

Entry points in action: Examples of equipping, connecting, informing and empowering middle-tier education officials in India

Insight Note

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Box 1

Summary: Entry points for supporting middle-tier officials in foundational learning reforms

Entry points for supporting middle-tier officials in foundational learning reforms

Equip

middle-tier officials with the knowledge and resources to work toward foundational learning goals.

Connect

middle-tier officials to a shared commitment to foundational learning goals.

Inform

middle-tier officials about progress toward foundational learning goals (eg with student assessment data).

Empower

middle-tier officials to prioritise and adapt in line with foundational learning goals.

Why is this entry point important?

In most education systems, middle-tier officials do not receive adequate training nor inputs (eg transport allowances) for fulfilling their responsibilities. This has negative effects on implementation quality.

A sense of connection to shared goals is a key factor in motivation. It has been shown to be present in low-resource settings with high-performing public services.

Regularly updated information on progress toward learning goals can help middle-tier officials tailor support to teachers and schools, foster a sense of connection, and correct misperceptions about progress.

Middle-tier officials often need to respond to complex implementation contexts that require flexibility and adaptation. They also need the flexibility to prioritise foundational learning goals alongside competing demands.

What might this entry point look like? (illustrative examples)

Providing an aligned package of initial training, tailored materials, monthly review meetings between coaches and middle-tier managers, and fuel allowances to help coaches to monitor and support teachers' delivery of a new pedagogical programme.
Partnering with universities to design and offer accredited qualifications for middle-tier officials that focus on the technical knowledge and skills needed to improve children's foundational learning.

Creating opportunities (eg in monthly group meetings) to discuss experiences, challenges and organisational mission with colleagues and/or with beneficiaries.
Generating social recognition incentives by publicising (good) performance.
Introducing financial or other extrinsic incentives that have a collegial component and are carefully calibrated to minimise negative side effects (eg based on collective rather than individual metrics).

Using low-cost technologies (eg WhatsApp messages, existing tablets) to provide middle-tier officials with right-sized, timely information about each classroom or school that they are responsible for visiting.
Building dashboards that summarise key indicators of progress toward foundational learning goals and that offer tailored interfaces to top decision-makers, middle-tier officials, and teachers and headteachers.

Revising middle-tier officials' job descriptions to prioritise responsibilities that contribute to foundational learning goals.
Granting middle-tier officials the discretion to target certain resources or activities (eg follow-up school visits) where they are most needed, with appropriate checks and balances.
Streamlining reporting requirements to reduce time middle-tier officials spend on extensive administrative processes.

For more on each entry point, see the synthesis brief 'Entry points for supporting middle-tier officials in foundational learning reforms: Equip, connect, inform, empower.'

1 | Introduction

Middle-tier officials are intermediaries between top decisionmakers and schools in education systems. Thus, they are **crucial in implementing and monitoring policy plans** that are designed by a small number of policymakers but ultimately delivered at scale by teachers and other school-level actors. They are also critical in institutionalising effective instructional programmes at scale, such as targeted instruction and structured pedagogy programmes. However, in many education systems in the Global South, middle-tier officials don't receive the support that would enable them to effectively drive progress toward foundational learning goals at scale.

The **entry points for supporting middle-tier officials in foundational learning reforms** in Box 1 emerged from a synthesis of research on how to effectively support middle-tier officials to improve foundational learning. The entry points are described in more detail in a companion synthesis brief.¹ The identification of the entry points aims to support those designing, funding, implementing and studying foundational learning programmes in their efforts to develop evidence-based ways to maximise the role of the middle tier. These entry points – **equip, connect, inform and empower** – are summarised in Box 1. Rather than a step-by-step guide on the one hand or a high-level theory on the other, the entry points offer a balance of rigorous insights with practical application aimed to inform action.

In this insight note, I complement the synthesis brief with detailed examples of some of the entry points in action, with a focus on middle-tier officials who provide instructional support to teachers. These snapshots come from a field trip to India in early 2025, during which the Language and Learning Foundation² hosted me and a colleague for an immersion visit in Hisar district in the state of Haryana and Leadership for Equity³ hosted me for an immersion visit in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad in the state of Maharashtra. These examples operate like mini case studies, intended to concretely illustrate what the entry points look like in two contexts and to offer inspiration for what is possible for supporting middle-tier officials to pursue foundational learning goals even in resource-constrained contexts.

