

Quasi-public Kindergartens in Keelung City is Celebrating the Lunar New Year

(Courtesy of Zhi-Ying Guo at the Division of Junior High, Elementary School and Preschool Education)



As the Lunar New Year was approaching, Wen-Chung Pan Minister of Education, You-Chang Lin, Mayor of Keelung City, and 18 quasi-public kindergartens gathered together to participate in the kindergarten festival activities. The adults and children wrote spring couplets and kneaded dough to make rice cake together to celebrate the coming of the Year of the Pig in children's laughter. At present, the ratio of public and quasi-public preschool education services in Keelung City reaches almost 60%, and it is also the best New Year gift for parents in Keelung City.

In the face of the crisis of low birth rates, the government must race against time. It is necessary to provide sufficient quality and affordable preschool education services in a multi-pronged

manner to address the child care dilemma for parents, enabling young people to strike a balance between family and work. Therefore, the government adopts a dual-track approach to launch public kindergartens and quasi-public kindergartens at the same time. On the front of public kindergartens, it plans to establish 2,247 classes in public and non-profit kindergartens in six years, which will increase the number of enrollment openings by 60,000. This is the largest increase over the years.

The Ministry of Education said that: considering the long-standing contribution made by private kindergartens, the "quasi-public kindergarten" mechanism was first introduced in August 2018 to accelerate increasing quality and affordable preschool education services through the participation of private kindergartens. For quasi-public kindergartens, the monthly payment for parents does not exceed NT\$4,500, and parents can enjoy a NT\$ 1,000 deduction for their third child or above. The children from middle-and-low-income families are exempt from tuition fees, which are directly paid by the government to kindergartens; parents will not only feel that preschool education is affordable but enjoy diverse opportunities to choose a suitable kindergarten for their children. The quasi-public mechanism was implemented in two phases; in the academic year of 2018, it was first implemented in 15 counties (cities) outside the six special municipalities and then launched nationwide in the academic year of 2018 (August 2018). In the 15 counties and cities, the number of kindergartens that charge based on the agreed scope of cooperation fees is 764. By the end of last year (2018), the number of quasi-public kindergartens that have completed the review process was 288; in the second semester of the academic year of 2018, the number of quasi-public kindergartens in the 15 counties and cities would reach 300 and more. Because of the quasi-public mechanism, affordable preschool education services have grown by more than 15%, and there are 18 quasi-public kindergartens in Keelung City.

Minister Pan said that because low birth rates were a very daunting challenge, the government must put forward effective policies, and that the quasi-public kindergarten policy allowed us to see the support of the government and the efforts of kindergartens, enabling children to receive quality and affordable preschool education. In addition, young parents would feel the support for child rearing and child care provided by the government was indeed helpful. He was confident that the government could just call on couples "Be brave to get married and have a child!"

Mayor Lin said that when he visited Naha City in Ryukyu, Japan, the top priority for the Naha mayor was to enable all children to go to kindergarten, which also meant that the neighboring country Japan was still unable to provide universal preschool education. He pointed out that we in Taiwan have already enjoyed universal kindergarten education in Taiwan, which demonstrated that preschool education in Taiwan was actually better than that in many countries. He hoped that people could understand and in turn support the government's policies.

Director Kao of the private Keelung City Private Chang-Gung Forest Kindergarten said that the biggest gain of joining the quasi-public mechanism was that it could bring more educational resources to both parents and children and reduce the burden on parents, which was also the top priority for the government. He hoped that everyone could work hard together and continue to support the government. For parents, the quasi-public policy was the most tangible policy. Mrs. Weng pointed out that the cost of kindergarten education for two children originally put heavy pressure on the family; the quasi-public policy demonstrated the government's determination to lessen the burden on parents. Originally, she had to pay NT\$9,000 a month and now only NT\$4,500 a month, which helped her save NT\$9,000 a month for two children. Parents could really feel that this policy was helpful, and they were very grateful to the government's efforts in introducing such a policy.

In addition, the quasi-public kindergarten policy not only benefits parents and children, but also help with preschool educators' pays, since the quality of early childhood education will be improved with stable preschool educators. Therefore, the quasi-public mechanism included the "preschool education teachers and educare givers' pays" as one of the cooperation requirements to motivate teachers and educare givers who care for children at the forefront. It is hoped that with appropriate salary structure, more excellent early childhood education talents will be attracted and stay in the workplace, while making it easier for kindergartens to hire suitable talents, so as to lay a solid foundation in the quality of human resources as well as create a win-win situation for kindergartens, teachers, and parents.

The Ministry of Education emphasizes that the implementation of the quasi-public policy requires concerted efforts from all walks of life. The application for quasi-public kindergartens in the second semester in the academic year of 2018 in 15 counties and cities is still open. Private kindergartens that have the willingness and meet the requirements are welcome to join. It is believed that through the cooperation between the government and the private sector, the goal of "high-quality and affordable child care" will be achieved, so as to create a multiple-win outcome for kindergartens, teachers, teachers, educare givers, children, and parents.