

## Testing and Writing Lines in Taiwan's Education

To whom it may concern,

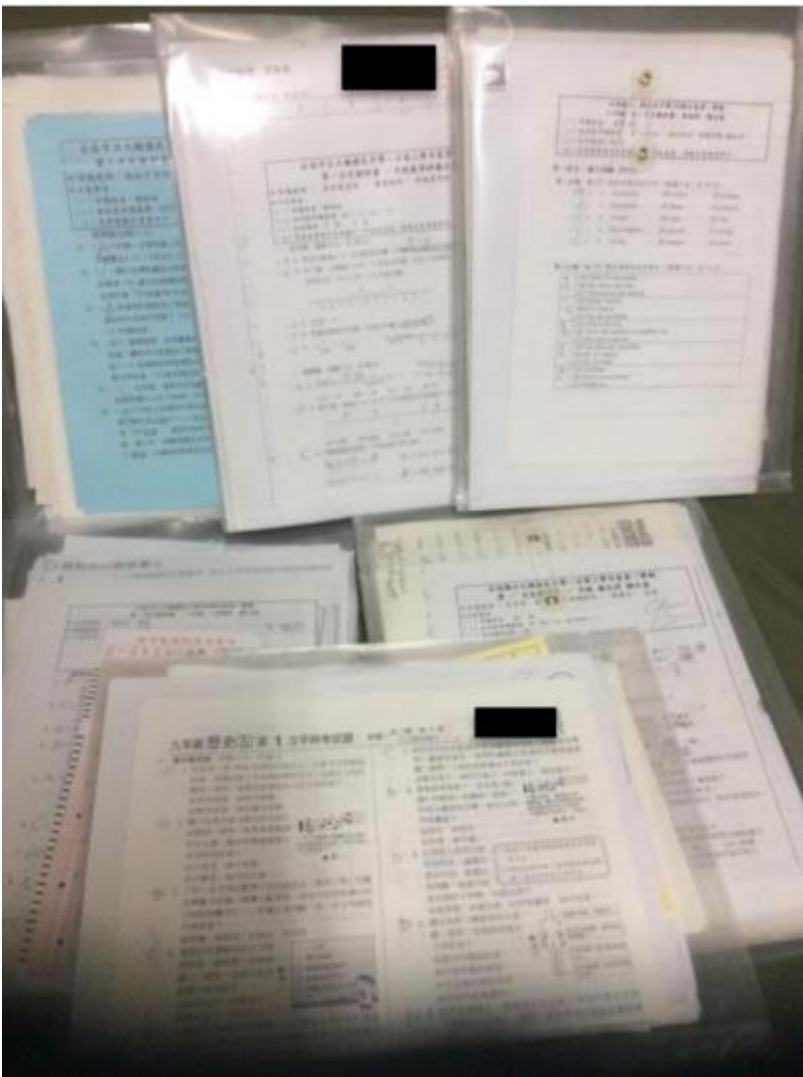
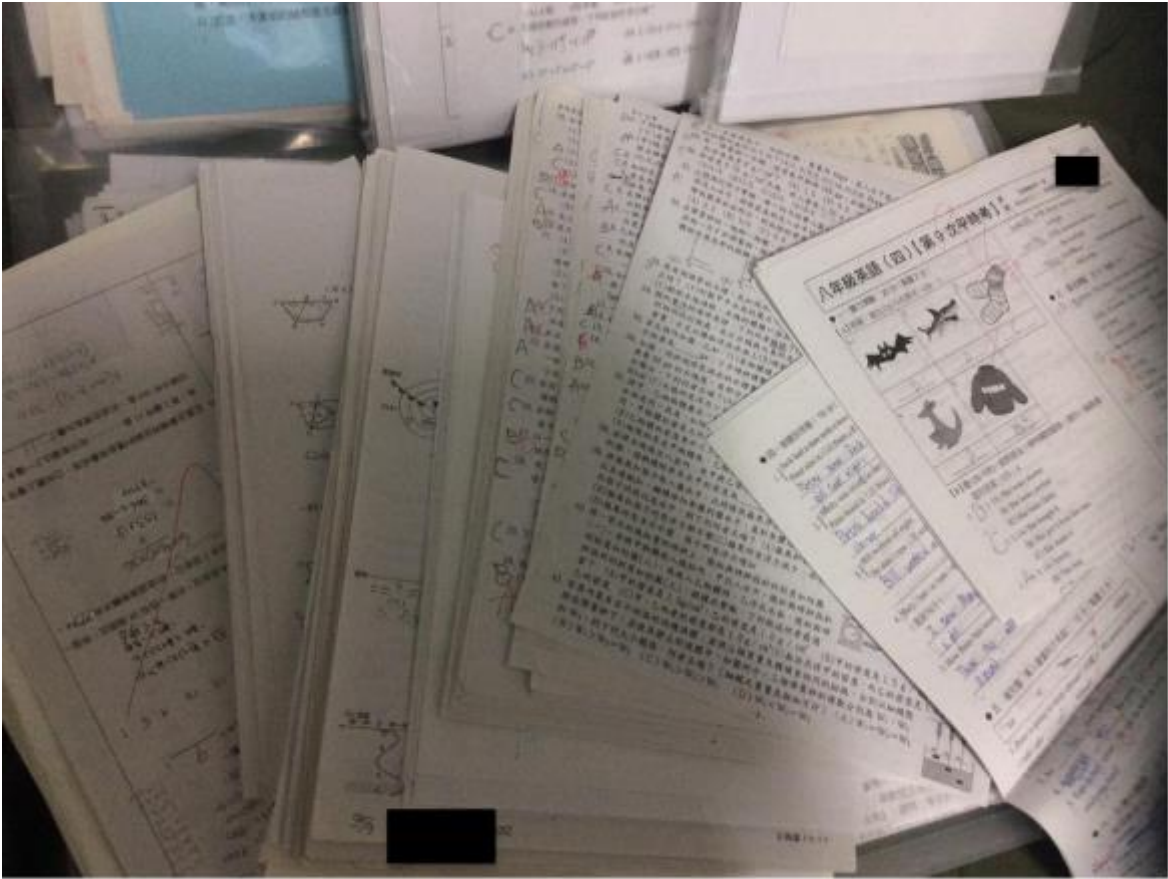
I'm a ninth grader who goes to junior high school in Taiwan. I've grown up without parents since I was little. Three years ago, I was adopted and moved to the other city. Over the past three years, I participated in discussions on child and youth issues and other philosophical topics. My friends and I very much enjoy participating in social and civic activities. Group discussions enable us to know better about our nation and society. I really hope to do my share of work to make the world better. Because of my personal experiences, I want to participate more actively in child and youth welfare activities. My biological family did not work out. I have not lived with my parents since I was six months old. I was almost abandoned and sent off to live with strangers. Fortunately, my maternal grandparents took me and looked after me. Two years ago, I ran away from home and skipped classes. My grandparents couldn't find me anywhere. As a teenager, I became rebellious. Because I was raised by my grandparents, I was forced to transfer to a different school. The transfer was not smooth due to some custody issues. I couldn't even apply for a passport because my guardian disapproved. I felt sad about having parents who did not fulfill their parental responsibilities and abused their guardianship rights. Having gone through all this, I hope one day I can help kids like me.

