

**The Government must enhance its support  
for the diversified development of children**

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# **Motion 1: The Government must enhance its support for the diversified development of children**

## **Introduction**

Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that, “The child has the right to education, to develop his or her personality, talents and abilities to the fullest, respect for human rights, others and the natural environment, and a sense of responsibility.”

Many schools urge their students to focus on studying. The result is a societal overemphasis on test scores and academic performance that prohibits students from achieving a well-rounded development in non-academic areas, discovering their own interests and making good use of their strengths.

In light of this, it is our opinion that the government must reinforce its policy on the diversification of education. Children should receive a diversified education and more diverse opportunities for exploration at school, thus allowing them to find and extend their own interests in their future development and personal growth.

The motion aims to provide more opportunities for children to utilize, explore and extend their strengths and interests. The areas of development include science, technology, engineering and mathematics education (STEM), sports and arts, languages, and so on.

## **Background of the questionnaire**

In order to measure the opinion of different stakeholders, our group designed two questionnaires for primary and secondary school students, and for the general public, respectively. A total of 373 completed student questionnaires and 163 public questionnaires were received.

## **Current situation**

In the survey, nearly 60% of the interviewees thought our school education puts too much emphasis on traditional subjects, namely Chinese, English, Mathematics and Science, the four subjects that have always been seen as the only yardsticks for assigning academic and career opportunities, while other subjects are widely neglected. The truth is, not every student is good at examinations. According to the survey, approximately 76% of the children gave up on their interests because of a lack of resources and opportunities. Those who lacked the opportunities to pursue their interests ended up going to school only for duty's sake. With their interests stifled and talents wasted, the students became passive, lost and hesitant in choosing their future. In Hong Kong, a

university degree has been considered crucial, yet with a yearly admission rate of 18%, many students have no choice but to take up tutoring classes. The immense pressure has caused many cases of child suicide and other unfortunate events. In fact, children have unlimited potential, and they deserve more options and resources to help them explore and develop their own potential and interests. As long as the society affords them appropriate resources and opportunities, they will be able to repay the society in the future. Therefore, the government needs to provide a more comprehensive education and a diversified support system. This will only maximize the children's opportunities to learn and to broaden their own horizons.

Although many applied learning courses are available as electives in secondary education, these are only provided for Form Five and Six students. Moreover, under the current Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) system, the highest score of an applied learning course is only equal to a score of level 4 in Category A subjects, making these courses less useful as far as applying to university is concerned. Therefore, applied learning courses are not particularly helpful. The government must improve its diversified education and support system to let children truly develop their strengths.

### **Examples of children's diversified development overseas**

In foreign countries, diversified development is an indispensable element in the growth of children. It allows a child to come in contact with and develop his or her abilities in different domains. This is an area in which Hong Kong still falls behind. Therefore, the territory needs to draw lessons from the following countries:

In the United States, examination results are only a part of the equation. Many other factors, such as personal interests, awards and specialties are all taken into consideration, making society less likely to accept the "teach to examination" approach. All this strengthens society's emphasis on diversified education and allows children more opportunities to gain different kinds of knowledge. On the contrary, a majority of Hong Kong's higher education institutions focus mainly on examination results. This makes society overemphasize academic performance, and many students who do not excel in this area are denied the opportunity to further their education.

In Australia, English is the only compulsory course in high school education, where students can take as many as twelve elective courses. Young learners can choose the subjects they like and drop those they don't. Apart from this, vocational education courses are also provided in high schools. Programmes are jointly organized by schools and local vocational institutes, covering professions such as construction, retail, tourism

and others. Students can choose the courses based on their own ability and career planning.

By contrast, the education system in Hong Kong leaves much to be desired. The systems in the U.S. and Australia are known respectively for their diversity and flexibility. Hong Kong would do well to learn from these two countries in improving its own education system.

## **Recommendations**

### ***1. Promote the message and educate the public***

The government should expand its staff to help advocate for the importance of diversified development, and to popularize the idea by enhancing the public's understanding of this issue. The government should also conduct a territory-wide survey and organize a territory-wide forum at the end of every academic year, to gauge public opinion on the issue. Moreover, we hope the government will hold an exhibition day at the end of each academic year, where students can share their experience on how their potential and interests are enhanced, so as to enhance public understanding.

### ***2. Introduce compulsory lessons on diversified development at school***

In order to fully achieve the purpose of diversified development, children need to have more opportunities to explore and develop their potential from a variety of aspects. School is the best place for this to happen. Some schools have already set aside class hours for diversified development, either after examinations or during regular school days, during which students can choose various activities to participate in. With a compulsory implementation of the diversified development learning hours, schools can ensure that the students will be able to try different things and explore more topics. The hours should not be added to the existing class schedule; rather, the Education Bureau needs to adjust its traditional curriculum and make sure the students will not have to stay in school longer.

### ***3. Schools should provide registration methods for diversified development courses***

For the students to explore their interests with greater ease, we suggest that schools should take up a leading role and provide registration channels that allow students to learn more about, and eventually take part in, the courses of their choosing. Schools should act as a coordinated platform, where course information is posted and renewed on the intranet every month. Students would also be able to register on the intranet. These efforts will allow all students to explore their interests in different fields, helping them find their own potential and providing them with more options.

#### **4. Provide more subsidies for all students to apply for diversified development activities**

According to survey data, 73% of the 573 interviewees agreed that all students should be provided with subsidies to participate in diversified development courses. Therefore, we suggest the establishment of a Children's Diversified Development Fund that accepts applications from all children instead of only students in need, as originally proposed. The fund would reimburse the students for their actual expenses, and would be subject to a minimum participation time of one hour per week.

#### **5. The government needs to allocate resources for NGOs that organize different courses**

Social welfare agencies in Hong Kong now receive one-off payments from the government. This is a design with significant financial problems. Dr. Law Chi-kwong, the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, stated in his *The Pros and Cons of the Lump Sum Grant (LSG) Subvention System*, that in order to save sufficient budget for their operation, NGOs might lower staff salary, thus making these jobs less attractive and pushing experienced workers to work for the government instead. Under the LSG subvention system, it is obvious that a balance in budget for NGOs is very difficult to achieve. Therefore, the government should reform the existing subvention system and adopt a reimbursement approach, providing more flexibility to NGOs. The new system can help attract NGOs to organize more diverse activities for children, thus enabling students to have more opportunities for diversified youth development.

### **Conclusion**

Every child is unique. They have their own ambitions for their future. They should be the ones who are in charge of their paths ahead, with education serving as a mere assistance. However, the education system we have in place is instead a hindrance for children, burdening students with an overemphasis on academic achievements and the fact that one single open examination determines their future. We must review the existing homogeneity of education in Hong Kong.

Everyone has his or her own interests and talents, for sports, arts, music, and so on. Academic performance is only a part of the equation. A real education should not focus only on academic achievements, but also on opportunities that allow students to venture into different areas, find their own interests and strengths, and show their talents at school.

Therefore, as a start, the government should adopt a policy to promote diversified development among school students, in order to let them find their own future paths and restore their hope for the future. Let's bring back the "happiness" to Hong Kong children!

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