THE QUALITY OF PRIMARY EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF MADURAI AND VILLUPURAM DISTRICTS IN TAMIL NADU, INDIA

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Executive Summary

This pilot quality assessment study is based upon school observations, interviews and research conducted in two districts of Tamil Nadu, India. The most salient findings were that key structures are in place for imparting quality primary education. However, several weaknesses in the system of educational administration and management currently limit the quality of education provided. A strengthening of crucial elements of the education system is needed in order to achieve the two important goals of building

- **Strong accountability in the system** and evaluating the quality of the system by regular
- **Monitoring of student learning**, and thus, improving the overall efficiency of the system.

Based on research and findings, the following recommendations towards improving quality are made:

1. Redesign the system of district level education administration and school management.
   - Redefine role and job description of school heads; move towards school-based management;
   - Re-engineer supervision structure – demarcate administrative and academic supervision; make inspection officers responsible for administrative supervision and Block Resource Centers responsible for academic issues;
   - Institute formal pre-service training for school heads and Inspection Officers to bolster institutional capacity building
   - Institute supervision mechanisms reinforcing good teacher management and strengthen accountability systems
   - Give monitoring responsibilities to local communities
   - Strengthen the role and capacity of District Training Institutes to handle the onerous task of grassroots capacity building

2. Institute a system of monitoring and evaluation of student learning
   - Administer a standardized assessment to a sample of students in Standard V every 4 years to monitor student learning progress
   - Establish a common examination paper for all Standard III - V completers

3. Improve the efficiency of the teacher training process
   - Use a participatory methodology in the trainings to build teachers’ capacity for improving their teaching
   - Include multigrade instruction techniques in pre-service and in-service trainings
   - Allow Inspection Officers, school heads and teachers to give input in the content areas of training

4. Explore innovative options for financing the reforms
   Though this aspect was beyond the scope of this study, it is a crucial element to look into. Further studies that assess the return on investment of incentive schemes such as free uniforms must be conducted to determine the impact of such programs. In a system with scarce resources, schemes that do not have demonstrable impact should be abandoned to mobilize funds for other more
meaningful interventions that are known to have a larger impact. Another option that may be explored is that of disinvestment of state-owned enterprises to raise resources for quality improvements in primary education (Bajpai 2001).
Introduction

Background

“Education for All” has been a global issue ever since the 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Jomtein. India was one of the participants and signatories to the Declaration. The expansion of primary education in India over the last decade has been phenomenal. But, by all accounts, the expansion of the Indian education system has led to deterioration in the quality of education. Recent studies have shown that even when students are retained in schools, they do not learn what they are supposed to learn. Low levels of learning at the primary stage are almost a universal phenomenon in India (Dave, 1988; Shukla and others, 1994, Varghese 1996). While the majority of the schools are of poor quality (by international standards), there are specks of excellence. While the scenario is fraught largely with poor quality, there has been an increasing expression of concern for quality (Mukhopadhyay and Parhar, 1999).

Like in the rest of India, a wide array of initiatives undertaken by the Government of Tamil Nadu (GoTN) have resulted in making primary education accessible (and attractive) to a very large majority of families. Through the District Primary Education Program, Operation Blackboard and other incentives-based initiatives that are supposed to give all primary school children free textbooks, midday-meals and uniforms, the Tamil Nadu state government is close to its goal of 100% enrollment. Unfortunately, like elsewhere, studies on Tamil Nadu have shown a quality-quantity tradeoff as enrollments increase (Duraiswamy, James, Lane and Tan, 1997). There is, however, a dedication in the current state government to an improvement in the quality of education. It is with this commitment that the government initiated this study to be conducted by researchers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education under the aegis of the Center for International Development at Harvard.

Objectives

The purpose of this paper is to describe the findings of a pilot study that was conducted in the state of Tamil Nadu (T.N.) in southern India. The objectives of this study were to assess the current state of primary education in 2 sample districts, and then analyze the data gathered with a view to identifying areas of weaknesses that may be contributing to the lack of acceptable quality of education in primary schools. As most studies have focused on analyzing data such as completion, repetition, and dropout rates, this study aims to go beyond an analysis of those indicators. The goal of this study is to identify and analyze the processes that impact attendance, completion, and repetition. Therefore the focus of this study was on the learning environment, which encompasses the classroom, teacher-learning practices, teaching-learning materials, teachers and students. Issues related to school governance and management (at the school and district level) insofar as they affect the learning outcomes, were also examined. Finally, this paper makes recommendations on a few salient issues for improving the outcomes of primary education as influenced by the indicators focused on.

Methodology

The functioning of a school can only be properly analyzed within its local environment (Carron & Chau, 1996). This study therefore uses a micro-approach to studying the problems of quality in the primary education in Tamil Nadu. As this was a pilot study, 2 districts were selected so that findings from this preliminary study may be used to design a more in-depth study on a larger
scale. This study was thus restricted to the districts of Madurai in the South and Villupuram in the North.

This study falls in the category of qualitative research, in that it aims to generate theories and hypotheses from the data rather than test a pre-conceived hypothesis. This case study gathered data primarily from three types of sources:

- Interviews (semi-structured, specific questions)
- Observations (of the participants, school and classroom settings)
- Reports and MIS data available from the district education offices

Two researchers working under the guidance of a faculty member over a period of about 3 months conducted this study. The team also tapped into expertise of other faculty at the School of Education and JFK School of Government at Harvard, in specific areas such as educational assessment, accountability and affecting school reform in a politically feasible manner. Some doctoral students at the School of Education with experience in qualitative research were also consulted in the formative stages of this study.

The major steps involved were to gather detailed background information; data from the field during a field visit and perform subsequent analysis and synthesis of the data. The fieldwork component had the researchers spending a 2-week period on site to conduct interviews, and observations of the day-to-day functioning of some representative schools and classrooms, district teacher training institutes, and district education offices.

The interviews and observations were part of the fieldwork conducted during the two-week site visit to Tamil Nadu. For this study, interviews were conducted with several officials associated with Elementary Education at the State and district level (Madurai and Villupuram) in Tamil Nadu. (See Appendix 1 for complete list). In addition, brief, informal conversations were held with some parents and children, as well.
Indicators of “quality” primary education

This study uses a slightly modified version of the model of education effectiveness proposed by Lockheed and Verspoor (1991). According to this model (see Appendix 2) inputs, processes and outputs all function within a context, which exerts positive or negative influences. An example of a positive influence is supportive parent and community attitudes toward schooling, while negative factors include demand for child labor, which is exogenous to the education system, and political and labor interference which undermines the accountability and hence efficiency of the education system. Like Lockheed and Verspoor’s model, our concept of effective schools also stresses on school management and system accountability that ensures that resources are well utilized and there is efficiency in the system. This last aspect is especially relevant in this context as the Central and State governments are on the verge of putting into effect the most comprehensive of “education for all” schemes to date called the “Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan” (which literally translates to “Education for All Scheme”). This was launched as a result of a recommendation by Bajpai and Sachs (2000) subsequent to which the Prime Minster of India announced the scheme on August 15, 2000. Under this scheme the government is pumping vast sums of money for capacity building and quality improvement measures.

The study therefore focused (to varying degrees) on the following indicators as factors affecting the quality of primary schooling in Madurai and Villupuram.

The Primary School System
This encompasses all the participants and determinants within the school system that contribute to the effectiveness of the education. Amongst these are:

- The school
  - Infrastructure (typology of the school)
  - School Atmosphere (discipline, orderliness, punctuality)
  - Academic Emphasis
  - School Leadership (principal, administrators)

- The curriculum (Intended and Implemented)
  - Ability to engage problem-solving and “higher-order” cognitive skills
  - Language of instruction
  - Is mastery of communication in language other than mother tongue an issue?

- Teachers
  - Level of education
  - Pre-service training
  - In-service training
  - Knowledge of subject matter
  - Pedagogical practices (lesson prep., teaching style, etc.)
  - Motivation and job satisfaction
  - Professionalism, dedication and attitude towards job

- Students
  - Distribution by gender, age, no. of repeaters and drop-outs
- Number per class (teacher-student ratio)
  - Teaching-Learning Materials
    - Textbooks (quality, how they map to curriculum, availability)
    - Teacher Guides
    - Basic school materials (exercise books, paper/slates, pencils/chalk)
    - Subsidies
  - Learning Time
    - Official time for learning
    - Absenteeism (teachers and students)
  - Teaching Practices
    - Student participation
    - Student Performance Assessments
    - Feedback to students and parents

- Educational Administration
  - Relationship between school and district education administrators
  - Supervision and inspection
  - System Accountability

- The community
  - PTA’s and community participation
  - Empowerment of local bodies

Profile of the Primary Education System of the Sample Districts

The following table provides a snapshot of the primary school system in Madurai and Villupuram.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.N.o</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Villupuram</th>
<th>Madurai</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>School Age population</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>1.98 lakhs</td>
<td>1.30 lakhs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>1.91 lakhs</td>
<td>1.27 lakhs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.89 lakhs</td>
<td>2.57 lakhs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Total no. of primary schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>School supervision and inspection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>By periodical visits and annual inspections</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State level – SPO(DPEP) &amp; DEE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>District level – DEEO(DPC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Block level – BRC &amp; AEEOs (4+2 officers)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>By periodical visits and annual inspections</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State level – DEE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>District level – DEEO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Block level – AEEOs (2 officers)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The functioning of government primary schools at the district level comes under the purview of the District Collectorate and is managed and administered by the District Education Office. This is overseen directly by the District Elementary Education Officer (DEEO) with the assistance of District Assistant Education officers (DAEO) and District Additional Assistant Education Officers (DAAEO) who report directly to the DEEO. Each AEO (and AAEO) has responsibility of about 50-60 schools.

The typical primary school has 5 grades (or classes or standards), - 1 through 5 - and has a head master/mistress (HM) at the helm. The HM is usually the senior teacher with at least 10 years teaching experience, which may or may not be in primary classes. They usually have teaching responsibility, as well. HMs usually do not receive any special training specifically for the post of HM. The minimum educational qualifications for primary schoolteachers are secondary school (12 years) plus 2 years of teacher training. All teachers we met satisfied these minimum requirements; some teachers in these districts even had bachelor’s degrees (in education and other subjects). HMs of school in a “block” attend a meeting every month (or every two months) which is also attended by the AEO and AEEO for the area. These meetings are the forums for the district administration to inform or train HMs on any new decisions, schemes, government initiatives and policies affecting education at the district level. Teachers belonging to schools in a geographically proximate area also meet every month (on a Saturday, usually the 3rd) to discuss teaching methods, share teaching experiences, hold model classes or be trained by “block resource persons”.

The DAEO’s and DAAEO’s are senior HMs who have a Bachelors degree in Education and are usually from the same district. They are the district officers responsible for school supervision and inspection. The District Elementary Education Officer relies on his AEO’s (and AAEO’s) to provide him with a picture of the functioning of schools in his district. In addition to basic supervisory duties, they are also an important piece in the teacher-training infrastructure. These district officers make decisions on which teachers are invited to participate in teacher training programs. They also select teachers who will be trained as “block resource persons” and in turn train other teachers in their geographical area. They are thus the link between the school and the government administration on one hand, and between the teachers and district teacher training institutes on the other. In addition, they are the also in charge of disbursing salaries to teachers and HMs, and annual funds earmarked for schools (such as an annual sum for TLM, or annual maintenance funds). Lastly, he/she also has the authority to approve medical and other types of leave, which require prior permission, for teachers and HMs.
District Administration and School Management

Since the 1990s, India has moved to decentralize governance of education through a constitutional amendment that authorizes states to establish a tiered governance structure to implement central and state education policies and schemes. Through this process village, block and district-level bodies were created and empowered. The aim of this decentralized planning and management of education is to ensure local participation and involvement in the education process. The formation of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) in schools and Village Education Committees (VECs) at the local level are efforts directed towards bringing about changes at the school level through local efforts.

According to our model of effective schools, one of the important pieces is the context within which primary schools function. This piece is the administrative machinery of the schools, blocks and districts within which the schools operate. The responsibilities of this machinery fall under the broad categories of -

- **School management**, and
- **District governance** which includes (but is not limited to) the important functions of **capacity building** i.e. training of teachers, HMs, and other actors in the district education system such as the education officers; and **school supervision and inspection**

School Management

In most of the areas covered by this study, small schools were the norm, with the HM having teaching responsibility as well (usually as class teacher of the higher grades in the schools). The HM’s role in school management is limited to that of performing routine day-to-day administrative functioning and routine maintenance of the school. This includes conducting the school assembly and keeping track of teacher attendance. In addition, there are some non-routine responsibilities such as attending HM meetings at the block level, PTA meetings and VEC meetings. Routine tasks performed on an annual basis include drawing up the timetable, establishing some school policies and determining school expenditures.

**School Heads: Teachers not Leaders; Little Authority; No Training**

Despite limited responsibility, the HMs tasks are multifaceted and complex. In addition to teaching, day-to-day running of the school, which involves administrative and record-keeping tasks and maintaining the facilities, they are responsible for liaising with the community and parents. It would appear that with all the teaching responsibility they shoulder, they would be hard-pressed to find the time to perform any additional duties effectively. Also worth noting is that for all the organizational management they have to do, they receive no special training for the role of HM. They are selected from the ranks of teachers on the basis of seniority (any teacher with 10 years teaching experience can apply for a promotion). There is no pre-service training before they take up this post and no in-service training catering specifically to HMs that we were made aware of.

HMs typically exercise little authority in the decision-making process of education at the
block or district level. They have little say in the allocation of resources of even their own school. HMs do not participate in decisions that affect their ability to improve student achievement. Curricula are designed at the state level, often with little attention to the diversity of the schools; textbooks and teaching guides are provided by the state; teachers’ appointments, transfers and training schedules are all governed by the district-level authorities. Even teacher leaves are approved by AEOs, not by HMs. Teachers are appointed, assigned, and promoted at the district level, leaving headmasters little control over the selection and discipline of their teachers (World Bank, 1997).

All this seems to have undermined the role of HM completely. He/she is in reality little more than a member of the teaching staff of the school with some minor additional administrative responsibility (and a higher salary grade). The lot of HMs seems, for most part, an apathetic bunch that takes no initiative to build and maintain an effective school environment. When asked if they ever requested for a teacher (including themselves) to be sent to some appropriate training programme, the answer was always an emphatic ‘no’. When asked if they ever provided feedback on the curriculum, the answer was again uniformly in the negative. In spite of many obvious infrastructure deficiencies in the school and classrooms, when asked if they were satisfied with the functioning of the school, most answered in the affirmative. When queried about what initiatives they had taken or were planning to take for the betterment of the school, few had any concrete answers. In stark contrast to this reality is the opinion of the HM’s role expressed by the state and district officials that we interviewed. They all seemed convinced that quality of schools could and should be improved by HMs taking the initiative to be more involved in the functioning of the schools and be more resourceful and raise funds for the school.

