

For discussion on
30 April 2009

Legislative Council Panel on Education
Drug Abuse in Schools

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the strategy and support measures to tackle drug abuse in the school setting.

Background

2. Over the years, progressive efforts have been made to provide preventive education on drug abuse in schools. The Education Bureau (EDB) constantly reviews and updates the school curriculum to incorporate anti-drug elements in both the school curriculum and life-wide learning activities, with varied emphases and coverage at different levels and in Key Learning Areas (KLA). With the launch of the New Senior Secondary Curriculum from September 2009 onwards, anti-drug education will be further strengthened. EDB has also organised anti-drug seminars for teachers and principals in collaboration with the Narcotics Division (ND) from time to time. To further strengthen preventive education in schools, ND and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) have also engaged non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to provide drug education talks and activities for students to enhance their knowledge about drugs.

3. To foster the healthy growth and development of youths, the Department of Health (DH) started launching the Adolescent Health Programme for students in 2001 aiming at improving the psychosocial health of adolescents and minimizing their risks of engaging in various health-compromising behaviours. The Health Programme has complemented drug education by providing useful information to adolescents on the harmful effects of smoking, alcohol and substance abuse. The Programme also empowers adolescents' refusal skills to resist temptations. Besides, the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust has provided \$750 million to implement the "Positive Adolescent Training through Holistic Social Programmes to Adulthood: A Jockey Club Youth Enhancement Scheme"

(PATHS) in secondary schools from 2005/06 to 2011/12 school year. PATHS, jointly organised by SWD, EDB and five universities, has been providing comprehensive training programmes/ activities for junior secondary students to promote positive values and enhance their resilience against adversities and ability to develop a sense of right and wrong.

4. On law enforcement, the Police School Liaison Programme of the Hong Kong Police Force plays an important role in the coordination and collaboration among the Police, teachers, school social workers, school management staff and the community. It provides a platform to sustain crime prevention efforts in schools. The Police School Liaison Officers (PSLOs) are dedicated to organising anti-drug and fight crime seminars in schools from time to time in collaboration with schools, SWD, EDB and NGOs.

5. On treatment and rehabilitation, school staff and school social workers collaborate with the seven designated Counselling Centres for Psychotropic Substance Abusers, the district youth outreaching social work teams, and the overnight outreaching teams for young night drifters to identify at-risk students and provide comprehensive counselling services, including referrals for appropriate treatment and rehabilitation services.

6. According to the 2004 survey on drug use among students, about 3.4% (i.e. 17 300) of the secondary school students had abused heroin or psychotropic substances in their lifetime while about 0.8% (i.e. 4 300) of the secondary students had abused heroin or psychotropic substances in the last 30 days prior to the survey. According to the Central Registry of Drug Abuse¹, the number of reported young drug abusers aged under 21 has increased by 57% in four years since 2004 (i.e., from 2 186 in 2004 to 3 430 in 2008). The proportion of reported young drug abusers that were students increased from 21.9% in 2004 to 26.3% in 2008. The mean age of first-time abuse for those aged under 21 was 15 while the percentage of these youngsters first abused drugs aged under 15 increased from 34% in 2006 to 38% in 2008. For those aged 15 or below, nearly two-thirds reported to be of student status. Signs such as the unhealthy youth sub-culture

¹ Central Registry Drug Abuse is a voluntary reporting system which only records drug abusers who have come into contact with and been reported by the reporting agencies. Although it is not possible for the Registry to ascertain the exact size of the drug abusing population in Hong Kong at any particular time, the statistics should be taken as indicators of the trends in drug abuse over time.

legitimizing drug abuse, the falling age of first-time drug abusers, and the lack of motivation for drug abusers to seek help are worth our attention.

Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse

7. In view of the significant rise in the number of young people (under the age of 21) abusing psychotropic substances, the Administration is determined to tackle this trend in a concerted and holistic manner. For this purpose, a high level inter-departmental Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse (Task Force) was set up in 2007 under the chairmanship of the Secretary for Justice. The Task Force concluded its work and released a Report in November 2008. The Report contains some 70 recommendations spanning the five prongs of the anti-drug policy, namely,

- (i) preventive education and publicity;
- (ii) treatment and rehabilitation;
- (iii) law enforcement and legislation;
- (iv) external cooperation; and
- (v) research.

