

**Vivekanand Education Society's College of Arts,
Science and Commerce (Autonomous)**

Best Practices 2022-23

1. Title of the Practice

Selfless Outreach activity: Empowering School Dropouts through "**The Sunday School**" Initiative

2. Objectives of the Practice

The "Sunday School" initiative was conceived with a clear set of objectives aimed at addressing the pressing issue of school dropouts in Chembur and neighbouring areas.

The primary objectives were:

1. Provide free and quality education to school dropouts in Chembur and nearby areas.
2. Operate on Sundays and public holidays for accessibility.
3. Offer education in English, Hindi, and Marathi to cater to language preferences.
4. Target school dropouts, repeater students, and under-served communities.
5. Analyze and support students facing challenges in completing their basic SSC education.

3. The Context

"The Sunday School" initiative emerged in response to the educational challenges posed by increased school dropout rates, especially among under-served communities in the vicinity of the College in Chembur. The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded these challenges, making it imperative to find innovative solutions to bridge the educational gap and reduce school dropout rates.

One significant aspect of the context was the existence of "Form No. 17," a provision that allows individuals to continue their education without attending regular school. However, it was observed that many eligible students did not avail themselves of this opportunity, indicating a need for further exploration of the underlying reasons.

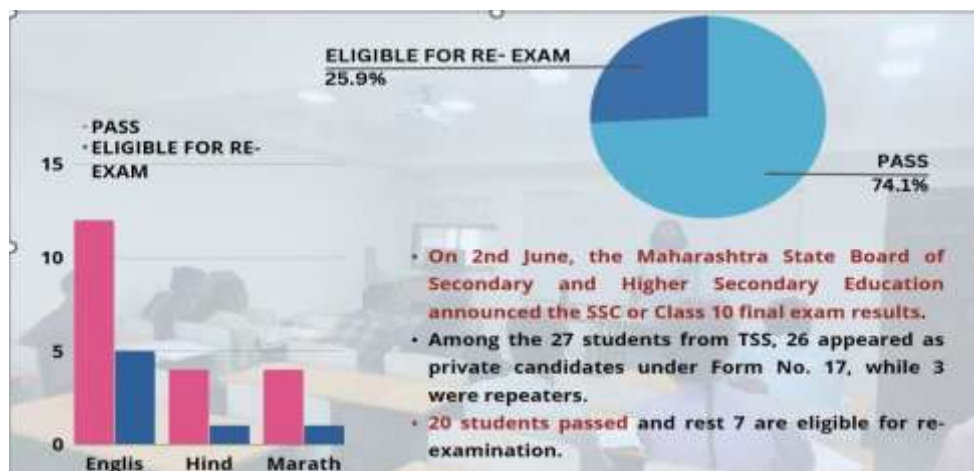
4. The Practice

"The Sunday School" (TSS) was envisioned as a pioneering initiative where college students volunteered their time and expertise to mentor school dropouts. This mentorship took place on Sundays, aligning with the initiative's commitment to accommodating students' busy schedules. The program's support structure included:

- **Infrastructure:** The initiative was hosted at Vivekanand Education Society's College of Arts, Science & Commerce (VESASC), which provided state-of-the-art classrooms and library access to the enrolled students.
- **Study Materials:** To facilitate learning, a book donation drive successfully sourced textbooks, reference materials, question banks, and other essential resources, ensuring that students had access to the materials they needed to excel in their studies.
- **Nutritional Support:** Recognizing the importance of students' well-being, TSS provided a nutritional brunch (mid-day meals) funded by management and VES teaching staff. This initiative addressed the issue of classroom hunger and improved attendance.
- **Regular Assignments and Tests:** To maintain motivation, regular assignments and tests were conducted, promoting consistency and continuity in the learning process.
- **Doubt-Solving Assistance:** A dedicated effort was made to provide immediate help and doubt-solving assistance to students, ensuring that they had the support needed to excel academically.

5. Evidence of Success

The initial pilot project of "The Sunday School" enrolled 32 students who represented diverse educational backgrounds, including school dropouts and individuals seeking a second chance at education. The program achieved significant progress among these students, demonstrating the potential of the model to make a positive impact.



Additionally, the initiative provided valuable life experiences for college student mentors, fostering a sense of responsibility, leadership skills, and a deeper understanding of educational inequity.

The initiative's student-led nature showcased its potential for high acceptability without straining the existing educational apparatus.

