



Hong Kong Unison Limited
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For information on 8th June 2015

**Submission to the Panel on Education of the Legislative Council
on enhancing Chinese learning and teaching for non-Chinese speaking students**

1. Hong Kong Unison has been following up closely with concerned stakeholders, including scholars, principals, teachers, ethnic minority parents and students, on the implementation of the Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework (“Learning Framework”). Despite efforts made by the government, Hong Kong Unison is concerned about the effectiveness of the funding support and appropriateness of the Learning Framework for non-Chinese speaking (“NCS”) students to learn Chinese.

Curriculum and Teaching Materials

2. Teachers opined that the Learning Framework is essentially a ‘breakdown’ of objectives and expected learning outcomes of the mainstream curriculum. An explicit and systematic curriculum is necessary so that teachers can set strategies to help NCS students learn Chinese. Many Chinese teachers, school administrators and academics continue to express disappointment over the lack of a specific curriculum for second language learners.
3. Many teachers feel that there is a lack of appropriate teaching materials for NCS students to successfully learn Chinese. Currently, there is no standard across the board on teaching materials. Teachers opined that language backgrounds, cultures and learning characteristics of NCS students should be well addressed and incorporated into designing teaching materials.

Stage Learning Objectives

4. Teachers expressed concern that these small steps, objectives, and expected learning outcomes in the Learning Framework are just descriptions for measuring the Chinese proficiency of an NCS student in the mainstream curriculum. Teachers have not been provided with any guidance on the targets students are expected to meet at a certain grade. Without specific grade learning objectives, parents have no idea on the level of Chinese their children are at, as different schools teach the Chinese language at different levels even at the same grade.
5. Once the graded learning outcomes are agreed and set, assessment tools, teaching materials, teaching and learning activities, teachers’ trainings can be discussed and planned accordingly to help ethnic minority students learn the Chinese language in a systematic and thorough manner.

Assessment Tools

6. There is no assessment tool for Chinese as a second language (“CSL”). NCS students, under the Learning Framework, continue to participate in the Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA) at Primary 3 and Secondary 6, and the DSE (if they are up to par) with other ethnic Chinese students. Teachers and scholars criticize that the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) Chinese Examination and other non-local Chinese examinations are by no



means appropriate assessment tools for NCS students on CSL. An internationally and locally recognized examination should be developed for CSL, with a level that strikes a balance between the need for further studies and working in Hong Kong, and testing the abilities of NCS students in Chinese language after years of study in the Hong Kong education system.

Professional Support

7. Many teachers find such professional support inadequate and not helpful for teaching second language learners. A CSL curriculum would work only when teachers learn to respect the unique cultural identities of NCS children and understand them. Cultural sensitivity and pedagogy in teaching a second language should be included in teachers' professional training to promote an inclusive and respectful teaching and learning environment that encourages, motivates and inspires NCS students to learn Chinese. It is a must that schools accepting NCS students have teachers trained in teaching CSL (based on a CSL curriculum) and cultural sensitivity.
8. In order to provide more incentives for teachers to attend specialized training, it is suggested that the government reference experiences from other countries such as Canada, where teachers must acquire specialized qualifications/certifications before they can teach English as a second language, and enjoy salary increments to recognize their qualifications. The government should consider subsidizing such certifications.

Parental Involvement

9. More support should be allocated on workshops for NCS parents to strengthen collaboration in support for their children's learning of Chinese. To date, the Education Bureau ("EDB") has only conducted two parents meeting since September 2014, to explain to parents the Learning Framework. Parent's involvement is important in children's learning especially in early years. Apart from educators, parents should be included in the consultation for the Learning Framework. Without parents' involvement, the efforts would not work. Parents could be an important push factor for NCS students to learn Chinese. Schools admitting NCS are encouraged to take initiatives to communicate with parents in different modes such as district study circles, so parents would participate, encourage and promote learning Chinese, and build role models in their communities.

Eliminating De Facto Racial Desegregation

10. A Chinese-speaking environment definitely benefits the learning of Chinese for NCS students. The situation of aggregation of ethnic minorities in certain schools and segregation of ethnic minorities from ethnic Chinese students in the same school has not improved significantly since 2013/14. Although the EDB states that ethnic minority parents are free to choose any public and subsidized school, and claims that *de facto* racial segregation is merely a result of parents choosing to put their children into school with high concentration of ethnic minority students, Hong Kong Unison latest research (*attached*) found no evidence that *de facto* racial segregation in Hong Kong's public education system is a result of ethnic minority parent's preference to place their children into racially segregated schools.



