

Expansion of Public Educare Services: Another 1,000 Classes will be Offered

(Courtesy of Lin, Yen-Ling, Division of Junior High, Elementary School and
Preschool Education)

Pan, Wen-Chung, the Minister of Education, reported relevant plans regarding “Expansion of Public Preschools” today (20th of Nov.) at the Executive Yuan. To be in line with the childcare policy of the incumbent President that aims to offer affordable as well as quality childcare services, while alleviating financial burdens of parents, the Ministry of Education has managed to increase the enrolment and openings of preschools, and offer 40% of small children more and better access to public preschools in a steady manner based on the principle of mutual benefit between the public and private sectors. To establish non-for-profit preschools that are supplemented by public ones, it plans to invest roughly 6.2 billion of New Taiwan Dollars (NTD) from 2017 to 2020 to help local governments in offering another 1,000 classes in preschools. It is estimated that another 30,000 small children will have access to these public preschools, another 2,450 preschool educators will be employed, and another 450 cooking slots will be created as a result, which will provide parents with more affordable and quality public educare services, and alleviate their parenting burden.

According to the Ministry of Education, to turn around the problem of low birth rate, it is critical to provide incentives to increase citizens’ willingness to have children through enhancing their ability to raise their children in Taiwan. Pushing public educare services has become a pivotal policy for the entity. Through assistances such as sorting out the spare space of school buildings in both elementary and junior high schools through an information system, amending relevant laws and regulations, streamlining the administrative process, and delivering subsidies, local governments can establish public preschools in areas where public educare services are inadequate. The establishment of non-for-profit preschools is deemed as a major and appropriate mean to achieve the ends envisioned in education policy.

The Ministry of Education has been promoting non-for-profit preschools as the main option of diverse preschool education. The government will commission charitable institutions, in addition, the affiliated preschools of charitable institutions can also apply for restructuring with resources and assistance stemming from the public sector and charitable institutions. For small children, it means high quality educare services can be offered, and disadvantaged kids will enjoy preferential admission; meanwhile, school fees will be more affordable for parents, and the hours of operation will be more aligned with the demand of working parents. On the other hand, it poses no risk of money loss, and meets the purpose of charity for charitable

organizations; at the same time, it lessens the financial burden on local governments with the assistance from the central government. Take a non-profit preschool that aims to recruit 90 preschoolers for example, if the Ministry of Education subsidizes 90% of the funding, then the local government only bears roughly 280,000 of NTD every year. In this way, preschools will develop in a more positive and proactive manner, and a more beneficial and friendly educare environment will be cultivated among preschoolers, parents, preschool educators, charitable organizations, and the government. In this way, parenting will be made much easier.

Currently, 50 non-for-profit preschools have been established nationwide, four of which were restructured and transformed from affiliated preschools of charitable institutions. Merciful Mother Kindergarten, which was restructured during the academic year of 2015, originally was an affiliated preschool of The Bethlehem Foundation, has been operating in a non-profit way, taking care of children from underprivileged families, and devoted into integrated education before its restructuring. Initially, the kindergarten had to bear an enormous financial burden, yet since the core values of the institution were well in line with that of non-profit preschools, it applied and joined the ranks of non-profit preschools. More importantly, the government helped to create a win-win situation for cooperation through offering subsidies to its foundation in order to sustain the service for the disadvantaged children in the local community.

The Ministry of Education will encourage more non-for-profit organizations that recognize the values of public educare services to provide affordable and high quality educare through relevant packages. As the government is working towards the goal of offering additional 1,000 classes from 2017 to 2020, parents will be more convinced that their children are in good hands, and that they will grow in a healthy manner.

In addition, to allow the disadvantaged children to have access to nearby preschools, the Ministry of Education will work with designated private preschools of quality on a trial basis. As they release some slots, the government will cover certain amount of the cost, which will enable the underprivileged children to receive quality educare services as soon as possible, and lay a foundation for the expansion of public educare services in the next stage.