

**The Joint Committee of Hong Kong Secondary School Councils and
Secondary School Principals' Associations of 18 Districts
Executive Summary of Report on Survey of the New Academic System
(11-11-2011)**

1. Background of the survey

1.1 To investigate the key concerns of Hong Kong secondary schools on the implementation of the new academic system, the Research Task Group set up by the Joint Committee of Hong Kong Secondary School Councils and Secondary School Principals' Associations of 18 Districts has launched a territory-wide survey. Questionnaires were sent to all Hong Kong secondary schools between July and September 2011, and a total of 230 returns were received, which accounted for 49.6% of public secondary schools in Hong Kong.

1.2 The survey focused on five aspects in the launch of the new academic system by secondary schools, namely, difficulty in implementation, teaching by groups, deployment of manpower, financial expenditure and factors of school background.

1.3 Data collected were analyzed using rigorous empirical research methodology. In addition to calculation and comparison of frequencies and means, correlations analyses, ANOVA, MANOVA (within-group design) and multiple analyses were conducted.

2. Difficulty in implementation

2.1 Schools in general encountered great difficulty in implementing the new academic system. Among the 18 questions listed in the questionnaires, schools strongly agreed that 17 of them created real difficulty, and 16 of them had to be tackled with top priority. The mean scores of rating the degree of agreement were both above 5 in a 7-point scale.

2.2 Among these 18 questions, the 5 most difficult to schools were: the ratio of number of teachers to number of classes (teacher-class ratio) being too small (6.63); the number of students per class being too large (6.54); increased student differences (6.32); heavy burden of Independent Enquiry Study (IES) of Liberal Studies (LS) on teachers (6.32); difficulty of students to handle

many school-based assessments (SBAs) at the same time (6.18). The mean scores were all above 6 in a 7-point scale.

2.3 Schools also strongly agreed that these 5 most difficult questions had to be tackled with top priority: the ratio of number of teachers to number of classes (teacher-class ratio) being too small (6.64); the number of students per class being too large (6.56); increased student differences (6.25); heavy burden of Independent Enquiry Study (IES) of Liberal Studies (LS) on teachers (6.24); difficulty of students to handle many school-based assessments (SBAs) at the same time (6.18). The mean scores were all above 6 in a 7-point scale.

2.4 Regarding the class-teacher ratio, schools generally considered that the number of teachers relative to the number of classes was too small. 75% of schools rated 7 in a 7-point scale, expressing strong agreement that the number of teachers had to be increased. The average suggestion was to raise the ratio from 1.7 to 1.99 at the junior level and from 1.9 to 2.27 at the senior level.

2.5 As for the number of students per class, schools generally agreed the number of students in a class under the new academic system was too large, 76.8% of schools rated 7 at a 7-point scale, expressing strong agreement that the number had to be reduced to 30 students.

3. Teaching by groups

3.1 In face of the difficulty in implementing the new academic system, schools generally tended to teach by groups. As regards the degree of group teaching at the junior and senior levels, the overall ratio of number of groups to the number of classes was 1.30 or above, which means every 10 classes of the 4 core subjects (Chinese language, English language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies) were expanded to 13 groups. The overall ratios at the junior and senior levels were 1.24 and 1.27 respectively.

3.2 Schools had group teaching in all the four core subjects, namely, Chinese language, English language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies. At the junior level, their ratios were 1.21 , 1.30 , 1.16 and 1.14 respectively, and at the senior level, they were 1.16 , 1.27 , 1.13 and 1.39.

3.3 The ratios of the 4 core subjects at the junior and senior levels were different.

On the whole, there were more groups for Chinese language and English at the junior level, and more groups for Liberal Studies at the senior level.

4. Deployment of manpower

4.1 In coping with the needs of group teaching and support work, the number of teachers provided by the present staff establishment was found to be insufficient because of the heavy workload. The deployment of manpower in schools was very tense. 93.3% of schools had to employ extra teachers on top of their staff establishment, 99.6% of schools had to employ different types of support staff, and 91.4% of schools which had set up Incorporated Management Committee (IMC) had to employ extra teachers using Teacher Relief Grant (TRG) to freeze teaching posts.

4.2 Regarding the use of TRG, 68% of schools froze 1 to 4 teaching posts, 29.2% of schools froze 5 to 6 teaching posts, and the mean was 2.99. As for the number of extra teachers employed through freezing of teaching posts, the mean was 4.60.

4.3 Regarding the employment of contract teachers on top of the schools' staff establishment, 43.1% of schools employed 1 to 4 extra teachers, 50.2% of schools employed 5 or more extra teachers, and the mean was 5.91.

4.4 As for the employment of support staff, 41.8% of schools employed 1 to 6 support staff of different types, 57.8% of schools employed 7 or more support staff, and the mean was 7.96.

4.5 The different types of support staff employed by schools, in descending order of their average number were: teaching assistants (3.71), technical assistants (1.82), other types (0.666), guidance assistants (0.63), administrative assistants (0.58) and activities assistants (0.55).

5. Financial Expenditure

5.1 To meet the demand for manpower deployment and other support work, schools generally had to make flexible use of government and non-government financial resources. 39.3% of schools spent between HK\$ 100,000 and HK\$ 500,000, 33.3% of schools even spent as high as above HK\$ HK\$ 1,000,000, and the mean amount was HK\$ 1,080,392.67.