1 Hwa, Y.-Y. (2025). Entry points for supporting middle-tier officials in foundational learning reforms: Equip, connect, inform, empower. What Works Hub for Global Education. Synthesis brief. 2025/005. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-WhatWorksHubforGlobalEducation-RI_2025/005

2 <https://languageandlearningfoundation.org/>

3 <https://www.leadershipforequity.org/>

These examples look at:

- **informing middle-tier officials about progress toward foundational learning goals** in Hisar, Haryana;
- **connecting middle-tier officials to a shared commitment to foundational learning goals** in Pimpri-Chinchwad, Maharashtra; and
- **empowering middle-tier officials to prioritise and adapt in line with foundational learning goals** in both Pimpri-Chinchwad and Hisar.

2 | Informing middle-tier officials about progress toward foundational learning goals: An example from NIPUN Haryana

To complement India's National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN), some states – including the northwestern state of Haryana – have launched their own NIPUN initiatives. Under NIPUN Haryana, a crucial role in implementation is played by middle-tier officials who work at the level of Haryana's 140 blocks (a sub-division of each district). These associate block resource coordinators, who provide 'supportive supervision' to schools and teachers, are also known as teacher mentors. Through a few different channels, they are kept informed about progress toward foundational learning goals in the schools within their remit.

The core of NIPUN Haryana is a structured pedagogy programme⁴ that includes a suite of aligned textbooks, workbooks and teacher guides.⁵ Every NIPUN Haryana teacher guide includes **tables for teachers to keep track of each student's mastery of the targeted literacy and numeracy competencies** (see Figure 1). Block-level officials can then refer to these tables as a convenient snapshot when discussing children's foundational learning progress with the teachers they support.

⁴ Hwa, Y.-Y., Kayton, H., & Kaffenberger, M. (2024). *Implementing structured pedagogy programmes at scale*. Synthesis brief, 2024/002. What Works Hub for Global Education.

⁵ Examples of NIPUN Haryana teaching and learning materials are available at <https://nipunharyana.in/academic-materials/>.

Figure 1. In a Hisar district primary school, a teacher has used her teacher guide to maintain regular records of her students' mastery of targeted learning outcomes. These up-to-date records can facilitate feedback conversations with the associate block resource coordinator who is responsible for visiting and supporting her.

कक्षा 2 | शिक्षक संदर्भिका (2024-25)

खण्ड 1-14
विषय 6

संसाधन 1-14 में डिफिकल्टीय रक्तकृत पक्षों का आकलन किया जाएगा। रक्तकृत आकलन 'मेने सीख लिया' के प्रश्नों के आधार पर बच्चों का पता लगाने के लिए।

डिफिकल्टीय

- अध्यापक बुनियादी में दिए गए पाठ 'मेने सीख लिया' से पढ़ पाया।
- पाठ 'मेने सीख लिया' के प्रश्नों के आधार पर जो बच्चे सर-1 पर हैं, उनके लिए 1 और जो सर-2 पर हैं, उनके लिए 2 लिखें।
- अपने अनुभव का किसी पक्ष के बारे में कोल पाठ अपने विचार रख पाया।
- डिफिकल्टीय के साथ-साथ रक्तकृत पाठ विचारों से संबंधित आकलन उनके नाम के आगे '-' चिह्न और जिन बच्चों को सर-1 के आधार पर आकलन नहीं है उनके नाम के आगे '✓' का चिह्न लगाया।

साप्ताहिक आकलन टैकर

क्रमांक	बच्चों के नाम	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
2		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
3		1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
4		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
5		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
6		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
7		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
8		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
9		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
10		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
11		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
12		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
13		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
14		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
15		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
16		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
17		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
18		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
19		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
20		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

नोट - अगर कक्षा में बच्चों की संख्या 20 से अधिक हो तो शिक्षक अतिरिक्त शीट का उपयोग करें।

कक्षा 2 | शिक्षक संदर्भिका (2024-25)

21		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
22		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
23		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
24		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
25		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
26		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
27		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
28		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
29		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

कक्षा 2 | शिक्षक संदर्भिका (2024-25)

