

立法會 *Legislative Council*

LC Paper No. CB(2)1667/05-06(02)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 10 April 2006

School-based professional support programmes

Purpose

This paper summarises the deliberations of the Panel on Education and the Finance Committee on school-based professional support programmes to assist schools in the implementation of the education reform.

Background

2. The Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) provides schools with support services in different areas, including school development, curriculum development, principal development and teachers' reflective practice. According to EMB, there was feedback from principals and teachers that schools did not have sufficient knowledge and capacity to implement the various elements of the education reform. Such feedback was corroborated by stakeholder surveys, which found that teachers' understanding of the purpose of the reform and the support they received in implementing the reform were not strong and thorough enough.

3. To strengthen direct support, particularly site-based support, to help principals and teachers to connect and implement the various elements of the education reform, the Finance Committee approved on 2 July 2004 the Administration's proposal to create an Education Development Fund of \$550 million to implement school-based professional support programmes starting from the 2004-05 school year for an initial period of five years. The school-based professional support programmes include the following –

- (a) Principal Support Network (PSN) – to establish principal

networks to facilitate professional learning and experience sharing;

- (b) School Support Partners Scheme (SSPS) or the Seconded Teacher Scheme – to second/recruit excellent serving/retired teachers at Key Learning Area (KLA) to work alongside the officers of the Regional Education Offices in support of learning and teaching at schools;
- (c) Collegial Participation in External School Review (ESR) – to encourage all serving principals and a proportion of experienced teachers to take part in the ESR of another school to enhance participants’ understanding of the school improvement processes and techniques;
- (d) Professional Development Schools – to build a locus of schools, including special schools, with breakthrough practices in KLAs or whole school pedagogical issues to provide support for an associated network of schools; and
- (e) University-School Support Programmes - to commission school support services through universities and other institutions with proven track record in delivering high quality school-based support.

Deliberations of the Panel and the Finance Committee

4. When the Administration consulted the Panel on Education on the proposed school-based professional support programmes on 21 June 2004, before submitting the financial proposal to the Finance Committee, members in general supported the direction of providing more support to schools. They raised no objection to the establishment of an Education Development Fund to provide the proposed school-based professional support to enable schools to build capacity to take forward the education reform measures. They, however, had raised concerns about PSN and SSPS. The deliberations of the Panel and the Finance Committee are summarised in the following paragraphs.

Feasibility of PSN and SSPS

5. Some members were concerned about the feasibility of PSN and SSPS. They considered it necessary to address some practical problems associated with these two programmes. These included the impact of engaging another principal in addition to the incumbent principal on the operation of a school; the need to relieve serving principals/teachers to assist another school; and the difficulties faced by seconded principals/teachers in taking forward

improvement measures.

6. Members had pointed out that serving principals and teachers were already overloaded with teaching and learning activities in schools. It was doubtful whether schools would take the risk of releasing their outstanding principals and teachers to join PSN or SSPS for an extended period. Whether schools would like to invite other principals to guide their principals in implementing the education reform was also questionable. Moreover, there were situational and interpersonal factors which would affect the performance of principals and teachers in different schools.

7. According to the Administration, the purposes of the proposed school-based support programmes were to strengthen schools' understanding of the aims of the education reform, and to prioritize the different elements of the education reform at the school level. PSN and SSPS were modeled on the successful experience of the Curriculum Development Institute in providing support to primary schools to develop school-based curriculum. The Administration considered that principals and teachers with an outstanding track record would be highly valued by peers and should be well accepted by the staff in the schools receiving professional support. The Administration would provide training and adequate opportunities for the secondees to make their secondment rewarding, and to deliver high quality school-based support to the staff who carried out the education reform in schools. Depending on the needs of individual schools, the Administration would provide a range of part-time and full-time working options over an extended period for the experienced principals and teachers to participate in the two programmes. EMB would offer schools adequate compensation for release of their staff, and draw on support from other external sources such as tertiary institutions, mainland teachers and overseas expertise.

8. As regards members' concern about the work pressure of serving principals and teachers, the Administration had assured members that the school-based professional support programmes were intended to relieve workload and release energy in schools, and not to impose another set of requirements on schools. The teachers under secondment would provide school-based professional support in the areas of learning and teaching, which should help reduce the workload of teachers.

Implementation

9. Some members considered it important to adopt an incremental approach in launching the proposed school-based support programmes. They stressed that secondment of principals and teachers to participate in PSN and SSPS should be arranged on a voluntary basis. There should be more flexibility in implementing the programmes and in using the Education Development Fund. The Administration should also conduct regular review on

the effectiveness of the programmes.

10. The Administration had confirmed that the support programmes would be implemented on an incremental basis in order to avoid creating additional workload for principals and teachers. The pace and scale at which support would be provided to schools would be driven by the identification of school requirements as well as the availability of professional secondees and appropriate support programmes. EMB would make use of the expertise and programmes offered by tertiary institutions in planning the provision and implementation of the support programmes for teachers. A working group comprising frontline educators, academics and community members chaired by a Deputy Secretary of EMB would be set up to oversee, monitor and evaluate the progress of the support programmes. The working group would consult the education sector on the detailed implementation of the programmes. The Administration had undertaken to report progress of the delivery of the programmes to the Panel.

Relevant papers

11. A list of the relevant papers is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
6 April 2006

Relevant documents on school-based professional support programmes

Date of meeting	Council / Finance Committee / Panel	Document / Question / Motion	Paper No.
21.6.2004	Panel on Education	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)3324/03-04
		Administration's paper on "School Based Professional Support"	CB(2)2786/03-04(03)
2.7.2004	Finance Committee	Minutes of meeting	FC112/03-04
		New Item "School-based Professional Support Programmes"	FCR(2004-05)26

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