

94000 Government Schools Shut: Crisis, Consolidation and India's Education Transformation

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94000 Government Schools Shut Latest News

- Recently, the main opposition party of India flagged a **NITI Aayog report** (first published in May) showing that 94000 government schools have closed over the past decade.
- This has raised concerns about children's access to education, prompting a closer look at the data behind India's changing school landscape.

Background

- For decades, India's education policy focused on **expanding neighbourhood schools** to ensure every child could access education close to home.
- Today, that narrative is shifting. Since education falls under the **Concurrent List**, several states have adopted policies to close, merge, or consolidate schools — raising both concerns and questions about the real story behind the numbers.

Three Broad Trends (2014-15 to 2024-25)

- **Total schools declined by about 45,000** — but this was driven entirely by a fall in government schools (94000 fewer), even as private unaided schools expanded.
- **Student enrolment declined** in a pattern mirroring school numbers — government school enrolment fell while private school enrolment rose.
- **Number of teachers increased**, indicating improved teacher availability despite fewer schools and declining enrolment.

What the Data Shows

- **Schools:** Total schools (government + private) **fell** from 15.16 lakh (2014-15) to 14.71 lakh (2024-25). Government schools alone declined from 11.07 lakh to 10.13 lakh, while private unaided schools grew.
- **Enrolment:** Overall student **enrolment fell** by 2.26 crore, from 26.95 crore to 24.69 crore. Between 2022-23 and 2024-25 alone, government school enrolment dropped from 13.62 crore to 12.16 crore, while private school enrolment rose from 8.42 crore to 9.59 crore (Rajya Sabha reply, March 2026).
 - Notably, nearly 70% of students remain enrolled in Classes I-VIII, underlining the continued importance of neighbourhood schools for young children.
- **Teachers:** Teacher numbers rose from about 90 lakh to over 1 crore, and the average **teachers per school improved from 5.9 to 6.9**.
 - However, national averages mask disparities — many rural schools still run with very low enrolment or a single teacher, while urban schools remain overcrowded.

Why This Is Happening: The Demographic Driver

- India is undergoing a **demographic transition**. The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has fallen from over 3 in the early 1990s to about **2.0** today — below the replacement level of 2.1.
- This decline stems from rising female literacy, urbanisation, better healthcare, wider family planning access, delayed marriages, and changing family aspirations.
- Fewer children being born naturally translates to fewer children needing schooling.

Why School Size Matters

- A school does more than deliver lessons — it nurtures a child's intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development through peer interaction, sports, and group activities.

- Such holistic development is difficult in schools with only a handful of students or a single teacher, who must simultaneously handle multiple classes, subjects, and administrative duties.
- Unlike home tuition, effective schooling depends on age-appropriate classrooms, subject-specific teachers, and peer learning — elements that low-enrolment schools often cannot provide.

School Consolidation: Does It Work?

- School consolidation merges under-enrolled schools into larger, better-equipped composite institutions with qualified teachers, laboratories, libraries, and sports facilities.
- This approach is supported by the **National Education Policy (NEP), 2020**, through the concept of school complexes and clusters — aimed at pooling resources to improve quality, not merely cutting costs.
- However, consolidation carries risks:
 - Increased travel distances can disadvantage young children, girls, and students in remote or tribal areas.
 - Success depends on balancing quality, efficiency, and equitable access — not administrative or financial convenience alone.

The Way Forward

- Consolidation decisions should be data-driven, based on enrolment trends, demographic projections, geography, and accessibility.
- Wherever schools are merged, governments must ensure safe transport and uninterrupted access, especially for young children, girls, and those in remote, tribal, and disadvantaged areas.
- Success should ultimately be judged not by the number of schools closed, but by whether every child can safely access a well-resourced school delivering quality education and holistic development.

Conclusion

- The closure of 94000 government schools is less a crisis and more a mirror of India's demographic shift and evolving preferences.
- Whether consolidation becomes genuine reform or a mere administrative exercise depends on ensuring equitable, safe access for every child, especially in remote and vulnerable regions.

Source: IE | TH

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