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Education Bureau

Government Secretariat, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

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27 June 2016

Miss Polly YEUNG
Clerk to Panel
Legislative Council Panel on Education
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong

Dear Miss YEUNG

Panel on Education

Follow-up to meeting on 22 March 2016

I refer to your letter dated 24 March 2016 requesting the Administration's responses to the two motions proposed under the agenda item of "Issues related to student suicide" and passed at the meeting on 22 March 2016. Our response is at the **Appendix**.

Yours sincerely

(C S WOO)

for Secretary for Education

Encl.

Panel on Education of the Legislative Council
Motion proposed under Agenda Item I - “Issues related to student suicide”
by Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun at the special meeting on 21 March 2016
and passed at the meeting on 22 March 2016

All along, the Government has been formulating education policies with students’ well-being as our prime consideration. For the past decade, the Education Bureau (EDB) has implemented progressively various improvement measures recommended in the education reform, hoping that our students will have joyful learning as well as balanced and healthy development. Following the passage of the motion on “Returning a Happy Childhood to Students” on 5 November 2014, the EDB has continued to enhance and improve various measures proposed by Legislative Council members. The wording of the motion moved by Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun under the agenda item of "Issues related to student suicide" at the special meeting of the Panel on Education on 21 March 2016 is the Annex. Below is the Bureau’s reply in response to the queries raised in the motion:

(1) Happiness Assessment Indicator

2. Basically, the Happiness Index is a measure of subjective well-being, covering life evaluation, affect and eudaimonia. This may be affected by various factors, such as healthy life expectancy, income, social support, freedom to make life choices, etc. Internationally speaking, it is more commonly used as an average score indicating the general life satisfaction of a large group of persons, instead of an individual. More evidence may be required to support the use of happiness index to indicate students’ level of stress and suicidal risk.

3. To identify individual students in need, we recommend that schools should adopt a Three-tier Support Model to provide different levels of identification and support by teachers, guidance personnel and professional staff, including daily observations, review of student information/records, Assessment Program for Affective and Social Outcomes and student surveys. Educational psychologists (EP) may also administer widely-recognised and locally normed behavioural checklists on a need basis to analyse students’ emotional and/or behavioural problems, such as depression, anxiety and social relationships, etc. If needed, EPs may refer the students to psychiatrists for in-depth assessment, diagnosis and treatment.

(2) Homework Policy

4. The EDB has all along attached great importance to the learning effectiveness and well-being of students. The Hong Kong school curriculum aims to provide students with meaningful and stimulating learning experiences, including life-wide learning activities, learning within and beyond the classroom as well as homework. Homework serves the purposes of application of knowledge, extension of learning, preparation for lessons, etc. to sustain students' motivation and enhance their confidence in learning. We encourage schools to formulate appropriate school-based homework policy with due consideration given to students' learning needs, abilities and interests.

5. In October 2015, we issued the updated circular on “Guidelines on Homework and Tests in Schools - No Drilling, Effective Learning” to schools reiterating that quality homework and meaningful assessments are conducive to enhancing student learning. The circular also points out that schools may arrange some time within school hours for teachers to assist students in finishing part of their homework, especially for younger students or tasks requiring more teacher guidance. Schools should ensure that students have sufficient time for rest and leisure to develop a healthy lifestyle. We encourage schools to regularly review their homework and assessment policies in consultation with their key stakeholders, including parents. At the same time, parents may also provide their feedback on the quality and quantity of homework with the schools direct. We will continue to keep in view schools' implementation of various curriculum reform initiatives, including the homework policy through different channels, such as professional development programmes for teachers, random-sampling questionnaire surveys, school visits and focus group interviews. We will also collect views from school leaders, teachers and students, and explore with them how to fine-tune the homework and assessment policies to better cater for the needs of students.

