

Chairman
Panel on Education
Legislative Council
Hong Kong SAR

February 6, 2011

RE: Secondary School Places in South Lantau

I am a Hong Kong registered teacher and I first came to Lantau to work in 1997. I consider South Lantau to be my home. I have no plans to leave.

Having attended two previous Legco meetings and read the Education Bureaus documents, I would like to comment on the EDB's argument that there are insufficient students for a secondary school on South Lantau.

1. When I first arrived on Lantau to teach, my sons were still school age. There was no school option on Lantau and so I had to find a solution to the problem myself. My solution was to leave Lantau and commute myself, because I did not believe that a long journey to and from school would be beneficial to my sons. My sons would not have counted in the Education Bureau's figures.
2. I know of many families, both Chinese and non-Chinese speaking using many solutions because of the lack of school places on Lantau, including home schooling and moving away. These are not easy decisions and these children do need school places, but the EDB will not include them in their figures.
3. I also know some youngsters who have given up their education as soon as they finish Secondary 3: long commutes to school, day in day out, for years, has worn them out.
4. The Education Bureau also claims that not counting non-Chinese speaking children is acceptable because they are transitory. Many, including my own family are not transitory. More people would be permanent if school places were provided. My own son has been employed in Hong Kong as a graduate and is so committed to improving his Chinese language skills that he has not only continued his lessons into adulthood, but has also attended courses at a Beijing University. He hopes to return to employment in Hong Kong soon, and I hope that he will be able to raise a family in the place he considers to be his home.
5. If there were a good secondary school in Mui Wo I suspect it would be over-subscribed since the Education Bureaus figures are inaccurate. We already have over 2,400 school age children in the community. More and more families with school age children are keen to move into South Lantau for cleaner air, and a safe and open environment. They see Lantau as an ideal place to raise children.

6. Although we maintain that if correctly counted there are sufficient students on South Lantau and the surrounding Islands, the South Lantau Community are also asking the Education Bureau to be flexible on its rules for the size of a schools for the special case of isolated South Lantau and its close Islands. I have spent much of my professional life teaching in small schools and we chose small primary and secondary school for our own sons. Small schools provide a different, more personal educational experience for students, and many students thrive in them.
7. The government keeps saying that 61 students per level is the minimum for a broad and balance curriculum. What's the point of having more subjects to choose from when our children can't even afford the time to do extra-curricular activities or 'other learning experience' activities because of long commutes, and often they struggle to stay awake during class because they are too tired – how 'broad and balanced' can that be for them!
8. The thriving cosmopolitan community on South Lantau needs a secondary school quickly and the Education Bureaus arguments for not re-opening our school are not valid.
9. Hundreds of our students have been desperate for the local secondary school to reopen and have waited for many years. Instead the school is left to rot. There is now some indecent graffiti on the school walls. The school has turned into a site of neglect, when it should be an icon of our colourful multi-racial community. This is a much treasured building for us. If the government cannot look after it properly, we will! And we will put it into optimal use, turning it into the pride of a vibrant community!

Thank you for the opportunity to make this statement and I hope you can support my community in their endeavors to improve the lives of all our children both Chinese and non-Chinese speaking, and give them a school where they can continue their education together, because together they are all going to contribute to the future of Hong Kong.

Jacqueline Sharp
Parent and Teacher
South Lantau