

Transform Idle School Buildings and Revitalize Campus

(Courtesy of Po-Ming Huang at the Division of Junior High and Elementary Education)



To cope with the trend of low birth rates and to revitalize spaces in national elementary and junior high schools actively, the K-12 Education Administration, Ministry of Education, has formulated the Guidelines on the Diverse Revitalization of School Spaces (Buildings) at National Public Elementary and Junior High Schools, which clearly specifies 14 functions of social education institutions, social welfare facilities, and facilities in alignment with the major policies of local governments, for community needs, and for other non-business purposes. Meanwhile, the local governments are urged to sign administrative agreements that prioritize culture, education and public welfare, promote school (building) safety, and uphold information transparency. All of this aims to allow many idle spaces at schools to be able to serve the community again in new forms while serving various functions, thereby putting into practice the concepts of space revitalization and sustainable development.

In an aging society, the demand for day care for the elderly has doubled. After the Zhongyong Elementary School in Changbin Township, Taitung County, was closed, the school buildings have been assessed for their earthquake resistance. The county's education department held a

community briefing session in 2015 to raise residents' awareness of the importance of a long-term care center. In a public selection project in September 2016, the Eden Social Welfare Foundation was selected to establish a private comprehensive long-term care service center for the elderly in Taitung County at the school site in November 2017. It is the first day care center for the elderly rebuilt from an closed school in Taiwan, and the first center set up for the elderly with dementia, so that the elderly in eastern Taiwan can enjoy quality day care services in the local community.

The baseball team dormitory at the Jhongsiao Elementary School in Kaohsiung City was no longer required due to the transformation of the team. In 2016, the Eden Social Welfare Foundation's Early Intervention Management Center moved into this dormitory to revitalize the space and to provide preschool children with developmental delay or physical and mental disabilities who cannot receive education in general kindergartens with unit teaching and interest-oriented classes, to satisfy their learning needs. As such, these children can be exposed to diverse learning models in daily life and learn in group. In addition, the outdoor space of the school, including the playground and the entrance hall, is surrounded by trees while colorful glass is adopted to decorate the interior of the school buildings to make them look like the house in *Hansel and Gretel*. All these spaces are shared with the young children at the Early Intervention Management Center to provide them with a safe and comfortable learning space.

It is a win-win outcome to utilize the idle school spaces caused by low birthrates and transform them for cultural and educational needs. The Guang-Ying Elementary School in Zhongliao Township, Nantou County was closed due to low birthrates and migration to the urban area. In 2016, a private organization leased the site and established Sen-You Ecological Experimental School. It aims to incorporate life aesthetics into the school by offering ecological experience courses, such as Color Science for Plant Rubbing on Curtains, and to guide children to design and make dog houses, thereby incorporating life education into the curriculum. Furthermore, the school works with local small farmers to hold a monthly holiday market to attract more tourists to Zhongliao Township and to bring different cultural resources to the local community.

In recent years, the K-12 Education Administration has committed itself to supervising and guiding the local governments to promote diverse revitalization of idle spaces. So far, idle school buildings have been transformed into kindergartens, elderly care facilities, service organizations for people with physical and mental disabilities, and care centers for young children and youths. The administration emphasizes that the revitalization of idle spaces has always been one of the goals towards which the government has consistently strived for, and it will continue to promote the revitalization of school buildings and spaces to re-use the idle spaces, thereby revitalizing campus vitality.