



New Teacher Transfer Policy to Bring In Greater Efficiency and Transparency

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Teaching is a very demanding profession that carries with it a great social responsibility. In order to do justice to their profession, teachers need to be able to focus on their school, children and their community without getting burdened by other distractions. One such distraction used to be teacher transfers. Teachers have location preferences which need to be balanced with the needs of schools, however, the information in these matters is not systematically available to teachers, which makes them go from pillar to post trying to extract information. It gives undue power to those with the information and results in injustice to student learning. In the Union Territory of Puducherry, the Department of Education has introduced a new policy for teacher transfers in order to bring in greater transparency and equity in the process of teacher postings. This note provides an overview of the issues with the earlier system, transfer norms and processes proposed in the new policy and our experience of rolling this out in the first cycle.

I. Background

Pondicherry is a union territory comprising of 4 non-contiguous districts – Puducherry, Karaikal (located in Tamil Nadu), Yanam (located in Andhra Pradesh) and Mahe (located in Kerala). There are 419 schools in the UT, of which 277 schools are located in the district of Puducherry. Out of a population of 2.5 lakh students, 32% are enrolled in government schools.

There are 3 grades of teachers in the Union Territory

- Primary School Teachers (PSTs) teaching classes 1 to 5. They need to have passed class 12 with a diploma in teacher education. They also need to clear the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET).
- Trained Graduate Teachers (TGTs) teaching at middle and high school levels. The qualifying criteria is a graduation degree and B.Ed. 40% of the posts are filled through promotion of PSTs to TGTs.
- Lecturers for higher secondary grades. The qualifying criteria is a post-graduation degree and B.Ed. 80% of posts are filled through promotion of TGTs to lecturer level.

II. Some issues faced recently in the area of teacher postings

- **Mismatch between student enrolment and teacher postings:** Over a period of time, with migration of students to private schools, there has been a decline in enrolment in government schools. This decline has been sharper in urban areas. However the number of posts in urban schools were not rationalised accordingly. This resulted in poorer pupil teacher ratios in rural areas despite the availability of excess teachers elsewhere. Teacher vacancies would also not be correctly reflected in some cases because of outdated records. E.g. retired / deceased teachers would continue to reflect in the records.
- **Oral order postings resulting in teacher shortage in rural areas:** As a consequence of the greater demand for postings in urban areas and areas closer to teacher's residence, functionaries and political leaders received multiple requests for 'oral order' postings – where the teacher is officially posted to a school, but is actually working in another school on an oral order, thus creating a parallel system of teacher posting.
- **Impact on teacher motivation:** Because of this lopsided teacher distribution and informal arrangements, there was many rural schools where one teacher had to take care of 2-3 classes at the same time. This also created demotivation among teachers who had to travel to far off locations while some of their peers managed to bypass the system.
- **Long leave:** In addition to eight days of casual leave and ten days of earned leave in a year and 120 days of maternity leave, teachers are eligible for two years of child care leave in their service tenure. While these measures are necessary for the welfare of teachers and their family commitments, when teachers take long leaves of absence, it affects student learning because there is no systematic provision of substitute teachers.

III. Improved process for teacher transfer adopted in the year 2015-16

- **Rationalisation of posts** – As per the norms prescribed in the transfer policy, a rationalisation of teaching posts was done based on the latest student enrolment data. Schools with higher enrolment and insufficient teachers were sanctioned additional posts. Similarly, the number of sanctioned posts were reduced from schools where enrolment has declined.
- **Cleaning up records** – The database of teachers was cleaned up. Cases of retired / deceased teachers were removed to show an accurate reflection of the number of vacancies and the number of teachers available.
- **Transparent online counseling starting from a 'zero' base** – A transparent counseling based process was used for teacher transfers starting October 2015. In order to ensure a fair opportunity for all teachers to get the location of their choice, all schools were brought to 'zero' posting status and allotments were made from scratch. Teachers were invited in the order of seniority to choose their schools. At the end of each day, a fresh list of 'availability' was created and updated online. This allowed teachers to check the availability of their preferred schools before they came in for counselling.
- **Fresh appointments and buffer teachers** – In addition to a revised transfer process, a fresh appointment of 429 primary teachers was made to ensure the availability of one teacher per class. Teachers were rationalised by posting them where there was a vacancy because of teachers on maternity or child care leave.

