

Cabinet boost for online education

Premier tells State Council executive meeting measures will enable better sharing of resources

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The State Council has announced measures to encourage the growth of online education in a major boost to businesses in the

sector, with experts calling for administration to be streamlined to further invigorate the market and promote education equality.

The Cabinet said in a statement released after its executive meeting on Wednesday that it will ramp up efforts to promote Internet Plus education — the use of information technology in teaching

— and encourage market entities to develop online education.

New, open and inclusive platforms will be established for vocational training and skills upgrading, it said.

Premier Li Keqiang, who presided over the meeting, said there is a great need for online education and training, and the measures will meet public demand for education services and enable better sharing of resources.

Chu Zhaoxue, a researcher at the National Institute of Education Sciences, said the growth of various types of entities is key to the development of the online education sector.

“For the authorities, it is important to reduce licensing red tape and boost compliance oversight, and to transform government functions so that market entities can start to flourish,” he said.

Chu said scrutiny of the online education sector remained tight, and further opening up would boost market vitality.

China stepped up oversight of after-school training institutions last year to reduce the extracurricular burden on students. Unlicensed institutions were required to obtain the necessary certificates, and licensed ones were told to provide details of their teaching activities to the education authorities.

232 million

number of users in China's online education sector as of June

A report published by the China Internet Network Information Center on Friday said China's online education sector had 232 million users as of June, up by 31.2 million, or 15.5 percent, from the end of last year. The report also found that over 199.4 million people take online education courses on their mobile phones.

“Customized education powered by artificial intelligence will be an important direction for the future growth of online education,” the report said.

By using AI and big data, online education platforms were able to analyze users' behavior and progress to provide the best solution for their learning activities, it added.

The report also underscored the important role of online education in offering solutions in rural education.

At its executive meeting, the Cabinet also called for the development of dedicated networks for education to be speeded up. By 2022, all schools will be connected to fast and stable internet services.

It also vowed more support for the development of diversified online educational resources for areas experiencing extreme poverty and pledged greater regulation and oversight to effectively protect the rights and interests of consumers.

Xia Peng, the founder of English-learning website ylyk.com, said the growth of the online education sector will help the country upgrade the structure of its labor force.

“Online platforms teaching programming will prepare people for the arrival of the age of AI, and those teaching language skills will enhance their communication abilities in workplaces,” he said.

However, Xia said, the recent boom in online education had, in part, been fueled by increased government scrutiny of after-school institutions, which spurred more of them to develop online arms.

He said he believed incentives from the authorities would only be the first step, and there would be follow-up measures, including more oversight, to guide the growth of the sector.

“Institutions that go online will be easier for the government to supervise,” Xia said.

“The statistics of platforms can be monitored, and the teachers' qualifications can be traced.”

Zuoyebang, a Beijing-based online education startup, said in an emailed statement that the Cabinet's decision pointed the way for the development of the online education sector, and follow-up policies could help it grow in a more orderly manner.

The company, which provides online courses to over 6 million people, said most of its users were from third- or fourth-tier cities in China.

“Combining education and technology in a better way and improving the quality of education will be key elements for the growth of the sector,” the company said.

Policy digest

Less red tape and more compliance oversight

More reforms will be carried out to cut licensing red tape and boost compliance oversight to promote fair competition and improve market efficiency, the State Council said in a statement released after an executive meeting on Wednesday.

The transferring of more administrative resources from licensing and approvals to compliance oversight is part of efforts to improve the business environment, and will help stimulate market vitality and resist downward pressure on the economy, the statement said.

It urged efforts to carry out oversight responsibilities in line with laws and regulations, saying that the authorities must step up compliance oversight of items that no longer require administrative approvals.

Supervision of fields that could affect public security and people's health, such as food, drugs and various types of equipment, must be enhanced, and there should be no blind spots in the areas, it said.

The government will come up with unified and simplified rules and standards for the oversight of separate areas to boost services to businesses.

