

# Performance Grading Index on quality of school education in Assam

The Department of School Education and Literacy (DSEL), India has recently released the Performance Grade Index- District (PGI-D), which assesses the performance of each district in school education. The PGI-D structure comprises a total weightage of 600 points across 83 indicators, which are grouped under 6 categories viz., Outcomes, Effective Classroom Transaction (ECT), Infrastructure Facilities & Student's Entitlements (IF&SE), School Safety & Child Protection (SS&CP), Digital Learning (DL) and Governance Process (GP).

First introduced in 2017 to assess the performance of states and union territories in school education, the evaluation was expanded to the district level in the following year. Through its comprehensive analysis, PGI-D serves as a valuable performance review of the school education system at the district level and helps policymakers tailor evidence-based interventions.

The data for the index has been drawn using the existing information from the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) portal, the National Achievement Survey (NAS) of 2017 and 2021, and information from respective districts. The districts are ranked into ten grades, with the highest achievable Grade being 'Daksh' for districts scoring more than 90% of the total points in a particular category or overall. The lowest grade in PGI-D is called 'Akanshi-3' for scores up to 10 % of the total points. This article focuses on the performance of the 35 districts of Assam in the PGI-D index.

A comparison between the first and the recent PGI-D index shows a decline in Assam's overall perfor-

mance. In 2021-22, the performance of seven districts showed a decline, for eighteen districts it remained similar to 2018-19, however for the remaining eight, there was improvement. The performance of the two new districts created in 2021-22- Bajali and Tamulpur- were graded Prachesta-2, indicating a score between 41-50%. When districts are compared for each category, it is observed that most districts performed better in all the categories except for Category-I, i.e., Outcome. Although, this year the performance of the districts is poorest under Digital Learning, it is crucial to note that the performance improved compared to 2018-19.

An inter-district performance comparison in PGI-D 2021-22 also reveals regional disparities in performance under the various categories. It is observed that the districts from Lower Assam and Barak Valley region were predominantly on the list of poor-performing districts. Among the districts, Kamrup Metro reported significant improvement in four categories in the recent PGI-D, i.e. ECT, SS & CP, DL, and GP in 2021-22, compared to 2018-19, whereas South Salmara-Mankachar reported a major decline, particularly in the outcome category (by 45%), a trend which is noticed among all the districts. This is a matter of concern since the Outcome category, which carries the highest weightage in the index (48%), assesses important indicators related to proficiency of students in numeracy, literacy, and other subjects taught; transition and retention rates, attendance and mainstreaming of Out of School Children (OOSC), Pupil-teacher ratio (PTR), teachers training, etc. These indicators are categorised under three Domains: Learning Outcome (LO),

Access Outcomes (AO), and Teacher Availability and Professional Development Outcomes (TAPDO).

A closer look at the NAS (2021) findings for Assam reveals that students' proficiency in language, mathematics, social sciences, and other subjects hovers between 40%-60%, which is a progressive decline compared to NAS (2017). Therefore, even though students are promoted to the subsequent grades, they are unable to master the grade-level competencies. This points towards the shortfalls in learning outcomes which may be due to factors such as large classroom size, teachers' shortage, unsuitable pedagogy or curriculum, etc.

According to the UDISE+ (2021-22) data, the state has low retention rates, especially for students at the secondary level (I to X), at 49.48 %. In June this year, the Education Minister of Assam revealed that the state has witnessed nearly six percent decline in school enrollment. Although 43% of identified out-of-school children were mainstreamed in 2021-22, there is a need for further impetus. At the backdrop of such concerning trends regarding enrollment and retention rates, the government's decision to close 16 Residential Special Training Centres needs to be reconsidered since these centers play an important role in mainstreaming OOSC into education.