It is certainly worth noting that in the schools that we visited, a few had HMs who seemed dynamic, resourceful and exhibited some leadership qualities (Vandiyur and Chettiarpatti in Madurai district). Such schools, without exception, had a perceptibly superior look and feel than those that lacked effective leaders (Sikander Savadi in Madurai district and Orthur in Villupuram district).

**District Governance**

The district elementary education office is headed by the District Elementary Education Officer who reports to the Director of Elementary Education at the Directorate of Elementary Education situated in the State capital. The function of the DEEO is to maintain administrative control over elementary education in the district. This is achieved through the staff of Assistant Educations Officers (AEOs) and Additional Assistant Education Officers (AAEOs) that reports to the DEEO. In addition, the district is divided into blocks each of which has a Block Resource Center (BRC) which is manned by a BRC Supervisor and BRC personnel. Until recently, the BRC structure was a characteristic of the DPEP districts, but with the introduction of the SSA scheme, BRCs now exist in all districts. The BRC in Villupuram, which has been a DPEP district since 1996, has been charged with the task of “institutional capacity building”. At the village-level where the school actually resides is the Village Education Committee. Finally, at the helm of the school is the principal or HM (for Headmaster or Headmistress) who, along with the school teaching staff is responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the school.
Capacity Building
In addition to the school governance structure in the district described above, there are support services provided at the district-level by the District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) which are equipped to provide various types to academic and management support. This includes, pre-service and in-service teacher training and training programmes for education officers. The DIETs are also responsible for working with the district education office to provide educational management and planning. The training structure in Tamil Nadu follows a “cascade” approach whereby, DIET teachers are trained at the State capital by the Directorate of Teacher Education and Training (DTERT). They, in turn, train BRC personnel. Finally, the BRCs provide academic guidance, counseling and training to teachers. The hope is that the BRCs provide training that is tailored to and relevant in the local context of the schools within the block.

Supervision and Inspection
As mentioned earlier, the District Assistant Education Officers and Additional Assistant Education Officers perform the main supervisory function in the district education system. They are the “inspection officers” as well as the “academic resource persons” who provide pedagogic support to teachers and set up training schedules for teachers. The job description of the AEO and AAEO is thus a very demanding one, combining both administrative and academic tasks. Each AEO/AAEO handles about 50 to 60 schools (the number is sometimes even higher than that) and about 200 teachers. A list of some of the main functions follows:

Administrative:
- To disseminate information on new policies and government initiatives
- To disburse salaries of teachers and HMs
- To inspect and administer all matters related to teacher employment which include (but are not limited to) religious/medical/other types of leave; transfer and promotion proposals; maintain a seniority list of teachers; life insurance, provident fund and pension related retirement issues
- Disburse government-allocated funds to schools (for TLM, annual maintenance and such) and maintain accounts for the same
- Oversee distribution of free textbooks, teaching guides, free uniforms and any other resources provided to the schools by the government
- Maintain list of teacher vacancies in the schools in his/her jurisdiction
- Liaise with the Village Education Committees to keep them in the loop of the district education administration

Academic:
- To supervise and inspect all schools in their jurisdiction. This function includes making at least 3-4 school visits, one of which is a day-long thorough school inspection while the other 2-3 are unscheduled “surprise” visits to monitor the functioning of the school
- Prepare a written report of each school visit that is maintained by the school. Each report typically contains information of pupil attendance at the time of visit, some broad
observations of the visit and any pressing matter that was discussed with the HM. It may be worth noting that there is no copy of this report maintained at any district office.

- Prepare a log of his/her monthly activities and send to DEO
- Complete exhaustive report of school annual inspection and send to DEO
- Bring to DEO’s attention any pressing matters emerging out of a regular school visit. Note that matters such as teacher vacancies, infrastructure issues such as no toilets, and inadequate space for learners in classrooms are considered routine and not urgent enough to be reported outside of the annual inspection report.
- Collect and compile school-level data on indicators such as enrollment, completion rate, drop-out rate and repetition rate; all data is collected on the basis of gender and social class (Scheduled caste/scheduled tribe/ backward class/ most backward class)
- Evaluate teachers and make suggestions on teaching practices
- Liaise with the DIETs to send teachers on appropriate training programmes
- Keep track of different training programmers that every teacher in their jurisdiction has attended

Interviews and fieldwork clearly indicated that the AEOs and AAEOs constitute the most vital link in the district education administration structure. They are the go-between personnel used by the government and decision-makers at the higher levels of education administration to disseminate information and details of implementation of education policies to schools and local communities. Equally important is their role in the current accountability structure, as they are the key information sources that provide the district administration about the actual goings-on in the classrooms, schools and communities across the district. They form the link between the Village Education Committees, schools and district education office.

AEOs: A Crucial but Powerless Link; High Workload with Little Training and Support

The workload of the AEOs and AAEO’s (collectively referred to as AEOs) is clearly very high. A neglect on any of the various fronts that these officers function in, can seriously compromise the district administration of the education system. **Despite all the importance of this position, these officers receive no pre-service training before taking up this post. They receive little or no formal in-service training.** The only training they get is on-the-job. They attend meetings with the DEO on a regular basis. During some of these meetings, they are given informal “training” on handling of some administrative matters. All the AEOs we met expressed a desire to be trained on education administration.

In view of such a heavy workload, AEOs simply cannot be expected to do a good job of academic supervision, which is an important piece of the teacher training and support system. That apart, the system by which DIETs inform the AEOs of upcoming trainings is faulty. Trainings are not scheduled well ahead of time and oftentimes *after* a training has taken place. This results in lost training opportunities for teachers in the jurisdiction of the AEO. The mechanism by which AEOs select teachers for a particular training could also be improved. More often than not, teachers who are selected by AEOs to be resource persons for the block are selected on the basis of their educational qualifications and rather than their teaching performance.
In addition, though the AEOs occupy an important place in the administration, they are virtually powerless to approve any direct action. Though they handle all administrative duties pertaining to teachers, they have no authority to hire and fire teachers. Any disciplinary action they wish to take against a teacher for non-performance is forwarded to the DEEO who is the ultimate authority on elementary education in the district. The most they can do is issues warnings, which are innocuous and have little effect on teachers and school management. Any disciplinary action they recommend against teachers (for non-performance) are almost always overturned due to the affiliations between strong teachers unions and political forces in the state. This injects a deep sense of hopelessness and lack of ambition among these officers.

For any issues pertaining to improvement of the physical infrastructure, they have to make recommendation to the Panchayat Unions and District Collectorate, in addition to the DEEO. They have no power to approve any such work. All the AEOs we met expressed this sense of powerlessness. This powerlessness has a ripple effect to the lower levels as well. Schools HMs and teachers often stated that they did not think it worth mentioning their problems to the inspection officers because they did not think anything would come of it. This, in effect, undermines the authority of these inspection officers over the schools and teachers they supervise.

Lastly, the mechanism by which these officers are recruited seriously compromises the accountability of teachers and schools that the AEOs and AAEOs are responsible for. Since these officers are senior HMs usually from the same area, they often have prior associations with the teachers, HMs and schools in their jurisdiction. This collegiality with the very same people they are expected to supervise and hold accountable, weakens the system of accountability for which they are responsible.

Accountability

The upshot of the current district administration and school management set-up with its weak system of school supervision described above is that there is little or no accountability in the system – at the level of teachers, schools, blocks and districts. With no formal monitoring and evaluation of levels of student learning, there is no way to know how well or poorly the system of education is accomplishing its ultimate goal – that of teaching a child how to read, write and contribute meaningfully to society. The lack of accountability is a feature stressed by every state and district level official who was interviewed. Unfortunately, almost no one had any suggestions of how the problem could be addressed. One unanimous opinion expressed by most education officials as a major factor contributing to the (poor) quality of primary education was the ‘poor quality’ of teachers who suffered from apathy towards their profession and an overall lack of commitment. The fieldwork conducted during this study seemed to confirm and support this view. In most of the schools, which we visited without prior notice, we found little or no instruction taking place. If this is indeed a problem, it has to be dealt through sufficient mechanisms of accountability and strong practices of teacher management in the organization. The following section will take a closer look at the issues of teachers in the districts covered by this study.
Teachers: Well-paid, often trained, empowered but also oft-absent and apathetic

As in most states and most countries, teachers’ salaries constitute the largest share of the education budget in Tamil Nadu. (Some officials put the figure at 95% - but no exact numbers were made available for this report). Salaries, often considered an important source of incentive, do not appear to be a strong motivator of performance (in India). (World Bank, 1997). Poor performance of teachers would thus contribute to a major lack of efficiency in the system.

Teachers are paid according to standard government salary scales. Every teacher interviewed in the course of this study expressed satisfaction with their salary and other employment benefits. A 3rd standard teacher interviewed in a poor village in Madurai district earned a gross income of about Rs. 9000 per month, and by his own admission, many of the students coming to his class, had family incomes of about Rs. 500 per month! By several accounts, teachers in rural and semi-urban area schools are often the richest in the community. In Villupuram district teachers are purportedly running side businesses as money lenders!

Like all government servants, teachers are entitled to many different types of vacation (casual, medical, religious, surrender) in addition to all national holidays, summer and winter vacations, and even some local holidays. Teacher absenteeism within this system of approved vacations is rampant. Almost every master teacher attendance register examined in the course of this study revealed some teacher or other in every school absent on casual or medical leave every single day! Several teachers, including HMs, avail of the provision of “medical leave” which can run into weeks at a time. By their own admission it is “not hard to get a medical certificate” which is mandatory for medical leave to be approved.

In terms of capacity building of teachers - over the last decade the system of in-service training has been considerably strengthened. With the formation of DIETs and BRCs there is formal system of teacher training in place. Although not all teachers are given equal amount of training, most teachers feel that they get an adequate amount of training, if not “too much”. The only subject they feel they need more training is in teaching of English, but the problems there go beyond training and lie almost solely in a lack of fluency in the language.
One other issue that surfaced was teacher placement and transfers. According to interviews held with AEOs, **any request for a transfer by a teacher MUST be approved** (provided there is a vacancy in the receiving school). This obviously results a high rate of transfer out of schools in remote areas and unavailability of teachers willing to serve in already underserved areas thus underscoring the issue of inequitable distribution of resources.

The entire system of teacher accountability seems to have been further weakened by the presence of strong teachers unions, which enjoy political clout. Interviews with several officials at the state, district and block level reveal that the teachers in Tamil Nadu are an empowered lot, which is backed by strong teachers union. This has resulted in the district officials feeling completely powerless to take any strong action against teachers for absenteeism, unprofessional behavior or just plain non-performance of their basic teaching duties. Members of the BRCs and DIETs complained that they could not take action against teachers who would not attend even mandatory training programmes. Since this study could not meet with members of teachers’ organizations, it cannot make recommendations on how to deal with this particular situation. Needless to say, however, **all recommendations later in this report will have to be planned and implemented with appropriate involvement of, and negotiations with, such organizations.**

**Material Resources of Schools and Classrooms**

There are two basic categories of material inputs that add to the quality of the primary schooling experience: physical infrastructure and classroom learning inputs. This study looked at both aspects of a school’s material resources. Tamil Nadu has made considerable inroads in addressing infrastructural inputs over the last several years, and the effect can be seen. A recent National Sample Survey found that lack of access to schooling is no longer cited as a significant factor in explaining non-enrollment and non-attendance (Tilak 1999). DPEP districts have greatly improved children’s access to schooling by these investments (Aggarwal 1999, DPEP State Project Directorate 2001). However, this study shows that there are still unmet needs that do impact attendance, enrollment, and completion rates.

**Physical Infrastructure**

Physical infrastructure includes adequate buildings with classrooms that allow instruction to take place without disruption and have enough space for the learners to participate in activities, clean and well-swept floors, well-ventilated spaces, latrines for girls and boys, drinking water, and enough physical space for learners to engage in physical activity on campus grounds.

**Classrooms: Cramped and Ill-Suited for Instruction.** While Tamil Nadu has made inroads in improving the physical infrastructure of their primary schools, much more is needed. Several classrooms in the schools we visited were held outside due to lack of space. Indeed, in Madurai East P.U. Middle School, Vandiyur, 3 classes were held outside because of lack of space in the buildings – while the school had recently found the funds to build a computer lab. While having a computer lab is laudable, the most impressive element of that example is the fact that resources were successfully mobilized.
In addition, most of the classrooms that we visited had extremely poor ventilation, walls mired with dirt, and lacked enough seating space for students to be able to move around and complete activities. One school that had a cost-effective design that also allowed for good ventilation was A. Chettiarpatti in Madurai. However, almost every other school we observed had cramped conditions that made learning difficult. Classrooms were also not cleaned; in one school students were actually asked to sweep the floors with their hands upon our arrival.

Most schools in Tamil Nadu, as many as 80%, are multi-grade classrooms.¹ This not only encompasses schools where one teacher is responsible for more than one class, but also where more than one teacher must teach in the same classroom. At least half of the classrooms we visited hosted more than one class. Around 60% of such classrooms had small wooden panels to “divide” the classes; however, they often were ineffective as the noise from the other classes caused disturbance to the learners. Teaching under such conditions is nearly impossible. Teachers

¹ Interview with Dr. S. Chandrasekheran, State Project Director, DPEP Chennai, 19/3/02.
must compete not only with disturbance caused by their own students, but also by activities going on in other classes.

**Latrines: Lack of Latrines Causes Attendance Problems.** Separate toilet facilities for girls and boys are extremely important factors in enrollment and attendance in primary schooling (Haq and Haq 1998). We also saw this in our observations. Of the nearly 20 schools visited, only two had latrines for students. One of these schools had separate latrines for girls and boys, whereas the other had a single latrine that was in poor condition, without a door or water. Thirteen of the schools visited lacked latrines for students.

This lack of toilets has severe ramifications for the learning process. Teachers often mentioned that the reason for discrepancies between recorded class attendance and actual observed attendance was because several students had to go to the village or home to access a toilet. In addition, parents are more likely to send their daughters to school when there are separate facilities for girls and boys.

**Drinking Water: Very Rare but Necessary.** Only 2 of the schools that we visited had drinking water available on school grounds. It was often, just as in the case of latrines, cited as a reason for children leaving school in the middle of the day. Adequate drinking water facilities are crucial as they impact enrollment, in addition to the aforementioned effect on attendance. The heat in cramped village schools is extreme, especially with the lack of ventilation. Water is necessary in order for children to be able to concentrate and learn at their best ability.

