CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

A STUDY OF DROPOUTS IN RTE 12(1)(C) IN CHHATTISGARH, 2021

INDUS ACTION

Executive Summary

This report evaluates the implementation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act's Section 12(1)(c) in Chhattisgarh, focusing on student dropout rates and related factors. The study indicates that since 2010, around 50,000 children, over 15% of those admitted under this policy, have dropped out of school. Key reasons for dropouts include financial difficulties, migration, early marriages, and lack of accessible schools.

Key Findings:

- **Dropout Rates**: The dropout rate is 21.5% over 10 academic sessions, with higher rates in districts with lower school registration rates.
- **Reimbursement Issues**: Only 35% of principals knew the correct reimbursement amount for primary schools (Rs 7,000). 21% believed the reimbursement was Rs 0.
- **Extra Fees**: 15% of schools charged additional fees for transport, books, and registration, contributing to dropout rates.
- **Principal Demographics**: 61% of the 101 interviewed principals were male, with an average age of 43.8 years and a median work experience of 10 years.

Recommendations:

- **Increase Reimbursement**: Adjust reimbursement amounts to cover educational costs better.
- **Establish Transfer Policy**: Implement a transfer policy for migrating students to ensure continuity in their education.
- **Improve Targeting**: Adjust eligibility criteria to better identify and support the intended underprivileged groups.
- **Enhance Capacity Building**: Provide comprehensive training for principals, teachers, and nodal officers to improve their understanding and implementation of RTE 12(1)(c).
- **Recurrent Monitoring**: Conduct regular monitoring and audits to ensure effective policy implementation and improved educational inclusion.

The study calls for targeted interventions to address the identified gaps and enhance the effectiveness of the RTE policy in Chhattisgarh.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Form
RTE	Right to Education Act
INR	Indian National Rupee
DEO	District Education Officer
ADEO	Additional District Education Officer
BEO	Block Education Officer
BPL	Below Poverty Line
DPI	Directorate of Public Instructions
GR	Grievance Redressal
OBC	Other Backward Classes
CI	Confidence Interval

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Introduction

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, commonly known as the Right to Education Act (RTE), was enacted by the Parliament of India on 4 August 2009. This law elaborates on the essentials of providing free and compulsory education to children aged between 6 and 14 in India as per Article 21a of the Indian Constitution. With the enforcement of this Act on 1 April 2010, India joined the ranks of 135 countries where education is a fundamental right for every child.

The RTE Act establishes that every child between the ages of 6 and 14 has the right to education and sets forth the minimum standards for elementary schools. It mandates that private schools allocate at least 25% of the seats in their entry classes to children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, with costs to be reimbursed by the state under a public-private partnership arrangement. Admissions to these seats are based on the economic status of caste-based reservations. The Act also bans the operation of unrecognised schools and prohibits collecting donations and conducting interviews with children or parents during admissions. Additionally, it guarantees that no child will be held back, expelled, or required to pass a board exam until they complete their elementary education. The Act includes provisions for special training to help school dropouts catch up to their peers.

Furthermore, the RTE Act requires the government to conduct surveys to track all children needing education and establish appropriate educational facilities. Sam Carlson, a World Bank education specialist for India, noted that the RTE Act is unique globally in placing the onus for ensuring enrolment, attendance, and completion of education on the government, unlike in the US and other countries where it is primarily the parents' responsibility.[1]

The Act also encompasses the educational rights of persons with disabilities up to the age of 18 under separate legislation - the Persons with Disabilities Act, and includes additional provisions to enhance school infrastructure, teacher-student ratios, and faculty qualifications.

Status of RTE Act implementation in Chhattisgarh

Since 2010, the Government of Chhattisgarh has been implementing Section 12(1)(c) and has devoted significant resources towards this initiative, disbursing approximately INR 400 crores directly in reimbursements and investing additional funds to support the education of roughly 3 lakh children at the elementary level. The entire admissions process was shifted online in 2017-18.

Despite these considerable efforts, implementing RTE 12(1)(c) has encountered challenges, notably an alarming dropout rate. According to the Department of School Education, Government of Chhattisgarh, around 50,000 children—over 15% of those admitted under this policy—have dropped out of school so far.

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[1]https://righttoeducation.in/know-your-rte/about

As per the 10-year analysis report of RTE 12(1)(c) in Chhattisgarh, the dropout rate across 10 academic sessions stands alarmingly at 21.5%, with the highest dropout rates observed in districts exhibiting lower school registration rates.[2]

There were various reasons for this dropout, and one might have been that incorrect information about students was provided in the first place or schools that had shut down but had not been updated in time with the district education office. However, other social and economic reasons for dropouts, like early marriages, financial difficulties, discrimination in school, and schools not being accessible, needed to be explored to understand how to address this issue in the state and course correct where required.

This context laid the groundwork for the present study, which aimed to examine the execution of RTE 12(1)(c) and evaluate its impact on educational inclusion and retention. This audit aimed to assess the effectiveness of the policy's implementation and understand how it was perceived by various stakeholders, including schools, families, and administrative bodies. Henceforth, this study was crucial for identifying necessary adjustments and enhancements in the policy's execution to ensure it better serves its intended beneficiaries.

Problem Statement

The study intended to evaluate the implementation of RTE 12(1)(c) with a special focus on factors influencing students dropout rates and also corroborate the validity of online data (as on the RTE portal) to that of the offline information assessed through school visits and interactions with stakeholders, and etc. (physical verification).

Research Objective

1. To examine the gaps and bright spots in the implementation of RTE 12(1)(c) at the district, block and school level; administrative processes, monitoring of school, grievance redressal, and the validity of online data (as on the RTE portal).
2. To identify different factors influencing the dropout of students at elementary classes (directly or indirectly): school/teachers' capacity to create an inclusive environment, parental engagement, and migration.

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[2] The 10-year report was created with data reported by the schools and districts on the RTE portal

Methodology

The <u>proposal</u> for the study was approved in August 2021, after the initial conceptualisation in 2020. This section contains:
1. Stakeholders selection and rationale
2. Geography and school selection
3. Pilot Survey learnings
4. Field Investigators selection and training
5. Questionnaire parameters

1. Stakeholders selection and rationale

A. Students and Parents:
- **Students currently enrolled under the provision (RTE Students):** As the direct and primary beneficiaries of the provision, these students were key to providing insights into the effectiveness and impact of the policy.
- **Students who dropped out post-enrollment (Drop-out Students):** These individuals were crucial for identifying the main reasons behind discontinuing their education, offering critical feedback on system gaps and social factors resulting in their dropout.
- **Parents of students enrolled under the provision (RTE Parents)**: These parents could provide valuable feedback on the positive aspects and shortcomings they observed in their child's educational experience.
- **Parents of students in the general quota (General Parents):** Their perspectives were essential to understanding the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within classrooms. This group was specifically selected due to anecdotal evidence suggesting challenges in integrating students from different admission backgrounds, notably between those admitted through the general quota versus those entering under RTE 12.1.c.

B. Government Representatives
- **District Education Officer (DEO):** The authority responsible for implementing the RTE 12.1.c. provision as per the RTE Act. Thus, they are accountable for all implementation aspects and serve as the key administrators bridging the state, school, and parents.
- Additional District Education Officer **(ADEO):** They assist the DEO in fulfilling their responsibilities and assume charge in the absence of the DEO.
- **Nodal Officer:** Appointed by the district to work with a specific number of schools. Their insights are closest to the ground, making them crucial for obtaining valuable information.
- **The operator in the DEO's Office (RTE Operator):** The individual managing the day-to-day operations related to the provision, including technology grievances, within the DEO's office. Consequently, they maintain close communication with schools and the state machinery.

C. **Private School representatives:**
  ● Principals of schools registered under Sec 12(1)(c) **(Principals)**: They are the first point of contact for the parents and students post admissions and continue to be for the entire duration of schooling, thus making them important for both a process implementation standpoint but also that of inclusion and retention of students.

Table 1: Number of stakeholders interviewed

Stakeholder	Number Interviewed
Private School Principal	101
Students: 1). RTE Student	109
Students: 2). Drop-out Student	15
Parents of: 1) RTE student	113
Parents of: 2) Drop-out student	84
Parent of: 3) General students	95
DEO/ADEO	6
RTE Operator	4
Nodal Officer	68

2. Geography and school selection:

Chhattisgarh's ~6,500 unaided private schools are spread across 5 *sambhag*s or administrative divisions. Thus, 5 districts were chosen for the study, one per *sambhag*. The random sample consisted of 20 schools in two blocks, both rural and urban. 10 schools were selected from each block, except for Udaipur in Sarguja, where only 9 schools were registered on the portal, and 11 schools were selected from the respective urban block, Ambikapur. The overall sample included 100 unaided private schools across the state.

Table 2: Geographic distribution of data collection

Sambhag	District	Blocks
Bastar	Bastar	Bastar, Jagdalpur
Bilaspur	Raigarh	Kharsia, Raigarh
Raipur	Raipur	Abhanpur, Arang
Durg	Rajnandgaon	Dongargaon, Rajnandgaon
Surguja	Surguja	Ambikapur, Udaipur

Sitapur from Bilaspur, Kanker, and Kondagaon were also considered potential blocks, but they were replaced due to resource unavailability.

3. Pilot survey

A pilot survey was conducted in Raipur at two schools by the Indus Action team to identify the scope of questions and oversee potential challenges, and the questionnaire was revised accordingly. This was done with the DEO Raipur's office, and all stakeholders - school principals, RTE students, RTE parents, and Nodal officials- were interviewed. Interaction with drop-out students and families was difficult since most of them had migrated. The key learnings from the pilot were that anonymity was crucial, researchers having local language knowledge and familiarity with the geography and school would be more helpful, and knowledge of the processes for RTE 12(1)(c) was crucial to understanding any of the nuances coming up, which was crucial since this would impact the selection and training of the researchers.

