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**Research on Ethnic Minority Parental Choice in  
Primary School Selection in Hong Kong**

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## Executive Summary

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. 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.

Hong Kong Unison administered surveys to 99 ethnic minority and 143 Chinese parents of children from Kindergarten 3 to Primary 3, between December 2014 and April 2015 in Yau Tsim Mong, Yuen Long, Sham Shui Po and Tuen Mun districts and followed up with some parents through interviews to explore factors that parents considered important in choosing a primary school for their children; parents’ satisfaction with the school they chose; racial composition in the selected school; sources of information parents used in making primary school choice; and respective usefulness of such information.

### Major Findings and Analysis

#### **1. Ethnic minority parents did not prefer their children enter racially segregated schools.**

When asked to consider 13 different school choice factors, “most of the students in the school are ethnic minorities” was considered unimportant by most ethnic minority parents, with 73% considering the factor “unimportant”, “of little importance” or “moderately important”. 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.

#### **2. Larger 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 having very few Chinese and majority ethnic minorities.

| <b>Categories of racial composition of children’s school</b>                                    | <b>Percentage of dissatisfied parents within the category</b> |
|---|---|
| Very few ethnic minority students; the rest of the students are ethnic Chinese                  | 0%  |
| Many ethnic minority students, but there are more Chinese student than ethnic minority students | 14%   |
| Ethnic minority-Chinese student ratio is about half-half  | 8%  |
| Many Chinese students, but there are more ethnic minority students than Chinese students        | 14%   |
| Very few Chinese students; the rest of the students are ethnic minority                         | 43%   |

### **3. Ethnic minority parents feel that there are no real, viable school choices available to their children**

Some ethnic minority parents feel that they have no real choice in the school places allocation process because they only find out after their children have enrolled that the school falls short of qualities that they deem important to their child's development.

We compared how high parents rated a factor affecting school choice versus how satisfied they were with their first-choice school in reality in terms of that factor. A negative difference implies that the parent is relatively dissatisfied with their chosen school in terms of a factor that they deemed important. Over 30% of interviewed ethnic minority parents were dissatisfied with important factors such as support measures in Chinese learning, quality of teachers, graduates' ability in Chinese and English.

In the qualitative interviews, some ethnic minority parents share that although they are more familiar with the education quality and situations in former designated schools or schools with a large proportion of ethnic minority students, they are willing to take risk and place their children into mainstream schools with majority Chinese students because they think these schools will provide better Chinese language learning environments, which will be beneficial to their children's long-term future. However, some parents with children enrolled in mainstream primary schools encounter major difficulties, including the lack of language support in various school subjects and unwelcoming attitude from school teachers. These parents feel that neither mainstream Chinese schools nor racially segregated schools are real viable choices.

### **4. 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 them the second least useful amongst 11 sources. Ethnic minority parents mentioned there are barriers 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 which are in Chinese only. Of the surveyed ethnic minority parents, only 3% can read and write Chinese (corresponding to data in 2011 Census).

### Conclusion

**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 gap between what ethnic minority parents considered important when choosing primary schools for their children and their satisfaction with their chosen schools; suggesting in reality, they are not empowered to make real and informed choices for their children's education.

## 1. Background

In Hong Kong, the phenomenon of *de facto* racial segregation exists in the public education system. In 2012/13, non-Chinese speaking ('NCS') students accounted for over 90% of the student population in at least 8 public primary schools, and accounted for more than 50% of the student population in at least 20 public schools (Education Bureau, 2013). Although the label of "designated school" was eliminated in 2013/14, the situation has not changed significantly in the last 2 years.

The emergence of the phenomenon of *de facto* racial segregation in Hong Kong schools is closely related to the ethnic minority education policies in the city. Before 2004, under the central allocation system, ethnic minorities face extremely limited school options. They could only choose schools listed in the 'Education Facilities for Non-Chinese Speaking Children' which offered classes in languages such as Urdu and French. The list included only 8 government and aided secondary schools, and 6 government and aided primary schools, some of which were highly competitive "Band 1" schools that required high academic achievements for admission (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2002). Over 90% of ethnic minority students were concentrated in 3 secondary schools. It was not until 2004 that the government changed the School Places Allocation System and allowed ethnic minority students to choose mainstream schools in primary and secondary admissions. In 2006, the EDB started providing designated funding to support NCS students in certain schools, and these schools were termed "designated schools". Schools which traditionally admitted a greater number of NCS students were selected as the first batch of "designated schools". The number of designated schools increased from 15 in 2006/2007 to 30 in 2011/2012, and ethnic minority students were largely concentrated in those schools.

Such labeling and categorization reinforces segregation and is not beneficial for ethnic minorities' integration into the Hong Kong society. Students from designated schools often felt awkward and ill at ease, and demonstrated lowered performance when they later joined the mainstream society. Research (Raman, 2010) has shown that "ethnic segregation in education results in mono-ethnic educational institutions, which are detrimental to the process of socialisation in a multi-ethnic society as they perpetuate an atmosphere that is inimical to ethnic relations. Although racially insulated environments tend to lead to a sense of 'situational security' among students who do not have to face the complexity of inter-group contact, students brought up under such situations have been found to be less prepared to face new, and particularly heterogeneous situations."

On human rights perspectives, *de facto* racial segregation violates Hong Kong's commitments under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination ("ICERD"). Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination ("CERD") states in its General Recommendation No. 29 that a government should "[undertake] to prevent, prohibit and eliminate practices of segregation directed against members of descent-based communities including in housing, education and employment" (Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 2002).

In 2013/2014, in response to the concerns raised by civil societies over racial segregation in “designated schools”, the EDB made changes to the funding mode for schools with NCS students. “We have decided to revise the mode of support to schools first in the 2013/14 school year with a view to providing more school choices to NCS parents, enhancing NCS students’ learning effectiveness of Chinese language and minimising the labelling effect arising from the so-called ‘designated schools’ system” (Education Bureau, 2013). EDB removed the label “designated school” and relabeled them “schools provided with recurrent funding by the Bureau to enhance school-based support in servicing the needs of NCS students” (Education Bureau, 2013).