30		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
31		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
32		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
33		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
34		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
35		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
36		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
37		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
38		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
39		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
40		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

नोट 21 22 23

Another channel of information is a digital database that operates not only through a website, but also through three separate but synced mobile apps for parents, teachers and teacher mentors. The NIPUN Haryana mentor app serves to **streamline administrative data collection for block-level officials** when scheduling and conducting classroom observations. Moreover, it includes a built-in function for block-level officials to **conduct 'spot assessments'** of five students during every classroom observation. These assessments are aligned with the curriculum for the grade and subject in question. They provide both a source of rapid feedback to the block-level official and the teacher being observed, as well a statewide picture of children's learning. In addition, access to NIPUN Haryana data also equips non-governmental organisations that are supporting programme implementation, such as the Haryana-based team of the Language and Learning Foundation, to iteratively target and tailor the support they provide to officials at the district, block, cluster and school levels.

As Hisar, ie the district we visited, is one of the Language and Learning Foundation's three 'demonstration districts' in Haryana, it receives additional support from the Foundation to strengthen the implementation of NIPUN Haryana. For example, through the support of the Foundation's Haryana team, routine **monthly meetings at the level of the block and cluster levels** have been transformed into an important channel for keeping middle-tier officials informed about progress toward foundational learning goals. In these meetings, foundational literacy and numeracy is a standing agenda item, with an earmarked 90 minutes. Each meeting pays particular attention to one or two foundational learning targets, which are reviewed in the subsequent meeting to identify challenges and track progress.

For more information, see:

- [NIPUN Haryana website](#)
- [Language and Learning Foundation webpage on the 'District Demonstration Program'](#)
- [What Works Hub for Global Education blog post on 'Learning and solving problems together: Promising shifts in educational norms in Hisar district \(Haryana, India\)'](#)

3 | Connecting middle-tier officials to a shared commitment to foundational learning goals: An example from the Urban Reform Project in Pimpri-Chinchwad (Maharashtra)

In the Indian state of Maharashtra, the Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation's Saksham initiative aims to improve the foundational literacy and numeracy of grade 3 to 8 students in Marathi- and Urdu-medium schools. As part of Saksham, a group of middle-tier officials known as teacher mentors are supporting teachers to deliver daily Saksham lessons. Teacher mentors, all of whom were previously classroom teachers, provide both group teacher training sessions and individually tailored support, including demonstrations of pedagogical techniques.

To supplement their initial training, teacher mentors receive ongoing support through a set of structures that foster collegial connections aligned with Saksham's goals. Coordinated by a local implementer organisation named Leadership for Equity, these structures include **weekly sessions** in which the teacher mentors discuss their work and receive training. For example, in one session, each teacher mentor shared two or three effective instructional practices that they had seen in the schools they visited. Teacher mentors also connect throughout the week through **two WhatsApp groups**: an official group facilitated by Leadership for Equity staff and an informal group started by the teacher mentors themselves.

At other levels of the education system, further elements mentioned by teacher mentors that facilitate a shared commitment to Saksham's literacy and numeracy goals include **direct endorsement for Saksham from the municipal commissioner** (ie the top civil servant in the municipality). Also, a consistent lesson structure and alignment of instructional content across classrooms and schools gives teachers and teacher mentors **a common basis for discussion** of pedagogical successes and challenges.

Some teacher mentors observed that these structures for connection and support contrast sharply with their own pre-Saksham experience as classroom teachers, when they often felt isolated both from collegial input into their teaching practice and from an understanding of why and how certain prescribed classroom activities were connected to learning goals. According to these teacher mentors, the support structures of Saksham meant that they had not only learned a lot about teaching and mentoring but

also grown in professional confidence. In turn, this enables them both to strengthen the technical quality of teachers' implementation of Saksham lessons and to gradually build teachers' buy-in to the programme.

