



Merger of Schools in Odisha: SATH Project

Why in News

The Odisha government has **identified around 8,000 schools** in 15 districts which **will be merged with other schools** due to **low enrollment** (less than 20 students).

- The merger is **being carried out under the [NITI Aayog's Sustainable Action for Transforming Human Capital in Education \(SATH-E\) project](#)**, and has been termed **Consolidation and Rationalisation of schools**.

Key Points

▪ SATH-E Project:

- **Sustainable Action for Transforming Human Capital (SATH)** focusses on **two main sectors - Education and Health** and to build **three 'Role Model' States**.
- **SATH-E** aspires to be a 'saathi', to the educational system with the student and the teacher at its centre".
 - In **2017, Odisha** was among three states, along with **Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh**, to be **selected by NITI Aayog** for the project.
- The initiative aims to transform elementary and secondary school education through goal driven exercise and create role model states for education. The initiative **culminates at the end of the 2020 academic year**.
- **Critical interventions** including **school mergers, remediation program, training, monitoring teacher recruitment/rationalization, institutional reorganization** at district and state level and proper utilization of **Management Information System (MIS)** are in execution mode since January, 2018.
 - **Merger of schools** is advocated to help **consolidate resources** such as teachers, libraries, laboratories and play equipment.
 - **MIS** can assist the school manager in determining the aims of the school, formulating strategic plans, distributing resources, and evaluating staff performance as well as organizational success.
- Progress of the project is **being monitored** through a National Steering Group (NSG) and Central Project Monitoring Unit (CPMU) at national level and State Project Monitoring Unit (SPMU) at State level.

▪ Concerns with Merger of Schools:

- Activists have argued that closure or merger of schools is **in violation of section 3 and 8 of the [Right to Education \(RTE\) Act, 2009](#)**.
 - **Section 3** provides to **every child of the age of six to fourteen years** the right to free and compulsory education in a **neighbourhood school** till the completion of elementary education.
 - **Section 8** assigns **duties to the appropriate Government** to ensure that it provides free and compulsory elementary education to every child, in a

neighbourhood school.

- Majority of these schools are **from tribal belts on hilly terrains**. Closure of schools in a village will only **increase the dropout rate** as it won't be feasible for students to travel far to attend school.
- Parents are also concerned that if their children fail to attend school, they will also be **deprived of the [midday meals](#)**.

▪ **State Government's Response:**

- Students who will have to travel to a distant school will be **provided with a daily allowance of Rs. 20** and **students from schools facing closure** will also be provided a **one-time facilitation allowance of Rs 3,000**.
 - If the **distance to school is more than 1 km**, students will be provided **travel allowance as per Right To Education (RTE) norms**.
- Further, the **district collectors have been authorised to cancel the merger** if genuine concerns arise.

Way Forward

- The merger would make schools aspirational for students and result in **improvement of Pupil-Teacher Ratio**. There would be **better infrastructure facilities**, better academic environment with additional e-Learning and co-curricular facilities. However, **geographical constraints and other hurdles** should be considered before closing/merging down schools.
- The entire process must be enabled through clear channels of communication, a rigorous **grievance redressal system** and thorough **counseling**.

[Source: IE](#)

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/merger-of-schools-in-odisha-sath-project>

