



# LEARNING FROM UTTAR PRADESH

A Playbook for Foundational Learning Reform

## The Global Learning Challenge & India's Bold Response

Around the world, education systems are grappling with a foundational learning crisis – millions of children complete early grades without basic reading or math skills. Rather than dwell on this well-known challenge, forward-looking countries are zeroing in on solutions.

In 2020, India launched a National Education Policy (NEP 2020) that made foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) its top priority. NEP 2020 declared, “our highest priority must be to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy in primary school”. This vision quickly moved from paper to action.

By 2021, India set up a mission-mode program called NIPUN Bharat – National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy – with an ambitious, time-bound goal: ensure every child can read with comprehension and do basic math by the end of Grade 3 by 2026–27. In practical terms, this means that by age 8 or 9, every child should be able to read and understand texts, write simple expressions, and perform fundamental arithmetic – the building blocks for all future.

Such a singular focus on FLN, enshrined at the highest policy level, was a refreshing contrast to scattershot reforms of the past. It resonated with a global trend as well: for example, Argentina recently launched a National Literacy Campaign to ensure that every third-grade student can comprehend written, rallying broad civil society and political support. Argentina's success – all provinces now have their own literacy plans and commitments from leaders – is held up as an inspiring example.

India's NIPUN Bharat is a similarly bold mission, aligning the country's vast education system around the most important goal: all children learning the basics. This clear emphasis on foundational skills, taken up as a top priority by national and state governments, has made India a case study in turning a crisis into an opportunity. As one analysis noted, the launch of NIPUN Bharat in 2021 was the first time India set a concrete deadline for universal FLN. In the years since, the question in India is no longer whether foundational learning matters – it's how to deliver it at scale. The experience of India's largest state – Uttar Pradesh – offers a playbook for how to do exactly that.

# Can We Learn from Uttar Pradesh’s FLN Turnaround?

Uttar Pradesh (UP) – India’s most populous state – was long seen as an educational underperformer. Yet UP is now emerging as an unlikely success story in foundational learning, outperforming national trends in recent years. Consider this: between the 2021 and 2024 national assessments of Grade 3, India’s average rose only 2-3 percentage points in language and math, still below pre-pandemic levels. But Uttar Pradesh jumped 10 percentage points in both reading and mathematics over the same period. In 2017, UP’s learning outcomes lagged well behind the national average; now, post-Covid, UP’s Grade 3 results exceed the all-India average.

| Grade 3 Averages                | Language | Mathematics |
|---------------------------------|----------|-------------|
| India 2017 (Pre-Covid, NAS)     | 67%      | 63%         |
| India 2021 (Pandemic, NAS)      | 62%      | 57%         |
| India 2024 (Post-Pandemic, PRS) | 64%      | 60%         |
| UP 2017 (Pre-Covid, NAS)        | 58%      | 59%         |
| UP 2021 (Pandemic, NAS)         | 58%      | 54%         |
| UP 2024 (Post-Pandemic, PRS)    | 68%      | 64%         |

This dramatic turnaround did not happen by chance – it was the result of deliberate reforms and strong leadership focus on FLN. Back in September 2019 (even before NEP 2020 was finalized), Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath launched “Mission Prerna” with the singular objective that all 1.2 crore children in UP’s primary schools achieve foundational literacy and numeracy. The state publicly set quantifiable Prerna Lakshya (learning goals) for each grade 1–5, such as expected reading fluency and arithmetic problem-solving

levels by Grade 3. “For example, in Grade 3, a child is expected to read at a fluency of 30 words per minute and solve 75% of single-digit addition and subtraction problems,” explained Vijay Kiran Anand, the state’s first Director General of School Education. These targets, compiled in a “Prerna Lakshya” document, were widely communicated – through teacher WhatsApp groups, wall posters in schools and villages, and even voice messages – to ensure every stakeholder knew what the mission aimed for and why it mattered.



## Uttar Pradesh's Playbook for Progress

Importantly, Mission Prerna was led from the top. The Chief Minister himself championed it, and a series of proactive senior officials translated it into action. Shri Vijay Kiran Anand (IAS), appointed as Director General of School Education in 2020, set the tone by swiftly rolling out foundational reforms and tracking accountability. During COVID school closures, he kept the mission alive through home-based learning initiatives ("Prerna e-Pathshala") and prepared the ground for post-pandemic recovery. As schools reopened, he launched Prerna Gyanotsav, a 100-day back-to-school FLN drive "to mobilise all key stakeholders to focus on foundational learning as children resume schooling", underlining that "the classroom scenario... cannot be 'business as usual' for primary grades".

This sense of urgency and clarity continued under subsequent DGSEs – Ms. Kanchan Verma and now Ms. Monika Rani – ensuring continuity rather than complacency. They were supported by committed Principal Secretaries of Basic Education (such as Mr. Shanmuga Sundaram, Mr. Deepak Kumar, and now Mr. Parth Sarthi Sen Sharma),

who reinforced the structures and accountability systems needed to sustain progress. One such structure was a statewide cadre of academic mentors. UP created a 4,000+ strong network of Academic Resource Persons (ARPs) tasked with visiting schools regularly to coach teachers and monitor FLN. The political and bureaucratic will behind FLN in UP sent a clear message down to every headmaster and teacher: foundational learning is the state priority, and help is available to achieve it.

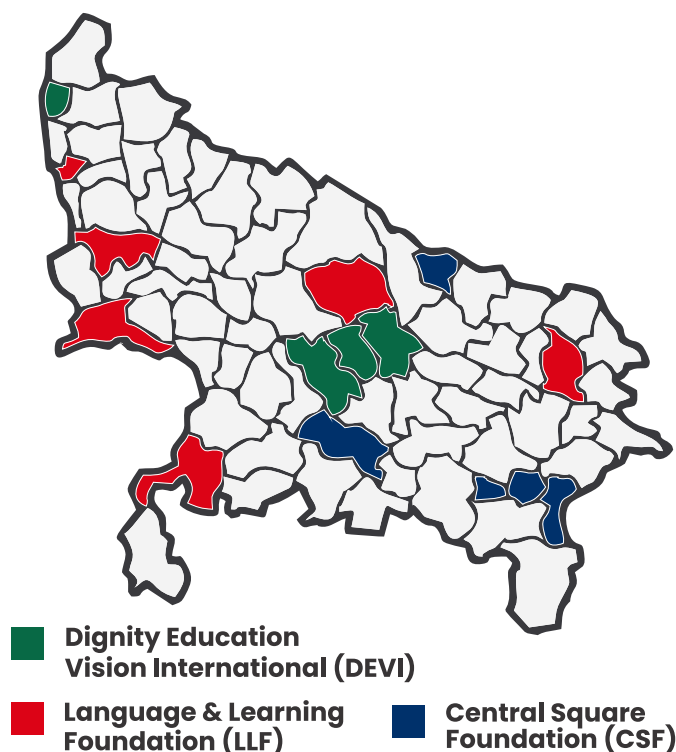
Early evidence suggests this focus is paying off. By the time of PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024, India's latest national survey) UP not only recovered learning losses from the pandemic but surged ahead. The state's 10 percentage point gain in Grade 3 literacy and numeracy between 2021 and 2024 far exceeded the national uptick.

