

Legco Panel on Education,  
HKSAR

**4<sup>th</sup> July 2012**

As a parent and NET teacher in HK, I am concerned at the aims, process and outcomes of the P1 allocation system (POA) in HK. I am representing my own views and not those of my professional body, NESTA. I believe NESTA has been raising similar issues with the EDB and LEGCO, specifically about helping its members get suitable schools for their children.

The POA issues affect a much larger section of HK society and reveal the true dysfunction of the system, for many and therefore deserve wider scrutiny and reform by stakeholders.

I emailed my concerns to the EDB in the last few weeks (**letter one** below) and their reply only explained the current POA process and as such was unhelpful at the least, and evasive at worst.

My reply to the EDB is enclosed (**letter 2 below**).

I propose Legco raise and act on these issues in their meetings for the benefit of the many tens of thousands of families deeply and negatively affected by the P1 allocation process. I am willing to take part in further correspondence or even attend meetings about the issues.

I have worked in DSS, aided and private schools in HK and have a deep knowledge of the system's strengths and failings, as well as getting two bilingual children of my own, into suitable schools.

Thanks for your kind attention.

Yours Sincerely

Patrick James Gilbert

**Letter one** 5<sup>th</sup> June 2012 to EDB

Also sent to 'letters to editor' SCMP newspaper:

Dear Sir/Madam,

As an educator and parent in HK, I am very concerned about the complexity and effectiveness of the P1 Allocation System in HK. It is a deeply flawed system causing massive stress and dissatisfaction for many, if not most applicants especially for those from 'mixed' families or minorities.

Is anything being done to overhaul this ridiculously cumbersome system? Is anybody studying its effects? Is it being reformed on a regular basis to meet the needs of society? A meaningful response from the EDB would be appreciated.

Regards,

Patrick Gilbert

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**Letter two** Fri, 29 Jun 2012 to EDB 5<sup>th</sup> June 2012

Thanks for your reply. It does however, not answer any of the key issues raised by my original letter. It is mostly just a rehash of the Edb policy position of which I am aware of already.

My original concerns are:

1) "a deeply flawed system (for P1 allocation) causing massive stress and dissatisfaction for many, if not most applicants especially for those from 'mixed' families or minorities." Mixed families, of which there are thousands in HK include children who can learn in both English and Chinese. Perhaps for whatever reason, the children may be fluent in English and Chinese but better suited to a school teaching mostly in English but also teaching Chinese Language and using Chinese in daily admin.

Many DSS schools do this. Is the Edb reviewing how DSS schools, private schools and International schools are required to allocate their places as part of a POA system review? If the P1 allocation system is so effective, how does that explain the huge number of parents hugely stressed out, even desperate, trying to get a suitable school for their kids, especially the "knocking on door" syndrome that we see every year in June, where students need to go through up to 3 interviews in each school while begging for a P1 place.

This syndrome clearly contravenes and contradicts your statement that "The (POA) system) disallow any forms of assessment in admitting Primary One students.

2) In my original letter, I also asked

"Is anything being done to overhaul this ridiculously cumbersome system? Is anybody studying its effects? Is it being reformed on a regular basis to meet the needs of society?"

Your answer ignored these points and just reinforced how complicated, inflexible and unsuccessful the system really is.

3) In as far as my own suggestions go:

a) Why does the Edb classify all students as either Chinese speaking or non Chinese speaking? This is one of the root causes of the system's problem. Would it be better / is it possible to recognize other needs such as those for "mixed" families outlined above.

b) I recall DSS schools used to have a quota for students placed by the EDB. Why has that been phased out?

c) Are enough restrictions in place to limit new arrivals from any region outside HK taking up places in all types of schools and blocking longer term residents from those schools?

d) What studies are being done to review and reform the allocation system to meet society's pluralistic needs?

I regret to say that your reply was unhelpful as it failed to answer the key questions posed.

Finally, this issue is being diligently discussed by Nesta, the NET teachers' professional body. Do you have any objection to your correspondence being submitted on their forum (without your name). Otherwise, I will just paraphrase your reply.

Thanks for your attention on this very important topic.

Looking forward to a more meaningful response.

Yours Sincerely,

Patrick Gilbert