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To: Legislative Council Panel on Education

Other parties speaking at the Special Meeting (I am keen to exchange a copy of your paper)

When we discuss what to do with education expenses, it is not about who are gaining, who are suffering, who like it, who do not. In any government decision, there are people who benefit more and there are people who benefit less. We cannot satisfy everybody. There should be some rational basis here. We need to think whether it is according to education policy that the society (or its representatives) has agreed. These policies may appear as education acts or council resolutions. Then no matter which political party gets the office then after, they cannot change the policy overnight, because, it has been a whole society's agreement and joint commitment. That is how we live together as a whole. Surely the policy has to change with time. But the change needs a due procedure of rationality, including debate based on evidence we get through exercising the present policy. Besides the agreed policy direction, in our discussion and decision must also be mindful about the general principles of justice. Even if we have an agreed goal, and no matter how noble the goal is, we must make sure that our means are just.

After 1997, the greatest policy initiative has been the reduction of high stake public examination and the curriculum reform that gears toward the objective of learning to learn. Here I am not talking about whether they are good or bad. But they are there, as something we all agree to move towards. So the mandate is to do it with our best effort and at the same time try to consolidate our experiences and resources, so that we can improve our implementation strategies to bring about the best results we can.

Over the past 10 years or so, educators have been working excessively hard, including frontline teachers as well as officers in education and examination authorities. Yet, the government is seemingly losing its mind. It is cutting what has been so essential for the realisation of the policy goal – the teaching force at the front line. Education development has gone through a long journey after WWII, the most obvious solution that come out of almost all research in all countries is that teachers matters most in educational reforms.

I can understand if a minister of education fails to get what education needs for achieving what wants because of recession and has to slow things down. But it is hard to understand why an education minister would cut what is essential for education that on his or her own accord. Is it because he or she is actually against and hence trying to undermine that educational change?

Without the hard work of the teaching force, the successful completion of the first cycle of the DSE (at the same time as the finishing of the last cohort of F7) can never have happened so smoothly. Yet, while as the CE has said in his 2013 Policy Address that "it is time to consolidate our educational policies, and avoid drastic changes to give stakeholder some respite. Our future priority will be to ensure the quality of our education by further improving relevant measures in accordance with existing policies." Our Secretary of Education is trying to cut down the teaching force that has been so important for the continuation, and the improvement of what has been achieved! It is like killing the reform in its infancy.

No one can deny the large number of temporary teachers and TA etc now working in schools and for the last few years, without which the NSS would have never been able to go through its first round as smoothly. But they are never counted as teachers on EDB's accounting book (just look at the education budgets submitted to the Legco). It is unjust to them. It is ignoring of the important contribution of these people. They are used temporarily and not respected as new blood in the teaching force, even though many of them are already qualified in terms of professional training as well as experience. By putting them not on the book, the injustice is concealed. Now with the reduction of funding, they are going to lose their job. And other young graduates who have committed passionately in the study of education will also face great difficulty in entering schools. They should be the young blood which can help schools keep its lively connect to the minds and hearts of new generations of school students to come. But we are now stepping on them. I must say I have never heard one single society of people who stepped on their younger generations could become blessed.

I also want to point out that the information given in the EDB document has not respond to the adversity situation on the succession of the teaching force in the future. On the book, the number of secondary teachers has been kept

between 23000 and 24000 in the past 10 years (2011-12 is an exception: 25700). If the EDB want to refute this challenge, she can do something very simple, find out the year profile of these 'on the book' teachers in 2006-07 and 2012-13 and let people see the difference.

Appendix

Head 156 — GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT: EDUCATION BUREAU					School Year		
ANALYSIS OF FINANCIAL PROVISION					2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Programme	2011-12 (Actual) (\$m)	2012-13 (Original) *(\$m)	2012-13 (Revised) (\$m)	2013-14 (Estimate) (\$m)	(Actual)	(Revised Estimate)	(Estimate)
(1) Director of Bureau's Office	11.9	12.0	10.4	11.4			
(2) Primary Education	11 549.7	12 408.3	12 672.6	12 893.7			
(5) Secondary Education	21 279.8	21 927.3	22 306.2	22 264.3	255 900	247 100	236 400
(4) Special Education	1 806.2	1 780.0	1 797.3	1 870.4	240 900	235 800	221 900
(3) Other Educational Services and Subsidies	3 199.6	3 326.1	3 203.0	3 484.4	30 100	—	—
(6) Vocational Education	1 854.5	1 901.2	2 012.9	1 953.8	25 700	24 100	23 400
(7) Policy and Support	5 160.5	1 836.1	8 744.3	1 970.4			
	44 662.2	43 193.5	50 746.7 (+17.3%)	44 478.4 (-12.4%)			
			(or -3.0% on 2012-13 Original)				
				subsidised secondary 4 to 6 places	255 900	247 100	236 400
				children in the 15 to 17 age group	240 900	235 800	221 900
				subsidised secondary 7 places [#]	30 100	—	—
				teachers in public sector secondary schools	25 700	24 100	23 400
				teachers in government secondary schools with relevant teacher training qualification (%)	95.5	96.7	96.7
				teachers in aided secondary schools with relevant teacher training qualification (%)	94.8	96.1	96.1
				teacher wastage rate of public sector secondary schools (%) ^Ω	3.9	8.3	5.0
				public sector secondary schools being provided with NETs to enhance English language teaching (%) ^p	100	100	100

What do I mean by not 'on-the-book'? From the Legco website, I can read the education budget each year, in which I can see actual financial provision for secondary education and number of teachers in public sector secondary schools. By going through the Budgets in given years, I created a table as follows:

	financial provision for secondary education (million)	teachers in public sector secondary schools (person)
2004-05 (actual)	15578.8	23300
2005-06 (actual)	16387.0	23400
2006-07 (actual)	16181.5	24400
2007-08 (actual)	17175.7	24600
2008-09 (actual)	18847.5	24400
2009-10 (actual)	19282.4	24400
2010-11 (actual)	19689.9	24400
2011-12 (actual)	21279.8	25700
2012-13 (estimated)	22306.2	24100
2013-14 (estimated)	22264.3	23400

The first thing I notice is that the number of teachers was kept constant in the years during the 1st cohort of NSS (even though I can expect the same drop in student population might happen in that period). In particular, there is a marked increase in teachers in the year 2011-12 to guarantee the double cohort exit. It is obvious here student number is not the main consideration. For the first round NSS, the government was willing to pay the money. But once the first cohort is done, the government thinks that the mission is accomplished, and the number of teachers is reduced. In fact, EDB has never expected that the implementation of the policy of learning to learn curriculum will need more teacher inputs!

The second thing I notice is: If I compare the financial provision in 2011-12 with that of 2008-09, as shown in the table, I can see only a 13% increase these 3 years, and not the 25% as stated in the EDB document. Is it because of the drop in total secondary school student population? (My math told me that would need about 10% decrease within the 3 years?) Or is it because the figure stated in the EDB includes expenses in 'Other educational services and subsidies' and 'Policy and Support'? If these are not clarified, the 25% increase stated in the EDB document may not directly reflect the government's intention to put additional investment in the school teaching force to enable the implementation of the curriculum reform.