

# **An Educational Reform of School Culture for Sustainable Development**

**– A Case of Educational Reform in Korea –**

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## **I. General Overview of Education Reform in Korea**

The Presidential Commission On Education Reform in Korea (PCER, hereafter) has presented reform proposals to the President on the four separate occasions. The proposals are being implemented by the Committee on the Education Reform Implementation. Although the Minister of Education is in charge of the implementation, Ministers of twelve departments are involved in the implementation of the reform proposals.

The reform proposals are broken down into 120 (action plan) tasks, which can be categorized into four areas:

Primary and secondary education (53 tasks): establishment of school council, introduction of student records, activation of after school programs, improvement in conditions of education, reform of school culture and etc.

Higher education (19 tasks): encouragement of autonomy for college admission quota, implementation of a minimum credit system for college major, improvement in college admission procedures and etc.

Continuing education and vocational training (25 tasks): establishing vocational education and training system (legislation of three laws on vocational training) and etc.

Building up an infrastructure for education: increase in educational budget to 5% of GNP, establishment of cyber information center for academic research, establishment of educational deregulation committee and etc.

Of the 120 tasks, 80 tasks (66.7%) are currently under implementation. Actions are being taken to enact laws for the 14 tasks. Studies are under way to work out policy for the 26 remaining tasks.

Out of the 120 reform tasks, special attention will be given to the innovation of school culture because it seems to be the most relevant area for the topic of sustainable development among the education reform proposals in Korea.

## **II. Reform of School Culture to establish Civic Norms Among Students**

Liberal democracy is the leading principle of The Republic of Korea as a nation for its sustainable development and will continue to be so. School provides formal education for the future members of society. Schools, therefore, should help students cultivate the aptitude, capacity, and personality required of a citizen of a democratic society.

For this reason, civic education for the upcoming generation has become a significant assignment throughout the world, not just in Korea. Schools in Korea, however, have comprised many democratic elements in its system, administration, content and methodology of education. School organization, administration, structure and environment have been inappropriate for teaching students democratic ways of life and forming the personality of democratic citizens.

School culture, in this respect, should be changed to allow students to learn and experience genuine democracy and civic virtues through everyday activities in school. As many scholars say, latent curriculum is powerful in changing and influencing students' behavior. Seven specific and concrete proposals were made to ensure the innovation of school culture.

### *A. Establishment of School Culture Based on the Obedience to Regulations*

The rights and responsibilities of students should be observed.

1. Depending upon school characteristics and realities at different education levels (up to high school), regulations should be revised to be appropriate and applicable.

2. In college, the autonomy of each and every school sector, including students, should be respected as much as possible. College regulations should reflect this principle and be applied consistently.

3. School regulation should define clearly and realistically the rights, responsibilities and obligations of students.

4. School regulations should become the genuine guideline of school management.

### *B. Expansion of and Support for Student Autonomy*

Student autonomy in elementary and middle schools should be substantially extended and promoted to help students cultivate civic virtues.

1. The rights, responsibilities, and activity areas of student organizations should be clearly defined, and teachers should respect their decisions

2. For school picnics, cultural tours, and field trips, student opinions should be respected, and each class should be allowed to organize these events.

3. Class meetings and club activities should be initiated.

4. Support for various student activities and associations should be expanded.

### *C. Democratization of Communication within School*

Communications among different sectors of school should be democratized.

1. Various school meetings should be organized in a democratic way, by

- Cultivating the capability to conduct rational, democratic discussions, and

- Cultivating the capability to conduct meetings.

2. The appointment of officers and operation of the school board and various committees should be democratized. The procedure and practice of constant mutual cooperation should be secured between the administrative staff and the school board members.

3. Various school events and group activities should be organized in a democratic way.

4. Communication channels among the different constituencies of the school —teachers, students, parents, etc.—

should be utilized and activated. School newspapers and broadcasting are good examples.

#### *D. Encouragement of Specifically Designed Civic Education Programs*

The employment of specifically designed civic education programs is encouraged to provide opportunities to solve rationally different problems particular to each school.

1. Each school is encouraged to devise and administer independent civic education programs as follows.

##### *For Examples of Various Civic Education Programs*

A student court is used as an education program to offer an opportunity in demonstration how to resolve conflicts using due process.

An ombudsman program protects the rights and interests of vulnerable students. The third party (teachers, parents or community leaders) accepts and handles petitions from students for fair results.

Mock autonomy activities helps students practice and improve competence in democratic autonomy and to heighten their awareness and understanding of the overall administrative system of democratic society. The mock congress is a good example.

#### *E. Establishment of Student Supervision Methods to Respect Human Dignity*

Corporal punishment is no longer an effective method for supervising students of the 21st century. Instead, it often fails to produce educational effects, and leaves psychological damage, and reproduces violence instead. Student supervision, therefore, should be reorganized to respect the human rights of students.

1. Corporal punishment should be banned in schools, and the student's human dignity should be respected.

2. Corporal punishment practices between older and younger students in schools and student associations should be banned.