11. Scholars, students and principals of former designated schools, feel it is of utmost importance to provide integration opportunities to foster collaborative learning and cultivate cultural awareness rather than provide remedial measures. An inclusive education policy embracing the diversities of different ethnicities in an immersed Chinese language environment should be in place.

Other Recommendations

12. Accountability and transparency of funds spent should be enhanced. This due diligence with respect to budget allocation to specifically address the learning needs of EM students is critical to oversight, assessment and evaluation of success of policies. Such reporting should be made available to concerned stakeholders.
13. We urge the EDB to establish a Chinese-as-a-Second Language working group, to include not only departments like the Curriculum Development Council and the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, but also education researchers, frontline teachers, and administrators, ethnic minority parents and students to include a wider range of stakeholders to develop a concrete curriculum of CSL, stage learning objectives, assessment tools for CSL, appropriate teaching materials, and effective teachers' training.
14. If non-Chinese speaking students from the outset can benefit from a Chinese language learning policy, their Chinese capabilities will enhance their competitiveness towards better opportunities in further study and employment in Hong Kong. Experts agree that the best time to acquire language ability is during the early formative years. Chinese learning must begin as early as kindergarten for the student to have a real chance to improve their social mobility and work prospects in the future. The government should develop and monitor the implementation of a CSL policy in early childhood education for NCS students.



For information on 8th June 2015

Research on Ethnic Minority Parental Choice in Primary School Selection
Executive Summary

1. Hong Kong Unison conducted a research to investigate if ethnic minorities have real and informed choices in primary school selection. The Education Bureau ('EDB') states that ethnic minority parents are free to choose any public and subsidized school, and posits that *de facto* racial segregation is merely a result of parents choosing to put their children into school with high concentration of ethnic minority students. The existence of racially segregated schools in Hong Kong violates anti-discrimination laws and is not conducive for ethnic minority children to interact with and integrate into the Hong Kong mainstream society.
2. Hong Kong Unison administered in-person and mailed surveys to 99 ethnic minority and 143 Chinese parents of children from kindergarten-3 to primary-3 respectively, between December 2014 and April 2015 in Yau Tsim Mong, Yuen Long, Sham Shui Po and Tuen Mun districts to explore factors that parents considered important in choosing a primary school for their children; parents' satisfaction with the school choices; racial composition in the selected school; sources of information parents used in deciding primary school choice; and respective usefulness of such information.

Major Findings and Analysis

3. **Ethnic minority parents did not prefer their children enter racially segregated schools.**
73% of the surveyed ethnic minority parents ranked "most of the students in the school are ethnic minorities" as the least important factor in primary school choice. They considered quality of teachers, welcoming attitudes towards ethnic minority students, graduates' English and Chinese abilities, and support measures in Chinese learning the most important factors.
4. **More percentage of ethnic minority parents expressed dissatisfaction in the school's racial composition where there are many ethnic minorities and few Chinese.**
43% of the surveyed ethnic minority parents whose children attend "racially segregated" schools were not satisfied with the school being so few Chinese and majority ethnic minorities. Those who are in mainstream schools (majority Chinese and very few ethnic minorities) did not express dissatisfaction at all towards the school's racial composition.
5. **There is a mismatch in the factors ethnic minority parents considered important in selecting schools and the satisfaction they experienced in schools.**
Graduates' ability in English, quality of teachers, support measures in Chinese learning, and graduates' Chinese abilities were four top most important factors for ethnic minority parents who chose to put their children in "racially segregated" schools. Incidentally, former "designated" schools, due to the long history of support for ethnic minority students, may have a good reputation in English proficiency and better understanding in ethnic minorities'



needs. However, these parents were most dissatisfied with support measures in Chinese learning, quality of teachers, and the proficiency in Chinese and English. These schools did not meet their expectations possibly due to incorrect assumption or misinformation.

6. Inaccessibility to primary school information for ethnic minority parents.

While Chinese parents rated official information sources such as EDB websites and booklets e.g. Primary School Profile moderately useful, ethnic minorities ranked it the second least useful amongst 11 sources. Ethnic minority parents mentioned there is barrier in accessing information. The English version of Primary School Profile is available only online (i.e. not a printed booklet like the Chinese version), and important information such as ‘School Characteristics’ (i.e. School Management, Learning and Teaching Plan, Students Support, Home-school Co-operation, School Ethos, and Future Development) are different from the Chinese version or not available in English or on school websites who are in Chinese only. Of the surveyed ethnic minority parents, only 3% can read and write Chinese (corresponding to data in 2011 Census).

