



# The Early Advantage

## Hong Kong System at a Glance

### Demographics

In 2016, there were 279,470 children aged 0-4 and 291,767 children aged 5-9 in Hong Kong, representing about 8 percent of the total population. The number of children has been declining because of decreasing birthrates. About 95 percent of young children in Hong Kong are ethnic Chinese. Children from low-income ethnic minority families experience language barriers that make it difficult for them to participate fully in the local education system as Chinese is used as the language of instruction in kindergartens and primary schools.

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### Support for Children and Families

Women are eligible for 10 weeks of paid maternity leave, and men are eligible for three days of paternity leave. There is a universal developmental surveillance service that monitors children’s development and universal access to comprehensive public health services. The Department of Health provides highly subsidized health care through clinics and hospitals. Private health care services are also available but can be expensive, so most who choose to use them do so through private health insurance.

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### Enrollment in ECEC

Center-based care and education is provided in child care centers, kindergartens, kindergartens-cum-child care centers, and special child care centers. Child care centers offer day care to children from birth to age 3, with a focus on providing stimulating environments to enhance their growth and development. Kindergarten-cum-child care centers provide care and education for children ranging in age from 2 to 6, while kindergartens provide services for children ranging in age from 3 to 6. Kindergarten is universally available to all children and, even though it is not mandatory, virtually all 3- to 6-year-olds attend center-based ECEC for at least 15 hours a week. Enrollments in child care centers for children under 3 are much lower.

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### Service Providers

All kindergartens and all non-residential child care centers are run by private or non-profit-making organizations, but the government is rigorous in monitoring quality. This is facilitated through both guidance and inspection.

## **Governance**

Hong Kong has a split-phase and split-governance ECEC system, with three bureaus (Education, Food and Health, and Labour and Welfare) sharing responsibilities for service provision and/or monitoring. The Education Bureau (EDB) governs ECEC services provided in kindergartens and kindergarten-cum-child care centers for children aged 3-6. The Bureau's Joint Office for Kindergartens and Child Care Centers monitors and supports the co-located education and care services provided in kindergarten-cum-child care centers (for children aged 2 to 6) and kindergarten-cum-mixed child care centers (for children from birth to age 6). The Department of Health (DH), which is located under the Food and Health Bureau, provides a comprehensive range of health promotion and disease prevention services for infants and young children from birth to age 5 in 31 Maternal and Child Health Centers (MCHCs) through an integrated child health and development program. The Social Welfare Department, under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, has developed a comprehensive network of family and child welfare services. Its Child Care Centers Advisory Inspectorate (CCCAI) oversees care and welfare services for children below the age of 3 in day child care centers. It also regulates services for children with special educational or family needs below the age of 6 in special child care centers and residential child care centers.

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## **Finance**

The Government allocated a budget of HK\$5.2 billion (1.07 percent of total budget) (US\$677.2 million) for fiscal year 2017-18 for pre-primary education (kindergartens and kindergartens-cum-child care centers). It also allocated HK\$3.9 billion (0.70 percent of total budget) (US\$441.7 million) for family and child welfare (including the provision of day child care, foster care, and residential care services). The government provides subsidies to eligible non-profit-making child care centers on a per-child basis for children under 3. Until 2017, the government provided vouchers to families that could be used in approved kindergartens; the government now provides subsidies to kindergartens on a per-child basis. The subsidies support 15 hours per week of services; families that qualify for social assistance can receive subsidies for full-day services.

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## **Regulation of ECEC**

Under Hong Kong law, all new schools—including child care centers and kindergartens—must be registered and comply with registration guidelines, which specify class sizes, floor space of classrooms, maximum number of pupils in each classroom, school fees and registrations of teachers, school managers, and the school name. Child care centers are subject to inspections by the Child Care Centers Advisory Inspectorate of the SWD at least once every three years, and kindergartens are inspected by the Inspectorate of the EDB once every five years. Inspection reports for child care centers are submitted to the centers and are not made public. Centers are required to develop improvement plans based on the reports, and the SWD may withhold or terminate funding to service operators should they fail to make improvements to reach prescribed standards of performance. Inspection reports for kindergartens are uploaded to the EDB website and are publicly available. Should a kindergarten fail to meet

prescribed Quality Review standards, government funding will be terminated and the government may terminate the kindergarten's operating license.

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### **Teacher Quality**

Any person who wishes to serve in a child care center must be registered as a Child Care Worker or Child Care Supervisor through the SWD. Any person who teaches in a kindergarten must apply through the EDB to be a registered teacher (who holds a Certificate/Postgraduate diploma in Education) or as a permitted teacher (who holds an academic qualification but does not have a professional qualification for teaching such as a Certificate in Education) prior to assumption of duty. The government has set suggested pay rates, although as private organizations, centers and kindergartens are not required to follow them. The highest suggested pay rate for kindergarten teachers is HK\$43,860 (US\$5,623) a month. The Professional Teachers Union has urged a mandatory pay scale, arguing that current pay is driving teachers out of the profession. There is a career ladder. One out of five class teachers in kindergartens may be upgraded to a senior teacher, and one senior teacher may be upgraded to vice principal, in kindergartens with three or more senior teachers.