5.2 In employing extra teachers, 23.5% of schools spent between HK\$ 100,000 and HK\$ 500,000, 27.5% spent as high as HK\$ 1,000,000 or more, and the mean was HK\$ 690,911.98.

5.3 In employing support staff, 25.5% of schools spent between HK\$ 10,000 and HK\$ 500,000, 9.8% of schools spent as high as HK\$ 800,000 or more, and the mean was HK\$ 252,423.79.

5.4 In procuring outside services, 23.5% of schools spent between HK\$ 10,000 and HK\$100,000, 19.6% of schools spent HK\$ 200,000 or more, and the mean was HK\$ 108,311.19.

5.5 In supporting students to enroll for Applied Learning (APL), 30.4% of schools spent HK\$ 10,000 and HK\$ 100,000, 17.8% of schools spent more than HK\$ 100,000, and the mean was HK\$ 28,745.71.

6. Factors of school background

6.1 The lower the banding of students, the greater the difficulty the schools encountered on the following problems: increased student differences (beta = 0.326, $p < 0.001$), the curriculum being too difficult (beta = 0.255, $p < 0.01$), more group teaching needed for elective modules of Chinese language and English language (beta = 0.193, $p < 0.05$; beta = 0.245, $p < 0.01$), insufficient resources for Applied Learning (beta = 0.266, $p < 0.01$), difficulty for teachers to cope with both subject teaching and other learning experiences (beta= 0.174, $p < 0.05$), insufficient opportunity of teachers' professional training (beta = 0.162, $p < 0.05$). Moreover, the lower the banding of students, the more strongly the schools agreed that the problem of insufficient resources for Applied Learning (beta = 0.266, $p < 0.01$) should be tackled with top priority.

6.2 The lower the banding of students, the greater the degree of group teaching for Mathematics at the junior and senior levels, and so the greater the ratio of the number of groups to number of classes (beta = 0.218, $p < 0.05$; beta = 0.193, $p < 0.05$).

6.3 The lower the banding of students, the greater the number of teaching posts the schools froze using TRG (beta = 0.346, $p < 0.05$), and the greater number of people employed by the schools under the following posts: overall support

staff (beta = 0.285, $p < 0.001$), teaching assistants (beta = 0.235, $p < 0.001$), activities assistants (beta = 0.238, $p < 0.01$), and guidance assistants (beta = 0.317, $p < 0.001$).

6.4 The lower the banding of students, the greater the amount of expenditure the schools spent on enrolment for Applied Learning (beta = 0.232, $p < 0.05$), and the smaller the amount spent on employing teachers (beta = -0.232, $p < 0.05$).

6.5 The larger the size of the schools (in terms of the total number of classes), the greater the difficulty for teachers to grasp the criteria of school-based assessment (beta = 0.215, $p < 0.05$).

6.6 The larger the size of the schools, the greater the number of support staff employed by the schools (beta = 0.199, $p < 0.05$), and also the number of teaching assistants (beta = 0.170, $p < 0.05$).

6.7 The greater the challenge of student enrolment of the school districts, the smaller the number of teachers employed by schools through freezing of teaching posts using TRG (beta = -0.300, $p < 0.05$).

6.8 The greater the challenge of student enrolment of the school districts, the smaller the amount of expenditure spent by schools on enrolment for Applied Learning (beta = -0.197, $p < 0.05$).

7. Recommendations

The Joint Committee of Hong Kong Secondary School Councils and Secondary School Principals' Associations of 18 Districts unanimously make the following recommendations to the Education Bureau:

7.1 Start immediately the revision of schools' staff establishment, beginning from the school year 2012-2013, raising the existing class-teacher ratio from 1.7 to 2.0 at the junior level, and from 1.9 to 2.3 at the senior level, so that schools can use the additional teaching manpower resources in a more flexible manner, which allows teachers to have more time and space to tailor the curriculum, to teach by groups or in small classes, to conduct school-based assessment, to organize other learning experiences, and to cater for the different learning needs of individual students, in the face of the changes in class structures and student composition under the new academic system,

and the ever increasing student differences.

- 7.2 Commence as soon as possible a review of the new academic system; conduct research and make timely revision on the curriculum, teaching, assessment and support measures in order to address the difficulties encountered by the schools particularly on catering for students' differences, implementing IES of Liberal Studies, and helping students to cope with their different school-based assessments; and provide adequate support to schools for a sustainable development of the new academic system.
- 7.3 With 30 students per class as a goal, reduce by stages the number of students in a class so that teachers can cater for the learning differences within classes more effectively; enhance their classroom teaching and management; have more time for pastoral care of individual students on academic studies and personal development, and to help their students grasp the curriculum of the new academic system, engage themselves in classroom learning, school-based assessment and other learning experiences.
- 7.4 Provide secondary schools with sufficient financial resources by extending and changing into recurrent grants existing general grants and special grants for subjects and other purposes, such as the Liberal Studies Curriculum Support Grant and Capacity Enhancement Grant; and by introducing special new grants for schools to employ extra teachers and support staff, to procure outside services, and to implement Applied Learning, so that schools can meet the needs of continued development of the new academic system.
- 7.5 Give priority to supporting schools with more challenges, particularly those with students of lower banding and smaller number of classes; raise their class-teacher ratio and increase their financial support, so that these schools can have more teachers, teaching assistants, activities assistants and guidance assistants for group teaching and student support, strengthen the professional training of their teachers to tackle the problems of increased student differences and over-difficulty of the curriculum in implementing the new academic system.