Instead of actively improving the education experience for ethnic minority students and creating a more racially diverse and accommodating school environment in all schools, the EDB has resorted to evading the responsibility of the phenomenon of *de facto* racial segregation by claiming it to be a result of “parental choice”. The EDB insinuated that *de facto* racial segregation occurred because ethnic minority parents choose to put their children into schools with high concentration of ethnic minority students: “NCS students can choose to enroll in mainstream schools; that a school becomes a designated school and enrolls more NCS students not by design of the Education Bureau. Rather, it is a result of parental choice” (Education Bureau, 2011).

Through our community work, Hong Kong Unison found that many ethnic minority parents wish to place their children in mainstream schools, but the lack of support in Chinese language learning in mainstream schools and other barriers compelled them to choose racially segregated schools. Other parents are not fully informed of choices available and choose schools that traditionally admitted more NCS students. Despite the EDB’s claim that *de facto* racial segregation is a result of “parental choice”, currently there is a lack of serious exploration into what “parental choice” means.

It is amidst this background that this research ventures to explore two aspects of parental choice:

- Real choice – Do ethnic minority parents choose “designated schools” because they want their children to be surrounded by other non-Chinese students?
- Informed choice – Are ethnic minority parents able make an informed choice based on the official information provided?

Although the EDB announced big changes in the support measures on Chinese language learning for NCS student with a view to “[encourage] NCS parents to send their children to mainstream schools” (Education Bureau, 2014), these new measures are largely unknown to the ethnic minority community. They have limited access towards such support as most official information are not posted in their native languages, and sometimes even released in Chinese only. On one hand, many ethnic minority parents Hong Kong Unison worked with want their children to study and grow up alongside ethnic-Chinese peers to help their children integrate into the Chinese-majority society and learn the Chinese language; on the other hand, parents feel they have no choice but to put their children into “designated schools” because

children cannot manage the Chinese curriculum at mainstream schools. Most ethnic minority families understand that primary school choice decisions have long-lasting effects on their children's education path and eventual success in the Hong Kong society, and the dilemma posed often put families under tremendous stress.

It is hoped that the findings of this research would shed light on the current situation faced by ethnic minority parents, and assist the government in the formulation of more effective measures to eliminate *de facto* racial segregation in the public education system.

## **2. Research Objectives**

- 2.1 Find out whether ethnic minorities can choose primary schools based on their priorities;
- 2.2 Find out whether there is barrier to school information in their decision process;
- 2.3 Find out what factors they value in schools but are not available.

## **3. Methodology**

This research aims at exploring the factors that ethnic minority parents consider when choosing a primary school for their children and is comprised of surveys and follow-up in-depth interviews. The questionnaire was designed to explore (1) Do ethnic minority parents who put their children in racially-segregated schools think racially-segregated schools/schools that have a longer history of admitting ethnic minority student perform better in factors they value? (2) Do parents have enough information about schools to make informed choices, or are they choosing schools with majority ethnic minority population because of lack of information?

### **3.1 Survey design and administration**

1. This research focuses on primary school choice because enrolment into primary school is the first entrance for any child into the public education system, and because primary school choice better reflects parents' considerations on school choice than secondary school choice since the former is less affected by factors such as students' prior academic record.
2. A literature review was conducted to identify factors that affect parental choice of schools. Common school choice factors that are pertinent to the objectives of this study were selected to be investigated through the survey. Pilot tests were done with ethnic minority parents in November and December 2014.
3. The survey contained 27 questions divided into four broad categories. The first category of questions asked parents to rate 13 factors that may influence school choice, from 1 to 5, based on how important each factor was to the parents' decision on primary school choice. The second category of questions asked parents to rate their top choice primary

school (or the primary school in which their child is currently enrolled), from 1 to 5, based on how satisfied they were with the school on 11 characteristics. We investigated the degree to which ethnic minorities have a real choice in choosing schools by comparing the parents' responses to the first and second categories of questions. The third category of questions focused on whether parents are able to make informed school choices by probing parents on how useful they think each of 11 information sources were in helping them decide on primary school choices. The fourth category of questions focuses on the demographic details of each interviewee.

4. We recruited university student volunteers to administer the survey in person with ethnic minority parents in December 2014 and January 2015. After receiving training, students were paired up such that every pair has one speaker of a minority language whenever possible.

## **3.2 Sampling**

### **3.2.1 In-person surveys**

5. Student helpers conducted the surveys in selected areas in the Yau Tsim Mong and Yuen Long districts. These two districts are chosen for their large population of ethnic minority young children – according to the 2011 census, South and South East Asians comprised of 23% of Yau Tsim Mong's population under age 5 and 11% of that of Yuen Long, the highest two proportions in Hong Kong.
6. The student helper pairs were sent out to different locations in these two districts to reach out to ethnic minority parents. These locations included areas in front of kindergartens and primary schools that are known to have large populations of ethnic minority children; in front of kindergartens that are known to have a small population of ethnic minority students; and public areas that ethnic minorities tend to congregate, such as neighbourhood parks.
7. The survey targets parents of children who are in K3 (last year of kindergarten), Primary 1, 2 and 3. Parents of children younger than K3 tend to not have thought through their primary school choices yet, while Primary 3 students were the first batch to enter primary school since the Education Bureau changed the “designated school” system in 2012. Parents had to have participated in choosing a primary school for their child to be eligible for this survey. If a parent had more than one child in our target grade range, the survey focused on the child in the lowest school grade.
8. Convenient sampling method was used to select survey participants. Student helper pairs approached ethnic minority parent in their location and screened for eligible parents before they administered the survey by reading the questions to the parent in a language they can comprehend.
9. 87 surveys from 86 ethnic minority parents and one Chinese parent were administered in person by student helpers.

