

## **Rethinking Minimum Standards in Public School Education**

Sunday, June 18, 2006

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It is a very difficult task to begin to set criteria for minimum standards for schools at a nationwide level. There exist today, even within the government sector, schools with varied levels of facilities and teaching standards. The standard for most schools, however, is dismal, and does not lend itself to fostering the overall growth and development of children, and giving them the skills required to survive with dignity in this ever changing global society.

There is, however, a common rule of thumb that can be applied in order to be able to set criteria in a justified manner. This depends on how the future of the country is being viewed by policy- makers. If the future of the country is looked at with seriousness, a very high standard of public education is required for the young people who will lead this country through this millennium. However, if policy makers and implementers are happy with the status quo that exists, then whatever we have is enough, and there is no need to work for a better future. Between what is ideal and what exists is the reality around which we need to work. The standards that we will decide on now will give Nepal or Nepalis a chance in the future. Only if everyone involved in education from people working in the policy making level to the level of the individual student, who in the eventual consumer, work harder for better education will there be a better Nepal.

With the changed political scenario, it is incumbent upon all, and particularly those who work in education, to ensure that Nepal is going to focus on education, and it will provide a high quality of minimum standards to all schools all over the country, with particular focus to those areas that have not been provided with adequate educational resources thus far. School education, and, particularly primary school education must be given the priority and respect it deserves.

This draft of enabling environment to achieve minimum standards outlines the work as well as decisions that have to be taken at the different levels of the education system. Comments and suggestions are welcome to finalize this piece.

## **A. Central Government Level**

- a. Professionalizing the education sector so that it is not influenced by adhocism and favoritism that can come out of politics
- b. Having a transparent system even at the selection of education consultants
- c. Make standards for everyone working in education and ensuring that these standards are met across the board
- d. Make the hiring of teachers and the promotions to higher positions transparent
- e. Hiring local teachers as far as practicable feasible. Decentralize the process of hiring teachers.
- f. Hire trained teachers, pay them well, and ensure that they have benefits
- g. Ensure that there are teachers as per requirement in each school all over the country
- h. In the mountainous regions train / arrange for multi-grade teaching, and begin the job of providing proper training right away
- i. In the Tarai region ensure that there are enough teachers as per the teacher:student ratio set out as minimum standards. The government must provide at least one teacher per class, and the emphasis must be on female teachers at least up to Grade III. There will be multiple sections in each grade in the schools in the Tarai, teachers need to be provided accordingly
- j. Have district wise competitions and award DEO's that work hard on improving their districts
- k. Ensure representation from the District level when major decisions or policy level changes are being envisioned or planned at the Center
- l. Follow policy change with adequate manpower, support and supervision: for example, if English is introduced from Grade I in each school, make sure that each school has one teacher in the primary grades that is capable of teaching English. English major at the 10+2 level must be the minimum requirement.
- m. Make provisions for providing more resources to disadvantaged areas so that these areas are able to catch up. Provide extra support particularly in areas where there is more poverty, and less support in places like Kathmandu where the local community and private schools are able to help out to improve education.
- n. Ensure that the data sent from each of the school to the districts and then to the central government is in fact correct so that proper planning is possible. Do not work with dishonest data
- o. Reevaluate the rule in which certain number of students have to be present before teachers are placed. This will reduce the prevalence of tampering with real data
- p. Avoid frequent transfers, allow time for officials to get involved in their jobs and show results. People must be in their jobs 3 – 4 years for any effect to be shown.
- q. The different government department to be coordinated so that resources are well utilized, and everyone gets the same message.

