

Dated: 27.03.2024

To,

1. Govt. of India

Shri Narendra Modi, Hon'ble Prime Minister - connect@mygov.nic.in

Shri Dharmendra Pradhan - Hon'ble Education Minister - minister.sm@gov.in

Smt. Annpurna Devi - Hon'ble Minister of State for Education - mosedu-ad@gov.in

Dr. Subhas Sarkar - Hon'ble Minister of State for Education - mosedu-ss@gov.in

Dr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh Hon'ble Minister of State for Education mosedu-rrs@gov.in

2. Govt. of Telangana

Shri Revanth Reddy, Hon'ble Chief Minister's & Education Minister's Office,

Through Shri V. Sheshadri, IAS, PS to the Chief Minister - cmo@telangana.gov.in

Sub: Representation against the strict age limit prescribed for admission into Grade-I

Honourable & Respected Sir/Madam,

I'm requesting your kind attention and swift action regarding the Letter D.O. No. 22-7/2021-EE.19/IS.13 Dated: 15.02.2024 regarding the restriction of admissions into Pre-Primary and Primary Schools.

SUBJECT MATTER IN BRIEF:

As this is a matter of National Significance and a Concurrent subject falling under the purview of both the Center and the State, I would like to bring your kind attention to the regulation preventing admission of students into Pre-School and Primary School. Being a matter concerning the mental health of our Nation's Children, it is of extreme urgency and of highest importance, so kindly respond to the matter at hand at the earliest possibility. It has come to my attention that a Letter D.O. No. 22-7/2021-EE.19/IS.13 Dated: 15.02.2024 (enclosed) has been sent to all the Schools in all States/UTs requiring a strict criterion of 6+ Years as eligibility for admission of students into Grade-I. I'm writing this letter requesting a swift action of rescinding this Letter and restoring the previously existing admissions criteria that was more equitable and fair.

FACTS IN BRIEF:

1. This is with respect to the Department Order of the Ministry of Education's Department of School Education and Literacy. I write this letter, as soon as it is practicable, with the interests of the Nation's children at heart. Because of the

aforementioned D.O, the Schools are being forced to turn away children looking for admission, sighing at their helplessness. These unadmitted children, subject to strict admission age limits and 31st March as the cut-off date, are sitting at home, all day, with mobile phones in their hands.

2. Children are like sponges and therefore leaving them to their own devices, unattended, as is self-evident in every household with children, is a recipe for an impending mental health disaster. You can try to take away the mobile phones from young Children and find out how fast they become violent (do not try it at home without a proper contingency plan in place). We are dealing with something that has so fundamentally affected the brain development of the children, that it would be an understatement to say that we don't yet fully grasp the big picture of the consequences that are yet to come.
3. This is not an indictment of the NEP 2020, nor is it about the age limit, per se. There isn't an iota of malice in my mind as I write this letter. This is truly about what all can be done to protect our children, considering the grave impact the mobile phone addiction is having on the young minds. This is about a tolerance period on the cut-off date. Even though this is not an end-all and be-all solution to the problem at hand, it will be the most significant relief by far to protect the most vulnerable of us, the Children.
4. Educators I have interviewed are all in agreement that the prescribed age limit criterion is not in the interest of the children, especially in light of the Rapid technification of the Indian Society and Households. The Covid-19 Pandemic magnified the intensity and increased the velocity of the Tech penetration. The Young minds are now being left to the mercy of Reels & Shorts. In a humble submission, I feel that young children should be allowed to join school as early as possible and be kept away from addictive tech gadgets as long as possible.
5. I acknowledge that the root cause of this issue goes much deeper, but, by reducing the raised age requirement to being a relaxed 6 from being a strict 6+, is the lowest hanging fruit that must be plucked off immediately. It is the least we can do to address the growing concern of the addiction to / the scourge of drastically rapid technological advancements.
6. This issue here is about the importance of adapting & changing laws with changing times; it is about the role of changing problems & challenges facing all the different sections of our society. What happens if a serious problem is not perceived as one until it's too late? Who is responsible for the damages and injuries suffered by crores of children? Because we have not taken a holistic approach that continually monitors the changing circumstances, the innocent children are paying a heavy price.