### 3.2.2 Mailed surveys

10. We also collected surveys from ethnic Chinese parents as control. The Chinese and English versions of the survey were mailed to all not-for-profit kindergartens in Tuen Mun and Shum Shui Po districts in April 2015. We did not mail to kindergartens in Yuen Long and Yau Tsim Mong districts to avoid duplications with the in-person surveys. These two districts were selected for their proximity and similarity in population characteristics to Yuen Long and Tuen Mun. Kindergartens were encouraged to distribute the survey to K3 parents of any ethnicities.
11. Nine kindergartens mailed back 157 surveys, of which 142 were by ethnic Chinese parents; 13 by ethnic minority parents and 2 of unknown ethnic background.

### 3.2.3 Follow-up in-depth interviews

12. In-person survey participants were invited to leave their contact information with us for follow-up actions. Five follow-up interviews were conducted with ethnic minority survey participants to explore their thoughts on the racial composition of student body and medium of instruction of primary schools; probe into the information sources accessible to parents in making informed decisions about school choice; investigate what kinds of school parents think are best for their children; and discuss general barriers and resources in navigating the Hong Kong public education system. The interviews form an exploratory investigation into more nuanced details in ethnic minority parental choice on primary schools.

## 4. Data Analysis

### 4.1 Ethnic minority parents did not prefer racial segregation

We asked parents the racial composition of their top choice school/ the school in which their child is currently studying. We also asked parents to rate how satisfied they are with the racial composition of the school.

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

The majority of ethnic minority participants do not think it is important to choose a school in which most of the students are ethnic minorities. When asked to rate, from 1 (unimportant) to 5 (very important), how important it is to them that the primary school they choose for their child consist mostly of ethnic minority students, 73% of the surveyed ethnic minority parents did not consider this factor important or very important (Figure 1).

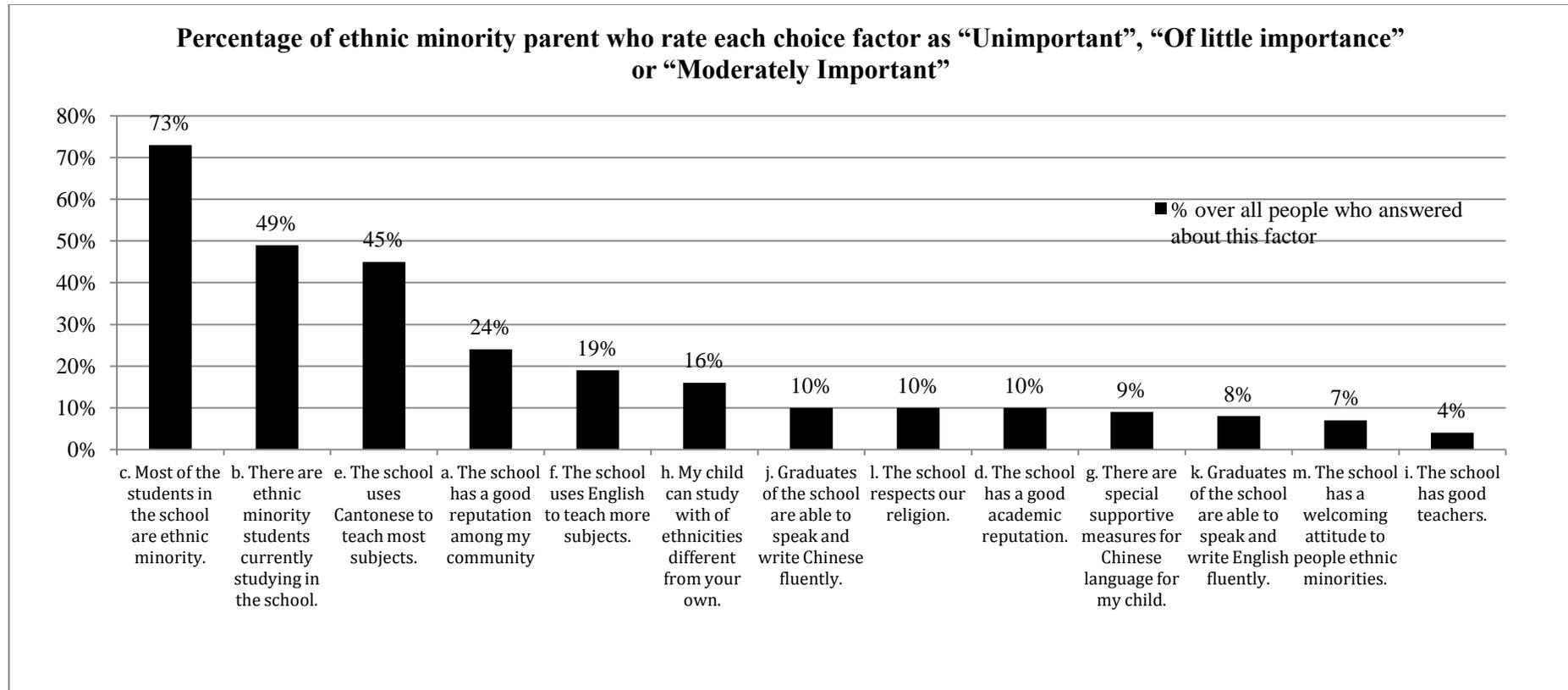


Figure 1: Percentage of ethnic minority parents who rate each choice factor as "Unimportant", "Of little importance" or "Moderately important"

Moreover, ethnic minority parents on average only rated the factor a 2.67 out of 5 in terms of importance, and choosing a school with high proportion of ethnic minority students is considered by surveyed ethnic minority parents as the most unimportant school choice factor among 13 factors (Figure 2).

