



A Decentralised Model of School Management

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The Panchayat Elementary Education Officer (PEEO) structure in Rajasthan offers a model for decentralising school management to the level of each Gram Panchayat. This model was initiated in 2015-16 across the state and evolved into its current form by 2017-18.

In the PEEO structure, the idea of block-level functionaries and cluster-level functionaries providing administrative and academic support, respectively, to schools was transformed into a decentralised structure at the level of each Gram Panchayat. The principal of the higher secondary school in the Gram Panchayat was appointed as the PEEO with the responsibility of administering all the schools in the same Gram Panchayat and improving the quality of education.

The Editorial Committee of Learning Curve has put this article together based on conversations with stakeholders closest to the reform, with support from members of the Azim Premji Foundation working with Government Schools in Rajasthan.

Context of reform

The reform in administrative and leadership structures in Rajasthan evolved from the strong political resolve of the government to improve the quality of education. At the time the reform was initiated in 2013, the Elementary Education Department managed schools with grades 1-5, 6-8 and 1-8. Management of these schools was the responsibility of the Panchayati Raj at the block and district level with the Directorate of Elementary Education and Elementary Education Department having overall responsibility at the state level. Schools with grades 6-10, 6-12, 9-12 were managed by the Secondary Education Department. Therefore, in most cases, a student had to change 3 to 4 schools to study up to the senior secondary level. Secondary schools were managed by the Department of Secondary Education.

Under this management structure, each Block Elementary Education Officer (BEEO) managed about 100-300 elementary

schools in an area of approximately 200-300 square km. Each Gram Panchayat had around 6-8 elementary schools but the Gram Panchayat's involvement in school management was minimal or non-existent. On the other hand, it was virtually impossible for the BEEO to reach every school on a regular basis, given the large number under their jurisdiction and due to geographical considerations. As a result, most elementary schools were actually not monitored. Further, administrative matters related to teachers, including disbursement of salaries, were managed at the block level by the BEEO.

There were also more 14000 secondary and senior secondary schools. Some of these schools were either located within the same campus as elementary schools or were a short distance away. These schools were in the bigger villages, usually the Panchayat Headquarters. Other secondary and senior secondary schools were located at some distance from elementary schools. Most of these schools were till grade 10; approximately 60% of Gram Panchayats did not have schools till grade 12. These senior secondary schools were managed by the Principal at the school level.

Girls were able to access school for so long as it was available in their village or in a village close by. The result was that if the secondary or senior secondary school was distant, many girls dropped out after grade 10. Another issue was that there was often more than one primary school (grades 1 to 5) in the same village. Naturally, these schools had low enrolment.

The first step was to create integrated schools (from grades 1 to 12), at least one in each Gram Panchayat. This was done by integrating elementary schools running in the same village with secondary/senior secondary schools in the same village

and by upgrading secondary schools. This resulted in at least one integrated schools with grades 1-12 in each Gram Panchayat, managed by the Principal, and an increase in the number of schools offering grades 1-10. At the same time, sufficient elementary schools were available to ensure adequate access as per RTE norms were ensured in each Gram Panchayat.

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This kind of integration was physical in terms of bringing students and teachers together in one school, while ensuring that access was not affected. However, in some Gram Panchayats, in remote areas, a few primary schools could not be integrated physically with other schools without compromising access. In such cases, where physical integration was not possible, these schools were managed by the principal of the secondary/senior secondary school, in a hub-and-spoke model.

The Principal of each integrated school was designated as the Ex-Officio Panchayat Elementary Education Officer (PEEO) and all elementary schools were brought under their administrative control for day to day supervision. All the teachers of the

Gram Panchayat were brought under the administrative control of the PEEO including disbursement of salaries, and responsibility for the Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs) and service books.

The integrated schools of grade 1-12 at the Gram Panchayat headquarters were designed to act as the resource centre for elementary schools in the Gram Panchayat.

