

Investing in the next generation

Weifang spends big on schools, professionals and resources to improve education from the ground up

By TANG ZHIHAO
tangzhihao@chinadaily.com.cn

The Weifang Hi-Tech Industrial Development Zone is continuously improving local education to develop a better study environment for students.

The zone initiated construction and expansion projects for 10 schools and kindergartens in 2016. Expansion of six schools, including Dongfeng School and Xinchang School, are already complete. Total investment in education reached 790 million yuan (\$113.57 million) in 2016.

These projects will supply schools with an extra 7,720 seats for the 2017 autumn semester, according to local authorities.

Education authorities have also striven to improve the quality of education in suburban regions to ensure greater convenience for students. The opening of Weifang Hi-Tech Zone's New Epoch School and the second phase of Gangcheng Modern School in the Xinchang and Xin'gang economic development zones, respectively, in September last year provided better study environment for students.

"There was no school in Xinchang in previous years. We spent a lot of time taking kids to schools in the Qingchi sub-district or Xin'gang economic development zone," said Wang Kai, a resident in the Xinchang Economic Development Zone. "The newly built Weifang Hi-Tech Zone's New Epoch School in Xinchang is nearby, but also famous. I have heard that many parents in other parts of the city are trying to send their children here."

Local education service providers are also happy to see expanded schools with upgraded facilities.

Zhang Yanwu, deputy principal of Gangcheng Modern School, said that the school has built a comprehensive new building to serve an array of different purposes. The building has various functional rooms, computer rooms and well-equipped labs. The indoor playground allows students to do physical exercises in bad weather.

"Construction of high-quality schools equipped with relevant software and hardware can help to reduce the size of classes. Children in the high-tech zone can now enjoy quality education services near home," said Li Jinle, a member of the Party committee of the zone's education bureau.

Unique features

Schools are encouraged to cultivate their own distinctive



An expert with the International Baccalaureate Organization trains teachers at Weifang High-tech International School in December.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Headmaster of Qingping Primary School Wu Jijin runs with a student during an extracurricular activity.



Parents and children perform together at Goer Kindergarten in the Weifang high-tech zone.

features to develop a diversified education system in the zone.

Zhiyuan Primary School offered 10-minute short classes in the morning and early afternoon from Monday to Friday on science fiction.

The school's students have reported outstanding results in model airplane competitions in Shandong province.

Qingping Primary School is keen on developing closer ties with parents so they may play more significant roles in supporting students' studies. The school has provided free lectures to parents to give them more knowledge about their children's education.

"I have learnt to calm down and talk with my daughter

when she makes mistakes," said parent Li Ping. "She is willing to share her secrets with me. We now have a closer relationship."

Li said her daughter also reported better academic results.

More funds have been provided to encourage government-operated kindergartens to develop distinctive education programs in recent years. A government-operated kindergartens spent 600 yuan on each child in 2016, increasing from 400 yuan per child the previous year.

The best teachers

The increasing number of schools and kindergartens has led to shortage of skilled work-

ers in the zone. Local authorities have put forward measures to train and attract more professional teachers. Ninety-six university graduates and 20 high-caliber teachers were recruited to work in the region in 2016.

Last year, two school principals in the zone were named in a list of "renowned principals" in Shandong province for their special contributions in the education sector. An additional 71 teachers were rewarded in Weifang city.

The zone has set up a one million yuan fund to reward exceptional principals, and a five million yuan fund to reward outstanding school teachers.

"An energetic education

team is the key to building an excellent education system," said Mu Yanhua, deputy director of the education bureau of the zone.

"A reward mechanism will support our education sector's development. It is also a way to acknowledge teachers' efforts."



Auto supplier marks 100,000th 8AT unit

By ZHUANTI
zhuanti@chinadaily.com.cn

150,000 transmissions

Shengrui was capable of producing in 2016

Shengrui Transmission Corp marked a major milestone recently with the production of its 100,000th 8AT unit, a type of automatic transmission.

Shengrui, the developer of the first front-engine, front-drive 8AT, assembled the 100,000th 8AT unit to be produced in the Weifang Hi-Tech Industrial Development Zone in November. The company created this form of 8AT in China in 2006.

"Our 100,000th 8AT marked a new chapter in China's 8AT production," said Wei Yanchao, director of Shengrui's general management office. "We will move toward our new concept and new target, and develop a new Shengrui to support China's automatic transmission development."

The company has set a goal to produce one million transmissions a year by 2020.

Shengrui is a key high-tech company in China, which has focused on automatic transmissions and heavy-duty diesel engine parts over the past decade.

The company has set up research and development centers in Germany and the United Kingdom, using global intelligence to support its long-term growth.

Shengrui has established partnerships with many automotive developers. For example, the 8AT has been equipped on many Landwind-branded vehicles. More vehicles will be

equipped with Shengrui's 8AT over the next two years, Wei said.

"We are actively expanding in our foreign markets. We have reached agreements with India's Tata Group," Wei said.

The company has long been committed to developing a transmission production industrial cluster in Weifang's high-tech zone.