4. Field investigators and training

Data collection and stakeholder interactions were executed through field investigators, recruited based on skills and relevant experience from Higher Educational Institutions in the respective districts to ensure the transparency and quality of the overall process. 8 resource persons were on board in partnership with Samarth Charitable Trust in Raigarh and Raipur, following the attrition of a few of the field investigators at the advent of the process.

All the field investigators were trained virtually by the Indus Action team. The training sessions, conducted in 3 phases, covered objectives, outcomes, do's and don'ts during the survey and community engagement, overview of the Act and the educational demographics of the state. Each of them participated in at least two mock interviews and debrief sessions with the team members to familiarise them with the questionnaire. Training also included familiarising the investigators with the tech platform. All responses were collected on the Survey CTO platform[3] where all questions were added before the surveys.

The first phase of surveys began in Surguja and Rajnandgaon in the first week of September 2021. Bastar, Raipur and Raigarh operations were initiated within a fortnight. The team was able to interact with at least 4 stakeholders every day. Daily debriefs were institutionalised at the end of the day, at the district level, to ensure accountability, provide constructive feedback and capture the daily highlights and challenges.

5. Questionnaire Parameters

The questionnaire covered specific parameters for each of the stakeholders being interviewed. The explanation for these parameters is as follows:
- **RTE Process:** The process of implementing the RTE 12(1)(c) provision, covering all aspects of school registration, online student application, admissions process, and reimbursement.
  - **Coordination between stakeholders:** While the processes are laid out on paper, much coordination is required between the state-district-block-nodal-school stakeholders to ensure that required actions are completed and grievances are redressed in time.

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[3] The Survey CTO was chosen for its user friendly interface, offline data collection mode and real time analysis features that helped especially in locations of low network connectivity.

- **Suggestions for policy/process improvement:** On-ground implementers are the best place to provide suggestions and suggest newer strategies to make the policy and process more effective.

- **Online Portal:** While the shift to the online 'RTE portal' has streamlined the overall process, utilising technology is not always intuitive, especially for first-time users. Since the portal was designed to be user-friendly, it was imperative to get feedback on it.

  - **Habitation and School Mapping:** A specific part of the online portal maps private schools to habitations, which ensures that the parents see them during the application process. Wrong or no mapping can confuse the parents and the school in question.

  - **Online Student Application:** This is one of the most crucial aspects of the online shift since it impacts the population with the lowest technology access and knowledge. Parents apply for their wards via an open online application via the RTE portal.

- **Grievance Redressal (GR):** Multiple channels have been initiated for grievance redressal. It was thus important to understand whether these were helping and if there were any suggestions for improvement.

  - Helpline: primarily for challenges faced by parents
  - GR form on the RTE portal: for issues faced by all stakeholders till the district level, with the state Education Department being the final resolution authority
  - WhatsApp group(s): A common WhatsApp group with RTE operators from all districts and the state RTE Cell, to help resolve process related challenges. All nodal officers in a district are connected via WhatsApp groups for each district.
  - Access to the DEO/BEO/Nodal officer: This is mainly for schools and parents.

- **Capacity Building:** Annual trainings are being conducted with the nodal officers and school administration to ensure clarity in both the policy and process of its implementation.

- **Experience of Schooling:** This includes students' experiences in receiving education at the school, encompassing aspects such as teacher interaction, student-to-student interaction, participation in extracurricular activities, school attendance frequency, likes and dislikes regarding the school, peers and teachers, frequency of homework assignments and checking of notebooks.

- **Dropout Reasons:** What are the key reasons for dropouts among the students that have done so? As mentioned in the introduction, these can be varied and related to the school, household and other social conditions.

- **Perspective:** The knowledge of and attitude towards Section 12(1)(c) among parents of both sets of students - RTE and non-RTE—is important to ensure the intended impact of the provision, i.e., an inclusive society.

- **Checklist for School Check:**

○ **Year-wise student data:** Registers, application forms, and student information being captured at admissions should match the online information being entered by the school on the RTE portal
○ **Dropouts:** Count of students who have dropped out in the past 3 academic sessions
○ **Infrastructure:** Basic infrastructure checks as per the information filled in the online school registration form

The table below covers the specific parameters for each stakeholder. The rationale for those specific parameters can be understood by reading the reason for choosing the stakeholder in the first place, as mentioned above.

Table 3: Parameters covered in the questionnaire for different stakeholders

Stakeholder	Parameters covered in the questionnaire
DEO/ADEO	● RTE Process ● Suggestions for policy/process improvement
RTE Operator	● RTE Process ○ Coordination between stakeholders ● Online Portal ● Grievance Redressal ● Capacity Building
Nodal Officer	● Habitation and School Mapping ● Online Portal ● Coordination between stakeholders
Students	● Experience of Schooling ● Dropout Reasons
Parents	● RTE Process ● Online Student Application ● Experience of Schooling ● Grievance Redressal ● Dropout Reasons ● Perspective
Principal	● RTE Process ○ Coordination between stakeholders ● Perspective
School observation	● Year-wise student data, dropouts, infrastructure

Findings

The analysis and findings from the interviews are shared in the following section. They have been segregated based on the stakeholder interview.

A. Principal:

General information

- Total interviewed: 101
- Gender: Male: 61, Female: 40
- Average age: 43.8 years
- Median work experience: 10 years
- OBC: 44%; General: 46%
- Masters degree: 77%
- Median Salary: Rs. 15,000 per annum

A set of questions explored the knowledge of the Principals about the provision and their experience with implementation. Some of the key learnings are shared below:
1. Reimbursement:
   a. Reimbursement amount
      - 35 Principals (35%) knew that the reimbursement for primary school was Rs 7,000.
      - For upper primary, the median reimbursement amount they mentioned was Rs. 6,717.
      - 21 (21%) Principals thought the amount was Rs.0 and 15 (15%) of them correctly responded, saying the reimbursement was Rs.11,400.
      - For secondary schools, 8 (8%) Principals reported that the amount was Rs.15,000.
      - Given that most schools were either primary or upper primary, the responses received were not surprising. The lack of knowledge among primary and secondary schools was surprising, but not for higher secondary schools, as the provision was extended to classes 9-12 in 2019, and most schools interviewed only ran up to the 8th standard.

   b. What aspects get covered under reimbursement?
      - 69 Principals said that books get covered under the reimbursement.
      - 54 said that uniforms were also covered.
      - Additional charges: 86 out of 101 principals said that they don't charge for anything additional; the other 15 included charges for transport, books and registration fees.

Table 4: Response of the Principals on the Additional Charges

Values	Principal response
Annual Function	2
Registration Fees	2
Extra-Curricular Activities	1

School Outings	7
No Additional Fees	87
Other	9

2. Online vs Offline implementation of Section 12(1)(c)

We asked the principals to rate their experience with the online and offline process. Of the 101 principals, 82 had also been part of the offline process.

Table 5: Offline vs Online RTE Implementation - Rating by Principals

Module	Mean Offline Score	Mean Online Score
Registration	2.95	3.91
Reimbursement	2.89	3.79
Admission Status	3.07	3.93
Student Tracking	3.21	3.89
Overall	3.11	4.15*

Significant at the 99% Confidence level

- The Principals were unanimous that the online process was marginally, yet statistically significantly better than the offline process (at the 99% CI). They rated the online process better than the offline process regarding reimbursement, student tracking, admission status and registration for schools.
- Of those who preferred the offline process, they mentioned that they were not tech-savvy, the nodals were more closely involved in the offline process, making it easier for them and that they faced technical difficulties in the online process.
- Those in favour of the online mode mentioned that the online process is faster (31 principals), there was greater transparency (27 principals) and all the information was available in one place (32).

3. Challenges faced with the implementation of Section 12(1)(c)

49 out of 101 Principals mentioned that they had challenges concerning RTE. The top 2 challenges were issues regarding the functionality of the online portal (12) and reimbursement (26). Only 1 Principal mentioned that they faced political pressure to admit students. Other challenges mentioned included a lack of provision for transport and parents not being aware of the provision in itself.

When asked who Principals reach out to in case of any queries regarding the provision, the response was as follows:
- Nodal Officer - 74
- DEO - 35
- DEO Operator - 39

Close to 75% of the Principals use WhatsApp for regular communication, followed by Phone Calls (61%) and in-person meetings (52%).
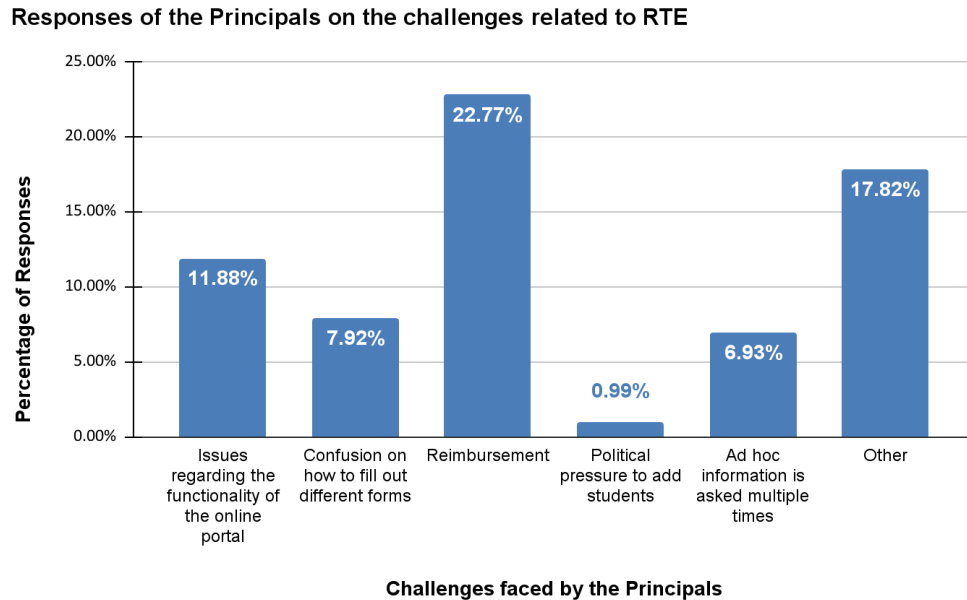
Responses of the Principals on the challenges related to RTE

Figure 1: RTE 12(1)(c) related challenges faced by Principals

4. Perspectives regarding RTE 12(1)(c):

We added this section to understand if principals knew the essence behind RTE 12.1.c., that of inclusion, and also to get their perspectives on the policy itself.

