

## **No-detention policy in school may be scrapped from next academic year: Union minister**



### **Summary:**

The government may scrap the no-detention policy from the next academic year as the policy has negatively impacted affected quality of basic education in the country. This comes on the backdrop of concerns expressed by various states over the declining quality of education due the policy.

### **What is no detention policy?**

The no-detention policy was introduced **as a part of the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) under the Right to Education Act (RTE) in 2010**. Under this policy, *students up to class 8 are automatically promoted to the next class without being held back even if they do not get a passing grade*. The no-detention policy under the RTE Act was to ensure that no child admitted in a school shall be held back in any class or expelled from school until the completion of elementary education.

The policy was path-breaking but, unfortunately, it ended up being completely opposite to its original objective. There have been plenty of arguments on both sides of this policy.

### **Arguments in favour of this policy:**

One of the strongest points in favour is that detaining children at an elementary education level damages their self-esteem and brings social stigma attached to failing in a class. In addition, the fear of examinations hurts a child's developmental plans and does long-term damage. By introducing a no-detention

policy, it has also been correctly argued that it helps keep children stay away from social evils, including juvenile crimes.

### **Arguments against this policy:**

Supporters of revoking the policy have argued that automatically promoting all students to the next class leaves very little incentive for students to learn and teachers to teach well. When students know that they won't be retained for academic performance or low attendance, it builds very little motivation. It ends up hurting the learning interest of the other students who want to study further. Teachers lose interest as well and the overall quality of education imparted suffers. Is it only the no-detention policy which has been responsible for the deteriorating quality?

As per some experts, the argument, that because of the no-detention policy, learning levels have gone down, may appear far-fetched because of the following reasons:

- Firstly, learning level is determined by several factors—teaching practices, teacher quality, availability of books, socio-economic background of children, school environment, etc. To isolate one factor, policy of no-detention, as a sole determinant of lowering of learning levels is neither plausible nor justifiable.
- Secondly, implicit in that argument is that children study only because of the fear of being detained. This is a serious charge and hits at the very bottom of the entire process and philosophy of school education.
- Thirdly, the no detention policy cannot be viewed in isolation but has to be looked at in conjunction with other provisions of the Act. The provisions of having an evaluation process which is continuous and comprehensive, having a class environment which is free from fear, trauma and anxiety, that there is no physical punishment or mental harassment of a child, ensuring that teachers perform their duty, including the requirement of transacting the curriculum as per schedule and in accordance with the laid down procedure, and assessing the ability of each child and providing additional instructions. All these are important determinants of quality education and improving learning levels. Gunning the no-detention policy is an alibi for sub-par teacher performance and classroom practices.

So, is there merit for revoking the no-detention policy or can there be a more moderate mid-way path?

- There is significant merit to a no-detention policy at the primary school level and especially till class 5. Learning focused on building key foundational blocks, this can help children develop an interest in learning and encourage them to study further without fear of failure or assessments. Combined with the

Mid-Day Meal scheme, this allows children to get nutritious food and also learn, thus increasing the probability of having them attend school.

- The middle school levels of class 6 to class 8 are the most critical. This is a stage where a strong knowledge block, if built, can help a child stay through the entire learning life cycle and also develop skills which are very important for a sustainable livelihood. It is proposed that some form of evaluation is introduced in these classes.
- However, unlike a summative assessment which is binary and turns up as pass or fail, the evaluation must allow credit points to be given for academic performance and school attendance. (In the no-detention policy, students without attending a single day of class can still be promoted). Evaluations done periodically, these points can be accumulated and carried forward, much like a deposit in a piggy bank.
- These evaluations must focus on language (say, reading in mother tongue), numerical skills and one key vocational skill. Students need to collect credits in at least two of these critical learning areas before being promoted to the next class. This can help bring in some sense of seriousness in the class. Students now know that they won't be automatically promoted. Executed well, this can ensure every child from class 6 to class 8 is trained on at least one vocational skill.
- Such a method where students get to collect learning credit points will help integrate vocational education seamlessly into school education. It will also help students who want to pursue higher diploma in vocational skills to monetise the points for waivers in fee, learning subjects, etc. Students who drop out and are unable to complete education can use vocational skills to commence livelihood activities.

### **Way ahead:**

There are sufficient arguments on either side of this policy. However, what is required is a pragmatic view of the problem and an avoidance of a one-size-fits-all solution. There appears to be an overemphasis on gross enrolments and dropouts. Both these are due to a variety of reasons, including socio-economic. Children in school help in controlling others factors like child marriages, reduced child trafficking, better health, child labour, slavery, etc. So, all steps must be taken to encourage maximum number of students in a classroom.

A no-detention policy is a lame, easy-to-do method to get a quick-fix solution to a complex problem. There is evidence available that there are significant gains of keeping children in school even artificially by promoting them through multiple classes, but lack of long-term learning outcomes and mass failures in higher classes are signs that all is certainly not well. Modifying the no-detention policy is easier said than done, since this will mean a repeal of a provision under the RTE Act. The

New Education Policy 2016 does mention these as areas of reform and hopefully this will be taken up soon.

**Conclusion:**

It is also true that revoking the policy in isolation without drastically overhauling the education system would only add more woes to the already overburdened lives of the poor Indian children. Hence, the policy should either be renovated with adequate changes to neutralize the ill effects or replaced with a new policy that would take a balanced approach. The prime objective should be to effect an all-round development of children and equipping them with life skills. The fact remains that today's children are tomorrow's future, and it is in our interest that we fix the issues we face before it gets too late.