Within UP, significant variation between different districts indicates that some embraced the mission more fully than others. This sets the stage for the most important question: how did these gains happen, and are there any trends among districts that realised the largest gains?



# FLN in Uttar Pradesh: NGO Partners

Within this overall picture of strong FLN progress, three major NGOs have played important but distinct roles in different geographies within UP. Their approaches differ along several dimensions: whether they focus on systems vs classrooms, on Language vs full FLN, on materials vs monitoring, and on how they build government capacity. A detailed district-wise analysis using data from NAS 2021 and PRS 2024 reveals interesting trends on the comparative efficacy of the different approaches.



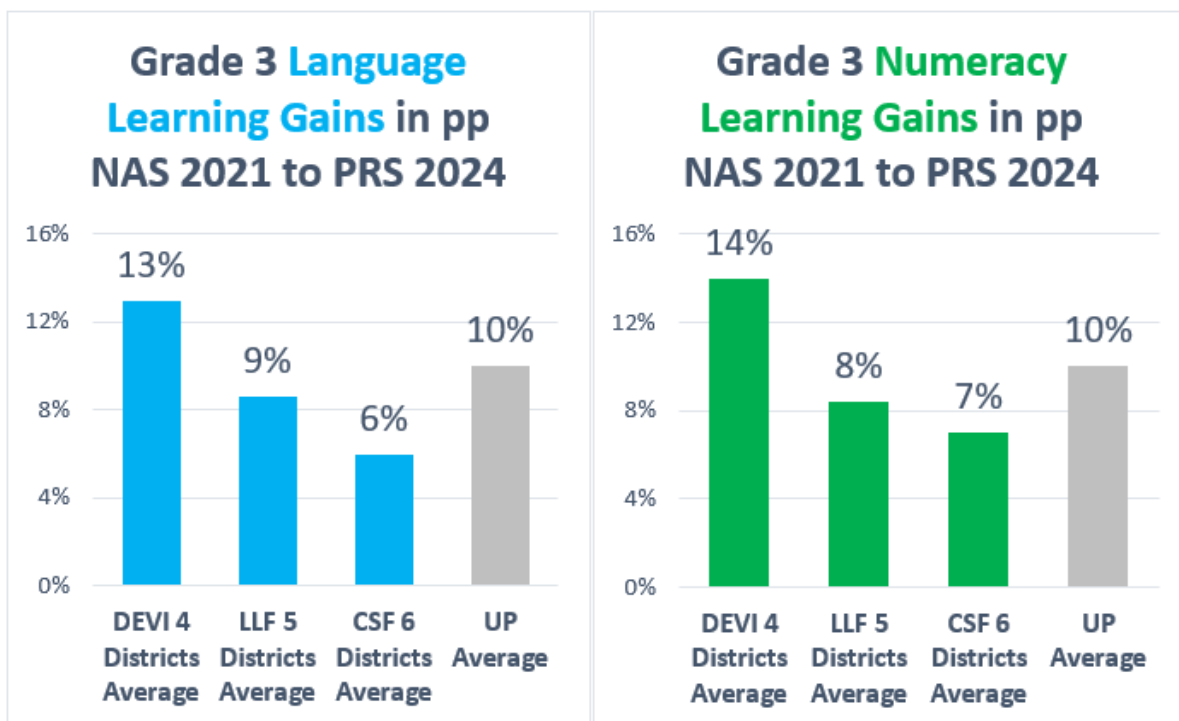
## FLN Scale by NGO in Uttar Pradesh

| NGO  | Students (approx.) | Teachers* (approx.) | Schools | Grade span (FLN focus) | Districts (UP)                                       |
|------|--------------------|---------------------|---------|------------------------|--|
| DEVI | 510,000            | 30,000              | 7,500   | 1–5                    | Shamli, Lucknow, Barabanki, Unnao                    |
| LLF  | 450,000            | 15,000              | 6,300   | 1–3                    | Bhadohi, Chandauli, Fatehpur, Shravasti, Varanasi    |
| CSF  | 350,000            | 25,000              | 8,400   | 1–3                    | Agra, Aligarh, Ghaziabad, Jhansi, Gorakhpur, Sitapur |

### Data Sources & Assumptions:

- All figures are based on the latest available UDISE+/NAS/PRS data.
- FLN-focused Grades 1–3 are a subset of these totals. Grades 1–3 usually account for around 60% of total enrollment in Grades 1–5.
- Teachers are not strictly grade-specific, but around 60% may be considered actively engaged in FLN (Grades 1–3).

# A Comparative Analysis of Gains DEVI, LLF & CSF



NAS  
2021



PARAKH  
2024



More info on different  
NGOs working in UP



## For DEVI's gains (+13 / +14):

### Vs UP average

30% higher in Language and  
40% higher in Mathematics.

### Vs India overall

6.5× India's gain in Language  
and 4.7× in Mathematics.

### Vs LLF districts

about 1.6× LLF's gain in both  
Language and Mathematics.

### Vs CSF districts

about 2.2× CSF's gain in Language  
and 2× in Mathematics.