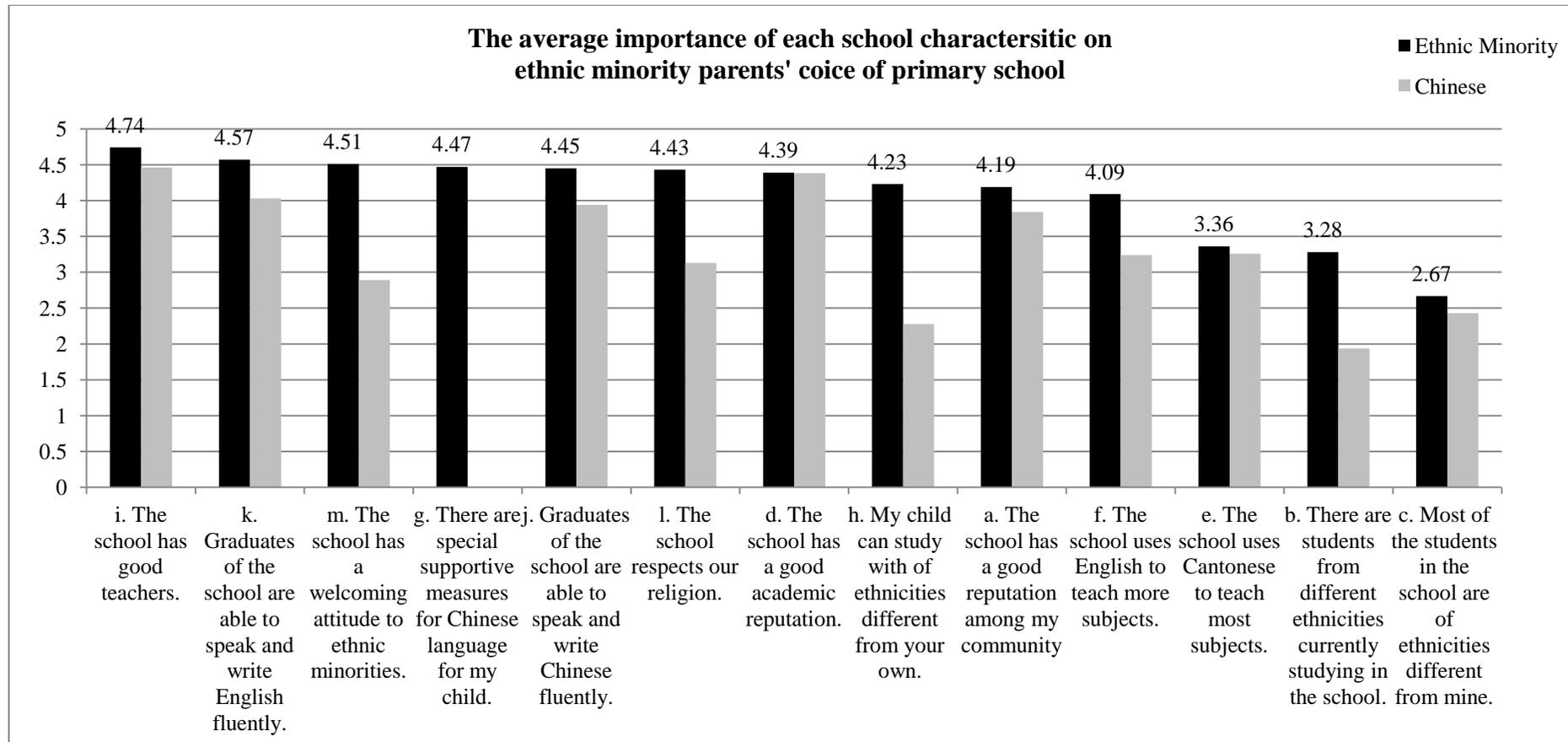


Figure 2: The average importance of each school characteristic on ethnic minority parents' choice of primary school (on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "Unimportant" and 5 is "Very important")

In fact, almost half of those parents who have put their children in racially segregated schools expressed dissatisfaction with the racial composition of the school. 43% of them are dissatisfied with the racial composition of majority ethnic minorities and very few Chinese (Figure 3). Those parents who chose mainstream schools did not express any dissatisfaction towards the racial composition of the school.

| Racial composition of first choice school   | Regarding the racial composition of the school, percentage of ethnic minority parents who are: |         |           |              |
|---|--|---------|-----------|--------------|
|   | Dissatisfied   | Neutral | Satisfied | Total number |
| Very few ethnic minority students; the rest of the students are ethnic Chinese                  | 0%   | 33%     | 67%       | 13 (100%)    |
| Many ethnic minority students, but there are more Chinese student than ethnic minority students | 14%  | 21%     | 64%       | 15 (100%)    |
| Ethnic minority-Chinese student ratio is about half-half  | 8%   | 15%     | 77%       | 14 (100%)    |
| Many Chinese students, but there are more ethnic minority students than Chinese students        | 14%  | 14%     | 71%       | 7 (100%)     |
| Very few Chinese students; the rest of the students are ethnic minority                         | 43%  | 7%      | 50%       | 14 (100%)    |

Figure 3: Matrix on whether parents are satisfied with their first choice school's student racial composition, by the racial composition of the school

The in-depth interviews tell why ethnic minority parents may prefer putting their children in an environment that facilitates interaction with ethnic Chinese students. Ganzala, a Pakistani mother with a child in primary school and a child still in kindergarten, opined that studying alongside ethnic Chinese students would help her child learn the Chinese language.

