The "National Education Philosophy (NEP), formulated in 1998, states that "Education in Malaysia is an on-going effort towards further developing the potential of individuals, in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens and who are responsible and capable of achieving a high level of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large".

There no discrimination against any individual in terms of access to education and financial support for maintenance of pupils or students in any education institution. The equality and right for education in Malaysia are fundamental liberties enshrined in the Federal Constitution and the Education Act of 1996. The provision for education in the Federal Constitution is articulated under Article 12 The right to education which states:

"(1) Without prejudice to the generality of Article 8, there shall be no discrimination against any citizen on the ground only of religion, race, descent or place of birth -

(a) in the administration of any educational institution maintained by public authority, and in particular, the admission of pupils or students or the payment of fees; or

(b) in providing out of the funds of a public authority financial aid for the maintenance or education of pupils or students in any educational institution (whether or not maintained by public authority and whether within or outside the Federation)

(2) Every religious group has the right to establish and maintain institutions for the education of children in its own religion, and there shall be no discrimination on the ground only of religion in any law relating to such institutions or in the administration of any such law; but it shall be lawful for the Federation or a State to establish or maintain or assist in establishing or maintaining Islamic institutions

or provide or assist in providing instruction in the religion of Islam and incur such expenditure as may be necessary for the purpose.

(3) No person shall be required to receive instruction in or take part in any ceremony or act of worship of religion other than his own.

(4) For the purpose of Clause (3) the religion of a person under the age of eighteen years shall be decided by his parent or guardian."

The right for education to all individual in Malaysia is further strengthen by various provisions under the Education Act 1996. The act regulates both the public and private institution in Malaysia.

The education system in Malaysia is structured to ensure that every citizen regardless of race, religion and economic background has the opportunity to enjoy equal access to quality education for at least 11 years. Where there is a need for students to pay fees, there is sufficient provision in the system to cater to those who are unable to do so. No student is left-out due to his/her inability to pay the required nominal fees.

The system provides ample assistance to poor students to remain within the structure of public schooling by giving monetary and material aid through various schemes and services. No child in need is discriminated by race, religion, skin colour or for any reason in receiving educational loans or scholarship or access to nutritional and health programmes or other educational facilities provided.

Every parent is free to choose whichever school he/she wants to send their child to. At the pre-school levels, kindergartens have been set-up by both government and non-government agencies with a high degree of flexibility in terms of teaching approaches and medium of instruction. Sensitivity to the multi-

ethnic nature of the population is exemplified in the two categories of primary schools set up through the nation: the national and national type schools. National schools use Bahasa Melayu (the national language) as the medium of instruction and English is a compulsory subject. National type schools use Mandarin or Tamil as the medium of instruction and Bahasa Melayu and English are compulsory subjects. Parents can also choose to enroll their children into private schools of their choice.

As an act to stress the importance of education, the primary level has been made compulsory since 2004 beginning with the Year One intake. Again, if parent are unable to cope with the nominal fees imposed, they are eligible to receive aid without any discrimination.

Educationally challenged children too have a special place in Malaysian educational system. Special education provides educational opportunities for pupils with special needs, such as spastic, handicapped, visually impaired, hearing impaired as well as those with learning disabilities. Such children are given an extended time frame to complete their education. For children who are specially incapacitated and cannot attend school, parents can apply to the Minister of Education to have the child home schooled.

To ensure accessibility of education to every child, school-boarding facilities in the form of day school hostels, central hostels and fully residential school hostels, have been set up throughout the country. In remote areas these are an essential educational amenity for pupils who would have otherwise traverse difficult terrain to get a basic education.