

# Preschool education to be more affordable

## Rise in kindergarten enrollment to boost key education sector

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By 2020, the targeted gross enrollment ratio of kindergartens will increase to 85 percent, with 80 percent of those kindergartens run by the government or private capital but providing affordable services.

The increase in the ratio, a statistical measure used in the education sector, was stipulated in a guideline jointly released by the general offices of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council last week.

A broadly based and quality public service system will be established for preschool education by 2020, with substantial governmental support and regulated operations in the sector. Big and mega-cities will take the lead in accomplishing the goal.

According to the Ministry of Education, China's gross enrollment ratio into kindergartens was 64.5 percent in 2012, with 36.86 million children being educated. The ratio climbed by 15.1 percentage points in five years. The country had 255,000 kindergartens last year teaching about 46 million children, and the gross enrollment ratio was 79.6 percent.

Also by 2020, a training system for kindergarten teachers will be set up with a focus on colleges. More than 200,000 students majoring in preschool education will join those currently teaching. Meanwhile, the country will also train another 1.5 million kindergarten headmasters and teachers.

The guideline says public kindergartens will account for at least 50 percent of all such institutions nationwide, another 30 percent will be affordable kindergartens run by private investors but offer services charging no more than public ones. Private profitable kindergartens can take the remaining 20 percent.

If these targets are fulfilled, about 3 million more children will get into affordable kindergartens in the next two years as the country strengthens public services of preschool education following a series of recent scandals in privately operated ones.

Wang Xing, a 36-year-old IT engineer in the Changping district in Beijing, took turns with his father to line up overnight for public kindergarten enrollment for a daughter in August.

Like Wang, many parents found it hard to get their children into public kindergartens, which usually charge less and are managed more strictly.

For example, a public kindergarten in Beijing usually charges around 1,000 yuan



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(\$144) per month for one pupil, only 10 to 25 percent of the money paid to private ones.

"For my overnight queue three months ago, I found a shortage of public or affordable kindergartens in this huge city. That's why my family spoke highly of the new guideline," Wang said.

Wang said many of his friends expect more public kindergartens to be available near their own communities, and hope the new guideline will provide better affordable preschool education.

According to the 2017 National Statisti-

cal Report on Education Development, privately-run kindergartens accounted for 62.9 percent of the country's overall number last year. It means about one-in-seven communities or villages had one public kindergarten, while other children had to go to private ones, which are more expensive and have been plagued by scandals like child abuse.

Meanwhile, on average, the pupil-teacher ratio was 18.91 in kindergartens last year, much higher than primary schools and high schools.

Xiong Bingqi, deputy president of the 21st Century Education Research Institute, said the new regulations in the guideline follow a series of scandals in preschool education, including shortage of supplies and poor quality of services and teachers, even for those very expensive kindergartens.

Affordable preschool education should be boosted by building more public kindergartens and providing support to privately-run ones, he said.

For those who want to earn large profits

by running kindergartens, the guideline was a warning, but it's beneficial for bringing preschool education back to what it should achieve, said Yu Feng, assistant professor in law at East China Normal University in Shanghai.

The guideline prohibits private kindergartens from stock market flotations. Education is a long process while capital pursues quick profits, and therefore these private kindergartens should offer high-quality services and educate children well, Yu said.

## POLICY RESPONSE

# Greater Bay area to play global role

By HU YONGQI

## Guangdong, HK and Macao to be center of world innovation

The National Development and Reform Commission said on Thursday six measures will be taken to build the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay into an area with a world-leading role.

The bay will be built as a center of international technological innovation, with a corridor connecting Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Hong Kong and Macao, the commission said. A comprehensive transport system will be built in the area to better connect Hong Kong and Macao with the mainland.

More effective exchanges of production will be achieved. A globally leading business environment will be built, with measures to promote trade liberalization, investment facilitation, and personnel exchanges.

Meanwhile, the area is set to work with Belt and Road countries in infrastructure connectivity, finance and ecological and environmental protection.

Guangdong will be supported in building industrial parks with Hong Kong and Macao to expand economic cooperation, learning from pilot zones in Qianhai in Shenzhen, Nansha in

Guangzhou and Hengqin in Zhuhai. Public services will be strengthened to help Hong Kong and Macao residents, especially young people, to study, work and start businesses on the mainland.