*“If [you] put more Pakistani or ethnic minority students together, then they will speak their own language and they will not learn Chinese. So it is better if there are only very few Pakistani students and more of Chinese students, then they will at least apply the language.”*

Another parent, Ghazala, like many of her friends, relied on friends’ opinions and experiences when they chose schools. Ghazala said that it becomes catch-22 when ethnic minorities want their children to study in majority-Chinese schools:

*“[We] want a school with fewer ethnic minorities (EMs), but when we recommend a school to our friends or tell them about my good experience in that school, slowly the school will get a lot of EM students and it is not the school [we] want anymore; but what can I do? I do not wish [my children] there ... but it is hard to search for another good Chinese school.”*

### 4.2 The school choice made by ethnic minority parents is not a real choice

In a school place allocation system that heavily relies on parental choice (such as that of Hong Kong), one often assumes that every parent have real choices, i.e. every school on their wish list are of similar quality; but with different characteristics - it is up to the parent to weigh the pros and cons of each school and make the optimal decision for their child. Often, the school that parents ended up choosing may not be the ideal school they had in mind.

Figure 4 below shows the percentage of surveyed parents that had a negative Importance/Satisfaction difference, i.e. the percentage of interviewed parents who felt their 1<sup>st</sup> choice school could not satisfy a school choice factor that they deemed relatively important. Compared to ethnic Chinese, ethnic minorities are more likely to be dissatisfied with school choice factors that they deemed important.

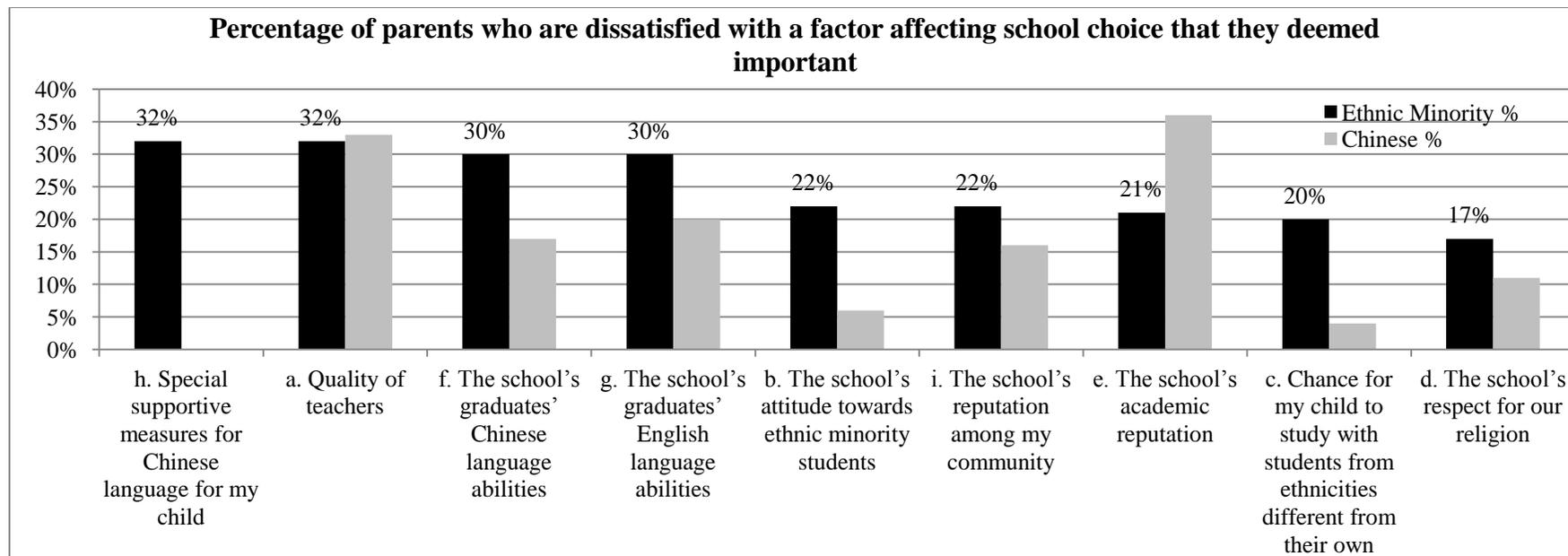


Figure 4: Percentage of parents who are dissatisfied with a school choice factor they deemed important

**As seen from the above figure, the school choice factors that most ethnic minority parents are disappointed in are**

- Special supportive measures for Chinese language for my child;
- Quality of teachers
- Graduates' Chinese language abilities
- Graduates' English language abilities

The level of dissatisfaction with the quality of teachers is similar between ethnic minority parents and Chinese parents, suggesting that the quality of teachers not meeting expectations is not a unique predicament that ethnic minorities face.

However, there is clearly a mismatch in qualities of schools that ethnic minority parents value and the reality of the schools they chose. Ethnic minority parents rely on schools to provide special supportive measures to help their children in Chinese language learning since many of them often face difficulties in learning the Chinese language and some of them do not know Chinese themselves. Throughout the years, Hong Kong Unison has collected numerous testimonies of ethnic minority parents expressing that they have no real choice when it comes to deciding on school because every school choice requires them to sacrifice school qualities that they deem important to their child's development. However, when none of the schools can meet all of a child's basic crucial needs, i.e. when every choice they know of is a doomed choice, do these parents truly have a choice in the school places allocation system?

In all of the follow-up in-depth interviews we did, ethnic minority parents mention the quality of language teaching as an important school choice factor.

*Rimsa (pseudonym)*

*Question: Why did you choose this CMI primary school?*

*Answer: In kindergarten also I had put her in a Chinese kindergarten. My friends' kids were already studying in a primary school. Everybody told me we should put her in an English school but I thought if we want to stay here [Hong Kong], she should be in a Chinese school*

*Question: Do many of your friends think English is important? Or they think Chinese is important?*

*Answer: In the beginning everybody is of the opinion that English is more important but then slowly, slowly... we realize to live here, to prepare for the children's future in Hong Kong, Chinese is essential. So now everybody has changed their thoughts and ... chose the Chinese school.*

*Question: What made everybody changed their thoughts?*

*Answer: All the good schools we come to know they are all Chinese. So if the children are studying English school they are... especially when they go the*

*secondary schools, they can't go to the Chinese ones. When we come to know that they are good schools and we want to put them there, but it is all in Chinese; how can my child do it if he does not know Chinese?*

*Chinese and English both are important. But to stay here, to live here, you need to know Chinese, not only spoken but also written. My husband can also speak very well Chinese but there is no use unless he knows how to read and write Chinese. So for the children's future, I think Chinese is very important.*

Rimsa said as compared to their Chinese counterparts, ethnic minorities could not get good jobs because of the language. She said if their children can learn Chinese, then they will be able to work alongside Chinese and will be treated equally.

