

(Hsu, Ing-Miin 徐英敏, 3/8/2007)

When I was elected as the new Principle of Columbus Chinese School in the summer of 1998, the plan to gain the non-profit (501(c) (3)) status for the school was already in motion. Under the leadership of the ex-principle, Chang I-Hsing (張一信), a bylaw framework in English with legal wording was already located, the decision to change the school name from Columbus Chinese School to Columbus Chinese Academy was already made, and the tax ID for the new school was obtained. The reason for the name change was mainly to create a new identify for taxation purpose with no past history, such as paying teachers who had no working permits, in order to meet the various requirements for the application.

The Chinese school already had a bylaw in Chinese at the time, due to the hard work of several past principles a few years back. I invited several ex-principles, who were heavily involved with the bylaw previously, and several parents who were always helping the school, and formed an organizing committee. The first order of business for the organizing committee was to translate the bylaw to English with the legal wording and then to prepare the election of the first board.

Every thing stated in the Chinese bylaw was incorporated into the English bylaw. But some major changes were also introduced. The first was to include the non-discrimination language in admitting students. The second was to define the board, since the Chinese school did not have a board at the time. After several discussions, it was determined we need to allow non-Chinese school member to sit on the board, in order to help support the operation of the school. For example, we may need some board member with professional knowledge in laws but the Chinese school members may not have such specialty at the time

The organizing committee met several times over the summer. The new bylaw was adopted by the majority vote and the first board was successfully elected in October 1998. Joe Wei (衛興中) was elected as the first chair of the board. By adopting the new bylaw and the elections of the first board, the school gains the valuable 501(c) (3), non-profit, status.

With the 501(C) (3) status, the school can raise funds with tax benefits for donators and can utilize all the fund raising vehicles already available for any other non-profit organizations. The school started several fund raising activities that year, including selling gift certificates from major grocery chains like Meijer and Kroger. The school even persuaded all local Chinese grocery stores to join the gift certificate program. The school also changed the Chinese New Year celebration from the show format with performances from each of the language and extra-curricular classes to the carnival format, with fund raising opportunities for both the school and individual classes.

One of the requirements for the non-profit status is that the entity needs to report taxes for itself and for its employees. In order to compensate teachers for the extra taxes that they needed to pay, the board decided to raise the pay for the teachers. Besides the pay raise, the need for accountant/CPA to file taxes on behalf of the schools and to keep a good tax records years over years also incurred additional expenses for the school. But due to the heavy fund raising activities and generous donations from parents, the school was able to support the pay raise without increasing the tuition not only for the current year, but also for the next couple of years.

As soon as the school started in September, another issue became urgent. The school had been meeting at Ridgeview Middle School for quite a few years. But Ridgeview school already told the Chinese school that they did not want to renew the contract. The main reason Ridgeview did not want to renew the contract was due to the many incidents reported by the classroom teachers, such as things on the teacher's desks were moved, hangings on the bulletin boards were brushed off, things from student's desks were missing, PC in the classroom was turned on, etc. Once, the custodian caught a Chinese school student dropping the stapler from the window on second floor to the lawn outside while a few other students were watching and laughing.

It took the staff the whole year to pursue a new location for the school. First, a list of criteria of a good school was identified. Then a list of potential school locations was identified. Then the school list was divided among the staff to approach and see their willingness for rent. Finally, a few schools were willing to discuss further. Some visits to potential schools were even arranged for parents. But towards the end of the school year, there was still not a single school wiling to rent. Finally, Nelson Kuo (郭南雄) through his connections with the city government found the North Education center at Arcadia Avenue.

Due to the painful school search experience, the next principle Frances Hsieh (謝世芬) worked the whole year to rally support to build our own school. Several alternatives were pursued so that if a new space was found, the new space could be fully used during the weekdays, not just for the weekends. Visits to some empty lots and properties were made to help the selections. It is too bad a new school was not built, but the efforts did result in sizable donations established as funds for building a Chinese school for the future.

Submitted respectfully by Ing-Miin Hsu (徐英敏), March 8, 2007
All errors and/or omissions were regretfully made by the author.