- When asked whether RTE 12(1)(c) was needed at all, 100 principals said yes, and only 1 said no. When we asked them to elaborate, we also got responses on challenges in the current system. Of the 12 who elaborated their answers, 50% of principals mentioned that the policy targeting was incorrect and that children whose parents were in government services or those who were "rich" should not be able to access this policy.
- When asked whether they see the provision as a Right or Charity, 84 of them said it was a Right and 14 said Charity, and 2 of them said that it was the choice of the child.
- In defining the objectives of the provision, 50 principals responded to promote equity and inclusion, 71 to give opportunities for children to study in private schools and 58 to improve academic outcomes.

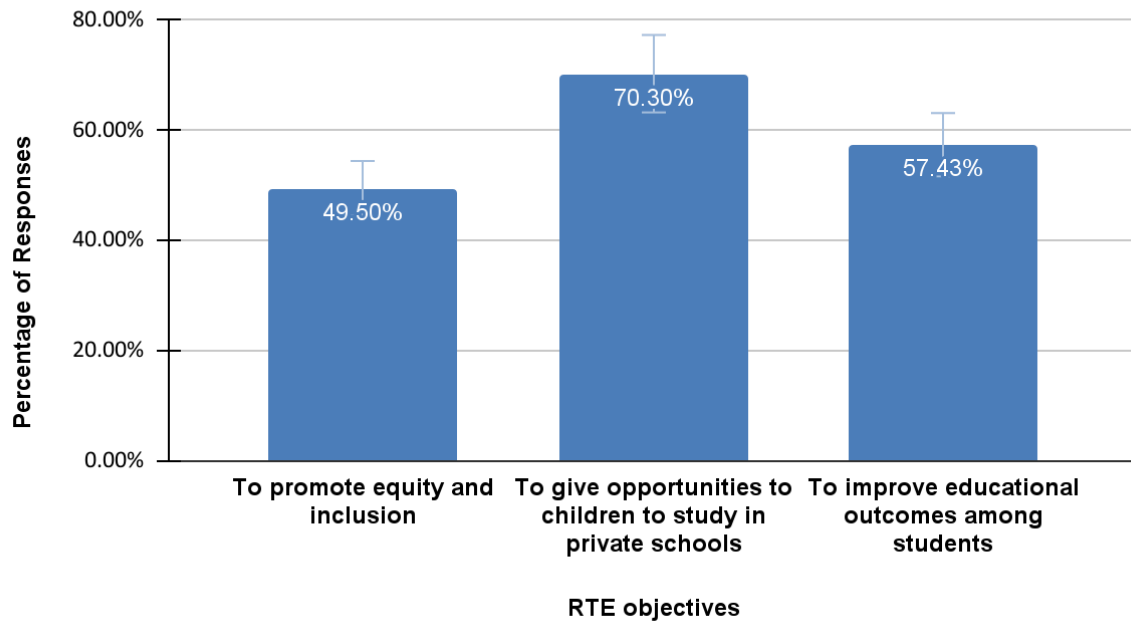**Responses of Principals on the RTE objectives**

Figure 2: RTE 12(1)(c) objectives as shared by the Principals

- On the question of whether the government should spend on government or private schools, 65 said both, while 20 mentioned only private and 16 mentioned only government.
- 30 out of 101 Principals felt that children faced challenges in schools. The top challenges included "Hesitant to ask questions", " English is an issue" and " Poor basics".
- We asked the Principals what the impact of RTE Section 12(1)(c) was on students. 13 mentioned that the difference between RTE and non-RTE students is heightened, while 64 of them felt that children of different backgrounds can socialise and learn from each other.
- When asked what they would change about the provision, 22 Principals mentioned that they won't have caste as an eligibility criterion and 53 mentioned that only schools that comply 100% with RTE norms should be allowed to enrol students.
- There was no statistically significant difference in the ratings given by the Principals on learning levels and Socio-Emotional Learning to RTE and non-RTE students. Non-RTE students were rated higher on attendance (significant at 95% CI), discipline (90% CI), and participation (99% CI).

5. Did the principals receive any pushback from the community?

   When Principals were asked if they faced any pushback, only 3 mentioned that they had - 2 from community leaders and 1 from a local leader. The key reason stated was that parents of general category students did not want their children to study with children admitted via Section 12(1)(c).

6. Drop Outs:
    a. Reasons for Dropouts:
        ● 70 out of 101 Principals mentioned that children dropped out as parents migrated to other areas. The second largest reason was that the parents did not pay attention to their children (24). The Principals shared that there is a pressing need to spread awareness amongst parents regarding the significance of education in the lives of their children. Of 101 Principals, 12 of them shared that students find it difficult to keep pace in their studies, hence they drop out, whereas 13 of them mentioned other costs too high to bear for the families of these students taking admission through RTE.
    b. Preventing Dropouts:
        ● 58 out of 101 Principals mentioned that they had implemented strategies to reduce dropouts. However, when prodded, they mentioned things that could be done to improve the situation instead of what they had already done. 19 Principals mentioned that creating awareness among parents/students on the Act would be beneficial, followed by taking tuition for RTE students and providing them with basic facilities that can allow them to continue in school.

7. Is Capacity Building Required?
    ● 8 Principals mentioned that training is not required. Of those who said it was required, these are the responses we got:
        ○ Training to build teachers' perspective on equality and inclusion - 56
        ○ Training for teachers on how to teach at the right level - 60
        ○ Promoting equity and inclusion through school activities - 31
        ○ Community Engagement -13

8. Some of the <u>recommendations</u> that emerged from the responses of the principals are as follows:
    ● Improving targeting and ensuring that only truly 'needy' children should receive the benefit. (20/101 Principals mentioned this)
    ● Removing the caste criteria, Section 12(1)(c) as it prevents those children from accessing private schools who need this facility the most. (22/101 Principals shared this)
    ● Of 101 Principals, 53 of them shared that enrollment of children should be allowed in only those schools that 100% comply with RTE norms.
    ● Only 3 Principals out of 101 mentioned that it is essential to increase parental awareness of the policy to ensure more parents can apply correctly.
    ● One of the Principals shared that there is a need to increase the per-child cost reimbursed to schools, as the current cost doesn't cover all the required costs in all schools.

B. Students:

General Information:

- 123 students were interviewed to understand their experience concerning RTE.
- Of these students, 109 were school-going and 14 had dropped out.
- 45 were male and 78 were female students.
- The median class the children were in was 5th grade.
- The median age was 12 years.
- In addition to the 14 dropout students who were interviewed in person, 77 parents of dropout children were also interviewed.
- These students belonged to the following *sambhags*: Sarguja, 17; Raipur, 22; Bastar, 13; Rajnandgaon, 7; and Raigarh, 16.

The responses are categorised by currently school-going children and those who have dropped out of school.

1. School-Going Children:

   These are students who are currently enrolled in school. Patterns observed from the responses are as follows:

   - 105 out of 109 attended school daily.
   - 106 out of 109 liked going to school, with the top reasons being - they liked to study (107 students), they have friends in school (65) and they like to play with their friends (65).
   - 106 students liked their classmates as they played and studied together
   - The 3 students who did not like their classmates mentioned that their classmates hit them, were troubled by them and that their classmates did not play with them.
   - 89 students mentioned they liked their teachers as they were taught well by them.
   - 53 students mentioned that they were asked questions in class.
   - 95 children participated in school activities, 14 didn't. This included playing (71), reading in the library(36), and art/dance/music(66).
   - Upon checking if their homework was given and checked, here is what we found:
     - 87 - Given HW regularly and checked
     - 11 - Given HW regularly but not checked
     - 8 - Given HW sometimes and checked
     - 2 - Given HW sometimes and not checked
     - 1 - HW not checked

2. Dropout Students:

   To gauge the dropout reasons, parents and students were interviewed in person and in telephonic interviews. Data was collected from parents whose children were admitted through the RTE process and dropped out. Similarly, for students, those who had secured admission through the RTE process but dropped out were interviewed to understand their reasons behind the dropout.

   The data collection process involved both in-person and telephonic interviews for various reasons. Telephonic interviews helped to reach out to those parents and students who were not available for in-person interviews, and in-person interviews

helped to establish a connection with the respondents, build trust and ask probing questions for data authenticity.

Parents were asked why their kids dropped out. The reasons, as a part of a multiple choice format, included the following:
- Punishment by the school - 2
- Financial status was poor so could not continue/Fees were too high/Had to earn for the family - 10
- COVID-19 - 1
- Admitted to another school - 2
- The school did not have senior grades - 1
- I dropped my child out of school because didn't get school of choice - 27
- Friends of my child were in govt school, so she/he wanted to drop out - 4
- My child was lagging in studies and felt uncomfortable continuing in the school - 8
- Migrated to a new place - 13

When children were asked the reasons for their dropout, none of them mentioned the reasons parents migrated to other places. Out of 14 dropout children, one of them shared that the fees were too high, another shared that he/she could not keep up with their studies, and 2 of them shared that they had to earn for their families. Two other children shared that fear of punishment was the reason for their dropout. Of the children who dropped out, here is what they are doing:
- Studying in another school - 7
- Working- 6
- Sitting at home - 1
- Of dropout students (interviewed in person) that are working, 2 are 7 years, 1 is 9 years, 2 are 10 years and 1 is 14 - only one is legally of working age.

