



Dissolving schools in Thailand: Where are children's best interests?

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Abstract: 15,000 small schools in Thailand are **at risk of** being dissolved by the government to reduce public expenditure. Millions of children **would face** a violation of their right to education. Thailand must terminate this policy for the best interests of all children.

In 2026 it is expected that Thailand will be the first developing country to become face [an aging society](#) severely. The depopulation of rural areas is especially worrying, as natality rates are low and more people tend to migrate to urban areas. Schools in rural districts in Thailand will soon end up to be empty and without students. According to the Ministry of Education of Thailand, [15,158 schools](#) across the country have less than 120 students. These schools are at risk of being dissolved and merged with the nearby schools within [six square kilometres](#). The Thai Ministry

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of Education's [statistics](#) shows that each small school carries an operational cost of at least 25,600 baht (751 USD/676 EUR) per student per year, higher than the mid-sized school at 13,600 baht (399 USD/359 EUR) per student per year. Therefore, the dissolution of small schools in rural Thailand would enormously cut down the public expenditure. However, this policy seems to contradict the right to education according to national and international mechanisms that Thailand must follow.

The right to education in Thailand

[Thailand](#) was among the first 48 countries to recognise the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ([UDHR](#)) in 1948. The country also ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights ([ICESCR](#)) in 1999. The right to education is ensured in article 26 of the UDHR, whereas article 13 of the ICESCR similarly enhances the state's accountability in arranging fundamental education. In addition, Thailand ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child ([CRC](#)) in 1992. This means that the country is held accountable for the protection and fulfilment of child rights under the CRC. The child's best interests must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children, as [stipulated](#) in article 3 of the CRC.

Under article 28(1) of the CRC 'state parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity'. Moreover, the same article requires that primary education must be 'compulsory and available free to all'. In addition, state parties must make secondary education 'available and accessible to every child', with free-of-charge and financial assistance if needed. Importantly, Article 28 [expands](#) the scope of the right to education. Subsequent article 29(1) sets out the [aims of education](#) from a human rights perspective. Described as a '[multiplier](#)', the right to education embodies the indivisibility of rights as it [contributes](#) to realise many other rights. That is why the dissolution of small schools contradicts the objectives of education, which respect not only children but also their parents as well as their roots or identities they belong to.

In article 54 of the [Constitution](#) of Thailand (2017), it is the duty of the state to ensure that every child is enrolled in at least twelve years of education from primary to upper secondary schools. Moreover, the government must be responsible for free-of-charge and accessible education for all children. Article 22 of the [Child Protection Act](#) (2003) focuses on the best interests of the child and highlights non-discriminatory actions to children. A few articles underline the responsibilities of different stakeholders in providing education to children, on the basis of their physical and mental capabilities, no matter where they are in the country. Furthermore, the [Child and Youth Development Promotion Act](#) (2007) ensures the maximum child and youth development with various supports from different government agencies. Its article 6 recognises authorities' roles to promote

accessible education to every child in formal, non-formal and informal education systems. It also highlights the roles of local administration in facilitating a learning environment to suit the local culture. The [National Education Act](#) (1999) emphasises education for children with intersectional identities and highlights modern curriculum.

The impacts of dissolving small schools

Tremendous consequences can be highlighted. First, when the local schools are dissolved, children will be required to travel further from their homes. Traveling far distances is difficult and should not be a choice for them. Starting from the morning, children have to wake up early to arrive to school for the first class which begins at eight o'clock. This means that children have to finish their daily routine and breakfast before traveling. Even though Thailand is considered an [upper middle-income country](#), its rural areas are still difficult to travel to. In this case, children have three options: private vehicle, public transportation, or school bus service. With regards to all possibilities, parents or guardians have to bear additional expenses. In addition, many farmers in rural areas do not have enough time to send their children to school. Therefore, taking a private vehicle to school is impossible. Moreover, many parents or guardians are worried if their children are out of their sight. In the evening, children have to travel back long-distance until they arrive home, and their spare time for homework and extracurricular activities is almost non-existent.

Second, the community identity risks being eroded. Besides the Buddhist monastery, schools are the most important places for people in the community. Teachers are those who people respect the most in the local community. Particularly at the times of community conflict, teachers act as mediators. In Thai society, the idea of '[community-temple-school](#)' still functions in rural areas, and they are interdependent. When the community arranges a ceremony or festival, the temple would be the venue, while the school would send their children and teachers to join and support the stage shows. The dissolution of small schools would ruin the community identity because the school would no longer be part of the community ceremony or festival. Thus, there is a possibility that the community would become less meaningful for many of its members. When the school arranges the fundraising programs for their students' scholarships, many members of the community would participate. As a result, collective identity is essential for the school to function as part of the community continuously.

Recommendations

Due to the closure of small schools, we could witness migration from rural to urban areas. Many people would migrate to the city to send their children to the best

places of education. Meanwhile, due to its expenditure and distance, parents or guardians would ask many children to discontinue their studies at school and enter work, such as farming. Without education, they would remain without opportunity or possibility for social mobility.

It is firstly recommended that the central administration maintain their support for small schools because they must provide accessible education according to article 54 of the national Constitution. The state should ensure the child's best interests and overcome their difficulties in accessing education when their local schools are dissolved.

Second, the relevant authorities should empower and entrust the capacity of small schools in rural areas. The central administration should not interfere in the education administration that is arranged by the local authorities to reach the child's best interests by accessing quality education. Local stakeholders, including parents or guardians, teachers, local community members, and children themselves, should be able to decide their future altogether.

In addition, the local communities should find crucial resources to maintain the school facilities and quality of education in order to develop children's capabilities to the same standard as other schools in urban areas. If schools have to be dissolved, the authorities should provide a free-of-charge school bus service for children to travel to their further schools.

Children represent the future generation. Thai authorities should not only respect, protect, and fulfil their rights, but should also empower children to encounter the uncertain future with the full potential they acquire. Education is essentially one of the elements that drives Thailand with pride and development. The best interests of the child must be the highest priority to follow.