

GOA'S APRIL SCHOOL CALENDAR DRAWS HEAT FROM PARENTS, TEACHERS

The State government's decision to commence the academic year in April has sparked widespread opposition from parents and teachers, with critics arguing that the move is unnecessary, defies educational norms and places undue pressure on students and educators alike. **VITHALDAS HEGDE** reports



The State government's decision to commence the new academic year for classes VI to X and class XII from April has sparked controversy, with a group of parents approaching the High Court of Bombay at Goa challenging the move.

Director of Education Shailesh Zingde confirmed that no final decision has been taken yet, as the matter is sub judice. "We have not taken any decision on starting the academic year from April because the matter is before the court," Zingde said. He further informed that the court has scheduled the next hearing on March 19.

Zingde noted that the Goa Principals Forum, Goa Headmasters Association, Teachers Grade I, and the Higher Secondary School Teachers Association (HISTAG) have expressed their support for the April start. However, the All-Goa Secondary School Teachers Association (AGSSTA) has strongly opposed the move.

Zingde also addressed claims made by parents that they have gathered 10,000 signatures opposing the government's decision. "We have over 2.69 lakh students studying from class I to XII, and 10,000 signatures is a meagre number," Zingde said, implying that opposition may not be as widespread as claimed.

UNWARRANTED CHANGE?

NCFSE 2023 guidelines:

- 1,045 annual instructional hours for secondary stage.
- 955 annual instructional hours for middle and preparatory stages.

Current system in Goa:

- 242 working days for teachers.
- 220+ school-going days for students.
- 5 hours 45 minutes of daily instruction.
- Goa achieves 1,046 instructional hours in just 182 days out of over 200 school days.

Parents raise legal and practical concerns

The legal challenge has been filed by Manuel Sidney Antao and seven other parents, who argue that the January 30 circular issued by the Directorate of Education to begin the academic year from April is unlawful. They contend that the directive violates Rule 21 of the Goa, Dam-nan and Diu Education Act, 1984.

The parents claim the government's decision was taken without proper consultation with key stakeholders, particularly parents. They expressed concerns that this sudden shift would place undue strain on students, disrupt family routines, and deprive children of essential summer breaks often used for rest, travel,

or extracurricular skill development.

According to the petitioners, the revised academic calendar would push the total number of instructional days to over 240 — exceeding the limits set by the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) and violating the provisions of the Goa Education Act, 1984.

They argued that the increased number of instructional days would result in excessive classroom hours, placing additional pressure on students who would be forced to attend classes in April's extreme heat.

Parents have also raised concerns that this sudden shift could disrupt established family routines. Parent Cecille Rodrigues explained that many working parents rely on set schedules to manage childcare and transportation.

"The new academic year will begin in April with classes ending at 11:30 am, instead of the usual 1:30 pm. Parents who have organised their work schedules and childcare arrangements accordingly will have to scramble to adjust," Rodrigues said.

Rodrigues added that school principals are also struggling to prepare for the proposed changes. "Principals are finding it difficult to plan the academic timetable. They need to account for reduced hours in April and extended hours later. Without proper guidance from the government, this has become chaotic," she said.

Teachers express strong opposition

Educators have also voiced their concerns about the government's plan. Principal Dattatray Naik described the decision to start the new academic year from April as "a wrong move" that lacks practical sense.

Naik pointed out that the government's rationale for introducing the April start — achieving 1,200 instructional hours and 200 instructional days — is flawed.

"If the new academic year starts from

April 7, we will only have 18 days available in that month due to three public holidays. This translates to just 54 instructional hours," Naik said. "It's unclear why the government is rushing this. Instead, examinations could simply be scheduled in April to meet these instructional hours."

Naik further questioned when students would find time for extracurricular and skill-based activities under the new schedule. "There are numerous enrichment programmes such as sports coaching camps that students participate in during the summer. When will these happen if students are stuck in classrooms?" he asked.

The Principal also raised concerns about promoting students without completing assessments. "Without declaring results, students will be moved to the next class. They cannot suddenly be told midway that they've failed. Teachers must prepare detailed time-tables and assess students properly before promoting them," Naik added.

AGSSTA criticises government's move

All Goa Secondary School Teachers Association (AGSSTA) President Savio Suraj Victoria also criticised the April start, calling it "unwarranted and unjustified."

Victoria emphasized that neither the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 nor the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023 mandates an April start for the academic year. "There is no provision in the NEP 2020 or NCFSE 2023 that requires states to align their academic calendars with CBSE or ICSE," Victoria stated.

Victoria also pointed out that the NCFSE 2023 recommends a total of 220 instructional days for students, with 20 days allocated for assessments, school events, and bagless activities.

"Goa's current system already accommodates these recommendations. We complete over 1,000 instructional hours annually within the existing 182-day schedule," Victoria said. "The State already meets the required hours without changing the academic calendar."

He further warned that extending instructional hours beyond recommended limits could harm students' well-being. "Studies show that excessive classroom hours contribute to burnout, stress, and anxiety in children," he said, citing data from the National Institute of Mental Health (2021).

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QUOTEROOM

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— Savio Suraj Victoria, President, All Goa Secondary School Teachers Association (AGSSTA)

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— Dattatray Naik, school principal

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— Cecille Rodrigues, parent

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longed classroom instruction reduces time for extracurricular activities, social interactions, and mental relaxation — all crucial elements for holistic development.

"The April shift is unnecessary and will burden students with more academic pressure," Victoria said.

SCERT Goa yet to develop learning outcomes

Adding to the concerns, Victoria noted that the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) Goa has not yet developed specific learning outcomes tailored to the state's student population.

"This lack of preparation will worsen the challenges faced by students, teachers, and parents," Victoria said.

With mounting opposition from parents, teachers, and education experts, the government's decision continues to face resistance. Many believe the April start will disrupt the education system without delivering meaningful benefits.

The High Court's ruling, scheduled for March 19, will be crucial in determining whether the proposed academic shift will go forward or if the traditional June start will continue.



SUMMER AT SCHOOL

GOVERNMENT DECISION

- State government plans to start the academic year for classes VI to X and XII from April 2025.
- High Court hearing scheduled for March 19 following parent opposition.

OPPOSITION FROM PARENTS

- Parents gathered 10,000 signatures against the move.
- Claim the decision violates the Goa Education Act, 1984 and increases instructional days to 240+, exceeding NCF recommendations.
- Concerns about:
 - Extreme heat in April affecting students.
 - Lost summer break impacting travel, extracurricular activities and sports.
 - Disruption to family and work schedules with early school hours ending at 11.30 am.

TEACHERS' CONCERNS

- AGSSTA argues the change is unnecessary since Goa already achieves the required 1,000+ instructional hours.
- Only 54 instructional hours will be added in April.
- Risk of students being promoted without proper assessments
- Lack of clear government guidance for revised timetables
- SCERT Goa yet to develop learning outcomes for NEP 2020 compliance