## **B. District Education Office:**

- a. Ensure that schools are supervised properly
- b. Rewards for schools / principals / teachers that do well.
- c. The DEO to visit a representative sample of 10% of the schools in the District within the first year of office, ensuring that he/she visits the school under the jurisdiction of each of the school supervisors
- d. DEO's to have meetings with head teachers as well as school supervisors and stakeholders of the school
- e. Ensure that all the information sent from each school is in fact correct. This will allow for proper planning and allocating resources
- f. Ensure that the DEOs has the opportunity to put forth the district level experience at the regional level meetings and at the central government level
- g. Each DEO to make plans for education improvement in their district in a phase-wise manner
- h. Ensure that there are a few schools that set standards for the district so others can learn
- i. Work hard to ensure that all the staff that have been allocated for each individual school are in fact in place and doing their respective jobs
- j. Together with schools set up a criteria for hiring teachers and ensure that the criteria is met when hiring people
- k. Do not reward people who come and visit the DEO and help the DEO in other social issues. Set a criteria for evaluation of principals / teachers, make it transparent, and follow it
- l. Ensure that there is regular meetings with the school principals a few times a year
- m. The DEO to ensure that the school supervisors are doing a good job
- n. The DEOs are to respect their jobs and give it the importance it deserves.
- o. They are there to serve the district education system in a sincere manner, and their conduct, personal, professional and social has to reflect this
- p. It is the job of the DEO to coordinate all the activities of all the different organizations in the district working in education.

## **C. School Supervisors and Resource Persons**

- a. School Supervisors have the job of visiting schools and providing the necessary backup and support to schools.
- b. School Supervisors do not just report negative aspects of the schools, but are supportive in the school development processes and assisting teachers / head teachers to run their school better.
- c. School Supervisors are a direct link between the school and community with the DEO, they need to realize the importance of their position.
- d. Resource Persons also help improve the teaching and learning, and the overall growth and development of schools.
- e. RP's need to be given responsibilities so that they support the development of schools

## **D. School**

### ***School Heads are the role models for the school***

They are to be provided with appropriate training for all heads of schools so that they are able to:

- a. Support and supervise staff
- b. Manage the day to day affairs of school
- c. Receive positive help from parents and the community
- d. Allocate resources in a professional manner
- e. Generate resources from the various organizations in the community and outside
- f. Develop Overall calendar and schedule for the academic year that reflects most of the things that need to be planned and implemented in the school
  1. academic
  2. staff meetings/trainings
  3. social – song/dance/debate etc
  4. parent involvement/workshops
  5. holidays
- g. Use authority to make daily schedules that meet the academic activities of the students
- h. Design the school calendar according to local needs
- i. Represent the school in the community and the government/non-government bodies.
- j. Develop linkages of school and community through services by students.
- k. Infrastructure development: plan for long-term maintenance and upgrading of school
- l. Ensure availability of minimum but essential material for teaching and learning
- m. Ensure that all the staff of the school are treated in a fair and respectful manner, listen to their professional and personal problems and help them to solve them
- n. Be a role-model, and stick to the rules of the school. If the principal is punctual and cares about the school, everyone will follow suit, if the principal does not care, it will be quickly reflected in the rest of the school community
- o. Head teacher clarifies the role of each teacher as well as other members of the school family. They are assigned duties not only as it relates to teaching, but also extra-activities and sharing of their particular strengths
- p. Keep transparent records of all financial transactions and report it to the parents as well as to the school management committee
- q. Depending on the issue, the head teacher involves parent / teachers / school management committee in decision making

## **E. Teachers**

**Teachers are the backbone of schools, and much is expected from them**

### **i. At all times the teacher:**

- a. Is a role model
- b. Conducts himself / herself as a in a fair and honest manner
- c. Welcomes parents to the class, and seeks their help in the regular classroom activities as well as in special event
- d. The teacher shares responsibilities with other staff and colleague
- e. Is able to work with others for the growth and development of the students and the school

### **ii. In the classroom, the teacher**

#### **a. Develops students' social /emotional growth and**

1. Makes a safe and non-threatening learning environment for student
2. Promotes student self worth and self esteem.
3. Fosters the growth of responsible students who are active learners and can make their own decision
4. Keeps reasonably high expectations of students and helps them meet it.
5. Creates an atmosphere of trust
6. Does not use corporal punishment, or take advantage of the students' situation
7. Teaches students good citizenship, peace and social responsibility
8. Has a good relationship with parents and goes out of the way to speak to them about their children
9. Teachers to be able to show that they are humans and have limitations, but will do their best for them.
10. Learn to respect students and give them the benefit of doubt
11. Allow students to make genuine mistakes. They learn best form their mistakes
12. Look to the overall development of these students