Some ethnic minority parents share that although they are more familiar with the education quality and situations in former designated schools or schools with a large proportion of ethnic minority students, they are willing to take the risk and place their children in mainstream schools with majority Chinese students, because they think these schools will provide better Chinese language learning environments, and provide opportunities for their children's future. However, some parents encounter major difficulties in mainstream primary schools, including the lack of language support in various school subjects and unwelcoming attitude from school teachers. These parents feel that neither mainstream Chinese schools nor racially segregated schools are real viable choices. Since, primary education is the foundational building block in a child's education, primary school choice has long-term ramifications in future school choice.

#### **4.3 Ethnic minority parents largely rely on “personal communications” as useful information sources; language barrier and/or access to official information made it difficult for ethnic minorities to be informed of factors that may influence their decisions**

While Chinese rate official sources such as booklets and websites as useful, ethnic minorities rate them less so. Information from personal/personable sources was seen as more useful by ethnic minority parents.

| <b>16. Information source</b>  | <b>Rank of info source usefulness (EM parents)</b> | <b>Rank of info source usefulness (Chinese parents)</b> |
|--|--|---|
| Visit the school or attend school open day   | 1  | 1   |
| Attend talks in my kindergarten or talk to kindergarten teachers about primary schools | 2  | 2   |
| Teachers or community workers from primary schools came and talked to me               | 3  | 5   |
| Talk to friends  | 4  | 4   |
| Call the school  | 5  | 11  |
| Talk to relatives  | 6  | 7   |

|  |          |          |
|--|----------|----------|
| Attend talks in community centers or other organizations about primary schools | 7        | 9        |
| <b>Read school website</b>   | <b>8</b> | <b>3</b> |
| <b>Read government's /EDB's booklet about schools</b>                          | <b>9</b> | <b>6</b> |
| Ask other people   | 9        | 10       |
| Read other resources (online forums, magazines etc)                            | 11       | 8        |

Figure 4: Rank of usefulness of school choice information sources (comparing ethnic minority and Chinese parents)

Ethnic minorities face language barrier when accessing information. Out of all the respondents, regardless of ethnicity, those who are able to speak/read Chinese find official sources more important, while those who cannot, find other sources more important. These parents do not find official sources such as EDB websites and booklets e.g. *Primary School Profile* useful in informing their primary school choices. 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 which are in Chinese only. Of the surveyed ethnic minority parents, only 3% of interviewed ethnic minorities can read Chinese; there is a language barrier in access of information, making it much more difficult for ethnic minorities to make informed choices. Moreover, official sources about important education policies such as the Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Framework (‘the Learning Framework’) are available in Chinese only (or that the Chinese version is much more accessible and widely disseminated).

#### *Ghazala*

*Question: If you need to tell your friend with a K3 kid which school to choose, what would you say?*

*Answer: We of course talk about the school in which our children are in, because that is the only school we know about. But then it is up to her whether she wants [her child] to go to [the same school]. Only when a child is studying in a particular school do we know about a school, otherwise we don't.*

*Question: What do you think is important for a good school or kindergarten?*

*Answer: The study should be good. There should be tutorials. And the children should learn. They should have [one-on-one tutorials] because we cannot do it at home ourselves. It should be a combination of parents' efforts and school's efforts.*

*Question: What are the things you look for to find out if it is a good school?*

*Answer: We go there and ask questions and also learn from our friends. It does not happen every time that a school answers all my questions. The answers from school are in very short statements and not in details.*

*Rimsa*

*Question: What do you ask the schools?*

*Answer: About school rules, tutorials, detail explanations not just “there are tutorials” but for what purpose and how many days [in a week]?*

## **5. Discussion**

EDB has implied on multiple occasions that racial segregation is a result of parental choice. They seem to be insinuating that parents like to put their children in ethnic minority-majority school because they like being in an environment where ethnic minorities are the majority, i.e. they prefer and seek such racial composition in these schools. Contrary to EDB’s statement, our results find that ethnic minority parents do not particularly like to choose schools where ethnic minorities are majority. If the “parental choice” cited by the EDB is not parents’ affinity for schools with majority ethnic minority students, then there must be other factors influencing their decisions. But if parents are compelled to put their children into racially segregated schools not because they like the racial segregation or be surrounded by other ethnic minorities, but because of other factors, one would be hard pressed to argue that racial segregation is a result of “parental choice”. Are ethnic minority parents really making a real choice?

From our research, we also observe that ethnic minorities do care about Chinese learning and integration; ethnic minority parents feel that it is important that schools provide supporting measures to help their children learn Chinese. The EDB claimed that they “encourage NCS parents to choose schools with an immersed Chinese language environment taking into account the aspirations and needs of their children, alongside the revised funding support for schools which also serves to widen NCS parents’ school choices” (Education Bureau, 2014). In the information given to ethnic minority students on choosing schools in September 2013, the EDB included the names of 33 schools offering alternative language subject or adapted Chinese curriculum for non-Chinese speaking students, but the Bureau does not inform the students that many of these schools teach Chinese at a much lower level than in mainstream schools nor does it advise parents that there is a high concentration of ethnic minority students in some of these schools. This necessarily impacted the decision-making of students and parents given the limited information they have regarding the local schooling system and which schools they might opt for and why. The available support in Chinese learning in a school with an immersed Chinese language environment and the schools with funding support are not disclosed by the EDB at the moment; without such information, NCS parents do not necessarily have a wide choice of schools.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

Schools with majority ethnic minority resulting in *de facto* racial segregation violate Hong Kong's commitments under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and result in harmful social and economic consequences for the children and their future integration into the society. The government has not provided adequate information to help ethnic minority parents make educated and informed choices. Many ethnic minority children have no choice but to attend 'designated schools' because they cannot manage the Chinese curriculum at mainstream schools since there is no adequate learning support or resources provided in these schools to enable teachers to provide assistance to non-Chinese students so that they may learn the local curriculum at a pace that is suitable for them.

