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Published in Hindustan Times
September 10th 2026 | 5:24 PM

Why PGI 2.0 must measure learning, not just schooling

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A few years ago, Meghalaya was better known for the challenges of delivering quality education across difficult terrain than for education reform. Today, it has emerged as one of the states showing steady improvement in the Performance Grading Index (PGI), driven by stronger teacher deployment, better governance and improved school infrastructure. Its progress reflects a larger shift in India's education story: education systems are becoming stronger. The next challenge is ensuring that children learn better because of it.

The ministry of education's Performance Grading Index (PGI) 2.0 marks an important evolution in how India measures school education. Moving beyond state rankings to performance bands, it encourages continuous improvement while assessing learning

outcomes alongside governance, infrastructure, equity, teacher development and school leadership. Together with the Performance Grading Index for Districts (PGI-D), it provides one of India's most comprehensive education accountability frameworks.

The latest results are encouraging. India today manages one of the world's largest school education systems, with 14.67 lakh schools, 24.72 crore students and over 1.03 crore teachers. States have strengthened governance, infrastructure and administrative efficiency, and the gap between higher- and lower-performing states has narrowed. Yet one challenge remains persistent: Governance indicators have improved faster than learning outcomes. States are becoming better at running schools, but not necessarily at improving what children know and can do. Ultimately, learning, not administration, is the true measure of an education system.

This is where PGI-D can become transformational. District-level assessments reveal local disparities that state averages often conceal, enabling governments to identify learning gaps and intervene early. But for this to have real impact, assessments must happen at speed and scale. Data should not simply produce annual scorecards; it should become a real-time decision-making tool that directs timely interventions and resource allocation where they are needed most.

The next evolution of PGI must also reflect the changing nature of learning. Competency-based education should begin from Grade 1 and cut across all subjects, ensuring that students progressively build critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity and communication skills alongside foundational literacy and numeracy. Artificial Intelligence, coding and digital technologies should move beyond awareness to hands-on, applied learning at scale, equipping students with skills that are increasingly essential in both higher education and the workplace.

Such a shift requires clear national standards. Just as foundational learning has measurable benchmarks, competencies in AI, computational thinking and digital literacy should be governed by common standards that enable consistent assessment while allowing flexibility in implementation across states.

Equally important is how reform is funded. Education transformation cannot depend on isolated projects or corporate social responsibility initiatives. It requires sustained government funding and resource allocation linked directly to evidence from PGI and PGI-D. Where assessments identify learning gaps, funding should follow quickly; whether for teacher capacity building, curriculum support, technology integration or targeted interventions. The objective should be simple: ensure that every rupee invested results in better learning outcomes.

The same evidence-based approach should extend to higher education. While India has rightly expanded opportunities for degrees and technology-focused education, funding should also respond to skill gaps identified through PGI data so that students develop competencies that are relevant to the rapidly changing world of work.

India has made remarkable progress in expanding access and strengthening education governance. PGI 2.0 reflects the success of that journey. The next phase of reform must ensure that stronger systems translate into stronger learning, future-ready skills and better outcomes for every child – both at scale and at speed. Meghalaya's steady rise shows what evidence-based reform can achieve. The next evolution of PGI should ensure that success is measured not only by how well schools function, but by how well they prepare young India for the future.