Introduction

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) called for a complete transformation of India's schooling system to make it of the highest quality for all students equitably, and to serve the needs and aspirations of the country and its people, today and for the future. The purpose of this National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE, in short NCF) is to help to bring about such changes by effecting corresponding positive transformations in India's school curricula.

In this NCF, 'curriculum' refers to the overall goals, plans, arrangements, and practices that shape the experiences of students in schools. Thus 'curriculum' does not just refer to the subject content of textbooks and other teaching-learning materials (TLMs) and their pedagogy, but also includes aspects such as school environment and culture. It is indeed only through such holistic and integrated changes across all these key aspects of the curriculum that we will be able to positively transform the overall learning experiences of our students.

Because it is the Teacher who must be the torchbearer for these changes, this NCF aims to see and present matters from the perspective of a Teacher's reality. For that reason, this NCF contains the kinds of details, suggestions, and illustrations that would clarify its approach and principles at the level of practice of a Teacher and the school. The Teachers and schools are not bound by these illustrations, but the level of detail provided would hopefully make this NCF more graspable and usable.

This approach of detailing should also make this NCF more useful and readable not just to Teachers but to all the practitioners of education — including school leaders and academic and administrative functionaries such as cluster and block resource persons, BEOs, teacher educators, examination boards, and curriculum/ syllabus/ textbook development teams — as well as to those who have the greatest stake in education, namely, parents, community members and, of course, the students themselves.

This NCF aims to provide each such interested reader a reasonable understanding of what education should be like in the vision of this NCF — and why — and what role they could play.

Vision of the National Curriculum Framework

The NEP 2020 called for the development of a new National Curriculum Framework (NCF) and new State Curriculum Frameworks (SCFs) as the bases for transforming school education in the country. This is in consonance with the empowerment of States in our federal structure, with education as a concurrent subject. This NCF would aim to help bring consonance and harmony across the curricula in the country.

In this spirit, it is of the utmost importance — for all our children of today and of tomorrow, and for the future of India — to develop an educationally robust and aspirational, yet practically implementable, NCF as well as SCFs, that will ensure that all students — no matter their circumstances of birth or background — have the best possible education, with complete support from the system.

At the level of the individual, the goal of the new curricula must be to foster a school education system that builds character and enables learners to be well-rounded, healthy, ethical, creative, rational, compassionate, and caring individuals, while also preparing them well for higher education as well as for gainful, fulfilling employment. It must aim not only for all students to learn, but more importantly to learn how to learn, so that they may become lifelong learners and also have the ability to constantly adapt to changing times. The new curricula must enable and inspire students to participate in and contribute to society — culturally, economically, and democratically.

At the level of society, the goal of the new curriculum must be to transform our society into one that is more just, equitable, humane, prosperous, sustainable, and rooted in Indian ethos and culture. It should enable India's continued ascent and leadership on the global stage in terms of economic growth, social justice and equality, research and knowledge creation, scientific and technological advancement, environmental sustainability, and cultural preservation and vibrancy. The education system must ensure that the actual practice of the curricula, including content, pedagogy, environment, and culture in schools, clearly promote these individual and societal goals.

Curriculum Content

The world is undergoing rapid changes in the knowledge landscape. With various dramatic scientific and technological advances, such as the rise of big data, machine learning, and artificial intelligence, many jobs worldwide may be fundamentally affected — while the need for a workforce with deep human capacities, including those involving multidisciplinary capacities across languages, mathematics, sciences, social sciences, vocational education, and art, and those that involve empathy, care, communication, and ethical reasoning, will be in increasingly greater demand.

With climate change, environmental degradation, and depleting natural resources, there will also be an increasing demand for capacities for environmental sustainability; indeed, mere environmental sustainability may not be sufficient any longer — environmental restoration and regeneration will be required to save our planet.

The health and well-being of individuals remains a key aspect for success in all other aspects of life. Education across all subject areas, as well as in physical education, health, and well-being, is also critical for the holistic development of the individual.

For these reasons, it is very important for students to receive a multidisciplinary education that includes art and craft, physical education and well-being practices, vocational education, languages and literature, as well as mathematics, science, and social science; this will help to ensure the development of all aspects and capabilities of learners, and help to make education more well-rounded, useful, engaging, and fulfilling to the learner.

Certain key capacities, values, and dispositions (which include what are sometimes called '21st century skills') should also be acquired by all students across subject areas to become good, fulfilled, and productive human beings in today's rapidly changing world. These capacities, values, and dispositions include: scientific temper and evidence-based and critical thinking; creativity and innovativeness; sense of aesthetics and art; oral and written communication; multilingualism; health and nutrition; mental and physical fitness and well-being; collaboration

and teamwork; problem solving and logical reasoning; ethical and moral reasoning; digital literacy, coding, and computational thinking; knowledge and practice of human and Constitutional values; empathy, inclusion, and pluralism; Fundamental Duties; citizenship skills and values; environmental awareness and sensitivity; cleanliness, sanitation, and hygiene; cultural literacy and identity; rootedness and pride in India while being a productive global citizen; and knowledge of current affairs and critical issues facing local communities, States, the country, and the world.

