

NITI Aayog flags low student retention, learning outcomes

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A decadal analysis of India's school education system by NITI Aayog reveals that while India has achieved a nearuniversal access to school at the primary level, it faces challenges in retaining students at the secondary level. There is also a persistent crisis in achieving learning outcomes.



The report, titled “School education system in India — temporal analysis and policy roadmap for quality Enhancement”, highlights the “pyramid” problem.

The education system currently resembles a sharp pyramid, housing 14.71 lakh schools and 24.69 crore students.

While the country boasts 7.3 lakh primary schools, that number plummets to 1.64 lakh at the higher secondary level.

Four out of every 10 children who enter the system drop out before completing higher secondary education.

“This structural fragmentation means only 5.4% of schools offer a continuous journey from Grade 1 to 12. For the vast majority of students, moving up through the grades requires changing institutions multiple times — a hurdle that contributes to a steep attrition rate,” the report said. “This fragmentation without any established linkage between schools for transitioning requires students to shift schools at key stages, depending on local availability, which further contributes to declining retention rates and limits the likelihood of progression to higher stages of education.”

To add to this, close to 7,993 schools across the country reported zero student enrolment, with the highest numbers seen in West Bengal (3,812) and Telangana (2,245). “While these schools appear operational in administrative records, they no longer serve any student population. These schools, despite zero enrolment, continue to receive financial and human resources due to the lack of updating of records, showing the difference between onground reality and planning,” the report said.

The report recommends “cylindrical” schooling to fix the “leaky pipeline” of student dropouts, which involves creating composite schools that cover Grades 1-12 under one roof. The report points to the fact that the Right to Education Act ends at age 14, leaving families to bear the costs of tuition, books, and transport for older children.

The report highlights that according to UDISE+ 2024-25, 1.19 lakh schools lack access to functional electricity.

Access to water and hygiene facilities is also inconsistent. The share of schools with drinking water facilities has increased from 96.5% in 2014 to 99% in 2025, but 14,505 schools still lack

functional water sources, and nearly 59,829 lack handwashing facilities, compromising student health and hygiene.

The report pointed out that in October 2025, the Education Ministry announced that AI and Computational Thinking will be introduced from Grade 3. However, the report warns that without ethical frameworks and better teacher training, an overreliance on AI could “diminish independent thinking” in younger learners.

Despite high enrolment, reading proficiency in Grade 8 has dropped. In 2014, 74.7% of Grade 8 students could read a Grade 2 text; by 2024, that figure fell to 71.1%. In mathematics, only 45.8% of Grade 8 students can solve a basic division problem.