**Classroom Learning Inputs**

Madurai and Villupuram had many of the required classroom learning inputs. Nearly every child we saw had a complete set of textbooks, as well as a slate. The only exception to this was Salamedu PUES in Villupuram, in which only 2 students had textbooks. The students and teacher explained by saying that the rest of their books had fallen apart or gotten lost. However, many important inputs were not adequately provided.

**Poor Provision of Teachers.** The most critical input into the classroom is the teacher. 80% of the classrooms in Tamil Nadu have students of more than one grade. Teachers face large pupil-teacher ratios (in some classes that we visited, teachers were responsible for nearly 80 students). In spite of recent state level reforms that have improved the appointing process and made recruitment and selection of teachers more merit-based, vacancies are a large problem, particularly in rural areas that are far from larger towns. A common complaint made was that once a rural post is filled, the teacher often requests a transfer to a larger town or closer to their home. Most of the AEOs that we interviewed agreed with this fact, and said that they usually grant transfers when the requested position opens, even if a teacher has served in one post for less than six months.

Rural schools are most disadvantaged as a result of this process, as those posts are more difficult to fill and keep filled for a longer period of time.
**Resourceful Use of Blackboards.** Every classroom we visited had a blackboard. When teachers needed additional space than that provided by the blackboard, they used several innovative methods to make some. For instance, several teachers painted black paint on the walls of the classrooms, and would use that as a blackboard. Another example is that teachers would use wooden classroom dividers as a space to write multiplication tables on if needed.

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**Noon meals.** A surprising element of the study was the finding that not all children receive free noon meals. Noon meals are given to the poorest children in the school (in many cases, most of the student body qualified for the meals). In addition, the noon meal attendant distributes the meals by morning attendance, to ensure that only children who attend school in the morning receive the free food.

**Uniforms: Free but Rarely Worn.** Uniforms were in shorter supply. Not all children receive uniforms; the recipients of uniforms are determined by family income. In general, most of the schools we observed gave uniforms to the same children who qualified for noon meals. The students only receive one uniform, which according to teachers and HMs becomes quite tattered by the end of the year. Therefore many schools require the students wear uniforms only one or two days of the week. In addition, another common complaint was that the size of many of the uniforms did not fit the children and made it impractical for them to wear.

The issue of uniforms needs a closer look by the government to determine whether it’s an efficient investment of resources. Because many schools do not make wearing uniforms mandatory for the majority of the year, it may be more cost-efficient to abandon this scheme and mobilize those funds for more meaningful interventions that would have a larger impact.

**Teaching Learning Materials.** DTERT has emphasized the importance of using additional teaching learning materials (TLM) other than textbooks in recent years. Teaching learning aids are extremely important in the learning process, as they supplement children’s knowledge and recognition of content covered in the textbook curriculum. Most of the classrooms visited had TLM to some capacity on the walls, though many of them were placed higher than the students’ eye levels (so they were not able to really see the materials). In addition, during surprise visits most of the teachers were not using any TLM. However, upon seeing that they had visitors, almost all teachers would take teaching learning aids out of locked cupboards. It did not appear that TLMs are used much in every day instruction.
Teachers supposedly receive Rs. 500 per year to spend on making and buying materials that aid the instructional process. However, several of the teachers we interviewed mentioned that they either have not received the Rs. 500 for this year, or it is often not enough. There were two main ways of dealing with this situation: either teachers spent their own money on buying materials for TLMs, or they did not and subsequently their classes did not have that resource.

Other teaching learning aids, such as audio cassette players, were found even in large rural classrooms that did not have electricity – warranting a questioning of their pertinence.

**Best Practices.** In both districts there were examples of innovative methods of overcoming a lack of material resources. These generally relied upon bridging partnerships between schools and the community or parents. PTAs, panchayats, village education committees, and wealthy individuals all were found to have been involved in upgrading the physical infrastructure of the schools. This is discussed further in the “Community and Parent Participation” section below.

**Learning and Teaching**
Our study focused on the effects of the changes in classroom inputs on classroom practices. Classroom inputs are as essential as material inputs in achieving quality schooling. Classroom inputs include curriculum improvements, instructional practices, and teacher development opportunities. All of these inputs into improving learning and teaching have gone to scale in Tamil Nadu.

**Curriculum Development and Instructional Materials.**
Many positive developments have recently taken place through the DPEP Directorate in Chennai. While the curriculum itself cannot be changed due to the centralized nature of curriculum development (World Bank 1997, PROBE 1999), several teachers’ handbooks have been developed to address deficiencies in the curriculum. These teachers’ handbooks are laudable, and address limitations such as the fact that Tamil Nadu textbooks currently are written from a middle-class point of view that may exclude the marginalized children found in many government primary schools (Clarke 1998). Such limitations can have major consequences for student achievement (Singh 1995, PROBE 1999, Reimers 2000).

Another positive aspect of these reforms is that they have included teachers in the reform process. Research and experience has shown that curriculum changes are successful when made with input and feedback from teachers. This link is crucial, because the success of the reform is dependent upon teachers to implement those changes in the classroom (Fuller & Clarke 1994, Reimers 2000, Taylor & Mulhall 2001).

We were exposed to many such improvements, and will highlight representative samples that demonstrate the innovation and limitations of them.
**Teacher’s Handbooks and “Hotspot” Manuals: Good Intentions but not too helpful.** Additional support materials for teachers, such as handbooks that are aligned with the curricula in each subject, are being designed (DPEP State Project Directorate 1999). These support materials are intended to make teaching the curriculum easier for teachers by giving examples of activities that can be implemented in their classrooms.

There are several positive elements in these new teachers’ aids. Firstly, they are being designed in a participatory manner that attempts to address the realities faced by Tamil Nadu’s teachers. Teachers are now incorporated into the process of developing both teacher’s handbooks and manuals addressing current “hotspots” in instruction. In fact, the authors of the Standard V English Teacher’s Handbooks are primary and middle school teachers. The goal is to show teachers “how to prepare less expensive but more effective teaching learning material” (DPEP State Project Directorate 1999: iii). In addition, each lesson was tested by teachers in village schools to determine their effectiveness. The “hotspots” in the recent manual were identified by teachers as areas in the curriculum that they had difficulty teaching.

Secondly, the handbooks aim to impart child-centered teaching techniques that engage and motivate the students. The preface to the Standard V English Teacher’s Handbook states that it aims to “instill interest and enthusiasm to learn” and base content material on “instances and practices from day to day life” (DPEP State Project Directorate 1999: iii). Such stated intentions are important; they are the first step in realizing change in the classroom teaching learning methodology used.

These goals are laudable, especially as many teachers had found the earlier changes in curricula to be difficult to keep up with. By demystifying the instructional goals and clearly relating them to the basic competencies, the Handbooks and “Hotspots” manuals are a good attempt at transforming classroom practices.

**Drawbacks to the Curriculum Overhaul**

Despite these important improvements, there are drawbacks to the recently redesigned Teacher’s Handbooks, which belie the state of the curriculum overhaul efforts. These limitations are significant because they undermine the investment made in such improvements.

- Many teachers in multigrade classrooms find that they cannot apply the techniques into the classroom reality they face everyday. Over half of the teachers we interviewed appreciated the handbooks, and said that they do not need to be improved. However, when we asked whether they could actually implement certain activities in the handbooks, most teachers said that they could not because they either did not have the resources (scissors, glue, colored paper) that were required, or because their classes were too big. Despite the investment and participatory approach adopted in developing these handbooks, the activities still did not apply to teacher’s contexts and realities. This shows

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2 The Manual that addresses “Hotspots” in teaching the curriculum is actually written in Tamil. Therefore the exact title is not known; this report refers to the manual as the DIET officials and translators did.

3 Interview with DIET Senior Lecturer, Kallupatti, 19/3/02
that the policymaker-teacher gulf is still large, and undermines quality improvement efforts in Tamil Nadu.

- Many teachers don’t actually use the techniques as they aim to. An emphasis on teachers completing weekly lesson plans has been made alongside the publications of the teacher’s handbooks and hotspot manuals. AEOs and BRC supervisors routinely check lesson plans during each visit, and place much importance on the existence of such lesson plans.

- This emphasis is not well placed. Completed, detailed, written lesson plans do show that teachers have invested time into developing their weekly plan. But they do not mean that teachers actually teach what they have written. In several of the classes observed, the teachers did not conduct some of the most vital activities that they had written in their lesson plans. Furthermore, this is easy to do, because most of the time the lesson plans is just copied verbatim from the handbooks. None of the teacher’s interviews composed their lesson plan in their own words. They all simply copied what was written word for word. This makes using a completed lesson plan as an indicator for quality problematic. A completed lesson plan does not equate to teachers understanding the purpose of conducting a certain activity or the benefits of really thinking through their lessons before leading a class.

**Instructional Practices Need Drastic Improvement.** 70% of the classrooms that we made surprise visits to had no instruction taking place at the time of our visit. Several times we happened upon teachers with a stick and reading a magazine in their hands, while their students played outside.

In addition, the instructional activities that we did witness were largely drill-based procedures, where the teacher either taught the children a song or ordered the children to repeat an oral dictation/spelling after her. When student participation was solicited, it was largely to give a rote answer to a question or to read out the text from the textbook. In essence, the pedagogy did not require students to actively engage in the learning process.

The “Progress Performance and Achievements of DPEP” book that describes successes of DPEP gives the framework for instructional improvement (DPEP State Project Directorate 2001). Examples such as “recitation of Tamil and English” and “Doing all the exercises given at the end of all the lessons” and “exercise to read and write Tamil and English without any mistake” denote that by following those principles will ensure improvement the achievement level of all students of a school” (DPEP State Project Directorate 2001: 42). However, our classroom observations found that they will not necessarily improve student learning. In fact, in the classrooms we observed, they were not helping students learn.

Students in these classrooms were definitely given the opportunity to read and write Tamil and English without any mistake. In the classrooms where we did observe instruction, we often saw children copying compositions from the blackboard onto their slate. However, they were not asked to write text on their own.
Informal Assessments show that Students are not Learning

Informal assessments of student were conducted in order to ascertain whether students were mastering basic literacy and numeracy skills as covered in the curriculum. In each visit we asked students to read and write text from lessons that they had completed throughout the year. Being that it was the end of the school year, the students should have completed their entire textbooks. However, many of the students that we spoke to lacked the ability to read and write words from the first several lessons in their Tamil, English, and EVS books. In several classrooms we asked students to write a word that they had learned. In many cases they were not able to write a word from hearing it, even if they had had it written correctly in their composition book (these words were simple words like “banana” in Tamil). Therefore they lacked functional reading and writing skills, while their composition books did show that they fulfilled the DPEP requirement.

Teacher Development: Good systems in place, but lacking in effectiveness.

Tamil Nadu has invested heavily in improving preservice and inservice teacher education. As a result many of the key structures necessary for sound, sustainable, and effective teacher training are in place. However, they are not working as planned, and are risking being too great in quantity.

Overview of Key Developments: Preservice Training

Preservice teacher training has been revamped in Tamil Nadu. Actual teaching experience is stressed. Students spend forty days during each year of the two-year program in a primary classroom; fifteen of those days are spent observing instruction in local classrooms, and twenty-five days are spent teaching in classrooms under the guidance of teachers. DIET Principals also stress the action research projects that teaching students undertake as well as the range of courses that students take, which vary from educational psychology to management. DIET lecturers and students have been published in teacher development journals.

These elements are beneficial and crucial in the establishment of successful preservice education programs. The teaching practicum experience is especially pertinent. We observed student teachers teaching in large, crowded single-classroom multigrade schools (cite pictures). These students were therefore gaining the exposure to the practical realities that they will have to deal with once they begin teaching on their own.

Drawbacks to the Preservice Trainings

- Multigrade teaching is not a part of the curriculum. It should be, as over 80% of classrooms in Tamil Nadu are multigrade classrooms. Both preservice and inservice teacher trainings should include multigrade teaching components.
- Most DIET lecturers do not have experience teaching at the primary level, and therefore cannot adequately prepare their students for the realities they will face. DIET lecturers were upfront about these limitations, but did not know how to overcome them.

Overview of Key Developments: Inservice Training
Inservice training has been completely revamped in Tamil Nadu. There are differences in DPEP and non-DPEP districts, but both use the cascade model of teacher training. In the cascade model DTERT trainers teach DIET officials in Chennai, who in turn hold trainings for BRC supervisors or Resource trainers, who in turn train groups of teachers. This section will analyze DPEP training models, since this will be implemented in all districts under SSA. Teachers also receive a large amount of inservice training, around 20 days per year. Most of this training time is spent on three day trainings at the BRCs, on such topics as “Evaluation”, “Activity-based Teaching”, and Joyful Learning. The methodology of most of the inservice trainings was a lecture-based format, where teachers observe a trainer teaching a class or showing techniques. They do not usually have the opportunity to actually practice the methods themselves.

However, DTERT is attempting to change this, albeit unsuccessfully. DIET trainings of Resource trainers/BRC supervisors that were observed were small and allowed for a high degree of participation from the learners. Teachers actually spent 2 of 3 days working in groups designing lessons, conducting model lessons to the group, and then receive constructive criticism. The participants had a clear idea of the principles being taught in the training, as they actually went through the motions necessary to teach such lessons in the classroom.

Whether block-level trainings are conducted this way is altogether another matter. The trainings observed for this study were not conducted in a participatory manner; rather they involved teachers observing/listening to a lecturer and not actually implementing the instructional techniques themselves. Research has shown that trainings must allow participants to model and simulate the methods themselves before they return to their classrooms and implement the new technique learned (Reynolds 1992, Villegas-Reimers 1996).

While teachers’ level of education varied from 12th standard to B.Ed., all teachers interviewed had received inservice trainings. Most teachers interviewed had received a two-year diploma in teaching, which is now given by the DIETs.

The only training that teachers requested was additional training in English. Most teachers could read and write English, but were not proficient at speaking. To progress in the global economy, it's crucial that primary school children are able to speak, read, and write fluently in English.

Tamil Nadu’s improvements to inservice training are informed by the expansive research base that supports those ideals. Experience in India and around the world has shown that the following characteristics are shared in effective teacher development programs:

- Content knowledge is important in order to teach subject matter to children well
- Knowledge of child cognitive development and how children learn is important in order to teach for comprehension
- Teachers need to have the opportunity for analysis and reflection on their teaching
- Peer networks are integral in addressing teacher motivation and improvement in teaching practices

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Action research projects by teachers are important as they get teachers thinking critically about teaching issues (Lieberman and Miller 2000, Darling-Hammond 2000).

