

Student Wellness Takes Center Stage at North East Educational Leaders' Conference



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With the rising tide of digital immersion and adolescent stress, educational leaders from across the North East gathered on October 30, 2025, at NEDSS, Guwahati, to reimagine student health as a cornerstone of national progress. The North Eastern Educational Leaders' Conference, themed *"Student Health, Nation's Future: Towards Better Learning and a Healthier Society in the Era of NEP 2020,"* brought together some 400 voices from academia, medicine, government, and the Church in a day-long reflection on holistic education.

Organised by Education Secretary, Holy Cross Father Dr. Paul Pudussery, the meet was hosted by the Assam Catholic Educational Trust (ACET) in collaboration with CRWI and NEEC+.

The conference opened with a blessing and welcome by Archbishop John Moolachira of Guwahati, President of the North Eastern Bishops' Council. Dr. Kandarpa Das, Vice-Chancellor of Girijananda Chowdhury University, delivered the inaugural address, followed by a keynote from Shri Sanjay Kumar, IAS, Secretary of the Department of School Education & Literacy, Government of India.

The morning sessions set the tone for a deeper inquiry into the challenges posed by artificial intelligence, social media, and screen dependency. Dr. Paula Mukherjee Goel, Medical Director of Fayth Clinic, addressed the psychological toll of digital life in her session titled *"Teens, Tech, and Turmoil: Rethinking Mental Health in the AI Era."*

A post-lunch panel chaired by Fr. (Dr.) Mathew Koyickal, Deputy Secretary General of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, featured four compelling perspectives. Dr. John Franco Tharakan, founder of Be-Ivy Education LLP and alumnus of Harvard and MIT, explored *"Between Screens and Selves: The Impact of AI and Social Media on Adolescent Wellbeing."* Sr. (Dr.) Deepa Raj, Consultant Surgeon at St. Joseph's Hospital, Baramulla, examined *"Scrolling Minds, Strained Bodies: Adolescents' Health in the Context of AI and Social Media."* Dr. Ranjan Bose, specialist in wellness medicine, reflected on *"Mind, Body, and Mobile: Adolescent Health in the Digital Era."* Former North East Bishops' Conference Secretary for Education for about 20 years and founder of Don Bosco Youth Services, Salesian Fr. V.M. Thomas, shared his experience as a teacher trainer.

The conference concluded with a forward-looking address by Bishop Paul Mattekatt of Diphu, Chairman of the North Eastern Education Commission, who emphasized the need for policy and pedagogy to embrace wellness as integral to learning.

Masters of ceremonies included Fr. (Dr.) Paul Coelho SJ, Sr. Emilia Chopfohra FMA, Fr. Alex Kalayathinal, and Sr. Malor Kodi CFMSS, who ensured the day's rhythm remained engaging and purposeful.

As NEP 2020 continues to reshape India's educational landscape, the North East has offered a timely reminder: the health of our students is not a side concern but the very foundation of a compassionate and future-ready society.

CM Paul

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