The transparency of government oversight will be improved to ensure fairness, and all law enforcement actions must be recorded, with their results made public, the statement said.

It also required more innovation in government oversight, with more joint law enforcement actions between different government departments and regions. The supervision of emerging sectors must continue to be prudent and accommodating, and Internet Plus oversight must be pushed forward.

Internet Plus is the central government's strategy to integrate mobile internet, cloud computing and big data with traditional industries.

Punitive measures such as interdepartmental punishments and lifelong bans on access to sectors will be established.

The meeting also decided on steps to further ease market access by scrapping production permits for some products.

Businesses that produce 13 categories of industrial products, including internal combustion engines and brake fluid, will be exempted from applying for production permits.

Such products related to security, health and environmental protection will be instead subject to management by China Compulsory Certification, with certification fees covered by the fiscal budget.

The Cabinet said the reduction of licensed production does not mean less responsibilities for government, and more oversight must follow to ensure the quality and safety of industrial products.

Private parties urged to invest in sports venues

The State Council executive meeting on Wednesday rolled out measures to promote public health and boost participation in sports.

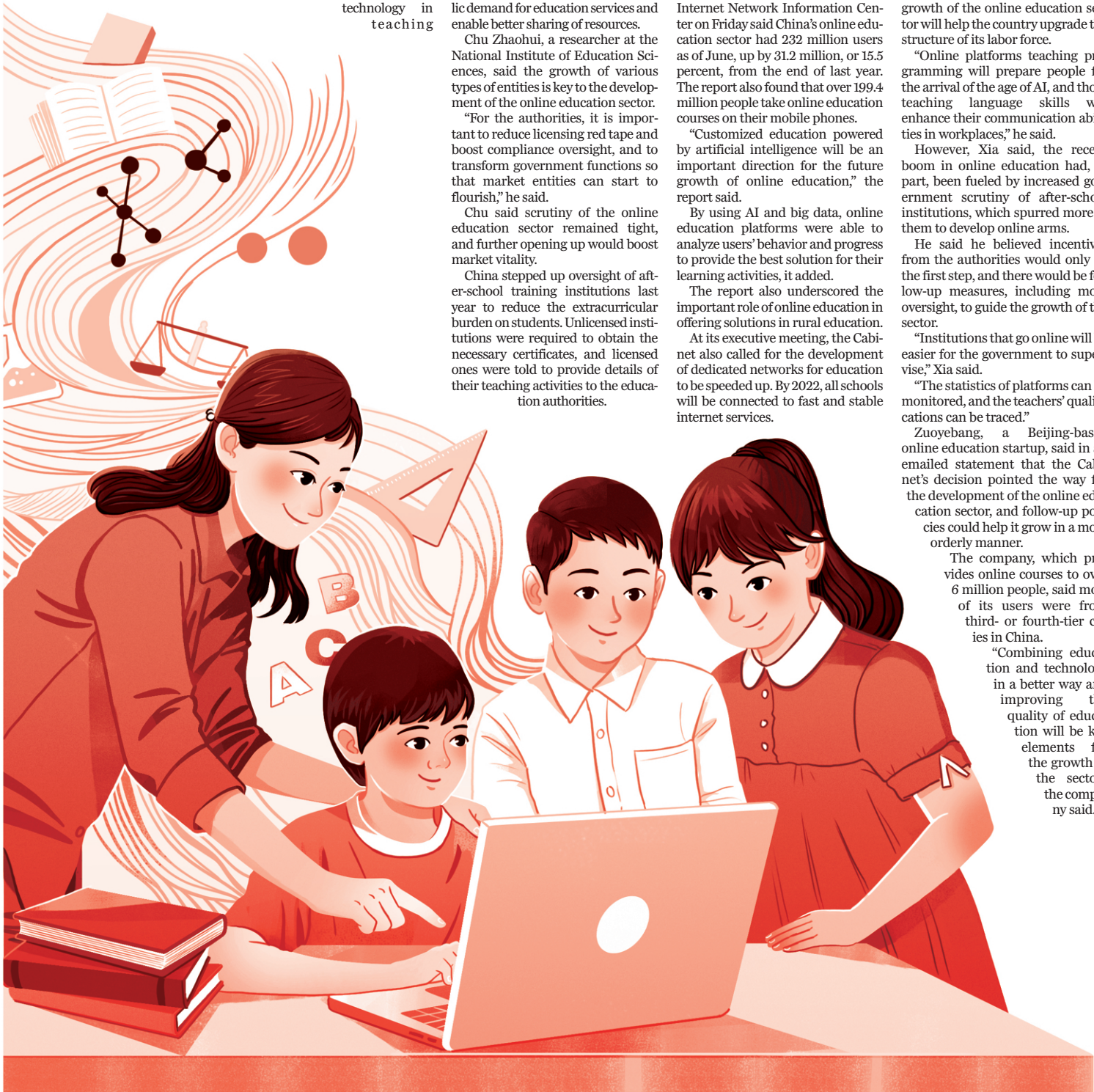
More public sports facilities will be open to the public to meet people's fitness demands, a statement released after the meeting said. The government will encourage the development of diversified fitness training and related services targeting different age groups.