**Drawbacks to the Inservice Training Process**

The inservice training process is not leading to the desired outcomes, as indicated by the previous “Instructional Practices” section and the “Informal Assessment of Student Learning” section below.

- The cascade model has practical limitations. The over reliance on the each trainers competencies can be problematic. Several trainings observed for this study showed that the trainers actually did not understand the concepts they were supposed to train people on. For instance, one BRC supervisor was conducting a training for around fifty teachers on multigrade instruction. However, he lacked an understanding of multigrade instruction – and therefore showed them a flawed methodology. The lesson consisted of a Class 3 and Class 4 being taught by the same teacher. While he was teaching one class, he ignored the other and did not give them an assignment – thereby not engaging in effective multigrade teaching. Because he failed to understand the multigrade techniques, the participating teachers did not leave the training having learned effective multigrade teaching techniques.

- The pedagogy of the teacher trainings is in opposition to the pedagogy of instruction that they aim to transfer to teachers. Most trainings are rote lectures at the CRC and BRC level.

- The lack of decentralization in decision-making regarding the inservice training sessions. Districts are told when to hold them and on what content, with very little flexibility. Several DIET officials mentioned this as a problem.

- A common complaint from HMs and teachers was that there was too much training. DIET officials also mentioned hearing this. They felt that the high amount of training actually took away from their ability to teach. This is important to note, as a large number of funds are being spent on trainings.

- DIETs are understaffed and under-resourced. The DIET in Villupuram had only seven lecturers in 2001-2002, whereas the year before nineteen lecturers were posted there. Most had requested and been delivered transferred, because they did not want to be in such a rural area. In addition, the Principal was upfront and said that all the seven remaining lecturers had requested transfers, and were waiting for them to be granted. Therefore rural areas are more marginalized, because the quality of the preservice and inservice trainings will decrease with less personnel resources.

**Community and Parent Participation**

Community involvement in the school’s management and functioning was key in obtaining material improvements. We saw many examples that highlighted the potential of community and parent participation. For instance, the PTA of Madurai East P.U. Middle School, Vandiyur
demanded a computer lab. They themselves took charge of mobilizing the funds. In addition, the PTA provided the school with screens to divide multigrade classrooms, as well as tables and chairs for teachers. At M. Kuchipayalam elementary school in Villupuram, the Panchayat provided two teachers, constructed separate latrines for girls and boys, and drinking water for the school.

At Mandapam PUES in Villupuram a local community member, and alumnus of the school, spoke with us. She donated a clock and flowers to the school, and remains involved with the functioning of the school. In addition, she visits the school often and remains in contact with the teachers and their needs. Such community support in a school with only 2 teachers is important.

However, community and parent support cannot be the end solution. School records from Mandapam showed that roughly 50% of the school year, one teacher was absent – meaning that all five standards were taught by a single teacher. This occurred despite the strong links with the community. Community and parent involvement is therefore not synonymous with accountability and monitoring. Linkages between systems of monitoring and accountability, and community participation need to be made.
Recommendations

Education Administration

Based on the assessment of the district administration and school management described above, this study makes a few recommendations. These recommendations are being made with the view that most of the supervision, capacity building and district administration pieces are already in place. What is needed is some redistribution of duties along clearly demarcated boundaries, better-defined job descriptions and tightening of systems already in place. The recommendations can be summarized into the following categories:

- Redefine role and job description of HMs; move towards School-based management
- Re-engineer supervision structure – demarcate administrative and academic supervision; make inspection officers responsible for administrative supervision and BRCs responsible for academic issues
- Institute formal pre-service training for HMs and Inspection Officers to bolster institutional capacity building
- Institute supervision mechanisms reinforcing good teacher management and strengthen accountability systems
- Give monitoring responsibilities to local communities
- Strengthen the role and capacity of DIETs to handle additional tasks of grassroots capacity building

The aforementioned recommendations are described in further detail below.

Redefine role and job description of Head Masters (Mistresses)

Educational specialists and policy makers in South Asia are presently showing increasing interest in the possible ways of strengthening ‘school-based management’ (Göttelmann-Duret, 2000). This would be hard to achieve without professional training and formal authority required to perform supervisory and management functions in an effective way.

The role of the HMs should be redefined to completely separate them from the role of a teacher except in some extenuating circumstances. The advantages of this would be two-fold – the first being that it would free the time available to HMs to perform the tasks of school-based management more effectively, and the second being that it would create the distance necessary between him/her and the teachers to exercise supervisory authority over the teachers.

The selection process for HMs should also be made more rigorous. Most countries in the Indian Subcontinent (Nepal, India, Pakistan) do not have a system of selection and preparation for the post of HM. An exception is Sri Lanka, where a teacher sits for an examination and receives special training before being promoted to the post of a principal (Göttelmann-Duret, 2000). Yet HMs’ teaching experience and the number of training courses they attend have been found to be
related to higher student achievement in studies in Egypt, Indonesia and Paraguay (Heyneman and Loxley 1983; Sembiring and Livingstone 1981; Fuller 1987 in World Bank, 1997). Varghese (1994) suggests that headmasters will need training in general administration (especially accounting and record maintenance), institutional planning, monitoring school activities, dealing with panchayat members, linking schools with the community, and planning for equipment (World Bank, 1997). In addition, in order for them to supervise classroom teaching and learning, they should also be trained in teacher evaluation and kept abreast of all new teaching methods that teachers are being trained on.

Above all, HMs should feel responsible for his/her school. This can come about only if he/she is empowered to take action at least in some matters pertaining to the school. This should be done in conjunction with the involvement of Village Level Committees. At the end of the day, it is schools that have a strong “internal accountability system”, i.e. a clear, strong internal focus on issues of instruction, student learning and expectations for teacher and student performance that will be the most effective (Elmore, 2002).

Re-engineer supervision structure

Based on the evidence presented in the pervious section on the assessment of the supervision system, there seems to be a clear need to re-design the current set-up of supervision, which involves redefinition of the role of the AEO. This needs to be done for two main reasons – the first being that the AEOs are overburdened and therefore unable to execute the important task of school supervision and inspection effectively; and the second being that there seems to be a need to separate the supervision of teachers and teaching from that of supervision of school and the attendant administrative tasks.

This solution seems almost logical with the existing structure of BRCs already in place. While the BRCs have been instituted to perform academic support functions for teachers including supervision, they are not responsible for teacher evaluation and decision-making as far as teacher training is concerned. Those tasks still belong with the AEO. There is thus some level of vagueness in the role of BRC supervisors. What would be advisable would be a complete division of supervisory duties into school monitoring and instructional support. The former would be handled solely by the AEOs and the latter solely by BRCs. The two teams would work in conjunction to present the DEO with a comprehensive picture of the schools they commonly oversee.

Capacity building and training of AEOs and BRC personnel is essential. As inspection officers, AEOs should receive special pre-service orientation school supervision, appropriate techniques to develop capabilities in educational administration, planning and management. BRC personnel should receive training in teacher professional development, teacher evaluation, new methods of teaching that teachers are being trained on. The role of the BRC personnel should be patterned on the “Master Teachers” of Sri Lanka where innovations in teacher supervision, monitoring and support is instructive (Göttelmann-Duret, 2000). In addition to the system of school-level supervision described in the previous section, a culture of self-evaluation of teachers should be promoted. This along with other teacher accountability measures will be listed in the next section.
To counter the issue of the collegial attitude of inspection officers towards the schools they supervise, a possible suggestion would be to change the recruitment procedures of inspection officers. In a system that existed in Tamil Nadu until a few years ago, and which is still in place in some other states such as Uttar Pradesh, Inspection officers are hired through direct selection by the Public Service Commission. A candidate for direct recruitment must possess a bachelor’s degree and a degree in education or a “Licentiate” diploma (Carron, De Grauwe, Govinda, 1998). Not being ex-HMs will help these officers to perform their duties in a more impartial and objective manner. In addition, however, these inspection officers should also receive the special pre-service orientation training described above.

**Reinforcing good teacher management and monitoring**

The main trouble with the current set-up of teacher management in Tamil Nadu seems to be that even though the system of education administration is decentralized to a fair extent, and continues to be decentralized further under the SSA scheme, the management of teachers is, in reality, still a state and to a lesser extent, a district level function. As a result teachers are not answerable to anyone at the lower levels of school, village and block. The salary of teachers, recruitment, placement, transfers and promotion are all handled by authorities much higher than the village, block and often even the district level. This does not bode well if teachers have to be made answerable to the communities which they serve.

The state of Madhya Pradesh in India has recently instituted teacher management reforms where almost all responsibilities relating to teaching staff management, except post allocation, have been devolved to sub-district level i.e. block, village and school levels. This addresses not only the issue of teacher accountability but also the problem of unavailability of teachers for remote and “difficult” schools. Delegation of power to the panchayats has created a new cadre of non-tenured teachers called Shiksha Karmis. The teachers are hired by the school and local bodies, usually belong to the local area, are on probation for the first 3 years and may not be transferred for that period. This scheme has been a success thus far. **The decentralization process in Madhya Pradesh has been exemplary and sets a positive example for other states in India.** It would be beneficial for Ministry of Education officials to visit Madhya Pradesh to further observe the process. Even if such a major overhaul of the teacher recruitment process is not instituted, at the very least, teachers should be expected to serve for at least a year or two in a school before they can apply for a transfer. Sri Lanka also has a transfer and promotion policy that requires teachers to teach in “difficult” areas for a minimum period.

Formal measures of in school monitoring of teachers should be instituted. Like in Sri Lanka, these may include maintenance of a Teacher Record book which tracks the performance of a teacher through his/her career and contains annual performance reviews by the HM. Additionally, there should be a system of performance appraisal prior to the promotion of a teacher to the next salary grade instead of the automatic promotion currently in place (based on years of experience). This appraisal should be the responsibility of a team comprising the HM, BRC supervisor, and VEC members. There should be transparency and objectivity in this process. There should also be a system of self-appraisal and evaluation. Ultimately, internal accountability precedes external
accountability and is a precondition for any process of improvement (Elmore, 2002).

Teachers should be trained to promote positive attitudes towards supervision, and self-appraisal. In addition, teachers and HMs should feel responsible for their own professional growth. They must have the option of attending a training they feel they would benefit from. The decision of in-service training should not sit squarely with the academic supervisor. Ostensibly, such measures that would enhance teacher accountability will be difficult to implement in the face of opposition from teachers unions. Since much of the clout of teachers’ unions comes from political affiliations, the government must decide whether they want to compromise the system of primary education and thus the future of the state, or stand up to such opposition in an effort to inject some measure of accountability in a system where there is none.

Empower local communities to monitor and supervise

By far the most significant recommendation is to empower local bodies to monitor the functioning of the school and teachers that are meant to serve their communities. As stated earlier, a new trend in supervision stresses the development of monitoring at the school level covering three complementary phenomena – a shift in responsibility of supervision to the school head, a greater reliance on self-monitoring by the school staff and the increased involvement of the community (Carron, De Grauwe, Govinda, 1998). There is much the community can do in ways big and small to strengthen the system of supervision, monitoring and accountability.

With the strong push towards decentralization under the newly launched SSA scheme, the education system is looking to the community for participation in the functioning and monitoring of their schools. The community ownership is central to the SSA programme. However, it seems the districts are as yet unclear how SSA will actually become a movement and will be different than other programmes of similar nature implemented in the past. (Mehta)

But there are several caveats to the successful implementation of such an initiative. For effective local-level planning and administration, capacity at the grassroots level needs to be built up (Srilekha Majumdar, 1999). “There is a lack of organizational mechanism to institutionalize the capacity that is created. In the absence of such mechanisms, the local level units will continue to depend on higher level institutions...Therefore, to sustain the efforts made towards decentralization, there is a need to institutionalize local level planning competencies and withdrawal of central and state government initiatives in a planned manner” (Varghese, 1996). Thus, this involves a sea change in the cultural landscape and will be slow. There are also some practical preconditions that must be satisfied before a society can claim to be ready for decentralization. Such civic capacities and capabilities include among other things basic literacy and numeracy; basic organizational and management skills within the community and an active acceptance of public accountability applied to civic associations, demonstrated by the creation of transparent reporting systems with implementing structures, and training citizens in the use of these systems (McGinn and Welsh, 1999).

Capacity building within local communities is thus a pre-requisite to effective decentralization. Communities must be made aware of how they can and must hold schools, principals and
teachers accountable. It must be impressed on them that teachers and HMs are government servants placed in schools to serve the community, their job being to teach the children belonging to that community. They should be trained on the basic qualities exhibited by an effective school, the meaning of quality education and their constitutional right to demand it for their children. The importance of setting expectations of teachers, HMs, schools and student learning must also be stressed. Strong expectations can influence and shape what a teacher or administrator feels responsible for in his or her work (Abelmann and Elmore, 1999).

When the community understands the importance of simple concepts such as the effect of time for learning in children’s education, they can perform informal supervision of the school. Monitoring could be done on a daily or weekly basis in small, informal measures such as keeping track of the time the school starts and ends, the time lunch breaks and other types of recess start and end, the punctuality of teachers, teacher absenteeism. This monitoring should be conducted in an open, guilt-free and transparent manner. The village communities should report their findings to the school inspection officers at VEC meetings.

One cautionary note about decentralization must be made if it involves reliance on local communities for funding school improvement measures. Provinces and communities have very unequal human and financial resources. If the state does not compensate such inequalities by providing the necessary resources and technical assistance, then decentralization can lead to serious disparities (Caillods in McGinn and Welsh, 1999)

**Strengthen the role and capacity of DIETs**

It is clear from all the aforementioned recommendations that the role of the district training institutions is emerging as a crucial element in capacity building of the education system at the district, block, school and village level. In light of the fact that not all the districts even have a well-staffed, functional DIET (as in Villupuram), serious attention needs to be paid to this aspect. For decentralization to be effective, there has to be resource mobilization at the grassroots level. But a majority of the rural communities are currently are simply not equipped to handle such responsibilities. The current infrastructure of the DIETs is clearly not equipped to handle this mammoth task of capacity building at a grassroots level.

In addition with the strong training structures recommended above for DEEOs, AEOs, HMs and teachers, DIETs simply have to be made more robust to perform all these tasks effectively.

