



School-district housing <http://wap.promisingedu.com/news/detail/7416>

## **“Gambling at the Starting Line”**

**Investigation of new school-entrance policy’s  
influence on school-district housing and long-term  
equality of education in Beijing**

High school affiliated to Renmin University  
By Chuyu Tao, Yuxuan Yang, Dian Guan, Kedi Li  
July.18.2019

# “Gambling at the Starting Line”

2019.07.17

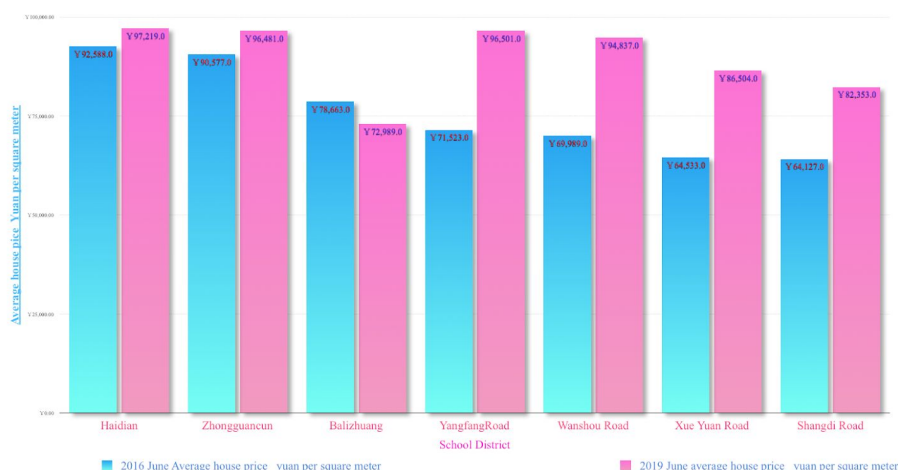
BEIJING, CHINA --- *Hongwei’s family determined to spend all their savings on school district house, praying for a bigger chance of her daughter getting into national key primary school next year, regardless of risk.*

Hongwei’s family has been saving money for school district house in Haidian district for two years. However, her “value-preserved” purchase plan turned into a “high-risk investment” due to the new policy releasing this year: Students’ enrollments in sought-after schools are no longer guaranteed by the locations of their homes, for they will be distributed randomly to all schools in their districts.

Already six months have passed since the policy was adopted, however the pricing of school district houses did not significantly cool down, which means they still ignited demand of parents. Hongwei has already visited two school-district houses in Haidian. Both of those apartments were under 100 square meters with prices above 8 million yuan. She decided to sell her current 137 square meters house in order to subsidize the purchase, even though the result of enrollment could be deviated from her expectations.

“It’s all for her (Hongwei’s daughter) education. To me, it’s **worth gambling.**”

Hongwei is not the only “gambler” though. The trend of school district houses’ prices heating was not significantly influenced throughout the implementation of new enrollment policy. In fact, as Graph 1 shown, except for Balizhuang district, all the other major school districts showed a great leap in average price. Among them, price in XueYuan Road district and Shangdi district were propelled by more than 20,000 yuan.



Graph 1. Average prices of major school districts in 2016 Jun compared with that in 2019 Jun.

Source: Beijing school entrance <http://www.vsxiao.cn/c/201701/10153.html>, Lianjia, <https://bj.lianjia.com/ershoufang/shiicheng/n4n5n6n7/>

The heating trend clearly shows the competition for education opportunities in key schools. Behind the phenomena, the link between “top schools” and positive learning environment should be understood comprehensively. Simply through the classic Chinese story *Mencius’s Mother Moved Three Times* one is revealed to the importance of early environmental education to the forming of children’s moral characters and intellectual abilities. Furthermore, it conveys the great stress parents laid on educating their children.

“Despite difficulties, I want my child to be a top student from the starting line.” Hongwei said firmly.

Indeed, seeking for a better learning environment for children is praised as a good virtue of parents. However, it becomes a heavy obligation when parents demand themselves to “bet” on more than they can afford in the game of education. A vicious cycle slowly develops between parents’ competition and unequal education resources.

It is under this condition that Beijing’s Ministry of Education released the new enrollment policies along with other ones like cancelling specialty student’s enrollment and reducing private education organizations<sup>1</sup>, intending to reduce stress on families by promoting equality in students’ access to education resources.

In other words --- **no more “top schools” for competition.**

However, imposing limitations on “top schools”, specialty students and private education does not match with parents need to cultivate “top students”. Therefore, these parents do not accept the new arrangement by waiting for the random distribution of schools. On the contrary, they keep purchasing school-district housing and believe that this is the only way left to win a better education environment for their children, leading to backfire on the original purpose of new policies.

Different voices exist as well. An anonymous mother whose daughter will be studying in Beijing No.101 Middle School mentioned that she believed the new enrollment policy was “on the right track”. She said that the environment is only a part of the education, what matters more will always be the self-motivation of students. However, she did think the policy will be generating new problems. For example, she was concerned that some students might spend longer time traveling between school and their homes.

“I believe this is what the government needs to solve in the next step. However, without the first step toward equality, we will never get there,” she insisted.