Concept of PEEO

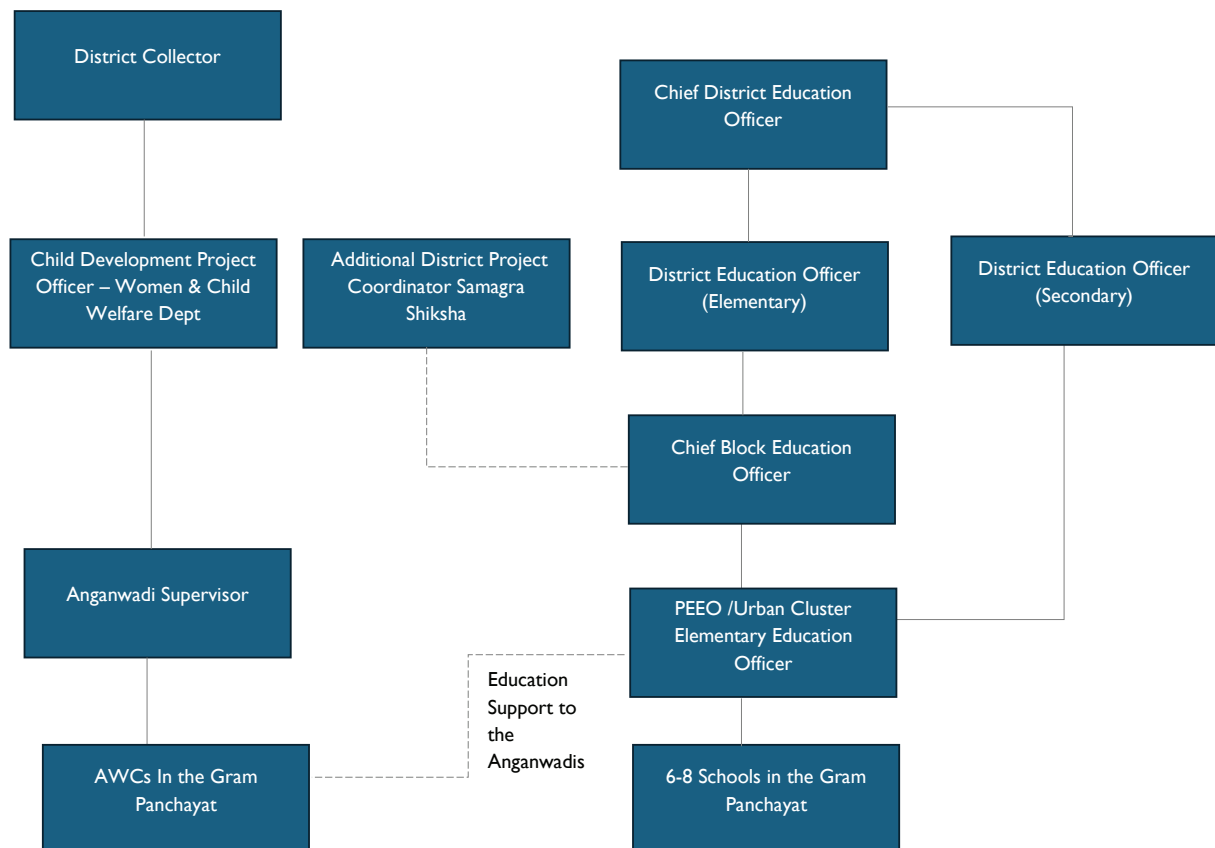
The principal of the school from grade 1 to 12 in the Gram Panchayat was redesignated as the PEEO. The status of the PEEO was equivalent to the BEEO in terms of decision-making capacities. The PEEO was the supervisory officer for the rest of the

schools at different locations within the Gram Panchayat. Responsibilities included drawing and disbursement of salary, review of teacher performance, and deputation of teachers within the Gram Panchayat's jurisdiction. They could also take disciplinary action, if required.

Comprehensive guidelines were prepared and shared with the PEEOs. Most importantly, PEEOs were empowered to make decisions within their jurisdiction. This gave them the wherewithal to make necessary academic and administrative changes.

The capacity of PEEOs to take up their new role was built systematically, through a comprehensive leadership development

Panchayat Elementary Education Officer (PEEO) structure at the district level



Redesigned Model of School Managements under PEEOs from the District Level. The Additional District Project Coordinator Samagra Shiksha also works closely with the Chief Block Education Officer

process. WhatsApp groups of PEEOs were formed, including senior officials, to offer ongoing support and discussions.

This process created education leaders at the Gram Panchayat level. In a sense, block-level processes were brought to the Panchayat level.

Advantages of the new structure

This structure created an institutionalised smaller ecosystem within the larger education system, where efforts at quality could be focused within smaller domains.

PEEOs were connected with the teachers on a regular basis since the geography was more manageable. Each PEEO had 6-8 schools, and 20-30 teachers located in the Gram Panchayat area to supervise. This smaller number led to better supervision of the school and teachers. Monthly meetings of teachers and schools at the level of PEEO resulted in better supervision of the school and teachers. Since salaries were disbursed at the Gram Panchayat level, their casual shifting from one location to another was not possible in the new system. They were also aware of the needs of specific schools. This decentralisation ensured that decisions were made on a case-by-case basis.



