

For discussion  
on 22 March 2016

## **Legislative Council Panel on Education**

### **Review of the Territory-wide System Assessment**

#### **Purpose**

This paper updates Members on the latest development on the review of the Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA).

#### **Background**

2. In 2000, the Education Commission proposed to introduce Basic Competency Assessments in its report entitled “*Learning for Life. Learning through Life*” to better enhance the effectiveness of learning and teaching. Being one of the components of Basic Competency Assessments, TSA is an assessment on students’ basic competencies in Chinese Language, English Language and Mathematics upon completion of the three key learning stages (i.e. Primary 3, Primary 6 and Secondary 3 levels). Basic competencies form part of the curriculum and have been integrated in students’ daily learning and internal assessments made by schools. Students are expected to acquire the basic competencies in the three subjects in order to proceed effectively to the next key learning stage.

3. At the territory-wide level, TSA data enable the Government to review education policies and provide focused support for schools. At the school level, TSA serves the function of promoting “assessment for learning” by providing schools with information that helps teachers identify the overall strengths and weaknesses of students and formulate plans to improve the effectiveness of learning and teaching in light of the assessment data and their schools’ development needs. After analysing students’ performance in TSA, schools will follow up through various measures, such as adjusting the teaching content, revamping the design of worksheets and assessments, and arranging after-school remedial programmes to cater for learner diversity.

4. The background, purpose and implementation details of TSA are set out in paper LC Paper No. CB(4)435/15-16(02).

5. Since the introduction of TSA in 2004, the Education Bureau (EDB) has been maintaining communication with various stakeholders (including schools, teachers, parents, primary and secondary school councils, the Committee on Home-School Co-operation, and

TSA concern groups, etc.) to understand the situation and enhance the implementation arrangements on an on-going basis. For details of the engagements with stakeholders and the enhancement measures introduced in 2014, please refer to paper LC Paper No. CB(4)/284/13-14(03).

6. As part of the continuous efforts to improve the implementation arrangements of TSA to address public concerns, the Secretary for Education announced in late October 2015 that the Coordinating Committee on Basic Competency Assessment and Assessment Literacy (Committee), established in 2014, would conduct a comprehensive review of the operation and implementation arrangements of TSA. The review was premised on the promotion of quality education, the learning needs of students, professionalism, and mutual trust among stakeholders. Two working groups have been set up under the Committee to conduct an in-depth study of the reporting and administration and the assessment papers and question design of TSA respectively, with a view to recommending short, medium and long-term improvement measures. In February 2016, the Committee submitted a report on the review of TSA to the EDB. The report has been accepted by EDB and can be accessed at <http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/tsa/fullreport.pdf>.

#### Latest Development

7. The Committee and its working groups have studied in detail the purpose, function and implementation situation of TSA. They reaffirm the intent and value of the establishment of TSA, and recognise the functional use of TSA data in providing feedback to learning and teaching, which include, at the school level, the use of related information that can enhance the school-based curriculum and teaching practices for more effective student learning; and at the territory-wide level, the use of TSA data that enable the EDB to identify priorities and directions for implementing measures to support learning. The Committee takes the view that TSA shall continue to be carried out to retain the functions above.

8. To reflect more clearly the intent of the assessment of basic competency, the Committee recognises that the assessment papers and question design could be adjusted. The Committee's recommendations in this respect are set out in *Annex 1*. The reports distributed to schools after the conduct of TSA could also adopt different formats to facilitate the enhancement of school-based curriculum and teaching practice while reflecting the low-stakes nature of TSA. The Committee takes the view that the relevant adjustments should be implemented as a tryout arrangement in 2016. Subject to the feedback of the 2016 tryout, the assessment arrangement in 2017 should be appropriately adopted and enhanced, including the provision of professional support measures for schools. The tryout should be of a representative scale to ensure its validity.

9. As recommended, the EDB launches the 2016 Tryout Study at Primary 3 level with the following major objectives:

- (i) to validate whether the revamped TSA papers and item design proposed by the relevant working group would uphold the reliability and validity of assessment while aligning with the requirements of basic competencies of Primary 3 students to tie in with the curriculum and student learning;
- (ii) to try out different reporting formats to meet the needs of individual schools;
- (iii) to strengthen the provision of professional support measures for schools on homework policy, assessment literacy, enhancement of learning and teaching (e.g. via the promotion of reading) as well as TSA in the course of the tryout. Public education would also need to be strengthened so as to enhance stakeholders' awareness of the TSA as part of the concept of "assessment for learning" with a view to enhancing quality education;
- (iv) at the territory-wide level, to keep track on the attainment of basic competencies of all students and to provide continuous data for other related studies; and
- (v) to demonstrate in good faith the low-stakes nature of TSA that it would not exert pressure on school sponsoring bodies, schools and parents; and to foster mutual trust through participation, sharing and collaboration in promoting quality education with a view to facilitating effective and pleasurable student learning.

10. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) issued on 29 February 2016 letters to invite schools to participate in the 2016 Tryout Study (Primary 3). About 50 primary schools of different types, i.e. about 10 per cent of the primary schools in the territory with each school participating as a unit, will participate in the tryout study. Schools have been invited on the basis of various factors, including districts, types of schools (government, aided and Direct Subsidy Scheme) and school size to ensure representativeness, reliability and validity of the tryout study. Apart from the schools invited to participate, other schools are also encouraged to take part in it on a voluntary basis.

11. A series of support measures will be provided for schools participating in the 2016 Tryout Study (Primary 3). Schools can join according to their needs. The support measures include:

- (i) organising seminars and providing on-site services for participating schools to enhance their capacity of deploying assessment strategies, designing assessment tasks and questions, and making use of TSA data to provide feedback to learning and teaching;
- (ii) giving priority to access school-based support services in 2016/17 to participating schools that wish to incorporate experience gained from the tryout study in the development of their school-based curriculum;
- (iii) engaging participating schools in joint research and development projects conducted by tertiary institutions on developing teaching and assessment materials as well as designing learning activities; and
- (iv) co-organising education seminars for parents with participating schools to promote understanding of assessment literacy.

12. During the sign-up process, the HKEAA has received many enquiries from schools that are interested in participating in the tryout study. Since many schools has reflected that more time is needed to discuss and liaise with stakeholders before a decision can be made, we will handle such cases flexibly. The EDB hopes that stakeholders would focus on providing feedback from the experience of the tryout study for future TSAs and professional support measures. This is to enable the development of the TSA to revert to the right track and to further enhance the effectiveness of learning and teaching.

13. To address various concerns in the community about TSA (including over-drilling, different stakeholders' perception of the stakes involved and the provision of support to schools and students), the Committee has made detailed recommendations which are set out in *Annex 2*. The Committee has also put forward some medium and long-term improvement measures, details of which are set out in *Annex 3*.

14. In February and March, EDB has organised four Regional Seminars on Enhancing School Homework Policy for primary school heads, deputy heads, curriculum leaders and teachers responsible for homework policy. Four primary schools were invited to share successful experiences and strategies for implementing homework policy and discuss with the primary school leaders on formulating an appropriate homework policy that best suits the school context and students' learning needs. Through the seminars, EDB hopes to promote exchanges of positive experiences in home-school cooperation to reduce homework stress of students and ensure adequate time for rest and engagement in activities that promote psychological and physical well-being of students leading to whole-person development.

Schools participating were actively engaged and recognised that the seminars served the purpose of helping them to continue to enhance the school-based homework policy.

15. The Committee and EDB will follow up and continue to review the above recommendations, with a view to improving the implementation and arrangements of TSA on an on-going basis.

### **Advice Sought**

16. Members are invited to take note of the latest development on the review of TSA.

**Education Bureau**

**March 2016**

**Coordinating Committee on Basic Competency Assessment and Assessment Literacy  
Recommendations on Improvement to Assessment Papers and Question Design**

On assessment papers and question design, major recommendations of the Coordinating Committee on Basic Competency Assessment and Assessment Literacy include:

(i) Principles of modification:

- learning needs of students;
- alleviating the learning burden on students;
- aligning with the spirit of curriculum; and
- adopting appropriate choice of words and phrases in assessment materials.

(ii) Primary 3 Chinese Language:

- the number of texts in the reading assessment will be adjusted from three to two; the total number of words per sub-paper will be limited to not more than 1 200 and the number of items will not exceed 20; practical writing will only be included in one of the sub-papers of reading to avoid giving undue weight to practical writing;
- in the writing assessment, certain information required for practical writing will be provided, such as salutation, complimentary close, greetings and date of a letter, etc.; the marking criteria on the format of practical writing will be adjusted; student exemplars demonstrating the attainment of basic competency will be provided; and
- a review of “five-options-choose-two” items, items requiring “reverse thinking” and so forth in each paper will be conducted.

(iii) Primary 3 English Language:

- the number of parts in the reading assessment will be reduced from four to three. The number of words per reading task will be limited to not more than 150 and the number of words of the whole paper will be capped at 400;

- to help students manage the assessment time for the reading and writing paper, invigilators will announce the time twice during the examination, i.e. 15 minutes and 5 minutes before the end of examination;
- items expecting answers in the past tense in the writing assessment will be scrapped, such as writing a recount; and
- assessment items on basic book concepts should be avoided.

(iv) Primary 3 Mathematics:

- the number of items will be reduced, with an immediate cut of around 20%;
- only one basic competency will be assessed in each item; and
- items requiring solving linking problems will be minimised.