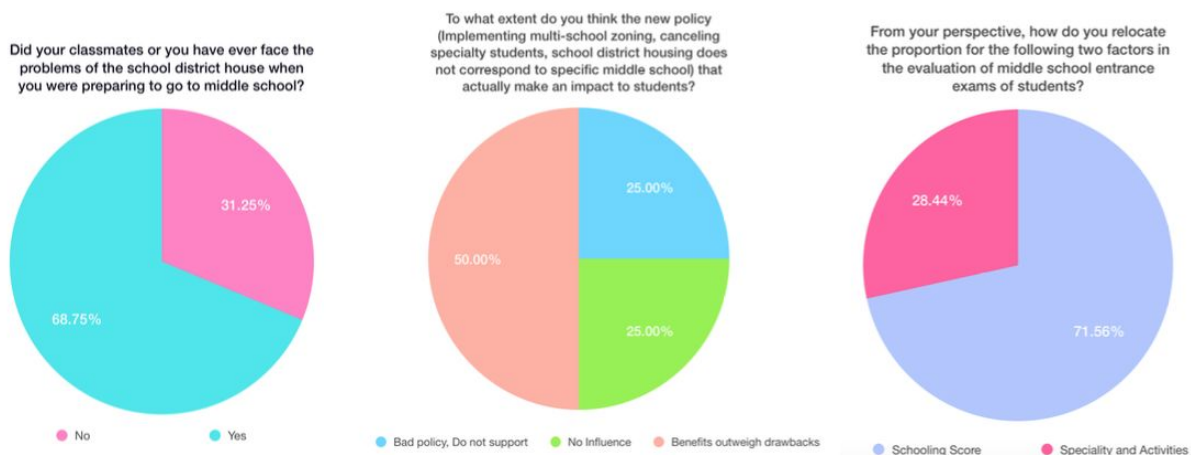
---

<sup>1</sup>Beijing announced the cancellation of school district housing, *Xiaoshengchu*, 01.11.2019.  
<http://www.xsc.cn/news/201901/14370.html>

## One may ask, **how is this “first step” going in schools now?**

Ruiying Liu, a mandarin teacher from Beijing No.80 middle school, acknowledged that, this year, most of the students in her class did not live nearby campus, which she believes, shows that the policy is truly making certain level of purposefully changes. At the same time, there are also students like Yijun Wang’s brother whose family moved for the second time this year to another school-district house in order to let their child have a seat in one specific school.

Purposefully changes are being made along with unsolved problem. A self-designed survey was distributed to 32 students who were randomly picked from 7th grade in No.80 middle school and 6th grade in GuangMing primary school. The selection of two age groups were intended to represent students who have gone and will go through the process of getting into middle schools under the new policy. As shown in Graph 2, even though, together, they show a positive view towards the effectiveness of policies, 68.75% of them were, or are having trouble with school district housing. Besides, when asking about the appropriate proportion of academic performance and activities each should take in the assessment of students, the survey’s results show that, on average, students believe that academic performance should account for 71.56%, far more than 28.44% which is that of activities.



Graph 2. Results from self-designed survey

It is obvious that traditional concept towards assessment for students who have long been under the education system of “scores first” has not changed. Considering this, parents’ disagreement with the policy should be expected, as their children are no longer guaranteed to be accepted by schools that offer the toughest tests. However, requiring children to stand out in the same way through the ranking of scores regardless of their personal strengths and interests is too extreme. Instead, “top students” should be allowed to excel in various ways.

Thus, the essence of contradiction between the intention and the impact of the policy is the direct implementation of it without fore guidance for paradigms shift among the public. It

means that the policy should not only be made for balancing education resources, but also for constructing a diverse environment that cultivates well-rounded students through different aspects.

Luckily, good news came--there is now **an observable trend towards more comprehensive evaluations of students** in education system of Beijing.

New policies for schools to adjust their ways of teaching students were released. For example, according to Beijing's Ministry of Education, primary and middle school students are now required to participate in social practices for no less than 10% of their class hours and it will weight 30% in the score they use to apply for high schools<sup>2</sup>. More and more schools have correspondingly reduced the proportion tests take in courses, and incorporated social experiences like field trips into the compulsory courses for students to develop their interests and shape their path of becoming more mature individuals.

“This is really surprising! Tests start to fade out of our lives. Now, we not only learn in classes and exams, but also outside of them,” said a student from the Middle School Affiliated to Renmin University of China. “Last week, our class visited a craft production base, where we all enjoyed trying out pottery-making, tie-dying and woodworking. I found these skills useful in real lives, which helped me to be more engaged in the society through new variety of ways.”

Teachers are enjoying these changes as well. “This is really helpful for students at this early stage of life to cultivate their interests and talents in different fields, rather than becoming the so-called generation of ‘bookworms’,” said Anmei, a primary school teacher from Zhongguancun No.1 Primary School. “With the new teaching norm, we can expect a surge in more diverse students with awareness of social responsibilities.”

The reform of the education system is indeed comprehensive and inspiring. Although problems like the school-district housing with skyrocketing prices still exist now due to parents' stagnant pursuit of “top students” under wrong assumption, we can see the “first step” is being taken in positive light. In the long-term, as diversity and equality become the main goal for educational reform, there is a high possibility for these problems to be solved inherently.

---

<sup>2</sup> Beijing high school entrance examination: the comprehensive quality evaluation of junior high school is included in the school enrollment for the first time, with a weight of 30%, *Guanchazhe*, 03.20.2019 [http://www.guancha.cn/culture/2019\\_03\\_20\\_494410.shtml](http://www.guancha.cn/culture/2019_03_20_494410.shtml)