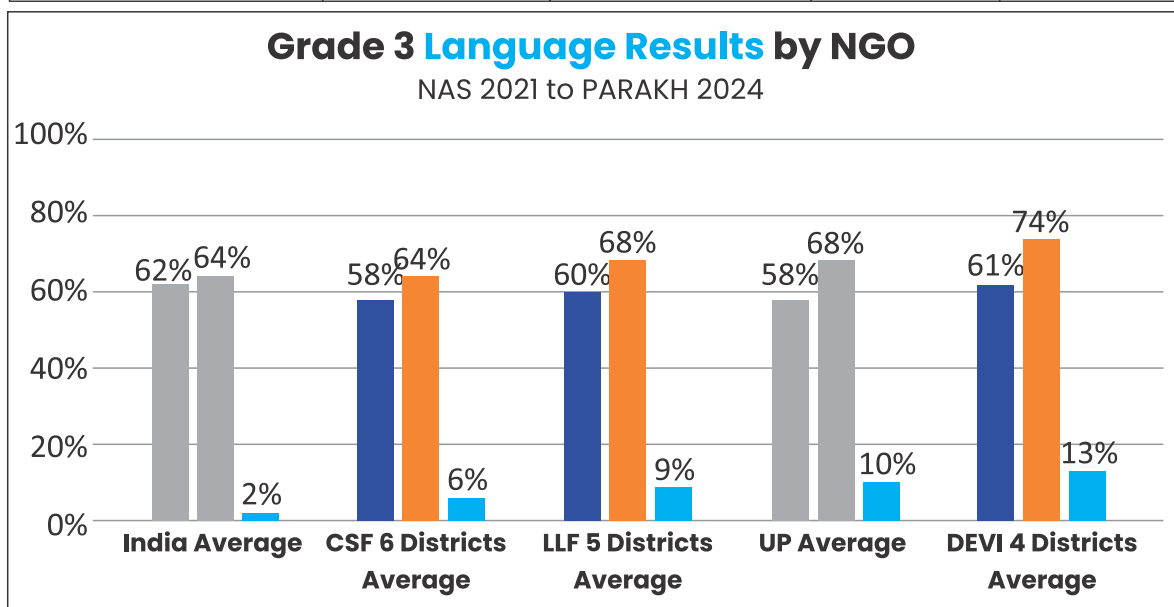
# Grade 3 Language Results for UP: DEVI, LLF & CSF

The districts the different NGOs are working in had similar performances in the 2021 NAS, but by 2024 a significant gap existed, with DEVI's district having gained a bigger ground as per table below, organized from highest to lowest gains both in terms of percentage points (pp) and relative gain % (PRS-NAS)/NAS x 100)

## Key

- NAS 2021
- PARAKH 2024
- Literacy Gain
- Numeracy Gain

| Group              | NAS 2021 (%) | PRS 2024 (%) | Gain (pp) | Relative Gain (%) |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-------------------|
| DEVI (4 districts) | 61           | 74           | +13       | +21.3%            |
| UP Overall         | 58           | 68           | +10       | +17.2%            |
| LLF (5 districts)  | 60           | 68           | +8        | +13.3%            |
| CSF (6 districts)  | 58           | 64           | +6        | +10.3%            |
| India Overall      | 62           | 64           | +2        | +3.2%             |





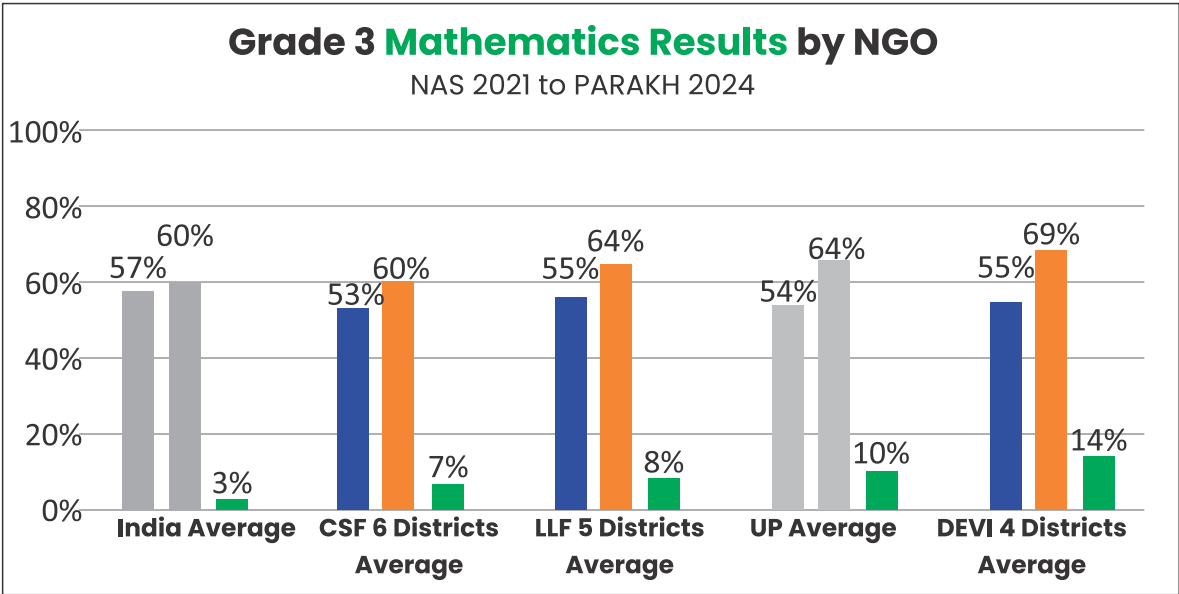
# Grade 3 Mathematics Results for UP: DEVI, LLF & CSF

The mathematics performance followed a similar trend to literacy, with DEVI's four districts gaining, on average, 14 percentage points, significantly higher than the state average.