8. On preventive education and publicity which is closely related to the school sector, a strategy along the following directions to combat youth drug abuse in the school setting has been recommended:

- (a) All schools should devise a healthy school policy with an anti-drug element to build up positive values and attitudes among students from an early stage. A school may, having regard to its own circumstances, devise a school-based policy to address its students' specific needs.
- (b) EDB would strengthen drug education through the school curriculum, life-wide learning activities and drug education programmes for students by reviewing and strengthening the anti-drug elements in various KLAs and providing more opportunities for students to engage meaningfully in life-wide learning activities including uniformed groups and specific education programmes for positive peer influence and life values cultivation. Departments and NGOs concerned should also strengthen and coordinate anti-drug programmes for students of primary four and above.

- (c) Schools would play a proactive role in identifying at-risk students and handle suspected drug abuse cases jointly with professionals from relevant sectors. Clear guidelines and protocols would be drawn up for all personnel in the school setting to handle cases involving at-risk students and those with drug abuse problems in a collaborative manner, to ensure appropriate assistance and timely referral and follow-up actions.
- (d) To enhance support for schools, two sets of Resource Kits would be developed for parents and school sectors respectively. Structured professional training for teachers would be provided to reinforce their competence and knowledge in delivering drug education and handling at-risk students who may have drug abuse problems. Supply teachers would be provided to enable teachers to take part in the training. The Police School Liaison Programme would also be strengthened to enhance communication among schools on matters relating to drug abuse. In addition, more anti-drug talks and programmes would be co-organised in collaboration with parent-teacher associations and their district federations so as to reach out to more parents to enhance home-school cooperation in combating the youth drug abuse.

Measures in Tackling Youth Drug Abuse in the School Sector

9. To help students adopt a healthy lifestyle is one of the aims of our school education. To take this aim forward, one of the learning goals is to lead a healthy lifestyle and develop an interest in and appreciation of aesthetic and physical activities. Schools have been working on it for years but with different focuses to address students' specific needs. As EDB is taking the lead to promote institutionalization of a Healthy School Policy in schools, we hope to take this opportunity to integrate related measures on healthy lifestyles within the school together with an anti-drug element into a school-based policy. As an all embracing policy on healthy lifestyles, the Healthy School Policy should consist of the following four elements:

- (i) developing a management and organization system for health matters;
- (ii) fostering a healthy school environment;
- (iii) developing students' healthy lifestyles; and
- (iv) identification of students who may need help and putting in place the referral system.

Relevant anti-drug measures should also be formulated around these four elements as set out in the following paragraphs.

Developing a management and organization system for health matters

10. Schools should set up a task group responsible for the overall health issues within the school and the task group should be led by an experienced teacher. The school should focus on the needs of students when formulating its school-based policy. ND in collaboration with EDB, SWD and other relevant departments has commissioned an NGO to develop a resource kit for schools to help the school management devise a Healthy School Policy with an anti-drug element.

Fostering a Healthy School Environment

11. In order to foster a caring and supportive school etho, the school should adopt a Whole School Approach to guidance and discipline. Each school should also strengthen the relationship with parents and the community to foster a drug-free environment conducive for the healthy development of students. In this respect, parent-teacher associations and their district federations will be encouraged to organise school-based and / or district-based anti-drug seminars, workshops and talks for parents to enhance their understanding on prevention of drug abuse. In addition, ND has commissioned an NGO to develop a resource kit for parents to help various organizations implement anti-drug programmes for parents. ND will also prepare a handy leaflet containing key information from the resource kit, such as help channels, for dissemination to parents.

Developing Students' Healthy Lifestyles

12. EDB would review and update the school curriculum to provide a holistic curriculum conducive to the whole-person development of students, comprising knowledge, generic skills and values and attitudes in the promotion of anti-drug education. In the existing primary and secondary curricula, elements on anti-drug education are incorporated in different KLAs/ subjects such as Primary General Studies, Social Studies, Integrated Humanities, Biology, Home Economics, Liberal Studies. Anti-drug education is further strengthened in the revised Moral and Civic Education

curriculum framework which was launched in 2008. Learning expectations relating to anti-drug education are clearly specified for different key stages of learning. EDB also develops learning and teaching resources in support of the anti-drug education and upload them on EDB websites for schools' reference. In the New Senior Secondary Curriculum to be implemented in September 2009, anti-drug education will be included and emphasized in the core subject of Liberal Studies and the elective subject of Health Management and Social Care.

