

1. **far-sighted** (adjective) – prudent, visionary, insightful/shrewd.
2. **mainstream** (verb) – accept/establish/recognize something by most people as a normal/conventional.
3. **equity** (noun) – fairness, neutrality, justice, integrity.
4. **stimulating** (adjective) – inspiring, stirring, exciting.
5. **pedagogical** (adjective) – relating to teaching.
6. **curiosity** (noun) – strong desire, interest.
7. **infuse** (verb) – add, introduce, impart/inculcate.
8. **primarily** (adverb) – mostly, mainly, most importantly.
9. **in line with** (phrase) – in accordance with.
10. **holistic** (adjective) – wholesome, comprehensive/entire, integrated.
11. **a step forward** (noun) – progress, advancement, development/headway.
12. **transformative** (adjective) – life-changing, metamorphic, progressive.
13. **totality** (noun) – whole, total, entirety.
14. **encompass** (verb) – include, subsume, incorporate.
15. **cater to** (verb) – accommodate/serve, provide for, oblige.
16. **comply with** (verb) – abide by, adhere to, conform to.
17. **live up to** (phrasal verb) – achieve, meet, satisfy/fulfil.
18. **devote** (verb) – allocate, set aside, earmark/reserve.
19. **liberalisation** (noun) – removal or loosening of restrictions on something, typically an economic or political system.
20. **amend** (noun) – change, modify, adjust.
21. **stream** (noun) – (British term) a group of schoolchildren (with the same age and ability) are taught. The US term is “track”.
22. **well-thought-out** (adjective) – carefully considered and planned.
23. **persuade** (verb) – motivate, convince, prompt.
24. **ambitious** (adjective) – difficult, exacting, formidable/challenging.
25. **shortcoming** (noun) – fault, flaw, imperfection/defect.
26. **anganwadi** (noun) – a type of rural child care centre in India.
27. **address** (verb) – attend to, tackle, deal with.
28. **cutting-edge** (adjective) – state-of-the-art, innovational, pioneering, revolutionary.
29. **productive** (adjective) – useful, creative, valuable.
30. **egalitarian** (noun) – fair, just, common/equal; supporting social equality.

Starting at three: On RTE progress

Extending the right to education to younger children would be a welcome step

India’s far-sighted Right to Education Act is making slow progress in mainstreaming equity, in the absence of a strong political commitment in several States. The proposal to extend its scope to younger children through early childhood education is, however, wholly positive. The move suggested in the draft National Education Policy to put children three years and older in a stimulating nursery environment is a welcome logical measure. The

pedagogical view is that the pre-school phase is crucial to stimulate a child's curiosity and help her prepare for schooling at age six. The NEP proposal to infuse the existing child development schemes, which are primarily nutrition-oriented, with a learning component is in line with this thinking on holistic development. An extension of the RTE would be a big step forward, but in the absence of measures that will deepen equity, the law cannot be transformative. The Centre has to guarantee that in its totality, the Right to Education will encompass all schools bar those catering to minorities. This is necessary to achieve its moral goal of bringing quality schooling to all in the 6-14 age group; adding the early childhood section, now under the Ministry of Women and Child Development, will then be meaningful. Unfortunately, the evidence indicates that only 12.7% schools comply with the law's requirements, and at the pace seen since RTE became law in 2010, it will take decades to achieve full coverage.

Giving all children aged three and above the right to an education can become a reality only if the state is willing to live up to its promise of devoting more financial resources. An expenditure of 6% of GDP on education could have transformed the sector, given the large wealth generated since economic liberalisation. But far less is spent — for instance, 2.7% in 2017-18. The lost years have cost millions a brighter future, but the draft NEP provides an opportunity to make amends. Bringing more children into the formal stream needs a well-thought-out road map. The Centre has to play a leadership role to ensure that States, some of which have done a poor job of implementing the RTE Act, are persuaded to implement urgent reform. The NEP's proposal to have well-designed school complexes, where pre-primary to secondary classes will be available, is in itself an ambitious goal that will require mission-mode implementation. Shortcomings in anganwadi centres must be addressed in the expansion plan. State governments will have to fill teacher vacancies and ensure that the training of recruits is aligned to scientific, child-oriented teaching methods. Education reform is vital to prepare for a future in which cutting-edge skills will be necessary for continued economic progress. Changes to the RTE Act that will prepare all children for a more productive schooling phase can help make India's educational system morally fair and more egalitarian.