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. Any reliance on parental choice to evade the responsibility of eliminating *de facto* racial segregation violates Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the best interests of the child. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination states in its General Recommendation No. 19 that a condition of racial segregation can arise without any initiative or direct involvement by public authorities. The government should work towards the eradication of any negative consequences that ensue.

## 7. Recommendations

Only 10% of the surveyed parents studied in Hong Kong. The majority of parents we interviewed are likely primary caregivers and housewives who may have limited connection to the mainstream society. Making an informed choice in primary school may be difficult for them. We realize 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 stand a chance in Hong Kong. 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 the accessibility of information and communication with ethnic minority parents and ensure appropriate support to ethnic minority students is available in schools.

### **Transparency and accessibility to education information and support measures should be enhanced for ethnic minorities.**

1. 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.
2. 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 for ethnic minority parents when selecting schools. Appendix 3<sup>1</sup> 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 leads parents to select schools with majority ethnic minority students.
3. English information should be provided with the same accessibility as Chinese information, including printed booklet of *Primary School Profile* by districts; "School Characteristics" on individual school information sheet; and information on the Learning Framework<sup>2</sup>.
4. Information such as Chinese curriculum for ethnic minority students, teachers with professional development in teaching CSL, intensive learning and teaching modes

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

<sup>2</sup> 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/cla/chi-edu/second-lang/resource.html>;

adopted<sup>3</sup>, and additional measures, etc. of each school should be made available to parents so they can make informed decision that best suits their children.

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

5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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 conducted to guide parents to understand that their choice in primary schools will have a major impact on the future of their children; not all parents are fully aware of the crucial importance of early Chinese language learning as a foundation for secondary learning and future opportunities. The EDB should look into the possibility of providing information booklets and a dedicated website tailor-made for non-Chinese speaking parents/students to enable more readily such information.

**The government should monitor racial composition in schools**

8. To prevent the *de facto* racial segregation phenomenon 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.

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<sup>3</sup> 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; (6) Co-teaching with 2 or more teachers/teaching assistants to provide in-class support.

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## Appendix A – Survey

|                            |                    |       |
|----------------------------|--------------------|-------|
| <i>For office use only</i> | Date: _____        |       |
|                            | Survey code: _____ | _____ |

### Survey on ethnic minority parental choice of primary schools

1. Do you have a child in K3 now and going to primary school in September 2015?  
 Yes       No

2. Do / did you help to decide which primary school to put your child into?  
 Yes       No

**If you have more than 1 child, all questions below apply to the oldest child currently studying in K3.**

3. Is your child in K3 the first child to enter primary school in Hong Kong?  
 Yes       No

4. The following is a list of qualities about schools. In general, how important are they to you when you choose a primary school for this child? Please rate from 1 (Unimportant) to 5 (Very Important). You can also answer “have not considered” if you have not considered a quality before.

|   | N/A<br>Have<br>not<br>consi<br>dered | 1<br>Unim<br>portan<br>t | 2<br>Of<br>Little<br>Impor<br>tance | 3<br>Mode<br>rately<br>Impor<br>tant | 4<br>Impor<br>tant       | 5<br>Very<br>Impor<br>tant |
|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| a. The school has a good reputation among my community  | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| b. There are students from different ethnicities currently studying in the school.                              | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| c. Most of the students in the school are of ethnicities different from mine.                                   | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| d. The school has a good academic reputation.   | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| e. The school uses Cantonese to teach most subjects.  | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| f. The school uses English to teach more subjects.  | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| g. (For Non-Chinese speaking students) There are special supportive measures for Chinese language for my child. | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| h. My child can study with of ethnicities different from your own.  | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| i. The school has good teachers.  | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| j. Graduates of the school are able to speak and write Chinese fluently.  | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| k. Graduates of the school are able to speak and write English fluently.  | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   |

|   |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. The school respects our religion.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| m. The school has a welcoming attitude to people who are ethnic minorities. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5. Are there other factors that you consider but are not mentioned above?  
How important are they to you when you choose a primary school for this child? Please rate from 1 (Unimportant) to 5 (Very Important).

|                                   | 1<br>Unimportant         | 2<br>Of Little<br>Importance | 3<br>Moderately<br>Important | 4<br>Important           | 5<br>Very<br>Important   |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Other Factor 1:<br>_____<br>_____ | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other Factor 2:<br>_____<br>_____ | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other Factor 3:<br>_____<br>_____ | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

6. Have you decided on which primary schools to apply to?  
 Yes [continue to next question]       No [skip to question 15]

7. Which one is the first choice school that you have applied or will apply to?  
 Name of school: \_\_\_\_\_

**Questions 8 to 14 will be based on the situations of the school you mentioned in Question 7.**

8. Again, the following is a list of qualities about schools. Based on what you know about the school, how satisfied are you with your first choice primary school on these factors? Please rate from 1 (Very Dissatisfied) to 5 (Very Satisfied).  
You can also choose N/A if a quality is not applicable to the school, or if you don't know.