More info on different  
NGOs working in UP



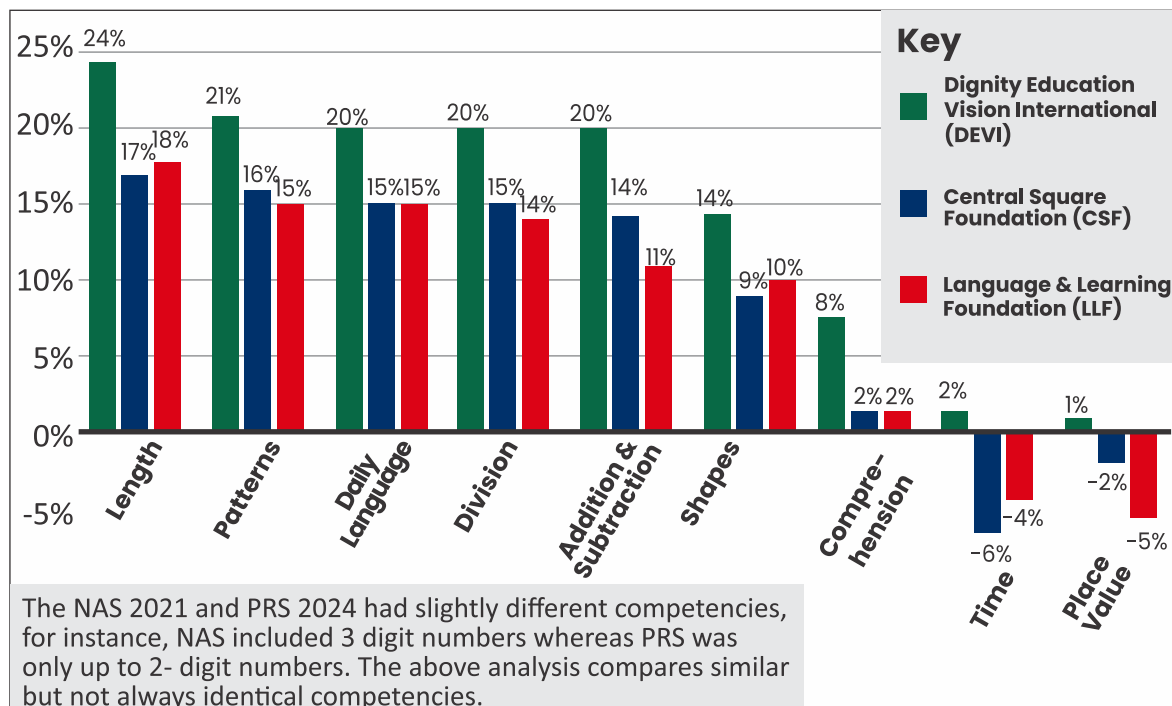
| Group              | NAS<br>2021 (%) | PRS<br>2024 (%) | Gain (pp) | Relative<br>Gain (%) |
|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------|----------------------|
| DEVI (4 districts) | 55              | 69              | +14       | +25.5%               |
| UP Overall         | 54              | 64              | +10       | +18.5%               |
| LLF (5 districts)  | 55              | 64              | +9        | +16.4%               |
| CSF (6 districts)  | 53              | 60              | +7        | +13.2%               |
| India Overall      | 57              | 60              | +3        | +5.3%                |



# Gains by Learning Outcome

Breaking down the results by learning outcome we find that DEVI's 4 districts had larger gains in all of the comparable competencies.

## Grade 3 Competency Gains

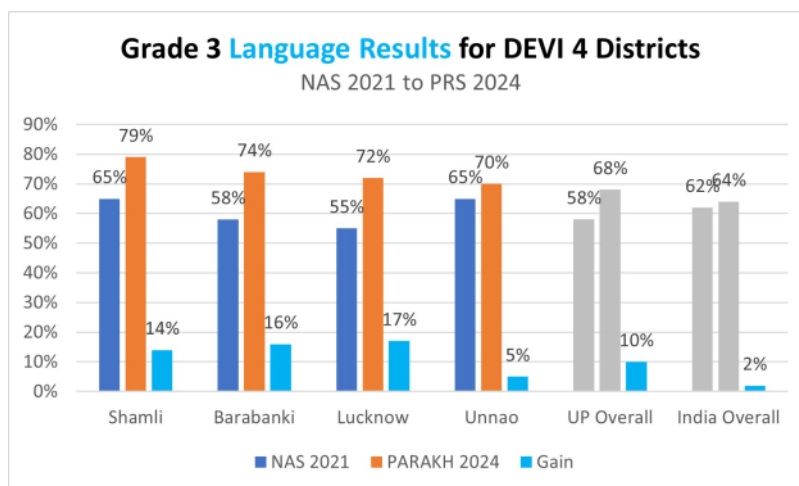


| NAS 2021 |  | PARAKH 2024 |  |
|----------|--|-------------|--|
| LO Code  | Learning Outcome for Grade 3   | LO Code     | Learning Outcome for Grade 3   |
| M312     | Estimates and measures <b>length</b> and distance using standard units like centimetres or meters & identifies relationships | C-8.9       | Select appropriate tools and units to perform simple measurements of <b>length</b> , weight, and volume of objects in their immediate environment. |
| M318     | Extends patterns in simple shapes and numbers  | C-8.2       | Identifies and extends simple patterns in their surroundings, shapes, and numbers.   |
| L312     | Reads printed scripts on the <b>classroom walls</b> : poems, posters, charts etc.  | C-9.7       | Knows and uses enough words to carry out day-to-day interactions effectively and can guess the meaning of new words by using existing vocabulary   |
| M306     | Explains the meaning of division facts by equal grouping/sharing and finds it by repeated subtraction                        | C-8.7       | Recognises multiplication as repeated addition and division as equal sharing   |

