



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.

Website: www.rurlachina.org

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

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

Read the RCEF Blog

**Discover and discuss
 what's going on
 in RCEF and rural China.**

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

Dear Friends,

I just spent a week at the 2008 Clinton Global Initiative, where hundreds of organizations talked about how they are affecting thousands of people with their programs. By contrast, it seemed like RCEF is very small. However, far from leaving with the feeling that we are insignificant, I am convinced that RCEF's current size is good for our growth.

One question people often ask is, "How many schools does RCEF work in year-round?" The answer is "one"—Guan Ai Primary School in Shanxi Province. This may seem shocking or even disappointing. Why so few? Shouldn't RCEF be expanding? Well, it depends on how one defines "expansion". Although we have reduced the number of year-round sites, we have "expanded" by going deeper in one school. Why is this necessary? First, our staff members need to get in-depth, hands-on experience in the overall educational process in a rural school. This will help us know more about the realities of change on the ground. That helps us make better decisions about how to align RCEF's resources so that they advance real change.

Second, RCEF endeavors to help rural teachers innovate and evolve from the use of old methods in order to meet the real world needs of their students. However, innovation cannot be prescribed externally by NGO trainers from outside their context. It has to be achieved by the teachers themselves.



Researchers have found that teachers listen more to peers who encourage innovation because they know that their strategies have succeeded in settings similar to their own. They want to know that their coaches are competent, knowledgeable, and trustworthy. Such traits can only be genuinely earned through ample time and hard work in context. What RCEF is doing now is investing that time and helping a small group of motivated teachers to adopt innovations so that they can influence and support more and more rural educators in the future.

RCEF has chosen to start small, to respect of the wisdom and experience of rural teachers, and to accumulate new experiences alongside them that can eventually ring true to their peers. We welcome your feedback and questions about this strategy.

Warm regards,
 Diane Geng, President



Integrative Rural Education Program

New Semester Starts at Guan Ai Primary School, Shanxi Province



The new semester has begun! About 190 students, many returning from last year, enrolled in six grades. RCEF hired 18 teachers to work at the school, expanding the teaching force by five. This gives all the teachers a lighter class load so that they can spend more time preparing lessons. New

initiatives this semester include:

Curriculum Innovations: Science, a subject traditionally neglected in rural primary schools, is going to receive special emphasis at Guan Ai. There are frequently

Scheduled Science periods for grades 3-6 and dedicated teachers. We're also starting extracurricular activities every afternoon. These were devised by teachers based on their hobbies and talents. Students signed up voluntarily, ranking their top choices. The activities include: Community Service, Soccer, Chess, Arts & Crafts, Cooking, Theater, School Newspaper, and more.

School Management

We are working with the school to revamp the daily schedule, teachers' salaries and evaluation system.

Hardware Improvements

The first grade classrooms have a new look with special hexagonal tables for group work and shelves with individual cubby holes for storing students' items. Teachers have new offices with desks and computers to use for lesson planning and meetings.

Teaching and Professional Development

Five RCEF staff have teamed up with teachers to support them in their teaching. **Ron Sung** works with Math and Science teachers, **Kiel Harell** with English teachers, **Steven Liu** with Math and English teachers, **Sara Lam** with Chinese and Social Studies teachers and **Jiang Peng** with Physical Education teachers. We are involved in the whole teaching process starting from lesson planning, through to observing or assisting in the classroom and finally providing feedback and discussing possible improvements afterwards. We've found most of the teachers to be very receptive to our involvement. Some of them actively seek us out to observe their lessons and have been quick to try out new approaches.

In addition to everyday teaching, we also facilitate "teaching research" among teachers. This is a form of professional development, where we introduce new methods and sometimes coach



teachers to use them, followed by meetings where teachers share their experiences gained by using the methods and come up with ways to adapt them to this school's needs. During this first month, our teaching research was focused on approaches to lesson planning, setting standards and assessing students learning abilities.

We have commenced the introduction of a standards-based approach to curriculum development and teaching at the school. The national standards developed by the Ministry of Education promote a very comprehensive and well-rounded education standard for students. Standards for each subject include not only knowledge for students to acquire, but also skills to master and attitudes to foster. The social studies standards, for instance, require students to learn how to conduct their own research, analyze social issues and voice their opinions in addition to knowing facts about Chinese history and society. Unfortunately, a lot of the goals related to skills and attitudes are neglected in exams and in turn are absent in classrooms as well. We are now asking teachers to familiarize themselves with the national standards. We also work with individual teachers to set goals that are in line with both the standards and their students' specific needs.