|   | N/A<br>Don't<br>know     | 1<br>Very<br>Dissatis-<br>fied | 2<br>Dissatis-<br>fied   | 3<br>Neut-<br>ral        | 4<br>Satisf-<br>ied      | 5<br>Very<br>Satisfi-<br>ed |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a. Quality of teachers  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| b. The school's attitude towards ethnic minority students                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| c. Chance for my child to study with students from ethnicities different from their own | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| d. The school's respect for our religion  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| e. The school's academic reputation   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| f. The school's graduates' Chinese language abilities                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| g. The school's graduates' English language abilities                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| h. Special supportive measures for Chinese language for my child                        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| i. The school's reputation among my community   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| j. <i>Other Factors #1 you mentioned in Question 5</i>                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| k. <i>Other Factors #2 you mentioned in Question 5</i>                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| l. <i>Other Factors #3 you mentioned in Question 5</i>                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>    |

9. Which of the below do you think best describes the student racial composition of the school?
- There are very few ethnic minority students; the rest of the students are ethnic Chinese
  - There are many ethnic minority students, but there are more Chinese student than ethnic minority students
  - The ethnic minority-Chinese student ratio is about half-half
  - There are many Chinese students, but there are more ethnic minority students than Chinese students
  - There are very few Chinese students; the rest of the students are ethnic minority
  - Not applicable / I don't know

|   | N/A<br>Don't<br>know     | 1<br>Very<br>Dissatisfie<br>d | 2<br>Dissatis<br>fied          | 3<br>Neutr<br>al              | 4<br>Satisf<br>ied       | 5<br>Very<br>Satisfied     |
|---|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 10. Are you satisfied with the Chinese-ethnic minority student ratio in the school?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>      | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/>      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| 11. If you answered “dissatisfied” (answered 1 or 2) to the question above, please explain why.   |                          |                               |                                |                               |                          |                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> There are too few ethnic minority students in the school.<br><input type="checkbox"/> There are too few Chinese students in the school.<br><input type="checkbox"/> Other:   |                          |                               |                                |                               |                          |                            |
| _____   |                          |                               |                                |                               |                          |                            |
| _____   |                          |                               |                                |                               |                          |                            |
| 12. What language does the school use to teach most subjects?   |                          |                               |                                |                               |                          |                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Most of the subjects are taught in Cantonese or Putonghua (except English lessons)<br><input type="checkbox"/> Most of the subjects are taught in English (except Chinese lessons)<br><input type="checkbox"/> Some of the subjects are taught in Cantonese while some of them are taught in English |                          |                               |                                |                               |                          |                            |
|   | N/A<br>Don't<br>know     | 1<br>Very<br>Dissatis<br>fied | 2<br>Dissatis<br>fied          | 3<br>Neutr<br>al              | 4<br>Satisf<br>ied       | 5<br>Very<br>Satisfie<br>d |
| 13. Are you satisfied with the school's language of instruction?  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>      | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/>      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| 14. If you answered dissatisfied (answered 1 or 2) to the question above, please explain why.   |                          |                               |                                |                               |                          |                            |
| _____   |                          |                               |                                |                               |                          |                            |
| 15. What information do you reference when you choose primary schools?  |                          |                               |                                |                               |                          |                            |
| Below is a list of information sources. If you have used the information source, how useful was it in helping you decide on primary schools? Please rate from 1 (Not useful at all) to 5 (Very useful). If you have not used an information source to help you decide on primary schools, choose N/A.                         |                          |                               |                                |                               |                          |                            |
|   | N/A<br>Have not<br>used  | 1<br>Not<br>Useful<br>At All  | 2<br>A Little<br>Bit<br>Useful | 3<br>Moderat<br>ely<br>Useful | 4<br>Useful              | 5<br>Very<br>Useful        |
| a. Read government's /EDB's booklet about schools   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>      | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/>      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| b. Read school website  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>      | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/>      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| c. Read other resources (online forums, magazines etc)  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>      | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/>      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| d. Called the school  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>      | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/>      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| e. Visited the school or attended school open day   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>      | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/>      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| f. Teachers or community workers from primary schools came and talked to me   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>      | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/>      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   |
| g. Attended talks in my kindergarten or talked to kindergarten teachers about primary schools   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>      | <input type="checkbox"/>       | <input type="checkbox"/>      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   |

|   |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| h. Attended talks in community centers or other organizations about primary schools | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| i. Talked to relatives  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| j. Talked to friends  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| k. Asked other people (specify who: _____)  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

16. Did you have any difficulties finding information about the primary schools?  
 Yes     No

17. What do you think about the following statement?  
*"I was able to find all the information I needed to help me choose the best school for my child."*

| Not Applicable/<br>I don't know | Strongly Disagree        | Disagree                 | Agree                    | Strongly Agree           |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/>        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Personal information of the parent filling out this survey:**

18. What is your ethnicity? \_\_\_\_\_
19. What is your gender?  
 Female     Male
20. What languages can you speak? (Please check all that applies)  
a. Cantonese  
b. English  
c. Putonghua  
d. Other languages:\_\_\_\_\_
21. What languages can you **read and write**? (Please check all that applies)  
a. Chinese  
b. English  
c. Other languages:\_\_\_\_\_
22. What languages can your child speak? (Please check all that applies)  
a. Cantonese  
b. English  
c. Putonghua  
d. Other languages:\_\_\_\_\_
23. Have you studied in primary school/ secondary schools/ college or university in Hong Kong?  
 Yes     No
24. What is your education level?  
a. Primary school or below  
b. Secondary school  
c. Post-secondary diploma or sub-degree  
d. University bachelors degree  
e. Masters degree or above
25. How many years have you lived in Hong Kong? \_\_\_\_\_ Years
26. In which district do you live? \_\_\_\_\_
27. Do you and your family receive CSSA?  
 Yes    No     I don't know.

**~End of survey. Thank you for your participation~  
Please kindly return this survey to your child's kindergarten for collection.**