

9.4 mln students sit China's college entrance exam

A total of 9.4 million Chinese students Wednesday began the annual national college entrance examination, known as the Gaokao, which will have a large impact on their futures.

According to the 2017 enrollment plan issued by the Ministry of Education, some 3.72 million of these students are expected to enroll in undergraduate degrees following the examination, nearly 10,000 more than in 2016. However, competition is fierce to get into top institutions.

Local authorities have taken extra measures to eliminate cheating, which, since last year, can be treated as a criminal offence. Increasingly sophisticated cheating methods have impaired the integrity of examination, which is intended to be a level playing field.

In east China's fiercely competitive Shandong Province, the local education department has ordered college students not to ask for leave during the examination period, except in special circumstances, to prevent them acting as substitute exam takers.

"The whereabouts of absentees who do not have sufficient reasons must be investigated. Stricter procedures must be followed in approval of leave requests," according to a directive issued by the department.

Zhang Zhiyong, deputy director of the department, said, the move "aimed to eliminate problems that may enable cheating."

Police in central China's Henan Province, which has the most exam takers at more than 860,000, have arrested 16 people suspected of operating businesses related to exam cheating. They have confiscated equipment including signal emitters, cell phones and laptops.

In Beijing, which has more than 60,000 exam takers, local authorities have stepped up management of examination papers. The papers were delivered to the city's 92 examination sites under police escort. The deliveries were monitored by GPS positioning and video surveillance systems.

"My family was poor and couldn't afford to send me to the college, so I started working as a teenager," said Du Wanjun, father of a Beijing exam taker. "But now, all children can compete for university places and many can succeed. I'm really happy for them."

He said he does not hold expectations for high exam results. "I hope my daughter can relax and try her best. The Gaokao is just an experience," said Du, who unlike many parents left the campus without looking back.

Some parents are not as calm as Du. In the city of Changchun in northeast China's Jilin Province, a mother told Xinhua that she got up at 4 a.m. to

cook a breakfast of carp for her child.

There is an ancient Chinese legend about a carp that jumped over a high gate and became a dragon, which is often used as a metaphor for academic and career success. "I chose carp to wish my child a 'leap' in the exam," said the woman as she waited anxiously outside the exam site.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of resumption of the Gaokao after it was disrupted by the Cultural Revolution (1966-76).

In recent years, many high school graduates have chosen to attend overseas universities. However, the overwhelming majority of Chinese students and parents regard the Gaokao as a fair way for Chinese universities to select students for enrollment and a competition they cannot afford to lose.

A report released by China Education Online showed that the number of students taking the exam has declined from its peak of 10.5 million in 2008, and has remained stable at around 9.4 million since 2014.