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10 March 2017

Ms Angel WONG
Clerk to Panel
Legislative Council Panel on Education
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central
Hong Kong

Dear Ms WONG,

Panel on Education
Issues related to Student Suicides

I refer to your letter of 28 February 2017 requesting the Administration's responses to the issues raised in the joint letter from Hon Tanya CHAN, Hon Dennis KWOK and Hon Alvin YEUNG. Our response is at the **Appendix**.

Yours sincerely,

(Godwin LAI)
for Secretary for Education

Encl.

Prevention of Student Suicides

Recommendations of the Committee on Prevention of Student Suicides

In response to the spate of student suicides in the 2015/16 school year, apart from putting forward a series of responsive measures immediately, the Education Bureau (EDB) set up the Committee on Prevention of Student Suicides (the Committee) on 30 March 2016. The Final Report of the Committee was submitted on 7 November 2016.

2. To understand the relationship between different factors and student suicide and to identify areas for improvement, the Committee conducted research on local and international data and information. Based on the analysis, the Committee pointed out that each of the student suicide cases involved multiple contributing factors and causal pathways. The reasons behind each case were very complex and the triggers were also different, including mental health difficulties (e.g., early psychosis, depression and anxiety disorder), psychological concerns (e.g., negative thinking), family/peer relationship, family/school adjustment problems and academic pressure, etc.

3. The Committee has proposed a number of recommendations on student suicide prevention, which could be grouped under five broad categories: (i) Enhancement of Student Support at Schools and Post-Secondary Institutions; (ii) Enhancement of Support to Families; (iii) Enhancement of Roles of Traditional and Social Media; (iv) Promotion of Multiple Articulation Pathways; and (v) Other Related Views on the Education System. Even though the recommendations put forward by the Committee were not exhaustive, they were evidence-based, aiming to improve students' resiliency and psychological well-being, restore the support system for our students so as to strengthen their sense of connectedness with their families, friends and the community. In addition, the Committee emphasised the importance of cross-sector collaboration. As pointed out by the Chairman of the Committee in the Foreword of the Report, "There are indeed no easy solutions to complex problems. However, we strongly believe and emphasise that the

seemingly meagre measures standing alone could yield great resilience and proactive strength when implemented together.” This perspective is relevant to the viewpoint – “the government must face squarely the overall sources of pressure of students”, which was expressed in the letter to EDB. EDB and other bureaux and departments will collaborate actively to mitigate students’ pressure as well as in student suicides prevention work so as to implement the Committee’s recommendations effectively.

Follow-up Work

4. To promote students’ mental well-being and health as well as to assist schools to identify and support students with suicidal risks, EDB and other bureaux and departments, including the Food and Health Bureau (FHB), the Department of Health (DH), the Home Affairs Bureau, and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) are formulating feasible measures and carrying out the work to follow up on the recommendations of the Final Report in accordance with the four key areas, including (i) Promotion of Students’ Mental Well-being and Health, (ii) Strengthening Support for Schools and Teachers, (iii) Reviewing Relevant Domains in the Education System, and (iv) Enhancement of Family Life and Parent Education, so as to strengthen support for schools, teachers, parents and students. Relevant progress of work is set out in the Annex. The major recent work of EDB in collaboration with other bureaux / departments is as follows:

(a) EDB and DH are promoting the Joyful@School Campaign in primary and secondary schools in the 2016/17 school year in order to enhance mental health literacy in schools. EDB has uploaded relevant information including suggested activities and teaching materials on the website, which will be updated regularly for schools’ reference and application. Under the Campaign, the Joyful@HK Run was held on December 11, 2016, with 42 participating teams. EDB and DH are now running the video competition “Your Joyful Record”, aiming to enrich the public and students’ understanding of mental health through the event.

(b) FHB, in collaboration with EDB, the Hospital Authority (HA) and

SWD, has launched a pilot scheme named as “Student Mental Health Support Scheme”, with 9 schools participating in the first phase. Starting from September 2017, the scheme will be extended to the 8 schools of the second phase. Experienced psychiatric nurses will visit schools regularly and form a multi-disciplinary team with school personnel, school social workers and educational psychologists to conduct professional deliberations on specific cases. FHB will provide training for the teachers of the 17 participating schools and relevant professional staff.