**Learning and Teaching**

There are several sets of recommendations that can improve the quality of the learning and teaching process in Tamil Nadu:

Redefine the method of deciding inservice training content
Adopt a participatory teaching methodology in teacher trainings
Include multigrade instructional techniques in preservice and inservice trainings
Administer a standardized assessment to a sample of students in Standard V every 4 years to
monitor student learning progress
Establish a common examination paper for all Standard III-V completers

Redefine the process of determining inservice training content.
The current state of teacher training, as outlined above, is currently at risk for undermining any gains that could occur from teachers receiving inservice training. Resentment against the trainings is high, not only from teachers but also DIET officials. Not only do teachers find the trainings to take much of their time, but also the inapplicability of the trainings only exacerbates the problem.

DTERT in Chennai mandates when each training should occur and what the topic will be. Often DIETs and trainers do not find out about what trainings they will need to hold until the week before – which was mentioned as a constraint in planning and preparing for a training.

The needs of rural areas differ greatly from the needs of urban areas; and the needs in particular areas of the state vary between regions. Therefore a uniform method of teacher training is not the most efficient method of conducting trainings. It is essential to allow for decentralized decision-making in the determination of teacher training modules. Teachers, HMs, BRC officials, and AEOs should be asked for their input into what trainings they think are needed. Formalized systems should be set into place that allow for this to occur. A set of trainings on different topics should be designed at DTERT, and made available to DIET/BRC/CRC trainers on demand.

The trainings should include trainings on assessment methods, multigrade teaching, innovative methods for teaching maths, etc. They can also become quite specific, one-day trainings on particular topics such as “Teaching fractions” or “Teaching past tense”. The rate of return on this investment will be higher, as the content of the trainings will be more specific and teachers will get more concrete skills out of it.

Adopt a participatory teaching methodology in teacher trainings.
Trainings are currently conducted at odds with the changes they intend to make in the curriculum. Activity-based Teaching trainings are currently conducted in a lecture format – completely antithetical to what is intended. Fundamental changes need to made in the process of training teachers.

A participatory methodology needs to be used in DIET, BRC, and CRC trainings. Such a methodology allows for critical reflection of the techniques being learned and leads to a greater likelihood that the techniques will be adopted in the classrooms (Kanu 1996, Tatro 1997, Villegas-Reimers 1996).

Practically, this means that trainings will emphasize teachers learning various teaching activities, designing their own lesson plans, and then conducting those lessons to classes of children. The training can end with teachers discussing their experiences and limitations to those activities – again to foster critical reflection skills while also getting them thinking about the practical
realities of applying the new techniques in the classroom.

**Include multigrade instruction techniques in preservice and inservice trainings.**
The majority of primary level teachers in Tamil Nadu are responsible for more than one grade in a classroom. However, the current curriculum does not include trainings on how to deal with multigrade instruction. Multigrade instruction requires a different approach than if a teacher is teaching children from only one standard. The observations conducted for this study indicated that most multigrade teachers do not use effective techniques, and as a result only the children of one class is doing meaningful instructional activity at a time. This needs to change.

In addition, multigrade teaching techniques need to be broad and generalizable across subjects. Each subject-specific training, for instance in maths or Tamil, must include sample activities that can be used in multigrade classrooms. Teachers need to be equipped with a range of teaching strategies at their disposal (Little 2001).

In Villupuram various videos with multigrade teaching techniques were shown, that demonstrate different instructional strategies. However, they must be used in tandem with a participatory approach that allows teachers to design and conduct lessons after watching the video.

**Administer a standardized assessment to a sample of students in Standard V every 4 years to monitor student-learning progress.**
The poor quality of schooling evident in Villupuram and Madurai point to the need for knowledge about current levels of student learning. The low levels of student learning that we saw via informal methods of assessment must be verified in order to ascertain levels of student learning. A standardized method of assessment would allow for this to occur.

When thinking about standardized assessments it’s important to remember that they have limitations. Firstly, they can never be treated as sound, absolute, and comprehensive assessments of a student’s knowledge. Variation in an individual student’s score on the same test will exist due to random error, including things such as test conditions or different forms of the same test (Linn & Gronlund 2000). In addition, a student’s performance on a standardized assessment depends largely on the way the test is constructed; for instance children whose first language is a minority language will be disadvantaged on a maths test whose questions involve complex grammar in the dominant language.

It’s therefore important to realize the limitations in the conclusions that can be drawn from achievement test scores. They only measure how well the student performs on that test, and larger conclusions regarding ability can be drawn in a limited manner.

There are two main options of standardized assessment that the State of Tamil Nadu can consider adopting. Both will be discussed in length, and our recommendation will follow.

1. **Administer tests to each individual child, and report scores back to the children and their**
This type of assessment is the one commonly used in the U.S., more so than in other developed countries. It’s used because it has the potential to identify and diagnose student weaknesses/needs in certain areas (Hargreaves 2001). Ideally, obtaining the results of each individual child's level of learning will allow for teachers to identify weaknesses and target instruction towards individual weaknesses. However, in the TN context, this use is most likely limited. Teachers may not analyze their students' scores to the extent necessarily to conduct such an analysis. And, instruction cannot be tailored to individual children because of the demands placed on teachers including large multigrade classrooms. It's also extremely expensive to administer a test to each child. This involves training proctors who would travel to each school and actually administer the test (so that the likelihood of cheating is less). Secondly, parents in TN, many of whom are poor and illiterate, will not use the test results in the manner intended (for them to look at scores, identify their children’s weaknesses, and hold their teachers accountable.

2. Test a sample of students in order to assess general student progress.

Such an assessment does not need to be conducted every year, but every 2 or 4 years - this way costs of administration and test construction are kept down. In addition, real annual student improvement is marginal, and therefore to gauge improvement it is more efficient to administer tests periodically without losing anything (Linn 2000). The data can be reported by district to obtain an overall picture of how each district is performing. The schools should be selected at random. Such assessments have been used in America (the National Assessment of Educational Progress) and Jordan (the International Assessment of Educational Progress).

Jordan began its system of assessment in 1990. Jordan’s use of a monitoring assessment program served several purposes:

- "Establish benchmarks of 13-year-olds’ achievements in mathematics and science
- Show the areas of weakness and strength in each subject
- Compare the performance of students in schools run by different education authorities in Jordan, in different administrative regions and in urban versus rural areas
- Identify certain cognitive processes involved in learning and respond with a view to informing teacher’s preservice and inservice training programs
- Target the negative and positive influences of various classroom practices, out-of-school student activities, and student attitudes on achievement in mathematics and science” (Billeh)

This type of assessment meets the needs of Tamil Nadu, and is politically feasible. It allows the government to monitor student performance, while also giving weight to AEO and BRC inspections and instruction evaluations in analyzing school performance. It's also non-threatening to teachers as the scores cannot be tied to particular teachers or particular schools. In addition, since the scores are not tied to accountability measures, there is less incentive to cheat or take other measures that would undermine the validity of the test.

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By being administered every four years, less money has to be spent on test construction. In fact, two or three versions of a test can be used, and rotated each usage - so that they are repeated every 2 years. There is less of a likelihood that teachers will teach to the test, and the scores will be more valid.

Scores can be used to generalize regarding trends in performance and learning. They will allow for much data to be gathered, if they are administered correctly.
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APPENDIX 1: Interviews

For this study, interviews were conducted with the following eminent personnel of the State Government of Tamil Nadu in Chennai:

- Development Commissioner for the State of Tamil Nadu
- Secretary of School Education for the State of Tamil Nadu
- Director of Elementary Education for the State of Tamil Nadu
- State Project Director of DPEP (and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan)
- Members of the State Education, Research and Training body
- Member of the Planning Commission, Tamil Nadu
- Education Consultant to the Planning Commission, Tamil Nadu
- UNICEF Chennai

At the district level, interviews were conducted in Madurai and Villupuram with the following personnel associated with primary education:

- District Collectors
- District Elementary Education Officers
- District Assistant Education Officers and Additional Assistant Education Officers
- Block Resource Center personnel
- Principals and staff of the District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs)
- Principals of primary and middle schools (about 10 schools in each district)
- Primary school teachers
APPENDIX 2: Model of Educational Effectiveness

- **Inputs**
  - Facilities
  - Teaching Materials
  - Institutional capacity building (teachers, HMs, AEOs, EEOs, and community)
  - Parent and community support

- **Processes**
  - **District Level**
    - Administration and Management
    - Monitoring and Evaluation
    - Accountability
  - Village Level
    - Community participation
  - School Level
    - Monitoring and Evaluation
    - Effective leadership
    - Accountability
  - Classroom Level
    - Effective teaching and learning
    - Student assessment

- **Contextual Factors**
  - Political climate
  - Cultural tendencies
  - Labour groups
  - Social and economic characteristics of students

- **Outputs**
  - High student learning
  - Societal and individual returns
APPENDIX 3: Background Information on DPEP and SSA

The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) have been two ambitious centrally planned and mandated schemes that have shaped the education reform in India and Tamil Nadu in the mid-nineties and in the 21st century respectively. As such an understanding of the basic components and features of these schemes is essential in any study that hopes to assess the primary education system in Tamil Nadu. Also, Villupuram was one of the districts chosen for DPEP in 1996. Both Madurai and Villupuram are now under the newly launched SSA scheme as of April 1, 2002.

A brief report of DPEP in Tamil Nadu (source official website of the government of TN)

District Primary Education Programme is one of the schemes, which strives to attain the goal of 100% literacy by providing quality education and checking drop-outs totally. Dharmapuri, Thiruvannamalai, Cuddalore and Villupuram Districts were selected for the implementation of this scheme under Phase I for a period of 7 years from 1994-95 based on the criteria that female literacy rate of these four districts were below the national average. Under phase II this programme is implemented in Pudukottai, Ramanathapuram and Perambalur districts where total literacy campaign is successful and which are backward in socio-economic conditions in the State.

Achievements

To provide access, District Primary Education Programme has opened 406 new elementary schools with required teachers and additional teachers numbering about 1771 have been posted. In addition it is running 932 part time Alternative Learning School Centers for out of school and drop out children. To increase the infrastructure facilities, District Primary Education Programme has undertaken the construction of 105 Block Resource Centers, 1571 new school buildings, 1495 toilets and provision of drinking water facilities to 1472 schools. Out of the above construction works, 107 buildings were constructed by the community using cost effective technology and innovative designs. The construction work of 299 classroom buildings is in progress. Awareness campaigns and media activities are undertaken with community support for 100% enrolment of all school age children. Community is involved in all school activities and Village Learning Centers are made functional.

In-service training and capacity building programmes to District Primary Education Programme functionaries are undertaken for quality improvement. For this purpose, 106 Block Resource Centers and 993 Cluster Resource Centers are functioning in the districts. Schools are classified based on the performance and academic assistance is given to low performing schools. All teachers are given training in evaluation techniques.

Special Coaching Classes for SC/ST children in 3814 centers and for the education of disabled, Integrated Education for the Disabled is conducted in 106 centers with the help of voluntary agencies and trained teachers.

The enrolment in primary schools in District Primary Education Programme Districts is 14.78 lakhs children. The overall Gross Enrolment Ratio(GER) is 97% with the highest GER of 102% in Thiruvannamalai and the lowest GER of 90% in Perambalur.

The overall completion rate as per the cohort studies 2000-2001 is 60%, the lowest being
55% in Dharmapuri and the highest with 65% in Villupuram. The dropout rate for all is 13% in the seven District Primary Education Programme districts with the highest dropout of 16% in Dharmapuri and the lowest in Cuddalore with 8%.

The repetition at primary level in District Primary Education Programme districts is 27% with the highest repetition of 34% in Ramanathapuram and the lowest with 23% in Villupuram. In phase I districts out of the total project outlay of Rs.16897 lakhs, a sum of Rs.15399 lakhs has been spent upto 28 Feb.2002, the achievement being 91%. Likewise in Phase II a sum of Rs.5567 lakhs has been spent out of Rs.9244 lakhs and the achievement being 60%.

District Primary Education Programme in Phase I districts has been wound up as on March 31.2002 and the scheme of Education for All (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) will be implemented in middle schools. In respect of Phase II districts, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and District Primary Education Programme will function simultaneously for middle and elementary Classes respectively. In both the phases “Education for all” Programmes will be continued in the 7 districts even after the closure of District Primary Education Programme. Schemes have been chalked out to the tune of Rs.1172.50 crores and forwarded to the Government of India.

**Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan – (source: SSA - A framework for Implementation)**

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is a historic stride towards achieving the long cherished goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) through a time bound integrated approach, in partnership with State. SSA, which promises to change the face of the elementary education sector of the country, aims to provide useful and quality elementary education to all children in the 6 -14 age group by 2010. The SSA is an effort to recognize the need for improving the performance of the school system and to provide community owned quality elementary education in mission mode. It also envisages bridging of gender and social gaps.

**Objectives:**

♦ All children in school, Education Guarantee Center, Alternate School, 'Back to School' camp by 2003;
♦ All children complete five years of primary schooling by 2007;
♦ All children complete eight years of schooling by 2010;
♦ Focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life;
♦ Bridge all gender and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007 and at elementary education level by 2010;
♦ Universal retention by 2010.

**Structure for Implementation**

The Central and Slate governments will together implement the SA in partnership with the local governments and the community. To signify the national priority for elementary education, a National Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Mission is being established with the Prime Minister as the Chairperson and the Union Minister of Human Resource Development as the Vice Chairperson. States have been requested to establish State level Implementation Society for DEE under the Chairmanship of Chief Minister Education Minister. This has already been done in many States.
The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan will not disturb existing structures in States and districts but would only try to bring convergence in all these efforts. Efforts will be made to ensure that there is functional decentralization down to the school level in order to improve community participation. Besides recognizing PRIs/ Tribal Councils in Scheduled Areas/ including the Gram Sabha, the States would be encouraged to enlarge the accountability framework by involving NGOs/ teachers, activists/ women's organizations etc.

Coverage and Period
The SSA will cover the entire expanse of the country before March 2002 and the duration of the programme in every district will depend upon the District Elementary Education Plan (DEEP) prepared by it as per its specific needs. However, the upper limit for the programme period has been fixed as ten-years/ i.e./ up to 2010.

Strategies Central to SSA programme

**Institutional reforms** - As part of the SSA, institutional reforms in the States will be carried out. The states will leave to make an objective assessment of their prevalent education system including educational administration, achievement levels in schools, financial issues, decentralization and community ownership, review of State Education Act, rationalization of teacher deployment and recruitment of teachers, monitoring and evaluation, education of girls, SC/ST and disadvantaged groups, policy regarding private schools and ECCE. Many States have already effected institutional reforms to improve the delivery system for elementary education.

**Sustainable Financing** - The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is based on the premise that financing of elementary education interventions has to be sustainable. This calls for a long-term perspective on financial partnership between the Central and the State governments.

**Community ownership** - The programme calls for community ownership of school based interventions through effective decentralization. This null be augmented by involvement of women's groups, VEC members and members of Panchayati Raj institutions.

