Education Ministry Calls for System Shake-up

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The education ministry in Kazakhstan is drawing up a draft law to shake up the national education system before switching to the European model. NBCentralAsia observers say the architects of the law should define how the transition to a different system will be made.

On June 28, Education and Science Minister Janseit Tuymebaev said that his ministry will put forward proposals for new legislation that would make fundamental changes to the education system, making it easier to shift to the European education model.

Compulsory schooling will be extended from 11 to 12 years in 2008 as part of the preparation process for Kazakhstan to join the Bologna Process in 2010. This European initiative is designed to set up a common higher education space where the systems used in different countries are compatible, making it easier for students to work and study abroad.

Around 100 schools in Kazakhstan have already shifted to the new system as a pilot project.

Tuymebaev said the changes will mean compulsory national testing for teachers and widespread use of interactive teaching methods. Powers to appoint district and regional education department heads will shift away from local government to the ministry of education.

NBCentralAsia observers say that if they are approved, the changes envisaged in the bill will bolster teachers’ qualifications, but the law also needs to specify how the education system will make the transition to the European model.

“It would be a good thing if the draft legislation sets out some mechanisms for making the transition to the western model. We don’t correspond to European or American principles in every regard,” said education expert Zinaida Savina.

Aliya Kulumbetova, a linguist and professor at the South Kazakhstan State University, agrees that the changes need to rectify the shortcomings of the existing system.

As an example, she says that when it comes to introducing a common national testing system for teachers, the architects of the draft law should take a recent incident into account where the answers to a test – in this case for pupils - were leaked beforehand. The test for teachers could be a similar fiasco.

“Before teachers are tested, their workload should be reduced and salaries increased. You can’t set stricter requirements without financial incentives,” she said.

Observers also want the legislation to address the currently poor quality of textbooks.
“Textbooks represent the building blocks for developing the awareness and knowledge of children and teenagers. They need to be flawless,” said Savina, adding that a separate law on teaching materials is needed, and new books need to be shown to international experts for their comments.

(News Briefing Central Asia draws comment and analysis from a broad range of political observers across the region.)

Location: Kazakhstan
Focus: News Briefing Central Asia

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