- (c) EDB will launch a resource handbook in March this year, helping schools in identifying, supporting and referring students with suicidal behaviour. To further strengthen schools’ ability to identify and support students with mental health difficulties (including depression and anxiety disorder), an educational resource co-developed by EDB and HA will also be published in August 2017.
- (d) EDB will continue to collaborate with different organisations to promote mental well-being to schools. For example, the Department of Psychiatry, University of Hong Kong and DH have organised a seminar in January 2017 to enhance teachers’ understanding of mental health for better support of students with mental illness. About 300 school principals and teachers attended the seminar. EDB had also conducted a seminar for secondary school teachers in February 2017 to share good practices on S1 bridging programmes and assessment and intervention for suicide risks. Approximately 200 school principals and teachers attended the seminar.
- (e) EDB will launch gatekeeper training programmes for teachers, which include elementary training for teachers at large and in-depth training for designated teachers to enhance their knowledge on mental health and to help them early detect and support students with mental health needs including those with suicidal risks. The training will begin in September 2017.
- (f) Starting from the 2017/18 school year, the Learning Support Grant that EDB provides for public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools will cover students with mental illness, so that schools can

have additional resources to support these students' learning, social, emotional and behavioural needs.

5. In addition to the above measures to strengthen teachers' and students' understanding of mental health and enhance students' resilience, the EDB and relevant bureaux / departments are actively developing the following measures to relieve students' pressure:

(a) EDB has written to the Vocational Training Council (VTC) and self-financing post-secondary institutions to encourage them to follow up on the recommendations of the Committee. Apart from results from the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education, they are encouraged to also recognise students' other learning experiences in sports, music, or social services etc., in order to make the admission system more flexible. EDB will also encourage the University Grants Committee-funded universities to take into account both academic and non-academic achievements in their undergraduate admission.

(b) EDB will continue to endeavor to develop life planning education so that students can understand their own interests, abilities and aspirations, develop positive attitudes and values as well as gain knowledge about different industries and articulation pathways through career exploration activities. EDB in collaboration with schools and stakeholders will continue to step up publicity about alternative pathways, job-tasting programmes and the Qualifications Framework. For example, information on various articulation opportunities will be further promoted among secondary school graduates through the annual Information Expo on Multiple Pathways. Through the INFO Day held by VTC's member institutes, students can learn more about the provision of multiple pathways in the professional education and training programmes. Also, through a variety of activities such as talks, workshops and fieldtrip activities, secondary school students will learn about related industries and progression pathways under the Qualifications Framework, thereby assisting them in their planning of further studies and career development. Moreover, EDB will disseminate updated information on multiple pathways to various stakeholders through different

channels, including the EDB website, parent talks, focus group meetings and publications, etc.

- (c) The 2017 Policy Address announced various measures to provide multiple pathways and further study opportunities for young people so that they can develop according to their capacities and interests. The related measures include inviting the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research to consider implementing a vocational English programme with the support from the Language Fund for senior secondary students who aspire to pursue vocational and professional education and training or who are prepared to work, with a view to enhancing their English proficiency and enabling them to obtain relevant qualifications from recognised courses for further studies and employment. Besides, the Government decides to regularise the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors from the 2018/19 academic year onwards. Current students of the designated programmes will also receive the subsidy from the 2018/19 academic year so as to complete the degree programmes.
- (d) To foster a culture of multi-faceted excellence, the Government has set up the “Multi-faceted Excellence Scholarship” to support universities and tertiary institutions in admitting about 20 local undergraduate students a year who excel in sports, arts and/or community services, with effect from the 2015/16 academic year.
- (e) Moreover, in terms of measures related to support for parents, the Committee on Home-School Cooperation (CHSC) takes an active role in promoting the “Happy Kids Charter” to schools and parents. The topics related to the coping of academic stress include “Adjust your expectations—Understand your child’s abilities. Over-expectation will backfire” and “Embrace our nature—Take a break from homework. Learn from nature”. EDB also actively encourages the Federations of Parent-Teacher Associations of different districts and the schools’ parent-teacher associations to organise relevant activities in response to the content of the Charter.
- (f) The Government has been promoting messages on positive thinking in

face of challenges in life via different media platforms. For example, EDB has produced TV/Radio APIs and poster on “Think on a Broader Plane: Unwind and Relax”. SWD has also discussed topics on coping with adversities or failures, supporting children to acquire stress management skills, and strengthening children’s ability to cope with adversities in the radio programme on “harmonious communication in a family”.