6. Problems and Challenges Encountered

While "The Sunday School" initiative achieved commendable success, it encountered several challenges along the way:

- **Clearing Weak Foundations:** Many school dropouts had gaps in their foundational knowledge, making it challenging for them to catch up with regular schooling.
- **Classroom Hunger and Inattentiveness:** Some students attending TSS faced issues of hunger, which led to inattentiveness in class. The provision of a nutritional brunch addressed this problem and improved attendance.
- **Financial Constraints:** The financial burden on school dropouts was a significant barrier to their educational aspirations. The book donation drive successfully provided students with essential study materials at no additional cost.
- **Center Fees and Internal Assessment Charges:** To facilitate the smooth functioning of TSS and conduct of internal assessments, there were financial implications. However, donors, who were faculties of VESASC, generously funded these expenses, ensuring that financial constraints did not hinder students' progress.
- **Need for a Conducive Study Environment:** Many students had demanding weekday jobs, requiring a conducive environment to study after work. TSS recognized this need and allowed them access to the college library, providing a supportive space for concentration.
- **Regular Doubt-Solving Assistance:** To address the need for immediate help and doubt-solving, regular doubt-solving assistance was provided to students.
- **Challenges in Examination Sitting:** Despite efforts, a few students out of the total 32 regular attendees faced obstacles in sitting for examinations. Some of these challenges included the unavailability of Leaving Certificate (LC) and Domicile Certificate, hindering their formal examination participation.

These challenges highlighted the diverse obstacles that school dropouts encounter when attempting to resume their education. Despite these hurdles, TSS remained committed and implemented innovative solutions to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment for all participants.

The commitment of the mentors, donors, and the entire TSS team played a crucial role in overcoming these challenges and making a positive impact on the lives of the students. With

continued dedication and support, TSS aims to further enhance its effectiveness and expand its reach to empower more school dropouts in their educational journey.

7. Notes

The success of TSS was attributed to the support of management, principal, and commitment of mentors, donors, and the entire team of TSS. The initiative's potential for scalability and integration into the formal education system was highlighted and were suggested to higher authorities for further enhancement. The program was appreciated by the Central Ministry of School Education and they recommended Maharashtra School and Sports Ministry to support this initiative.

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Best Practises 2022-23

1. Title of the Practice

Student Connect - a Mentoring Program for students

2. Objectives of the Practice

1. To provide a mentoring system for the students involving personal interactions with their mentors
2. To guide students in their academic growth, goal setting and career planning
3. To provide emotional support and guidance to the students,
4. To motivate students and facilitate their overall personal development
5. To enable students to be confident and constructive members of society and good citizens of the nation

3. The Context

Students who enter degree college are often confused about their career goals and lack the motivation to pursue their academics with focus and dedication. Besides, many students face financial difficulties, health issues, and emotional problems. Student Connect is a mentorship program conceived to identify the challenges faced by students and help them navigate through them. It aims at providing students with individual guidance and support so that they have a safe platform to express their thoughts and doubts. They are given academic guidance, career counseling and emotional support. Those facing mental health issues are identified and directed to professional counselors. The main objective of the practice is to motivate the students to perform to the best of their potential.

4. The Practice

Each teacher is designated as a Mentor (class coordinator) and allotted a group of students whom they are required to mentor. A one-to-one interaction is conducted with each student in which his/her academic progress, co-curricular activities, personal strengths and challenges are discussed, and possible solutions are suggested. The relevant personal details of the student are entered in a Mentee Evaluation Form which is passed on to the future mentors of the student by the Student Connect committee. To enhance the effectiveness of the program, feedback on the mentorship process is obtained from the students at the end of the academic year through Google Forms. The feedback received is analyzed by the Student Connect committee and the analysis sent to the mentors to help them gain insight on how they can improve their mentoring.

The Student Connect initiative is a unique practice in the Indian Higher Education context, since students of most colleges in India do not have the benefit of personal mentoring and guidance. The highly personalized support offered by the Student Connect initiative makes it a valuable resource for the all-round development of the students.

The main challenge faced in implementing the process is the uneven distribution of students in different courses, resulting in some mentors having to deal with a relatively large number of students.

5. Evidence of Success

The feedback obtained from the students was overwhelmingly positive, with 85% of the respondents saying that the mentoring was effective and 75.5% saying that the mentoring had a significant impact on their life or personal development. 71% of the respondents said that they had received motivation and encouragement from their mentors, 62% appreciated career guidance, 57% -academic support, 36% - help in administrative matters and 25% - emotional support, showing that the program had achieved most of its objectives. The comments about the process were strongly indicative of the success of the program in achieving personal development of the students.

6. Problems Encountered and Resources Required

The main problem encountered in implementing the practice is lack of time to carry out personal mentoring of every student, especially in large classes. Besides, a few students are not communicative and do not open out easily to their mentors. The main resource required for the program is space for personal mentoring.