

The Springboard Project Limited Address by Glen Braden to the Legislative Council on Thursday, April 3 2008

A Parent's Perspective

As a parent of a child with Special Educational Needs I hope to bring you a slightly different perspective than the schools and educators. I am the Chairman of the Springboard Project, but I got to this point by first simply being a parent.

My wife and I moved to Hong Kong 8 years ago. We did not anticipate being in Hong Kong for as long as we have been, nor did we plan on needing to have as much knowledge about the state of SEN in Hong Kong.

We adopted our two children here in Hong Kong. Our son has moderate SEN. We knew that when we adopted him. What we did not know is that there was, and to a large extent, still is very little SEN provision for English-speaking families with children needing more support than the Learning Support Classes can offer.

We learned that the only place that could take our son was the Springboard Project primary class at Korean International School. Springboard uniquely provides a nurturing classroom where students are taught based on individual needs and integrate into the mainstream where appropriate. There is literally no other school that could or would take the majority of the children that are helped by Springboard programmes. The Springboard programmes currently serves 60% are ethnic Chinese children, 10% are of mixed ethnic decent and 30% are non-Chinese or ethnic minority children with SEN who have English as their first language.

I advocate for not just an increase in the number of Learning Support or similarly modeled spaces for children and young adults but for an increase in the number of spaces in international schools for children with special needs.

When international schools are not required to do something about SEN, very few will take responsibility to do something on their own that benefits more than the simplest of cases. A typical response to the question "Why don't you provide more SEN places or for a deeper level of need?" the answer boils down to two things – we don't have to and it is too expensive. Both of these things can and should be addressed by the government.

It is not easy to be a parent in Hong Kong to begin with, but adding in the challenges that face you in raising children with SEN it can be down right discouraging. It is not only the challenges of the child's SEN that are difficult but the climate that we face in finding and additionally paying for the help that they need.

Thank you for the time you have given me and on behalf of all the parents in similar situations, show us that you believe our children are as important as children who can speak Cantonese and attend the local system.