First off, I want to have the real summer vacation. In Taiwan, the academic year is split into two semesters. The first semester is between September and mid-January and the second is between mid-February and June. We have a two-month summer vacation and a roughly one-month winter vacation. But those are not vacations as their names suggest. Students still need to attend compulsory school-organized programs during vacations. Representatives from Taiwan's child and youth welfare and I conducted a survey and found that many schools in Taiwan have compulsory after-school and summer vacation programs. I am a camp-kind of person, and I enjoy going to camp during long vacations to broaden my horizons. But our school asks us to attend a one-month program during the summer vacation, with an extra tuition fee. This really upsets me.

How I wish not to attend the school program during summer vacation. In addition to academic knowledge, there are so many other things to learn, such as sports and music. Learning sports and music takes time. On typical school days, I spend more than nine and half hours in the school.

However, the school only focuses on academics and puts grades as the first priority. I wish I could spend summer vacation learning new sports and exploring different places. For me, that is more important than classroom sessions because we can't get to know the nation and the world just by reading. Here in Taiwan, we put too much weight on academic outcomes in evaluating how much students have learned. We ignore that youth should have the freedom to explore new things. I wish to have the freedom to plan my own schedule and be the master of my own learning. I think schools should allow students more time and space during summer vacation and encourage them to schedule their own learning plans. I really hope schools can let us make our own plans and not to control our vacations. No more forced summer classes!

Secondly, I'd like to share how examination-oriented middle schools in Taiwan are. Starting in the seventh grade, there are exams almost every single school day. For all seven subjects we study—Mandarin, English, math, physics and chemistry, geography, history, and civic education—there are big and small exams, ranging from classroom quizzes and tests to two mid-terms and a final, which are arranged by the school. Ninth graders will have to take four simulation exams as prep for the joint entrance exam to senior high school. All ninth graders in Taiwan have to take these simulation exams. Together with classroom exams, school midterms and final, that's a lot of exams. In just one semester, I can accumulate a stack of more than 200 exam papers. On average, each month I write at least 40 big exams and 20 small exams. The following pictures show how many exams I have written during the last four semesters. The pile is about 15 centimeters thick and is made up of more than 2,000 pages. It would have been even bigger if I had not applied for a three-month period of homeschooling. The collection does not include classroom quiz papers. The exams have multiple-choice sections. Most of the time, I don't understand how such tests would work in finding out how much students have learned. I don't like exams. Many of the exam questions are tricky or questionable in themselves. I don't know why schools do not evaluate my physics and science by asking me to do experiments instead. I like philosophy and science. Sometimes, our science teachers ask us to learn by rote as a shortcut for test-taking success. The exam papers are boring. Exams that are too frequent have turned me into an exam robot. I really hope to see this situation change. Every day, we go to school just to study for exams. It's very frustrating. I see many exam robots, who are unhappy and not motivated to learn. I really hope someone can come and help us end it all!





### I Wish I Had The Right to Decide the Length of My Own Hair

I am a student in private Senior High School, which was founded by a religious group. I've been in private schools since grade one. My parents think that private schools are better than public schools, but there is one thing that I don't agree with. Students with long hair are required to wear their hair in a bun. I won't cut my hair short unless I want to attract attention. On days like Mother's Day and religious festivals, we are asked to have our hair tied up in a bun. It's a confusing requirement. Why can't I decide the length of hair for myself?