

By e-mail and post

February 25, 2004

Miss Cyd Ho
Chairperson
Bills Committee
Legislative Council
Room 602, Citibank Tower
3 Garden Road, Central, Hong Kong

Dear Miss Ho,

Education (Amendment) Bill 2002

I understand that the Bills Committee of Legco is now examining the Education (Amendment) Bill 2002. I was a member of the defunct Advisory Committee on School-Based Management (ACSBM) established by the former Education Department whose recommendation led to the proposal of this Bill, but I am against the management structure as proposed in the Bill. I am not sure whether my minority view in ACSBM has been reflected in the documents which you have in examining the Bill. I am therefore sending you a copy of a letter which I sent to members of ACSBM in October 2000 expressing my views on the issue. I hope you would help me distribute this letter to members of your Committee in their consideration of the Bill.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Yours sincerely,

Frederick Leung

From: Frederick Leung
To: Members of the Advisory Committee on School-Based Management
Date: 20 October 2000

Dear Committee members,

Please accept my apology for not being able to attend this meeting as I am attending another meeting in Melbourne at the moment. In our last meeting, I was asked to write a paper on the two-tier system. Instead of writing a formal document, I have decided to write this as a personal letter to you. I am writing this letter out of my own conscience, as an experienced educator in Hong Kong who has a wide exposure to education in the international scene, and someone who is gravely concerned about the education in Hong Kong, and I'll be as frank as possible. I choose to write a personal letter because I find the discussion on SBM has degenerated into a struggle for power and control over the running of schools among different interest groups, instead of seeking a model that works best for schools in Hong Kong. Most of you know that I am closely related to a major SSB, but I have no obligation or vested interest to defend that SSB (or any other organizations), other than the fact that my children are studying in schools run by that SSB and I want the schools to continue to be run well. If the worst comes to the worst (e.g. the schools have to be run in a mode drastically different from the present mode so that the good traditions of the schools cannot be maintained), I can always resort to sending my children to international schools or overseas. So far I have not been doing that because I can still find some good schools in Hong Kong. But if the result of this reform is such that the Dean of Education of a major University of Hong Kong needs to take this step, then I think it is the saddest thing in the history of education in Hong Kong.

My suggestions for a two-tier model are very simple and have actually been elaborated clearly in some of the submissions. In a word, the governance structure should consist of two levels. The first level, mainly comprising members appointed by the SSB who share the same philosophy in education (and which the Government endorses, otherwise it shouldn't have entrusted schools under their care in the first place), sets major policies (vision and mission) and oversees the overall direction of the school. It also manages private funds and land, and appoints principals and other major personnel of the school. The second level comprises members from various stake holders. It advises the first level on the major policies, and implements the policies in all aspects of the running of the schools, including how public funds are used, curriculum etc. The second level is the major decision body in the actual running of the school, but the first level should have veto power on decisions at the second level should the decisions be contrary to the overall policies of the school.

The suggestion above takes advantage of both participation of various stake holders and the unique situation in Hong Kong where the SSBs are playing a major role in running schools, a situation that I believe have given schools in Hong Kong the richness that it has. I fully support a participatory model of school management, but I don't think participatory management necessarily implies participatory decision on all

matters by all stake holders. The two-tier system draws on the participation of stake holders in areas that they are able to contribute most. As to the question of whether there will be undue influence by the SSBs, my view is that if Hong Kong is to continue this system of relying on SSBs to sponsor the running of schools, it should trust the SSBs. Otherwise, it may as well turn all schools to Government schools.

It is in this spirit that ECR-7 suggested a two-tier system, and it is obvious that the recommendation of a one-tier system presented by ED in the last meeting is substantially different from the model suggested by ECR-7. I am therefore totally appalled at ED's "explanation" saying that the two suggestions are compatible. When ECR-7 was making the recommendation, it was clearly doing so in the context of the existing SMC structure. ED is making a recommendation essentially different from that of ECR-7, and it should be brave enough to say so. To say that the two are actually compatible is twisting the facts, and reflects a lack of sincerity and confidence in what it is proposing.

Let me re-iterate that I am not suggesting a two-tier system for all schools in Hong Kong. What I am suggesting is a system flexible enough for schools to be allowed to run in this mode if it works better for them. What I am pleading is simply to allow those schools with good traditions to continue to be run in a manner which they find works for them, and not to force them into a uniform mode for the sake of fulfilling some version of participatory governance of SBM.

I must warn again that this is potentially an explosive issue which if not handled well may lead to a major crisis in the education in Hong Kong. The whole basis of the running of many good schools is at stake. I have done my part in issuing the warning and making my views known, and I leave it to the conscience and judgement of the Committee members to make a decision. If the Committee decides to stick to the proposal tabled in the last meeting, please record my objection to it. I hope my name will go down in the history of the education in Hong Kong that I have objected to this proposal.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Frederick Leung