



Note from the Field

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The **RCEF Diaries**, our monthly newsletter, is meant to keep everyone updated on what is going on in RCEF, and highlight activities and events organized by our volunteers. Please let us know what you think!

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The Rural China Education Foundation (RCEF) promotes education for people in rural China that empowers them to improve their lives and their communities.

RCEF is run by full-time workers on the ground in China as well as a team of volunteers around the world.

RCEF is a 501(c)(3) public charity registered in the U.S.A. Donations can be made online at www.ruralchina.org or checks payable to the "Rural China Education Foundation" can be mailed to:

Rural China Education Foundation
PO Box 92424
Rochester, NY 14692-0424

The RCEF Blog

Reflections from Guan Ai School

<http://blog.ruralchina.org/>

Dear Friends,

Several weeks ago, a few RCEF staff went to visit rural schools about an hour's drive from our headquarters site, Guan Ai School. The facilities were impressive: buildings in stable condition, spacious walkways, lots of room for running around. Coming from Guan Ai, which is bursting at the seams, we felt a bit envious! But something was missing. Many cavernous classrooms were empty or had just a handful of children all huddled up at the front. Campuses that could handle nearly a thousand students were only at 10% capacity. Where were all the students?

The explanation from the principals (who seemed rather numbed) was that over the past few years, their once bustling student bodies have siphoned off in large numbers to urban schools. Student migration is a reality of public education in rural China today. Even though tuition is free at public schools, many rural people have lost confidence in the quality of public rural education. Local people know the principals and teachers in the area. They know their backgrounds and whether or not they are responsible and dedicated. Educators with the best reputations have transferred to city schools where social status, payment and resources are better. From there, their students, starting with the most academically strong, usually follow and the result has been a mass exodus.



A rural school: overgrown and nearly abandoned.

However, rural families shouldn't have to look to cities for quality education. It's a waste to let good rural schools lie empty and unused and there are rural educators who want to improve. Thus, RCEF is committed to helping rural schools reform so they can attract and serve well the 80% of Chinese school-aged children who are from rural areas.

Guan Ai School is a good example of this. It used to be the village public school but was closed down after dwindling to about 20 students. That's when local villagers **Mr. Yang** and **Ms. Sun** came in, reviving the school under their management. They attracted around 200 students by delivering on their promise of hardworking teachers and love and care for all children. Now, with the support of RCEF, Guan Ai is pursuing more explicit reforms of curriculum and teaching (see page 2). This will help it become a great rural education option for local people and pave the way for practical reform in neighboring schools. We hope you will support RCEF and Guan Ai in this exciting endeavor!

—Diane Geng, RCEF President



Program Restructuring

For the six months, RCEF programs and supporting committees have changed to focus more on strengthening RCEF's core program – the **Integrative Rural Education Program (IREP)**. Guan Ai School is the pilot partner school for this program, though we plan to expand to other schools in the Yongji area after we have accumulated expertise in our methods. Please visit the RCEF website (www.ruralchina.org) for more information about IREP or read the RCEF blog (blog.ruralchina.org) for a look at the every day experiences in Guan Ai.

Below are updates on how the various programs have been restructured to center around IREP.

Summer Volunteer Program

This program has traditionally recruited volunteers to put on summer camps for rural children. In 2008, the program was entirely held in Yongji and a lot of local teachers participated. It was scaled down from the past because RCEF staff were focusing their energy on preparing for IREP training and the new school year.

Next year, we will further shift our focus from volunteers to professional development for teachers. The summer program will likely be some sort of training camp for teachers, and volunteers will play an assisting role in the training.

Innovation Grants

This program funds grassroots rural education projects in line with RCEF philosophy. Beginning this academic year, we will no longer publicize the grants nationwide, but only to school and organizations in the Yongji, Shanxi Province area.

This will help RCEF identify potential local partners for when we are ready to expand in this region. Another benefit is that program staff do not have to spend that much time on travel to visit and evaluate the projects that receive support.

Research and Evaluation Committee

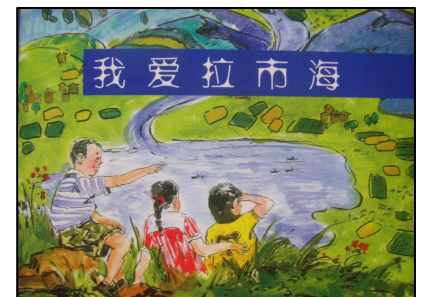
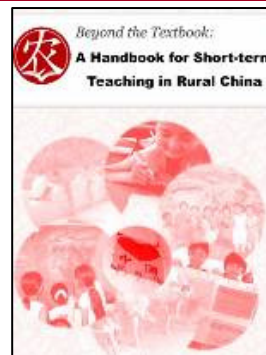
The Research and Evaluation Committee (REC) has been researching issues relevant to the implementation of IREP. Their research findings can now be directly implemented at Guan Ai School. For example, the research on libraries and reading has informed the reading activities at the school. REC has also provided a lot of information about standards-based education and school-based professional development, which are just starting to be implemented in Guan Ai this semester.