**Institutional capacity building** - The SSA conceives a major capacity building role for national and state level-institutions like NIEPA / NCERT / NCTE/ SCERT / SIEMAT. Improvement in quality requires a sustainable support system of resource persons.

**Improving mainstream educational administration** - It calls for improvement of mainstream educational administration by institutional development, infusion of new approaches, and by adoption of cost effective and efficient methods.

**Community based monitoring full with full transparency**- The Programme will have a community based monitoring system. The Educational Management Information System (EMIS) will correlate school level data with community-based information from micro planning and surveys. Besides this, every school will have a notice board showing all the grants received by the school and other details.

**Habitation as a unit of planning** - The SSA works on a community based approach to planning with habitation as a unit of planning. Habitation plans will be the basis for formulating district plans.

**Accountability to community**- SSA envisages cooperation between teachers, parents and PRIs, as well as accountability and transparency.

**Education of girls** - Education of girls, especially those belonging to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, will be one of the principal concerns in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.
**Focus on special groups** - There will be a focus on the educational participation of children from SC/ST, religious and linguistic minorities disadvantaged groups and the disabled children.

**Pre Project phase** - SSA will commence throughout the country with a well-planned pre project phase that provides for a large number of interventions for capacity development to improve the delivery and monitoring system.

**Thrust on quality** - SSA lays a special thrust on making education at elementary level useful and relevant for children by improving the curriculum, child-centered activities mid effective teaching methods.

**Role of teachers** - SSA recognizes the critical role of teachers and advocates a focus on their development needs. Setting up of BRC/CRC, recruitment of qualified teachers, opportunities for teacher development through participation in curriculum related material development, focus on classroom processes and exposure visits for teacher are all designed to develop the human resource among teachers.

**District Elementary Education Plans** - As per the SSA framework, each district will prepare a District Elementary Education Plan reflecting all the investments being made in the elementary education sector, with a holistic and convergent approach.

**Components of SSA**
The components of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan includes appointment of teachers, teacher training, qualitative improvement of elementary education, provision of teaching learning materials, establishment of Block and Cluster Resource Centers for academic support, construction of Classrooms and school buildings, establishment of education guarantee centers, integrated education of the disabled and distance education.

**Requirement of Financial Resources For SSA**
According to broad assessments made by the Department of Elementary Education & Literacy, nearly Rs. 60,000 crores additional resources are required from the budget of the Central and the State level Departments over the next ten years. Since SSA is a programme for universalisation of elementary education, the actual requirement of funds can only be worked out after the District Elementary Education Plans are finalized. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has two aspects - 1) It provides a wide convergent framework for implementation of Elementary Education schemes; II) It is also a programme with budget provision for strengthening vital areas to achieve universalisation of elementary education. While all investments in the elementary education sector from the State and the Central Plans will reflect as part of the SSA framework, they will all merge into the SSA programme within the next few years. As a programme, it reflects the additional resource provision for UEE.

**NORMS FOR INTERVENTIONS UNDER SSA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVENTION</th>
<th>NORM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>One teacher for every 40 children in Primary and upper primary schools.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>At least two teachers in a Primary school</td>
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<tr>
<td>School/Alternative facility</td>
<td>Within one Kilometer of every habitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Details</td>
</tr>
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<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Primary Schools/Sector</td>
<td>➢ As per requirement based on the number of children completing primary education up to a ceiling of one upper primary school/section for every two primary schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Rooms</td>
<td>➢ A room for every teacher in Primary &amp; Upper Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ A room for Head Master in upper Primary school / sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free textbooks</td>
<td>➢ To all girls/SC/ST children at primary &amp; upper primary level within an upper ceiling or Rs. 150/- per child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Works</td>
<td>➢ Ceiling of 33% of SSA programme funds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ For improvement of school facilities, BRC/CRC construction.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ No expenditure to be incurred on construction of office buildings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintenance and Repair of School Buildings</td>
<td>➢ Only through school management committees</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Unto Rs. 5000 per year as per a specific proposal by the school committee.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Must involve elements of community contribution.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upgradation of EGS to regular school</td>
<td>➢ Provision for TLE @ Rs. 10,000/- per school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Provision for teacher &amp; classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLE for upper primary</td>
<td>➢ @ Rs. 50,000 per school for uncovered schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>➢ Rs. 2000/- per year per primary/upper primary school for replacement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher grant</td>
<td>➢ Rs. 500 per teacher per year in primary and upper primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher training</td>
<td>➢ Provision of 20 days in service for all teachers, 60 days refresher courses for untrained teachers and 30 day orientation for freshly trained recruits Rs. 70/- per day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training of community leaders</td>
<td>➢ For a maximum of 8 persons in village for 2 days @ Rs. 30/- per day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provision for disabled children</td>
<td>➢ Unto Rs. 1200/- per child for integration of disabled children, as per specific proposal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research, Evaluation, supervision and monitoring</td>
<td>➢ Unto Rs. 1500 per school per year</td>
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<td></td>
<td>➢ By creating pool of resource persons, providing travel grant and honorarium for monitoring, generation of community based data, research studies, cost of assessment and appraisal terms &amp; their field activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Cost</td>
<td>➢ Not to exceed 60% of the budget of a district plan</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Innovative activity for girls' education, early childhood care &amp; education, interventions for children belonging to SC/ST community, computer education specially for upper primary level</td>
<td>➢ Unto Rs. 15 lakhs for each innovative project and Rs. 50 lakhs for a district will apply for SSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block Resource Centers/ Cluster Resource Centers</td>
<td>➢ Rs. 6 lakh ceiling for BRC construction wherever required</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Rs. 2 lakh for CRC construction wherever required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Deployment of up to 20 teacher in a block with more their 100 schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Provision of furniture etc. @ Rs. 1 Lakh for BRC and Rs. 10,000 for a CRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Contingency grant of Rs. 12,500 for a BRC and Rs. 2500 per CRC per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interventions for out of school children</td>
<td>➢ As per norms already approved under Education Guarantee Scheme &amp; Alternative and Innovative Education providing for the following kind of interventions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Setting up Education Guarantee Centers in unserved habitations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Setting other alternative schooling modles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Bridge Courses, remedial courses, Back to School Campus with a focus on mainstreaming out of school children into regular schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SSA in Tamil Nadu

This study was conducted at the very eve of the launch of SSA in Tamil Nadu. Every individual associated with elementary education in the districts was abuzz with hope and excitement about this new scheme. The districts we visited, especially Madurai, seems to have done a good job in the pre-project planning phase. The following excerpt the official website of the government of Tamil Nadu describes some of the planning that has been done.

To implement the scheme in 22 districts at the state, schemes have been chalked out to the tune of Rs.2945.96 crores and forwarded to the Government of India. The assistance under the programme will be in the ratio of 85:15 during the IX plan period, 75:25 during the X plan period and 50:50 thereafter between the Central and State Governments respectively. This scheme will be implemented in the elementary and middle schools and also in 6, 7, 8 standards of high and higher secondary schools. Under this scheme, provision of infrastructure facilities such as construction of class rooms, provision of toilets, drinking water facility, electrification and maintenance of schools, opening of elementary and middle schools, appointment of teachers,
sanctioning grant-in-aid to teachers for procuring teaching aids, etc. will be undertaken. Under this scheme 3060 B.Ed. teachers will be appointed in 306 Block Resource Centres in order to impart in-service training to the teachers.

Under the scheme of Education for all, details of schemes approved during 2001-2002 and schemes to be implemented during 2002-2003 are given below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details of the scheme</th>
<th>Schemes approved in 2001-2002</th>
<th>Schemes to be implemented 2002-2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Elementary Schools opened / to be opened</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Elementary schools upgraded / to be upgraded as middle school.</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>1243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointment of Teachers to new schools</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>1430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointment of Additional Teachers</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>17629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training to Teachers</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>242346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training to Community/VLC members</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>38260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Learning Equipments for new primary schools</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Learning Equipments for new middle schools</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School grant</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>38260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher grant</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>242346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance grants including repairs</td>
<td>9770</td>
<td>17302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction of buildings for Block Resource Centres</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction of class rooms to those having no class rooms</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction of buildings for new elementary school</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>1430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction of additional class rooms</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilet facilities to schools</td>
<td>2510</td>
<td>12399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking water facilities to schools</td>
<td>2367</td>
<td>15177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative education activities – (Rs.50 lakhs per district)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>29 Districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Evaluation, Supervision &amp; Monitoring</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>38260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers for Block Resource Centres</td>
<td>3060 (306 Centres)</td>
<td>636 (106 centres)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To implement this scheme, in 22 districts a sum of Rs.65.42 crores has been allotted during 2001-2002. A sum of Rs.372.99 crores is to be incurred in all districts during 2002-2003. Apart from this a sum of Rs.3.00 crores will be incurred for the establishment of State Institute of Educational Management Administration and Training (SIEMAT) at Chennai during 2002-2003.
APPENDIX 4: Observations of school visits in Madurai District

School: V.Ammmapatti
District: Madurai

Physical Infrastructure:

One school building – one single classroom
No toilets
No drinking water
No compound wall
Open grounds surround school but just off the road
Building in state of disrepair – walls very dirty, need painting; floor broken here and there, chalkboard on all walls
Inadequate space for students
One trunk in classroom for storage
5 classes – grades 1-5 facing diff. Walls (or portion of wall in the case of 2 classes) – each with a separate blackboard

Teacher and student attendance:

3 teachers (2 teachers; 1 HM+teacher) – all female
8 student teachers from neighbourhood DIET (in Kallupatti) in the classroom – all female
Headmistress on leave
Student enrolment – 69 girls + 43 boys = 112 total
Students in attendance – 64 girls + 38 boys = 102 total

Classroom environment

Students not in uniform – some in torn, dirty clothes
Students seem interested – most of them on task
Only whole class activities going on
Student teachers teaching with TLM (charts) they have brought with them
Noise level VERY high – more than one class saying (shouting) words/poem – hard for other classes to concentrate when one class takes off like this

Teacher interview highlights

Would like more TLM – pictures for storytelling; maps
Don’t use teaching guides; only have and show one – on Joyful learning
Main reasons for children not coming to school – child labour during harvest season
Drop-out rate (~4%) and repetition rate (4 repeaters last years) not an issue
English – main area that needs improvement
Main challenges – need 5 classrooms for 5 grades
Last training – Joyful Learning for 5 days at DIET
Find training very useful
Meet with other PU teachers on 3rd Saturday of every month
PTA meeting held once a month – parents are happy
Teachers not very happy with parents’ attitude towards education
School inspector visit – once a month (NOT CORROBORATED)

ANALYSIS:

Lack of separate classrooms an obvious issue
Noise level very high when whole classes start chanting poems, words, etc.
Teachers have not been trained on multigrade teaching techniques
Teachers needed to be prodded for answers to questions about what could be done to improve the quality of the school, classroom
Classroom walls dirty and bare – teachers could have made an effort to make the room clean and pleasant with whatever little they have
Teachers seemed satisfied with what they are getting and are complacent about the lack of quality in the education in that school. They have not thought much about what could be done to improve things other than the one obvious issue of a single classroom for 5 grades.
School: Thiruparankundram Panchayat Union Primary School, Silaiman
District: Madurai

School expected our visit

Physical Infrastructure:
Two constructed school buildings – one with low thatch roof
Grades 3 and 5 separated by wooden partition in building 1
Grades 1, 2 & 4 in thatch roof building – single room; no partitions
2\textsuperscript{nd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} grade have 2 sections
No toilets
No compound wall
Very limited open space around the school
Water pump behind the school

Teacher and student attendance:
7 teachers (6 teachers; 1 HM+teacher) – 4 female, 3 male; Male HM
1 Teacher vacancy – 1\textsuperscript{st} grade
Student enrolment: 155 boys + 157 girls = 312 total
SC/ST enrolment: 48 boys + 49 girls = 97 total (About 1/3\textsuperscript{rd} of total)
PTR: About 1:45
All teachers live in Madurai city
School has a “conductress” who helps around the school – brings absentee children from home

Classroom:
Kids neatly dressed in uniform
Children seated on clean floor, in 2 groups – boys on one side, girls on other with an aisle in the middle

Grade 5 observation highlights: (HM is class teacher)
Science class (Space programs) – teaching with chalkboard, map (on wall – very high up – barely readable), picture of rockets and satellites on wall and textbook

Teacher teaching mostly to front rows of girls side of room
Teacher posing questions now and then – mostly girls raise hands
A girl asks a question once
Boys are mostly uninterested
Teacher reads out of textbook for a length of time – girls are following, boys mostly are not
Teacher picks a girl to step out in front of class and read – girl starts to read in sing-song fashion 2-3 words at a time – class repeats after her – class 3 starts shouting some words together – noise level VERY HIGH – drowns out girl’s voice – most of the class stops repeating – esp. boys
During observation of grade 3 in same classroom – grade 5 teacher hit 2 students

Grade 3 observation:
Math class (Coins and money) – teaching with chalkboard (and colored chalk), actual
Teacher has attention of most of the class
Asks questions – many kids raise hands – both boys and girls picked for answering
Prompts kids to clap after a child answers correctly
Has kids come up to the board to solve problems
Teacher gives examples using names of children in class (girl A wants so-and-so amount from boy B and girl C…)
Most textbooks are in VERY bad shape – front and back covers + many back pages missing, corners of books curled up
Uses coins actively for counting and teaching

Principal Interview highlights:
Need more time to handle administrative tasks – he and teachers spend a lot of their time on admin. tasks.
In his opinion, AEO’s need more time to do a good job of supervising all the schools in their jurisdiction
Has spoken about a new school building (to replace the thatch roof building) to AEO and Panchayat Union.
Is happy with all his teachers
“good teaching practice” equivalent to good marks in exams
Makes very good money (Rs. 14,000 per month gross)
If they report about getting money for TLM, they are told to get donations from PTA
Teachers don’t bring any issues to him because “I can’t do anything”
Attended a “joyful learning” training about 2 years ago
HM/Teachers never have never expressed an interest in going for a particular training
Some training they receive are not practical (e.g. use of audio equipment – due to lack power-cuts, large class problems)
Need more TLM
Parents are not cooperative

ANALYSIS:
Observed some good use of TLM
Kids picked at random were able to read fairly well
HM and teachers making very good money – should work harder at garnering some funds for the school to get some basic infrastructural improvements in place
Girl students washing dishes during the school day
School: Madurai East P.U. Middle School, Vandiyur
District: Madurai

School expected our visit (had small gifts for us and artwork done by students for us!)