- (g) In view of the fact that young people now use cyberspace for social activities, SWD has outsourced an online interactive service to the Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong to provide information and support service to people with suicidal thoughts/ behaviour through a thematic website.

Recent Cases

6. A total of 10 suspected student suicide cases occurred between the start of the 2016/17 school year in September to the end of February, among which 6 occurred after the Lunar New Year holidays in February this year. Although the cases are still under investigation and it is advisable not to speculate on the reasons of death at this stage, we are still very concerned about the situation and have sent a letter to schools to remind teachers to use the resources provided by EDB and stakeholders from different sectors to enhance students’ awareness and understanding towards mental health. Schools are reminded to care for their students and be aware of students’ warning signs. Parents are also encouraged to provide more support and care for their children. EDB and other bureaux / departments will continue to implement strategies in mitigating students’ pressure and in suicide prevention to reduce the occurrence of further tragedies.

7. Local and international research have shown that suicide behaviours are related to various factors including a person’s mental health, psychological concerns, school adjustment, family support, and the social atmosphere, etc. According to the Final Report of the Committee, multi-sectoral collaboration is of critical importance in the prevention of student suicide. Currently, the education sector, health sector and social welfare sector are joining hands to organise and promote measures to

prevent student suicide, such as enhancement of the public's mental health awareness, development of gatekeeper training and parent education, and promotion of campaigns to reduce stigmatisation of mental health difficulties and help-seeking behaviour. EDB will continue to collaborate with different stakeholders in implementing comprehensive student suicide prevention work, joining efforts to create a tightly knitted support network and an accepting and caring culture, in order to strengthen students' adjustment skills and resilience, and foster their mental well-being in facing the challenges of personal growth.

Education Bureau

10 March 2017

**Final Report of the Committee on Prevention of Student Suicides
Follow-up Measures (up to February 28, 2017)**

Key Areas	Measures
Promotion of Students' Mental Well-being and Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Education Bureau (EDB) and the Department of Health (DH) are promoting the Joyful@School Campaign in primary and secondary schools in the 2016/17 school year. The Joyful@HK Run was held on December 11, 2016, with 42 participating teams. To facilitate schools to conduct school-based activities for the Campaign, for instance, promoting mental health, starting the new school year in a good mood, meeting challenges positively and relaxing in preparing for examination, EDB has uploaded relevant information including suggested activities and teaching materials on its website, and will update them regularly for schools' reference and deployment. EDB and the DH are now running the video competition "Your Joyful Record", aiming to enrich the public and students' understanding of mental health through the event. Schools are encouraged to participate in the competition and the deadline for application is May 10. <li>● The Food and Health Bureau (FHB), in collaboration with EDB, the Hospital Authority (HA) and the Social Welfare Department (SWD), has launched a two-year pilot scheme "Student Mental Health Support Scheme", with 9 schools participating in the first phase. Experienced psychiatric nurses pay regular visits to schools and form a multi-disciplinary team with designated teacher(s), school social workers and educational psychologists to conduct professional deliberations on specific cases. Up to February 23, 2017, a total of 25 students across 9 schools have joined this Scheme. Starting from September 2017, the scheme will be extended to the 8 schools of the second phase. <li>● EDB has invited post-secondary institutions to collaborate with schools in developing mental health promotion programmes through the "Education Development Fund – University Support Programme". It is planned that relevant activities will be launched in schools starting from September 2017. <li>● EDB continues to encourage schools to strengthen the element of enhancing students' mental well-being in the bridging programmes for Secondary 1 and Secondary 4 students, and to conduct seminars on sharing of successful practices. EDB has conducted a seminar for secondary school teachers in February 2017 to share good practices on S1 bridging programmes as well as assessment and intervention strategies for suicidal risks. About 200 school principals and teachers attended the seminar. We will continue encouraging schools to make use of the case referral mechanism to enable