#### **b. Develops students' academic growth by**

1. Planning meaningful lessons for students
2. Being punctual and increasing the time on task
3. Understanding how students learn and using this knowledge in teaching children
4. Implementing effective teaching techniques
5. Taking advantage of training opportunities offered to the teacher
6. Keeping continuous records of how students are learning
7. Developing end of term assessments that measures the true growth and development of students
8. Giving students positive feedback of their growth and development
9. Using all available teaching material to make lessons meaningful
10. Creating own teaching / learning material at low / no cost.
11. Working on multiple intelligences of children in the classroom
12. Giving positive feedback to parents and making them partners in improving the student's overall performance
13. Helping students set their own goals and supporting them to reach those goals
14. Meeting with parents and providing positive feedback on their children so that parents learn to work on the students' strength for further development
15. The teacher makes classroom /out of classroom plans as per the school calendar

**16. Linking whatever is being taught in the class with the student's real / daily lives**

**F. Students**

The growth and responsibility of students is of utmost important. They learn best when they are in primary school, and this is when they must be provided with all kinds of inputs to make them into well rounded social beings who have a good sense of themselves and are curious and eager to learn.

The general rule for a school that fosters the growth and development of students is to provide the students with adequate responsibility to develop their overall life-skill even as they are growing academically. Teachers therefore do not do what the students can do, they focus on important tasks such as lesson planning, implementation of proper lessons as well as evaluation of students, and meeting with parents. Students, on the other hand:

- a. Become responsible for their academic work
- b. Do not waste time waiting for a teacher, organize the class so that there is student teaching
- c. Help each other keep classroom clean and school compound as well as toilets clean
- d. Help the teacher by collecting home-work
- e. Do assigned jobs in the class
- f. Learn new skills and share it with friends, and help each other grow.
- g. Become pro-active and caring students who have an interest in their own growth as well as that of their friends
- h. Become team players and learn to take turns
- i. Be a true friend
- j. Do age-appropriate chores at home
- k. Learn to be respectful towards everyone at school and in the home
- l. Learn to celebrate victory in moderation and not to be too disappointed with failures.
- m. Be active in clubs initiated by the school, by other organizations, or by yourselves
- n. Develop good work habits, particularly in reading, so that good books will always provide a companion

**G. Parents and Community**

- a. Parents and Community are concerned with school affairs and interacting positively with the school.
- b. Parents participate in school governance and are involved in the school improvement plans
- c. Parents feel welcomed and appreciated by the school
- d. School Management Committee is proactive and working to fulfill the mission and goals of the school
- e. Parents understand their role in the home for the growth and development of their children
- f. Parents provide the school with knowledge and skills where appropriate

- g. Parents help at in school events including in academic activities
- h. Parents to come to school organized functions and meetings called by the school
- i. Parents realize that the development of their children benefits the family the most, and therefore to ensure that the students are responsible, honest and caring
- j. Parents are aware of the various needs of their children, and to be available for them in times of need
- k. Parents to speak positively about the school with their children so that their children feel good about the school and will thus put in their best in all their work in the school
- l. Parents to feel comfortable to speak to the concerned teachers, the school management committee or the principal if things are not going well, but to do this in a proper manner
- m. Parents to know that they are responsible for the attitudes and behaviors exhibited by the children, and thus to work with the school to make this positive
- n. Parents can become trained to help a teacher that has too many student.
- o. Parents help the school improve facilities by helping gather resource
- p. The community sees the school as the potential to make a long term development of their community by providing better and more skilled graduates, and in that sense, helping to fulfill the genuine needs of the school.