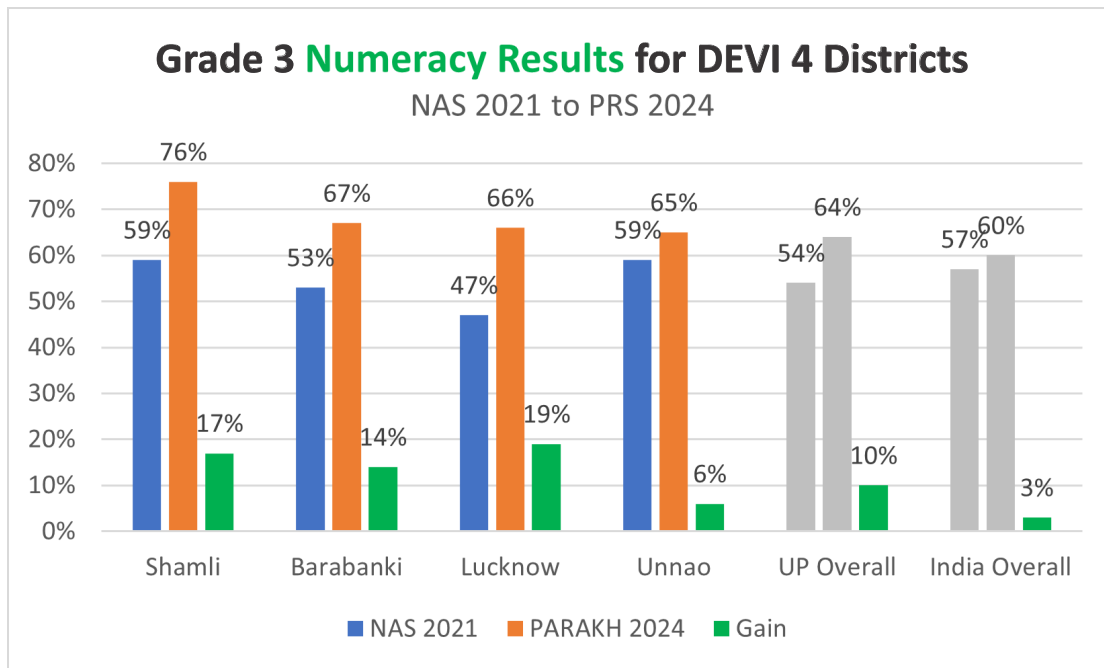
| NAS 2021 |   | PARAKH 2024 |  |
|----------|---|-------------|--|
| LO Code  | Learning Outcome for Grade 3  | LO Code     | Learning Outcome for Grade 3   |
| M303     | Solves simple daily life problems using addition and subtraction of three-digit numbers with and without regrouping | C-8.6       | Performs addition and subtraction of 2-digit numbers fluently using flexible strategies of composition and decomposition of both numerical and word problems     |
| M309     | Identifies and makes 2D-shapes by paper folding. paper cutting on the dot grid, using straight lines etc.           | C-8.8       | Recognises, makes, and classifies basic geometric shapes and their observable properties, and understands and explains the relative relation of objects in space |
| L304     | Reads small texts with comprehension, i.e., identifies main ideas, details, sequence and draws conclusions          | C-10.5      | Reads short stories and comprehends their meaning – by identifying characters, storyline and what the author wants to say – on their own                         |
| M302     | Compares numbers up to 999 based on their <b>place values</b>   | C-8.5       | Recognises and uses numerals to represent quantities up to 99 with the understanding of decimal place value system   |
| M317     | Reads the time correctly to the hour using a clock/watch  | C-8.10      | Performs simple measurements of time in minutes, hours, day, weeks and months  |

## Analysis of DEVI's 4 Districts

- DEVI began work in government schools in late 2022 with Shamli district; Lucknow Unnao and Barabanki began phase-wise in 2023/2024.
- The results for Shamli are the highest where DEVI has been working the longest.
- There was a time-lag in implementation in Unnao, which may explain it's lower gain than other ALfA-implementing districts.







## Analysis of 15 Districts: DEVI, LLF, CSF

### Grade 3 Language

### Grade 3 Numeracy

| NGO           | District  | NAS 2021 | PARAKH 2024 | Gain | NAS 2021 | PARAKH 2024 | Gain |
|---------------|-----------|----------|-------------|------|----------|-------------|------|
| DEVI          | Barabanki | 58%      | 74%         | 16%  | 53%      | 67%         | 14%  |
| DEVI          | Lucknow   | 55%      | 72%         | 17%  | 47%      | 66%         | 19%  |
| DEVI          | Shamli    | 65%      | 79%         | 14%  | 59%      | 76%         | 17%  |
| DEVI          | Unnao     | 65%      | 70%         | 5%   | 59%      | 65%         | 6%   |
| DEVI Average  |           | 61%      | 74%         | 13%  | 55%      | 69%         | 14%  |
| LLF           | Bhadohi   | 54%      | 66%         | 12%  | 50%      | 62%         | 12%  |
| LLF           | Chandauli | 59%      | 63%         | 4%   | 55%      | 59%         | 4%   |
| LLF           | Fatehpur  | 71%      | 72%         | 1%   | 67%      | 68%         | 1%   |
| LLF           | Shravasti | 55%      | 73%         | 18%  | 51%      | 69%         | 18%  |
| LLF           | Varanasi  | 59%      | 67%         | 8%   | 54%      | 61%         | 7%   |
| LLF Average   |           | 60%      | 68%         | 9%   | 55%      | 64%         | 8%   |
| CSF           | Agra      | 54%      | 56%         | 2%   | 49%      | 52%         | 3%   |
| CSF           | Aligarh   | 65%      | 72%         | 7%   | 60%      | 69%         | 9%   |
| CSF           | Ghaziabad | 60%      | 71%         | 11%  | 54%      | 65%         | 11%  |
| CSF           | Gorakhpur | 56%      | 65%         | 9%   | 52%      | 61%         | 9%   |
| CSF           | Jhansi    | 60%      | 58%         | -2%  | 54%      | 54%         | 0%   |
| CSF           | Sitapur   | 52%      | 61%         | 9%   | 47%      | 57%         | 10%  |
| CSF Average   |           | 58%      | 64%         | 6%   | 53%      | 60%         | 7%   |
| UP Overall    |           | 58%      | 68%         | 10%  | 54%      | 64%         | 10%  |
| India Overall |           | 62%      | 64%         | 2%   | 57%      | 60%         | 3%   |

## Comparison of FLN Teaching– Learning Approaches in UP

| NGO / Model (Grades)   | Core teaching– learning design   | What children do in class  | Teacher role & scaffolding  | Equity & broader skills  |
|------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| DEVI–ALfA (Grades 1–5) | <b>A 45 day structured FLN primer:</b> 1 period of literacy and 1 of numeracy daily, designed to get children quickly to NIPUN competencies and back into prescribed textbooks. It is structured pedagogy led by a fixed learning process, not by scripts. | Children learn in <b>random pairs</b> using thin, highly visual ALfA booklets. In literacy they move from <b>pictures → first sounds → letters → blended words</b> from day one. In numeracy from <b>claps/snaps (tens/ones) → concrete objects (sticks, beans, leaves, etc.) → written numbers</b> . Most of the time is spent working with each other, not waiting for instructions. | The teacher is a <b>process facilitator</b> , setting up pairs and routines, then circulating to support and correct. Page bottom prompts guide when to intervene. Learning is scaffolded from <b>known to unknown</b> , with built in “perfection loops” so children re work misconceptions immediately. | Random pairing makes it <b>learning without ability based grouping</b> ; all children take turns explaining and asking questions. This builds <b>equity, inclusion and 21st century skills</b> (communication, collaboration, creativity, confidence) as part of everyday FLN, not as an add on. |



