



Hong Kong International School

Submission to the Panel on Education 13 February 2012

The Hong Kong International School (HKIS) has more than 46 years of history in Hong Kong as a nonprofit organization. As a longstanding member of the community, HKIS is concerned by the lack of international school spaces in Hong Kong, which challenges the city's standing as Asia's world-class business centre. Every year, HKIS turns away 70 percent of applicants due to a shortage in education spaces at our facilities. These applications are most often from students at the primary level who seek entry into international schools to begin their education and a place to spend the next 12 years of their formative educational training.

HKIS is eager to work with the Hong Kong government to alleviate the shortage of international school spaces, but there must be a concerted focus on education in Hong Kong from the top-level of government. HKIS is willing to expand our student body by 500 spaces, but we need to redevelop our campuses to make room for such an increase in students and teachers. However, despite having a redevelopment plan and support from appropriate government bodies, attempts to redevelop our campus resulted in a dead-end due to an unsuccessful search for a temporary campus site. In addition to the loss of future students, HKIS incurred financial losses due to construction delays and the investment of hours spent participating in official and unofficial meetings with government and community bodies in an effort to expand a school campus. The government must orchestrate cross-departmental efforts to alleviate the shortage of international school spaces.

We recommend the establishment of a government policy that results in a proper and effective allocation of resources to meet the needs of schools in Hong Kong. This prioritization of education should come from the top-levels of government with the intention that all government bodies work together, with increased communication and transparency, on resolving the shortage of international school spaces. We also suggest a special advocate is assigned to help international schools navigate the process of increasing their student bodies—in particular if this process, like ours, involves redeveloping a campus and finding a temporary location for students.

HKIS is pleased to present these suggestions to the Panel on Education for their consideration.

A WORLD-CLASS EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM ATTRACTS AND SUPPORTS HONG KONG BUSINESS GROWTH

It is imperative for Hong Kong to develop a world-class educational environment that supports the growing pool of dynamic professionals and their families who relocate to and work in Hong Kong. The ongoing shortage of international school spaces is affecting the ability to retain talent, as families are unable to get their children into schools. A former HKIS family opted to be based in Singapore when faced with the choice of returning to Asia rather than to confront the challenge of finding international school placement for their children in Hong Kong.

The American Chamber of Commerce conducted a survey on its membership in May 2011 in regards to the impact of the shortage of international school spaces on the ability of Hong Kong to attract and retain talent. One of the key findings was that 68 percent of members believe that the lack of international school spaces is affecting their business. An overwhelming 75 percent stated that this shortage makes it harder for them to attract overseas talent and 63 percent noted that they have lost candidates to other markets such as Shanghai or Singapore. Furthermore, 72 percent believed that the shortage of international school spaces makes Hong Kong less appealing as a regional hub.

The British Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong also invited all members to complete a brief survey in March 2011 to share their company's experience with securing international school spaces. Survey results received from all participating businesses showed that 75 percent of all respondents felt that a lack of international schools places detrimentally affects their business. Of which, 78 percent expressed that their business is affected by staff being unwilling to relocate to Hong Kong. The shortage of international education spaces impacts Hong Kong's ability to be a truly world-class city.

The October 2011-12 Policy Address of Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam-kuen stressed the need to support the expansion of international schools: "We will continue to support the in-situ expansion of individual international schools or allocate suitable vacant school premises to them for short-term use." The Hong Kong government recognizes that the lack of international school spaces is a serious challenge to Hong Kong's competitiveness as an international business center.

ROCKY ROAD FOR HKIS CAMPUS REDEVELOPMENT

HKIS and the Education Bureau first started discussing additional student spaces in 2006. The goal was to create 200 extra spaces in the Repulse Bay campus and 300 extra spaces on the Tai Tam campus, resulting in 500 new spaces total. HKIS has made repeated requests for a suitable temporary site on Hong Kong Island since 95 percent of our student population lives on the island. During the discussion period, HKIS also made several requests for the vacant school building in Stanley; the site remains empty. In March 2011, the Education Bureau proposed a temporary site in a Chai Wan public housing estate that met all of the structural requirements for an HKIS facility, including an outdoor playground and access for school buses. After a period of due diligence, HKIS Head of School and Board of Managers decided to move forward with a plan to refit the Chai Wan site in June 2011. However, it was not until November 2011 that HKIS received a letter of policy support from the Education Bureau. With the Chai Wan temporary site seemingly secured, HKIS enlisted a team of architects and experts to develop plans to refit the building and visited the site multiple times with government representatives. However, for various reasons beyond the control of HKIS, this site is showing signs that it potentially may no longer be an option. HKIS has had to delay redevelopment of the Lower Primary campus for at least a year.

This delay in securing a temporary campus will cost HKIS over HK\$70 million and the entire process has required a large number of meetings with government and local departments. Furthermore, the initial goal to open the Lower Primary campus with increased capacity for students is now delayed from 2015 to beyond 2016. The associated costs are not confined to just money and time, but also include the continued number of applications that HKIS must refuse each year due to a shortage of spaces.

The proposed redevelopment of the HKIS Lower Primary campus will not only create an additional 500 international school spaces, but also it will address the bulk of the historical traffic issues in Repulse Bay. The physical constraints of the current HKIS parking lot, playground area and car entry and exit points, which have been in place for several decades, have not kept pace with development in the area. Not only does the current HKIS structure limit the number of school spaces, but it also does not allow for a satisfactory permanent fix for the current traffic problems. However, all of these redevelopment plans are frozen until HKIS can secure a temporary campus site.

COLLECTIVE EFFORT TO MAKE EDUCATION A PRIORITY

The Government urgently needs to work to set coherent and long-term sustainable policies to support education and talent development in Hong Kong. There needs to be a concerted focus from within the top-levels of government to promote a renewed attention on education.

A Top-down Approach

- Create a government policy that results in the proper and effective allocation of resources to focus on education in Hong Kong. This message of prioritizing education should direct all government bodies to work together, with increased communication and transparency, on resolving the shortage of international school spaces.
- Appoint a special advocate to assist international schools who are willing to allocate more spaces to students but need help in navigating the process to expand the boundaries of their classrooms. Have this advocate report directly to the Chief Executive both to signal the urgency of the issue and to encourage communication across multiple government bodies.
- Encourage government bodies at all levels to unify behind cross-departmental efforts to increase the number of international school spaces and communicate on all relevant issues relating to school sites. This should improve transparency in the process.
- Ensure that the currently vacant school sites on Hong Kong Island are made available for immediate development of additional international school spaces.

CONCLUSION

HKIS urges the Hong Kong government to implement a clear, firm and unified campaign concerning the problems of education space in Hong Kong.

HKIS appreciates the Government's efforts to date in regards to its efforts to resolve the shortage of international school spaces, and HKIS welcomes the opportunity to continue working with the Government in order to formulate best practices and practical policies that will be mutually beneficial for the international school community and Hong Kong.

HKIS is resolved to strengthen Hong Kong's brand as 'Asia's World City' and to continue efforts to open our doors to a greater number of students. We look forward to continuing our search for a temporary campus and to further the conversation on alleviating the shortage of international school spaces.