Legislative Council Panel on Education
Progress Report on the Implementation of
The School Development & Accountability (SDA) Framework

Preamble

The purpose of this paper is to brief Members on the progress of implementation of the SDA Framework between March 2003 and July 2004 and on the related review findings.

Background

2.   With the launch of various Education and Curriculum Reform initiatives comes the need to strengthen schools' capacity to cope with change.   SDA was introduced in May 2003 to provide rigorous, objective and systematic quality assurance procedures that are needed to maximize the benefits of these initiatives for students.   Members were briefed on 28 April 2003 on key elements of the SDA policy which include:

(a) Schools to conduct rigorous School Self-evaluation (SSE) based on

  • strategic planning, including both an annual action plan and a performance report based on evidence and data;

  • the use of evaluation tools, namely the performance indicators (PIs) and Key Performance Measures (KPM) including stakeholders' surveys; and

  • on-going monitoring and evaluation of programmes.

(b) Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) to validate the school SSE of all public sector schools within an anticipated four-year period.

3.   Inherent in the SDA policy is EMB's pledge of a mutual commitment to enhance the quality of school education and student learning outcomes by

(a) having performance measures readily accessible to all schools to support evidence-based and data-driven SSE;

(b) conducting External School Review (ESR) within a reasonable time frame to complement schools' own performance assessment;

(c) supporting schools in focusing on improved learning outcomes;

(d) providing the system and the public with information on school

performance; and

(e) using lessons learned from these processes to inform future policy.

Progress update

4. SDA was developed based on findings from a pilot project on 'School Development through School Self-evaluation' in 21 schools in 2002/03. Since May 2003, we have promulgated the principles and practices to guide the implementation of SDA and conducted briefings and workshops for schools, external reviewers and EMB staff. Achievements in the first phase of implementation to July 2004 include:

- review of 99 schools, including 32 secondary, 60 primary and 7 special schools;

- dissemination of good practices in SSE and ESR among schools, illustrating strategic and action planning and clear priorities for sustained school improvement;

- helping schools to apply SSE in a way consistent with the intended purposes;

- training of 129 front-line principals and experienced teachers as external reviewers; and

- developing a set of tools in support of SSE and ESR and regularly capturing views on their application for further refinement.

Concerns with the SDA framework

5. There has been some disquiet from schools during this early phase of implementation, indicating the need for a better understanding of the theories and principles of school improvement and accountability. Expressed concerns include:

- increased workload resulting from SSE and preparation for ESR, based on the PIs and KPMs;

- the collectibility, reporting and transparency of data on KPMs;

- the reporting requirements of SSE; and

- the uploading of ESR reports to the school and EMB websites.

The situation is aggravated by the decline in the student population and the anxiety that the reporting of school data will be directly associated with school closure.

6. The situation is understandable as the concept of data management and

evidence-based self-assessment is relatively new to schools. Some schools tended to over-prepare and over-document in preparing for ESR. For example, despite the EMB's recommendation of a maximum of 10-page SSE report, many schools produced reports of around 30 pages and in the extreme case, up to 70 pages or more and together with 10 carton boxes of documents. In a small-scale study conducted by EMB, it was also found that the time taken by schools to prepare for ESR varied greatly. The more ready schools spent only a few working days, using 1-2 days for the collection of KPM, whereas some schools needed nearly a month in their preparation.

7. Since June 2004, taking into account these concerns, EMB has undertaken a review of the implementation strategy, and ESR for 2004/05 is delayed for implementation till January 2005 to allow time for review and refinement of SDA practices in the light of experience.

Improved measures to address the issue of workload

8. The small-scale study on a number of ESR schools revealed that the workload issues could be reduced by the collaborative efforts of teachers and the use of clerical staff in the collection of data. Schools were also encouraged to make good use of readily available information and data that could be easily retrieved. In June 2004, in order to address the workload issue, the following changes were introduced:

- specified more clearly the nature of documentation required of schools and cautioned schools against over-documentation for ESR;

- schools may decide on the frequency of the stakeholder surveys within the ESR cycle of four years;

- full KPM data will only be collected from individual schools once every four years at the time of ESR;

- only data on continuous professional development (CPD) of principals will be collected. Data on teacher CPD are not to be collected while the CPD framework is in its 3-year trial period;

- the SSE report on the 14 PI-areas will only be required of schools prior to their external review when it occurs within the four year cycle, i.e. once every four years;

- maintained close co-ordination with the School Sponsoring Bodies (SSB) in promoting better understanding of SDA requirements;

- established a telephone hotline service and Saturday walk-in sessions to provide information and give direct responses to schools' concerns; and

- organized sharing sessions on good practice in SSE as well as in the use of data for school development.

