
Issues arising out of school transport in a multilayered system of education

Introduction

Every now and then, almost on every day basis, we hear of some school bus accident in some corner of India in which a few to a few dozen school going children are killed or admitted to hospitals with grievously fractured limbs and other major or minor injuries in school bus accident. Thus ends the life of the country's Naunihals - the would - be builders of the Nation. The private TV channels and the print media compete with each other in reporting such incidents along with all the hypothetical solutions to help their sale or TRP ratings. But even after this, combined with the various orders of the Supreme Court and the sane advice of the country's elders on this issue no change is affected. The very next day the country and its school buses are back to square one-back on the road. This raises a barrage of questions on the need of ferrying children to distant schools, long travel time, chance of accidents, effect of Air pollution, adverse effect on body and mind and loss of useful time by 2-4 hours (journey time) by every child every day. Issue before the society is whether the sacrifices of these young citizens in this manner are necessary for education. It should be given serious consideration whether such travels can be avoided without compromising with the overall output of education.

Background

My school has 20 buses and other vans and autos for transportation. Also hundreds of private cars come to the school to drop their children and take them back. This condition prevails in all the schools in my city Ranchi. For thousands of school buses and vehicles running in Ranchi everyday pollution due to burning of petrol and diesel, not to talk of other wear and tear additives causing damages to environment, can be easily calculated. This must be the story with majority of schools in India.

As per the DISE Report¹ the total number of schools were 12,85,576 in 2008-09. A miniscule number of schools

in India provide bus service. It is estimated² that of the 60,000 buses sold in India annually, schools account for nearly 10,000, which is close to 20 per cent of the total bus market. For proper evaluation of the net effect private cars or commercial vehicles including public transport used for transporting children to and fro their schools also need to be accounted for along with the school buses. This must be generating a large number of polluting gases in still higher quantity affecting the environment adversely in much bigger way³. The rich private schools are hiring Air-conditioned buses to protect their travelling students from pollution. Renowned environmental magazine 'Down To Earth' (May 1-15, 2012 edition⁴) has reported various studies and concluded in its editorial that AC buses/vehicles have higher pollution effect on their travellers/own passengers than those which have their windows down. This shows that even AC equipped vehicles are not safe for the owner or the user. The climate change and global warming caused by increased pollution are already knocking at our doors in different ways. International conferences and Global summits are warning us day in and day out of an impending disaster due to the ever increasing pollution. A more accurate estimate can easily provide data for the variety of damages caused to children in particular and public in general. They can be one or all of the following

1. Reduced safety and security of children during travelling
2. Increased difficulty for parents in visiting school and keeping track of their wards
3. Improper/ undesired use of vast and costly resources of the country in the form of school bus and imported fuels like petrol and diesel.
4. Increase in Air pollution
5. Traffic Jams leading to waste of time, money and other resources

The first two items listed above affect the mental and physical health of the travelling children and their

academic output. But it is for sure that as long as the system provides different kind of schools with different patterns like syllabi, standard etc. such a rat race of sending children to distant schools and millions of vehicles transporting them is destined to take place.

Neighbourhood Schools

If school is in the neighbourhood with facilities for free equitable quality education, parents will agree to send their children to such a school without any hesitation. Children can go just by walking to the school. My school is around 100 metres away from my residence. One can watch my whole school from my house. No transport facility is required. So if school is in the same locality as one's residence then no buses, vans, cars would be required. No fuels will burn releasing a mix of polluting gases. Hence, human race will be saved from their bad influences. In addition the other important advantage of Neighbourhood Schools is that this also helps in safety and security of children. Walking down the school just a half or one km from the house is safe for children. Parents can keep eye on them. I can describe many incidence of my school. Many students who come by school bus elope away with their friends before entering the school premises. And they are back to catch the return bus on time to go back home. Neither school nor parents know that their children are bunking classes. Thus children succeed in keeping their parents in the dark. This can be prevented if school is in the neighbourhood.

If parents desire to visit the school they can easily go to the school in the neighbourhood. Just opposed to this the parents will delay their visit if they are residing far away from the school. The last but not the least is the saving of school bus fees in terms of money which sums up to a respectable amount in the days of ever rising cost of living.

Solution is CSS-NS

CSS in neighbourhood school could be a boon for people. If there is a school in every locality with common facilities, educational services of perfect standard etc. then it will convince both rich and poor parents to send their

children to the school in the neighbourhood rather than sending to a far away school in a bus/ vehicle. To successfully implement it both Central and State Governments will need to focus and work towards a fully public-funded Common School System based on Neighbourhood Schools from pre-primary stage to senior secondary stage (i.e. Class XII).

This alone can guarantee free and compulsory education of equitable quality to all children without any discrimination whatsoever. It is also a fact that those of the countries which had common school system in neighbourhood schools developed and created better place to live in than those which imparted education in a selective or preferential way.

Conclusion

Finally, my take is strongly in favour of the Common School System in Neighbourhood School (CSS-NS). This system will really help a student to study and grow up fearlessly. All schools must be upgraded to a common standard, let us say of Central Schools level, with common facilities like Science Lab, Computer Lab, Library, regular trained teacher, high quality prescribed books etc. for free to all. Government should set up such new schools in the localities where this is not available. I support this and wish this system to succeed in India.

References

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