Li Yani is a fifth grade Chinese teacher. One of her goals for the year is for the fifth graders to have better interpersonal communication. Within this goal, she has started more specific objectives, such as: students stating their own opinions and supporting them with persuasive reasons, speaking loudly and with good posture to show confidence, listening carefully and being able to paraphrase what others have said etc.

Crystal Ng and **Liyang** from the **Research and Evaluation Committee** have provided us with a lot of background and best practices for standards-based education. We thank them for their contribution to this effort!



Fundraising

Volunteer Makes Donation

Annie Zhou joined RCEF in 2007 as the director of corporate grants in the Fundraising Committee. She works in the finance sector. In the midst of the Wall Street crisis, Annie donated \$500 to RCEF. We thanked Annie for her generous contribution and asked what moved her to give financially on top of her volunteer time. This is what she wrote:

“The decision to make a personal contribution to RCEF came naturally to me, as education reform has always been a long-term goal of mine. My involvement with the organization began when I became a volunteer in the fundraising committee, working with dedicated individuals such as Jean Tsao. Through information sessions and gatherings, I met some of the most committed people in the non-profit sector and learned about RCEF’s numerous developments in China. I have since made efforts to raise awareness for RCEF among friends, family and professional organizations.



In the next year, individual donor cultivation will be one of the major focuses of RCEF, and I felt that it was my responsibility to contribute to an organization that I strongly believe in.

It is really an honor to be part of a group which is doing so much to improve the lives of the future leaders of China, and I wanted to take the lead in making a significant contribution as a volunteer. We have so much potential in training more qualified teachers and revolutionizing education reform in China and have developed a model that can be widely implemented throughout other parts of the globe.

Next Fundraising Event in New York City

Our next fundraising event will be held on November the 1st at Le Parker Meridien Hotel to reach out to members of the Chinese Finance Association (TCFA), a non-profit organization dedicated to connecting professionals in the finance community. As a member of its Board of Directors, **Annie Zhou** will organize a table for RCEF and allow us to distribute flyers and brochures.

The purpose of this event is to increase exposure and reach out to finance professionals who may have the means to support RCEF through donations but little time to get involved. Annie said, “I believe we can help them realize some of their goals by establishing a long-term relationship where they know that their contributions are helping to build a future for rural students. I am looking forward to seeing the implementation of our new initiatives this year and throughout 2009. I hope we will continue to have information gatherings to collect new ideas and improve RCEF.”

Research and Development Division

Recently, the Research and Evaluation committee finished its 2007 Summer Volunteer Program Evaluation based on survey results of 177 students from differing rural areas. Here is an excerpt from their evaluation. The full version will be posted on the RCEF website soon.

The volunteer program 2007 did benefit Chinese rural students in three aspects:



1) Their goals of learning were transformed in a way that they become more interested in learning for its own sake but simultaneously, they care about their performance in front of the teachers and peers. This would not necessarily be detrimental, as attention to performance would also

possibly lead to better performance. Still, arousing their intrinsic interest would be our first task.

2) Students become a bit more aware of other people’s thoughts and perspectives. This would benefit them in terms of establishing a social network and relationships with peers.



3) Students appear to be more confident about their capabilities to do well in school.



Networking

RCEF at the 2008 Clinton Global Initiative



RCEF was invited to the 2008 Clinton Global Initiative in New York City from September 23-26. **Diane Geng** represented RCEF. Hosted by former U.S. President Bill Clinton, the annual conference brings together politicians, business leaders, celebrities, and NGOs to establish connections and make commitments to tackling global problems.

RCEF's **Integrative Rural Education Program** was announced at the meeting as a particularly noteworthy initiative in the Education Track.



On the first day, there was an exhibit of NGOs. Volunteers **Jean Tsao** and **Ting Zhou** took time off of work to staff RCEF's table. Materials Design Committee Director **Marco Flagg** designed a sign for RCEF as well as new brochures.

The conference focused on quality in education and the challenges of bringing the best human resources to the field. Below, Diane described one of the discussions on this topic:

“Michelle Rhee, the chancellor of the Washington, DC public schools, spoke on a panel about “Improving Quality Education” with two women from Mali and India—places that seem worlds apart from Washington, DC but that actually face very similar root problems in their schools. 50% of fifth graders surveyed by the NGO Pratham in India could not read simple sentences!

