated with the various boards will be overcome to ensure uniform capacities among students to negotiate the content being proposed.
4. **Need for a stronger focus on Mother tongue-based multi-lingual education, particularly in tribal languages:** While the NCF recommends that students should be taught exclusively in their mother tongue until the age of eight, the NCF skirts the question of which language should be considered as the mother tongue, particularly in areas where the languages spoken at home are different from the state language. A more explicit focus on the need to promote tribal languages should be prioritised. At the same time, no clear strategy is discernible on how the growth of English will be addressed. States with significant tribal populations like Odisha and Rajasthan promote English medium



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government schools, labelling them as "Model/Ideal" schools, while emphasizing the importance of mother tongue instruction.

5. **Addressing the implementation of the vision.** Implementation of equity provisions has always been challenging. Practical ways of making resources available, building instruments and mechanisms, incorporating training, monitoring, and building corrective measures are big challenges. Without mainstreaming equity across the entire document, these challenges will not be addressed in practice.
6. **Some specific suggestions for Section D from an equity lens.** Schools should recognize and address the influence of social identities, promote equitable treatment, challenge stereotypes and discrimination, and create inclusive environments that empower all students to thrive as learners. This involves the following suggestions for changes in the text
 - a. **Classroom Processes (Page 561)-** Part D 1.3.3.1 (Classroom practices, seating arrangement) mentions the potential issues with seating arrangements that reinforce hierarchies and differences among students, such as smarter students occupying front seats and lagging students sitting at the back. Numerous studies have identified discriminatory seating arrangements, like the placement of children from Dalit backgrounds in the back of the classroom. This section must emphasize the elimination of such practices. This section also does not discuss the importance of inclusive seating arrangements that accommodate different learning styles and encourage collaboration among students. Seating arrangements should be flexible and ensure the participation of all children.
 - b. **Diversity and representation in teaching-learning materials:** While the passage briefly mentions the availability and accessibility of teaching-learning materials, it does not address the significance of ensuring diversity and representation in these materials. Students need to see themselves and their experiences reflected in the learning materials to promote inclusivity and a sense of belonging.
 - c. **Positive classroom culture:** While the passage briefly mentions different rituals and their impact on the classroom atmosphere, it does not discuss the importance of cultivating a positive classroom culture that promotes emotional well-being. Creating a safe and supportive environment, fostering positive teacher-student relationships, and addressing students' social-emotional needs are vital elements for effective teaching and learning.
 - d. An **enabling classroom environment upholds values of equality, social justice, and respect for diversity.** It is a space where children feel secure, free from fear, and where relationships are based on equality and fairness. In this environment, teachers actively promote dialogue and encourage children to ask questions, share experiences, and engage in meaningful discussions with both the teacher and their peers. The classroom becomes a lively and adventurous place where teaching is not predictable and boring, but a dynamic exchange of ideas and perspectives. Such an environment fosters the development of self-confidence, self-esteem, and improves the overall quality of learning.
 - e. **Influence of Identities on School Processes:** Research indicates that children's identities continue to impact how they are treated within schools, leading to unequal opportunities for



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learning. Interpersonal relations, teacher attitudes, and cultural norms within schools can reinforce social hierarchies, gender stereotypes, and discrimination, perpetuating notions of purity and pollution, gender expectations, and privileging certain ways of living while marginalizing others. Thus, creating an equitable classroom environment is essential. Schools have a responsibility to be conscious of the need for equitable classroom environments that ensure students are not subjected to unfair treatment based on their gender, caste, disability, tribe, or minority group membership among others.