Phone survey-specific insights:
- We asked parents what would have prevented the students from dropping out. Here are some of the most common answers:
  - If we had more money
  - If they got admission to another school
  - If studies were better
  - If they didn't get into Aatmanand
  - If they had gotten promoted
  - If higher classes were available
- Of the parents who were surveyed via phone, most of the children had dropped out in KG 2, Class 1 or Class 2 - this may indicate that they had not got their preferred school initially. 10 children had dropped out of class 5, which indicates that they were initially satisfied with the school.
- 27 out of the 77 children went to a private school on a non-RTE seat, while 45 went on to attend Government schools.
- 10 out of 27 kids who didn't get a seat of choice went to Private schools anyway, while 15 went to government schools.

C. Parents:

1. RTE Parents

- Responses have been collected from parents and guardians of 113 students in RTE seats and 92 in the general category.
- 93% of students are currently studying in 12.1.c seats, and 7% were parents of students who dropped out.
- 54% of the parents get to know about RTE 12(1)(c) though other families in the community.
- The rest of the sources are newspapers, pamphlets, school teachers, choice centres, portals, helpline numbers and public announcements.
- 42% of parents have secured admission for their children through online applications whereas the rest, 58% through offline mode. The remaining 4% of the applicants could not secure admission as they did not possess the required documents. Some of these parents shared that they were not aware of the documents required for admission, and others shared that procuring the documents is time-consuming.
- 78% of parents commented that better education quality is why they have chosen private schools. Securing their children's future, eligibility and awareness of the Act made the other parents apply for Section 12(1)(c) seats. 6% of parents shared that due to the lack of Government schools in the vicinity of their houses, they opted for private schools. According to these parents, these are the areas where there is no government school in the vicinity:
    1. Ward 41, Basantpur, Rajnandgaon,
    2. Rajim Nayapara, Ward No 6, Abhanpur
    3. Bade Gaon post, Khedma
    4. New Bus Stand Arang
    5. Ganoud
    6. Maharani Ward, Krishi Utpan Road
    7. Village Tumdibod

- When parents were asked whether their children share their school experiences with them at home, 100% parents responded in affirmation that their children share their school experiences and none of them felt they were treated differently. All of them get homework in class, and 91% get checked by the teacher. 75% of them are being checked daily and 14% once or twice a week, and the rest, 11% are not checked every week.
- 13% of the parents have arranged private tutoring for their child outside school. Most of the parents believe that they cannot support their child in academics. Few of them pointed out peer influence, lack of attention from teachers, the poor performance of students in the class, etc., as the other reasons.
- 77% of the parents visit the schools once a month, whereas 3% have never visited the schools yet. The rest of them visit once every 3 or 6 months.
- 81% meet the school principal to discuss students' progress in academics and co-curricular activities. Some parents also discuss the areas of improvement and social skills of their children. However, 55% of the parents spend less than 15 minutes in the 1 on 1 meeting with the class teachers.

- 93% of parents are satisfied with the treatment by the school management, whereas 7% are hesitant to approach the management. 71% of parents interact with parents of non-RTE students 92% of them felt comfortable, and 6% felt they were treated differently in the interaction.
- Data shows 92% of students travel < 5 kilometres to reach school and 2% travel more than 10 km for the same.
  - Out of 113 parents, 5 of them shared that the distance of the school from their house was more than 5 km, of which three of the parents shared that the school was at a distance of 7kms, one of them shared that the distance of the school from their house was approx 15 km and another shared 30 km.
  - Of 113 parents, 108 (95.5%) shared that the school was at a distance of 1-5 km.
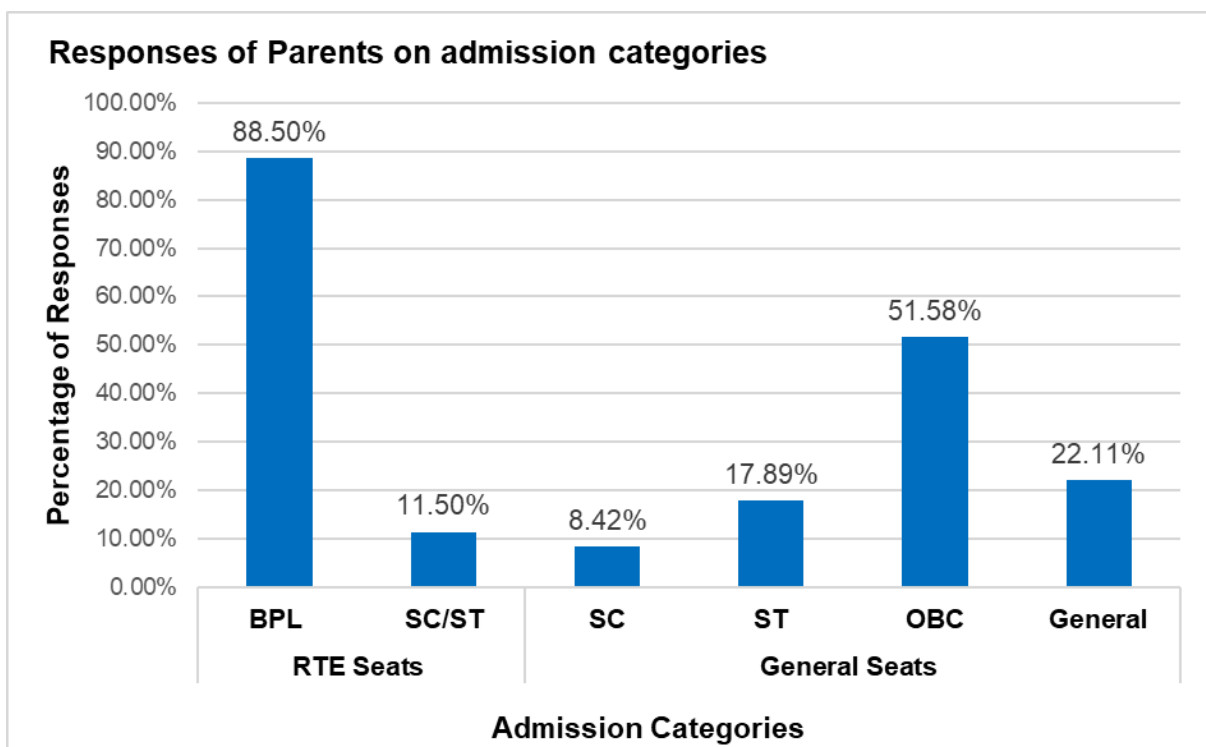

Figure 3: Caste-wise representation of admission categories based on responses from parents

Table 6: Distance of school from home as shared by the RTE parents

Distance from school, as shared by RTE parents		
District	**Block**	**Kms**
Raigad	Raigad	7
Surguja	Udaypur	7
Surguja	Udaypur	15

Surguja	Udaypur	30
Bastar	Jagdalpur	7

Parents have noted a few challenges in the admission process:
- Lack of awareness to use the online portal and wrong information provided at the choice centre. Out of 113, 2 parents, one from Block Ambikapur, District Surguja and another from Block Abhanpur, District Raipur, shared that they were given the wrong information about the online admission process by the Choice Center.
- One parent from Block Aarang, District Raipur and another parent from Block Jagdalpur, District Bastar shared that school authorities asked for fees and did not process the admission even after document verification.
- Grievance was not addressed timely.
- Lack of awareness on the timeline or change in status.

2. Parents of dropout students:

   We interacted with 14 parents whose children dropped out from RTE 12.1.c seats. Migration is one of the reasons for dropping out, whereas being unable to get to school was another. 2 parents elaborated that their children were lagging behind in studies and hence felt uncomfortable to continue in the school. 7 out of the 8 joined another school and continued studies. 6 of them chose neighbouring Government schools for the same, and the remaining one in another private school.

3. Parents of General category students

   - 87% of parents consider the Act a right of the children and 13% a charity.
   - 21% of the parents responded that the Government should invest money in Government schools, whereas 18% supported the investment in private school seats. The rest remarked that the investment should be mutual in government and private schools.
   - Though 12% of the parents responded they have observed the influence of students in 12.1.c seats on their wards, only 3 of them remarked that academic performance and behaviour is negatively affected. The rest of the respondents consider the influence in a positive manner.
   - 59% of the respondents interact with the parents of students in 12.1.c seats and 73% of them think that they show interest in their child's studies. The rest of them remarked that the parents neither pay attention to the child's academics, are literate enough to support the students, nor visit the school often.
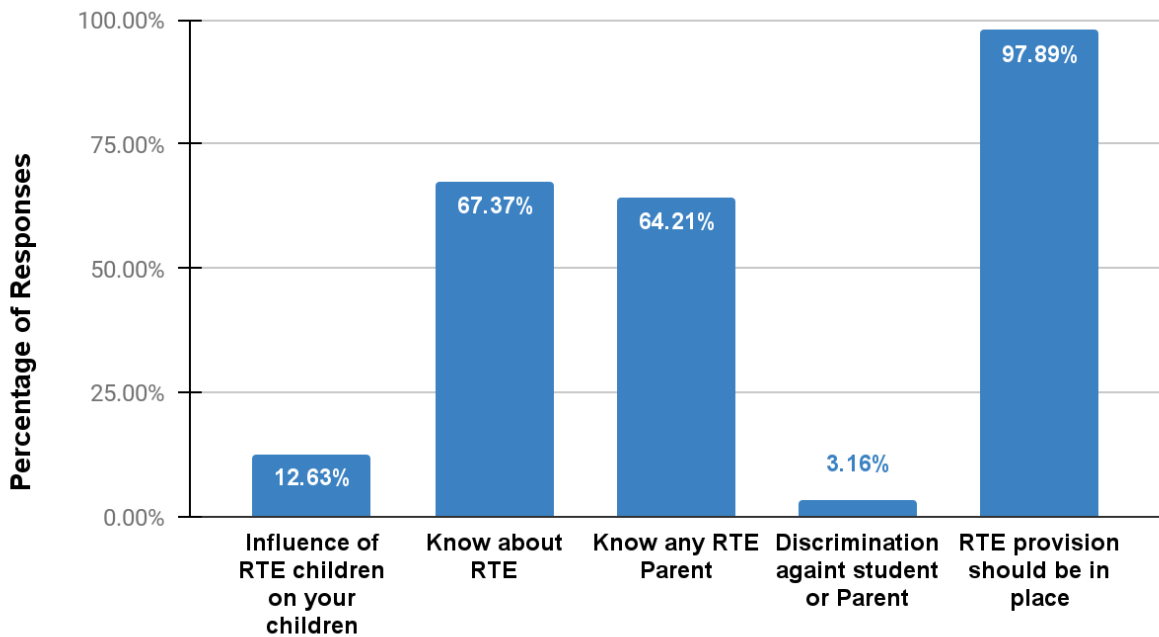
Responses of Parents on RTE

