

FIRST STEP IS THE HARDEST

Nursery admission procedures across metros

ABC NEW DELHI

Last year, the so-called Ganguly Formula, named for the committee chairman who devised it, forced schools to award points, for instance for proximity of neighbourhood children. Parent and child interviews were forbidden. The formula has been widely seen by educational experts as the first attempt to introduce a transparent, regulatory framework in nursery admissions—although many parents and the Delhi government protested. A Supreme Court reversal late last year has once again allowed schools to establish their own criteria for admission. But they are not allowed to interview children, and can seek informal interaction with parents only after admission. The court said: "What is the need for interaction before admission, unless schools want to negotiate how much parents could pay for the admission of their ward?" The Delhi government has warned schools against asking parents questions about professional qualifications or income. As thousands seek seats in the nation's capital, reports of violations—along with requests for steep donations amounting to lakhs—are rampant.

ABC MUMBAI

Private schools follow state government rules on education. Schools say they wish they could interview parents and observe children, but the government prohibits it. A system of donations and exerting influence still thrives in many schools, though some institutions employ more straightforward procedures where parents simply fill in a form and then wait to hear if their child has made it. Others violate the law and conduct interviews anyway.

ABC BANGALORE

Each school has been empowered to take decisions. Some take children at two-and-a-half years, others at three. Parochial schools, such as Bishop Cottons, give preference for Church of South India members. Some attempts are being made to regulate school admissions with the government contemplating making it mandatory for schools to conduct admissions only in April. Until such a proposal is enacted, however, schools are conducting admissions way earlier because both schools and parents know that they cannot wait till April to make these decisions—there are far too many children to filter out.

ABC HYDERABAD

Nursery admissions begin at two-and-a-half years of age. Compared to other centres, parents in Hyderabad seem more inclined to send their children to schools in the neighbourhood. Schools advertise in December and start admitting by the end of the month. By January, parents are called for the interview. The average admission fee for nursery could range anywhere from Rs10,000 to Rs45,000. The annual fee for the nursery can vary from Rs20,000 to Rs45,000. At the Meridian School for Boys and Girls, principal D. Usha Reddy says: "We speak to the parents before the child joins the school. The idea is to get find out if the parents' perspective gels with our school." Meridian sees 400-500 applicants a year for 60 spots.

ABC KOLKATA

The state government leaves admissions unregulated and in the hands of schools. "They (private schools) are not under our control, there is no scope for that. They have their own officiating bodies," says West Bengal's minister for school education Partha De. The reality is a system where parents use connections and offer donations to get their children into school. Children are often interviewed, as are parents.

ABC CHENNAI

Schools determine who they admit. For example, the Padma Sheshadree Bala Bhavan School says it considers distance the top criterion, to encourage neighbourhood children. Its T. Nagar branch receives 400-500 applications, of which 35 students are taken into each of the four sections. The K.K. Nagar branch receives 700-800 applications, and about half make it.

India is not alone in the hunt for a good education

In New York, some nursery programmes run up to \$30,000 (Rs11.82 lakh) annually. Parents jam phone lines in early September to secure applications, then await interviews called "play dates". Notifications are sent out in March. A business of independent nursery consultants has sprung up to coach parents on interviews and how best to fill out forms. The

Manhattan Private School Advisors, for instance, charges clients upwards of \$10,000. Another group, called SmartCityKids, offers a course called "The parents survival class for nursery school admissions." The cost of class: \$195. London, meanwhile, boasts the most expensive nursery schools in Europe. Some parents apply

before birth, while others call right after (often the day after delivery). One school even advised mothers having C-sections to try to schedule them for earlier in the month to win a spot earlier. According to the London Telegraph, parents pay £15,420 (Rs12 lakh) per year for a child under two.