D. Need to strengthen the gender lens:

The NCF does commit to addressing the educational challenges of girls, but it fails to suggest concrete measures to address behavioural and societal change required to correct gender inequality in educational settings. A much more coherent strategy is needed to address the challenges faced by girls and transgender students in classrooms beyond the programmatic elements being proposed. At the same time, a focus on gender requires attention to the issues of boys as well, particularly at the secondary and higher secondary levels where dropout rates are higher among boys in some states. We have some specific recommendations:

1. **Inclusion Addressed through Pedagogy** (Pg 507): This section reiterates the need for gender integration in education, including the need for gender-sensitive curricula, gender-responsive teaching-learning material, and equal opportunities for girls and boys. It also highlights the importance of teacher training to address gender biases and stereotypes, as well as the creation of safe and inclusive learning environments for all genders. These are positive steps in promoting gender inclusion in education. However, the text would be stronger if it included concrete actions that can be taken to tackle pressing issues such as gender-based violence, gender-based discrimination, and the underrepresentation of girls and women in STEM fields. It is crucial to develop strategies and interventions that actively combat these challenges and provide girls with the necessary support and opportunities to thrive in all educational domains. Moreover, the text overlooks the significance of addressing intersectional issues that affect girls from marginalized communities or girls with disabilities. To achieve true inclusion, it is essential to consider the unique experiences and barriers faced by these girls and implement tailored approaches that address their specific needs. This could involve targeted support, inclusive policies, and inclusive pedagogical practices that consider the intersecting identities and challenges faced by girls from diverse backgrounds. To ensure comprehensive inclusion, it is necessary to implement concrete actions, policies, and pedagogical approaches that actively address these issues and promote equitable and inclusive education for all genders.
2. **Chapter 3. Information and Communication Technology** (Pg 509) lacks recognition of the gendered dimensions of the digital divide. It fails to address how this divide disproportionately affects girls and women, leading to limited access to and use of ICT. It is important to acknowledge the existing gender disparities in technology access and digital literacy, as well as the societal and cultural factors that contribute to these disparities. By recognizing and addressing these issues, educational policies and



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initiatives can be designed to promote equal opportunities for girls and women in accessing and utilizing ICT tools and resources. Additionally, while it recognizes the need to keep children safe online, it does not address the specific challenges faced by girls and women in the digital space. Online harassment and cyberbullying are significant concerns that disproportionately impact girls and women, leading to negative experiences and inhibiting their participation in online activities. To address this, it is crucial to incorporate strategies and guidelines for creating a safe and inclusive digital environment within educational settings. This can include educating students about responsible digital citizenship, promoting ethical behaviour online, and establishing mechanisms to report and address incidents of online harassment or cyberbullying. By prioritizing the safety and security of girls and women in the digital space, educational institutions can create a supportive and inclusive environment that encourages their active participation in ICT-enabled learning. In conclusion, the document should recognize the gendered dimensions of the digital divide and address the challenges faced by girls and women in accessing and using ICT. It should also emphasize the need to ensure their safety and security in the digital space, particularly concerning online harassment and cyberbullying. By addressing these issues, the potential of ICT in school education can be harnessed in a way that promotes gender equality, inclusivity, and a safe learning environment for all students.

- Chapter 4. Guidance and Counselling in School** (Pg 527). This part on guidance and counselling services in schools lacks explicit mention of the need to address gender inequalities or promote gender equity. Schools need to recognize and actively address gender disparities and promote gender equality in all aspects of education, including guidance and counselling services. This can be achieved by incorporating gender-sensitive approaches that consider the unique needs and experiences of students who may face discrimination or marginalization based on their gender identity or expression. By implementing inclusive and comprehensive guidance and counselling programs that are sensitive to gender-related issues, schools can create a supportive and empowering environment for all students. Accordingly, the document should explicitly acknowledge the importance of addressing gender inequalities and promoting gender equity in schools, particularly in the context of guidance and counselling services. It should highlight the need for programs that are specifically designed to cater to the unique needs and experiences of students facing discrimination or marginalization based on their gender identity or expression. By incorporating gender-sensitive approaches, schools can foster an inclusive and supportive environment that promotes the holistic well-being and development of all students, regardless of their gender.
- Chapter 5. Developing Sensitivity to and Care for the Environment** (Pg 533). The chapter does not explicitly mention the gender angle about developing sensitivity to and care for the environment. However, it is crucial to recognize that gender plays a significant role in environmental issues and their impact on individuals and communities. Women, particularly in developing countries, are often disproportionately affected by environmental degradation and climate change. They may face specific challenges such as limited access to clean water, increased workload due to environmental responsibilities, and vulnerability to natural disasters. In the context of school education, it is essential to address the gendered dimensions of environmental concerns and ensure that both girls and boys are