Figure 4: Responses of General parents on awareness and their perspective regarding the RTE Act

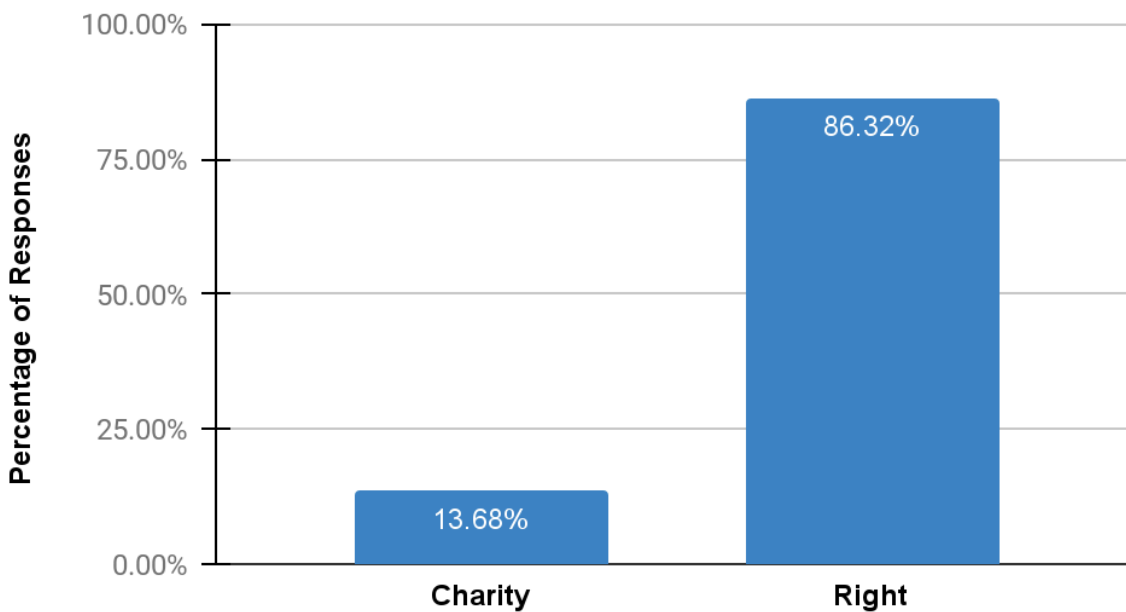**Responses of Parents whether RTE is a Charity or Right**

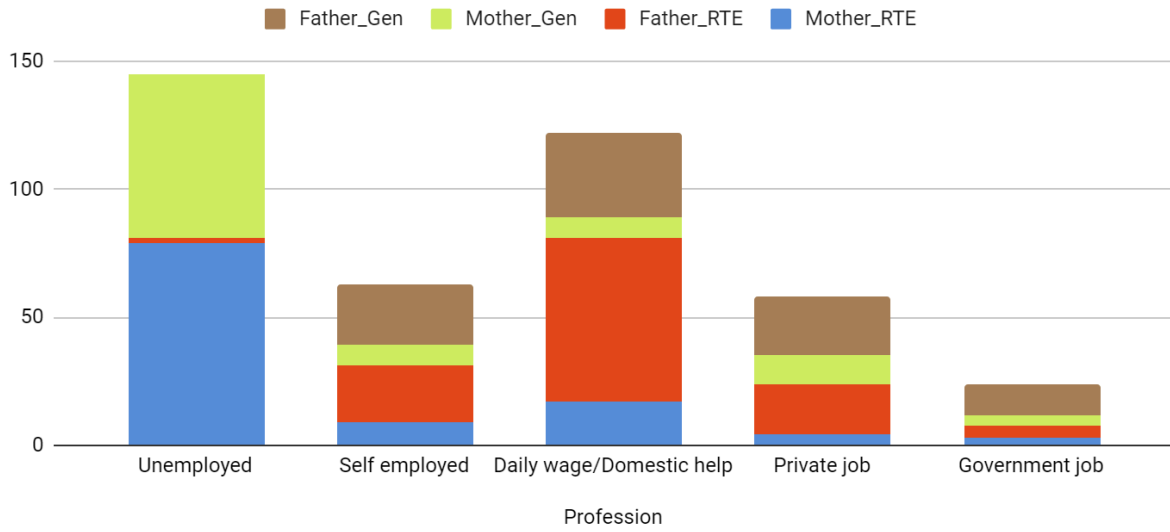*Figure 5: Responses of General parents on the RTE Act*

Figure 6: Comparative analysis of the RTE parents and General Parents' profession

D. District-level officials

- 6 district-level officials were interviewed during the process of 5 *sambhags*, including 4 DEOs and 2 ADEOs.
- DEOs have been authorised to issue certificates of recognition to schools under the RTE Act. They have the power to seek information about the schools or inspect the schools seeking recognition to verify whether they meet the standards and norms prescribed under the Act.
- When asked about their roles and responsibilities, they described their responsibility as ensuring proper implementation of the act, promoting equality in schools and ensuring admissions in every RTE seat of the district.
- District officials monitor the process through nodal officers, RTE operators, school principals and stakeholder meetings.

Table 7: Responses of District level officials on the aim of RTE

Aim of RTE	Number of Responses
Promote inclusion and equity	4
Opportunity to study in private schools	4
Improve education outcome	4
Promote private schools	2

They remarked that capacity building is required for the implementing officials at different levels in the following categories:
- Equality and inclusion: Promoting fair treatment and opportunities for all children, irrespective of their socio-economic background, caste, religion, and gender, and ensuring every child feels valued and included in the school.
- Socio-emotional skills and child psychology: It is imperative for all educators, educator leaders and officials to understand the significance of developing socio-emotional skills in children. This includes developing abilities such as empathy, self-regulation, and interpersonal skills in children and understanding their emotional and psychological development.
- Technical hard skills: Specific skills taught to students that involve hands-on abilities and knowledge to prepare them for future challenges
- RTE provision: Implementing the Right to Education (RTE) Act, which ensures free and compulsory education for children below 14 years old.

Following are some challenges mentioned by the DEOs and ADEOs.
- Lack of a method/tool to verify admissions eligibility under the BPL category.
- Political pressure during the admission cycle
- Inability to ensure students' academic achievement due to school shutdown during COVID.

Suggestions to improve the existing process:

- There should be a provision under RTE Act that RTE children of migrating families get admission to private schools where they migrated.
- Increase in awareness amongst parents about RTE Act and the admission process.
- Increase in the number of campaigning before admissions.
- There should be constant process monitoring, even after the admission cycle.
- Teachers should be trained to create an inclusive environment in the classroom and provide enough time for students who find it difficult to cope with the school atmosphere

The campaigning in rural parts of Raipur has been mentioned as a best practice by the DEO, especially in terms of the investment school managements and nodal officers.

E. RTE Operators

- We have interacted with RTE operators in 5 districts regarding their experience working on the Act.
- The average years of experience of the operators is 3.75. They handle 412 private schools on average, with Raipur being the highest and Bastar the lowest. The experience of RTE operators was considered relevant for this study in understanding their need for capacity building and understanding of the RTE admission process.
- 75% of their work time is spent on work related to RTE 12.1.c as all of them are involved in different workstreams like Scholarship scheme, Mid Day Meal, Infrastructure etc.
- Similar to responses from district officials, some of them have responded that they receive pressure from influential parents to secure seats under the provision.
- Operators remarked on the need for capacity building and training on reports from the portal and reimbursement claim approval.
- Whatsapp is the preferred medium of communication with the school authorities and nodal officers followed by phone calls and in-person meetings.
- The number of meetings RTE operators conduct with the private schools and nodal officers in a year are 4 and 2, respectively.

Table 8: Ratings given by the operators on parameters regarding the state RTE portal and work related to RTE 12.1.c. on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the least.

