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Neighbourhood school system suggested to end rich-poor divide

By Our Special Correspondent

MADRAS, APRIL 3 Growing segmentation of society because of dual schooling system catering differently to the needs of the rich and the poor has become a cause of serious concern for education planners, educationists and social activists here. Experts feel that the system hardly allows equalisation of educational opportunities and something needs to be done to provide the same quality of education to all students up to the age of 14 years.

To seek expert opinion on equalisation of educational opportunities, the UP State Council of Education Research and Training recently organised a seminar where participants expressed themselves strongly against the multiple system of schooling. Having different categories of schools for the rich and the poor could never bridge the psychological gap between the two and this would be the cause of social disunity, they warned.

It was pointed out that the education policy, formulated after the Education Commission (1964-66) submitted its recommendations, had stressed the concept of equalisation of opportunities for all.

The Commission had recommended development of a common school system which should cover every part of the country, education at all levels and for all categories of children. In this context, it was recommended that neighbourhood schooling was the only means to bridge the gap between education provided to the rich and the poor.

The neighbourhood school plan envisages that every school would admit children living in its vicinity without consideration of caste, creed or economic and social status. Besides ensuring social unity, the concept is also likely to help children receive good

education as participation in the life of common people itself is a necessary part of this.

There are other factors also which hinder development of such a system. Presently knowledge is increasing in an exponential fashion. This explosion of knowledge had not only created an urban-rural divide but also a state-to-state divide. This divide would have to be bridged by taking steps for equalisation of educational opportunities.

The so-called public schools rarely follow the neighbourhood admission policy. While these schools deprive children living in the neighbourhood, they provide admission to others who reach there from a distance of up to 20 km. Growing competition in life had made children as well as parents conscious of the quality of education. They wanted to be served by any school which they think was best for them. This made it necessary to improve the standards of common schools which catered mainly to the poor.

The seminar recommended that the State Government take legal measures to implement the neighbourhood school system and common school system. A public awareness programme should be launched to encourage the concept. Cooperation of persons interested in the cause of education should be sought and a practical approach adopted to make the system a success.

Experts also recommended an "education cess" to generate resources to provide sufficient material facilities in common schools which should be developed as centres of excellence.

A common syllabus should be formulated for all schools as far as possible. The syllabus should also have sufficient elasticity to meet specific needs, experts felt.

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**CLASS DISTINCTION BETWEEN STUDENTS
COMMUNALISATION OF EDUCATION
COMMON SCHOOL SYSTEM**