##### *Definition of Corporal punishment :*

An act by teachers (or older students) of inducing corporal pain in students (or younger students) by using devices or parts of the human body, such as a hand or foot.

3. Based on professional judgment, however, schools or teachers should be allowed to apply appropriately other punishments besides corporal punishment to supervise students. Each city and provincial board of education can develop and practice diversified, educationally meaningful supervisory methods.

4. Education laws should reflect this ban on corporal punishment, and city and provincial boards of education can design and practice detailed regulations.

#### *F. Routine Use of Polite Language in School*

Polite language should be used routinely in schools to initiate an environment in which different members of the school respect one another and to stimulate the use of respectful language in society.

1. Polite language should be routinely used for school official activities, student meetings, and classroom instructions.

2. Any verbal abuse should be banned completely at school.

#### Definition of polite language :

- Polite language is a language of formality that can be used universally to anyone regardless of age or status.
- It is a language of casual deference in which sentences end with "hamnida," "haseyo," or "haeyo." It is different from formal usage of substantial deference.

#### Classic occasions of polite language :

- broadcasters' language in news or entertainment programs
- public speeches (those at large public gatherings, for example)
- language used in discussions and debates at small and large public gatherings
- language used over the phone when two parties do not know each other

#### *G. Establishment of a School Community Free from Violence*

The following measures have been recommended to protect students from violence and to provide counseling for problematic students.

1. Violence awareness programs should be devised and implemented as appropriate at different levels of education :

kindergartens, elementary school, middle and high schools, and colleges.

The Violence Awareness Program is an education program to help establish the proper understanding of the corporal and psychological damage induced by violence and to heighten public awareness of the danger and negative impact of violence. Through this program, students at different levels of kindergarten, elementary, middle and high school, and college are expected to understand better the criminal, inhumane, and unethical nature of violence as well as the consequent corporal and psychological damage and pains. This program will also prepare students to deal with such incidents.

2. The legislation of the tentatively titled "Youth Violence Preclusion and Prevention Act" is necessary as part of the governmental efforts to deflect and prevent school violence. This act should include the following conditions.

- assistance with and protection for violence victims
- organizations and networks for school violence prevention
- cooperative systems among related government sectors
- regulations on and support for voluntary, non-governmental organizations working for student protection
- establishment of return-to-school programs for violent students

3. Self-help efforts for school violence victims and their parents should be supported.

- Class and school transfers upon a student's or parents' request as well as short-term home schooling should be allowed.

Home schooling : A student can be allowed to study under the guidance of the parents for a fixed period of time based upon the request of the student or the parents and the approval of the school.

4. A referral system should be introduced so that school can commission specialists if a school finds it necessary for the counseling of the victimizers or the recuperation of the victims.

Referral system : When any victimizers or victims of school violence need professional counseling and action, they can be placed for specific orientation and treatment with specialists.

groups or organizations.

### III. The Implementation and Outcomes

Most of the seven proposals to reform school culture are now under implementation, with strong supports from every sector of the society. But the exception is the uses of corporal punishments and polite language.

The pros and cons are clear and are manifested between teachers and parents. Most teachers resist the ban of corporal punishment, as shown below, and the enforcement of using polite language in class and during school activities. On the contrary, parents and the general public favor the measures against corporal punishment and the use of polite language.

#### Teachers' Attitude on corporal Punishment

(1) Should always be allowed	10.0%
(2) Should be allowed if necessary	75.9%
(3) Only Non-corporal punishment is ok	10.6%
(4) Should not be allowed for any reason	3.1%
(5) Not decided	0.3%
(6) No response	0.1%

It is curious why so many teachers still favor corporal punishment. As shown below, many teachers believe that corporal punishment is effective.

#### Teachers' Attitude on the Effect of Corporal Punishment

(1) Very effective	32.9%
(2) Effective but not long	49.9%
(3) Not immediate effect but later	11.5%
(4) No effect	1.2%
(5) Don't know	3.4%
(6) No response	1.0%

The complete extinction of corporal punishment from schools is the core thrust of education reform concerned about the formation of a democratic culture in the schools of Korea. This reform task, however, can never be accomplished without the

help of teachers, who are now very pessimistic and cynical about the measures. This is the dilemma that we are now confronting.

Such reluctance from teachers on the ban of corporal punishment make the speed of the reform implementation vary according to the faith or will of the superintendent to stop corporal punishment. In fact, a superintendent in the southern part of Korea has taken an immediate action in accordance with the spirit of the reform as soon as the proposal had been promulgated. But many other high authorities of educational administration keep hesitating, being conscious of the resistance to the program by teachers.

It has always been well accepted that the success of education reform is heavily dependent upon the commitment of teachers. In the case of the proposed ban of corporal punishment, however, the majority of teachers are against the proposal. Despite the well-intendedness and necessity of the ban, its prospect is not certain because of the teachers' disengagement. To cope with this barrier is the pressing task in hand.

## References

The Presidential Commission on Education Reform The Republic of Korea, 1997, *Education Reform for the 21st Century — To Ensure Leadership in the Information and Globalization Era-*, Seoul, Korea.