

To Our Readers



Over the past few years, the awareness of our national identity has been the core value of our education policies. A clearer perception of Taiwan's identity and the enhancement of our social care systems are two of this Ministry's four major education policies. The first is partly achieved by providing our young a better understanding of this island's history, culture and marine resources. The second includes the issue of education in our mother tongue education and in the historical heritage of our homeland. We can thus speak of a Mother Tongue Education and Homeland Education.

Taiwan has diverse cultural groups of people and this Ministry plans to encourage more young people to learn and use their mother tongues--Taiwanese, Hakka or any of the 43 indigenous languages. The government has established two TV channels, one

broadcasts in Hakka and the other in indigenous languages. After Mandarin, Taiwanese is the second most popular language in Taiwan. In order to provide a complete and well-rounded Taiwanese learning and teaching system, the MOE developed a standard Taiwanese pin-yin system and established a vocabulary with 300 of the most frequently used words. The MOE has also set up a consultation team to help schools teach mother tongue courses. With these measures, we hope to help Taiwan's many local cultures have a renaissance.

Together with Mother Tongue Education, we hope to utilize Homeland Education as a catalyst to promote the overall recognition of our national identity. Taiwan's long history of governance by a single political party had the unfortunate outcome of neglecting for many years, the education of our

people in our homeland history and literature. Fortunately, in the year 2000, many scholars put themselves to the task of designing homeland education courses. The MOE now encourages schools to increase the number of homeland education courses in their curriculums.

The MOE is also committed to help address Taiwan's many pressing social concerns. One proof of this commitment is the establishment of Digital Opportunity Centers. This is our way of narrowing the digital gap between rural and urban areas. We have sought the involvement of college and university student volunteers to teach residents how to use the Internet. By using state-of-the-art information technology, residents of rural communities have a better opportunity to promote the culture and history of their own rural towns to the world. On the other hand, decreasing the digital gap also helps children in urban areas understand their home country and of Taiwan's unique place in the world.

Enhancing the quality of vocational education is another significant policy of this Ministry. Globalization has given rise to the easy availability of skilled labor at low wages. Domestic workers who lack technical skills are displaced. In view of this, we need to develop a skilled workforce, and a sound vocational education system is one way of doing this. Vocational education enables our young people to acquire practical skills instead of just having as an objective that of passing the university/college entrance exams. According to our latest surveys, the number of students enrolled in senior vocational schools increased by approximately 10%. To maintain the quality of teaching, the government has set aside a budget to help vocational schools

establish industry-academia partnerships. This allows vocational school students to gain practical experience and to pursue higher education degrees.

When I was appointed as Minister of Education three years ago, I asked my colleagues in this Ministry to have the liberalization of education as our guiding principle. I am pleased to say that adopting this principle has given birth to some major reforms such as the "One Standard, Multiple Textbooks" policy, that allows teachers to choose or even write their own textbooks; the "University and College Multi-channel Admissions" policy, that provides young people more channels to enter universities or colleges; the NT\$5 billion "Five-Year Development Plan for World Class Universities and Research Centers of Excellence Project" that encourages higher education to enhance the quality of its content; and the policy of supporting institutions of higher education have international education exchanges with institutions in other countries—this trains our students to acquire a global view.

We are now on the irreversible path of educational reform. Our hope is that we arrive at our destination of an educational system that is more diversified, creative, and equitable.

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Minister of Education