Key Areas	Measures
	<p>students in need to receive continuous support after promoting or transferring to other schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● HA will further promote the psychiatric advisory hotline, namely “Mental Health Direct”, in the community so as to provide over-the-phone consultation on mental health issues and support for patients, their care-takers and other stakeholders. ● EDB has produced TV/Radio APIs and poster on “Think on a Broader Plane: Unwind and Relax” to promote the message of positive thinking in face of challenges in life. ● EDB has sent letters to principals of all primary and secondary schools in February 2017 to call on schools to promote mental well-being and health to students and to recommend relevant resources.
Strengthening Support for Schools and Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In collaboration with the Department of Psychiatry, University of Hong Kong and DH, EDB has organised a seminar on supporting students with mental illness and promoting students’ mental health in January 2017 to strengthen the understanding of secondary school teachers about relevant knowledge. About 300 school principals and teachers attended the seminar. ● FHB has entrusted the Hong Kong College of Psychiatrists to provide training for teachers and related professional staff of the 17 schools participating in the “Student Mental Health Support Scheme”, starting from end February 2017. ● EDB will launch the gatekeeper training for teachers in the 2016/17 school year, which includes elementary training for teachers at large and in-depth training for designated teachers. It is planned that the training will commence in September 2017. ● EDB will release refined screening tools and materials in March and August 2017 to help schools in identifying, supporting and referring students in need. ● Starting from the 2017/18 school year, the Learning Support Grant for public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools will cover students with mental illness, so that schools would have additional resources to provide support to these students.

Key Areas	Measures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● EDB and relevant bureaux/departments (including DH) are working on strengthening and consolidating the school-based programmes and work related to students' mental well-being and health, such as the Understanding Adolescent Project, Personal Growth/Life Education, Enhanced Smart Teen Project, Life Education Interactive Learning Materials, and Adolescent Health Programme, etc. ● EDB has written to post-secondary institutions, encouraging them to consider allocating more resources to enhance their promotion of mental health and well-being, screening services, gatekeeper training and follow-up support for students at risk. ● EDB continues to encourage schools to review the implementation of their school-based homework and assessment policies in accordance with students' learning needs.
Reviewing Relevant Domains in the Education System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● EDB continues to review the relevant domains in the education system, which as a whole should give due recognition to non-academic achievements in order to duly support and address the developmental and diverse needs of students and young people. ● EDB continues to encourage and support schools in implementing the suggestions made in the review of the New Academic Structure, so as to support the diverse learning needs of schools and students. Measures include: increasing the flexibility in deploying lesson time, trimming, enhancing or updating curriculum contents and assessment arrangements, clarifying the breadth and depth of subject curricula; implementing School-based Assessment in fewer subjects and improving its implementation to reduce student and teacher workload, arranging accreditation of more Applied Learning courses under the Qualifications Framework and increasing opportunities for Industrial Attachment, and encouraging students interested in vocational training or joining the workforce to study two Applied Learning courses, etc. ● EDB has written to the Vocational Training Council (VTC) and self-financing post-secondary institutions to encourage them to follow up on the recommendations of the Committee. Apart from results of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education, they are encouraged to also recognise students' other learning experiences in sports, music, or social services etc., in order to make the admission system more flexible. EDB will also encourage the University Grants Committee-funded universities to take into account both academic and non-academic achievements in their undergraduate admission.