9.   Good practices which schools have adopted to minimize teachers' workload include:

- involvement of non-teaching staff and parents to share out the workload of teachers in the collection of information and data;

- use of information technology in storing, processing and analyzing school information and data;

- effective use of staff time for discussion and preparation, using regular staff development days, staff meetings and subject panel meetings; and

- incorporation of the evaluation and review processes in the routine work of departments and committees.

10.   Schools are further encouraged to form quality circles and enhance collaboration in coping with change.   Examples can be found in the network formed in Tai Po and within some SSB.   With the participation of school principals and school teachers as a member of the ESR team, it is anticipated that good practices and effective school management skills in addressing the workload issues will be shared and disseminated more widely.

Improved measures to address the issue of transparency

11.   Consistent with existing quality assurance practices, schools are required to upload their plans and reports to the school website.   We appreciate schools' concern about increased transparency at a time of declining student population.   To their concerns over reporting on KPM items to the public on the school website, we are prepared to relax the requirements for the first phase of SDA.   Since June 2004, schools are no longer required to include any KPM items in the uploaded school report for the 2003/04 and 2004/05 school years.   Schools will need to report only about 10 KPM items to the school management committee (SMC) and key stakeholders up to the 2004/05 school year.   Other refinement measures include:

- the SSE report (based on 14 PI-areas) prepared for validation by ESR teams will NOT be uploaded to the school website;

- the placing of ESR reports onto the EMB homepage, which is in alignment with current quality assurance practice, will continue but the reports will not contain commentary on discrepancies between the SSE and ESR results; and

- ESR reports for individual schools uploaded to the EMB webpage will not include specific ratings (i.e. *excellent, good, satisfactory and unsatisfactory*) on school performance in the 14 PI-areas. Ratings of a school's performance in the 14 PI-areas will be released to its major stakeholders, primarily the SMC, and contained at the school level.

Improved measures to make better use of data

12.   To foster better understanding of the value of data in support of school improvement:

- a series of seminars chaired by distinguished overseas education professionals has been organized;

- workshops conducted by experienced principals on the use of school data to develop appropriate learning and assessment policy have been held;

- a pamphlet on the use of KPM has been produced to promote the use of data for school improvement; and

- a few cases of malpractice in the administration of stakeholders' surveys were identified and rectified.

13.   To create a positive culture in the use of data, the following measures will be taken:

- conducting a review before the 2005/6 school year of the KPM, covering issues such as selection, collection and reporting.   Based on feedback from ESR schools and careful deliberation, KPM for 2003/04 will be retained for 2004/05; and

- establishing protocols to prevent the abuse of data, e.g. for publicity purposes.   Schools not observing the protocols will be required to upload all their performance information on EMB website in subsequent years.

Interim policy review

14.   A systematic Impact Study by Professor John MacBeath and Mr Bill Clarke, two quality assurance and school improvement specialists, was conducted to evaluate the implementation of SSE and ESR in its first phase from February to July 2004.   A summary of the findings is at Appendix 1.   Quantitative and qualitative data were drawn from questionnaires, surveys, interviews, written comments and case studies.

15.   Preliminary findings of the impact study of ESR confirmed the initial success of the SDA policy.   The study indicated that ESR schools were capable of conducting

robust, systematic and evidence-based SSE to establish a firm foundation for enhanced learning outcomes.   This supports the view that the SDA framework can be used to provide useful feedback to schools for self-improvement.   With regard to schools' concerns outlined in the preceding paragraphs, the study has the following findings:

(a) *Workload issue*

There remains a widespread perception that SSE adds to workload.   At this stage of development, there are still many teachers who see the audience for SSE as being the review team or EMB rather than the school itself.   Some see SSE as an event rather than as a process integral to on-going professional practice.   There are, however, leading-edge exemplars to draw on from schools that have made SSE their own and have successfully embedded self-evaluation in the daily round of activities.