The speaker from Mali said that 80% of sixth graders in her country could not read. And Michelle confirmed that those disparities are similar to the academic gap between rich and poor DC students. ‘I hope this tells you that books and desks and materials are so far from the end game,’ she said. ‘We have all those things in DC. But the quality is still abysmal.’



All three speakers said the solution is high quality principals and teachers. How to get them as soon as possible is the concrete, unifying challenge facing all our countries. Across the world, the teaching profession isn't structured for children's education, but rather for adult employment. Currently, adults get paid as long as they show up in the classroom and deliver the curriculum. It doesn't reward or punish them for how well their students learn the curriculum or how they do in the world. But those purposes are exactly what education is for! If we're not paying people based on their students' development, it's not surprising that there are so many students who are in school but not getting an education. As Michelle said, the system is ‘adult-centered’ and has bred entitlements, instead of effectiveness.

Educating students well—especially in disadvantaged environments like rural China or inner city America—takes people who personally care about their students' well-being and who have the inner resolve, energy and stamina to work like crazy to do it. They may not know how to teach well yet, especially if they're young or inexperienced, but they have the most important ingredients already: belief and dedication. Support and time will do the rest.

I believe this is a global movement that RCEF is a part of and I'm glad we have other like-minded organizations to exchange ideas with.”



Networking

RCEF received a lot of visitors at Guan Ai School in September. An employee and a volunteer from **Fupin School** came to share experiences in working on rural education. Fupin has been providing financial and short-term professional support to some rural schools in northern Shanxi province. They are considering providing more on-the-ground support to the school in the future and were interested to see our approach.

Representatives from the **Chen Yet-Sen Family Foundation** visited to check up on the “Innovations Central” project of RCEF which the Foundation is sponsoring and to learn more about RCEF strategy. They

also shared with us successful experiences and lessons from other projects they support.

Two teachers from **Concordia International School in Shanghai** brought twelve high school girls for a field trip to Guan Ai. Guan Ai’s sixth graders brought them on a tour of the school and the village. Then, the girls taught our fifth graders some English games and songs. The high school girls come from many different countries and Guan Ai students were eager to meet them. They had many questions such as “Do dogs and cats wear clothes in your country?,” “Who is your president?” and “How is learning Chinese coming along?”

Pictures from the Summer Volunteer Program



See more photos from
Summer 2008 in the RCEF
Gallery!

gallery.ruralchina.org

Open Positions

RCEF relies on volunteers for many important roles. 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.

Public Education Designer

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 education among your colleagues and friends? Join us to collect and compile useful and interesting topics related to rural China development. The current projects include a “China Information Package,” that can be distributed in conferences, on university campuses etc. for various purposes. Current topics include general introduction to rural China, rural migrant workers in cities, 2nd generation of migrant workers, and health condition in rural China etc.

We also have a “Web Quiz” that needs maintenance. Users measure their knowledge of rural China education as well as learn some basic information through this tool.

Start Date: immediately

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 and capability to work independently and within teams as well as communicate efficiently in virtual environment

Start Date: immediately



Open Positions

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

Start Date: immediately

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

Start Date: immediately

Materials Design

Committee: Materials Design

Time Commitment / Week: 2 hours

Duration: minimum 1 semester

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.

Start Date: immediately

Volunteer Directory Coordinator

Committee: Human Resources Committee

Time Commitment / Week: 5 hours/week

Duration: 3 months

Tasks:

- Gather pictures, bios and information about all of RCEF's active volunteers
- Compile information into directory
- Possibility for extension to create a long-term online directory

Skills Needed:

- Commitment to the task
- Detail oriented
- Strong Communication skills (in both Chinese and English, preferred)

Start Date: immediately

Academic relations coordinator

Committee: Research and Evaluation Committee

Time Commitment / Week: 4 hours minimum

Duration: minimum 1 year

Responsibilities/Qualifications:

- establish and maintain long-term relationships with academic community (in education particularly) to seek inputs,
- 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

Start Date: immediately

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.

Start Date: immediately

For more information on RCEF, visit www.ruralchina.org

RCEF produces a monthly newsletter as well as a quarterly edition called the "Highlights".

To subscribe or unsubscribe, please email info@ruralchina.org.