For more information, see:

- [Leadership for Equity webpage on 'Empowering Teacher Mentors for Academic Excellence'](#)
- [Leadership for Equity research on 'Role of Middle Management in Policy Implementation'](#)
- [What Works Hub for Global Education blog post on 'Iterating and collaborating toward large-scale education reform in government schools: An interview with the co-founders of Leadership for Equity, India'](#)

4 | Empowering middle-tier officials to prioritise and adapt in line with foundational learning goals: Creating new cadres of officials focused on foundational learning in Maharashtra and Haryana

One strategy for empowering middle-tier officials to prioritise and adapt in line with foundational learning goals is to create of new subgroups or ‘cadres’ of middle-tier officials who are specifically empowered to prioritise supporting teachers and schools in improving the quality of classroom instruction for foundational learning. Examples where new middle-tier cadres have been created include initiatives in Uttar Pradesh⁶, Delhi⁷ and Maharashtra, the latter of which is the focus of this section.

The teacher mentors in Maharashtra’s Pimpri–Chinchwad Municipal Corporation⁸ are given **clear guidelines on how to allocate their time between competing priorities** of school-based administrative work and foundational learning-oriented support. Teacher mentors are expected to spend one day a week in their ‘original’ schools, where they may support headteachers with administrative paperwork, data collection and the like. However, the rest of their time is ring-fenced for the Saksham foundational literacy and numeracy programme. In this capacity, they visit schools to provide training sessions, lesson observations and pedagogical demonstrations. One teacher mentor in this relatively urban area said that she aims to visit two schools a day, conducting two classroom observations per school.

During their time spent on pedagogical support for Saksham, teacher mentors **work flexibly within shared structures that maintain a focus on foundational learning goals** in Marathi and mathematics. These structures include a common progression of lesson plans that teacher mentors support teachers to deliver. This common progression not only ensures that each successive lesson builds on children’s prior learning at an appropriate pace, but also provides teachers and teacher mentors within and between schools with a basis for shared discussion of the content currently being

6 On academic resource persons in Uttar Pradesh, Shashidhara, S., Joseph, J., Chordiya, A., Garg, S., & Dhand, S. (2024). *Understanding the Motivations and Challenges of ARPs in Uttar Pradesh* [Diagnostic report]. Centre for Social and Behaviour Change; Language and Learning Foundation.

7 On mentor teachers in Delhi, see: Aiyar, Y. (2024). *Lessons in State Capacity from Delhi’s Schools*. Oxford University Press. Childress, D. (2023). *Case study: Strengthening academic support for teachers in Delhi*. In B. Tournier, C. Chimier, & C. Jones (Eds.), *Leading teaching and learning together: The role of the middle tier* (pp. 26–37). IIEP–UNESCO, Education Development Trust.

8 See ‘Connecting middle-tier officials to a shared commitment to foundational learning goals: An example from the Urban Reform Project in Pimpri–Chinchwad (Maharashtra)’ above.

taught. However, within this structure, teacher mentors support teachers to use a range of teaching methods depending on teachers' classroom contexts and pedagogical skillsets. Teacher mentors also adapt their coaching practices depending on the needs of students, teachers and schools in question. They also adapt their approaches based on relational features such as each teacher's comfort and confidence with being observed and receiving feedback as well as their level of buy-in to the Saksham programme.

Other specialised middle-tier roles for foundational learning may sit at different levels of the administrative system. In Haryana, the middle-tier officials who are closest to the school are the associate block resource coordinators,⁹ each of whom is responsible for an average of 10 schools. Additionally, the NIPUN Haryana programme also resulted in the creation of a **designated FLN coordinator for each district**. These coordinators were selected from among existing classroom teachers in a process that included a written exam and an interview that incorporated questions on plans for improving foundational learning in the district if selected.

In Hisar, a Language and Learning Foundation 'demonstration district', the FLN coordinator had been a teacher for a dozen years prior to applying for the role out of a desire to reach more classrooms and schools. He now works across over 500 schools in the district. In contrast to previous years when the instructional focus was on covering the textbook, he said that NIPUN Haryana had brought a **clear sense of priority for foundational learning goals**. This FLN coordinator contributes to shared foundational learning goals in a number of ways. Like associate block resource coordinators, he conducts classroom observations, visiting approximately 12 schools in a typical month. In addition, he **adaptively draws on a network of supports to address the challenges and problems that teachers across the district bring to him**. He responds to such support requests either by meeting with the teacher himself, or by redirecting the request to a middle-tier official based at the sub-district (block or cluster) level or an embedded Language and Learning Foundation team member.

