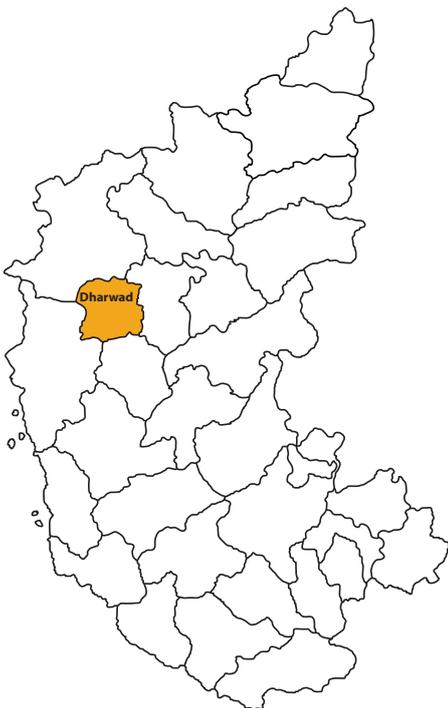




Sikshana

Raising the bar in the public education system

Area of operation: Dharwad



Name of the Organisation	Sikshana Foundation
In the Sandbox	Since 2011
Type of organisation	Non-profit
Focus areas	Working in collaboration with state governments, Sikshana has created a replicable model that improves learning levels in the public education system in rural and semi-urban areas.

ASER 2012, the 8th Annual Report on the Status of Indian education, ends with the following ominous lines: "The guarantee of education is meaningless without satisfactory learning. There are serious implications for India's equity and growth if basic learning outcomes do not improve soon."

Eighty per cent of India's children study in Government schools today and according to ASER findings, more than 50% of children in class 5 cannot read a book, 75% cannot perform a simple division and about a quarter of all children struggle in spite of going to private tutors.

When Sikshana started off in 2001, they were certain of one thing: any transformation in Indian education cannot ignore government schools.

The Genesis: Low Education Quality In Government Schools

Short of assuming direct control over the affairs of a government school, Sikshana, the organisation started in 2002 by E.S. Ramamurthy, a renewable energy professional with over 30 years of experience in the industry, based its grounding philosophies strongly on three factors:

- a. facilitating the process leaving ownership to the schools,
- b. keeping costs low and
- c. improvement in learning that is measurable and quantifiable at all times

The Sandbox Story

The project to improve learning in rural government schools began in Karnataka with 79 schools in Kalghatagi taluk, Dharwad and came into the Deshpande Foundation to scale-up the effort in 2011. The Sikshana team comprised support offices in Bangalore and Kanakpura, program officers at the district level, mentors for a group of schools to check for compliance, Shala Hiteshis (community para-teachers) to guide and mentor students in individual schools and volunteers to back them up.

"A lot was being done to improve basic infrastructure, but very little attention was being given at a basic level to improve learning patterns here in Hubli. This is where we began," says Sharanappa Kattimani, Program Manager of North Karnataka region.

"We started with the main motive of making education interesting," says Gouramma, a Field Mentor in Hubli.

Here are 6 areas that Sikshana focused on in order to improve the education system in the Hubli schools that they worked in:

1. Blank Sheets Of Paper: The Reading And Writing Program

Realising that students could not afford notebooks, Sikshana started supplying blank A4 sheets that students could take home and write about anything that interested them.

"We observed an increase in interest towards studies and other activities among students after Sikshana started distributing these stars. They attend school regularly now," - K.R. Mulmani, Principal of a government school in Hubli.

This simple intervention has been singularly responsible for improving both reading and writing skills of the students, including those written off by the school as abject failures. The writing assignments not only triggered a stiff competition amongst students to see who wrote the most but has also expanded the scope of their reading habit to non-textbook sources and helped them improve their writing speeds during exams.

Each student maintains a file of his/her writing as matter of pride. "The students compare files with each other and want to write more," says Kattimani.

