



“Double Reduction Plan” reduces homework and off-campus tutoring for Chinese school students

(Information as at 30 November 2021)

On 24 July 2021, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Chinese State Council jointly issued the “*Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training for Compulsory Education Students*”, commonly referred to as “the Double Reduction Plan” (the Plan). The Plan is a high-level document aimed at reducing educational burden on Chinese school students, improving the quality of education in schools and promoting educational equality.

The Plan, which reduces homework and after hours tutoring, may have an impact on foreign educators and investors since it expressly prohibits any kind of foreign ownership in off-campus tutoring and prevents foreign instructors located overseas from educating students in China at the compulsory level. The Plan outlines precise guidelines for reducing educational burden on school students, family education costs, and parents’ time and energy spent supporting their children’s studies. **The goal is to “effectively reduce” these costs and burdens within one year and achieve “significant results” in three years’ time.**

The initiative will be piloted in nine provinces and municipalities, and we are already seeing substantial changes in the sector, such as large providers and professionals quitting the field.

Reduction in homework

According to the Plan, schools will need to improve the management of homework provided to students to ensure that it does not exceed the degree of complexity necessary for the study level, and that homework hours are regulated depending on students’ levels. For example, students in grades 3-6 should not be given more than 60 minutes homework to complete each day. Teachers are also urged not to assign students large volumes of repetitive work or rote learning.

Schools are expected to provide children with after-school care services, such as homework assistance, arts and sports groups, but not to teach any new course material out of hours. This is consistent with the government’s goal of producing well rounded individuals – students that excel in all areas of life and not just their studies.

In parallel, education authorities are being urged to consolidate high-quality online educational resources and make them available to students for free in order to provide more students with access to high-quality educational materials. This also includes inviting top teachers to do free online Q&A sessions for with students.

Reduction in off-campus tutoring

China's off campus tutoring market was estimated to be worth over 2 trillion RMB (approximately 425 billion AUD), with those at primary and secondary level making up about 40% of the market.ⁱⁱ Long hours, high cost and advanced teaching in off campus tutoring has been the center of discussion amongst parents for several years.

According to the Plan, off-campus tutoring agencies offering "subject-based"ⁱⁱⁱ courses at compulsory education level (years 1-9) will no longer be approved to be established and all existing agencies will be asked to operate and register as "non-profit organisations".

Foreign capital will not be allowed to control or share stock in tutoring agencies that offer subject-based courses. Any existing agencies with foreign capital will need to cease operations. Foreign ownership of education institutions operating at the compulsory level has long been prohibited under Chinese law, but this is the first time that off-campus tutoring agencies offering compulsory subjects are explicitly banned.

Online tutoring agencies that teach subject-based courses will now need to apply for a permit from local authorities to operate, as opposed to simply being retained on file as in the past. The Plan also places a strict ban on foreign teachers that are physically based outside of China teaching students in China, which is likely to impact those online tutoring companies that have hired foreign offshore teachers to teach Chinese students online.

While the paper primarily focuses on students at compulsory education level, it also says that efforts would be made to supervise off-campus tutoring for students in preschool (ages 3-6) and senior high school. Online tutoring agencies are not permitted to teach preschoolers, and off-campus tutoring agencies are not permitted to teach compulsory education level content^{iv} (including foreign languages) to preschoolers in any way. The establishment of new off-campus tutoring agencies for preschoolers and agencies offering subject-based courses to senior high schoolers will not be approved by Chinese authorities. Those that teach non-subject-based courses will need to receive approval from local authorities under new requirements and standards.

The release of the Plan is the latest action in China's ongoing efforts to ensure that schools "remain the primary venue for education". Off-campus tutoring supervision has been strengthened since 2018 following several high-level documents in the lead up to the Double Reduction Plan. Additionally, the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE) established a new department – the Department for Supervision of After-School Tutoring Institutions specifically to regulate such agencies, just one month before the publication of the Plan.

What has happened so far and what to expect

Beijing, Shanghai, Shenyang, Guangzhou, Chengdu, Zhengzhou, Changzhi, Weihai and Nantong are among the nine cities/municipalities chosen to pilot the Double Reduction Plan. Other provinces will be required to nominate at least one city to participate in the trial Plan.

So far, Beijing^v and Shanghai^{vi} have each released their own Double Reduction Plans, which mirror the national goals. Beijing has set a two-year deadline for achieving “substantial results” in the reduction work, one year earlier than the national target. Shanghai’s plan ambitiously cuts it even further to one year, which is unsurprising considering Shanghai’s history of being the forerunner in education reform – it was the first to pilot the new Gaokao^{vii} in 2014 and was recently named by the MoE as the pilot zone for education digitalization transformation^{viii}.

Progress on the implementation of the Plan can be found on the MoE website^{ix}. Of note, it reports that as of late October 2021, Beijing has reduced its after-school training institutions by 60% and about 35,000 personnel who worked in after-school training in Shanghai have left the industry.

