

# Need surgical strike to ensure quality

The latest Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) draws our attention yet again to the fact that a lot needs to be fixed in our education system. Without commenting on the small changes in percentages reported over the last two or four years, the underlying message remains that we aren't making an impact on our children's learning – the most important thing we can invest in as a country.

Today, we live in a world full of opportunities where technology and global connectedness can help a student in a small village become the next global executive or entrepreneur. Can we afford to hold these children back by allowing them to leave school without being able to read and do arithmetic properly?

Without greater focus and action on education, we are becoming a nation at risk. An ineffective education system hurts us more than an attack from a hostile country or a

health epidemic, even though its effects are not that dramatic. Wouldn't we react very differently to those threats?

Most states and countries have recognized that while good inputs like school buildings, trained teachers or effective midday meals are important, an effective education system is one in which children are learning well and



## MY OPINION

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developing holistically. Concerted, multi-pronged and focussed efforts, which are sustained over at least a 5-year period, are needed to make a difference. While some parts of the solution are simple and basic, other pieces are complex as they require a mindset change.

### Areas that need focus

- Transparent, annual assessments in government and pri-

vate schools that point clearly to the problem areas in learning, are required.

These assessments would be even more detailed than ASER, and would build on it. Additionally, we need to participate in international assessments like TIMSS and PISA and benchmark ourselves with others. These assessments should be designed in a manner to test understanding as against recall. All of the information generated should be captured in a Student Progress Tracking System based on Unique Student IDs.

- Establish a movement that makes reading a focus area from both action and measurement perspectives. Track reading outcomes for students using technology (such as a reading test on tablets), combined with specialized training programmes for teachers on reading skill development and measurement.

- Teachers need assessment. Overhauling teacher training, providing them information

on common misconceptions and mistakes with concrete tips on teaching-specific concepts and topics that can be accessed by teachers any time, anywhere, is crucial.

- Improve research infrastructure in the country and enable long-term systematic research by co-opting the private sector for skills that do not yet exist in the government sector. Establishing a fund similar to the national NMEICT or the American National Science Foundation fund will provide support for innovation to take root and grow in all sectors.
- Non-partisan cooperation among influential players, combined with consistent efforts by state governments while recognizing that change in a large system takes time, at least initially.

The ASER results show us the price of not fixing even the easy parts. We need a surgical strike and more on the problem of poor-quality education, and this is everyone's problem.