After 2 years of being in the Sandbox, Sikshana started a detailed assessment for students through a benchmark writing test. If the students wrote 25 lines in 15 minutes, they were graded as Average. Students who wrote more than 25 lines were graded Good and those who wrote less than 25 lines were classified as Slow Writers. This helped in focusing only on those students who were very slow in writing and also in cutting costs in



Students committed to an extra school hour of one focused activity everyday: math or reading along with a skilled peer and overseen by a facilitator.

SL.No	Block	Strength (3rd std to 8th std)	Students slow in writing	Students good at writing
1	Kalghatgi	14062	9140	4922
2	Hubli	21368	17094	4274
3	Dharwad	18969	15175	3794
4	Kundgol	11641	9313	2328
5	Navalagund	12520	10016	2504
6	Harapanahalli	3614	2891	723
Total		82174	63629	18545

2012-2013 Writing assessment results for Sandbox schools

terms of both time and money. 30 writing sheets were given to each slow writer and 15 sheets were provided to writers who were graded as good.

2. The 30-Day Challenge: Learning Through Non-Cognitive Methods

Sikshana found out that most schools spent a lot of time battling failure among their students. Learning levels were below average and the conventional methods of remedial learning that made students to do overtime assignments in their homes were largely ineffective.

Sikshana learnt two things – that teachers were teaching adequately, yet no learning was happening, and that teachers could impart knowledge but didn't have the time

to nurture a 'skill'. Sikshana tried an intervention with an external teacher which met with limited success and was difficult to replicate. Building on the peer-to-peer learning method which is now regarded in education circles as the most powerful way to learn, Sikshana ran pilots on a 30-day program, including holidays. Students committed to an extra school hour of one focused activity everyday: math or reading along with a skilled peer, and overseen by a facilitator. In two pilots run across 40 schools the results were astounding: more than 90% easily passed, including repeat failures. Learning with peers and the non-cognitive method of submitting to a regimen and persevering had produced results where years of remedial learning had previously failed.

Drawing on its learnings in the Sandbox, Sikshana today assesses

learning levels and categorises students into 3 groups, level A, B and C. The levels help Sikshana decide the kind of work that the student is capable of doing.

3. Reaching For The Stars: Rewarding Good Work

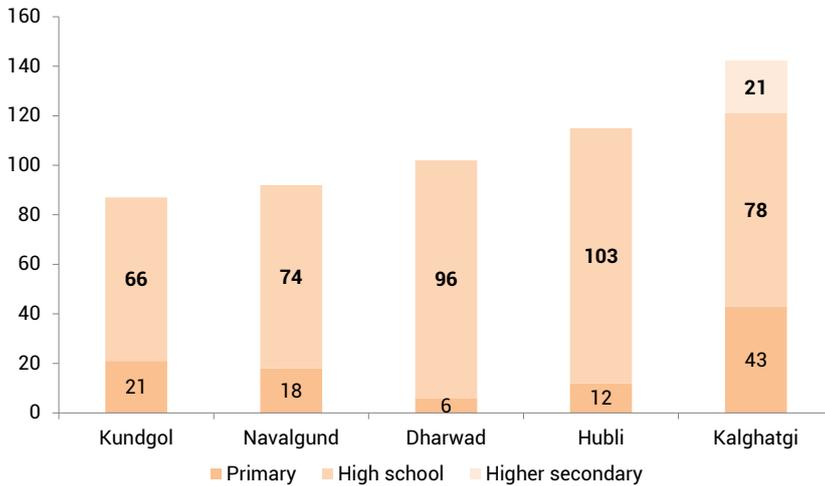
The most popular among Sikshana's classroom techniques to keep the motivation levels high among children is the Stars program. Good work of any kind is rewarded with stars: green for environment, pink for cultural activities and silver for academics, which can later be redeemed for gifts. Students take pride in wearing their signs of good work besides motivating their classmates to emulate them. "These stars encourage healthy competition and excitement among children. They work extra hard to get them," says Kattimani.