## **H. School Management Committee**

*School management includes parents in the School affairs by scheduling time in the school calendar to have meetings with parents regarding*

- a. Development of their children and how to give them better overall support regarding school work at home
- b. Making parents realize that students should work at home, but tasks should be age appropriate
- c. Suggestion for school improvement and their own contribution towards it  
Participating in school governance, by voting
- d. With the support of head teacher and other relevant individuals be responsible for the hiring and firing of teachers. This is not to be done through the DEO. Proper guidelines have to be set so that there is no nepotism, and placing inappropriate people in the classroom. Hire local people as far as possible.
- e. Parents representatives of the students currently enrolled in the school
- f. Principal given the independence to design the school calendar according to local needs

## **I. Physical Infrastructure**

In order to provide some kind of minimum standard, it is essential that only the teaching / learning aspect of the school is improved. There has to be proper investment in the minimum standard of physical facilities even for schools in the poorest areas of the country. These minimum standards mean that students have a safe and secure space to learn and grow. They are protected from the elements and have minimum per student space within the classrooms. Here we make the following basic suggestions.

For primary schools, particularly where there are about 100 – 200 students in each school, that there are:

- a. One classroom per 20 – 40 students in each grade. (if there are more than 50 students in any one grade, the class must be split). As per this requirement, there will be one teacher per 20 – 25 students, and not one per 30 or 40 as has been planned thus far.
- b. Office space for Principal and for accounts purposes: one room
- c. Teacher's work room / meeting room / resource room / library for students: one large sized room
- d. Playground facilities: adequate
- e. Compound wall so that the school premises is safe
- f. Toilets: four for boys, four for girls in a primary school for 200 students, this is shared by teachers also so that cleanliness is assured, and there is no vandalism.
- g. Water: adequate supply for drinking and for keeping school clean
- h. Books for library as well as minimum teaching material to be stored in the resource room. Ideally there is a reading room with basic educational toys for the primary level.
- i. Have facilities for Shishu Kachya in each primary school. This will help improve grade I achievement. This needs to be worked out at the DEO, or perhaps higher level of Government.
- j. Depending on the need of the community, provide one meal with high nutritional value to children

## **J. Training of Education Personnel**

Much of what is required in setting the minimum standards depends on proper training. Training has to be provided to Head Teachers so that they are able to produce genuine community schools. Training must be provided to School Supervisors and Resource Persons so that they are able to transfer their skill and knowledge to teachers and thus do their job in an honest, positive and supportive manner. Training must be provided to teachers so that they are able to make classrooms havens for children's learning and development, and will be able to work with parents in such a way that there is good coordination between the home and the school. Training should be provided to District Education Officers and other personnel working in the education sector so that they are able to take their jobs seriously and do a good job at whatever they are assigned.

## **K. Conclusion**

There are many schools in Nepal, even at the government sector, that have been able to meet these minimum standards we are talking about here in terms of the physical facilities, because this has always been the focus of everyone. These schools generally have either a very active and supportive community, or have been able to receive help from international sources. It is very important for such schools not to relax because they have met the minimum standards in the physical setting, but to try and continue to improve in the teaching and learning aspect of minimum standards.

However, there are many schools that are nowhere meeting the minimum standards spelt out here in any of the aspects mentioned above. These schools are in the majority. It might not be exaggerating when we say that none of the government schools meet the minimum standards set here, and that is why we have no schools in Nepal that we can consider a model school. Therefore it is very important for the government and individual schools to ensure that the above standards become the focus of school development in the upcoming years. It is not that difficult to put the hardware (school building, staff and text books) in place. However it is a completely different skill to make all these things work out in a dynamic and organic way so that every child gets the due he/she deserves, no matter which family they come from and where they come from in Nepal.

The future of our country rests on these students who are now in primary school. If we are able to provide them with the best of what we know, the benefits we all will reap will be so much more. And, it is up to organizations such as ours and individuals such as ourselves to ensure that this will happen, otherwise the future generation will blame us for not doing what we were supposed to do and when we had to do it.

*Visual Case Study presentation of Jana Uddar Primary School in Kavre, and RBPOP schools in Dailekh, Dhading, Lalitpur, Makwanpur and Myagdi*