

余若薇立法會議員辦事處
Office of Audrey Eu, Legislative Council Member



立法會
教育事務委員會
教育事務委員會主席
李慧琼議員, JP

李議員：

要求召開聯席會議討論香港國際學額供應

過往傳媒已多次報導國際學校學位不足的問題，近日再有傳媒指包括英基學校協會旗下學校在內的國際學校，學額短缺導致激烈的競爭，令部分非華語學生沒有任何機會參與入學試。

議員多次向政府反映有關意見，惟政府重覆表示，目前本港國際學校的平均入讀率達 88%，有約 4100 個剩餘學額，並無顯示學額已出現供求飽和或供不應求的情況。不過，本人幾年來持續收到來自不同界別的外籍人士和商會投訴，不滿教育局根本沒有深入理解學額不足的問題，也沒有誠意設法去解決。他們又指，因國際學校學額不足，令很多跨國公司的員工或外地專才無法在港找到適合的學校讓他們的子女就讀，故最終選擇不來港工作。

由此可見，國際學校學額不足已經不止是一個教育議題，而是會因此而令海外人士流失，嚴重影響香港的競爭力和營商環境，若果政府不嚴肅處理學額不足和有關的配套問題，香港將無力吸引海外人才長期駐留，長遠會為發展知識型經濟帶來負面影響。

因此，本人希望閣下考慮，盡快安排一個教育事務委員會及經濟發展事務委員會聯席會議，討論現時國際學校學額不足的情況，以及因此而對香港經濟發展造成的影響。本人期望聯席會議能召開聽證會，廣邀關注議題多年的團體出席會議，並發表意見，同時，政府就應此事項提交文件，以及委派政策局及部門代表出席，就如何紓緩學位短缺的問題，回答委員和團體的提問，謹附上最近傳媒就有關事項的報導，以供參考。

謝謝閣下對此事的垂注！

教育事務委員會 委員 余若薇 謹啟

二零一一年十二月一日

副本致：經濟發展事務委員會主席 林健鋒議員

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RECORD WAITING LISTS AT SCHOOLS

Rise in foreign residents is contributing to a shortage of spaces at top international and ESF institutions

Hong Kong's top international schools are swamped with applications and are facing record waiting lists.

Hong Kong International School has seen a 27 per cent increase in the number of applicants since 2006, and the number of students attending this year is the "highest in the school's 46 years", a spokesman for the institution said.

Schools under the English Schools Foundation (ESF) are also seeing record-high figures this year. Some have recently told parents their children will not even get an entrance interview due to the high number of applicants - twice the number of available vacancies. The German Swiss International School says it has received 1,673 applications for 126 vacancies across all age groups.

John Walsh, communications manager at Hong Kong International School, warned that the city could become less competitive because of the shortage of spaces at international schools. "The implications of a lack of international school spaces are clearly economic," he said.

The school has recently been embroiled in controversy over its attempt to redevelop facilities at its Repulse Bay campus and increase space for students and staff. Local residents oppose the plan, concerned about traffic congestion and other issues.

The ESF was expecting about 2,300 student applications for the next academic year, but there were only 1,020 spaces available, it said in a letter to parents.

Amanda Chapman, whose daughter has applied to enter Sha Tin Junior School, an ESF school, said the ESF recently told her that her child would not get an interview due to the large number of applicants. "She is a native speaker [of English] and is a permanent Hong Kong resident," she said.

Chapman, an English-language teacher, says the situation is ironic. "We are invited to improve the standards of English at local schools in Hong Kong, but we are denied an opportunity to educate our own children in English".

Howard Yeung, a data analyst who recently moved back to Hong Kong from San Francisco, said it took him more than one year to secure places for his two children in ESF schools.

Lawmaker Emily Lau Wai-hing attributes the growing demand for school places partly to the increase in foreign residents in Hong Kong but also to a lack of confidence in the education system among well-off residents.

The city's population of foreign residents has grown by about 5 per cent in the past year, the Immigration Department says. The Indian, American and Australian populations have increased by about 7 per cent, while the British has risen by about 20 per cent. The government has pledged to increase the number of international school places by 5,000, from the current 36,000, in the next few years by providing sites for new schools and helping existing ones expand.

"The administration supports the development of a vibrant international school sector to meet the demand for school places from families coming to Hong Kong for work and investment," an Education Bureau spokeswoman said.

Growing problem for expat parents

Talented people from overseas are essential for keeping our economy competitive and moving forward, but can be difficult to accommodate when it comes to educating their children. Like other parents, they want the best possible school at a cost within their budget, not too far from home and with good facilities. They have another important requirement, though - that a place is available as soon as, or shortly after, they arrive. Long waiting lists at international schools mean that many do not find their needs readily met, leading to talented people deciding not to come here to work.

The dilemma has long been known to foreign chambers of commerce, which have been complaining to the government for more than a decade about the perceived lack of places. That is in large part due to well-heeled local parents, unhappy with Hong Kong's education system, turning to international schools and those of the English Schools Foundation for English or Putonghua education and tuition under the globally recognised International Baccalaureate programme. The problem is apparently being made more acute by a rising number of expatriates moving or wanting to move here as employment opportunities dry up at home.

Our top international schools have record enrolments and the longest-ever waiting lists. But the government does not perceive a problem, contending the present international school population of 36,000 will grow by 5,000 in the next few years through its provision of land and help in expanding campuses. That is cold comfort for parents having to put up with second or even third best or those eager to take up work here, but unable to get the type of education they seek.

Authorities, schools and the business community should work more closely to gauge needs. The government has to be more flexible and prompt in providing land and turning over disused public school buildings to the international system. But expatriates may also find it worthwhile to be less choosy and demanding.