The Stars program which is successful across the 1160 schools that Sikshana works with, is a proof of how interventions can be creative without adding to the tasks of an already burdened teacher. "We observed an increase in interest towards studies and other activities among students after Sikshana started distributing these stars. They attend school regularly now," says K.R. Mulmani, Principal of a government school in Hubli.



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Shikshana – Number of Sandbox Schools



Growth of Sikshana program in the Hubli Sandbox.

4. Spot Prizes, Mentors And Empowered Teachers

While the larger goal is good performance in the examinations, Sikshana has initiated 'spot prizes' to motivate students by celebrating small successes. The teacher is given total freedom to choose and decide which efforts to reward; the students usually get oral hygiene or stationery products. Besides encouraging children to learn, this method has made a big difference to the morale of the teachers, who feel 'empowered' by the scheme.

One of the core focuses of the Sikshana program is to incentivise and motivate teachers and provide them with the right tools to focus on student quality. Sikshana school

teachers benefit from regular teacher-training programs, Total Quality Management sessions, exposure trips abroad and timely rewards. In turn, the teachers take complete ownership of their schools and the students' performance, often going much beyond the call of duty to strive towards results. Teachers and Headmasters coming on time, keeping a regular check on students, regular interaction with parents – all of these have become a sign of changing patterns in government education system. In the Sandbox, Sikshana runs a unique two-day camp for teachers to unleash their talents, hone their inter-personal skills and build their confidence. Thus far, 382 teachers and 64 Cluster Resource Persons have been part of camps held at the 'Discovery

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Village', located on the outskirts of Bangalore.

Sikshana wanted a way of increasing the capacity of teachers and support them without adding to their burden, while also keeping costs low. In North Karnataka, with the help of Deshpande Foundation, Sikshana recruited 60 Shalai Hitaishis - para-teachers from the local community who had finished their B.Ed, to work closely with a group of 8 to 10 schools on specific objectives like reading skills, fulfilling resource gaps, checking for attendance and motivating the students. The para-teachers go through rigorous training in Sikshana's methods, get a monthly salary of Rs. 5,000 and ably assist the school staff in delivering the programs. The program has directly led to a positive impact on the pass percentage and brought community involvement into the local schools, another of Sikshana's cornerstone principles.

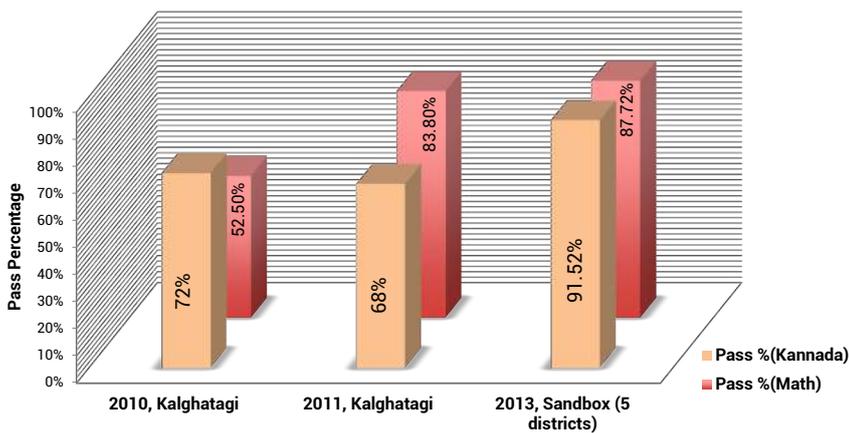
Improving Learning At Rs. 500 Per Child

Sikshana spends on improving learning levels through various classroom methods with the



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Sikshana Sandbox Schools: Secondary School Exam Results



Across the 539 schools that run Sikshana's programs in the Sandbox, the pass percentages have consistently increased, reaching close to 92% last year.

existing State syllabus and available infrastructure. While Government spends Rs. 13,500 per child per annum, Sikshana programme costs only Rs. 500 per child per annum. Sikshana's annual reports reinforce the organisation's priorities in spending: ~ 75% on the schools, 20% on mentors and 5% in administrative costs. In the Sandbox, with the support of Deshpande Foundation's grants team, Sikshana identified various points that further brought down cost per child from Rs. 400 to Rs. 350 in just over a year, enabling them to reach many additional schools.

