

Bhandara District on its way to 100% enrollment

Abhaysinh Parihar

Principal, District Institute for Education and Training, Bhandara

Ensuring complete enrollment of children in the 6-14 year age group is a prerequisite to fulfilling their right to education. Every child deserves to get a quality education, but how will their schooling start unless every child is enrolled in school?

The Education Department of Government of Maharashtra has launched a comprehensive program – Pragat Shaikshanik Maharashtra – to address major educational issues and upgrade the learning outcomes in a time bound manner. Achieving complete enrollment is one of the several initiatives under this program.

Bhandara takes a lead to cent percent enrollment

Motivated by the appeal by our Education Minister Shri Vinod Tawade and Principal Secretary Shri Nand Kumar, I decided make Bhandara a test case.

Located in Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, Bhandara district has seven blocks. The population is diverse or Adivasi, Muslims, and nomadic groups, who are semi-literates and working as laborers on brick kilns and small vendors.

At the inception of the new educational year, in June 2016, District Institute for Education and Training, Bhandara decided to take up this challenge of enrolling each and every child in the formal stream of education. Our survey showed total 95 out-of-school children at the district level.

The district team planned a systematic program in July to achieve its goal in a month's period, till 31st July 2016.

Motivating the district team

This would not have been achieved without the active involvement of the educational machinery in the district, from officers to teachers. A series of motivation meetings were planned by DIET, first for its resource persons at the district level, and then in each of the seven block level with Block Education Officer, Extension Officer, Cluster In-charge in respective, and Head Teachers of all the schools in the area. The meetings helped to make it a collective initiative. Everyone

owned up the goal and decided to work in a time bound manner to get rid of the problem of out-of-school children.

The spirit was so high that we even coined a slogan – ‘Identify out-of-school child after 31st July and win Rs. 1000’.

Mobilizing community participation

Community participation was essential to achieve the goal. Involvement of college students and NSS and NCC cadets’ in the awareness drives and door-to-door campaign, the involvement of Grampanchayat and School Management Committee, helped to turn it into a community initiative.

Block level surveys helped to identify out-of-school children and reach out to each and every child and family to convince them for enrollment. Reaching out to vulnerable spots like surrounding areas of public hospitals, railway station and slums areas, shops and hotels, settlements of nomadic groups and migrant laborers, efforts were made to cover each and every area in the blocks.

The situation was different in each of the seven blocks in the district. Accordingly, each block team identified the problems areas and did their planning.

Gram Panchayat helped to identify out-of-school children if there are any, otherwise certified that there are no out-of-school children by a letter signed by Sarpanch, Police Patil, and School Management Committee. Similar certification was taken by schools and centers and collated.

One to one interactions with parents

The most challenging part was to convince the parents to admit their children in the school. Adverse living conditions and cultural practices are major hurdles in achieving complete enrollment. For instance, some nomadic communities do begging for a living and every family member, including children, are on streets to get enough to survive for the day. It is challenging to convince the importance of education to such families living difficult conditions.

We organized parent awareness programs and personally interacted with each one of them. Explaining them the government schemes that will help them, we encourage them to send their children to school. Distribution of books, notebook and school bags to these children helped them to motivate to join schools.

Targets could be achieved as each one focused on their plan and found solutions specific to each case.

Efforts succeeded

In Bhandara block, we identified 25 out-of-school children. Of these 19 were studying in Madarasa and were shifted to Urdu School run by the Municipal Council, rest of the 6 children were enrolled in the primary schools nearer to their homes.

Similarly, we were successful in enrolling all out-of-school children in Pavani (1), Sakoli (13 out of 14), and Lakhandur (49 out of 55). Three blocks did not have any out-of-school children. Thus with a one month campaign by the end of July 2016, we were able to enroll 88 children out of 95 out-of-school children identified in the survey.

Five out of seven blocks have achieved cent percent enrollment. Although it was a major success (92.65% were enrolled), we have still to enroll 7 children who difficult to reach. In Sakoli 1 child is out of school due to the critical family situation and we are interacting with his father. A nomadic community in Lakhandur does fortune telling wanders from places to places along with family. They are reluctant to enroll their children.

Follow-up measures

In districts like Bhandara where migration is common, more infrastructure support is necessary to check absenteeism and dropping out. Some assured means of income for the laboring communities and better facilities like hostel accommodations for their parents are crucial in the long run.

We are sure to bring the remaining children also in the stream of education soon. Now it is equally important to make learning enjoyable for the newly enrolled children so that we would want to come again. The children are learning through constructivism tools and educational videos. Bi-lingual books are made available to Urdu schools. Child to child learning is also planned for newly enrolled children so that the new students would not feel burdened.

A monthly survey will be carried out to check long absenteeism. Awareness and strict implementation of laws against child labor and blind faiths are also called for. Considering the high migration rates in the district we are planning a 'monitoring team' to ensure that children are migrant workers do not miss their schooling.

We are ensuring that the families of the newly enrolled and still out-of-school children get the benefit of appropriate government schemes they deserve. In future, we are also planning to help them find livelihood options locally.