Key Areas	Measures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To foster a culture of multi-faceted excellence, the Government has set up the Multi-faceted Excellence Scholarship to support universities and tertiary institutions in admitting about 20 local undergraduate students a year who excel in sports, arts and/or community services, with effect from the 2015/16 academic year. ● EDB continues to endeavour to develop life planning education so that students can understand their own interests, abilities and aspirations, develop positive attitudes and values as well as gain knowledge about different industries and articulation pathways through career exploration activities. EDB in collaboration with schools and stakeholders continue to step up publicity about alternative pathways, job-tasting programmes and the Qualifications Framework. For example, information on various articulation opportunities is further promoted among secondary school graduates through the annual Information Expo on Multiple Pathways. Through the INFO Day held by VTC’s member institutes, students can learn more about the provision of multiple pathways in the professional education and training programmes. Also, through a variety of activities such as talks, workshops and fieldtrip activities, secondary school students can learn about related industries and progression pathways under the Qualifications Framework, thereby assisting them in their planning of further studies and career development. Moreover, EDB will disseminate updated information on multiple pathways to various stakeholders through different channels, including the EDB website, parent talks, focus group meetings and publications, etc. ● The 2017 Policy Address announced various measures to provide multiple pathways and further study opportunities for young people so that they can develop according to their capacities and interests. The related measures include launching a vocational English programme with the support from the Language Fund for senior secondary students who aspire to pursue vocational and professional education and training or who are prepared to work, with a view to enhancing their English proficiency and enabling them to obtain relevant qualifications from recognised courses for further studies and employment. Besides, the Government decides to regularise the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors from the 2018/19 academic year onwards. Current students of the designated programmes will also receive the subsidy from the 2018/19 academic year.
Enhancement of Family Life and Parent Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Committee on Home-School Cooperation (CHSC) takes an active role in promoting the “Happy Kids Charter” for schools and parents. The CHSC’s work foci in the 2016/17 school year include enhancing parents’ efficacy in nurturing their children, assisting them in early identifying their children’s emotional problems and fostering positive thinking in their children. EDB also actively encourages the Federations of Parent-Teacher Associations of different districts and

Key Areas	Measures
	<p>schools' parent-teacher associations to organise activities based on the content of the Charter to enhance students' mental health and well-being.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● DH continues to further promote the parenting programmes run by the Maternal and Child Health Centres. ● SWD continues to encourage service platforms including the Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs), Integrated Services Centres (ISCs), Working Group on Family Life Education Resource Development and relevant non-government organisations, etc., to strengthen the element of “gatekeeping” in their family life and parent education. SWD also promotes and publicises the intensive counselling and support services provided by the IFSCs, ISCs and Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness, in order to facilitate the families in need to receive timely service. ● SWD has produced TV/Radio APIs and poster on “Consider different perspectives. Take a positive view” and also launched a Publicity Campaign on "Strengthening Families and Combating Violence". Through the radio programme 「訴心事家庭」, topics such as coping with adversities or failures, supporting children to acquire stress management skills, and strengthening children's ability to cope with adversities were explored. ● The Family Council and Radio Television Hong Kong collaborated to launch territory-wide campaigns that encouraged families to strengthen communication among members and build up supportive and trustful relationships through the promotion of themes on “transgenerational harmony and communication” and “mutual help and support among family and friends”. ● In the meetings of the Committee on Integrated Family Service Centres held in December 2016 and February 2017 respectively, SWD reminded and urged the Assistant District Social Welfare Officers supervising the IFSCs of various districts, Service Directors/Service Coordinators/Service Supervisors of NGO's running IFSCs and representatives of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service who participated in the meetings to encourage their units to continue to strengthen family life and parent education, promote and publicise IFSCs and their intensive counselling and support services through district service platforms, such that families in need could receive timely assistance. SWD also briefed the Committee about the “Student Mental Health Support Scheme”, encouraging relevant units to provide support to students in need and their parents through multidisciplinary collaboration. ● In the year of 2016-17 (up to December 2016), the IFSCs have conducted 502 groups related to parent-child relationships

Key Areas	Measures
	<p>and 1 227 activities related to parenting. They have also conducted 3 groups on emotional management and 4 activities related to cherishing life. These activities aim to enhance parents' sensitivity towards their teenaged children's emotions and stress conditions, understanding of emotional health and improvement of parent-child relationships, so as to allow the caring of people around as well as to learn to love oneself.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the period from January to December 2016, 22 SWD-funded Independent Family Life Education Units have conducted 1380 family life education activities. The number of participating youth, expectant parents and parents was 42 956. Among these educational activities, 889 of them focused on improving personal knowledge and skills in order to cope with the ever-changing roles and needs in life and to improve family relationships. The total number of participating children, youth and parents in these activities reached 32 770. • SWD has outsourced an online interactive service to the Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong to provide information and support service to people with suicidal thoughts/ behaviour through a thematic website.