The Department has received a very positive feedback from teachers, teacher associations and the establishment on this process as it brought in greater transparency and sense of fairness in allocation of schools. This has been the first time in many years where there were almost no requests received by political leaders to influence the posting.

IV. Additional improvements in the policy to be implemented going forward

There are some more improvements in the new teacher transfer policy that have already been passed and will be rolled out going forward.

- **Division of the Union Territory into urban, semi urban and rural zones:** In order to fairly balance the distribution of teachers in urban and rural areas, schools in the four districts are divided into different zones. For instance, schools in the Puducherry district were divided into four zones:
 - o Zone A – town
 - o Zone B – periphery of town
 - o Zone C – rural areas
 - o Zone D – far off rural areas

Teachers need to spend a minimum of one-third of their service tenure in rural areas. Teachers newly recruited in the district of Puducherry will first be posted in zone D. After completing four years in that zone, they will be transferred to zone C, and so on. After completion of four years of service in Zone A, they will be transferred back to zone D and the cycle continues. Similarly, on promotion, teachers will first be posted in zone D and will be eligible for transfer to zone C after four years of service, and so on.

Exceptions are being made for teachers with three years of service left or less, differently abled teachers, teachers with serious ailments and in situations where vacancies are not available in the eligible zone of transfer.

- **Regularization of transfer cycle, limitations on mutual transfers and office orders:** All transfers will be done in the month of May in order to avoid disturbing the school calendar. There will be no transfers on oral orders. No mutual transfers are allowed in the probationary period in case of newly recruited teachers or in the first year of service in case of other teachers. Mutual transfers are allowed only in zone C and D in Puducherry district. A teacher can seek a mutual transfer a maximum of two times during the entire tenure of service.

- Merit criteria for transfers: Going forward, teachers will be invited for counseling in the order of their 'entitlement points'. These points are based on the academic performance, co-curricular service and tenure. Some illustrative criteria in each category are given below:

Performance criteria

- o Performance of students in class X and XII, class average marks in VI-IX school exams
- o Enrolment of drop-out children (in case of primary school teachers)
- o Performance in national talent search Navodaya entrance exams (in case of primary school teachers)

Co-curricular activities

- o Co-curricular activities like National Cadet Corp, National Service Scheme, Central Service Scheme and National Green Corps
- o Guide teachers at science exhibitions and seminars at state and national level
- o Presentation of research papers

Tenure

- o Points for every year of service
- o Additional points for services rendered in regions other than their own

Similar criteria has been formulated for school heads, technical and special teachers.

V. Gaps that are yet to be addressed

- Performance measures: Entitlement points is an initial step. The system needs to be refined to account for teacher performance more comprehensively. More than absolute measures, relative measures of improvement need to be devised to account for the varying level of social disadvantage faced by different schools.
- Subject knowledge of middle and high school teachers (TGTs): Automatic promotion of primary teachers to middle schools on tenure grounds is not a very healthy practice. They may not have sufficient knowledge of the

subject to teach middle and high school levels. There should be an eligibility test for teachers to be promoted to middle school / high school levels.

- Alternative growth options for primary teachers: Moving from PST to TGT should also not be the only growth option for primary teachers. There should be alternative growth trajectories – master teachers, cluster / block resource persons in addition to the current roles of school leaders / high school teachers. This will allow teachers to move into roles where their strengths can be better utilized. There could also be an option for a teacher to continue in the role of primary school teaching instead of moving to a role he may not be suitable for. The compensation could grow with years of service without compromising the fulfilment of a role.
- Avoidance of high school postings: During this process, many of the senior teachers avoided postings in high schools and chose middle schools to avoid the pressure of public exams. Up to middle school, there is a no detention policy, and so no accountability for teachers. This does disservice to students. Going forward, this issue can be addressed by tightening performance measures and stipulating a minimum service period in high schools.

With the new teacher transfer policy, there is a greater transparency in the process. With some of the above measures, we should be able to further move in the direction of ensuring quality education for all children.

The full version of the teacher transfer policy can be accessed on the website of the Puducherry Department of Education. The link to the document is given here <http://schooledn.puducherry.gov.in/HTML/CircuTenders/circular2015/TeachTransferPolicy.pdf>

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