Moreover, the pandemic further exacerbated the accessibility issue. The linkages between the Outcome Category and DL became evident during the lockdowns. For instance, in Nagaon district, students faced difficulties accessing the Diksha e-

platform, affecting their learning and access outcomes. Given the concerning performance of most of the districts under the DL category with scores as low as one or two out of 50, it becomes imperative that on the way forward, additional focus is put on strengthening digital infrastructure.

Regarding TAPDO, it was reported that almost 3000 schools have only one teacher, and 12,371 schools have teacher shortages relative to the students. The District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) has also reported 34.4% vacancies, with 378 faculties in position against 575 sanctioned posts (PAB, 2023-24). Following this, the Project Approval Board 2023-24, for Samagra Shiksha Assam, directed DSEL to fill up these vacancies in the DIETs, among other teacher training institutions. Keeping heed of this, the State government has recently announced the creation of 800 new teacher posts in 422 tea garden schools, which is a welcome move (India Today, 2023).

The decline in the overall performance of Assam calls for urgent attention from policymakers. The state must prioritise improving learning outcomes by addressing teacher shortages, and access issues and encouraging teacher training, including training in digital literacy. The state must also work towards increasing the number of Special Schools in the areas where issues, such as child labour, child marriage, etc., are higher in number to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for vulnerable children. Efforts in these areas are crucial for the development and progress of the education system in Assam.

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## CM Sarma attends ceremonial distribution of financial relief under AMFIRS 2021

**Guwahati:** Taking another giant leap forward towards fulfillment of promises made during campaigning for the 2021 State Assembly elections, Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday attended as Chief Guest the ceremonial distribution of relief under "Category - III" of the Assam Microfinance Incentive & Relief Scheme (AMFIRS) 2021 at an event held at the Janata Bhawan Complex in Dispur. Borrowers whose accounts had turned non-performing asset (NPA) as on March 31, 2021 and having outstanding principal amount up to ₹25,000 are deemed to be eligible for benefits of Category - III of AMFIRS 2021. The State government is shelling out a total of ₹291 crore as compensation to the lenders (microfinance institutions) and this move is expected to benefit a total of around 2.2 lakh borrowers from across the State. In return, the concerned microfinance institutions shall issue "no due certificate" to the borrowers, thus making the latter credit-worthy again under the formal financial system. Speaking at the event organized at the

Assam Secretariat Complex in Dispur, Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma expressed happiness at the prospect of as many as 2.2 lakh female microfinance and bank loan borrowers again becoming credit-worthy through the Category - III relief launched today. Referring to the Assam Microfinance Incentive & Relief Scheme as a first of its kind in the country, Chief Minister Dr. Sarma said its main objective was to provide relief to eligible borrowers who had availed small loans from microfinance institutions and the formal banking system but owing to certain circumstances, they couldn't repay the borrowed amount in full. Expressing his gratitude towards the microfinance institutions for agreeing to waive of around ₹300 crore in interest income for the sake of successful implementation of Category - III relief measures, Chief Minister Dr. Sarma appealed to the beneficiaries of the scheme to ensure from now onwards any amount borrowed from financial lenders are repaid in full and on time. Providing the scheme's beneficiaries with "no due certificate" would also

aid in the process of universal financial inclusion, Chief Minister Dr. Sarma added. Chief Minister Dr. Sarma also spoke about the launch of "Category - IV" relief in days to come. Chief Minister Dr. Sarma further said the primary reasons behind the default in loan repayment can be said to be the Covid-19 pandemic scenario and the anti-CAA movement. Now that the pandemic period and days of strife have been left behind, it is important a healthy credit habit is built up in the State, the Chief Minister added. Chief Minister Dr. Sarma, referring to recent media reports alleging the State government back-tracking on its promises to provide relief to microfinance loan defaulters, put the record straight by making it clear that only those loans which had become non-performing as on March 31, 2021 shall be eligible for coverage under AMFIRS 2021. The event was also attended by Ministers of Assam Cabinet Ajanta Neog, Jayanta Mallabaruah, Chandramohan Patowary, along with a host of senior officials and representatives of microfinance institutions.