School Observations

Physical Infrastructure:
Two constructed school buildings – one 2-storeyed building
Inadequate space for learners – classrooms VERY cramped – poor ventilation
2 classes sitting outside under the tree
No open grounds for physical activity
No toilets
No compound wall
Very limited open space around the school

Teacher and student attendance:
40 teachers – 36 female; 4 male; Female HM
1 Teacher vacancy – 1st grade
Student enrolment: 574 boys + 523 girls = 1097 total
Student attendance: 539 boys + 488 girls = 1027 total
SC/ST enrolment: 202 SC children

Classroom:

Principal Interview Highlights:

Teaches 8th std. English grammar
Satisfied with district officials (DEEO, AEO); serving on District Planning Committee
School received “best school award” for 1999-2000
PTA demanded a computer lab for which they provided funds.
PTA also provided school with screens for dividing multigrade classrooms; and tables and chairs for teachers.
Very happy with her teaching staff (says they are all “like her daughters” – her daughter is actually the 8th grade class teacher – with a classroom separate from the rest of the school on the 1st floor next to the computer lab)
Thinks Joyful Learning is useful. “When students are joyful, they learn”.
Govt. gives uniforms and midday meals for about 750 children. Uniforms are often unusable due to incorrect sizes.
School lacks TLM - needs more blackboards, charts, models.
PTA has collected Rs. 750 towards purchase of a TV.
Government gives Rs. 300-500 per year for TLM
Quality of teaching in this school is “very good” but for the lack of space due to which individual attention cannot be given to students
Need more training in English
Drop-outs due to migration of families
Repetitions in class due to students being absent – due to child labour
Trying to address the issue by “talking to parents”
“More Space” will help raise overall school performance. “Doing as much as we can”

Teacher Interview Highlights

ANALYSIS

Principal seems a dynamic, resourceful person. After 2 years (of petitioning with the district), got the 2nd storey constructed on top of one of the school buildings
Instead of using it to house the classes studying outside under the tree – a large room upstairs is being used for a computer lab! The principal’s contention is that literate and well-to-do parents have wanted such a facility for their children. There are 8 workstations (and a computer literate tech. Teacher). Kids were playing with applications such as “paint”. Parents pay Rs. 24 per month – about 400 students currently enrolled in computer classes.
There are no toilets in the school, but the school has a computer lab!
This school seems to have an active and well-funded PTA. This seems to be making a difference to the school and a contributing factor to the best school award.
A number of the higher classrooms – grade 5 (and 8) had some clay models of various things students had made.
School: Sikandar Savadi
District: Madurai

School did not expect our visit – highlights of “surprise element”
Official school start time is 9 am. We arrived at 9:15 am – school was still not in session – several children were present – running around and playing - NO TEACHERS WERE PRESENT
HM arrived at 9:25 am.
One teacher arrived at 9:35 am
Another teacher arrived well after 10 am
One teacher absent due to a scheduled teacher training
Another teacher who was absent the previous day did not show up – HM assumes he plans to be absent one more day

Physical Infrastructure:
One constructed school building in pretty run-down condition, in the midst of a village – no area around school that separates it from rest of houses – locals (some were drunk) walk past school and sometimes stopped to gape or question teachers/students about goings-on
Inadequate space for learners – classroom cramped
Open grounds in front of school – but the area is thoroughfare for villagers
No toilets
No compound wall
New school building under construction a short distance away (from funds supplied by local elected MLA (member of legislative assembly))

Teacher and student attendance:
5 teachers (4 teachers; 1 HM+teacher) – 3 female, 2 male; Female HM
Only 3 were present (see above)
No Teacher vacancy
Student enrolment: 100 boys + 96 girls = 196 total
Student attendance: 539 boys + 488 girls = 1027 total
SC/ST enrolment: Almost 50% are SC and the rest are BC
Teacher Attendance register showed at least one teacher to be absent every day;

Classroom environment:
5 grades in single room separated by 2 wooden dividers which create 3 separate – for classes 1&2, classes 3&4 and class 5
Some kids dressed in uniform; others wearing dirty often torn clothes
Classroom is dusty – very few TLM on walls
Teachers say they keep charts and other TLM at home
Wooden storage box and almirah for storage
Teachers openly hit students with hand/stick to make them sit quietly

Principal/Teacher interview highlights
Community consists of labourers – many liquor shops in area – saw some drunks in
neighbourhood – school principal says most fathers have a “drinking problem” and parents “fight”
Teachers cited TV as a big distraction for the kids and said that they did not do any homework because of watching TV all the time
Parents are illiterate and cannot help children with studies but are eager for their kids to be in school and learn
All the teachers have been trained in Joyful Learning and think it to be very useful
School has very low completion rate- only 33% of students who enrolled in 1995-1996 graduated in 2000-2001

ANALYSIS

Our surprise visit gave us a fairly accurate picture of some issues of the school, namely, teachers and principal are not dedicated and responsible

**The number of “leaves” teachers and HM take is very high** - HM took one month off earlier in the year (mid-Jan to mid-Feb); another teacher took 3 weeks off (1st three weeks of Feb.) on “medical leave” – the 2 leave periods overlapped, resulting in HM (who is also a 5th grade teacher) and another teacher being absent for extended periods at the same time close to the end of the school year
Among random kids who were picked up to read from their texts – very few actually could – some knew the text by rote and could not actually “read” the words at all
A few girl students were very enthusiastic about volunteering to read and actually attempted to sound out words they had not read before in the process of trying to read
Observed English being taught – teacher himself spoke words incorrectly – students who repeated after him – also spoke the works in the same incorrect pronunciation
HM and another teacher are close to retirement – seem very lax – both took long medical leaves
The composition of the village indicates that the home environment of the students is also not very conducive for children to do homework
Teachers did not seem to be maintaining classrooms well – very few TLM on walls, classrooms not very clean
Teachers blamed low completion rate on migratory patterns of labourers, but the school did not seem to have the type of atmosphere that would encourage a child to stay in school
School: A. Chettiarpatti  
District: Madurai

School did not expect our visit

Physical Infrastructure:
2 constructed school buildings. Well-ventilated classrooms.
Class 5 – adequate space for learners
Small open space in front of school – no proper playground
No toilets
No compound wall
School is just off Madurai-Melur road, but set a little inside

Teacher and student attendance:
4 teachers (3 teachers, 1 HM+5th grade teacher) - 3 female + 1 Male; Male HM
All in attendance that day
No teacher vacancy – according to 1:40 PTR they do not qualify for a 5th teacher
5 grades : 32 + 26+ 32 + 38 + 30 students in grades 1 to 5 respectively.
Student enrollment: 85 boys + 73 girls
Student attendance: 16 + 23 + 29 + 36 + 27 in grades 1 to 5 respectively.

Classroom environment:
Separate classrooms for every grade except grades 1 and 2 which sit together
Well-ventilated
Lots of TLM on walls
Table and chair for teacher
Almirah for storing TLM in grade 5 (HM’s) classroom
Kids sitting in 2 groups – boys on one side, girls on another
Students in uniform – green and white - different from that given by govt.
Most kids on task

Principal/Teacher interview highlights
Principal is happy here – asked to be transferred to this school because of its proximity to his hometown, Madurai
In contact with village counselor – asked PTA for help with getting a toilet for teachers and a compound wall for school.
Parents are mostly farmers and very poor
Strictly enforces uniform rule – sends students back home if they are not in uniform
Students from neighbouring villages also send their kids to this school
AEO visits about 3 times a year; HM meeting held every month or so
HM has taken the initiative to contact some rich family in Madurai to provide free notebooks to the students for the coming school year (Govt provides free textbooks)
Happy with his teaching staff
Got only Rs 250 of the Rs. 500 he is supposed to get for TLM for the school year – not enough-
teachers spend their own money to buy and prepare TLM
English is a problem subject
Parents are not educated; kids don’t study at home
Good attendance record of teachers
Good student attendance except for 1st standard – parents think the children are too small to be sent to school – keep them home
Teachers go on regular training – joyful learning etc.
Thinks training is not very applicable in village classrooms; it caters to city schools
AEO has asked that they get help from local community for some infrastructure improvements such as a compound wall and toilets
Feels government not giving enough support – so “little by little” they will have to do things themselves because he is “eager to improve” the school

Teacher interview highlights

ANALYSIS:
This school was pretty impressive after some of the others we’d seen. They were not expecting our visit so most of what we saw was not a show put out for our benefit like at some of the other schools.
We reached at 11:30 and school was in session – teaching going on
Classrooms had more TLM up than any other place
Principal was happy here and taking the initiative to do things for the school
Principal was well aware of the low attendance issue of class 1 children and the reasons for it
Master attendance register showed few leaves taken by teachers and HM – they seem like a dedicated lot. Their dedication shows in the atmosphere of the school
Principal is enforcing a strict school uniform policy.
School: A. Vallalapatti
District: Madurai

**School did not expect our visit**

Physical Infrastructure:
Several constructed school buildings. Some well-ventilated classrooms. Others not
Some classrooms were *very* cramped – inadequate space for learners
Open spaces in front of school buildings
No toilets
Compound wall made from barbed wire and shrubbery

Teacher and student attendance:
13 teachers (12 teachers, 1 HM+5th grade teacher) - 12 female + 1 Male; Male HM
One teacher belonging to that village
All teachers other than HM are SC and BC
2 teacher vacancy – according to 1:40 PTR
5 grades : 138 + 128 + 106 + 122 + 107 students in grades 1 to 5 respectively.
3 section each for grades 1, 2, 4 and 5, 2 sections (2 teachers) for grade 3; grade 2 has 3 sections but 2 teachers
Student enrollment: 291 boys + 310 girls (about 1/3rd are SC/ST/BC)

Classroom environment:
Separate classrooms for every grade except grades 1 and 2 which sit together
Some classrooms were *very* cramped – inadequate space for learners
Not much TLM on walls
Some classes – no teaching going on – teachers chatting while class sits around with NOTHING TO DO

Principal/Teacher interview highlights
“Village students are weak in everything” (academically)
Class repeaters are the ones who absent a lot - very few repeat
English is a particular problem for students
Many parents attend PTA meeting
Teachers meet every 3rd Saturday of month
2 teacher vacancies since 2 years – AEO is aware
Got only Rs. 300 of the Rs. 500 govt. is supposed to give them for TLM
Have a scheme where every entering student’s parents pay Rs. 20 to PTA fund which is deposited in a Post Office fixed deposit scheme; use the interest to pay for TLM, buy school supplies and pay electricity bill
They buy the government-set syllabus from independent publishers;
Government does not provide meals and uniforms for every student (320 out of 600 get);
uniforms provided by the government are of poor quality and not a good size
Not so satisfied with AEO – they are “powerless” and “not ultimate authority” to get things done
Last AEO school visit was 6 months ago
Hold classes before school (multiplication tables and poems) from 8:30 – 9 am
ANALYSIS:
This school was more like the average schools we’d seen.
Not much teaching going on in most classrooms – some teachers openly standing around and chatting while children do NOTHING.
Some teachers holding a stick in hand – using it for disciplining students
One teacher of this school serves as a “resource person” and trained at DIET and in turn trains other teachers in the district
Some classrooms were very dirty and obviously not swept clean
The lower grades were seated in cramped corridors – almost no TLM up on walls
Principal not too happy with government support but does not seem to be doing much himself to improve the school
Principal reported zero dropout rate because he never took students off the roster.
APPENDIX 5: Observations of school visits in Villupuram District

Note: DPEP in Villupuram administered a standard test to all class five students at the end of the school years 1999-2000 and 2000-2001. These have been tabulated as “Achievement Test Scores” and schools have been ranked accordingly.

School: Sinthamani
Block: Vikkravandi
District: Villupuram

MODEL SCHOOL
School expected our visit
Average achievement test score: 61

Physical Infrastructure:
Several school buildings, including one new one constructed with village funds with two classrooms in the octagonal shape, and the HM’s office
Several blackboards outside in the courtyard, donated by a wealthy individual
Large courtyard/physical space for play
No water
Toilet is there, but is in bad shape (no water, no door)
Water tank (from village fund)
Characteristics of the classrooms in the new building:
4 sets of bookshelves
almirah
2 chairs
1 desk
1 TV (procured with village funds)
Shelving also running along the bottom of the wall, across 1/3 of the room
There were displays, including some hung from the ceiling, but none were at the learner’s eye level
Adequate storage space for TOM

Teacher and Student info:
Middle schools (grades 1-8)
264 students, 130 girls and 134 boys
Few SC/ST: 2 girls 1 boy
Few repeaters: 1 girl and 2 boys in class 1, 1 girl and 1 boy in class 3
Not all students receive meals: 99 girls and 111 boys, same for uniforms

Grade 5 observation highlights:
Teacher was doing a lesson that she had originally taught in January
Teacher asked for how many absences at the beginning of the class
Children are seated in rows
Exercises wouldn’t help children learn
It was obvious that the children didn’t fully understand the concepts in the lesson, even though they had already done the lesson several months before. For instance, after they had recited a poem together, the teacher asked “What is the age of the tree?” The children responded with a line directly from the poem “Now my age is 23”, rather than saying simply 23. She tells them to say “23” but doesn’t explain why.
A matching activity, which involved each child receiving a word printed on a card, could have let children match themselves up by past tense-present tense. Instead it was taught in a didactic teacher-based method wherein the teacher identifies each pair for the class.
Noise from other classrooms is very loud!!
Teacher slapped one child when the child asked a question

Teacher interview highlights:
I asked the teacher whether the children write their own compositions in English or Tamil (because they have composition books). The teachers says “No, only the bright students could write on their own”.
Lesson plan: simply copied down from the teacher’s handbook, though she didn’t do all of the activities that she had written down. Some of the important activities related to motivating the students were not done correctly, even though the handbook gave guidelines for how to do it. In addition, though the teacher had copied all of the activities listed in the handbook, intending to do all four of them, she only led one such activity.