(b) Transparency issue

The study affirmed that the preparation of the SSE report on the 14 PI-areas can be an important catalyst in bringing a school's staff together for the first time to reflect on the quality and effectiveness of the school as a whole.   The press for evidence and the inclusion of a range of stakeholders in the evaluation process have encouraged schools to view their practice through different lenses and challenged complacency and self-satisfaction, where they existed.   The creation of a greater sense of openness and transparency has, to a large extent, moved schools towards a more systematic and rigorous approach to assessing the quality of practice.

(c) Use of data

The study confirmed the importance of the use of data as a basis of SSE and gave credit to SDA in giving impetus for schools to move from 'impressionistic to evidence-based' approach in performance management. The study report also recognized EMB's achievement in providing knowledge of how to retrieve and use data to best effect and acknowledged the move as conducive to the nurturing of a self-evaluation culture.

Confirmation of the values of the SDA framework

16.   The Impact Study confirmed that many of the key objectives of SSE/ESR have been realized:

- a deepening understanding of the purposes of ESR and SSE;

- promoting the use of data and evidence as a basis for SSE;

- supporting schools in getting better at identifying their strengths and areas for improvement;

- developing a more systematic and informed approach to SSE in schools to help conduct informed discussions; and

- creating a greater sense of openness and transparency.

17. EMB also conducted a post-ESR survey to solicit the views of all school teachers. The survey results were considered by Professor John MacBeath in completing his Impact Study. The returns from schools also revealed similar positive findings as in paragraph 16. (Details at Appendix 2.)

Public Relations

18. Consultation sessions were organized with major SSB and Schools Councils. Their views were sought and were supportive of the proposed refinements. Their collaboration will be further secured in facilitating the implementation of SDA.

Recommendation

19. The experience in Phase 1 implementation of SDA is an affirming one. EMB has been able to adjust and refine the implementation strategies to address schools' concerns and is committed to continuing appropriate modification in the light of experience. SDA has a pivotal role to play in school planning for integration of critical components of education reform measures at the school level, and encouraging reflective practice which is the key to sustainable development. In addition to the refinements introduced in June 2004, the following strategies will be taken to further support the implementation of SDA:

(a) Provision of accredited agencies for conducting ESR

- Accredited agencies will be established to conduct ESR for schools by around 2005/06 school year. These agencies, to include tertiary institutions and independent bodies, will be accredited through a rigorous training and assessment process and will be subject to quality assurance monitoring. The creation of these accredited agencies will broaden the expertise available, provide choice for schools (and also pre-primary institutions and other private schools) in the conduct of ESR and draw a clearer distinction between SSE and ESR which is oriented towards self-improvement quality assurance.

- To ensure public accountability, ESR teams from these accredited agencies will have at least one member drawn from EMB.

(b) ***ESR refinement***

- By closely collaborating with SSB, EMB will be able to adjust the pace of implementation and take into account the readiness of individual schools.

- Given the diversity in the capacity and readiness of schools for the SSE process, EMB will timetable schools in consultation with SSB.

- Flexibility will be exercised in terms of time and team composition and the involvement of more front-line school personnel and academics as external school reviewers. Consideration will be given to involving academic expertise in the leadership of an ESR team.

(c) ***Enhancing information management for school improvement***

- In the light of feedback from schools, the KPM framework and reporting requirements will be reviewed, with reference to the quality, usefulness, and collectibility of data.

- Given the significance of publishing data as a new expectation of schools, there needs to be a balance between the accepted goal of transparency and school morale in the phasing in of the new requirements. At this early stage, data on KPM will be held at school level and to be used for school development purposes.

- To maximize the value of KPM data collected from ESR schools in 2003/04, they will be analyzed and compiled for reference by other schools when conducting SSE.

(d) ***Strengthening SSE through focused training, enhancement of understanding and support from academics and scholars***

- Training and support will be strengthened at both district and school level and on-line training will be provided to better address individual school needs.