| NGO / Model (Grades)                 | Core teaching– learning design   | What children do in class   | Teacher role & scaffolding   | Equity & broader skills   |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| LLF – Early FLN (Balvatika– Grade 3) | A <b>structured early FLN package</b> within NIPUN, with strong emphasis on Hindi literacy and supportive numeracy. It strengthens content and lesson design rather than introducing one common process across subjects. | Children use <b>Hindi and numeracy workbooks, readers, big books, cards and posters</b> in lessons that are mainly teacher led: read alouds, guided reading, decoding and comprehension activities, plus basic numeracy tasks. Group and individual work happen, but there is no single, mandated routine like daily pair learning for all. | The teacher is the <b>primary instructor</b> , supported by trained SRGs/ARPs who demonstrate lessons, observe classes and give feedback on how to use LLF supported materials. Scaffolding is embedded in the sequence of workbooks and guides (letters to words, simple to more complex number tasks), rather than in one explicit “learning process” children apply themselves. | Inclusion is supported through <b>age appropriate texts, visuals and maths TLMs</b> that make content more accessible. The development of 21st century skills or peer learning depends more on how individual teachers choose to use the materials and organise groups. |





| NGO / Model (Grades)                         | Core teaching–learning design   | What children do in class   | Teacher role & scaffolding  | Equity & broader skills  |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| CSF – NIPUN systems support (Grades 1–3 FLN) | A <b>systems level approach</b> that improves how NIPUN runs; it does not bring its own classroom pedagogy. Teaching is based on the state’s FLN textbooks, workbooks and teacher guides. | Children follow lessons planned around <b>existing NIPUN materials</b> , with classroom practice varying by teacher. There is no distinct CSF classroom routine; the teaching–learning approach is whatever the state programme prescribes. | CSF works mainly with <b>state, district and block teams</b> on planning, monitoring and observation tools. Teachers feel its effect indirectly through clearer guides, more structured classroom observations and stronger follow-up, not through a new child-facing process or materials. | Equity and 21st century skills are pursued <b>through NIPUN’s own goals and curriculum</b> . CSF’s contribution is to help the system apply these more consistently via data driven reviews and better management, rather than by reshaping day to day interaction in the classroom. |



# More Detailed Explanation of Approaches

## 1. Dignity Education Vision International (DEVI) – ALfA Classroom Model

### What The Intervention Is

DEVI's work in Uttar Pradesh centres on ALfA (Accelerating Learning for All) – a short, intensive FLN primer, not a full-year programme. ALfA typically runs for about 45 school days, with one period of literacy and one period of numeracy each day. That is roughly 9% of the academic year, but it is designed to give children a powerful kick-start into NIPUN Bharat competencies so that they can re-enter their prescribed textbooks with confidence. ALfA is another form of structured pedagogy, but it is process-led rather than script-led. Instead of trying to script every step for the teacher, it establishes a simple, repeatable learning routine that children can carry with them into any textbook. The focus shifts from teaching to learning: children are taught how to learn with each other, not just what to cover in each lesson.

Crucially, ALfA is intended as a supplement to the existing system, not a replacement. It assumes that the government's own textbooks are the main, year-long pathway for children in each grade. ALfA's role is to sit alongside them as a short, front-loaded FLN block that makes the rest of the year's work with those textbooks more effective.

### How It Works In The Classroom

- Children work in **randomly assigned pairs** using thin, highly visual ALfA booklets in language and mathematics. Pairs change regularly so that all children help and are helped by different classmates.
- Each page is a **short, clearly illustrated task** that children can mostly understand by themselves. The booklets are designed specifically for paired work, so children do not wait for step-by-step instructions once they know the basic routine.
- In **literacy**, two familiar pictures are placed side by side. The first sounds of the two picture-words blend into a new word. Children know many of these pictures from their environment; when images are new (for example, in English), they quickly remember them. From day one, children move from **picture → sound → blended word → letter**, rather than the usual **letter → syllable → word**. This saves months of time. In just a few pages, they encounter all the letters of the Hindi alphabet and decode hundreds of words naturally, by working them out together.
- In **numeracy**, learning begins with body movement: **claps for tens, snaps for ones** (e.g. three claps and four snaps means 34). Children then move to **concrete objects** – small and long sticks, or any locally available materials like beans, leaves, pebbles, spoons or vegetables – and only after that to written numbers. They physically

experience that after nine snaps comes one clap, and that ten small sticks are exchanged for one big stick. Place value and the four operations are learned through this kinesthetic → concrete → abstract pathway.

- Every page builds in “perfection loops”: partners check each other’s work, fix mistakes, and repeat until both understand. At the bottom of each page are small prompts for the teacher – what to say, what to notice, how to support a struggling pair – so each lesson doubles as on-the-job training.

These pedagogical differences lie at the heart of ALfA’s **process-led transformation**. Children are learning a method for learning together, not merely the content of a specific page.

## Typical Support to Teachers & Government Officials

- DEVI does not create a parallel delivery chain. It works through existing structures by training and coaching BSAs, SRGs, ARPs and block-level leaders to run and own ALfA.
- Trainings are short and focused, followed by frequent, lighter refreshers rather than long, one-off workshops.
- Teachers meet in GROW Circles to share what went well, discuss challenges, plan upcoming modules using the book prompts, and review simple class trackers and reflection registers.
- District and block officials use ALfA-specific observation checklists during school visits so that supervision is tied to what is actually happening in ALfA classrooms rather than generic compliance checks.

## Data Collection And Usage

- DEVI combines its own quick diagnostics with existing government tools. Larger tests are scanned through the Pragati app, which immediately generates simple, colour-coded reports for teachers, head teachers and district leaders.
- These reports are studied alongside PRS, NIPUN and attendance data in regular review meetings to decide which schools or teachers need extra support.
- By design, data-use habits remain inside the government system, so monitoring and follow-up can continue even after DEVI’s direct presence reduces.





