

Fujian To Pioneer Gaokao Reform - Economic Observer Online - In-depth and Independent

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Fujian's Ministry of Education is introducing a new policy for students registered in other provinces sitting the university entrance exam (*gaokao*).

According to the new rules, students who aren't registered locally according to China's nationwide household registration or hukou system, but have completed 3 years of high school in Fujian, will be eligible to sit the *gaokao* in Fujian from 2014.

In the past, students who were registered elsewhere had to return to their place of registration to sit the exam. Fujian is also likely to become the first province in China to allow students from elsewhere to sit the university entrance exam.

The new policy has been prompted by recent changes in both the education and labor markets in Fujian. According to official data, from 2011 to 2012, Fujian accepted 678,000 students who are the children of migrant workers to receive basic education in the province, 419,000 of these students are from other provinces.

Meanwhile, the number of local students in Fujian who have been registering to take part in the annual *gaokao* has been declining every year since 2009. This decline has mirrored the decline in the provincial birth rate. Local higher education institutions are also starting to have problems in recruiting enough students.

In addition, government policies aimed at supporting economic development in central and western China have created more job opportunities for people living in these areas. Salaries for skilled workers in these regions have reportedly come close to those being paid in coastal provinces like Fujian and Guangdong. Due to these changes, Fujian has been suffering from labor shortages in recent years.

Liu Jianjin (刘剑津), deputy secretary of the Fujian Education Commission told the Economic Observer on May 28 that "the policy will help with the conflicts between rural and urban areas, and is good for social justice. It can also promote the quality of education in Fujian and attract more migrant workers to Fujian."

Liu Weixiong (刘辉雄) from the Fujian Provincial Education Examination Authority (福建省教育考试院), said Fujian needs more skilled workers in order to realize its goal of industrial upgrading.

Fujian started down the road of education reform in 2008 and since then has made steady progress. In 2008, the children of migrant workers were formally brought into the provincial public education system. Schools accepting migrant children were subsidized to the tune of 40 million yuan in 2008, that figure rose to 110 million yuan in 2009 and 260 million yuan in 2011.

Special classes with different textbooks for students from different regions were also initiated, in an attempt to make it easier for students to go back to their hometown to take the *gaokao*. Each province uses its own textbook and syllabus and designs a unique exam for its students.

In 2011, Fujian started allowing students registered in different districts within Fujian province to take the university entrance exam in the region where they were studying.

There is still some controversy around Fujian's new policy, especially with balancing concerns that local students aren't made to pay the price for making the system fairer to students from elsewhere. Some are also worried the education quality will be challenged and immigrant candidates may flood in and use up limited educational resources.