7. As personal experience serves, even the online content that is supposedly curated for Children (kids mode), can't be trusted without first being checked by the parents. The sheer volume of addictive content over innumerable OTT platforms combined with the voracious appetites of young minds to consume said content, makes it practically impossible for all the content that the Children might be exposed to, to be checked before allowing it to be watched by the Children. Unscreened content can cause serious damage to the children's brain development, at times even scaring them for life.
8. Those who still find themselves unconvinced may only reach out to their nearest helpless and hopeless parent to enquire about how bad things really are with regards to their children's addiction to phones.
9. The research, studies, analysis and expert opinions concerning the admission age that went into the making of NEP 2020, all stand obsolete and outdated as they are most likely pre-pandemic and pre-Jio market flooding of dirt cheap mobile data. Owing to this sea change in accessibility and unlimited consumption of the internet content, the scourge of mobile phones, on our children, has become an untamable beast.
10. Addiction to mobile phones and the internet content consumption is now a major social problem. All sections of the society are affected by it. Unfortunately the Children are the worst affected by this problem because they do not yet possess the mental faculties to protect themselves. In this regard, actions such as strict regulation over content being made available on the Internet & OTT Platforms and increased monitoring and governance of mobile apps and games that come pre-installed on the phones, may be considered. The situation for the people is so bad, that the Companies with monopoly over Mobile Operating System (OS) won't even allow use of the phone, even though they paid market price for the product, without first logging in. For them, capturing more and more data on you allows for effective advertising and increased revenues. Even Children will not be spared in such business models. All the data & profiling done will be put to use the day they turn 18. With such incentives at play, we can only expect things to get worse.
11. I would like to stress that we are not living in the old India where children can just tag along with their parents and relatives to the fields, places of business or animal husbandry farms, picking up important life skills. In new India, we are all working class citizens who are overworked and exhausted with no time to spare for our Children. This has resulted in the addiction of Children to mobile phones. Such uncared-for Children in combination with tired parents and absent grandparents pushes one to believe that we may be living in a doomed society after all.
12. In the middle of all this confusion, having a Policy/Regulation that dictates/mandates children to stay at home with no admission into schools, at the time when they are being dragged deeper and deeper into addiction to phones, on the basis of

some artificial cut-off deadline, is like cutting down the only tree that is giving shade to all those suffering the harshest of heatwaves. Here Schools are the Trees and sending Children to School is to provide them the protection they deserve.

13. The Schools are following 31st March of Academic Year as the deadline for calculating the age of Student. Strict imposition of this deadline, without any tolerance or grace period is causing undue damage to the young minds owing to lack of interaction, exposure & education.

Ex: In illustration of a practical example - A Child born on April 1st 2022 won't be eligible for Admission to Grade-1 until Academic year 2028-29, when he will be only 1 day short of being 7 years old. As per the previous existing admissions criterion, instead of being in Grade-I, as he enters Age 6 in 2026-27, he has to wait Two Full years before he even becomes eligible to join School. During which time, a bright young mind is being wasted away because nobody can afford to take proper care of the Child. In these 2 years, the child becomes addicted to the overwhelming access to dirt-cheap digital "entertainment", which has already shown to be causing all sorts of mental illness including virtual autism, speech disabilities, depression, anger, rage, affinity to self-harm, uncontrollable adamancy, lack of empathy and an overall sense of disconnectedness from the environment. Children belonging to SEDGs (Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups) who until the age of 7 are restricted admission into school, will inevitably be exposed to Child Labor. After which, the children may never join School.

