Project Phoenix: Proposal for reforming the house system

Preface

BASIS International School Nanjing (BINJ) has a house system. Students and most teachers are assigned to one of four houses: Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. In primary and middle school, the system is mostly embraced by the students; however, in upper school, as the students grow older, they start to grow distant from the house system, mostly neglecting it, and not care about our respective houses. It's not like in Harry Potter, in which each house dines together and participate in Quidditch as a team; although we have some house activities, they are relatively few and, from high school students' point of view, not very interesting.

This proposal seeks to reform the house system to make it more interesting for high school students and lower graders alike. This proposal will outline the problems identified in the house system and propose changes to allow students to engage better in it.

Problems

Here are some problems identified within the house system.

1. Students lack a sense of belonging. As previously mentioned, in Harry Potter, the four houses do most things separately. They have separate dining tables, separate common areas and dorms, and separate teams. Although we have common areas in our school, they are mostly used interchangeably, i.e. the house to which the room belongs is not respected. In addition, house members rarely interact with each other. The only time a house gets together is during house assemblies, which are rare throughout the year.

   This causes students to gradually lose interest in their house. The house becomes transparent - unknown, uncared for. It prevents the house system from creating what it was dedicated for - unity and cohesion.

2. BINJ uses house points (HP), which is (maybe?) also influenced by Harry Potter. However, there are no clear rules for the distribution of HP. Teachers give out HP when they want, and some teachers stopped giving out HP altogether. Moreover, many students in high school and middle school hoard HP. They take them home and never return them to the school.

   This further causes the disinterest of students in the house system and HP, which in turn discourages teachers to give out HP even more. It forms a negative feedback loop which is detrimental to the house system.

Proposed Solutions

Problem 1: Lack of belonging

This problem can be tackled in multiple ways, all of which focus on one goal: making a student's house "visible". Here are a few ways to achieve this.

1. Change the student's ID card color. ID cards are an item that each student brings (or is supposed to bring) to school every day. If we make the student's house visible on the ID card, it can increase the visibility, so to speak, of the house system. Then perhaps students will be able to see each other's house and improve upon the current transparency of houses.

2. Add a color badge next to every student's name on Teams. This might be more difficult to achieve; however, it might be beneficial, since most students use Teams on a daily basis to not only communicate with teachers but also with their classmates and friends. If the house is visible next to the Teams name, then perhaps students will be more caring towards each other's (and their own) house.

3. Create more house-based activities. For example, in class, some group work activities or contests could be based on houses rather than teacher-assigned or student-formed groups. This can increase unity within a house, at least those members in the same class.

Many other possibilities exist here. Any method that can make houses seen and integrated into daily school life can greatly improve the lack of belonging of students.

Problem 2: House Points

This problem really has three parts. Part 1 is the unknown rules of distributing HP. Part 2 is the illegal hoarding of HP. Part 3 is the lack of enthusiasm of students (and some teachers alike) in receiving/distributing HP.

Part 1 can be solved by setting rules for HP distribution. Possible rules include:

1. Answering/Asking questions in class
2. Paying attention in class
3. Achieving a certain grade threshold on an assessment, quarter, week, etc.
4. Participating in activities, such as contests, outside of school

These are only brainstormed ideas; they don't have to be adopted. However, clear rules must be established, announced, and followed in order for students and teachers to be on the same page and respect those rules.

Part 2 is, in fact, closely connected to Part 3. Students hoard HP because they lack motivation to turn them in. In many students' opinion, turning HP in has no effect whatsoever; thus, they choose to keep them as souvenirs.

To solve this issue, the key is to increase the motivation of turning in HP. The most significant way to achieve this is to credit students for HP they turn in. This can be done in multiple ways:

1. At the HP tubes, where students currently simply put in the HP, create a mechanism where the students can swipe their ID card and then throw in HP. Then the system can recognize the student who turned in HP.

2. Digitize the entire HP system. Teachers can distribute HP on Teams or another website/platform, by searching the student's name. This approach eliminates the need for physical HP. The HP tally can then be displayed on a website, or on the TV in the cafeteria.

   A demo of a digital HP distribution system is created on Teams. Message *David Wang* (david.wang15275-binj@basischina.com) on Teams and send a message saying "hp card". Then follow the instructions. Currently the only students in the system are David Wang (Spring), **[REDACTED]** (Summer), **[REDACTED]** (Fall), and **[REDACTED]** (Winter), all of whom are in Grade 9. More students can be easily added, given their names, Teams email addresses, grades, and houses. Sending "hp stats" will show the current HP statistics.

Conclusion

Thank you for taking your time to view my proposal. This proposal outlined the current problems in the house system and proposed solutions to said problems. The house system is to some extent unique to BINJ, and its importance is self-evident. With Project Phoenix, the house system will be reborn, more visible, more attractive, and much stronger than before.

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