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Is CBSE rigging high stakes engineering admissions?

Abhishek Choudhary, TNN | May 29, 2013, 02:06 AM IST

NAGPUR: The stupendous rise in number of CBSE std XII students scoring 90% and more marks has raised a red flag with state board officials. Compared to last year, there has been a 36% jump in students scoring over 90% marks. Further dissection of the statistics reveals that there has been a staggering 62% jump in students scoring more than 95% marks. State board officials said it cannot be a mere coincidence that this sharp increase came just when std XII marks are going to count during admissions to engineering colleges.

A senior state board official said, "It is clear that CBSE was very lenient while marking std XII papers. If that is not the case then the only logical argument is that the intelligence level of 62% more students increased drastically, which we all know is not the case. There seems to be a connection between this lenient marking and the fact that Joint Entrance Exam (JEE) score and board scores are combined for admission to engineering colleges."

Even the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) will use the board marks as a qualifying criteria. This year, all CBSE students who score more than 391 marks (out of 500) are eligible for admissions to IITs, provided they have cleared JEE (Mains) first and subsequently the JEE (Advanced). The 391 marks cut-off for CBSE students works out to 78.20%.

CBSE chairman Vineet Joshi did not answer calls or respond to an SMS on this topic.

Jaspal Singh, principal of Guru Nanak High School and Junior College, said, "There should be an enquiry on how this increase has occurred. It is impossible for any board to clock such high numbers, and this has been done by CBSE to increase the chances of their students getting admissions in engineering colleges. What I am worried about is the effect it will have on state board students, who may not make the cut because of CBSE's leniency."

Sanjay Charalwar, principal of Mohta Science College, said, "CBSE seems to have planned this because I cannot believe that standard of students and teachers has increased manifold suddenly. Someone should recheck the answer sheets of std XII and it will confirm that marking was extremely lenient."

However, principals of CBSE affiliated schools deny the 'conspiracy theory', saying the teaching methods have undergone changes. Reena Dargan, principal of Ira International School, said, "There is no way anybody can manipulate the marking method in std XII, as there is a multilayer system of checks and balances. One of the reasons for high scores is that now schools teach students how to crack exams. We keep drilling into their minds the importance of remembering keywords in answers - keywords that the valuator is looking for."

With the state board std XII results due on Thursday, there is a lot of anxiety on how the results will pan out. Charalwar said, "If you look at our state students, then over the last couple of years the number of high scorers has gone down, but in CBSE it is totally the opposite. If on Thursday our kids don't fare well then it will have an impact on their chances in higher education - and the worst part is that none of this will be their fault."

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