**Coordinating Committee on Basic Competency Assessment and Assessment Literacy  
Recommendations to Address Concerns in the Community about TSA**

To address various concerns in the community about TSA (including over-drilling, different stakeholders' perception of the stakes involved and the provision of support to schools and students), the Coordinating Committee on Basic Competency Assessment and Assessment Literacy has made the following recommendations:

(i) Over-drilling

- to refine TSA papers and item design to align better with the requirements of basic competencies and tie in with schools' everyday teaching and students' learning needs. In this way, the need for schools and students to prepare for TSA by drilling will be eliminated, enhancing learning and teaching, minimising impact on the balanced and whole-person development of students;
- through enhancing training and development for teaching staff at different stages (including training for prospective teachers, pre-service training for appointed teachers, and in-service training for serving teachers), to enable them to get acquainted with curriculum arrangements, teaching strategies and teaching resources, as well as to improve the assessment literacy, understanding that over-drilling is ineffective to facilitate student learning; and
- to strengthen communication among the EDB, school sponsoring bodies, schools, parents, students and different stakeholders in the education sector in order to promote understanding and support of the schools' arrangements on homework, exercises and tests/examinations.

(ii) Stakeholders' perception of the stakes involved in TSA

- the EDB to reassure the education sector of the low-stakes design of TSA. Specific internal guidelines should be issued to explicitly state that the EDB will not use TSA data to assess the performance of a school (e.g. External School Review). From the 2016/17 school year, TSA should be removed from the focus questions under "8.1 Academic Performance" of the "Performance Indicators" to alleviate schools' concerns. In addition, provision on schools' good use of TSA data to



provide feedback to learning and teaching should be further emphasised under “3.3 Performance Assessment”; and

- to step up public education and promote assessment literacy to encourage the public and the education sector for cultivating a positive and right attitude towards the application of assessment data to serve the function of “assessment for learning”.

(iii) Strengthening support for learning

- to organise seminars and workshops for different stakeholders in school;
- to encourage experience sharing among schools on the use of TSA data to enhance the curriculum and enrich teaching activities;
- to further promote the use of the “Web-based Learning and Teaching Support” platform (including exercises and learning materials that are developed based on TSA data) to support and facilitate learning and teaching;
- to conduct consultancy studies and visits to learn more about the relevant practices in other places, particularly their approaches in using assessment data for devising measures to support teaching in school and student learning; and
- to provide effective support to schools.

(iv) Enhancing transparency and strengthening communication with parents

- the EDB to disseminate information related to TSA through various channels to enhance transparency and strengthen communication with parents, helping them to understand the purpose, implementation and function of TSA.

**Coordinating Committee on Basic Competency Assessment and Assessment Literacy  
Medium and Long-term Improvement Measures on TSA**

In the medium and long run, the Coordinating Committee on Basic Competency Assessment and Assessment Literacy has made the following recommendations:

- (i) to enhance the overall assessment literacy among various sectors, including understanding assessment as an integral part of learning and teaching, knowing the functions of daily exercises, schools' internal examinations, public examinations and assessment studies; enhancing the capacities of making use of assessment data to provide feedback to learning and teaching and to develop and enhance the school-based curriculum and learning activities; as well as strengthening the communication and collaboration among various sectors, such as:
  - for school sponsoring bodies, incorporated management committee members, EDB visiting officers: promoting among them the understanding that the TSA data reflect and assess only part of the learning objectives, and student and school backgrounds should be taken into account in the relevant analysis;
  - for principals (including aspiring principals, newly-appointed principals): promoting among them the understanding of using TSA information for leading the school in enhancing learning and teaching;
  - for curriculum leaders and teachers: promoting among them the understanding of using TSA information for planning curriculum, enhancing curriculum leadership and providing feedback to learning and teaching;
  - for prospective teachers: equipping them with the understanding of the concept of the TSA design and its implementation as well as the knowledge of assessment for learning;
  - for parents: promoting among them the understanding of the concept of assessment for learning, strengthening home-school cooperation and communication for better understanding of their children's learning needs; and

- HKEAA officers: promoting assessment for learning through enhancing assessment items and reports.
- (ii) in the long run, to review the overall arrangements for basic competency assessment and the formulation of basic competencies, to continue to draw reference from the assessment practices in other places;
- (iii) to expand the existing central online assessment bank, “Student Assessment”, to better serve everyday learning, teaching and assessment;
- (iv) to further promote professional development among schools, and to share successful experiences in making good use of assessment to benefit learning and teaching through the Quality Education Fund Thematic Networks;
- (v) to review the arrangements of basic competency assessment for students with special educational needs and non-Chinese speaking students;
- (vi) to ensure the interests of students should come first in the practices of effective learning and teaching in accordance with the curriculum documents so as to equip students with the abilities to embrace future challenges with a positive and proactive attitude and pursue lifelong learning and whole-person development; and
- (vii) to review the above recommendations on an on-going basis for improvement.