Libraries Program

We have instituted reading time and activities in Guan Ai as part of IREP. This is an incubator for methods that can be shared with other program sites. During the summer, teachers from Guozhuang and Dayang came to Guan Ai and held a seminar on how to make best use of school libraries. Guan Ai school will continue to be the hub of the project in terms of experimenting with methods, collecting the methods of other schools, and disseminating information.

Curriculum Development Committee

RCEF published a teaching handbook in 2006 that was introduced RCEF philosophy and included example lessons taught by volunteers during the Summer Volunteer Program. Now we are planning a new, expanded edition. Instead of sharing curricula only from the Summer Volunteer Program, we will print new compilations of student-centered, community-based curriculum created and taught by Guan Ai teachers.





A Look Into the Community of Excellent Schools



By Sara Lam, RCEF Co-Executive Director

Principal Sun Huimiao of Guan Ai School and I attended the Second Conference of the Community of Excellent Schools. The Community is a loose network of schools around China, which has been inspired by the legendary Dulangkou Middle School and are drastically reforming their schools. Many experts and famous educators gave speeches at the conference, but presentations by principals of the “excellent schools” left the deepest impression on me. It was motivating to meet these bold, innovative and visionary principals and hear about the trials and triumphs they have experienced as they revolutionize management and teaching in their schools. There are a few things that all schools had in common which I think are key ingredients for successful reform:

1) Strong Vision & Leadership

Each and every principal had a clear and comprehensive projection for how to change their school around, and had the strong leadership necessary to make it happen. Everyone in their teams knew where they were headed and how they are going to get there. Even when they faced resistance from teachers or even their own vice principals, they never compromised.



Left: Principal Du explains the teaching model used in his high school.



Above: Even the physical environment at Dulangkou School transformed to support the teaching reform.

2) Whole School Reform

They all stressed that you can't just change what happens in the classroom without changing the whole culture of the school. Management reform and changes in the physical environment go hand in hand with reform focused teaching, and many of the schools are using innovative methods for motivating teachers and creating a more collaborative environment. One school, for example, does not do any evaluation of individual teachers, but rather evaluates every subject team and every grade team as a whole to encourage teachers to support each other. Many of the schools create spaces for teachers to publicize their experiences and brainstorm solutions to common problems, such as a teachers' exhibition room, or open lounges filled with blackboards and bulletin boards.

3) Constant Adaptation

All of the schools started their reforms by copying the Dulangkou model, but they quickly made their own improvements to the model. The principals understood that you must learn the essence and spirit of good education models, instead of just transplanting the specific techniques you see on the surface. Because of this, the Community of Excellent School is really a vigorous community for creating and sharing good educational practices. We were so intrigued by the Community that we were compelled to make an unplanned visit the original Excellent School — Dulangkou Middle School. **Principal Xu** talks about the reforms in his school. Here's one of his sayings: ‘Don't write a lesson plan, but a learning plan; not the teacher, but students correct the homework; don't write thesis, but reflection; don't have a meeting, but engage in talking.’



Above: Students work in small groups and help each other understand.



New Guan Ai Educational Philosophy

After returning from the conference of the Community of Excellent Schools, **Sara Lam** and **Principal Sun Huimiao** felt it was important for Guan Ai School to articulate its educational values. Below is a document crafted by the school principals with the help of RCEF Teaching Consultants. After it was adopted, the principal printed it out on a big poster board which is displayed in the middle of the school for all to see.



Teaching Philosophy

Emphasize the cultivation of abilities; raise the overall quality; teach your students how to become caring, dutiful, scientifically innovative, cooperative and socially responsible people.

Caring devotion and social responsibility

Students and teachers should all aim to be loving, open-minded, interested, virtuous and willing to serve others. Teachers should take care for students' life needs, create a happy environment for study and respect each student's personal dignity. Students should have respect and gratitude towards their teachers. Students should pay attention to the problems around them and have the courage to take action and make improvements.