HM Interview highlights:
“too much time” is spent on training
The government says that all children receive uniform and free meal, but this doesn’t actually happen
Textbooks are given in August and September - not June when the school year begins
The old book bank is a problem every year
quality of teaching in the school is rated very good
Teacher performance is evaluated by the printed weekly syllabus that they are supposed to be covering (from DPEP)
PTA meets once every 2-3 months, with 12-13 parents present
VLC meets every month, with 50-60 people present
believes that the DIET teacher educators are qualified, but that the BRC supervisors are not skilled enough
Difficult to deal with the politicians

ANALYSIS
This school visit embodies the best in teaching that Villupuram has - the school itself had been selected as a model school, and they had prepared for our visit. However, the teaching that I did observe made me question whether the students could learn basic literacy and critical thinking skills (Note: I did not observe any maths classes). By not being encouraged to write on their own, and only copying what was already written or spoken, children are’t actively engaging their previously constructed schemata [cognitive structures] in the learning process.
VLC and wealthy individuals donated funds for school improvement - underscores the importance of building those relationships and coalitions

Too much attention may be placed on checking lesson plans as a means for determining that a teacher is on task. BRC supervisors and AEOs routinely check whether teachers have filled their lesson plans. However, if they have indeed written a lesson plan, more times than not it’s actually a direct copy, verbatim, of the teacher’s handbook. And, the fact that a lesson plan is written does not necessarily mean that it is used when class is conducted.
School: Orathur
Block: Vikkavandi
District: Villupuram

Surprise Visit
Achievement Score: 32.38 (lowest in the Block of Vikkaravandi)

Physical Infrastructure:
very, very poor quality of buildings
Several multigrade classrooms
3 buildings
There is room for physical activity on the grounds

Teacher Attendance:
Class 2 teacher was not there, HM gave many excuses (i.e. “gone to the toilet”)
HM was on leave

Classroom Observation:
Class 1 roll was not written on the board
Class 2 teacher was not present. When asked, children said that he did not come much, and that when he was at school, he was doing paperwork.
Many students present (around 25 out of 36), even though the teacher was not there
I asked the students to show me how much of the book they had actually been taught:
English: 1 lesson
Math: 4 lessons
Tamil: up to page 29
EVS: 3 lessons

When I asked 5-6 students to read something from the first two lessons in Tamil and EVS, they were not able to do so.

HM Interview:
Children wear the uniform on Monday and Friday
8 teachers, including the HM
HM was on leave, interviewed Assistant HM

ANALYSIS
The poor achievement scores does correlate with very poor schooling
It’s important for the AEO and BRC supervisors to follow up on the low performing schools. A strong accountability system is imperative, as the lack of one shows that a school with such little teaching and such poor quality services can exist without any accountability measures
Very little teaching going on, yet students still attend school - shows the desire and motivation for education among the children. It also shows that parents are willing to send their children to school; even though the children had not even covered half of the curriculum by the end of the year, most of the students in Class 2 were present.
School: PUES Sengamedu - Mundiyampakkam
Block: Vikkaravandi
District: Villupuram

Surprise visit, DPEP consultant from Chennai was visiting and checking the records/interviewing
teachers. We arrived during break so we did not observe classroom instruction.
Achievement Score: 48.93

Physical Infrastructure:
Several buildings
Class I had its own classroom, though 1/3 of it was filled with broken furniture in the back
Very little TLM displayed on the walls
No latrines
There is room for physical activity on the grounds
Adequate storage space for TLM; almirahs in every classroom
Buildings are in disrepair, dirty

Teacher Interview:
Checked lesson plans - Class 4 teacher had completed them, and they were copied verbatim from
the Teachers Handbook (we checked the English)
School: Panayapuram
Block: Vikkaravandi
District: Villupuram

Surprise Visit; teachers were still eating lunch when we arrived
Achievement Score: 68.97, ranked 15 out of 75

Physical Infrastructure:
Classrooms very dirty, full of flies, not swept
Almost no charts/displays/TLMs in classrooms
no toilets
PU board provided for a water tank, which is being built
No drinking water
Great TLMs that the teachers took out of storage upon our arrival; however they looked brand-new and un-used
Compound wall

Teacher Interview:
2 teacher vacancies since 9/2001 and 11/2001
There’s enough training
5th grade teacher was absent due to qualifying paper preparation
Want to learn more Tamil, so would like Tamil training
HM not around

Class 3 English Observation:
Recitation of word spellings: b-a /class repeats/c-k/class repeats/”back”
Asks the students “what is the meaning”, and explains the meaning in Tamil
All girls were present; only 11 out of 20 boys were present

Class 1& 2 observation:
Children were told to clean the floor
Teacher teaches time with a plastic clock

ANALYSIS:
This school received high achievement scores, but the efficiency of the school was in question: the HM was not around, and teachers were still eating at our arrival time (which was when lunch was supposed to have ended)
Our visit was short, so it’s difficult to make judgments/analyze properly
School: Thoravi
Block: Vikkavandi
District: Villupuram

Surprise Visit, and instruction was actually taking place when we came!
Achievement Score: 69.68, 12 out of 75

Physical Infrastructure:
No compound wall
No latrines

Teacher interview, Class 3 & 4:
in school since 1998
Teacher position vacant for 1 year, so he teaches two classes
He was aware of their high achievement test scores - “second in CRC”
Acknowledged that the activities in the Teachers Handbook aren’t applicable in his situation (78 students)
So what teaching methods does he use: “My own method”
Did not complete lesson plan after March11
Dropout is a problem; children travel to Andhra Pradesh to work
Wants more training in English, does not want multigrade training
Most students are SC/ST, all 3 teachers are SC/ST
seemed very committed to teaching; kept on looking back at the children, making sure that they
were on task while we were speaking
Last year had 20 days of election duty
Had homework assignments piled on his desk, was in the middle of checking them

Instruction Observation: Class 3 & 4

Though attendance was recorded at 67 out of 78 enrolled, I counted 54: teacher said that the
discrepancy is because of a festival
Good use of TLM
Teacher was teaching a multiplication lesson
On the board: $3 \times 2 = 6$, and a map of India with states shown, to help with multiplication
He calls on students and asks to complete a multiplication or division problem on the board
Objects on the table (stones etc) that the student can use to understand the multiplication or
division
However, many children are not paying attention, especially those at the back of the classroom.
Class 4 is doing nothing while class 3 is having their lesson.

Class 1 & 2 Teacher:

Had homework assignments piled on her desk, was in the middle of checking them
Dedicated teacher
Has abundant TLM
Says its hard to control 2 classes
VLC not supportive
Asked children to write on slate while we talked
Mentioned that children dropout b/c they go to A.P. and Karnataka with their parents to work

HM Interview:
2 teacher vacancies
Has had enough training
Wants training in Tamil
“What do you need to improve schooling”: “More teachers”
In response to our questions regarding the discrepancy between recorded attendance and actual attendance, she mentioned:
that after the noonmeal many students leave (we came after lunch)
students also leave because there is no drinking water
Also mentioned other problems causing low attendance:
while parents are working in the field children stay at home to take care of siblings
HM was very concerned re: her students and us taking time away from their instruction; during our interview she would walk to them and make sure that they were on task

ANALYSIS
Teachers were using their TLM in sound, instructive ways
Teachers were also very committed to teaching their students, and would continually check on them during the interviews
There seems to be a relationship between committed teachers and good achievement scores
All of the children passed in grades 4 & 5 (DISE report)
Large multigrade classrooms were a huge problem as was the fact that the community was comprised of migrant farmworkers (so high dropout)
School: Mandapam  
Block: Vikkaravandi  
District: Villupuram

Surprise Visit  
Achievement Score: 62.28, 33 out of 75

Physical Infrastructure:  
1 building, 2 classrooms for grades 1-5  
No compound wall or adequate physical space  
There is storage space for TLM  
Student work is displayed on walls  
New water tank by TN Water Board

HM Interview:  
Records show that half of the time 1 teacher is absent  
1 teacher for grades 1,2,3

Class 1, 2, & 3 Observation:  
At first the teacher is teaching class 2. Teacher has several piles of objects on the floor for counting:  
[says she learned this from DPEP] straw  
plastic letters of the alphabet  
stones (2 different types, so two piles)  
seeds  
figures  
cut bangles  
However, she doesn’t allow the students themselves to count using the objects. Rather, she calls them to the board and writes $1 + 2 = \_\_\_$. Then she hands the student the stones, and tells them to write 3.  
While she is teaching some students maths, the others are writing on their slates. They’re copying numbers that she has written on the board.  
Then the teacher teaches Class 1 (only 4 children) all 4 of the children go to the board and write numbers 1-20 on the board

Teacher Interview:  
Finds it difficult to teach 3 grades  
Wants training on multigrade teaching and English  
While she teaches one class, the others do “activities or written work”  
Has been here for 6 months  
I ask how she deals with multigrade teaching. She shows me, by doing the following:  
Directs Class 1 to copy something from the board onto their slates. They do it for a few minutes and then lose attention  
Class 2: she places a textbook on the ground and tells the five students to copy the text from that page onto their slates  
Class 3: she teaches them a lesson through recitation
Analysis:
The importance of having strong community involvement is key. One VLC member, an alumnus, comes by while we are conducting our visit. She shows us the flowers and clock that she donated to the school. She’s finished her +2, and is now a housewife.
Training on effective multigrade teaching techniques is extremely important! This teacher was responsible for 3 grades, and was not successful in sustaining students’ attention on academics.
School: Kolathur
Block: Koliyanaur
District: Villupuram

Surprise Visit; we reached at 11:25 am and no school was in session, children were walking in the surrounding fields (break is supposed to be from 11:00-11:10 am)
Achievement Score: 26.73, ranked 73 out of 74

Physical Infrastructure:
2 classrooms:
Classes 1 & 2
Classes 3, 4, & 5

HM Interview
Many Casual leaves taken by teachers - often 2 teachers are gone in the same day (in several instances, one was at training and the other was on casual leave)
No SC or special coaching offered

ANALYSIS:
Again, the worst performing schools on the achievement tests appear to have the weakest administration/management and teaching. Teachers are often absent, and when we arrived instruction was not taking place. Obviously any system of accountability is not being enforced here.
School: Salamedu
Block: Koliyanaur
District: Villupuram

 Surprise Visit, though they were expecting a visit from the World Bank (they had constructed a welcome sign). We had not told them of our visit in advance.
Achievement Score: 39.73, 60 out of 74

Physical Infrastructure:
No latrines for students
Received facilities such as table from DPEP
Had brand new TLM, did not look used

Class 1 Observation:
Had a wooden panel separating Class 1 from Class 2.
Good-sized classroom for the 13 students, enough space for them
Only 2 of the 13 students had textbooks, 1 Tamil book and another EVS book
When I asked where the books were, the children said that they had fallen apart and gotten lost
Informal assessment of student learning: only 1 out of 13 students could read page 15 in the Tamil book by the end of the year. The other students were just describing the pictures
Teacher led class in typical Joyful Learning instruction, with singing and dancing

HM Interview:
MBC students don’t do well
textbooks always come in June
Students wear uniform on Fridays only
They receive enough training
3 teachers

ANALYSIS:
Informal assessments of student learning indicated that by the end of the year most students in Class 1 could not read from the first lessons in the Tamil book.
Students in Class 1 were lacking basic physical inputs such as textbooks (and we had not seen this in any other school - that so many students “lost” their textbooks or had them fall apart)
School: Kavanipakkam
Block: Koliyanaur
District: Villuppuram

Surprise Visit, no teaching is going on when we arrive
Achievement test: 41.53, 59 out of 74

Physical Infrastructure:
2 buildings, 3 classrooms total
Classes 1 & 4
Classes 5
Classes 2 & 3
No compound wall
No latrines
right off of dirt road, so there isn’t adequate physical space for children to play

Class 1 Observation:
teacher was hitting, slapping, and pulling the hair of children to get them to sit quietly in a circle
Only 1 child selected randomly in the class could read a chapter in English (that they had previously studied)
A perusal of several students’ Tamil and Maths textbooks showed that very few exercises had been filled out
TLM looked brand new, was lying in almirah and trunk

Class 1 Teacher Interview:
Has attended Activity-Based Training in Joyful Learning
When asked why the attendance record had 2 more boys than actually were present, she said that they had gone to drink water

Class 2 & 3 Observation:
Children are sitting in rows
Recorded attendance is off by 3, she mentions that one child went to the bathroom
sang several songs
Informal assessment of student learning:
I asked 8 students to read from the Class 2 Tamil book. They could only read those lessons for which they had learned the songs to, and could not read anything else. I also asked the students to write down the words that were in those particular lessons, and they were not able to do so. Then the teacher asked them to write any word on the board, and they could write “amma” and “neela” (both words of their choosing) but could not write the Tamil words for “banana”
I asked Class 3 students to read from the English book (the teacher said that she had taught the entire book). Most of the children could not read past the first lesson. I then asked the children to write on the blackboard some of the words that they were able to read (such as “pup”), but they were not able to do so. I asked one student to write “goat”, but instead she wrote “dog”.
The teacher said that the students can’t learn because they are SC/ST and because their parents are poor and uneducated
Class 2 & 3 teacher Interview:
When I asked the teacher to show me some Activity-Based Teaching techniques that she learned in her in-service training, she made the class show me a “Clap your Hands” song.
She’s been teaching for 8 years
“much improvement has been made since DPEP”
“When children want to come to school”
When asked why, she said “because of singing and dancing”
Class 3 teacher vacancy for 8 years

HM Interview:
Teacher vacancy in Class 1
The current Class 1 teacher was a PTA teacher, and had been in the position for 10 months
Holds special coaching class from 4:30 - 5:30
mostly SC children
110 children (out of 128) get noonmeal, though the school divides the food so that every child can eat it
all children received uniforms
Have enough TLMs
VLC donated 20% of the land that is currently being used as a garden/playground
Has been to many trainings

ANALYSIS:
Children weren’t learning, which correlates to their less-than-average score on the achievement tests
It appears that the Class 2 & 3 teacher was teaching to some extent, as the children knew the lessons by song. However, they had not learned much functional literacy; they could follow along with a song but had difficulty reading or writing those same words out of context of the song
School: Anichampayalam
Block: Koliyanaur
District: Villupuram

Very short write-up
Achievement test: 58.10, 23 out of 74

Physical Infrastructure:
[nothing written]

Information:
Got the syllabus from the shop
60% achievement rate, 73% completion rate
School: M. Kuchipayalam  
Block: Koliyanaur  
District: Villupuram

Surprise Visit, some of the 3 classes had teaching going on when we reached  
Achievement Test: 62.57, 15 out of 74

Physical Infrastructure:  
Latrine for children, separate for girls and boys  
No compound wall  
Drinking water available

Class Observation:  
Asked 5-6 students to read, no girls could and 1 boy could read a little  
Students could not read the names on the “Historical Monuments” chart

HM Interview:  
2 teachers provided by the government  
Other 2 teachers are provided by the PTA  
Has attended many trainings  
BRC supervisor is retired and is not “strengthy”, so does not come  
Only the AEO comes  
Special coaching classes offered every day from July -Dec. not from Jan - April  
The PTA meets once in 2 months, the leader is the Panchayat President  
Christian church gave a tape recorder

ANALYSIS:  
Shows the benefits of PTA and panchayat involvement: the PTA provided teachers, toilet, and drinking water  
Community involvement is key!