

## **Submission to Education Panel Meeting of Legislative Council on 10 July 2006**

### **Toward a Sustainable EM Education Policy**

As a social welfare service agency aiming to serve the needy EM groups, we would like to raise the following concerns for consideration by the Administration and LegCo members, while postulating a sustainable EM education policy in the affluent HK society:

#### **1. Proficiency in Chinese Language:**

Being an ethnic minority in Hong Kong, the key to integrate into the mainstream society is to master the prevailing language – Chinese. However, as the overwhelming majority of ethnic minority families would not use Chinese at home, it is not possible for the EM kids to be hands-on in taking up the mainstream Chinese curriculum and to achieve a satisfactory outcome if they opt for Chinese medium instruction schools.

Proficiency in Chinese is inevitable for EM students to proceed forward in their further education, to get a decent job offer, and to build up their business in the Chinese dominated HK society. The present arrangements adopted by the Administration have proved to be ineffective after years of trial. Besides a few exceptional cases, the vast majority of EM students have failed to take up the mainstream Chinese curriculum during their primary studies; therefore, they would have very limited choices in acquiring good quality secondary education (either not up to the requirements of the sought-after EMI schools and not fit for enrollment in CMI schools), and would finally end up with poor results in public examinations. Such a vicious cycle will continue if we still hesitate to take a bold step to tackle the problems being addressed. Equal opportunity in education and employment are the most viable means to erase the social stigma and improve the socio-economic status of ethnic minority groups in HK.

#### **2. Positive Discrimination Actions in EM Education:**

Language barrier in the school system could only be removed by introducing a series of positive discrimination actions such as specially trained teachers, after-school student support service; parents' support, and a tailored

curriculum (refer to discussion in Para 4) for non-Chinese speaking EM students. The Administration should take a proactive stand in the formulation of policies and provisions in the EM services. Discriminative actions with extra resource allocation are necessary in EM education. Teaching EM students is undoubtedly a challenge to most local teachers; hence, special trainings are necessary to enhance their capability in delivery of Chinese as a second (or even third) language. After-school student support service is vital, especially for those new starters and new arrival students to cope with the tight academic schedules adopted by most mainstream schools. A supportive network for parents could help to foster mutual support and orientations to new parents in assisting their children's adjustment to school life.

### **3. A Tailored Chinese Curriculum for Non-Chinese Speaking Students:**

As Chinese is not a commonly practiced language for most EM students outside the classroom setting, it is strongly proposed that a tailored Chinese curriculum should be introduced as an option for non-Chinese speaking students. The design and standard of such curriculum could take the reference of similar programmes offered in other Chinese dominated societies to their non-Chinese speaking students. Successful completion of such curriculum should be adequate as a qualification for the student to advance his/her path to further education and employment in HK.

To ascertain an effective pilot of the new curriculum, EMB should take immediate action to appoint designated primary and secondary schools in the five LegCo geographical constituencies and start enrolling EM students in the coming academic year.

### **4. A Collaborative Effort to Support EM Education:**

Collaboration between schools, social service agencies and EM organizations is essential in providing supportive services to help EM students in the learning of Chinese and to achieve an early integration into the local community. Through engagement with the nearby social service agencies and EM organizations, after-school support services and parents' support networks could be developed. With such collaborative efforts, the ideal to foster social integration and racial harmony is possible through a wide range of social and recreational activities at the neighbourhood level. This is the most effective means to erase misunderstanding between the different racial groups as well as nurture cultural sensitivity of all stakeholders.

With the resource input from social service agencies and the referral network from EM organizations, parent mutual support networks could be set up at the neighbourhood level. Through mutual support and emotional sharing, the anxiety and insecurity levels of EM parents would be greatly reduced.

## **5. Conclusion:**

The problems and difficulties encountered by about 350,000 EM in HK should not be overlooked. Education is always a crucial means for the marginalized ethnic minorities to uplift their socio-economic status. We appeal for both the Administration and LegCo members to take a bold step in adopting a sustainable EM education policy in the World Class City of Hong Kong.

**Submitted by Humanitarian and Social Service Department,  
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