- Publicity strategies are to be strengthened to dispel myths, reiterate facts and enhance the understanding of SDA by school personnel and the public.

- To establish the culture of accountability and collaboration in schools, overseas and local academics will be involved in open forums and

seminars to enhance schools' understanding of change and accountability. Additionally, local academics will be invited to serve as external school reviewers.

- Sharing sessions on good practices in SSE and the intelligent use of data for school development will be organized.

Advice sought

20.   Members are invited to note the progress of SDA and the recommendations outlined above.

Education and Manpower Bureau
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Summary of the Impact Study

Background

- The Study conducted by a research team from Cambridge Education and the University of Cambridge in 2004 was to evaluate the Phase I Implementation of SSE and ESR in the 99 schools involved.

- It draws on a comprehensive amount of quantitative data from questionnaires and surveys complemented by qualitative data from field studies, interviews, written comments and five in-depth case studies.

Major Findings

1. Overall responses from schools were encouraging.

2. Preliminary findings indicated that most principals confirmed ESR as a positive force to impel the schools forward on the whole. They confirmed that ESR had an impact on the school and added value to SSE. Preparation of the SSE report on the 14 Performance Indicators-related areas of school life proved to be an important catalyst, bringing school staff together to reflect on quality and effectiveness of the school as a whole. Some school personnel, however, considered the primary audience for SSE as the review team or EMB rather than the school itself. As such SSE was perceived just an event rather than a process integral to ongoing professional practice.

3. Many of the key objectives of SSE/ESR had been realized. The major three were:
   - A deepening understanding of the purposes of ESR and SSE
   - Promoting the use of data and evidence as a basis for SSE
   - Helping schools to conduct informed discussions as to the value of the SSE and its relationship to school improvement

4. The overall responses from teachers were highly positive. They provided evidence of:
   - Clarity and understanding of ESR
   - A sense of participation by school staff
   - Overall satisfaction with the process
   - Accuracy and insights of ESR team reports
   - The approachability and professionalism of the review teams

		No. of Questionnaires Issued	4778
Opinions of Teachers on ESR – All Schools (99)		No. of Questionnaires Collected	3817
		Overall Response Rate	80%

		Strongly agree		Agree		Neutural		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Missing Data		Total No. of Questionnaires Collected	%
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%		
1	I am clear about the objective of the ESR.	1205	31.57%	2182	57.17%	351	9.20%	71	1.86%	5	0.13%	3	0.08%	3817	100.00%
2	I am clear about the procedure of the ESR.	1205	31.57%	2145	56.20%	373	9.77%	84	2.20%	6	0.16%	4	0.10%	3817	100.00%
3	I am clear about the scope covered by the ESR.	1005	26.33%	2186	57.27%	497	13.02%	112	2.93%	7	0.18%	10	0.26%	3817	100.00%
4	The coverage in the performance indicators is adequate.	632	16.56%	2072	54.28%	846	22.16%	189	4.95%	27	0.71%	51	1.34%	3817	100.00%
5	The questionnaire in the stakeholders survey , in general,														
(a)	were clearly written,	726	19.02%	2284	59.84%	645	16.90%	121	3.17%	18	0.47%	23	0.60%	3817	100.00%
(b)	could effectively collect stakeholders' views about the school.	586	15.35%	2147	56.25%	837	21.93%	185	4.85%	35	0.92%	27	0.71%	3817	100.00%
6	The information provided by the Key Performance Measures (KPM) facilitates school self-evaluation.	593	15.54%	2277	59.65%	728	19.07%	166	4.35%	26	0.68%	27	0.71%	3817	100.00%
7	I had adequate opportunity to take part in the write up of the self-assessment report.	1030	26.98%	1940	50.83%	614	16.09%	177	4.64%	45	1.18%	11	0.29%	3817	100.00%
8	The amount of documents and information requested by the ESR team is appropriate.	603	15.80%	2037	53.37%	847	22.19%	246	6.44%	62	1.62%	22	0.58%	3817	100.00%
9	My school was well prepared for ESR.	1256	32.91%	1920	50.30%	479	12.55%	123	3.22%	21	0.55%	18	0.47%	3817	100.00%
10	I think that the pre-ESR visit														
(a)	has increased my understanding of the ESR;	719	18.84%	2212	57.95%	702	18.39%	153	4.01%	23	0.60%	8	0.21%	3817	100.00%
(b)	has helped dispel my worries about the ESR.	407	10.66%	1625	42.57%	1260	33.01%	418	10.95%	96	2.52%	11	0.29%	3817	100.00%
11	The number and variety of activities observed by the ESR team was appropriate.	487	12.76%	1813	47.50%	955	25.02%	412	10.79%	141	3.69%	9	0.24%	3817	100.00%
12	The external reviewers were professional in their work.	636	16.66%	1998	52.34%	876	22.95%	240	6.29%	55	1.44%	12	0.31%	3817	100.00%
13	The attitudes of the external reviewers were sincere and friendly.	878	23.00%	2014	52.76%	699	18.31%	163	4.27%	43	1.13%	20	0.52%	3817	100.00%
14	Participation of front-line educators as member of the ESR team enabled the school's performance to be assessed from different perspectives.	751	19.68%	2182	57.17%	703	18.42%	146	3.82%	18	0.47%	17	0.45%	3817	100.00%