To date, major off campus tutoring providers – including New Oriental and TAL Education – have announced they will close down tutoring services at compulsory education level and expand on non-subject based related tutoring such as English language tutoring for college students.^x

The Double Reduction Plan is expected to bring significant change to the tutoring sector with more providers leaving the industry because they refuse to become not-for-profit. At this time, it’s unclear how difficult it will be for providers to register for off campus tutoring or apply for an online tutoring permit.

Family Education Promotion Law

Separately, on 23 October 2021, China’s National People’s Congress Standing Committee passed the Family Education Promotion Law^{xi}, which outlines the role of parents and guardians in minors’ education. The Law, which will take effect from 1 January 2022, requires parents and guardians to protect the physical and mental health of minors, and carry out family education in accordance to Core Socialist Values.

The Family Education Promotion Law echoes the Double Reduction Plan by asking parents to make sure that students are not overloaded with homework, and that students have time for exercise and rest. The law also outlines the responsibilities of government organisations to assist in family education by providing guidance and support.

Conclusion

For China, the Double Reduction Plan is an essential component of educational and social development in the pursuit of “Common Prosperity.” Although it has long been recognised that education in China, particularly at the compulsory education level, should not be used for profit, this document has for the first time specified that those operating outside of school grounds are also prohibited from making a profit and foreign investment has been barred.

The pilot regions are anticipated to provide detailed rules in support of the Double Reduction Plan soon, including the application criteria and process for off-campus and online tutoring agencies. These criteria are likely to impose constraints on financing sources, servicing time, price, and educational content.

For further enquiries, please contact the [Education and Research Section](#) of the Australian Embassy in Beijing.

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- ⁱ People's Republic of China, The State Council, “中共中央办公厅 国务院办公厅印发《关于进一步减轻义务教育阶段学生作业负担和校外培训负担的意见》(The CCPC and State Council Publishes ‘Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training for Compulsory Education Students’).”, Xinhuanet, 24 Jul 2021. http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-07/24/content_5627132.htm
- ⁱⁱ Xinhuanet. “双减”落地，对校外培训影响几何？” (Double Reduction, how will it affect after-school tutoring agencies?), Workers Daily, 2 August, 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-08/02/c_1127719950.htm
- ⁱⁱⁱ “Subject-based” (学科类) refers to government set subjects that are taught at schools in China at compulsory education level, including Chinese literature, maths, foreign languages, history, geography, physics, chemistry, biology, and morals and law.
- ^{iv} Some tutoring agencies have been teaching primary school materials to kindergarten students to give children a “head start”.
- ^v People's Republic of China, The People's Government of Beijing Municipality, “中共北京市委办公厅 北京市人民政府办公厅印发《北京市关于进一步减轻义务教育阶段学生作业负担和校外培训负担的措施》的通知》(The General Office of the CPC Beijing Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the Beijing Municipal People's Government issued a circular on Measures taken by Beijing Municipality to Further Reduce the Burden of Homework and Off-campus Training for Students in compulsory education).”, 14 Jul 2021. http://www.beijing.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengcefagui/202108/t20210818_2470436.html
- ^{vi} People's Republic of China, Shanghai Municipal People's Government, “关于进一步减轻义务教育阶段学生作业负担和校外培训负担的实施意见 (Opinions on further reducing the burden of homework and off-campus training for students in compulsory education).”, 27 Aug 2021. <https://www.shanghai.gov.cn/nw12344/20210827/4c2be31e10d449a3b9533266b6d2a162.html>
- ^{vii} People's Republic of China, The State Council, “国务院关于深化考试招生制度改革的实施意见 (Opinions of The State Council on deepening the reform of the Examination and Enrolment System).” 3 Sep 2014. http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2014-09/04/content_9065.htm
- ^{viii} People's Republic of China, The State Council, “教育部关于同意将上海作为教育数字化转型试点区的函(Letter of the Ministry of Education on approving Shanghai as the pilot area for education digital transformation).” 16 Sep 2021. http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A16/s3342/202109/t20210916_563764.html
- ^{ix} The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, “中华人民共和国家庭教育促进法 (Family Education Law of the PRC).”, 23 October 2021. <http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c30834/202110/8d266f0320b74e17b02cd43722eeb413.shtml>
- ^{ix} Xinhuanet. “双减”落地，对校外培训影响几何？” (Double Reduction, how will it affect after-school tutoring agencies?), Workers Daily, 2 August, 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-08/02/c_1127719950.htm
- ^x Caixin, “教培 “营改非” 大限将至 (Switching from for profit to non for-profit, the deadline is approaching)”, 11 Nov 2021. <https://weekly.caixin.com/2021-11-13/101804388.html>
- ^{xi} Unofficial English translation of the Law: <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/family-education-law-draft/>