


# Learning standards set specific aims for each aspect of schooling

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September 13, 2023



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**Bid/Offer opens on Thursday, September 14, 2023**

**Bid/Offer closes on Monday, September 18, 2023<sup>#</sup>**

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Learning Standards (LS) are the spine of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF), that was released by India's ministry of education on 23 August 2023. 'Spine' because the NCF is built around these Learning Standards, knitting all its elements together to form the whole. Most importantly, these standards drive goal alignment in all these elements to enable consistency and coherence. Let us explore this in some detail in this column, the second in this series about the NCF. This piece, like the others in this series, paraphrases text from the NCF copiously but retains fidelity to its spirit.

To begin, a recap: The curriculum includes the syllabus, content, pedagogical practices and assessment, textbooks, teaching-learning-materials, school and classroom practices, the environment and culture of schools, and more. The design and development of these elements are informed by a wide range of considerations, like educational psychology and neurosciences, subject knowledge of disciplines, experience and research in pedagogical practices, and the capacity and resources of our schools.

Achieving coherence in this vast array of elements, ensuring they work in harmony, and toward the goals that we set for our education system, is one of the most fundamental challenges in education; especially in the design and development itself, much before the implementation. This column doesn't deal with issues related to implementation other than noting that good design and development, including accounting for practical considerations, is a necessary though not sufficient condition for effective practice and implementation in the real world.

What are the Learning Standards and how do they bring about goal alignment? In essence, LS are a set of objectives. They range from the most abstract and long-term to the more specific, shorter-term and useable. Iteratively, the LS become more detailed and specific, ultimately even spelling out goals relevant to day-to-day life in a school. Rigour in this process ensures that each goal is tightly derived from higher-level goals, is internally

coherent, and is sufficient to address all aspects and nuances of the higher goal. All elements of the NCF are focused on achieving these goals and facilitating alignment and coherence.

At the highest level, the LS articulate the aims of school education derived from the vision of our society as imagined in the Constitution of India. These aims are the development of rational and independent thinking, health and well-being, democratic and community participation, economic participation and cultural participation. These in turn require developing appropriate values, acquiring positive dispositions and developing capacities for inquiry, effective communication, problem solving, logical reasoning, creativity, aesthetic expression, maintaining health, productive work and effective social engagement; and acquiring knowledge in breadth and depth across 'curricular areas' of Language, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences and Humanities, Art, Physical Education, and Vocational Education.

The LS to achieve these values and dispositions, capacities and knowledge are then derived at four levels of increasing specificity. Curricular Aims are articulated within each curricular area; enabled by appropriate school culture and processes, these are to be achieved by the end of schooling. The Aims lead to Curricular Goals for each of the four stages of school—which are specific statements that give direction to curriculum development and implementation. These in turn 'flow-down' to Competencies—which are specific learning achievements that are observable and can be assessed systematically. These are further broken down into specific Learning Outcomes for each class—which are milestones of learning that progress in a sequence, leading to the attainment of a Competency, and which enable teachers to plan their content, pedagogy and assessments.

Here is an example directly from the NCF. One of five Curricular Aims of Language Education is development of effective communication skills: "Students should develop their language capacities to think critically, identify real-world problems, analyse them, make rational arguments, and work out solutions. The capacity to use language to think and communicate well in a variety of situations is critical for effective democratic, social, and cultural participation." One Curricular Goal for the Secondary Stage this leads to is: "Use Language to develop reasoning and argumentation skills by engaging with a variety of audio and written material." This then leads to the following Competency—one of 14 others: "Argues with proper rationale by carefully evaluating premises." Finally, this leads to one of many Learning Outcomes for Class 9: "Evaluates the premises of an argument for its clarity, relevance, and reliability (of evidence)."

Learning Standards thus provide goals to activities in education at all levels and for all time frames, from teaching a single class period in a school to the development of textbooks and a syllabus. This is what makes it the spine of the NCF. This will be discussed in detail in my next column.

*Anurag Behar is CEO of Azim Premji Foundation.*

