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Panel on Education

Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 29 February 2008

School Development and Accountability Framework

Purpose

This paper summarizes the deliberations of the Panel on Education (the Panel) concerning the implementation of the School Development and Accountability (SDA) Framework.

Background

2.   In 1991, the then Education Department (ED) introduced the School Management Initiative Scheme under which schools were required to conduct self-evaluation and report their performance in a school profile annually.   The performance data in the profile served as a reference basis for schools to identify areas for further development and make action plans for improvement.   In September 1997, ED introduced a quality assurance (QA) framework to give impetus to the school improvement process and to accentuate accountability in the school system.   In this framework, QA inspection served as an external QA mechanism while schools were required to conduct self-evaluation as an internal QA process.

3.   In 2000, all schools in Hong Kong started to implement school-based management under which schools were devolved with more responsibilities and enjoyed greater flexibility and autonomy in operation and resource management. Schools were required to develop formal procedures for setting school goals and evaluating progress towards achieving the goals, and to provide documents including a school profile, an annual development plan and an annual report for information of parents and the then Education and Manpower Bureau (reorganized as the Education Bureau (EDB) on 1 July 2007).

4.   EDB implemented the SDA Framework with effect from the 2003-2004 school year.   The SDA Framework comprises two key elements, namely, school self-evaluation (SSE) and external school review (ESR).   SSE is based on strategic planning and includes an annual action plan and a performance report. EDB has provided schools with a common set of key performance measures (KPM) and standard stakeholder survey questionnaires for SSE.   KPM covers four domains, namely, management and organization, learning and teaching, student support and school ethos, and student performance.

5.   ESR is conducted by EDB in a four-year cycle with the aim of validating SSE of all public sector schools.   Should a school be identified through ESR as under-performing, the school will be closely monitored.   Further action will be taken by EDB should the school fail to achieve the targets set for improvement.

6.   In 2004, EDB commissioned Professor John MacBeath of the Cambridge University to conduct "The Impact Study on the Effectiveness of External School Reviews in Enhancing School Improvement through School Self-evaluation in Hong Kong" (the Impact Study) to evaluate the implementation of the SDA Framework.

Deliberations of the Panel

7.   The Panel discussed the implementation of the SDA Framework at its meetings on 28 April 2003, 13 December 2004 and 11 June 2007.   The issues of concern raised by members are set out in the following paragraphs.

Workload of schools

8.   Members were concerned about the workload generated by the implementation of the SDA Framework.   They pointed out that over the past few years, teachers were hard pressed to cope with the various education reform initiatives.   Members sought information on the measures taken by EDB to reduce schools' workload to facilitate the implementation of the SDA Framework.

9.   The Administration acknowledged that the concept of data management and evidence-based assessment was relatively new to schools.   EDB had provided a set of guidelines and made available sample school plans and reports on the EDB website for schools' reference.   Noting that schools tended to over-prepare and over-document for ESR, the Administration reviewed in June 2004 the implementation strategy and deferred the implementation of ESR for 2004-2005 to January 2005 to refine the SDA practices.   A number of measures were introduced to relax the requirements for reporting on KPM and to enhance better understanding and development of a culture in the use of data to facilitate school improvement and development.   In the light of the operational experience, the Administration made significant modifications to the implementation Framework in July 2005.   These included, among others, confining the number of school

documents prepared for ESR to three, i.e. School Self-Assessment Report on the 14 Performance Indicators, KPM and Stakeholder Survey findings, and limiting the length of a School Self-Assessment Report to no more than 20 pages.

Transparency of school data

10.   Under the SDA Framework, schools were required to upload their annual plans and reports onto their websites, and release information on KPM to their management committees and key stakeholders, including parents and teachers. Members noted that schools with outstanding performance were ready to publicize their achievements.   However, schools with less impressive performance might wish to keep their KPM data confidential.   Members were concerned how EDB monitored the publication of KPM data.

11.   The Administration explained that to address the concern of some schools about increased transparency in the context of declining enrolment, it had relaxed the requirements for the first phase of SDA.   Since June 2004, schools were no longer required to include any KPM items in the uploaded school reports for the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years.   Schools had to report on about 10 KPM items only to the school management committees and key stakeholders up to the 2004-2005 school year.   As the prime objective of SDA was to enable parents and other key stakeholders of a school to have access to KPM data and be aware of the strengths of the school and areas for improvement, EDB would continue to encourage schools to publicize their KPM to enhance transparency and accountability in school management.   To avoid unnecessary publication of KPM data, EDB would establish protocols on the use of KPM data for schools to follow. Moreover, to address the concern of some schools about selective reporting of ESR reports by the media to the detriment of the schools' reputation, the Administration had, since July 2005, ceased uploading ESR reports onto the EDB's website.

