

Tuition Waiver and Subsidy: Relief for Parents and Happy Schooling

(Courtesy of Lin, Jia-Yi, Division of Junior High, Elementary School and Preschool Education)

Tuition subsidy applications for 5-year preschoolers in the second semester of the academic year of 2016 will start in March, 2017 and close on April, 15th, 2017. For households with small children who were born between September, 2nd, 2010 and September, 1st, 2011, parents can consult their kindergartens, or look for more relevant information on Early Childhood Education (<http://www.ece.moe.edu.tw>).

The tuition waiver and subsidy program is divided into two categories: "Tuition Waiver" and "Extra Subsidy for the Underprivileged." For young children at age five, they are totally exempted from their tuition fees for public kindergarten; on the other hand, young children who go to private kindergarten will be subsidized with NTD\$15,000 per child each semester. In addition, children from underprivileged families with annual income below NTD\$700,000 per year are eligible for the tuition waiver as well as the extra subsidy: each child will be granted from an extra NTD\$6,000 to NTD\$10,000 each semester if they attend public kindergarten, an extra NTD\$5,000 to NTD\$15,000 each semester if they attend private kindergarten. For detailed information about the amount and category of the subsidies, please refer to the attachment.

According to the Ministry of Education, since the tuition waiver program for the five-year-old was launched across-the-board in the academic year of 2011, about 190,000 children on average have been benefited nationwide every academic year, which has indeed reached the goal of alleviating parents' financial burden and increasing the opportunity for small children to receive head start education. Overall, more than 96% of 5-year-old children from both ordinary households and disadvantaged backgrounds enrolled in kindergarten in the academic year of 2016. Furthermore, a variety of measures have been developed under this tuition waiver program to uphold small children's right to education. One of the measures is to subsidize local governments to expand public and non-profit kindergartens. From 2000 to the academic year of

2016, 1,381 public kindergartens and 50 non-profit kindergartens have been founded. Moreover, roughly 1,800 kindergartens have been subsidized to improve their equipment and facilities so as to increase the opportunity for education for small children at different ages and offer young children a safe and proper environment for educate. What's more, to relieve burden for working parents, both public and non-profit kindergartens have been encouraged to launch after-school programs that underprivileged small children can join for free, which has benefited around 35,000 children.

The tuition waiver program, along with its supplementary measures, have indeed decreased the financial burden for the small children and their families so that their opportunity for education was not affected simply by their family backgrounds. Xiao Hua, living in Changhua, was from a family with eight family members from three generations living together. His mother and four other siblings all held a disability card, so the burden of supporting the whole family was shouldered by his father through several part time jobs, and the responsibility of childcare was taken by his aged grandmother and intellectual disabled mother. With the assistance of the principal and one director from a primary school in the school district that Xiao Hua was living in, he attended kindergarten and applied for the tuition waiver and extra subsidy for underprivileged children to reduce the financial burden of his family. Thanks to this policy, Xiao Hua, who originally lacked stimulation for learning and interaction, gradually caught up with his peers and became more lively and outgoing. The transformative power of this policy can be witnessed in other cases as well.

Xiao Shan's parents were divorced when he was born, and his father left him to his great grandfather to care for him in a tribe community in the mountains of Taoyuan. His great grandfather made a living by growing vegetables and digging ginger for sale. The two depended on no one but each other. One day, one kindergarten teacher ran into Xiao Shan and his great grandfather in the tribe, and his great grandfather said: "This poor kid can only work on my side when I'm working in the mountains. It costs a lot of money for him to go to kindergarten, and I really cannot afford it. I'm afraid that he may be left behind when he goes to school next year." That teacher talked to his great grandfather about the tuition waiver program, so his great

grandfather felt relieved to send him to kindergarten. In such tribe communities, there are many more children like Xiao Shan, and with such policy, those small children have an opportunity to learn and interact with other peers in kindergarten while their parents can feel relieved to work.

The Ministry of Education would like to remind parents that apart from the tuition waiver program, there is also a subsidy for small children aged between two to four from middle-and-low-income families. Parents who plan to apply for this subsidy need to be verified as a middle-and-low-income family by the township (town/city/district) office in which they live; then, their children's kindergartens will help them go through the application process.

According to the Ministry of Education, to create a safe and proper environment for educate, it will continue to increase relevant budgets in this field so as to decrease the parenting burden; meanwhile, a proactive approach will be taken to turn educate into a public service as well as gradually increase the number of high-quality, affordable, and accessible kindergartens in the neighborhood. In this way, a solid foundation will be laid for children to develop a good character as well as learn and grow up happily.