Parameter	Mean Rating
School registration approval	3.5
Reimbursement claim approval	2
Nodal work completion	4.25
School work completion	3.25
Nodal-Habitation mapping	4.25
Reports from the portal	4.25
School-Habitation mapping	3.75
School-nodal mapping	4
Grievance redressal by themselves	4
Support from nodal on RTE work	3.25
Support from DEO on RTE work	3.25

Process flow of grievance redressal:
- On average, operators solve all admission-related grievances by themselves, whereas both reimbursement and school registration-related queries are directly sent to DPI first.
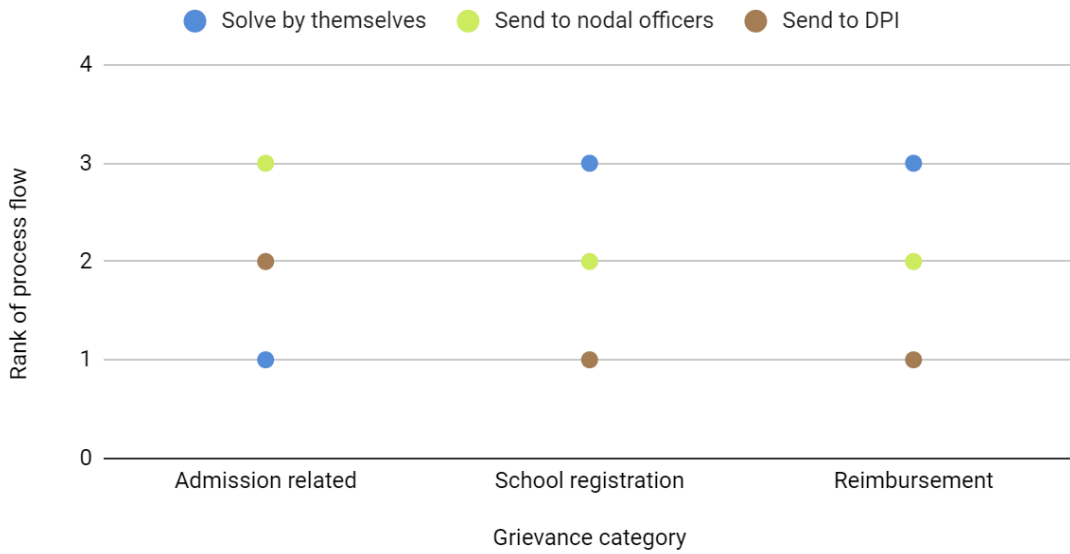
Figure 7: Process followed by RTE operators to solve grievances related to admission, school registration and reimbursement, steps ranked from 1 to 3

F. Nodal Officers

- 70% maintain a record of the RTE related work out of which 87% maintain a register, whereas the rest maintains an online record.
- 48% agree that the records maintained are being checked by DEO, BEO or the DPI.
- 97% believe that the Act has to be kept as it promotes equality and gives children from economically weaker and socially disadvantaged sections an opportunity to study. The 3% who responded that the Act should be removed believe that Government schools should be given priority and eligible children should not occupy the seats.
- 82% responded that a centralised lottery system is more efficient than the decentralised model. Those who responded in favour of the latter give the lack of transparency, clarity and awareness among parents and school authorities regarding the lottery system as the reason.
- 47% of the officers receive grievances from parents, schools and SMCs. The grievance redressal is done either by self (44%) or by sending to DEO office (48%) or the DPI(6%). 2% take no action to solve grievances. Support received from respective DEO offices obtain an average rating of 3.9 on a scale of 1 to 5.
- Nodal officers suggest a few changes for making RTE 12.1.c admissions more efficient. On-ground awareness campaigns are the most frequent response, whereas some nodals suggest the integration of the portal with other websites of the Department, smooth transition of students from primary to secondary, change in timelines to achieve work-free vacations and yearly monitoring and evaluation of the portal.
- 45.6% of nodal officers would like to be involved in process-related capacity building and training sessions. 33.8% of them need training on the overall RTE portal.

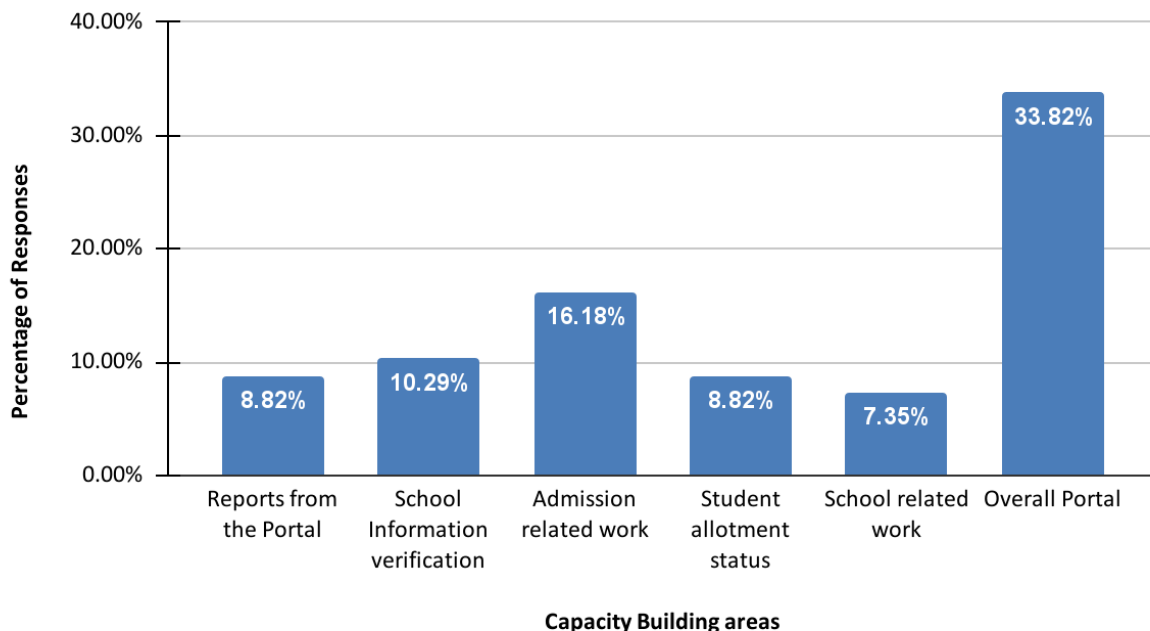**Responses shared by the Nodals on their capacity buidling areas**

Figure 8 : Percentage of nodal officers that wish to receive capacity building on various fields of RTE portal

- 22% of the nodals are not able to spend more than 20% of time on RTE related work. Nearly 50% of them are handling the portal by themselves without the help of an operator.
- Only 15% can spend more than 60% of their overall work time on RTE, of which 7 in 10 nodals have less than 7 schools mapped to them.

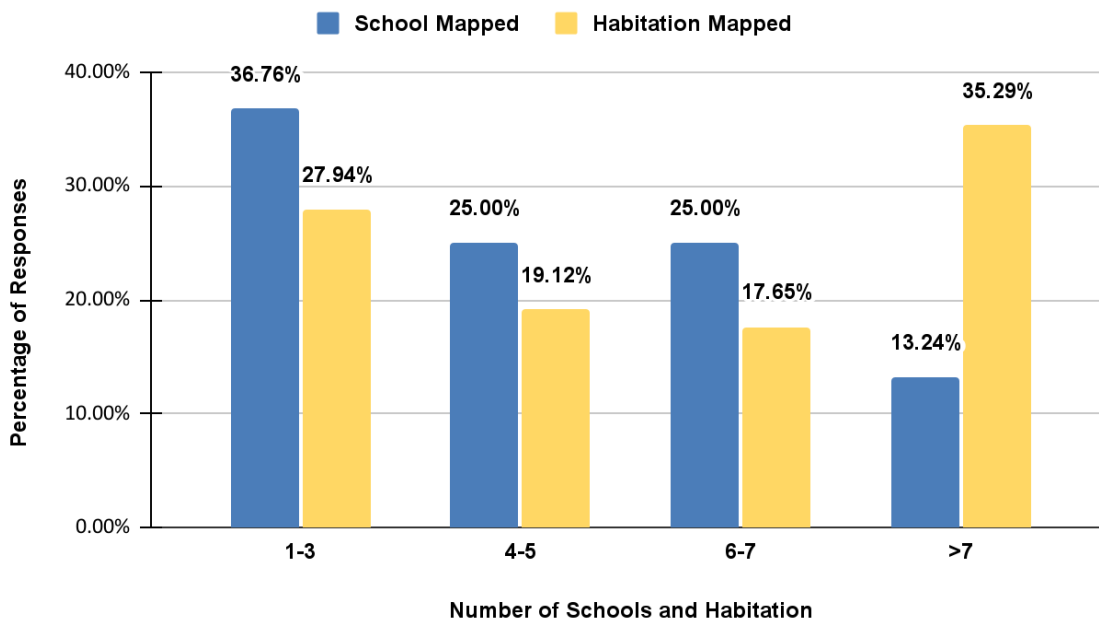**Responses of Nodals on the number of Schools and Habitation Mapped**

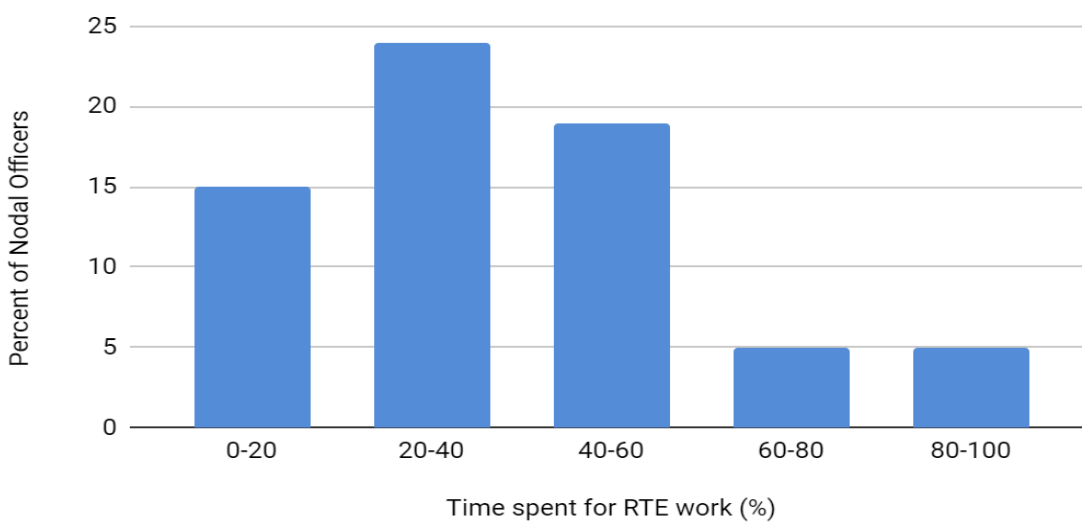*Figure 9 : Nodals' responses on the mapping of schools and habitation*

