We wish to start by putting on record our deep appreciation and gratitude for the very pro-active steps being taken by the government to prevent the spread of the pandemic ‘Covid-19’ in our country and to keep its citizens safe and healthy. Schools have a fairly large community base. We are maintaining close connect with our respective communities and are spreading the message of hope.

We wish to attract your attention to recent circulars released by several on collection of fee during the lockdown. While we are not aware of the specific incidence that has prompted the same, we feel such an advisory at a universal level can put educational institutions at a serious risk. Stray incidences should ideally be dealt with individually. Blocking the cash flows of all schools shall have a domino effect and harm several members of the society including the most vulnerable ones.

Some facts:

1. Schools work for a fixed number of days a year. Even if April / May is lost, there is enough time for schools to make up this calendar. Through internal sources, we are aware that the MHRD is already working on an alternative academic calendar for this year. Hence school fees for entire year will be due in any case.
2. Besides fee payments, unaided schools do not have any other inflow of cash
3. Almost ninety percent of the costs that schools incur are of fixed in nature and recur on monthly basis. Whether physical classes happen or not, they need to be paid on monthly basis.
4. Rising to the occasion and adhering to the call of our Hon’ble Prime Minister, schools are attempting to protect salaries of all their staff and support staff members
5. Several schools have embarked on technological platforms to deliver online learning programs to the students and have made significant investments, in fact increasing costs, ensuring the learning continues.
6. Besides the heightened call of duty towards their own family members and households in the current locked down environment, school faculty and staff have been working overtime to keep students engaged through virtual learning and /or assignments/worksheets

Important questions to delve on?

As the government rightly wants to ensure that the larger population is not inconvenienced in the lockdown period, it is important to think through some key questions to device a strategy that augurs well for the long terms goals of the very beneficiaries of this order, the parents, and at the same time the very existence of the educational institutions is not threatened.

1. Do parents want to jeopardize the stability of the schools their children study in?
2. Most schools do not have large reserves, if the lockdown extends, how would they pay salaries in absence of any fees received, which is their only source of revenue?
3. If schools get destabilized, would it not affect the long-term interest of education and the growth of the nation, setting us back by at least a couple of years?

School education is a public-spirited essential service. Blocking cash flows of schools shall be very detrimental at this stage as this may lead to school closures. On the contrary the need of the hour is to support various kinds of schools to embark on technology platforms.

While we respect the decision for the lockdown until the 3rd May, here are some solutions:

1. The Schools will ensure that fee is collected monthly instead of quarterly or annually. This will ensure that cash flows of households is not affected.
2. No Late penalty on fees that is paid till the next three months. Late fees should be suspended for now.
3. Schools to provide online instruction, so teachers and students are both engaged and learning continues. For the budget schools this can also happen over simple phones. The government could support with the massive work they have already been doing in this area.
4. Schools could rationalize charges for optional services like meals, transport, stationery, books and uniforms etc, till schools open.
5. The government can support in the payment of salaries to staff members.

Keeping in view the current lockdown, we completely agree that any coercion or compulsion for immediate payment would be inappropriate. However, the schools can only make a humane appeal to parents to pay the fees as their services are not stopped. This option should be available to parents who are willing to pay school fees and there should not be a complete restriction on collection of fees.

In these testing times we seek understanding and support from the government and administration to ensure the sustenance of schools. We appeal and pray to your high office to kindly take note of the above and issue appropriate advisory.