

Position Statement of OMEP-Hong Kong

OMEP (World Organization for Early Childhood Education) is an international non-governmental and non-profit organization concerned with all aspects of early childhood education and care (ECEC). It was established in 1948 and is comprised of 65 national committees. OMEP-Hong Kong is a member of OMEP World, which defends and promotes the rights of young children to education and care and supports activities that improve accessibility, affordability and accountability of ECEC. We aim to achieve equal access to quality education, in line with the UN's millennium development goals.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) protects children's rights by setting standards in health care, education, and legal, civil and social services. By agreeing to undertake the obligations of the Convention, the Hong Kong government has committed itself to protecting and ensuring children's rights and has agreed to hold itself accountable for this commitment. All young children in Hong Kong should receive quality early childhood education without discrimination. Launching the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) is an endeavor toward this end and improvements should follow to make this effort more effective and meaningful.

After thoroughly consulting our members, we have achieved the following consensus regarding the review of PEVS. We would deeply appreciate it if the educational authorities could take our suggestions into consideration when reviewing the voucher policy.

1. Child's Rights.

We believe that all young children of 3-6 years, regardless whether they are in half-day or full-day kindergartens, should have the right to claim the voucher. And those studying at full-day kindergartens should not be disadvantaged by this half-day voucher.

2. Teacher Qualifications and Development

We are very concerned about teachers' professional development. We expect that kindergarten teachers will become degree holders very soon and that salary and benefits should be commensurate with teachers' increased qualifications. We strongly suggest that the salary scale be reinstalled and a teacher development fund operated by the educational authorities be set up after 2012.

3. Parental Education

Parents have the right to receive multi-disciplinary training on early childhood care and education through multiple channels, such as: parental TV, radio, newspapers, the Internet, etc. We need to promote the concept of

developmental appropriateness through parent education programs. We strongly suggest that educational authorities promote parents' education by all means possible to help them make informed choices about kindergartens.

4. Quality Assurance and Review Processes

All eligible kindergartens are required to take a quality review, which is a means to self-evaluation and school improvement. However, kindergartens do have the right to choose whether to publicize their quality review report or not. And there should be a mechanism for appeals involving a third party expert. Thus, we strongly suggest: (1) to delink the quality review from the voucher's eligibility; (2) to seek a kindergarten's consent before releasing the review report; and (3) to set up an independent accreditation centre led by quality review experts in the field.

5. Mapping early childhood education in HK.

We believe Hong Kong society as a whole has the right to determine its well-planned future in early childhood education. We strongly suggest that a comprehensive review of early childhood policy be conducted and an official planning committee be set up as soon as possible. This is crucial to the sustainable development of society. A planning committee will be set up as soon as possible to develop a comprehensive five-year plan.

OMEP-Hong Kong

December 3, 2010.