



**D Dong's Response to the
“Measures to Address Issues arising from the Drop in
Secondary School Population”**

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1. Introduction to D-Dong

D-DONG is one of the few professional youth institutions in Hong Kong. It was established by a group of high-calibre young people in 2010. D-DONG is an elitist institution; all the members are carefully chosen in order to meet the demanding requirement of the organization.

Since establishment, D-DONG remains to be fair, objective and neutral. We embrace all kinds of opinion, and therefore earn the respect of different sectors of society.

D-DONG focuses on issues that are related to youth culture and policies. We release research reports regularly. The research are conducted in the most serious and professional manner. Since 2010, we had released over 10 study reports, which were widely reported by the media. In June 2012, D-DONG has its first overseas research team stationed in England.

D-DONG is eager to enhance public awareness of youth problems and youth issues, to make policy recommendations that are beneficial to the young people, and to encourage the healthy growth of Hong Kong politics. We also encourage young people to contribute to society and participate in various community activities. D-DONG is the ideal place for them to experience the joy of contributing to Hong Kong, China and the international community.

2. D Dong's View towards Measures Introduced

2.1. The Problem

According to the government estimate, there is a transitional drop in secondary school student population until the school year of 2017/18, when the figure rebounds to the present level. In response to the situation, the Government proposed the “voluntary optimization of class structure” on 18th November, in an attempt to “stabilize the schools and their teaching force” and avoid “affecting the long-term stability” of schools when the figure rebounds.

Some groups view the situation as a policy window for achieving small-class education.

3. D Dong's View towards the Pupil Population Drop

3.1. The Rebound Assumption

Similar to many post-industrialized societies, Hong Kong has faced a continuous low natural increase rate. However, the problem shall be examined in a scientific way.

The estimate for the school-age Secondary One students shall be based on birth rate and the inflow of school-age immigrants. The recent decrease of the number is partly due to the low birth rate observed since the year 1996, when the crude birth rate significantly dropped from 9.9 per 1000 population in 1996, to 7.8 in 2000¹. The figure rose significantly after 2007, when the crude birth rate rebounded to 10.2 and substantial rise is noted (11.3 in 2008; 11.7 in 2009)².

Students are entitled to be enrolled in secondary schools at the age of 12. The Government has been stressing the gradual recovery observed after the 2016/17 school year, when the level rebounds to the current (2011/12) level. Assuming that, given no major change in the relevant policies, the demographics of

¹ Table 1, *Census Department, The Fertility Trend in Hong Kong, 1981 to 2009*,

<http://www.statistics.gov.hk/pub/B71011FC2010XXXXB0100.pdf>.

² Ibid.

immigration remains constant, the projection is mainly based on birth rate. Therefore, the detrimental factor for the 2017/18 secondary one student population would be the birth rate in 2005 and after. We do observe that there is a significant rise in the crude birth rate since 2003. Nevertheless, the figure might not reflect the reality in that there is also a much more significant rise in new-born population whose parents are non-residents. Among the new-born population, this percentage rose from 16.2% in 2005 to 36.9% in 2010.

While the Government presents no estimate on the impact of this trend, it can never be concluded that the rise in crude birth rate since 2003 would end up a solid rebound in the student number who would be promoted to Secondary school. We have reservations about the Government conclusion that the drop is definitely “transitional”.

3.2. Short-term relieve Measures

Given an obvious confirmed drop in the school population until the 2016/17 school year³, the Education Bureau implemented the Voluntary Optimization of Class Structure Scheme, in an attempt to maintain the present provisions.

We welcome any initiatives taken to relieve the predictable shock. Education policy should be serve students’ interest and hence the long-term needs for development. The existing variety in the system is worth being preserved and the organizational memories and teaching experience of the school teams are crucial. While the nature of the decrease in the school-age population is uncertain, we agree that the Government opt for a temporary measure that stabilizes the system.

³ <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/chinese/panels/ed/papers/ed1108cb2-2647-1-c.pdf>

4. Suggestion Made

4.1 Government Actions Urged

We have pointed out that the impact of a surge in new-born babies whose parents are non-residents shall be carefully assessed. In a letter dated 20th September 2011 from the Education Bureau to the Education Panel of the Legislative Council, the Government admitted that the exact figure is difficult to be estimated without further studies in the immigration pattern, inclinations of the parents having their Hong Kong-born children receiving schooling in Hong Kong.

We urge the Government to conduct a thorough study in the above factors.

4.2 Implementation of Small-class Teaching

At the present stage we have not come into conclusion concerning small-class teaching. We believe that the full implementation of small-class teaching would imply a reform of the education policy, which requires much more thorough studies. We are open to any policies that are in the interest of students.