

1 Working collaboratively with your state

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 and Right to Education (RtE) Act 2009 changed the landscape of school education in India by promoting decentralisation and clearly articulating the state's role, as well as that of various district and block-level organisations. At the school level, the RtE 2009 clearly mandates the role and responsibilities of the SMC. There are different levels of responsibility, but the state stipulates that schools must have:

- safe access for students with transport if required
- a prescribed student:teacher ratio
- an all-weather building with requisite classrooms and separate and functional toilets
- adequate and safe drinking water
- a boundary wall within which a playground and kitchen shed are provided, along with sports equipment
- a library
- trained teachers that treat all children equally
- special training for late admissions
- provision of all teaching and learning material such as textbooks, workbooks, stationery, uniforms and midday meals.

It is likely that the state will have various initiatives and schemes to address these responsibilities, for example a three-year programme to put perimeter fences around each elementary school, a recruitment drive to fill 50,000 teacher vacancies, mobile vans with specialist services for students with learning disabilities, or a roll-out plan for instituting a technology infrastructure across the state.



Figure 1 As a school leader you need to be aware of the state's schemes and plans so that you can plan how to utilise them for the benefit of your school and students.

Activity 1: Identifying where state-level institutions could help

Look at the list above and identify any areas where your school may not be as well served by the key state-level institutions, including those at the district, block and cluster levels. You might, for example, have poor toilet facilities, or the perimeter fence may be broken, or you may be short of teachers. How would you report this shortfall in a way that is likely to get a favourable response?

Discussion

Notifying, negotiating and working with different state, district and sub-district representatives from a variety of institutions is a tremendous challenge. As a school leader, a first step could be to reflect on the needs or requirements of your school or what has already been stated in your school development plan (jointly formulated with your SMC). You may have already done this.

There is probably a lot to be done in different areas (infrastructure facilities, teaching and learning, attendance, connecting with the community, etc.), and inevitably there would be limited resources available to make the desired improvements. It would be beneficial if you enlist the help of the SMC members or some key people or leaders in the local community who can offer the help and support you require in realising your vision and goals.

Another aspect could be to find out and carefully examine the schemes and projects that are available in and pursued by your state. It is useful to be aware of these, as you can then advocate for them in your school in the allocation of resources and/or opportunities.

So as a school leader you need to inform yourself about how different state institutions can help and support you to improve the quality of education in your school. You need to work directly with your state organisations and build relationships in order to remain informed and have influence.

As you work with your state organisations you will realise that it is not just about getting resources from them for your school, but about influencing provision, solving problems, planning for the implementation of major school activities, monitoring progress and – most importantly – ensuring that all students learn. In the following case study you will see that there is more of a two-way communication and relationship between school and the state institutions, in which, as an active school leader, you are a resource as well as a beneficiary or ‘customer’.

Case Study 1: Mrs Mistry works with the DIET

Mrs Mistry, a school leader with more than 12 years of experience, works closely with the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) in her area and has established regular communication with the DIET principal, who keeps her updated on new teaching methods and resources for teaching her students.

Mrs Mistry is regularly short of teachers and finds it difficult to release the teachers she does have to attend training sessions organised by the DIET, but she is committed to their continuous professional development nonetheless. So she has conducted a few sessions on her own in the school with support from the DIET. They have helped by providing open education resources and showing her some websites that she could refer to.

The other way that Mrs Mistry engages with the DIET is by influencing their training programmes in a number of ways – essentially through sharing experiences of her school with other schools located in different contexts, and citing the problems and barriers faced by her school and how she resolved them.

Given the increasing shifts and innovations in quality education in the country, she finds it important to support the DIET in the design, implementation and planning of teacher training programmes, and so the relationship with the DIET is very much a two-way street.

Activity 2: Evaluating the type and extent of your engagement with key state-level institutions

For this activity you will need to refer to the blank table in Resource 1. The left-hand column of Table R1.1 includes a list of important state institutions that are relevant to your work as a school leader. Next to each institution, rate how far you are engaged with them by ticking one of the next four columns that best describes your level of contact with them. For example, you may have more contact with the CRC and/or BRC as compared to the DIET or State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT).

Think about whether this contact is two-way, or instead is information coming from them to you or going from you to them through other institutions. You may find that with some you have little or no contact – you may not even be sure of their roles or responsibilities. It will help if you write down the aspect for which you are in contact with them (e.g. midday meal, data collection, providing information, developing materials, training, academic support, etc.) in the sixth column. Then note the name of the main person you connect with in that institution, if you know a name. This may not be the most senior person and sometimes your contact will be a friend or relation, or a person who can connect you with the right person.

Discussion

This activity may have made you realise who you do and do not know, and at what level of the system your network is the strongest. Are there any other institutions that are critical for you to collaborate and network with that may not be in the list above? More importantly, what kind of collaboration and networking do you have presently, and what are the major areas of your work as a school leader that you contact them for or that they contact you for? In building a professional network you can enlist the help of other school leaders if you are not sure where or how to start. Once you have a network, you need to decide and plan how you will keep it live. Possibilities could include developing two-way communications (for example, by phone, email, letter, in person or using online social media sites such as LinkedIn).