Despite the promising contributions of such specially mandated cadres to foundational learning reforms, there are two risks to consider in implementing such a model. First, there is a risk that **special cadres may be seen as separate from the main education system**, which may weaken teachers' responsiveness to their input. This may be a particular risk for individual middle-tier officials who are younger and thus seen as less authoritative than the teachers they are supporting, as reported by teacher mentors in both Maharashtra and Haryana. It can also be a challenge for middle-tier cadres that are not permanent government employees and are thus seen as having a lower social

⁹ See 'Informing middle-tier officials about progress toward foundational learning goals: An example from NIPUN Haryana' above.

status.¹⁰ Beyond the school level, special cadres may also be seen as a threat by higher-level officials who view them as a ‘parallel bureaucracy’.¹¹

On the flip side, there is a risk that **special cadres’ priorities may be diluted to incorporate competing demands of the wider education system**. This has happened with prior reform efforts that created new cadres of cluster resource centre coordinators or associate block resource coordinators – whose academic priorities have since been eclipsed by a host of administrative responsibilities.¹² One bottom-up way to buffer against this risk is to recruit these new cadres via selection processes that screen for both a sense of connection to foundational learning goals and the technical skills to work toward these goals. Typical civil service recruitment exercises use generic selection criteria or broad-based exams and interviews. However, the creation of these new cadres often works around standard civil service hiring rules either through secondment of applicants who are already employed by the government as classroom teachers (eg in Maharashtra) or by newly hiring applicants on time-limited contracts rather than as permanent government employees (eg in Haryana). These cadre-specific recruitment processes increase the likelihood that the selected middle-tier officials will optimally benefit from their empowerment to prioritise foundational learning goals.¹³

10 eg in Jharkhand, see Vivek, K., Bhattacharjee, P., Mani, S., & Kumar, A. (2021). *Strengthening Teacher Mentoring and Monitoring Systems: Evidence from India*. World Bank.

11 eg p. 152 in Aiyar, Y. (2024). *Lessons in State Capacity from Delhi’s Schools*. Oxford University Press.

12 eg Aiyar, Y. (2024). *Lessons in State Capacity from Delhi’s Schools*. Oxford University Press. Attavar, S., DeBacker, H., Kothuri, A., Lima, L., Ohyama, K., Mangla, A., & Tudor, M. (2024). *Teacher Mentorship in India: Improving Pedagogy in Government Schools*. The Reach Alliance.

13 At the state level in Maharashtra, Leadership for Equity has collaborated with the State Council of Education Research and Training to conduct ‘selection conferences’ for choosing from a pool of experienced teachers who had applied for specific roles in providing academic support beyond their individual schools. These selection conferences included tasks that tested candidates’ social skills, technical tasks performed on a laptop, and individual interviews conducted by university faculty members for third-party independence. Similarly, in Delhi, mentor teachers were selected from the active teaching cadre through a full-day selection process that included group discussions, a psychometric test, and subject matter tests. In addition to technical capabilities, they had to demonstrate communication skills and motivation. See p. 31 in Childress, D. (2023). *Case study: Strengthening academic support for teachers in Delhi*. In B. Tournier, C. Chimier, & C. Jones (Eds.), *Leading teaching and learning together: The role of the middle tier* (pp. 26–37). IIEP-UNESCO, Education Development Trust.

5 | Conclusion

The examples in this insight note offer brief snapshots of the entry points for supporting middle-tier officials in foundational learning reforms. They illustrate a range of possible tools – from WhatsApp groups to data systems to recruitment exercises – that can help to equip, connect, inform and empower middle-tier officials in line with foundational literacy and numeracy goals, such that middle-tier officials can in turn support teachers and students in line with these goals.

Much more work is needed to understand how to optimally implement these entry points in practice, whether in research across contexts or in iterative adaptations within contexts. For more on the entry points, including a deeper analysis and a research agenda of open questions, see the companion synthesis brief.¹⁴

6 | Acknowledgements

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¹⁴ Hwa, Y-Y. (2025). Entry points for supporting middle-tier officials in foundational learning reforms: Equip, connect, inform, empower. What Works Hub for Global Education. Synthesis brief. 2025/005. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-WhatWorksHubforGlobalEducation-RI_2025/005

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