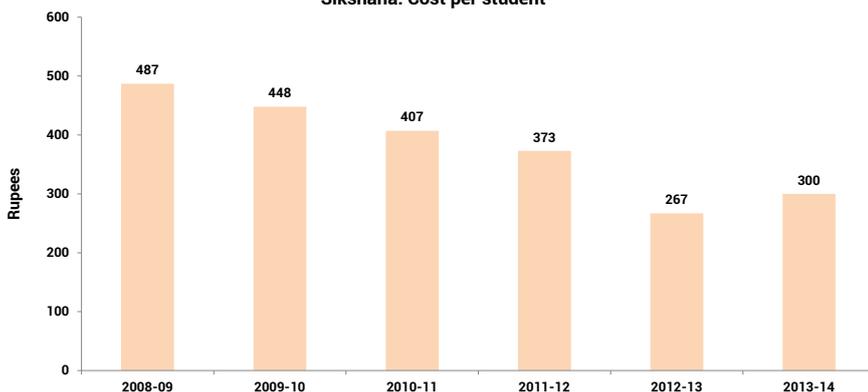
To ensure effective utilisation, funds earmarked for schools are also routed through School Development Monitoring Committee (SDMCs) created by Government, comprising local leaders and parents, which is responsible for the school affairs locally. Issues faced by the schools are discussed at SDMC meetings

held mandatorily every month and attended by SDMC members and school staff.

The Impact: An Interest In Education

Today, Sikshana reaches close to 200,000 children in four states, 11 districts and 22 taluks with its programs. Sikshana adopted Government High Schools in Ramanagara district and Kalghatagi taluk and has produced exemplary results in the recent Secondary School Leaving Certificate Exam conducted by the State Education Board. Ramanagara district has moved to 8th position; earlier it was ranked 26th. Kalghatagi taluk has registered an overwhelming 93.1% pass percentage. Similarly, 91 schools out of 104 in Ramanagara district have registered a pass percentage of 80 and above with the State average at 77%.

Sikshana: Cost per student



Cost optimization in the Sandbox.

In the Sandbox, Sikshana identified various points in their operational model that further brought down cost per child in their model from Rs. 400 to Rs. 350 in just over a year.

Beyond the numbers, it is community involvement, school ownership, engaged stakeholders and interested students who have played a huge role in helping Sikshana scale its programs rapidly.

Last year, over 200 schools were run entirely by community volunteers. Sikshana has signed an a Memorandum Of Understanding with University of Pennsylvania to research into methods to keep the community engaged and scale further.

Parents and the local community are taking extra interest in the schools. Spot prizes and many other small initiatives are being funded and led entirely by the community.

Encouraged by good results, Headmasters and teachers are taking ownership and accountability of their wards. The schools show better attendance to regular checks. Sikshana gives out a Gurupuruskar award where selected teachers are given an opportunity to go abroad. Last year three teachers were sent to the United States and this year two teachers are being sent to Belgium.

As you walk inside any Sikshana run school, the infectious enthusiasm for learning is palpable. You see students with colourful stars comparing theirs with others and vowing to get more the next time. "I have received the maximum number of stars in this class, it feels good to show off these stars and files, everyone wants to get as much stars as I have. I even went to Delhi!" says Sanjana, a class 7 student.

"This time my friend got the highest number of stars in class, next time I will make sure I study and perform better," chirps Vibhu, a class 5 student. This belief in being able to generate an enduring interest and pride in learning is at the core of Sikshana's sustainability model.