## Private enterprises to get support in financing channels



The National Development and Reform Commission said a number of new policies will be released to support private enterprises in expanding financing channels, such as in the bond market.

Among these measures, the commission will support private companies in the issuing of bonds, support bond issuing for startup businesses, and work with financial management departments to support private enterprises in bond and equity financing.

Meanwhile, the necessary fiscal support and aid will be given to private enterprises, which had bond defaults due to tight cash flow, but are in line with China's economic restructuring.

## Access to be eased for medical institutes and professionals

Registration for medical institutes and professionals will be simplified, with a shorter period of approval time and fewer documents required, said a notice released last week by the National Health Commission and the State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Medical institutes, doctors and nurses can register online, and they can check how the procedures are being done, the notice said.

Starting on Nov 10, profit-making medical institutes, including those solely owned by businesses from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, saw setup approval time cut to 20 days from the previous 30 days. The approval time for medical institute registration was cut to 30 days from 45 days. The approval time for practice registration for doctors and nurses was shortened to 12 days from 20.

## Weather risks to be dealt with in major areas of production

Measures to ensure safety in production to combat risks arising from bad weather, low temperatures, rain and snow, were issued in an urgent notice from the Work Safety Commission of the State Council last week.

The notice said some companies did not make adequate investment in work safety and relevant equipment, while iron and steel factories are more vulnerable when prices are surging amid short supplies of coal, concrete, and other basic chemical products. These problems might become more prominent at the end of the year and key sectors must be checked to avoid overproduction, it added.



## Policy digest

### Pilot project for govt websites

A pilot integration of government websites will improve management and services, according to a work plan released by the State Council General Office on Nov 9.

The plan will enhance connectivity among government websites and reduce information barriers so that online government services can be better accessed.

It recognized problems of scattered development, data disconnections and inconvenient usage for the government websites.

The use of big data, cloud computing and artificial intelligence will be further promoted in developing government websites, and interconnected platforms will be developed, the work plan said.

It also called for more coordinated planning and top-level design to optimize the allocation of technology, funds and personnel. Stricter budget and program management will be implemented to prevent repetitions in development.

The government will pilot the program in 10 provincial-level areas, including Jilin, Anhui, Shandong provinces as well as Lhasa in the Tibet autonomous region.

Government websites in these areas will be integrated by the end of December 2019 and these websites will prioritize unifying standards, technological platforms, safety protection, maintenance and supervision.

An integrated platform must be developed at provincial levels, or at both provincial and municipal levels, so that the platform can provide government websites with support in website and service item management, information release as well as user and identity registration.

Standards will be formulated for the information and data provided by the websites as well as domain names, major functions and webpage setups.

The government websites will develop an information resource database so that they can better aggregate the information and services. They are also required to provide one-stop services and step up efforts to expand administrative information, data and resources through new media platforms so that more services can be accessed through mobile devices.

Safety protection at the websites will be improved to prevent attacks and infiltration, the work plan said. Internet safety at government websites will be further enhanced, and they will be required to prioritize the procurement of domestic software and hardware as part of the efforts to ensure online safety.

There will be clearer responsibilities for operators of the government platform and websites in safety management. An early warning system will be established to cope with unusual circumstances, it added.

The pilot areas are required to include the integration of government websites and their maintenance in government budgets. More oversight and performance evaluation will be conducted.

The General Office of the State Council will promote the pilot efforts nationwide before April 2020, the work plan said.

### Key group to look at pollution



Vice-Premier Han Zheng will lead the group for the second national census on sources of pollution, according to a statement by the State Council released on Nov 12.

Han will be the leader of the 18-member group. Ding Xuedong, a deputy secretary-general of the State Council, and Li Ganjie, minister of ecology and environment, will be deputy leaders of the group, along with Ning Jizhe, head of the National Bureau of Statistics.

The group also comprise of members from 14 ministry-level departments. The office of the group will be established at the Ministry of Ecology and Environment. Zhao Yingmin, vice-minister of ecology and environment, will be director of the group's office, the statement said.

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