

Back And Forth To School

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It's difficult to say who is happiest from the reopening of schools after a long pandemic break of almost two years. It could be the teachers, fed up with online classes with faceless children, or the tired parents, or the politicians who want to show that everything is back to normal. With students however it's a mixed reaction depending on the age group.

The tiny-tots, for instance, who had been confined to their homes and subjected to the rigours of online classes by their tired-looking moms were raring to get out and join their friends. Some of them were telling their parents to send them to school even on Sundays and holidays. Good that they had not read Shakespeare whose character Jaques says in 'As you like it' that the second stage out of the seven stages of a man's life is that of

*"The whining schoolboy
With his satchel
And shining morning face,
Creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school"*

That image of a child being dragged to school by parents has stuck in the imagination for ages and it's difficult to find kids rushing to get back to school to meet their friends in person. The senior children have started going back to school after a long back and forth movement. While the government wanted them back earlier the parents were unwilling to take the risk of infections.

Some children and parents even started a strong online campaign saying #no vaccinations no schools. This voice became so strong that the Prime Minister had to personally intervene and declare that all students who had board exams of Xth and XII th would be passed without exams. But before that, they had already taken several pre-board online exams. That is another story of course.

However, after vaccinations were introduced for children above 12 there was no valid excuse for them to stay back in the comforts of their homes and they were put back in the place where they belong - in schools. From my personal knowledge, I know that most of the eleventh and twelfth students were initially very irritated that they were being forced to go to school.



"Our teachers also seem unwilling to teach us. They just want us to get to school because they have to fill up the quotas of attendance. Sometimes we are left alone for two periods at a stretch because the teachers themselves are not prepared with the lessons," said a student from a reputed school in Greater Noida.

However after about a month today, she says that she is very happy to get back to school because she has made a lot of new friends after a two-year gap. A school where I was invited to give a talk to motivate the children of Class XII to attend school gave me the impression that they were getting a little irritated by the number of extracurricular activities and lectures by so-called specialists, including me. I realized that I could not give them any new inputs about their career choices or the importance of getting into the groove for the year ahead because they are already quite well informed.

The children of today are not like my generation when we had no one to guide us at such crucial stages of life. Having taken online classes by organizations like BYJU and Vedantu they have become much smarter than their teachers. Today they are happy going to school like going to a party or on a picnic. Good for them but for teachers this is alarming.

A school principal confided in me and said

"We are conducting offline examinations for students of XII th but most of them appeared totally unconcerned. I guess most of them from my school have already planned and got admissions abroad. For them, it's just a matter of clearing the Boards." Unfortunately, the Ministry of Education has only helped to create more confusion and disinterest in the Board Exams.

Having introduced the Central University Entrance Test (CUET) system for admissions to colleges across the country this year the Center has effectively negated the relevance

of all Senior Secondary Board examinations. While earlier, admissions only to MBBS and Engineering classes were based on competitive exams, today the situation has totally changed.

The new regulations clearly state that for admissions to higher education the CUET will not consider the marks obtained in the Boards. "If the government itself is not serious about the school board results, how can we blame the children?" asked a chemistry teacher in Varanasi.