Evaluation of school performance

12.   Members were concerned about the objectivity of and consistency in assessing performance improvements on the basis of KPM as schools might set performance targets at different levels for self-evaluation purpose.

13.   According to the Administration, a full set of performance indicators and reference data on KPM had been issued to schools in 2002 and 2004 respectively. As the school data size became sufficiently large, the benchmark process should provide a set of more objective and consistent standards for different levels of outcome and schools' performance achievements.   The annual plans and performance reports of schools would be validated by the ESR Team.

14.   Enquiries had been raised as to whether schools could include other KPM such as participation in social services for the purpose of self-evaluation.   In the Administration's view, the strategy was to develop KPM gradually as a common platform for the balanced assessment of school performance in the four domains

(paragraph 4 above).   EDB aimed to develop territory-wide norms against which school performance could be compared and assessed.

Findings of the Impact Study

15.   According to the findings of the Impact Study, teachers were in general satisfied with the ESR process and considered it open and transparent.   The majority of the teachers agreed that KPM and Stakeholder Survey were helpful for SSE.   There was evidence that classroom teaching was more open to evaluation by fellow teachers, resulting in a greater sense of professional trust and critique. School principals were also becoming more open to seeking feedback from staff about their leadership and management.

16.   Members questioned the reliability of the findings of the Impact Study. Some members considered that the findings had not reflected the actual situations in schools, in particular about the substantial workload of and pressure on schools arising from the hasty implementation of SSE and ESR.   Members were also concerned about the benefits to the key stakeholders, including principals, teachers, parents and students, pursuant to the implementation of SSE and ESR, as shown in the Impact Study.

17.   The Administration acknowledged the additional workload arising from data collection and documentation requirements and the pressure created because of the performance ratings in the ESR report at the initial stage of implementation of the SDA Framework.   With the concerted efforts of EDB and schools to reduce the unnecessary paper work in the past years, teachers were more receptive to SSE and ESR.

18.   Professor MacBeath explained that the Impact Study covered data collected from 35 000 teachers in the form of questionnaires, case studies, observations and focus group discussions.   Analysis of these data revealed a generally positive response from schools, with a marked increase in perceived benefit since the inception of SSE and ESR in 2003.   A high percentage of teachers responded that SSE and ESR had helped improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools, and that they and their students had become more effective teachers and learners. In the view of Professor MacBeath, dialogues and interactions between students and teachers in the course of self-evaluation would facilitate teaching and learning. The continuous evaluation of teaching and learning performance in schools would help improve the quality of school education, which would ultimately be reflected by students' performance in public examinations.

Second cycle of the SDA Framework

19.   Diverse views had been expressed by members on whether the second cycle of the SDA Framework should commence with effect from the 2008-2009 school year.   There was a view that given the impending implementation of reforms in the senior secondary academic structure which entailed changes to the school

curriculum and examination and assessment systems, the Administration should consult the key stakeholders and review the need to proceed to the second cycle of the SDA Framework. However, there was also a view on the need to establish an objective self-evaluation culture on the basis of school data in the teaching profession to facilitate long-term development in education. To achieve this purpose, the Administration should work out measures to enhance the necessary changes in the school culture and provide adequate support for schools and teachers.

20. The Administration assured members that to facilitate implementation of the second cycle of ESR, EDB had been consulting the key stakeholders including school councils and sponsoring bodies on the reduction of the performance indicators and KPM, and ways to simplify the data collection and document preparation and submission processes. EDB would organize briefings to prepare teachers for ESR and remove their anxieties and perceived pressure about ESR. In addition, EDB would plan and implement the necessary support measures for schools to make use of external observations to collect feedback on performance improvement, remove the confusions about the purposes of ESR and the document preparation and data collection processes, and improve the time, priority and process management for ESR.

21. According to Professor MacBeath, it was natural that there would be anxiety and pressure on the part of teachers who had to tackle the changes arising from implementing SSE and ESR. The move from quality assurance or inspection to SSE complemented by ESR would inevitably require adjustments by both schools and the systems. As in other places, there would be early adopters supporting the SDA framework and late adopters rejecting the framework at the initial stages of implementation. Given the findings from the Impact Study, it would be unwise to stop the process and give up the established momentum of conducting self-evaluation in schools.

Relevant papers

22. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
25 February 2008

Relevant papers on
the School Development and Accountability Framework

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	28.4.2003 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda
Legislative Council	11.6.2003	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 86 - 87 (Question)
Bills Committee on Education (Amendment) Bill 2002	3.3.2004	CB(2)1549/03-04(01)
Panel on Education	13.12.2004 (Item V)	Minutes Agenda
Legislative Council	9.3.2005	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 104 - 107 (Question)
Panel on Education	11.6.2007 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda

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