## **2. Language & Learning Foundation (LLF)**

### **– Early Language–Centred FLN**

### **What The Intervention is**

LLF works in Uttar Pradesh as a specialist in early language and FLN pedagogy, with a strong emphasis on Hindi reading and writing in the early grades, and accompanying numeracy. It operates inside the NIPUN Bharat framework, helping the state develop and use FLN resources for Balvatika to Grade 3. LLF's main contribution is an alternative, year-long package of materials and mentoring that runs alongside the state's textbooks, rather than a short, front-loaded process like ALfA.

### **How It Works In The Classroom**

- LLF helps design or adapt grade-appropriate materials – Hindi and numeracy workbooks, teacher guides, storybooks, big books, reading cards and other TLMs – aligned with the state's FLN curriculum.
- Classroom practice centres on structured language routines: read-alouds, guided reading, phonological awareness activities, decoding, fluency and comprehension tasks, plus basic numeracy work.
- Lessons remain primarily teacher-led. Children do more reading and activity-based work than in a traditional classroom, but there is no single, mandated learning process (such as daily random pair-learning) that runs across all subjects and grades.
- Unlike ALfA, LLF does not fundamentally redesign how the whole learning sequence is scaffolded; it strengthens existing sequences (letters → words → sentences; simple → more complex number tasks) through its materials and training, rather than introducing a different route like pictures → sounds → words.

### **Typical Support To Teachers & Government Officials**

- LLF works mostly through government resource cadres – SRGs, ARPs and other mentors – rather than training every teacher directly.
- These cadres receive intensive training and mentoring from LLF and then:
  - Conduct demonstration lessons,
  - Observe classes and give targeted feedback,
  - Co-plan sessions with teachers and help them use the materials as intended.
- At block and district level, LLF supports planning and review discussions that keep early language learning on the agenda and tie training more closely to what is observed in classrooms.

## **Data Collection And Usage**

- LLF uses state FLN data and its own simple tools to track reading and comprehension, and some aspects of early numeracy.
- It helps districts interpret where children are stuck (for example, at decoding versus comprehension) and then adjusts the focus of training and mentoring.
- All of this sits under NIPUN Bharat; LLF's niche is to keep a sharp focus on early language outcomes and the specific teaching strategies needed to improve them, while working alongside textbooks over the whole year.

## **3. Central Square Foundation (CSF) – Systems Strengthening for NIPUN**

### **What The Intervention is**

CSF's work in Uttar Pradesh is mainly at the systems level. It does not bring its own classroom pedagogy; instead, it aims to help the state run NIPUN Bharat more effectively. The focus is on planning, monitoring and management, with day-to-day teaching defined largely by the state's FLN materials.

### **How It Works In Practice**

- CSF supports the state in designing and strengthening planning and review structures for NIPUN at district and block levels.
- It helps refine teacher guides, observation formats and review tools so that officials and mentors have clearer expectations and frameworks when they interact with schools.
- In classrooms, teachers continue to use government-provided textbooks and workbooks; CSF's role is to help ensure these are implemented more consistently, not to replace them with a separate CSF pedagogy.

### **Typical Support To Teachers & Government Officials**

- Most direct work is with state, district and block teams – PMUs, academic resource groups and officials.
- CSF supports:
  - Setting up and running regular review meetings,
  - Clarifying roles and routines for school visits,
  - Providing tools that help mentors give more structured feedback to schools.
- For teachers, classroom support is therefore indirect. They experience CSF's influence mainly through clearer guides, stronger NIPUN materials, and more consistent visits and follow-up by government mentors.

## Data Collection And Usage

- CSF places strong emphasis on making better use of existing data sources – NAS, PRS, NIPUN tools and other state assessments.
- It works with government teams to build habitual, data-driven review cycles: regularly examining district and block performance, identifying where progress is slow, and planning follow-up actions.
- Over time, the aim is for data use to become routine in how NIPUN is managed, helping the state track and improve its own FLN programme without heavy external presence.

## Comparative Summary

In simple terms, the three partners sit at different points in the FLN ecosystem, but all of them work alongside the government's textbooks, not in place of them.

- DEVI's ALfA model is a short, process-led supplement: about 45 days of one literacy and one numeracy period per day that gives children a rapid FLN kick-start so they can then move much faster and more confidently through the prescribed textbooks.
- LLF provides an alternative, year-long package of materials and mentoring in the early grades, especially for Hindi literacy and basic numeracy, running alongside the textbooks within the NIPUN timetable.
- CSF strengthens the system behind the textbooks – planning, monitoring, data use and review – so that NIPUN can be implemented more consistently across districts.



## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR POLICY?

The data point to a hard but overdue truth: unless we change how children are taught, no amount of money, materials or monitoring will be enough. Pedagogy has to move to the centre of FLN policy. A full classroom process model like ALfA is delivering gains that system reforms alone have not matched, even when planning, training and data use improve.

Policymakers therefore need to move beyond a narrow view of impact that looks only at test scores. In parallel, we should rethink how we talk about “best buys”: invest in much sharper, comparative analysis of leading approaches – including those of DEVI, LLF and CSF – using the same yardstick for all.

That means examining not just academic gains, but also what each model does for social-emotional learning, equity and inclusion, and the everyday 21st century skills that NEP 2020 calls for, and then backing the approaches that clearly move the dial on all of these.

The data and experience from Uttar Pradesh point to several important lessons for policy.

**First**, ALfA shows that a short, focused FLN supplement at the start of the year can change the trajectory of learning far more than trying to

pursue all goals in parallel throughout the year. A 45-day block, with one period of literacy and one of numeracy each day, uses only a small fraction of total teaching time, but gives children the core skills to read, write and work with numbers on their own – exactly what NIPUN Bharat defines as foundational. After that, they can move through their textbooks three to four times faster and with better understanding, especially if pair learning continues alongside regular lessons.

**Second**, this argues for a rethink of FLN sequencing, not just coverage. Many structured-pedagogy models across states now mandate a tight weekly script: a fixed number of pages per week, followed by an assessment day and a remediation day. Teachers are told to move, for example, only four or five pages a week. This can unintentionally hold back children who are ready to go much faster once they can read. Teachers then feel constrained by the pacing guide even when their students could comfortably handle more. By contrast, when children first acquire the skill to read and understand through a concentrated process like ALfA, the same textbooks stop being a barrier and become a springboard; structure then supports learning instead of getting in its way.



