

Quasi-public kindergartens Launched in Academic year 2018-An Alternative Choice of Affordable Educare Services

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The burden of modern parenting has become increasingly heavier. Since preschool children education and care costs are getting higher, what parents need is quality nursery sites with reasonable prices, which can help balance their work and parenting. To alleviate the burden of parenting, the Ministry of Education has been striving to promote the policy on public educare services in recent years. Through the "Program for Expansion of the Public Early Childhood Educare Services," the Ministry of Education has continued subsidizing local governments to establish public and non-profit kindergartens, and the number of classes is expected to increase by 1,247 from 2017 to 2020.

As the timeline for the expansion of public educare services and supply of such services are not able to meet parents' expectations, the government has cooperated with private kindergartens that meet certain conditions since the academic year of 2018 on a trial basis, and they are regarded as "quasi-public kindergartens." As such, parents only need to pay a fee, equivalent to that charged by a public kindergarten; then, parents are able to enjoy a wide choice of affordable educare services and to have their financial burdens alleviated through this newly created channel. In addition, in the academic year of 2019, besides nationwide implementation of the quasi-public kindergarten policy, if a family's Income Tax rate does not reach 20%, each of its small children at age 2 to 4 who have not entered the public or quasi-public kindergartens will be offered NT\$30,000 as the "Child Care Allowance" per semester in line with the principle of respecting parents' education choices, to ensure respect and care for each child.

The Ministry of Education notes that the objectives of the countermeasures against the low birth rates include five major aspects: "continuous acceleration of public educare," "alleviation of the parental burden of educare costs," "improvement the educare personnel's wages and salaries," "stabilization of the quality of educare services," and "increasing the enrollment rate for children at age 2 to 5," and the planned content is illustrated below:

1. Expansion of affordable educare services

(1) Expansion of public educare services: The Ministry of Education will continue implementing the "Program for Expansion of the Public Early Childhood Educare Services" to subsidize local governments to increase the number of public and non-profit kindergartens, which will increase the number of classes by 1,247 from 2017 to 2020. In addition, priority will be given to establishing kindergartens for public elementary schools that do not have affiliated kindergartens or non-profit kindergartens in 2021 and 2022; as such, each elementary school

will have its own affiliated kindergarten. It is expected to set up 1,000 additional classes; a total of 2,427 classes will be created from 2017 to 2022, providing 60,249 public kindergarten openings.

(2) Establishment of a quasi-public mechanism

A. Implementation timeline: This will be implemented in two phases. It will be piloted in the academic year of 2018 (starting from August 1, 2018) in 15 counties (cities): Keelung City, Hsinchu County, Hsinchu City, Miaoli County, Changhua County, Nantou County, Yunlin County, Chiayi County, Chiayi City, Pingtung County, Yilan County, Hualien County, Taitung County, Jinmen County, and Penghu County. Then, it will be implemented to the entire country in the academic year of 2019 (starting from August 1, 2019). In addition to the 15 counties (cities), six special municipalities: Taipei City, New Taipei City, Taoyuan City, Taichung City, Tainan City, and Kaohsiung City, will be included; thus, a total of 21 counties (cities) will participate (the kindergartens in Lianjiang County are all public).

B. Requirements for cooperation: Monthly kindergarten charges shall be lower than (equal to) NT\$10,000, NT\$ 9,000, and NT\$8,000 for 60 approved openings, 120 approved openings, and more than 120 approved openings, respectively. Additionally, the monthly insured salary for teachers and caregivers shall not be lower than NT\$29,000. Moreover, the basic evaluation and facility safety need to be approved, teaching personnel arrangement shall comply with regulations, as well as curriculum and teaching activities shall be of high quality, along with counseling services and corresponding exit strategies.

C. Parental payment: For general households, NT\$4,500 a month will be charged for a small child and NT\$3,500 a month for a third or subsequent child; children from low-income households or middle-and-low-income households are exempt from such payment.

D. Enrollment regulations: Priority is given to children from disadvantaged backgrounds to enroll, and the enrollment shall be handled in accordance with the public kindergarten enrollment timetable and guidelines, which are developed by the special municipal, or county (city) competent authority in the district where the kindergarten is located. If the number of children, who are qualified for priority admission, exceeds a given kindergarten's number of enrollment slots, it should be addressed through public lot drawing with parents supervising on the spot.

(3) Workplace mutual assistance service: To provide a nursery site that helps parents to balance their work and parenting, the Ministry of Education is revising the Early Childhood Education and Care Act, and will work with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Ministry of Labor to encourage enterprises to provide the workplace mutual assistance educare service to their employees.

2. Child Care Allowance for children at age 2 to 4 to alleviate the parental burden:

(1) Implementation timetable: It will be implemented in the academic year of 2019 (August 1, 2019).

(2) Qualified Candidates: Households whose income tax rate is lower than 20% have small children at age 2 to 4 who have not attended public or quasi-public kindergartens.

(3) The subsidy amount: Each small child will be offered a subsidy of NT\$30,000 per semester; a family's third and subsequent small children will be awarded additional \$12,000 per child. To reverse the low birth rate crisis, the Ministry of Education will adhere to its policy objective of

"alleviating parental burden" and provide affordable, high-quality, convenient, and widespread educare services around each local communities, in line with the principles: "respecting parents' choices," and "ensuring respect and care for every child," and "seamless connection." The government will strive to establish partnerships with the private sector create a "four-win" outcome among educare service providers, parents, educare service personnel, and young children. Moreover, the Ministry of Education will handle a number of public hearings in the near future to solicit opinions from all walks of life to develop more holistic plans and policies.