Conclusion

7. Our research found no evidence that *de facto* racial segregation in Hong Kong’s public education system is a result of ethnic minority parent’s preference to place their children into racially segregated schools.

There is clearly a mismatch in what ethnic minority parents considered important when choosing primary schools for their children and the satisfaction they experienced in schools; suggesting in reality, they cannot make real and informed choices for their children’s education. They likely did not intentionally put their children in schools with majority ethnic minorities and very few Chinese and contributed to the *de facto* racial segregation situation. Most parents recognize the importance of their children integrating into the Hong Kong Society and the need to equip their children with good Chinese skills so they could have an opportunity in Hong Kong.

Recommendations

8. Of the surveyed parents, 63% have lived in Hong Kong 15 years or less and only 10% studied in Hong Kong. Making an informed choice in primary school may be difficult for ethnic minority parents. 81% of parents we interviewed were females, the majority of whom are likely to be the primary caregivers and housewives who may have few technological skills and limited connection to the mainstream society. Reliable and accurate information, such as ethos and characteristics of schools and support available to non-Chinese speaking students in schools are very important to facilitate parents make real and informed choice for their children. The situation of *de facto* segregation can be rectified if the government and schools improve information and communication with ethnic minority parents and ensure appropriate support to ethnic minority students is available in schools.

9. Transparency and accessibility to ethnic minority education information and support measures should be enhanced for ethnic minorities.



10. We urge the government to review, improve and monitor the Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Framework ('the Learning Framework') on curriculum, teaching materials, specific stage learning objectives, assessment tools and provide more professional support to teachers in teaching Chinese as a second language ('CSL'). Support measures for students and teachers should be available in every school with ethnic minority students.
11. The medium of instruction of schools should be included (as a separate column along with School Type, Finance Type, Religion, etc.) in the printed and online copies of *Primary School Lists by School Net for Discretionary Places Admission Stage* for easy reference to ethnic minority parents when selecting schools. Appendix 3¹ in *Notes on How to Complete the 'Application Form for Admission to Primary One'* should be reviewed to include all schools that do not only use Chinese as the learning medium. The current list of 8 schools in Appendix 3 is a partial list which encourages parents to select schools with majority ethnic minority students.
12. English information should be provided the same as Chinese information, including printed booklet on *Primary School Profile* by districts; "School Characteristics" on individual school information sheet; and information on the Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Framework².
13. Information such as Chinese curriculum for ethnic minority students, teachers with professional development in teaching CSL, intensive learning and teaching modes adopted³, and additional measures, etc. of each school should be made available to parents so they can make informed choice that best suits their children.

The EDB and schools should improve communications with ethnic minority parents.

14. The government should urge schools to share individual student's stage learning objectives and related assessments on Chinese learning with parents regularly so parents can monitor their children's progress and seek additional support if needed.
15. The government should establish guidelines for schools to improve communications between schools and ethnic minority families, such as need for English notices and circulars, availability of interpreters and ethnic minority teaching assistants, and organising parents' talks and workshops, etc.
16. We urge the government to take more initiatives and be proactive to communicate with and engage ethnic minority parents. More briefing sessions and education workshops should be

¹ If parents/guardians indicate in the "Application Form for Admission to Primary One", that the applicant child cannot use Chinese as the learning medium, they can choose any schools in their residing school net in Category B as well as schools from any school nets which traditionally have a higher intake of NCS students (appendix 3).

² 中國語文課程第二語言學習架構專頁; The content of this page does not provide English version.
<http://www.edb.gov.hk/tc/curriculum-development/kla/chi-edu/second-lang/resource.html>;

³ Intensive learning and teaching modes adopted by schools in 2014/15 are summarized as (1) pull-out learning; (2) split-class/group learning; (3) after-school consolidation; (4) increasing Chinese Language lesson time; (5) Learning Chinese across the curriculum; (5) Co-teaching with 2 or more teachers/teaching assistants to provide in-class support.



conducted to guide parents to understand that their choice in primary schools will have a major impact on the future of their children, as some of them with limited educational background themselves do not fully appreciate the crucial importance of early Chinese language teaching as a foundation for secondary learning and future opportunities. The government should continue to encourage them to choose schools with an immersed Chinese language environment taking into account the aspirations and needs of their children. The EDB should examine the feasibility of providing information booklets and a dedicated website for non-Chinese speaking parents/students to enable more readily such information.

The government should monitor racial composition in schools

17. To prevent the *de facto* racial segregation situation in the public education system, under the new funding mode, the government should monitor the ratio of Chinese to ethnic minority students in schools to ensure a diverse yet Chinese-speaking learning environment.