Monthly meetings of teachers at the PEEO level led to better coordination among PEEOs and the teachers

This was helped by the transformation of monthly cluster levels to monthly meetings at the Gram Panchayat level.

With about 20 teachers under each PEEO, there was transparency related to teachers. The sheer management deficit was so large before this system was put in place that reliable data related to teachers was not available.

Another aspect was that staffing norms were such that even the smallest school had one teacher per grade. So, for a school with grades 1 to 12, a principal and 12 teachers were assured. As the number of students increased, the number of teachers also increased. A rationalisation exercise was also done to ensure subject teachers were available in all the schools.

Also, postings and appointments of teachers were based on a transparent counselling process, so that they had some degree of autonomy in choosing their location. One outcome of this effort was that the movement of teachers outside the Gram Panchayat reduced, so that there was continuity of teachers in the same school.

PEEOs could also take decisions to enable smaller schools to access resources in larger schools. As small groups of teachers interacted with each other on a regular basis, in addition to the monthly meetings, small learning communities formed. These meetings were academic and review meetings.

All the PEEOs reported to the Chief Block Education Officers (CBEO). Through this process, an integrated education system worked on improving the quality of schools.

This was of particular importance in difficult areas, where the government was the only service provider.

Integration of preschool education

The Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) were managed by the block level Child Development Programme Officer (CDPO), who had to look after 300-400 AWCs in the block. These AWCs were also responsible for pre-primary education for children. As with elementary schools, an integration exercise was carried out for AWCs as well. Most of the AWCs were shifted to the nearest elementary school.

The PEEO was given the responsibility of supervising the AWCs on matters related to pre-primary education. Thus, AWCs received handholding to resolve immediate problems. Officers of the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and Education Department worked together to enable this integration. Convergence was ensured at every level – from the AWCs and schools to the PEEOs, and at the block, district and state level.

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Buy in from stakeholders

There were pushbacks from multiple levels, including teachers. But within a year, the stakeholders realised the reform was good for not only the education system but also for them personally. Teachers and principals were promoted, new teachers were recruited, the counselling process gave teachers – especially women teachers – reasonable autonomy over their placement.

Getting different departments to work together required a lot of administrative work – technology helped. Regular video

conferencing with stakeholders, PEEOs and teachers, and emails sent directly to teachers from the Principal Secretary contributed to interest and motivation.

As results started showing within a year, political buy-in also helped in taking the process further. As teachers also realised that they could make a difference, it made them proud.

Sustainability

The biggest advantage was that the results led to buy-in from stakeholders and increasing political will to push for these structures. Another was convergence – the entire system was involved, including capacity building of district and state level officers. This integrated approach also worked since it was applied across the state – there was no pilot but direct intervention. Rajasthan's performance in the National Achievement Survey (NAS) 2017 when it moved from the 26th position in the year 2014 to being among the top three states also helped relevant stakeholders realise the benefits of the reform

The decentralised simple technology driven method (Shaala Darpan, Shaala Darshan and personalised learning tools, etc.) ensured every teacher's involvement in improving the quality of education.

A view from the ground: Insights from a Panchayat Elementary Education Officer (PEEO)

Harendra Faujdar, the PEEO at GSSS Bharja, has been serving in this role since 2023, overseeing three primary schools, two upper primary schools, and two senior secondary schools. Over the past two years, he has shown a positive and proactive approach toward school education, teachers, and overall school processes. His key areas of focus include enrolment,

infrastructure development, teacher presence, innovative teaching methods, and discussions on enhancing learning outcomes.

Through these efforts, Faujdar exemplifies the role of a principal as an academic leader, ensuring that education remains a priority for the entire community. However, his story is not unique. It represents the dedication of other PEEOs working across the system, striving to create better learning environments for students. His journey is just one example of the effort to strengthen school education at the grassroots level.

The sections below are based on our interactions with Mr. Harendra Faujdar and reflect our perspective. Any inaccuracies or misinterpretations are entirely our responsibility.

Driving quality education: responsibilities as a PEEO (Panchayat Elementary Education Officer)

The role of a PEEO is to provide leadership, direction, and coordination among the school staff, work in line with department guidelines to ensure that all schools in a Panchayat operate efficiently and deliver quality education across schools. To achieve this, the PEEO monitors the schools, supports teachers, and makes the best use of available resources. Additionally, they prioritise ensuring the availability of physical resources, organising co-curricular activities, and making sure that children benefit from the government's flagship schemes. PEEOs engage community members in school programmes to strengthen their connection with the school and their responsibilities also include building a strong team with the staff, conducting review meetings, and making continuous efforts to improve exam results.