14. From the language of the NEP, it seems like the policy is in full support of early childhood education. But the steps prescribed and taken (as is the case with the aforementioned D.O) are having an effect to the contrary, and are indisputably preventing the Children away from getting early childhood education.

"1.1. Over 85% of a child's cumulative brain development occurs prior to the age of 6, indicating the critical importance of appropriate care and stimulation of the brain in the early years in order to ensure healthy brain development and growth..." (this is an excerpt from NEP 2020).

Ex: In illustration of a practical example - A Child born on April 1st 2022 won't be eligible for Admission to Nursery/ EY-1 until Academic 2026-27, when he will be only 1 day short of being 4 years old. As per the previous existing admissions criterion, instead of being in Nursery/ EY-1 in 2024-2025, as per new criterion he is forced by Policy/regulation to wait Two Full years, as he enters Age 4, when he becomes eligible to join Pre-School. Even though it is very clearly stated in the policy that ECCE is for ages 3 to 6. This restriction is proving to be practically draconian when it comes to early childhood education.

15. Imagine the plight and lost educational opportunities of a young child who has been deliberately, by policy action, prevented from joining a School and has fallen victim to affliction of addiction to mobile phones. This affects all Children of all sections of the society, but, the worst affected are the Children belonging to the poorer, weaker & marginalized sections of the Society. The NEP abbreviation for such groups is SEDG's (Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Group). The Irony won't be lost on anyone, when the NEP, which is supposed to give an uplifting hand to those who need it the most, ends up trampling on the hopes and aspirations of those very young minds, simply because the implementation of NEP is too strict.
16. NEP and the work that went into the making of the NEP, appears to be outdated. It is rendering the actions with respect to the restrictive age limit in School admissions as being ill-conceived, harmful and directly contributing to the detriment of the Society at large.
17. In the framing of NEP, with regards to age limits, it seems to be making the Indian Education System to be in tune with the Western Education System, which, once again, may be misguided. As is evident from the undisputed and unmatched successes of Indian students in the World arena across all the different fields of study, our previously existing admissions criterion clearly helped the students excel and outperform their peers from around the World. If anything, the world education system might want to consider what India has been doing. Increasing the age limit for school admissions with no tolerance on the cut-off date is hurting the young ones.
18. This aforementioned D.O, supposedly, in line with NEP can be perceived as an effort, albeit inadvertently, that renders the children less knowledgeable, disadvantaged and incompetent. పిల్లలు నిర్వీర్యం అవుతున్నారు.
19. The role of parents in NEP has become merely namesake, as there are no inputs sought, nor are they afforded the freedom of decision to choose what's best for their child. A classroom must not become an over regulated confine. It must remain fairly free under the purview of the school with an active participation on the part of the parents.
20. An affluent parent may choose differently than a parent belonging to an SEDG. The parent of a girl child may choose differently than the parent of a boy child. In making the rules so strict, it takes away what little autonomy the parents have in carefully molding the Life of their precious children. A tolerance/ grace period on the cut-off date must be allowed. A grace period of a month or two, stands true to the purportedly 'light but tight' regulatory framework of the NEP 2020 Policy. Let the parents make the call, based on their own understanding of their child, in choosing when to admit the child. Leave the parents alone. Let us not infringe on the rights of the children and their parents.

21. In a society that is becoming increasingly isolated, restricting children from a holistic and interactive experience that can be easily achieved by sending Children to School, hurts the development of the child, especially when the alternative path facing the young mind is an even more increased isolation and disconnectedness.

22. 'Light but tight', regulatory framework, in the Policy's own words, emphasizes the importance of autonomy and empowerment. It should, within this context, therefore be interpreted as - go easy on the kids but be strict on the quality and standards of education. It certainly cannot be taken to mean - be unwavering with respect to kids and their access to education, but go easy on those who are incharge. Expectation of a little leniency and tolerance, with respect to the cut-off date for admissions that can make for a better overall situation for the child, should not be an unreasonable ask. Let us do it for the Children, because we cannot allow harm to the children in the name of progress.

