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HOW MUCH DOES FREE EDUCATION COST?

SURVEY ON EDUCATION FOR THE POOR

PRESS RELEASE

The poorest parents of Delhi were asked how much they were willing to pay for government school education, if they had to pay for it themselves. The average answer was an astonishing Rs.66/- per month. When asked what they thought it cost the government. They said Rs.100/- per month per child. Nearly 37% of them felt the government was spending about Rs. 50! In reality, these schools cost you and me, the tax payers, on a conservative estimate, Rs.800 per month per child! **Government school education is valued at less than 1/8th of what it costs the exchequer.** The discord between the perceived value of government schools and the actual value is indicative of the quality of the education provided. Rs. 800/- has not translated into quality worthy of that amount for the consumer – the poor parent.

The 'Education for the Poor' survey conducted by **Centre for Civil Society, Delhi** with **AC Nielsen ORG MARG** explored the poorest households of Delhi, government school teachers and the managements of private schools measuring their satisfaction with the current system of education and testing the concept of education vouchers as a possible solution.

GOVERNMENT SCHOOL TEACHERS SEND THEIR CHILDREN TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS

One of the highlights of the survey is that 28% of poor consumers expressed lack of confidence in government school education, choosing to *pay* for private education rather than avail of *free* government education. Some of them even preferred sending their children to Hindi medium private schools over English medium government schools. Further, a significant number of government school teachers claimed that they send their own children to private schools because the facilities were better and in some cases, because the school was English medium. **The private schools catering to poor households, on average, charged a fee of Rs. 241 per month for primary classes and Rs. 374 per month for secondary classes which, again, is less than half the cost of government school education.**

EDUCATION VOUCHERS: A RELEVANT SOLUTION TO INDIA'S EDUCATION CHALLENGES

In the course of the survey, parents, teachers and managements of private schools were exposed to the concept of education vouchers. In an education voucher scheme, the government gives poor parents the funds necessary to pay for school education in the form of a voucher. Parents choose the school for their child and pay for it with the voucher. This is an alternative to the current system of building government schools and hiring teachers to educate the poor. It gives poor parents the choice of exiting a bad school and affording better education outside the realm of government schools, if they so wish.

Nearly all parents interviewed (98%) liked the Education Voucher concept. On average, they felt Rs. 436 per month, is an optimal voucher amount. This is less than half of what the government currently spends per child per month on education in a government school! Three fourths of the teachers and nearly 86% of the private schools liked the concept saying that *it gives parents the opportunity to select a school of their choice*