Ensuring school operations and discipline

The top priority is ensuring that all seven schools in the Gram Panchayat open on time every day, with both students and teachers arriving punctually. The emphasis is on having an effective morning assembly where students share their thoughts and experiences, which helps maintain discipline, hygiene, and a positive learning environment.

To improve efficiency, it is ensured that students mark their attendance before the morning assembly. This has resolved the issue of late arrivals among both teachers and students, allowing the first period to be fully dedicated to learning instead of being consumed by attendance. Additionally, checking teachers' diaries is not just a formality, discussions are also held to assess the effectiveness of teachers and Head Teachers, especially during inspections.

Monitoring classroom engagement: Focus on Learning

PEEOs visit a classroom every day and thoroughly review students' notebooks, asking them questions to assess their progress. This is a part of their daily routine, not just in one school but also in other



Classroom observation by the PEEO

Panchayat schools and helps them gain insights on collaboration with teachers on academic matters. The PEEO also oversees infrastructure and resource improvements, such as setting up functional reading corners, while working to enhance the overall learning environment. To strengthen foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) and grade-level learning (GLL), PEEOs work closely with teachers, facilitate effective academic meetings, and ensure the successful implementation of educational plans.

Balancing academic and administrative responsibilities

PEEOs regularly analyse student attendance, assessments, and exam results while also maintaining data on teacher availability and performance. This information guides them in decision-making and contributes to improving the educational outcomes of the schools.

Administrative tasks, such as salary approvals and data sharing, consume significant amounts of time and affect other areas of work. Video conferences and travel to block or district headquarters also take up valuable time that could be devoted to schools. Resource constraints, such as insufficient budgets and lack of travel allowances, pose significant challenges. However, the most rewarding aspect of being a PEEO is the liberty to build schools according to their vision and earn the trust of the community towards government schools. The PEEO structure has brought about key improvements, such as better school environments, systematic monthly meetings, and initiatives to promote literacy and numeracy.

The most challenging aspect of this work is effective monitoring and follow-up of the schools, which is often hindered by sudden departmental programmes and

responsibilities. However, close observation helps them identify and address both gaps and best practices and successful practices are highlighted during monthly teachers' meetings to promote continuous improvement.



PEEOs hold regular staff meetings in the schools under their jurisdiction.

Building strong community networks

Engaging with the local community is crucial to the role and many PEEOs use School Development and Management Committee (SDMC) meetings to discuss school development issues and encourage community participation in school activities. This involvement has led to improvements in student attendance, learning outcomes, and teacher engagement. However, the level of community participation varies across schools.

A couple of success stories that ensured community involvement in both small and large school programmes could be highlighted here. a) The building of a walking track within the school premises - with contributions from the community, and accessible to Panchayat residents, strengthening their connection with the school; b) Development of volleyball and

cricket grounds for youth and community members.

Teacher interactions

To drive academic progress, monthly meetings are held with an academic agenda, setting goals and reviewing progress, striking a balance between academic and administrative work, encouraging open discussions, and providing insights based on experience. These meetings are typically structured around group discussions, experience sharing, and reflection to foster continuous improvement.

The most rewarding aspect of this role is the freedom to shape a school and ensure that all schools are aligned with the Panchayat vision. However, maintaining relationships can be challenging, as some teachers tend to take improvement suggestions

personally and distance themselves from their responsibilities. PEEOs strive to provide effective supervision while fostering relationships built on academic growth and collaboration.

Enhancing leadership training for effective school management

PEEOs deeply value leadership training programmes which give them an opportunity to build skills, make these programmes even more effective. An endeavour to provide a stronger focus on practical, classroom-based challenges and school processes would be beneficial. Trainings that offer knowledge to streamline daily tasks, and overall school processes along with case studies of successful practices can help them implement meaningful changes in the schools.

Harendra Faujdar's dedication and commitment to improving school education in his Panchayat are evident in his efforts and initiatives. He has been regularly organising monthly academic meetings, visiting classrooms, and discussing improvement of the learning levels with teachers. He has established reading corners in all schools, maintained a positive attitude and encouraged continuous discussion with teachers. His efforts have resulted in a better school environment and improved learning outcomes in his Gram Panchayat.

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