No.	Statement													Total	
15	The external reviewers could objectively listen to the views expressed by school staff in interviews/meetings. (*to be completed by school personnel who had participated in interviews/meetings with the ESR team*)	347	15.50%	1262	56.36%	450	20.10%	143	6.39%	37	1.65%	1578 *	-- *		3820	100.00%
16	Preliminary findings of the ESR team were clearly conveyed to the school personnel through the Oral Feedback session. (*to be completed by school personnel who had participated in* Oral Feedback session)	375	20.53%	1041	56.98%	309	16.91%	81	4.43%	21	1.15%	1990 *	-- *		3817	100.00%
17	I think that the ESR														
(a)	has given an informed judgement on the effectiveness of our self-evaluation processes;	411	10.77%	2032	53.24%	1009	26.43%	289	7.57%	58	1.52%	18	0.47%	3817	100.00%
(b)	has made an accurate evaluation of the standard of school's performance;	363	9.51%	1833	48.02%	1114	29.19%	382	10.01%	110	2.88%	15	0.39%	3817	100.00%
(c)	has helped my school devise future goals and development plans.	600	15.72%	2212	57.95%	780	20.43%	161	4.22%	48	1.26%	16	0.42%	3817	100.00%
18	The ESR has identified my school's strength.	750	19.65%	2175	56.98%	670	17.55%	162	4.24%	33	0.86%	27	0.71%	3817	100.00%
19	I agree with the recommendations made in the ESR report.	465	12.18%	2069	54.20%	1006	26.36%	203	5.32%	43	1.13%	31	0.81%	3817	100.00%
20	There was adequate time for the school to prepare its written response to the draft ESR report.	390	10.22%	1938	50.77%	1163	30.47%	223	5.84%	35	0.92%	68	1.78%	3817	100.00%
21	Adequate discussion was made among school personnel before finalising the school's written response to the draft ESR report.	671	17.58%	1952	51.14%	874	22.90%	169	4.43%	68	1.78%	83	2.17%	3817	100.00%
22	The ESR did not affect much of my daily duties.	158	4.14%	998	26.15%	1060	27.77%	952	24.94%	632	16.56%	17	0.45%	3817	100.00%
23	ESR did not exert much pressure on me.	123	3.22%	740	19.39%	1131	29.63%	1132	29.66%	674	17.66%	17	0.45%	3817	100.00%
24	The entire ESR process was open and transparent.	330	8.65%	1907	49.96%	1160	30.39%	339	8.88%	66	1.73%	15	0.39%	3817	100.00%
25	On the whole, I'm satisfied with the ESR process.	276	7.23%	1954	51.19%	1147	30.05%	319	8.36%	105	2.75%	16	0.42%	3817	100.00%

Rank	SGM/EO or above	GM/AEO	PSM or above	APSM
	275	628	247	256
AM	CM	Specialists	Void	Total
298	1489	76	548	3817

* Non-participants in focus interviews / oral feedback