Shengrui's automotive transmission industrial park, which started construction in May last year, is mostly completed, allowing companies to begin settling in. Six companies have signed agreements to launch production bases in the zone. Among these, one company has already started production in the park, according to Wei.

"Because of our plan to increase our production capacities to one million units a year by 2020, we welcome more transmission parts suppliers to move into our park," Wei said. "Many companies have contacted us and we are assessing our future partners."

Shengrui was capable of supplying 150,000 transmissions in 2016. It will boost its production capacity to 250,000 units in 2017.



A technician at Shengrui Transmission Corp assembles 8AT units on the company's production line.

Briefly

Weifang sets up financial town

Weifang, Shandong province, announced in December the establishment of a financial town in Weifang Hi-Tech Industrial Development Zone to support the local financial industry development. Leading financial institutions are invited to come to the town to support this upgrade. Local authorities are aiming for the financial industry to provide more support to the city's overall industrial development. The town will become a financial innovation platform, a research results commercialization platform and a mechanism innovation platform, according to officials.

Innovation base established

Foton Motor Group established an innovation center within its Shandong internet automotive industrial base in November to strengthen its core competitiveness. The company expects the move to accelerate the development of the internet-based vehicle industry development in Weifang, Shandong province. Vehicle sales revenue in

the city is set to reach 280 billion yuan (\$40.31 billion) in 2025, according to local authorities.

Weichai wins top invention award

An engine control patent that Weichai Power developed in the Weifang Hi-Tech Industrial Development Zone won the WIPO-SIPO Award For Chinese Outstanding Patented Invention and Industrial Design in December. The award, developed by the State Intellectual Property Office of China and the World Intellectual Property Organization in 1989, is the invention sector's top honor in China. The organizations designed the award to reward inventors, designers and patent owners for their special contributions to technology innovation and economic development.

To comment or contribute, please e-mail wangqian2@chinadaily.com.cn or call +86-531-58775018.

CHINA DAILY
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State Weifang High-Tech Industrial Development Zone

Bartering platform opens economic possibilities

By ZHUANTI

Weifang Zhongyintong E-commerce Co, operator of online barter trade platform iBBX in Weifang Hi-Tech Industrial Development Zone, has set itself the goal of becoming an iconic enterprise in the bartering industry, similar to United States-listed Alibaba in the e-commerce sector.

Bartering refers to the exchange of goods or services, which was the norm before money was invented.

iBBX's model, which was inspired by this traditional trade model, is experiencing a comeback by using technology, such as the internet, to aid trade in modern society. The platform allows member companies in Weifang to trade globally, according to Zhao Sheng, general manager of Weifang Zhongyintong E-commerce Co. Zhao said the model is supplementary to the modern money-based transaction model.

"People use what they have to exchange for goods or services. It is a win-win situation," Zhao said.

He said bartering has been popular in countries including Australia and Canada since

the 1980s. The development of internet technologies, big data and cloud computing strongly supports the growth of bartering business. The introduction of such advanced technology has broken the limit on the number of parties able to engage in a trading activity. It allows multiple parties to exchange on the platform and promotes the circulation of goods and services, according to Zhao.

"More than 1,000 companies in Weifang have registered on our platform. Monthly trade volume is about 4 million yuan (\$575,000) in the region," said Liu Shuai, a business manager of the iBBX service. "We could not have grown to our present scale without the internet and a cross-regional platform."

Supporting enterprises

Bartering has been gaining in popularity among small and medium-sized enterprises in Weifang recently, according to the company.

iBBX, launched in June 2015, already has more than 1,300 member companies, according to the company. A large variety of goods, such as wine, textiles and property are available on the platform.



Staff members of Weifang Zhongyintong E-commerce Co, an online barter trade platform operator, manage client resources online.

Yu Deping, general manager of Shandong Yinong Agriculture, successfully traded agricultural products for a property valued at more than 400,000 yuan in Weifang through iBBX in 2016.

"We have to strengthen our competitive advantage in the currently sluggish economy, although our sales performance is still good," Yu said.

"A bartering system will provide more help to businesses when economic growth is slowing down," Yu said. "Companies

would not have been interested in this traditional way of bartering if they didn't have overstock products."

Jinkaidi Textile and Garment, a textiles producer in Weifang, successfully traded about 20,000 bathrobes through iBBX last year, according to its sales director Zhou Xianke.

The platform can also help companies to resolve debts, according to Weifang Zhongyintong E-commerce Co.

Borrowers can repay debts with physical products. But if

creditors do not need the products, borrowers can trade the products on iBBX and the platform can provide credit points to creditors, allowing them to exchange the points for products they want.

Zhao believes that trust is the foundation of iBBX's long-term growth and strives to strengthen the platform's credibility.

"Many businesses are interested in the trade model, but they don't trust other businesses," Zhao said. "Platform operators have to maintain strict standards to reduce default risk."

The Zhongyintong business evaluation team is required to review member companies' performance on a monthly basis to judge their default risks.

The company has identified more than 300 businesses with default risks.

Looking ahead, it will pay more attention to business development, according to Zhao Sheng.

"We will strengthen global cooperation and utilize our local advantages in different countries to introduce our member companies' products to the world. We plan to build an 'Alibaba' in the barter industry," he said.