Scientific Innovation

Teachers should constantly come up with new approaches to teaching, research students' interests and search for suitable teaching methods. They should help students enjoy studying and be able to study independently. Their creativity should be developed, as should a constantly questioning scientific thought process and a tenacious perseverance. The aim is to create a harmonious school environment in which everybody works together and encourages each other.

Realistic Cooperation

Everything should be considered in light of its benefits for the students' future development. Always pay attention to fostering students' ability to cooperate in teams.

Special Characteristics

- Take into account the special natural and environmental characteristics of rural areas when developing teaching
- Make group learning and autonomous learning the main focus of teaching methods.
- Learn from doing.

Libraries & Reading Program at Guan Ai

One recent topic of the Chinese teachers' meeting at Guan Ai was how to strengthen students' ability and interest in reading. Teachers experimented with different methods over two weeks and shared their experience during the meeting. Here are just some of the methods they tried:

- *Pair students who get easily distracted together. Have them take turns reading one page to each other. They are more interested in reading if there is an audience, and the two students hold each other accountable to stay on track.*
- *Pair students who can't sustain their reading for long times with students who have very low reading levels. Have the first student read to the second one. This way, the first student is encouraged to read longer because they feel they are helping their classmate, and the second student can participate in the reading period by listening.*

- *Have students copy their favorite phrases and sentences in a notebook. Once a week, have the students exchange their notebooks amongst each other to see what other people have recorded.*

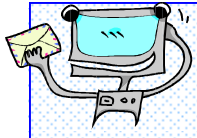
- *In groups of four, have students recommend good reading material to each other. Each group then chooses one story to read together.*

During the meeting, they also recommended books that students of different grade levels like and brainstormed possible solutions to problems that some teachers are facing. The teachers went back to their reading classes armed with new ideas, and agreed to discuss again in two weeks.





Blog Posts Delivered to Your Inbox



Don't you hate it when you forget to check the blog for a while and then come back and find you're completely out of the RCEF loop? Well, no need to fret! From now on, you can get the RCEF blog delivered right to your inbox! How did we achieve such magic? Well... It's pretty simple really. Just point your eyes to the right of this page, to that right-hand sidebar and scroll down to the box labeled "meta". There's a link there that says "**Subscribe to Posts**". Follow that and fill in your email and the captcha (the little image with letters in it) just copy the letters into the text field. This is a tiresome but necessary step to stop those evil spambots.) and just watch the posts flow into your mail as they're published.

The RCEF blog is the best way to keep up to date on what goes on in RCEF and with our programs in rural China. Six RCEF staff post every other day on the blog and we invite committee volunteers to contribute as well. If you have an idea for a post, please email Blog Editor **Zhong Qing** at: blogeditor@ruralchina.org.



The Communications Division also wants to make the blog more useful and attractive to readers. What kinds of posts attract you the most? What content do you want to see that's not on there? How can we attract more viewers? Please help us make the blog a tool for spreading the news about rural China education to the world. Send your valuable suggestions and comments to diane.geng@ruralchina.org. Thanks!

Open Positions

The positions are unpaid and no formal contract is signed. Applicants should send their application and CV/resume to recruiting@ruralchina.org. All positions are available immediately and open until filled. Applications will be considered on a rolling basis.

Materials Design

Committee: Materials Design

Time Commitment / Week: 2 hours

Duration: minimum 1 semester

Start Date: immediately

Tasks: Help design promotional materials for RCEF that we can publish and distribute, such as brochures, posters, T-shirts, and bookmarks. You will get to contribute your thoughts on RCEF's present design, and what it should look like in the future.

Newsletter Layout Editor

Committee: Publications

Time Commitment / Month: 6 hours per month

Duration: minimum 1 year

Responsibilities/Qualifications:

- Design the layout of the monthly newsletter

Skills:

- Possess aesthetic design skills and experience using computers to do layout for publication, including but not limited to Photoshop and Microsoft Publisher or other equivalent software.
- Capability to work independently and within teams as well as communicate efficiently in virtual environment

Academic relations coordinator

Committee: Research and Evaluation Committee

Time Commitment / Week: 4 hours minimum

Duration: minimum 1 year

Responsibilities/Qualifications:

- Seek input from and establish long-term relationships with academic community (in education particularly)
- organize dialogues, circulate information within committee;
- Broad theoretical background in rural China education
- Excellent written and oral communication skills
- Capability to work independently and within teams as well as communicate efficiently in virtual environment

Public Education Writer

Committee: Public Education

Time Commitment / Week: 2 hours

Duration: minimum 1 semester

Tasks: Would you like to raise public awareness and knowledge about rural China and rural education? Join us to collect and compile useful and interesting topics related to rural China development. The current projects include "Eastern Nexus," a series of short texts about rural China suitable for distribution in conferences and on university campuses for various purposes. We also need help maintaining an online "WebQuiz." The viewers can measure their knowledge of rural China education as well as learn new information through this tool.



