

# Every public schoolteacher's wish list for 2018

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Here is the “Every ordinary public schoolteacher’s wish list for 2018,” **as a sequel to my previous column**. The list does not contain the very specific kind of wishes that most teachers have about their individual students. These range from the desire that a student becomes more attentive, to another learning math better, and often includes matters like improvement in a child’s health and in the home environment of another. The wish list that follows is written in the voice of a teacher, as I have heard it often.

Dear Mr Officer,

1. Please do not ask me to go out of the school on “official duty”. If I am out of school, I cannot teach. Even if I am asked to go out of school for 10 days in a year, it means about 5% of the teaching days are lost. It is impossible to compensate for this loss. It forces me to rush through the syllabus.
2. Could you please stop the boring and ineffective training programmes that you organize? It is clear to me that I need to learn a lot to be able to teach better. I need to deepen my understanding of the content of the subjects, its related pedagogical approaches, and other matters such as why children behave the way they do. Could you offer, maybe, a bouquet of opportunities from which I can choose, depending on what I need to learn, rather than being forced to sit through something that is either irrelevant or which I already know? Also, wherever you organize these programmes, please do ensure that there are clean toilets on the premises.
3. The trainers should only be the best among the teachers. And they should have been prepared well.
4. There are many teachers who are very good. I would like to get to know them, to learn from them and to seek support when required. It would also be useful to observe how they teach. It would be very helpful if these opportunities are created systematically, rather than leaving it to individuals.
5. Don’t make me teach math when I haven’t studied it beyond class VIII myself. Recruit and appoint an adequate number of teachers for each grade, each subject in each school. Many states have eliminated corruption completely in teacher recruitment—learn from them.

6. Don't make the syllabus so content-heavy that it doesn't leave any time to get the children to understand, connect and apply; especially in an administrative culture which is focused solely on covering the syllabus. All aspects of the curriculum should fully reflect the good and progressive curriculum envisioned in the National Curricular Framework 2005. For this, the exams will have to be changed, the textbooks improved dramatically and the syllabus redone.
7. Textbooks, notebooks, uniforms and other things should reach us at the school a few days before the start of the sessions. Do break the long-held tradition of all these things arriving at the school months after the school session has started.
8. Convince the finance minister, and whoever else needs to be convinced, to increase the money that we get for the midday meals for the children. For many of these children, this is the most important meal of the day. The allocation for this has not increased in 10 years. With the food inflation, can any of us cook today with the same expenditure as 10 years ago?
9. Do something sustained to develop engagement of the local community in the school through the school management committee (SMC). I also need to learn how to work with the SMC more effectively, and this would be helped by a peer support network of teachers and head teachers.
10. No more tests and exams. We have more than enough of these in some name or guise. Going on assessing children's learning is not going to improve anything. Instead could you help us make the continuous comprehensive evaluation that we do, more effective.
11. Have courage and fire the truant teachers. You are not able to do that, instead all teachers are painted with the same black brush. Don't make us suffer for your weakness.
12. Don't keep asking for data that should be available with you. Invest in information and technology (IT), develop a good management information system (MIS). Reduce our administrative overload.
13. Nothing substantial needs to be done to motivate us. Only two things will help. One, don't keep blaming us for all the ills of the system. Two, treat us with the respect that is due to any other human being. We are not expecting any special status for being "developers of the society" (which we are). But do treat us like an equal human being. Not as the lowest rung in a massive bureaucratic machine, often blamed, mostly ignored and regularly mistreated.
14. We want our students to become confident, independent thinkers, humane and responsible. What matters most for this is the culture that we set in our school and classroom, and our own behaviour. Such a culture can be developed in a school only if the administrative culture of the system is empowering, trusting and enabling.
15. Please don't start new programmes every year and keep shifting priorities. We have had enough of flavours of the month and year, and pet projects of high officials.

16. And last but not the least, please don't ask to "innovate". A teacher by definition has to innovate every day. You can't see this unless you come and sit with us in the class. So, please, please, focus on the fundamentals and let us focus on the same.

Wish you a very happy New Year!

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