**Third**, the cost of leaving FLN gaps unaddressed is far greater than the modest cost of a supplemental package, whether provided by ALfA or by other FLN primers. In ALfA's case, the costs are very low and impacts unusually large; in pure value-for-money terms, this makes it a strong candidate for adoption across states in India, embedded within public education systems rather than kept at the margins. The policy question is not “What is the cost of making children literate?”, but rather “What is the cost of leaving children illiterate?”

**Fourth**, this has implications for how we design the start of the school year. We should not assume that children entering Grade 1 – even those who have attended Balvatika – already have foundational skills. A more realistic scaffolding would give full space to FLN in roughly the first 12 weeks of the academic year: focusing almost exclusively on foundational objectives through a proven process-led supplement first, and only then switching to the regular textbooks. Experience from ALfA districts suggests that, done this way, children can still complete the year's textbook work well before annual examinations – but now on a far stronger foundation.

**Fifth**, this front-loaded approach also addresses a deeper structural issue. We routinely say that foundational skills are the most important, but in practice we still try to cover all curriculum goals at once from the first day of Grade 1, hoping that FLN will somehow “come

along the way”. A deliberate FLN-first window at the beginning of each year in Balvatika, Grade 1 and Grade 2 – and, where needed, Grade 3 – would align system practice with system rhetoric.

Finally, the evidence from UP is particularly striking because it comes despite normal implementation frictions. As with all NGO-supported programmes, many teachers default to government materials and do not fully use any supplementary tools, whether from ALfA or from others. Even under such “diluted uptake”, ALfA's gains are stronger than other respected approaches. That should weigh heavily in policy discussions. If a simple, process-led FLN block, used for just one period per subject per day, can outperform existing models in one to two years – without even completing a full cohort cycle – then it deserves serious consideration to be adopted, adapted and embedded into state curricula as a standard starting point.

In conclusion, the 45-day toolkit can serve as a low-cost FLN booster at the beginning of the year, while the ALfA approach to pair learning – children explaining, questioning and creating tasks for each other – can continue as a year-long constant alongside the textbooks. In that sense, ALfA represents a new form of structured pedagogy: one that relies on a simple, repeatable learning process rather than heavy scripts, and that deserves attention in its own right, not just as a short supplement.

# FROM CLASSROOM TO SYSTEM

## A PLAYBOOK FOR EDUCATION MINISTERS

Uttar Pradesh's journey offers a practical roadmap for education ministers and policymakers aiming to move from isolated good classrooms to sustained, system-wide change. The process runs from setting a clear vision to empowering the ground-level drivers of reform.

1

### **Set a Clear Goal & Build Political Commitment.**

Make early literacy and numeracy the non-negotiable priority, with a clear timeline (e.g. "By 2026, all children will read with comprehension by Grade 3"). Publicly announce it, integrate it into all plans, and ensure that political leaders actively champion it. When foundational learning becomes a government-wide priority, the entire system aligns its focus behind it.

2

### **Invest First in Teachers and Middle Management**

Reform succeeds when the people delivering it are prepared and motivated. Start by training district and block officers, head teachers, and mentor teachers in the new focus areas. Encourage peer learning through cluster meetings or online forums. A reform is sustained not by policy papers, but by confident, supported teachers.

3

### **Pilot, Prove, and Refine Before Scaling**

Test the new approach in a small set of schools before expanding. Use pilots to demonstrate visible learning gains, gather feedback, and refine materials or training. Select pilot districts that are diverse and challenging to build credibility. A proven, locally tested model helps gain trust and creates early champions—teachers and officials who can guide others during the scale-up phase.

4

### **Scale Up Strategically with Strong Support Systems**

Expand gradually, ensuring each new phase has proper training, monitoring, and data systems in place. Protect time for foundational learning within the timetable and regularly track progress through simple assessments. Review data monthly and act quickly when areas fall behind. Celebrate achievements publicly to sustain motivation and reinforce the message that foundational learning comes first.

5

### **Institutionalise and Sustain the Reform**

Embed successful practices into curriculum, training, and budgets so they become part of routine operations. Gradually shift from "mission mode" to "normal mode," ensuring leadership continuity and clear performance indicators tied to learning outcomes. Keep the focus bipartisan and results-driven, making early learning an enduring national priority no one can afford to reverse.

## CONCLUSION: EVERY CHILD LEARNING

The story of Uttar Pradesh's recent FLN reforms offers hope that even in a large, historically under-resourced setting, rapid improvements in learning are possible. It required political courage to prioritize the basics, administrative focus to drive implementation, and pedagogical innovation to jump-start learning for every child. The payoff is visible in improved learning scores and lively classrooms from Shamli to Lucknow.

And the implications stretch far beyond one Indian state. If UP – with over 20 million students – can chart a faster path to foundational learning, so can others. As India enters the final stretch of its NIPUN Bharat mission (targeting 2026–27), the lessons from UP will be crucial. There were skeptics who believed that bridging FLN gaps at scale in government schools was unrealistic. Until recently, many believed that closing FLN gaps at scale was unrealistic. The evidence from India's most populous state now suggests the opposite: if approaches that work are adopted more widely by states, India may still meet, or even beat, its NIPUN goals."

In other words, the real test of success is not a glossy policy document, but whether it changes what happens in all classrooms and

for all children – not just the top 20%. Uttar Pradesh is showing that when you get those conditions right – laser-focus on the goal, empowered officials bridging policy to practice, and a classroom method that truly includes every child – the previously unimaginable can become reality.

The "UP playbook" demonstrates that the path to universal foundational learning is less about grand expenditures or silver-bullet tech, and more about relentless focus on the fundamentals done right. As education ministers and leaders look to post-pandemic recovery and the road to 2030 (the Sustainable Development Goals deadline), they would do well to borrow a page from UP's book: put foundational learning first, support your teachers and middle managers, and scale up what works.

By doing so, we can ensure that no child is left behind in learning the basics, unlocking all other possibilities in education. It is a big challenge – but as Uttar Pradesh has shown, it is one that can be met with the right mix of policy, passion, and pedagogy. Every child, in every corner of the world, deserves nothing less than the chance to read, write, and thrive.



 740 804 0222

 [alignFLN.org](http://alignFLN.org)

 [align@alignFLN.org](mailto:align@alignFLN.org)