Figure 10: Time spent by nodal officers on RTE work

- Nodal officers visit schools in the following frequency: 4% yearly, 28% half yearly, 50% quarterly and 15% monthly. 3% do not visit the schools. During the visits, the most common parameter checked is RTE compliance, along with the amenities in the school such as playground, toilet facilities, drinking water, and electricity. The least observed parameters are grievance redressal and COVID protocols during school reopening.
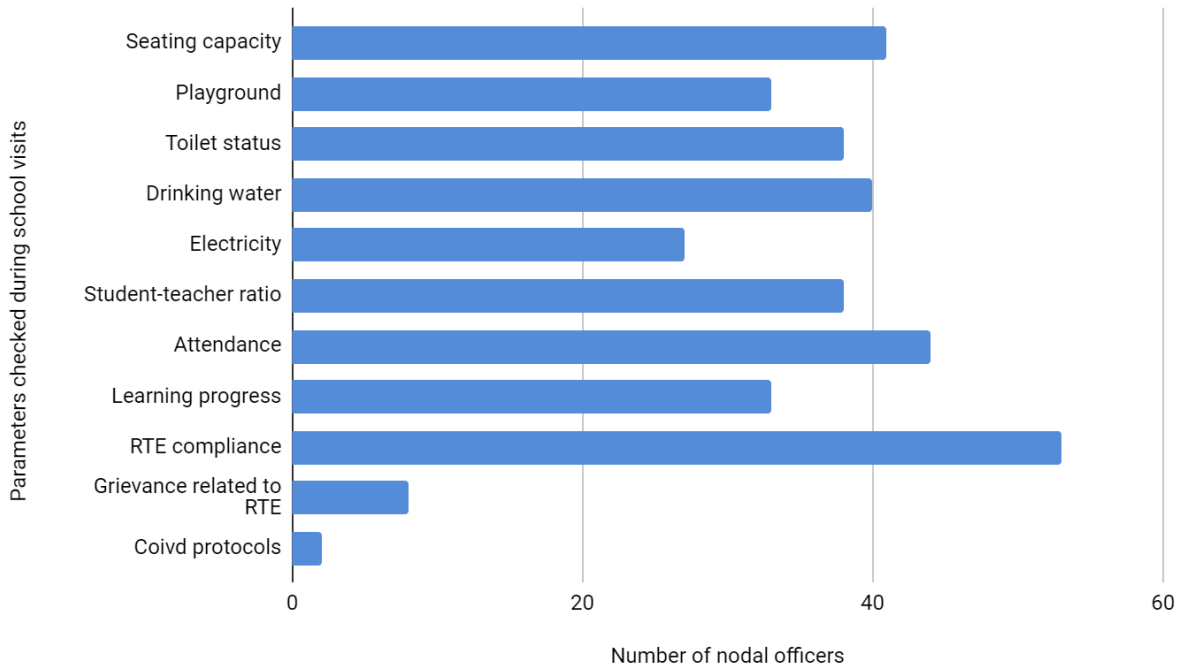

Figure 11 : Parameters observed by nodal officers during their school visits

Responses of Nodal officers on Grievance Redressal Mode
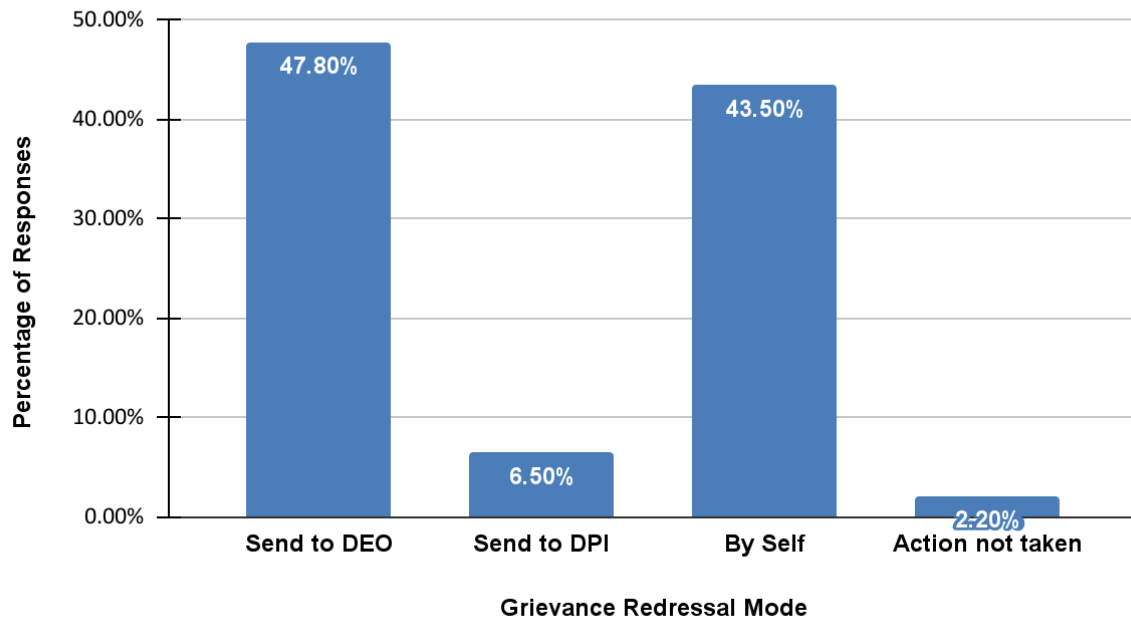
Figure 12: Grievance redressal mode adopted by the nodal officers

Nodal officers rated different parameters of RTE portal in terms of its user-friendliness and accessibility on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest.

Table 9: Average rating given by the nodal officers on RTE portal experience

RTE Portal Experience	Average Rating
Verification of school information	3.59
School verification work	3.54
Student allotment status	3.66
Report from portal	3.6
User friendliness	3.72

G. School Observation

Team of field investigators visited 100 private schools across 5 districts registered on the RTE portal and recorded their observations in terms of basic infrastructure, compliance parameters and the Act's reinforcement. The list comprised 42 English medium and 40 Hindi medium schools. 18 schools have both languages as the medium of instruction.

Average school fees for primary, middle and secondary are 8780, 9235 and 13,705 INR respectively.

Table 10: Data of students in RTE seats in 3 academic years

Academic Year	Number of RTE students	Number of girls	Number of boys	Number of stude: dropped out
2018-19	3894	1846	2028	182
2019-20	4747	2198	2549	158
2020-21	5000	2391	2609	204

- 68 of the schools run in their own buildings and 32 buildings are rented.
- Average pupil-teacher ratio is 16:1.
- Though 95% of schools have usable toilets, only 16% have toilets for special children and 2 of them are not in usable condition. Only 5 out of 100 schools have a teacher appointed for special children.
- 40 schools do not have a library and of the available 60 school libraries, 27% do not have space to sit and 20% do not have books in readable condition. 77% of libraries manage a register to track books that are issued.
- Main source of drinking water borewell, followed by water filter, tap water etc. Only 1 school depends on wells for drinking water.

School with Basic Amenities
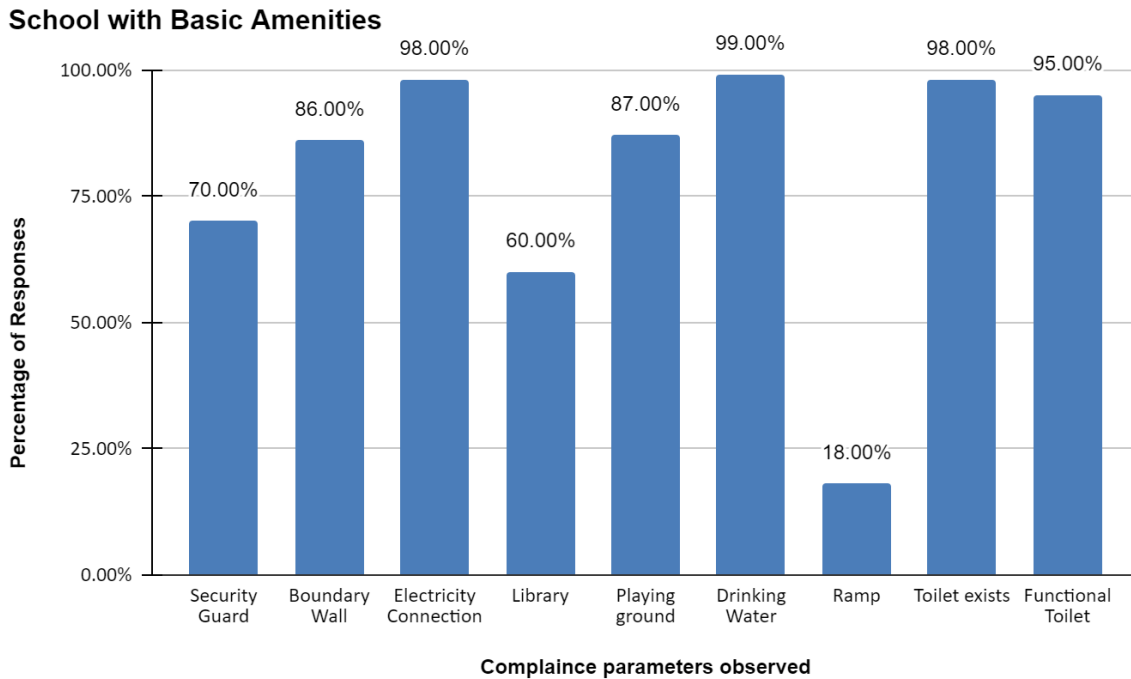
Figure 13: Percentage of schools complying to the availability of basic amenities