" The fundamental principles that will guide both the education system at large, as well as the individual institutions within it are:...

...a 'light but tight' regulatory framework to ensure integrity, transparency, and resource efficiency of the educational system through audit and public disclosure while encouraging innovation and out-of-the-box ideas through autonomy, good governance, and empowerment; ..." (this is an excerpt from NEP).

23. When there are no good options, we must choose the lesser of two evils. I gathered from my interviews of Parents that they would rather choose their child being stressed a little than willingly allow him to become an addict and disconnected from society. It is not in the interest of the children to keep them at home until an extra year, while he suffers, because he was born one day later than the admissions cut-off date. I say this understanding fully that a line must be drawn somewhere, but it must be done so by the parents, with the best interests of their Children at heart.

24. What can be said about the children, when the parents and grandparents (if they are present in the household) are themselves addicted to mobile phones? Like a gift that keeps on giving, mobile phones have become the cheapest drug that keeps on giving the high. Our Nation's children are unfortunately the worst affected by this scourge that plagues our society. This affliction is desensitizing the numbing minds of Children.

25. The problems that are being currently addressed, in the legislative arena, are from 75 years ago or before. Granted that those are all valid and much needed developments, but by the time we get to addressing the problems of Today, I'm afraid, we will run out of time (పుణ్యకాలం కాస్తా పూర్తి అయిపోతుంది). Serendipitously, the mission statements of both the current Government's at the Centre and in Telangana State are Janbhagidari and Praja

Prabhutvam respectively. I most sincerely appeal to the Governments' to stay true to their mission statements and take into consideration the most genuine and sincerest pleas of Parents and Teachers with respect to the admissions of students into Grade-I and allow a tolerance/grace period on the cut-off date for admissions.

I pray that you may immediately rescind the D.O. No. 22-7/2021-EE.19/IS.13 Dated: 15.02.2024, restore the previously existent admission criterion and immediately inform all school boards of all States/UTs across the Country, so the situation doesn't become worse than it already is. I'm hoping for a response from the State and Central Govt's on this matter as soon as practically possible.

Yours Sincerely,

Pesarikayala Pareekshith Reddy
Advocate,
www.paree.in@gmail.com
7730072415

This Letter/Email is also sent to the following officials:

Ministry of Education, Govt. Of India

1. PS to Hon'ble Education Minister - pstosm@gov.in
2. Sh. Sanjay Kumar, Secretary - secy.sel@nic.in
3. Sh. Vipin Kumar, Additional Secretary (SS-II) - as-school.edu@gov.in
4. Ms. Archana Sharma Awasthi, Joint Secretary (SS-I & AE Bureau) - jscord-sel@gov.in
5. Ms. Amarpreet Duggal, Joint Secretary (Coordination & Media Bureau) jsad-moe@gov.in
6. Ms. Prachi Pandey, Joint Secretary (Institutions & Training Bureau) - prachi.p@gov.in
7. Ms. Preeti Meena, Director - preeti.meena@gov.in
8. Sh. Rahul Pachori, Director - rahul.pachori@gov.in

Ministry of Education, School Education Wing, Govt of Telangana

1. Sri Burra Venkatesham, IAS, Secretary to Government - splcs-edu@telangana.gov.in
2. Smt. A. Sridevasena, IAS, Commissioner & Director - dir-dsets@telangana.gov.in
3. Sri K. Lingaiah, Addl. Director (Co-Ordination & MDM), (Services)-
tg.cdse@gmail.com

ENCLOSURE

D.O. No. 22-7/2021-EE.19/IS.13 Dated: 15.02.2024



Online link to the above Letter of Representation: <http://paree.in/articles/rnep.html>

Link to Post on X Platform(FormerlyTwitter):

<https://x.com/PareeReddy/status/1772720593692942490?s=20>