

Educational Reforms

Why in news?

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CBSE decided to make Class X board exam compulsory.

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What is the situation of education in India?

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- Reform in secondary education became the focus of policymakers soon after Independence.

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- They felt 10-year schooling to be short for a serious engagement with college education.

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- Initially, an addition of one year was recommended, leading to the model —implemented in some states — of 11 years of school education. Subsequently, one more year was added.

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- In the mid-1960s, **the Kothari Commission had hoped that the final two years in a 12-year model will provide a viable option of vocational courses.**

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- But the only change that occurred was that instead of one, students had to face two public exams before proceeding to college. Both exams caused great stress.

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Whether everything goes well with the system?

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- In the colonial era, board exams had begun to dominate and shape the teachers' sense of purpose and pedagogic practice.

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- The board exam had become a cultural institution, a test of endurance — of the capacity to cope with intense stress.

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- Popular faith in the integrity of the examination system remained largely intact despite common experience and evidence that the system was **neither just nor foolproof**.

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- Despite the criticism it faced in policy documents, the system retained its legitimacy.

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- The main point of criticism was that board exams mainly test the ability to memorise.

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- Efforts to reform the system attained only marginal success.

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- The high school exam, taken at the end of Class X, continued despite the introduction of the Class XII board exam.

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- Its main utility was that the high school “pass” certificate carried the student’s date of birth.

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- Structurally, the Class X exam helped to keep the transition rate low by eliminating a huge proportion of students — in many states, the majority — by “failing” them.

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Whether any attempts have been made to reform?

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- Two attempts were made over the last decade to soften the grip of exams on children’s lives.

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- One was **to make the Class X board exam optional**.

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- The other was the attempt to **replace the annual exam with Comprehensive and Continuous Evaluation (CCE)**.

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- At the elementary level (that is Classes 1 to 6), this step got codified in a law known the **Right to Education (RTE)**.

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- Apparently similar in purpose, the two reforms referred to two quite different stages of children's intellectual growth. Both attempts are now in trouble. Systemic resistance has proved its power in both cases.

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What is new hurdle?

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- The **Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)** has now decided **to make the Class X board exam compulsory once again.**

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- As for RTE's requirement that CCE should replace an annual exam in elementary classes, political consensus to rescind it by revising the RTE is reportedly growing.

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- In both cases, the main argument being given for reversal of reforms is that **children don't feel motivated to work hard** when there is no fear of failure.

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- Restoration of the Class X board exam is also being justified on the ground that the **state boards did not make it optional** — that is only the CBSE made it optional, hence there was a problem of parity.

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- Yet another argument supporting the CBSE's reversal is that the Class X board exam serves as a rehearsal for the Class XII board exam.

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Whether the cited reasons are justified?

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- Neither of the two arguments can bear scrutiny. If the fear of failure is all that motivates children, surely it is a symptom of poor quality teaching.

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- The way forward lies in improving pedagogy by reforming teacher training

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- The decision to make the Class X board exam optional was intended to encourage improvement in school-based exams.

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- Class X is not the terminal year of schooling as it once was, so there is no harm in giving children the option to avoid one board exam, especially if they are not planning to shift to a different school.
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- Coordination between the CBSE and state boards should have been attempted by encouraging these boards to follow the CBSE's lead.
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- If an exam system demands a rehearsal, surely it is not serving a pedagogic purpose.
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- The ordeal of public exams (and "pre-boards") is cherished because they keep pedagogy tied to preparation drills.
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- Teachers and parents both feel safe when nothing creative or original is expected to take place in the child's intellectual life.
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- A public exam is, by definition, narrow in its focus as it attempts to place thousands of pupils on one platform.
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- No individual qualities can be assessed in such mass evaluation. Nor can the results of such a mass test be regarded as reliable and fair.
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- It is unfortunate that the CBSE has agreed to give up a step meant to encourage the deeper reforms in the long run. Short-lived reforms have been characteristic of India's policy history in education.
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What will be the impact?

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- If the RTE is amended in order to allow the reintroduction of annual exams in the elementary classes, the path to making elementary education child-centered will close.
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- The idea of CCE as a substitute for annual, "pass-fail" kind of exams demands significant improvement in teacher training.
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- Teachers' ability to assess a child's individual trajectory of growth is a crucial factor in the CCE approach.
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- Unfortunately, the CBSE's own strategy for implementing the CCE is

cumbersome and stressful.

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- The NCERT has developed a better strategy, but coordination between the two institutions has never been easy.

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- Ultimately, it is our children who pay the price for the system's inability to sustain the effort to reform itself.

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Source: The Indian Express

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