NOTE ON THE PRERNAPROGRAMME [2016]
Department of Education, Himachal Pradesh
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CONTEXT

Independent research and surveys on learning level outcomes of students like the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) and internal studies conducted at the state level indicate that despite increase in enrolment and improvement in physical infrastructure, there has been a decrease in the learning levels of students. For example, in government schools in Himachal Pradesh the percentage of class 5 students who could read a grade 2 textbook declined from ~81% in 2007 to ~72% in 2014. In Mathematics too the percentage of class 3 students who could do subtraction declined from ~58% in 2007 to ~41% in 2014.[1]In order to address this situation and ensure that there is a measurable increase in the learning levels of students in early numeracy and literacy,the PRERNA program was initiated by the Government of Himachal Pradesh.

STRATEGY

The objective of PRERNA is to improve the learning levels of primary school children in government schools by focussing on basic literacy and numeracy skills through a learning intervention of 45 days.

First a baseline was conducted of students in classes 3, 4 and 5, independently, in Language (Hindi), and Mathematics, which helped identify gaps in learning. Basis the baseline assessment, students of similar competency levels were grouped together (irrespective of class) and group-based paedagogical techniques were implemented. The Teaching at Right Level approach (TaRL) was used by teachers to lead learning activities in Language and Mathematics with the aim of building up students' competencies in specific and measurable learning outcomes. Basic reading skills and the ability to execute simple mathematical operations are at the core of these competencies. TaRL uses a framework of assessment, teaching and learning based on the CAMaL (Combination of Activities for Maximized Learning) approach, developed by Pratham,which has had a proven impact on students' learning in other spheres.

To allow fast digitisation of student-level assessment data, the government of Himachal Pradesh has also implemented OMR-based assessment recording across the 2104 cluster schools where PRERNA was being executed. Question-wise data at the student level for ~50000 students was digitised in ~1 week at the state level which has allowed for immediate impact assessment.

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[1] See, for example:
http://img.asercentre.org/docs/Publications/ASER%20Reports/ASER%20TOT/State%20pages%20English/himachalpradesh.pdf [downloaded on 10 January 2017ce]

IMPACT

At the overall state level, 38,000 students were assessed in the baseline and 49,000 students were assessed in the endline under PRERNA.

Language Skills

It was found that whereas 43% students could *read a story* at the time of baseline, the number increased to 58% (an increase of 15%) of assessed students when the endline was conducted. Similarly, whereas only 27% students could *formulate basic sentences* at the time of the baseline, the number increased to 41% (an increase of 14%) of assessed students at the time of the endline.

Mathematical Skills

It was found that whereas 64% students could carry out *2 by 2 digit subtractions*at the time of baseline, the number increased to 82% (an increase of 18%) of assessed students when the endline was conducted. Similarly, whereas only 39% students could execute *2 by 1 digit divisions* correctly at the time of the baseline, the number increased to 60% (an increase of 21%) of assessed students at the time of the endline.

VALIDATION

The PRERNA programme is undoubtedly a success as indicated by the statistics given above. These findings are corroborated by preliminary analyses of Term-2 assessment results which are presently being collated for all winter closing schools in the state. The base data for the analysis comprises assessment data of class 3 students of ~40 cluster schools of 3 blocks in 1 district.The analysis validates some of the results of the PRERNA endline which tested key competencies imparted to children during the PRERNA programme.

From the preliminary sample analysis, the following picture emerges:

- Whereas ~70% children were competent in *directly retrieving facts* as per the endline in PRERNA (a key language competency linking to the ability to read stories), the foundational skill has sustained after the programme as 73% children were found competent in this area as per CCE Term 2 assessment results.
- Similarly, 66% students were found competent in *3by3 addition operations* as per the PRERNA baseline and this is reflected positively in CCE Term 2, where 70% children were able to successfully solve 3y3 addition problems.

CONCLUSION

While comprehensive analysis is underway, these preliminary numbers indicate the methodological success of focusing on basic competencies and foundational skills via competency-based teaching as in the PRERNA programme.

Given the efficacy of the programme, the government is now scaling up to cover all 10,000 elementary schools in the state.