13. EDB will encourage schools to provide more opportunities for positive engagement of students through life-wide learning activities and Other Learning Experiences. Building on existing practices and school-based needs, schools are encouraged to devise their relevant programmes (including elements of anti-drug education) to help nurture among students positive values and attitudes, as well as to adopt healthy lifestyles.

14. To cultivate positive values among students and help them acquire the skills to keep themselves away from drugs, EDB will enhance its efforts to promote students' participation in uniformed group activities and other youth development programmes such as the PATHS, Understanding Adolescent Project, Enhanced Smart Teen Project, Adolescent Health Programme, Junior Health Pioneer Workshop² and by exploring further collaboration with other parties. Schools should arrange these specific education programmes to enhance students' knowledge on drug and other health issues.

15. Through funding or subventions provided by ND and SWD, designated NGOs will also provide anti-drug talks to senior primary students and secondary students respectively to ensure they receive knowledge about the dire consequences of drug abuse and skills to refuse drugs. ND, the Police, SWD, EDB and DH are also working together to enhance coordination of anti-drug preventive education programmes to complement each other and to extend the overall coverage of students. Schools should encourage their students to actively participate in these talks and

² Student Health Service Centres (SHSCs) also started a Junior Health Pioneer Workshop in October 2007. All Primary 3 students who attend our 12 SHSCs will join the Workshop. The objective is to teach them about the harmful effects of smoking, drug abuse and alcohol drinking, as well as various refusal skills.

programmes to ensure the physical and mental well-being of students.

Identification of Students Who May Need Help and Putting in Place the Referral System

16. Early identification of at-risk students is important in providing timely support for them. The resource kit for schools now under preparation would provide useful checklists for school personnel including school management staff, guidance and discipline teachers, school social workers, class and subject teachers to identify at-risk students and make referrals where necessary. Guidelines will also be drawn up in handling cases involving at-risk students and those with drug abuse problems for schools' reference.

Support Measures for Schools

17. As teachers play a vital role in the healthy development of students, it is important to equip them with anti-drug knowledge. Apart from the provision of resource kits and checklists for teachers' reference or deployment, structured professional training programmes including half-day on-site programmes for class and subject teachers, and two-day advanced programmes for key school personnel would be also provided. In order to encourage schools to release teachers to attend the two-day advanced programmes, supply teachers will be provided.

18. The Police has also strengthened their co-operation with schools. 27 new posts of PSLOs have been created to enhance the co-ordination among the Police, schools, social workers and the community. They conduct regular visits and maintain close liaison with the school community including teachers, school social workers, school youth organizations and where appropriate parent-teacher associations. This helps to educate students, teachers and parents on drugs and related crime issues.

19. The school social work service has played a pivotal role in the early intervention of problem students with a view to preventing them from becoming hardcore youth at risk. School social workers collaborate with the school personnel and stakeholders concerned in providing the necessary

professional support to jointly tackle the student drug abuse problems, among other psychosocial and behavioral problems. This helping process includes initial engagement, motivational counselling to the needy students and their families, and subsequent referral to drug treatment and rehabilitation programmes upon consent.

20. To enhance home-school cooperation in the anti-drug cause, a resource kit is being developed to help various organizations plan and implement anti-drug programmes for parents (paragraph 11 above). Training sessions and district-level talks will also be organised to train and promote the use of the kit.

Way Forward

21. To take forward the recommendations of the report of the Task Force relating to the school setting and the above-mentioned measures, an advisory committee comprising school representatives and government officials has been set up under EDB since March 2008 to advise on the implementation details of the anti-drug measures in the school setting.

22. As regards the recommendation of school-based drug testing, the Task Force recognised that controversial issues would need to be addressed and would only recommend the introduction of a school-based drug testing scheme on a voluntary basis. Besides, ND will launch an in-depth research to devise possible schemes, taking into account local and overseas experiences, for voluntary adoption by schools.

Advice Sought

23. Members are invited to give advice on the proposed support measures to tackle drug abuse in schools.

Education Bureau
April 2009