

The Best Children's Day Gift

Launching Low-birth Rate Countermeasures in School Year of 2019

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



As the Children's Day was approaching, President Tsai, Ing-Wen, Lin, Wan-I, Minister Without Portfolio of the Executive Yuan, Pan, Wen-Chung, Minister of Education, Cheng, Wen-Tsan, Mayor of Taoyuan City, and representatives of kindergartens gathered at the private Poreau Pre-school in Taoyuan City on April 2, 2019, to share a tangible national policy with parents in the hope that young people would be more determined to get married, be willing to have children, and raise children without much worries. Meanwhile, they wished happiness and good health for the children at the Poreau Pre-school and all the children across the country.

President Tsai said that the issue of low birth rates was an issue of national security for her; if it was not resolved, it would not only create a burden on the country's finance but also much pressure on children as they grow up. Since the Quasi-public policy was launched last year,

many problems have surfaced; over the past year, the Executive Yuan and the Ministry of Education spent a great deal of time in communicating with the education providers, parents, and groups to seek solutions together. Today, comprehensive policy planning has been proposed. President Tsai pointed out that, first, on the front of publicization, strengthening the expansion of public kindergartens was the main pillar of the policy at this time; the number of public kindergarten classes would be further increased by at least 3,000 in eight years (2017-2024), to specifically respond to the expectations of the majority of the people; second, as for the supplementary quasi-public mechanism, a mechanism was also planned to attract more private early childhood education partners to participate. Meanwhile, for the quality of education that everyone cared about, the Ministry of Education has also established quality improvement measures and management mechanisms. In addition, regular subsidies for facilities and equipment, parenting education, and professional counseling were provided this year to quasi-public kindergartens. Furthermore, she added that this August, childcare allowance would be distributed to eligible children aged 2-4 who did not attend the public or quasi-public kindergartens, to reduce their parents' financial burden, while achieving the goal of offering uninterrupted subsidies for young children aged between 0-5. She noted that, through such policy planning, the goal was to enable the affordable education services to account for 70% by 2024. Finally, President Tsai expressed her gratitude toward the kindergartens that were willing to join, and said that their actions have endorsed the quasi-public policy, which is also a national countermeasure to the low birth rates in Taiwan. "To create a better childcare environment, although government policy matters, your actions at the forefront are even more important. I want to thank all of you on behalf of the country" said President Tsai.

Cheng said that he would fully support the central government's policies in the hope that after the relevant policies were launched this August, more private kindergartens would join. Cheng mentioned that since he took over as the mayor, he has taken the care for young families as a very important job, and hoped that the citizens would have "a bit more sweetness, a bit less

burden, a bit more dreams, and a bit less stress." He noted that at present, the birth rate in Taoyuan City was the highest in the country, making Taoyuan City the first choice for young families. In addition to responding to the central government's policies in the future, Cheng said that more subsidies would be offered to quasi-public kindergartens for the facilities and equipment.

Heads of kindergartens and parents who have joined the quasi-public mechanism also expressed their views on the spot. Ms. Peng, a parent of Cheng-Jing Kindergarten in Yunlin County, said that she only needed to pay a fee of NT\$4,500 per month, which was a very substantial and tangible reduction from the previous amount. The head of Di-Shi-Ni Kindergarten in Yilan County said that it was great to see the government promote the quasi-public policy, and that since the kindergarten joined the quasi-public policy, it has been a smooth journey, as the parents were relieved, the teachers were happy, the kindergarten became a warmer place; she really appreciated the government's efforts. In addition, Taoyuan City would also join in the future. The head of the Poreau Pre-school in Taoyuan City, said that after the Ministry of Education implemented the quasi-public mechanism last year, many parents were looking forward to joining the quasi-public mechanism, and that the pre-school continued to check whether it met the requirements for application. Now, they were ready and willing to work together with the government to create an affordable and high-quality nursery environment. Ms. Dai, a parent of triplets, said that she would be willing to have more children, besides loving children, she also felt that the government has worked hard to build a friendly nursery environment and provide resources for childcare; she hoped that this policy could continue and benefit more families.

The Ministry of Education also stated that low-birth rate countermeasures for the two-to-five-year-old that were launched across the board in the academic year of 2019. With the expansion

of public kindergartens as the main pillar of the government's policy, as long as the county and city governments were willing to accelerate and increase the number, the Ministry of Education would lend its full support; a seminar on the supplementary quasi-public mechanism would be co-held with the six special municipalities this April; it was planned that the private kindergarten applications would start to be processed during the period of May 20, 2019 to June 20, 2019. It added that as for the part of the childcare allowance for children aged 2-4, it planned to accept parents' applications from this August, and the allowance would be appropriated monthly to parents' accounts from this September. Moreover, it noted that other private kindergartens that did not join the quasi-public mechanism were also the government's focus of attention; therefore, it also planned to provide the said private kindergartens with subsidies this year for their facilities and equipment to help them provide a suitable and safe education and care environment for young children.

Finally, the Ministry of Education would provide information regarding the government's supportive measures for preschool children before the end of this May and send it to children's homes to help their parents learn about the subsidies and benefits associated with their children.