

# Maharashtra schools raise Rs 216 cr via crowd funding

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PUNE, APRIL 17

AN LCD projector worth Rs 78,000, a Lenovo laptop and Wi-Fi-enabled classrooms are the latest additions to this Marathi-medium government school at Dhekusim, a village of 1,800 people in Jalgaon's Ambaner taluka, some 360 km northeast of Mumbai.

Suresh Patil, headmaster of the zila parishad school, says the changes, including a 2,000-square-foot compound wall and revamped classrooms, came not

through government intervention but from funds raised from villagers. "When we reached out to people and sought help to improve the school, the villagers donated about Rs 5.5 lakh. As of today, at least 10 students have left private schools to join our school. Our total number of students has gone up from 42 to 78," Patil says.

This isn't an isolated story in Maharashtra. Data available with the Maharashtra State Council of Education Research and Training (MSCERT) shows that between July 2015 and December 2016, school teachers

## PAGE ONE ANCHOR

in the state managed to raise a whopping Rs 216 crore from the public — funds that have been utilised for revamping classrooms, building new toilets and on digital initiatives, among others. According to the MSCERT data, Ahmednagar district has ensured the maximum public participation, having raised over Rs 30 crore, followed by Pune (Rs 19.82 crore), Solapur (19.03 crore), Aurangabad (15.59 crore)



Over 1,000 Zila Parishad schools in Dhule district of Maharashtra have turned digital.

and Nashik (14.80 crore).

So what inspired these Maharashtra government schools to seek funds? Nand Kumar, principal secretary, state education department, says one of the reasons could be the Pragat Shaikshanik programme rolled out by the state government two years ago.

"One of the components of the programme was the compulsory reporting of public participation. Until now, schools didn't actively seek outside funds. But now, since the programme documents public participation, teachers have started

actively reaching out to the community, encouraging them to contribute and also seeking corporate help. There has also been an overall improvement in the quality of education, reflected in many recent surveys, due to which villagers have started investing in zila parishad schools," he says.

While in most districts, the change is being brought about by the community as a whole, Dhule district, said to be the first in the state to have 100 per cent digital classrooms in its government schools, might owe its

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## Crowd funding

transformation to a 35-year-old investment banker, Harshal Vibhandik.

"I live in New York and two years ago, I came back to my hometown in Dhule. I had Rs 9 lakh with me and after visiting a few schools, I decided to digitise nine of them. But then, villagers wanted to pitch in too and that is when the 70:30 funding idea came to me, with villagers raising the majority of the

money," Vibhandik says.

An idea that started off with nine schools soon cover all 1,103 zila parishad schools of Dhule with the banker's friends from abroad, donors, villagers, local NGOs all pitching in. Vibhandik, who is working from India for now, says he also travels to other districts. "People are investing in the idea, villagers are investing in it. It is amazing to see the change," says Vibhandik.

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