



Hangeul schools: the roots of our community

‘Student reporters’ report from the field and open the future

Hangeul schools transcend being mere institutions for teaching the mother tongue. They serve as an “emotional cradle” and “birthplace of identity,” providing an embrace amid the alienation and identity confusion children experience in immigrant communities while fostering pride in being Korean. This is precisely why improving the quality of Hangeul schools has been highlighted as a core task in overseas Korean policies since the launch of the Overseas Koreans Agency. Hangeul schools anchor our children’s identity and become the sails propelling them toward the future.

Over the past 123 years of Korean immigration history in the U.S., our overseas community has grown remarkably. Yet behind the dazzling statistics, a lingering challenge remains in the corner of our hearts: the issue of establishing the next generation’s identity. Having spent 28 years as a public school teacher on weekdays and a Hangeul school principal on weekends, I have witnessed firsthand that Hangeul schools must never remain mere “language education institutions.”

Amid these pressing demands of our times, expectations for the launch of the OKA are higher than ever. I firmly believe the core of this policy must lie in achieving a qualitative leap for Hangeul schools. It is now time to expand the concept beyond mere language acquisition to encompass Korean history, culture and spirit, transforming them into Korean schools.

I hope the launch of the OKA transcends the passive concept of merely “supporting second-generation education” and transforms into a “future investment” aimed at building the nation’s capabilities. The fact that children speak Korean fluently and cherish their homeland is thanks to the heartfelt dedication of teachers who have worked tirelessly behind the scenes. However, we must now move beyond relying solely on individual dedication and instead contemplate innovative educational models that align with the trends of our times.

As a first step we are focusing on the Global Hangeul School Student Reporter Corps project. Recently, Hangeul schools from over 10 regions worldwide, including New York, New Jersey, Washington, D.C., the U.S. West Coast, China, Germany, France and Johannesburg in South Africa, came together for their first video



Hwang Hyun-joo,
principal of the Korean School
of New Jersey, U.S.

conference. The process of high school student reporters directly covering local news and producing newspapers in multiple languages (Korean, English, French, etc.) will be a valuable experience for the children to find their own voice. We are confident this newspaper will become a powerful network connecting the next generation of compatriots worldwide.

Structural educational innovation is also urgent. For instance, the proposal to operate a “joint campus” combining the New York, Long Island and New Jersey campuses could be a practical alternative to efficiently

allocate educational resources and strengthen specialized research capabilities. Securing expertise in second-generation education must be concretely achieved. However, for such innovation to materialize, the OKA must provide unstinting support from a purely educational perspective, free from partisan interests.

Furthermore, if the networks of overseas Korean businesspeople, women leaders and elected Korean American politicians managed by various government ministries are focused on next-generation education, the nation’s capabilities can naturally be passed on to the second and third generations. This is not only crucial as a long-term core initiative for the OKA but will also significantly aid Hangeul schools in achieving financial self-sufficiency.

Finally, I wish to emphasize unity in the overseas Korean community. Rather than creating new organizations due to individual differences in opinion, we should strengthen existing structures like the 40-year-old National Association of Korean Schools (NAKS) to adapt to the changed AI era. Division is not the right educational model to show our children.

Hangeul schools are the roots of the overseas Korean community. Only with deep roots can the tree stand firm, and only then can the flowers blooming from that tree spread their fragrance across the world. We hope the OKA, now in its third year, will deeply understand the changed environment and implement effective policies for the next generation.

The author will also dedicate their utmost effort to ensure the inaugural issue of the student reporter team’s newspaper, which shares children’s experiences and opens the future, is successfully published. 📖

* The contributor’s claims or opinions may differ from the position of the Overseas Koreans Agency.