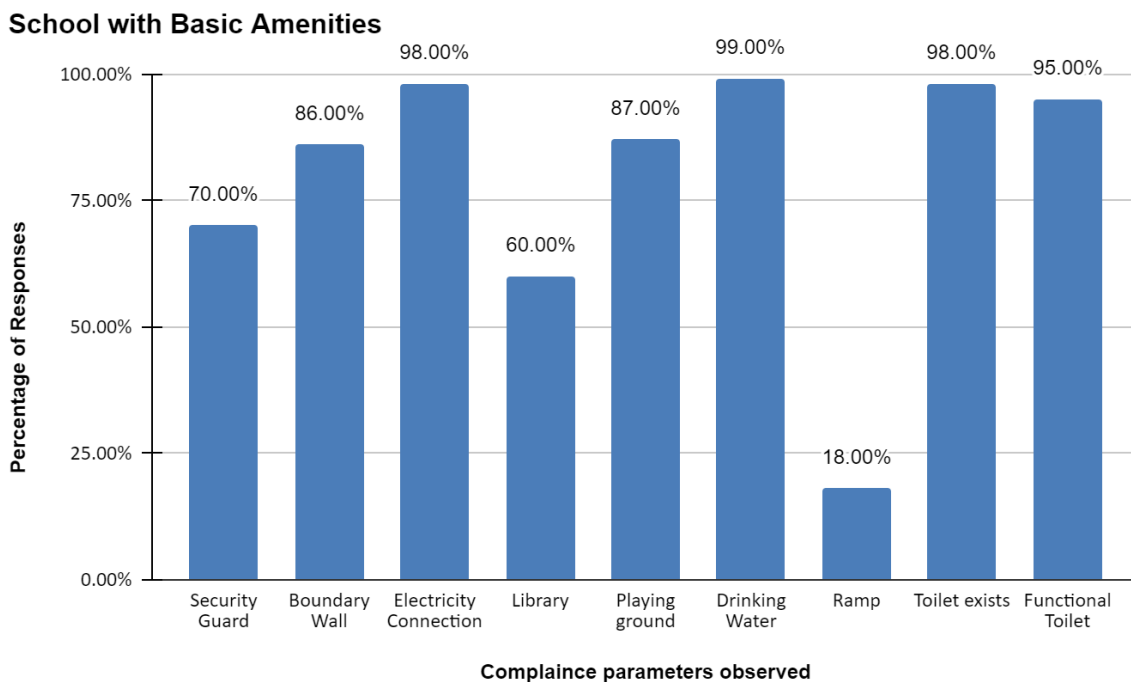**School with Basic Amenities**

Figure 14: Source of drinking water in schools

7 schools do not have blackboards and 8 schools lack tables and chairs in the classrooms. The black board, table and chair have been rated as poor, average and good as per the observation. Less than 50% of schools have these two facilities in good condition.

Condition of Black Board, Table and Chair in classrooms

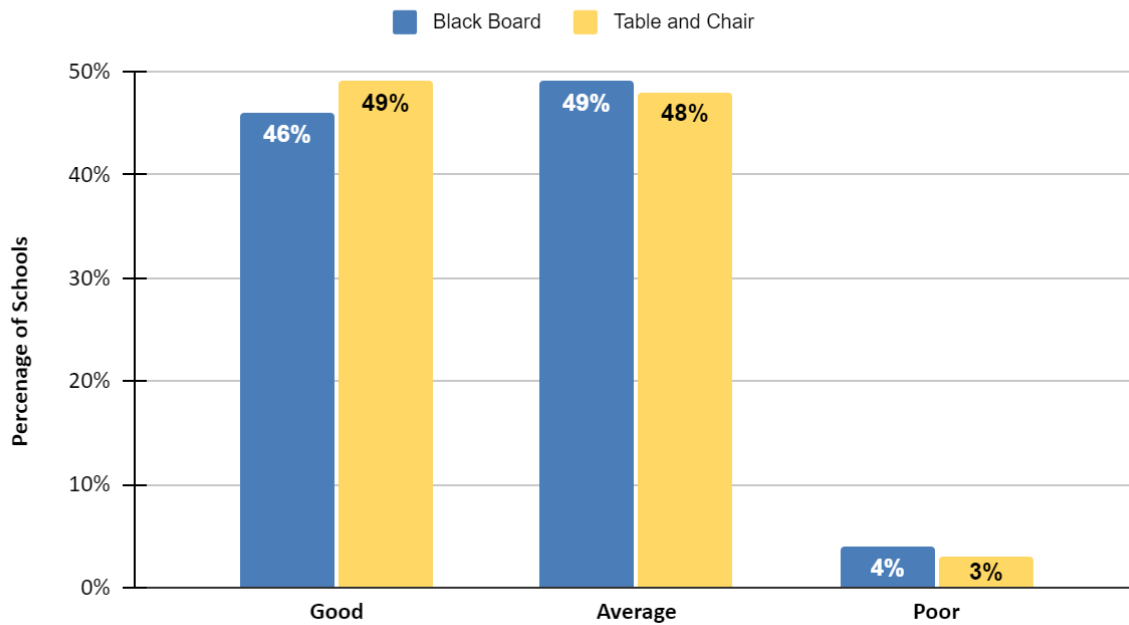*Figure 15: Condition of blackboards, tables and chairs in the classrooms*

36 schools have an active RTE cell, and 76 schools maintain a register for students in RTE 12.1.c seats. Though 47 schools have their own brochure or prospectus, 38% of them do not contain information regarding the Act or the reservation of seats. Out of 79 schools with a notice board, 37% have not displayed RTE information.

Recommendations

1. **Streamlining Reimbursement:**
   14 schools out of 101 mentioned that they charged extra admission fees for registrations and extra-curricular activities. 8 of the 14 drop-out children who we interviewed in person mentioned that if they had the financial resources, they could have stayed in school.

   Three recommendations to resolve this issue are:
   a. Streamlining the reimbursement process to ensure timely reimbursement to schools, i.e. within one year of admission
   b. Ensuring PFMS integration with the system such that there is 100% reimbursement from the center
   c. Increasing the per child cost provided as reimbursement to schools, such that some of the ancillary costs can be covered as well

2. **Transfer Policy:**
   Parents of dropout students also mentioned that since higher classes were unavailable in schools, they had to drop out. Nodal officers and Principals also echoed how children could not continue their education due to not having a transfer policy. 13 out of 77 parents of drop-out children also mentioned that their children had to drop out since they had migrated. 80 out of 101 Principals also mentioned that children dropped out as parents migrated to other areas.

   The current mode allows students to transfer to a Government school, but not any other private school. **There is a need to create a transfer policy to another private school in the event that the school shuts down mid-session, or if the school operates only till grade 3 or grade 5.**

3. **Proper Targeting:**
   A key theme that emerged unanimously from principals, nodal operators and DEOs was the need for better targeting. Many parents are now able to access BPL cards without meeting the criteria. This, combined with their social and financial capital, gives them a better chance of applying and getting into a private school through the lottery.

   The fact that Nodals face political pressure and pressure from parents during the admission cycle also shows that those whom the policy aims to target may not be able to get access to this. 27 parents actually got their children to drop out because they did not get a school of their preference, and 10 of them sent their children to private schools anyway. These findings are also corroborated by Indus Action's retention survey in 2022 and JPAL's recent study in Chhattisgarh.

   Thus, this policy's targeting needs to be rethought, be it through better and targeted awareness, increasing access points for the more vulerable, or even re-evaluating the current eligibility criteria.

4. **Capacity Building of Principals/Teachers/Nodals**
   Based on the survey answers, stakeholders need to build capacity on RTE (rules, aim, guidelines). In particular, for Principals and teachers, there is a need to focus on inclusive classrooms and teaching, which are of the essence to implement RTE in its fullest spirit. For example, around 30% of the Principals did not know that uniforms and books were covered under RTE and suggested that as a policy recommendation. Only 50 Principals believed that the essence of RTE was "to promote equity and inclusion". 45.6% nodal officers also responded that they would like to be involved in process-related capacity building and training sessions. 33.8% of them felt they needed training on the overall RTE portal. **There needs to be annual in-person training of all district officials, operators, nodal officers, as well as private school representatives.**

5. **Recurrent monitoring of 12(1)(c) implementation:**
   This is the first time that a research study on dropout students has been conducted in the state since the primary year of implementation. Since ground checks highlight the realities and challenges faced by stakeholders, it is essential to establish a sustainable and replicable model for conducting frequent such studies in the state. This will also allow us to course-correct the implementation of the provision. **One physical check in all schools should be done annually, with a fixed objective, and the report should be shared publicly.**

Conclusion

The study on implementing RTE Section 12(1)(c) in Chhattisgarh highlights significant challenges and opportunities in achieving educational inclusion and reducing dropout rates.

The findings highlight the need for better mechanisms to reach out the beneficiaries, design sessions for capacity building of stakeholders, increase awareness amongst parents and streamline reimbursement processes. In addition, there is a need to orient educators, educator leaders, officials and parents on the core purpose of RTE Act which is to enable each and every child access to quality education and social inclusion.

It is imperative to organise discussion sessions for all the stakeholders and build their perspective on the need for RTE Act. The study also highlighted one crucial difference the majority of the general parents (more than 80% Non-RTE parents) believe that the RTE Act is not a charity but the right to education of each and every child.

The research indicates that while the online implementation of RTE has shown improvements in transparency and efficiency, technical difficulties and a need for greater support and training persist.

Addressing social and economic barriers, enhancing monitoring mechanisms, and refining policy targeting are crucial for ensuring that the RTE provisions effectively serve the intended beneficiaries. This comprehensive evaluation provides a foundation for policy adjustments and strategic interventions to enhance the educational landscape in Chhattisgarh.

Annexure

Table 1: Seats, Applications, and Admissions Numbers

Area/Year	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Schools	6,192	6,426	6,445	6,633	6,430	6,581
Seats	80,583	86,508	81,356	83,864	80,849	55,266
Applications	75,875	99,798	84,654	44,425	1,11,191	1,15,027
Admissions	40,254	48,199	52,144	48,381	56,679	46,360

Table 2: Reimbursement/ Per Child Cost (INR)/Annum

Class	Fees			Books			Uniform		
	2010-11	2018-19	2020-21	2010-11	2018-19	2020-21	2010-11	2018-19	2020-21
Pre-Primary (Nursery, KG-I) Primary (Class 1-5)	7,000	7,000	7,000	250	250	250	400	540.52	540.52
Upper Primary (Class 6-8)	11,400	11,400	11,400	250	450	450	400	540.52	540.52
High School (Class 9-12)			15,000			450			540.52