Open Positions

Assistant IT Administrator

Committee: Information Technology

Time Commitment / Week: 6+ hours

Duration: Minimum one year, with possibility of promotion to paid, permanent role after one year.

RCEF is looking for an experienced web administrator to take on web administration responsibilities. The role can be fulfilled remotely, though there is an exciting opportunity to work 'on the ground' at one of our rural partner schools in Yongji, Shanxi Province.

Examples of duties entailed include the following:

- Keeping web application software up to date.
- Making CSS and PHP edits to alter the look and functionality of website, blog and gallery.
- Updating and maintenance of mailing list address books.
- Solving general technical problems RCEF staff and volunteers may be having with website and other applications.

Skills:

- Unix, and more specifically executing administration tasks via a Unix shell interface
- SQL
- HTML and CSS
- a high level programming language, including at least one of the following: Java, C++, Ruby
- Some knowledge of PHP would be an asset. If applicant is not familiar, he/she will be required to learn it.
- Excellent English reading ability and proficient spoken English a must.
- Ability to read and speak Mandarin Chinese at an intermediate level
- Teaching experience would be a plus so that you better understand the context RCEF works in.

Should the applicant be qualified and also have the desire to work directly in a RCEF site in rural China, they would have the extra responsibility of training teachers how to use computers to research teaching topics and track student progress. RCEF provides housing and a modest local living stipend if the IT Assistant is based at a RCEF site.

Data Inputter

Committee: Information Technology/Human Resources
Time commitment: Flexible, but preferably at least four hours per week

Duration: Depends on how long it will take to get all the data entered. The more volunteers we have the less time it will take.

Duties: You will be tasked with importing the data from our excel contacts spreadsheet into our new database via a web interface

Example: Much of the data is a bit of a mess to be honest. The following is a single column in our table:

CHANG, Roland

SHENG, Wenlu 盛文露

XU, Chongjian 许重建

CHEN, Shawn

CHUNG, Christina

GENG, Shu

GUO, Haipeng

GUO, Xin

HUEY, George

HUANG, Tracy 黄秀丽

The problem is the inconsistency among data. Chinese and English names are mixed together, surnames are capitalized, some have Chinese names, some don't, and some has a gap between their Chinese and English names.

Possible Solutions:

You could be a very patient and hard-working volunteer who diligently

copies and pastes various relevant bits of data from each cell in to four separate fields (First name, Last name, 姓, 名字).

You might be an excel wizard and be familiar enough with its text manipulation functions to be able to split the entries

Skills:

- Database knowledge
- Excel and Access
- Organizational Skills

Fundraising Events Coordinator

Committee: Fundraising Committee

Time Commitment / Week: 3-4 hours/week

Duration: minimum 1 semester

Tasks:

- Initiate and help to coordinate fundraising events around the world to raise money and support for RCEF.
- Provide advice on event planning, promotional materials, and other support to event organizers.
- Experience in fundraising and event planning preferred.
- Excellent written and oral communication skills
- Capability to work independently and within teams as well as communicate efficiently in virtual environment



Open Positions

Individual Donor Cultivation

Committee: Fundraising Committee

Time Commitment / Week: 3-4 hours/week

Duration: minimum 1 semester

Responsibilities/Qualifications:

- Establish and maintain a system for RCEF to attract and retain individual donors.
- Experience in fundraising preferred.
- Excellent written and oral communication skills
- Capability to work independently and within teams as well as communicate efficiently in virtual environment

Regional Representative Coordinator

Committee: Human Resources Committee

Duration: minimum 1 year

Tasks: Keep RCEF volunteers connected by coordinating volunteers in different regions to gather for RCEF social events.

Monitoring and Evaluation Researcher

Committee: Research and Evaluation Committee

Time Commitment / Week: 4 hours minimum but varies depending on project demand

Duration: minimum 1 semester

Responsibilities/Qualifications:

- familiarity with educational program evaluation methods;
- demonstrated ability to conduct educational research and evaluation;
- expertise and/or experience with qualitative and/or quantitative methods;
- broad theoretical background in rural China education;
- commitment to assigned tasks
- Efficient ability to work with teams virtually