To enable the development of the aforementioned Knowledge, Capacities, Values, and Dispositions, it will be necessary to reduce the content load in each subject to the core essentials — in order to make time and space for more effective pedagogy, including where relevant more multi- and inter-disciplinary, experiential, discussion-based, and activity-based learning. All of this together would result in a deeper disciplinary understanding of the subjects as well as develop these important capacities, values, and dispositions.

Pedagogy

To enable deeper understanding of concepts across subjects, and their interrelations, and to enable the acquisition of the various aforementioned values, dispositions, and capacities, pedagogy in the classroom must become more effective. Depending on the matter of study, context, and stage of the student, these effective pedagogical approaches would be of a wide range, including pedagogy that is more experiential, integrated, inquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, discussion-based, project-based, arts-based, sports-based, and activity-based. Such pedagogy will not only be more effective, but also more engaging and enjoyable.

In general, more participation, questioning, discussion, debate, and writing (including creative writing) by all students in the classroom in all subjects will help ensure the acquisition of capacities in languages, communication, and logical reasoning that are considered essential for effective exchanges of ideas across disciplines over a lifetime.

Assessment too will be transformed in parallel to the changes in pedagogy, from primarily testing facts, to testing core capacities and Competencies. The 'assessment culture' must change too, so that assessment is conducted increasingly *as learning* and *for learning.* There must also be periodic assessment *of learning* to ensure readiness for the next phase of learning, and to arrange suitable support for students when this readiness is not achieved.

The Board examinations for Grades 10 and 12 will also be substantially reformed. These will be made 'easier' — the Board examinations will primarily aim to assess understanding and achievement of Competencies rather than months of coaching and memorisation. To further eliminate the 'high stakes' aspect of Board examinations, all students will be allowed to take Board examinations on at least two occasions during any given school year, with only the best score being retained. In the long term, being able to take a subject Board examination immediately after the 'school term' (i.e., 'semester-wise' or 'on-demand' Board examinations) will be made available.

Environment, Practices, and Culture

The overall learning experience of students lies not only in the curriculum content and pedagogy, but is also determined by the school environment, practices, and culture. The culture of schools will be transformed to maximise the ability of Teachers to perform their roles effectively, and to

ensure that all members of the school are part of vibrant, caring, and inclusive communities of Teachers, students, parents, Principals, and other support staff, all of whom share the clear common goals — to ensure that our students feel safe and comfortable, are cognitively, emotionally, and physically healthy, and are enjoying the learning process.

A nurturing school environment and culture of this type can be developed through the leadership of Teachers, Principals, and other school functionaries who can act as role models to students. Inclusive, caring, and nurturing practices at the school by Teachers and other staff can help develop corresponding values and dispositions in students, e.g., not publicly sharing or displaying student information about their socio-economic backgrounds, not treating students any differently regardless of caste, gender, religion, disability, etc., fostering a sense of community, respecting students' home languages in cases where they are different from the main school languages, nurturing and valuing the natural environment, reducing and recycling, keeping the school building and surrounding areas clean and tidy, etc., will help develop corresponding desirable values and dispositions in students that may not be developed as effectively through 'curriculum content' alone.

Effecting these Curricular Changes

In order to enable these transformations of the curriculum in practice, this NCF aims to account for the reality of the average Teacher and school (such as the widespread existence of multigrade and multilevel teaching)—and provide a realistic pathway to the ideal from the current reality, in steps, taking into account the resources available to the Teacher, the capacities of the Teacher and the surrounding system, and the environment that the Teacher has to operate in, in terms of school and system culture, school and class size, and the community and socio-economic backgrounds of the students.

This NCF briefly touches upon the actions and practices of the various actors of the education system and its stakeholders, to enable its implementation — this includes not only Teachers, but also educational administrators, academic support institutions, schools and their leadership, and the families and communities of students.

The NCF aims to be unambiguous and unhesitating in confronting the key problems and realities facing the schooling system, without which real change in the educational lives of our Teachers and students would not be possible.

Organisation of this NCF

This NCF is organised into five parts.

- **Part A** articulates the broad Aims of School Education, and the desirable Values and Dispositions, Capacities and Skills, and Knowledge that are required for achieving these aims. It also lays down the principles and approaches for content selection, pedagogy, and assessment and gives the rationale and design principles for the four stages of schooling.
- **Part B** focuses on some of the important cross-cutting themes of NCF, viz., rootedness in India, education for values, learning and caring about the environment, inclusive education, guidance and counselling, and use of educational technology in schools.

- **Part C** has separate chapters for each school subject. Each of these chapters have Learning Standards defined for all the relevant stages of schooling along with specific guidelines for content selection, pedagogy, and assessments appropriate for that subject. The part also has a chapter on the Foundational Stage and one on design and range of subjects in Grades 11 and 12
- **Part D** handles school culture and processes that enable a positive learning environment and inculcate desirable values and dispositions.
- The last part, **Part E**, outlines the requirements for an overall ecosystem of schooling that would enable the achievement of the aims of the NCF. This includes aspects of Teacher capacities and service conditions, physical infrastructure requirements, and the role of the community and family.

