

## **The Financial Aid for Five-year-old Preschoolers: Application Starts in March!**

(Photo and article by Jia-yi Lin, Division of Junior High, Elementary School and Preschool Education)



The financial aid for the five-year-old preschoolers (thereafter referred as “the free tuition plan”) for the second semester of this academic year will start in March, and the deadline of application is April 15. Parents whose children were born between September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2008 and September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009 should contact the kindergartens where your children study or visit the website of Early Childhood Educare (<http://www.ece.moe.edu.tw>) for further information regarding the free tuition plans.

The free tuition plan has two major categories: tuition waiver and allowances for children in financially distressed families (thereafter referred as “allowances for the financially distressed”). The five-year-old studying in public kindergartens are granted full tuition waiver when their preschool studies begin, while those in private kindergartens can receive subsidy or voucher for tuition waiver up to NTD15,000 per child in each semester. Moreover, children from financially distressed families, which is defined as annual household income below NTD 700,000, can apply for additional allowances. Those in public kindergartens can receive extra allowances ranging between NTD 6,000 to NTD 10,000 per child in each semester. If they study in private

kindergartens, extra allowances ranging from NTD 5,000 to NTD 15,000 can be granted in the same manner as the cases in public kindergartens. For further details regarding the amount of allowances in relation to different stratified levels of income, please refer to the appendix.

According to the Ministry of Education (MOE), since the free tuition plan for the five-year-old preschoolers was incepted on a whole coverage in the academic year of 2011, the number of people benefiting from this plan has been estimated to be over 190,000 for every academic year. Thus, this policy has attained the goal of relieving financial burdens of parents and enhancing head start chances for preschool children, with the entrance rate of the five-year-old and those from the financially distressed reaching over 96% in this academic year. What's more, the free tuition plan is packaged with several accommodating measures to enhance the preschool education access for children. For example, the government has been providing local governments with subsidies to establish more public kindergartens, with the number reaching 1,167 classes after the addition of 142 classes in the academic year of 2014. In order to expand diversity in preschool education choices, subsidies have been provided to local governments and other non-for-profit entities to set up 10 non-for-profit kindergartens. Additional subsidies have been provided to over 1,500 public kindergartens for the upgrading of their educational facilities and equipments, in order to assure quality education services. Furthermore, in order to ease up burden for double income parents, free after-school caretaking services have been provided through public kindergartens to children from the financially distressed families, which have covered about 28,000 people.

The free tuition plan and its accommodating measures serve to relieve financial burdens of preschoolers' families and level the playing field in preschool education. For example, Xiao-yan lives in Nantou County with her mother who is not a native Taiwanese. Her mother worked very hard every day after her father's death but can barely made ends meet. What's worse, due to cultural differences, she cannot provide adequate help to assist Xiao-yan, who is about to go to elementary school, in her educational pursuit. Fortunately, the free tuition plan for the five-year-old preschoolers alleviated much of the mother's financial pressure. In addition, the free after-school caretaking services operated by neighborhood kindergarten allow the mother to focus on her work. Xiao-yan's teachers can also guide her to explore various learning opportunities during this period, which makes her more energetic, more confident, and indeed much happier.

Xiao-xing lives in Taitung County. Her father has been so chronically intoxicated that he could not maintain a steady job, which forces her mother to become the only bread earner in the

family and work hard from the early morning. Xiao-xing's mother said the caretaking of Xiao-xing and her younger brother used to be a thorny issue. However, after a kindergarten was set up near the elementary school, her daughter and son can now enjoy a good sleep before going to school, without being forced to wake up in the early morning. She is also thankful to Xiao-xing's teacher, who often takes her children to school when their father is too drunk, and the after-school caretaking services allow her to pick up kids after work. Thanks to the free tuition plan, Xiao-xing can now study at a public kindergarten and receive after-school caretaking services for free. The fact that children can study at a nearby, newly-established kindergarten and can be instructed and looked after by teachers alleviates much of her burden of children's preschool education.

Apart from the aforementioned free tuition plan, the MOE would also like to remind middle-low income parents of the availability of other similar programs for children of various ages. Parents can turn to the township, city or district public office of their residence for relevant application requirements. After obtaining the proof of middle-low income level, parents can submit it to the staff in the kindergarten for tuition waiver application.

In order to provide a safe and adequate education service so that parents can focus more on their works, the MOE will seek to secure funds for education programs that alleviate parents' burdens on child-caring. Furthermore, the MOE will actively seek to enhance the public education services and increasing the range of education choices through fair-priced, high quality kindergartens, with an ultimate aim to assist children in their learning and to grow happily, thereby laying the solid foundation for good moral characters.