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actively engaged in learning about and acting for the environment. This can be done by integrating a gender perspective in the curriculum and teaching materials, highlighting the experiences and contributions of women in environmental conservation, and promoting gender equality and inclusivity in environmental education initiatives. The curriculum and pedagogical approaches need to acknowledge and address gender disparities and the unique experiences of girls and women about environmental issues. By integrating a gender perspective, schools can contribute to building a more inclusive and equitable society that values and promotes environmental sustainability for all genders.

5. **Chapter 6. Rootedness in India** (Pg 537): There is an emphasis on Cultural Roots, the curriculum recognizes the importance of incorporating local and national cultural contexts into education. It aims to connect students with their heritage, traditions, and languages, fostering a sense of pride and belonging. It emphasises the representation of Indian Contributions. The curriculum highlights the contributions of Indian mathematicians, scientists, artists, and thinkers throughout history which may be expected to build appreciation for the achievements of their country. However, although the NCF acknowledges India's diverse linguistic heritage, it does not explicitly address the need for representation and inclusivity of marginalized groups, including Dalits, tribal communities, and religious minorities (Representation and Diversity) Ensuring diverse representation and perspectives in the curriculum would help foster inclusivity and promote understanding among students.

E. Knowledge

1. The NCF is correct in flagging the need for students to learn and appreciate India's history including its contributions to the early development of science, mathematics, and medicine, among others. However, the landscape of science, education and technology is rapidly evolving, and the priority should be on ensuring, students can keep pace with the latest science irrespective of where it comes from. At the same time, in a globalized world, it is critical to ensure that children are prepared to engage with counterparts across national boundaries.
2. Section C, Section 1.1. In this section, education in morality and ethics is reduced to a list of behaviour traits and values that children are expected to show. However, the development of values will not only be influenced by school and classroom processes but be rooted in building a new identity of the teacher and the community first and then the students. The message of no discrimination and integration must be built into the design of the education system including the vision of the 'Common School System.' At the same time, we should encourage the open flow of ideas, that enables students to be fully informed, use critical reflection, evaluate ideas, and show concern for the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities.
3. Strengthen the pedagogy to integrate 21st Century Skills across all the stages of education. There is a need to demystify and articulate the aims and objectives of each capacity and break it down into 'skills' for their effective integration in the syllabus, teaching-learning, assessments, etc. with the flexibility to provide for diversity in age and learning styles, among others. Thus, learning progression under the NCF document for Foundational Stage (pg 31) needs to be articulated more concretely, particularly in the domain of 21st Century Skills. These cannot be transferred in a vacuum, rather the skills need to be integrated into the



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transaction of disciplines. A clear road map with guidelines for how educators can integrate the development of student skills within existing subject-based curricula is required. An important component is to identify what demonstration of these competencies might look like and how to elicit or stimulate performance so that we know what the individual is ready to learn. There would be a need to develop learning objectives-based activities including field visits, experiential learning, etc. in the instructional programme to incorporate the 5Cs (Communication, cooperation, critical thinking, curiosity, and creativity) commonly called the 21st Century Skills.

4. The NEP / NCF lay great emphasis on the quality of the teacher. 'It is the Teacher who is ultimately the torchbearer for the changes we seek.' (pg 12). Teachers, therefore, need to be trained in not only transacting the subject matter of each discipline but also transferring the 5Cs to students. A paradigmatic change in the way teacher training is transacted is therefore called for. A more involved, hands-on, reflexive training needs to be designed for the teachers and a new cadre of teacher-trainers also needs to be created to carry out the training of teachers. This calls for strengthening the decentralised infrastructure of teacher training with equipment and material for transacting such training (beyond classrooms).

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