It will also encourage the development of fitness products to improve public health by enabling more people to acquire healthy exercise habits.

The Cabinet also underlined the unleashing of market potential in developing the sports industry. More private parties will be given incentives to hold sporting events, and all eligible sporting events hosted by national sports associations will be handed over to market players.

The supply of sports venues and facilities will be increased, and private parties will receive support in investing in the construction of sports facilities. The operation of new, government-invested sports venues should be entrusted to third parties, the statement said.

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POLICY RESPONSE

Language schools and cruising taxi fares on agenda

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Several ministry-level departments, including those responsible for education, transportation, and development and reform, have responded recently to issues of public concern.

Language school rules and requirements clarified

Foreign teachers employed by foreign-funded language-training institutions in China should have the necessary teaching qualifications and work permits, a notice published on Friday said.

The notice on the approval and registration of such institutions was jointly issued by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Commerce and the State Administration for Market Regulation, in an

effort to regulate the development of after-school training institutions.

Foreign teachers recruited by such institutions should also have professional ethics and competence as well as good social credit records, it said.

Chinese teachers hired by foreign-funded language-training institutions should have moral integrity and the necessary teaching qualifications.

Institutions established before the release of the notice should meet the requirements promptly and act in accordance with regulations, the notice added.

Cities encouraged to adjust cruising taxi fares

Cities will be encouraged to explore the adjustment of government-guided fares for cruising taxis to make them more competitive, an official with the Ministry of Transport said on Saturday.

Meng Qiu, director of the ministry's Urban Traffic Management Department, told a seminar in Beijing that it was part of efforts to improve the dynamic adjustment mechanism for cruising taxi fares.



Cruising taxis are those passing down streets in search of passengers, as opposed to those responding to bookings made via online ride-hailing services.

Meng said that even with the rapid development of new forms of transportation, such as online ride-hailing in recent years, cruising taxi services still accounted for more than 70 percent of passenger traffic in the taxi industry.

The ministry and departments at all levels of government will use administrative, economic and other regulatory methods to deepen reform of cruising taxis, according to Meng.

Ministry seeks to foster frontier science centers

The Ministry of Education wants Chinese colleges and universities to establish frontier science centers to

produce innovations and cultivate basic research talent in cutting-edge areas.

The ministry has issued a guideline on the construction and administration of frontier science centers to education departments, colleges and universities, a notice published on Friday said.

As pilot zones for the exploration of a modern university system, the centers should play a pivotal role in talent cultivation and scientific research, it said.

According to the guideline, such centers should conduct research in cutting-edge and emerging areas that are transformative or of strategic importance.

The research quality of such centers should be first-class nationally, with the potential to become world-leading.

