

To: <education@legco.gov.hk>, <panel\_e@legco.gov.hk>, <tflam@tflam.com.hk>  
From: "James Middleton" < >  
Date: 11/20/2012 08:49AM  
Subject: Introduce a voucher system to settle the ESF funding debate

>

Legco Panel on Education

Dr Lam Tai Fai SBS JP

Dear Sir,

### Removal of ESF subvention

As a permanent Hong Kong resident I have resided in and paid substantial tax in Hong Kong for 44 years. I have three children who were all born here to Caucasian parents whose mother tongue at home is English. All three children attend ESF schools in Shatin.

Now the Education Secretary announced he wants to increase free Chinese language and curriculum schooling for local Cantonese speakers to 15 years from the current 12 years so he is seemingly going to take the extra money required from the ESF parents who all pay tax and give it by way of free schooling to the local populace, many of whom do not pay tax and cannot afford to pay for schooling ?

What happened to <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm> Article 28 ? which part of 'all' is not clear to him ?

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and **on the basis of equal opportunity**, they shall, in particular:

(a) Make primary education compulsory and available **free to all**;

(b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them **available and accessible to every child**, and take appropriate measures such as the **introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need**;

(c) Make higher education **accessible to all** on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;

(d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance **available and accessible to all children**;

### Article 2

1. States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention **to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind**, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, **language**, religion, political or other opinion, national, **ethnic or social origin**, property, disability, **birth or other status**.

Has the Education Secretary thought about the consequences or are they saying, if you do not earn 100k a month ++ we do not want you in Hong Kong ? certainly looks that way in HK's Asia world city, one country one chinese system only. It hints at Gwailo go home, even if you were born here, mixed

race kids queue up and try to join the local education system ?

Of course it begs the question, what about the Government servants whose education for their children at ESF is now paid by HKG Govt – can we presume the Government will end this funding or exacerbate it by hypocritically increasing the required fee payments to Govt servants that will be charged as a result of the loss of ESF subvention ? – so they will take away the subvention from the private sector Peters but will pay an increased fee for the Government employed Pauls ?

How many Government servants currently send their children to ESF ? Can we presume Eddie Ng will be sending them all a memo saying the ESF loss of funding will mean they have to put their children into the local system they seemingly all hate, hence their choice of ESF, or they must like the rest of us, pay from their own pockets and then be taxed on the fees we pay for the schooling ?

How are they going to provide the additional places for non chinese speaking children in local schools (whose standard reply currently is that if your child cannot speak Cantonese and has no Chinese support at home do not bother to apply)?

How will this affect HK people's decisions to have more children or overseas talent to come to Hong Kong instead of Singapore ?

Why does the Government not offer an income tax break on school fees ? well because they provide free education if you can speak Chinese so there is no need to charge locals but people 'choosing' international curricula have to pay tax on the fees they pay to the ESF or other international schools.

How will they recruit NETS scheme teachers who have children ?

The current system is inherently unfair especially to Permanent ID card / locally born children whose mother tongue is not Cantonese and contravenes the above Treaty and binding legal international instrument. The proposed system below is the only equitable and fair way forward for 'all' children.

Yours faithfully,

James Middleton

Tel

Fax

**South China Morning Post** 南華早報

---

[Home](#) > Introduce a voucher system to settle the ESF funding debate

## **Introduce a voucher system to settle the ESF funding debate**

Submitted by admin on Nov 20th 2012, 12:00am

Business

MONITOR

Tom Holland

Allow schools to offer their own curriculum but give each permanent resident child a stipend to spend on an education of their choice

The Hong Kong government's education funding policy is in a mess. It's time to tear it up and start again.

Yesterday Secretary of Education Eddie Ng Hak-kim wrote to the *South China Morning Post* to set out his position on government subsidies to the English Schools Foundation. In a nutshell, he argued that: "ESF schools offer a non-local curriculum. It is not our established policy to provide recurrent subvention to schools offering a non-local curriculum." Therefore "the existing recurrent subvention will be phased out".

This line of reasoning betrays some severely muddled thinking.

The subsidy paid to the ESF works out at around HK\$21,000 per pupil per year. If it were to be withdrawn with the foundation becoming a purely private sector organisation, the ESF would have a powerful incentive to jack up its fees to fund investment in better facilities. In turn better facilities would allow it further to increase its fees in a continuous upward spiral.

In the short term that would mean a 40 per cent increase in fees to bring the ESF into line with other private institutions like the Australian International School or the English stream of the French International School.

It would also mean a sharp rise in capital levies and a proliferation of non-refundable up-front debentures. Many families would be unable to afford the extra costs, and would be forced to withdraw their children. Given that some 70 per cent of ESF pupils are permanent residents, largely of local descent, many would be placed in the local school system, where they would cost the government twice as much in subsidies as they do now in the ESF.

That would be a bad bargain for the public purse. However, Ng clearly believes there is something inherently wrong or undesirable about providing government subsidies to schools offering international curricula.

This seems a strange attitude. A government whose very foundation is the doctrine of "One country, two systems" can hardly oppose the idea of "One city, multiple school systems".

Forget that the government already subsidises private international schools through generous grants of free land.

What's really strange here is that the Hong Kong government feels it should be in the business of dictating school curricula in the first place.

Governments around the world have a lousy record when it comes to picking winners in business. It's hard to see why they should prove any more competent at deciding how children should learn their lessons, or what exams they should take.

On the contrary, it's easy to see why they would make a hash of the job. In a fast-changing world, any society is more likely to prosper if can draw upon a broad range of intellectual influences and a wide range of skills. That means encouraging diversity in education, not imposing uniformity.

One way both to iron out the glaring inconsistencies in funding and to promote this diversity would be to extend the voucher system that the government currently operates for kindergartens to the school system as a whole.

In essence, this would mean that the government subsidises pupils, rather than schools. Each permanent resident of school age would get an education voucher - say worth HK\$40,000 a year

for secondary students - which his or her parents could spend at a school offering the curriculum of their choice.

The government would still license schools, possibly providing capital assistance for new building works at some schools in return for a cap on fees. Other schools might choose to charge top-up fees from parents' incomes.

But as long as the schools met inspection standards, officials would no longer dictate the curricula they teach. Parental demand would take care of that.

Alas, I don't believe for a second any of this will ever happen. But it might just be one way to settle the perennial ESF funding debate.

Topics: \_\_\_\_\_

ESF

Subsidy

Voucher System

---

**Source URL (retrieved on *Nov 20th 2012, 5:35am*):**

<http://www.scmp.com/business/article/1086321/introduce-voucher-system-settle-esf-funding-debate>

**Links:**

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Legco Panel on Education**

### **Fifth Legislative Council (2012 - 2016)**

#### **● Terms of Reference**

- 1. To monitor and examine Government policies and issues of public concern relating to education.**
2. To provide a forum for the exchange and dissemination of views on the above policy matters.
3. To receive briefings and to formulate views on any major legislative or financial proposals in respect of the above policy area prior to their formal introduction to the Council or Finance Committee.
4. To monitor and examine, to the extent it considers necessary, the above policy matters referred to it by a member of the Panel or by the House Committee.
5. To make reports to the Council or to the House Committee as required by the Rules of Procedure.