**Reform of Vocational Education and Training**

Advisors look for counter social stigma, early categorization of students

By ZOU SHUO

The deep-rooted stigma attached to vocational education has prompted authorities to take bold measures to advise schools to join reform initiatives.

The education system must be restructured to improve the status of such education, so it has long been stigmatized as an option for students who do not have enough academic knowledge to pursue higher education, said Huo Wei, a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference and executive deputy director of the Shanghai branch of the China Vocational Education Association.

People have long held the perception that high school enrollment amounts to categorize students into regular high schools and vocational schools. The former has been regarded as the sounding board for the vocational education system. According to statistics, there are more than 30 percent of high school graduates in China who choose the vocational education route. Zhou Cao, director of the ministry’s Institute of Education and Social Development, told Xinhua that a large number of former students choose vocational education in order to have a different path to higher education. However, Huo said, this stems more from a lack of vocational education resources and students’ awareness of the education system.

Huo said that education systems in developed countries like the United States are not stigmatized as much because society and economics require vocational education. He said, however, that the government should take actions to address such social issues.

In order to reverse the stigma that vocational education is for 33 percent of all high school students, the government last year set a 20 percent target for 2020. As a result, the National People’s Congress and an affiliated body, the Chinese University, cited a survey conducted by the Institute of Education and Social Development of the National People’s Congress showing that students, teachers and principals at the high school level agreed that vocational education is important to their development. In addition, they said that 30 percent of parents want their children to enroll in vocational schools.

According to the proposal, the integrated development of regular high schools and secondary vocational schools, and allowing students in both to select each other’s courses and exchange credits, it said.

Different fields of vocational education schools in some provinces have chosen to further their study after graduation, and less than 10 percent start working, which area under the employment-oriented orientation, added the proposal.

However, the Ministry of Education recently dismissed appeals for the division of students into regular and vocational schools based on their last scores, and that students with lower scores can only attend vocational schools, he said.

This has been described as a dysfunctional education system.

The division of students into regular and vocational education systems, involving the selection and exchange of courses, is a critical problem that vocational education must face. If the division of students into regular and vocational education systems is not changed, the secondary vocational education system will remain on its own separate track, and only vocational education students can continue the division because secondary vocational education schools can only produce diversified development, and students have played an important role in boosting employment, regional economic development and improving people’s livelihoods.

According to the latest figures from the ministry, the country had more than 21 million students attending secondary vocational schools last year. They accounted for 33 percent of all high school students, the proposal points out.

The proposal said that all middle school graduates will be allowed to go to regular high schools and start the equivalent of the bachelor’s degree level education, the proposal stated. Other places can promote the integrated development of regular high schools and secondary vocational schools, and allowing students in both to select each other’s courses and exchange credits, it said.

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