(3) Students' Pressure Before and After the New Academic Structure

6. The EDB has been striving to remove unnecessary pressure on students. After completing the three-year junior secondary and the three-year senior secondary education under the New Academic Structure (NAS) implemented since 2009, students only have to sit for the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination, instead of sitting for two public examinations under the previous education system. This helps reduce students' pressure in preparing for public examinations. In addition, the EDB, the Curriculum Development Council and the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority jointly conducted the NAS Review from 2012 to 2015 to enhance the implementation of the senior secondary curriculum and assessment. After extensive consultation with different stakeholders (including schools, parents, and the public), a range of

recommendations on curriculum and assessment as well as support measures were implemented by stages. These include increasing the flexibility of lesson time; trimming, streamlining or updating curriculum contents; clarifying the breadth and depth of subject curricula; not implementing School-based Assessment in 10 subjects; and maintaining the curriculum framework as well as public examination grading mechanism. These measures were well-received, as supported by survey results which indicated that student and teacher workload has been reduced.

7. At present, all institutions funded by the University Grants Committee have established dedicated units to conduct mental health screening for students, promote mental health and provide students with professional counselling and related services. Some institutions incorporate positive psychology concepts in their teaching materials to strengthen resilience among students. Institutions also provide training for students to become mental health ambassadors and organise peer counselling activities.

(4) Other Measures

Training Courses to Induce Positive Energy on Students

8. All along, the EDB attaches great importance to nurturing students' positive values and positive thinking. The primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong have incorporated the content of life education, such as "understand life", "cherish life", "respect life" and "explore life", into different learning themes through development of a holistic curriculum. For example, the topics on "respect and value life" have been included in General Studies at primary level while the themes on "respect life" and "sanctity of life" have been included in the Life and Society Curriculum at junior secondary level. The meaning of "life and death" is explored and reflected on in Ethics and Religious Studies at senior secondary level. At the senior secondary level, Liberal Studies is the core subject which aims to help students understand their personal strengths and weaknesses, and learn how to manage stress and frustration as well as how to make decisions under the pressure of challenges for a positive and meaningful life in its curriculum aims.

9. In parallel with the curriculum, the EDB has been promoting diversified programmes for students' growth to enhance students' resilience through adventure-based, team building and problem-solving training. In recent years, the EDB has organized student guidance programmes based on positive psychology concepts to help students establish their positive self-image, treasure life and property.

10. To facilitate the implementation of life education at schools, the EDB has been organising talks and workshops, such as "How to Enhance Students' Value Judgment" workshop and inviting scholars, experts and teachers to share implementation strategies and practical experience so as to raise the attendees' awareness of life education and enhance their teaching skills. Besides, in order to support schools to implement life education, from the 2010/11 school year onwards, the EDB attaches importance to organising two programmes on life education for secondary and primary schools, namely "Programme on Planning Life Education for Secondary Schools" and "Programme on Planning Life Education for Primary Schools" respectively. The aims of two programmes are to assist schools to plan their life education curriculum based on their own needs, and to help teachers further acquire effective teaching strategies and skills in delivering life education, so as to help students build positive values and attitudes as well as enhance their resilience.

11. The professional competencies of teachers are of prime importance for nurturing students' intellectual, emotional and social development. All along, when planning for continuing professional development (CPD), schools and teachers have been referring to the Teacher Competencies Framework, under which student development is one of the four core domains. At the same time, the EDB continues to offer suitable CPD programmes to teachers to support them in attaining the soft target of engaging in at least 150 hours of CPD over a 3-year cycle. Besides, we communicate with teacher education institutions through regular meetings to facilitate their planning of initial teacher and CPD education programmes that are in line with the latest education policies, meeting the needs of professional development of the teaching profession and the whole-person development of the students.

12. All along, through the Committee on Home-School Co-operation, the EDB has been actively encouraging schools to set up Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), which serve as a bridge between parents and teachers to foster communication and understand the needs of parents. The EDB has also been providing financial support to schools and PTAs for organising school-based home-school co-operation and parent education activities, including activities for nurturing students' positive values and healthy life style, home-school co-operation and parenting skills. We will further promote home-school co-operation and provide appropriate support to address students' learning needs and their physical and mental development so as to support the healthy and happy growth of the students.

"Flipped Classroom" and Diversified Pedagogies

13. The EDB encourages adoption of diversified pedagogies and effective use of information technology (IT) to enhance students' learning effectiveness.

“Flipped Classroom” is one of the innovative pedagogies to make good use of IT to enhance the effectiveness of learning and teaching. We encourage teachers to make appropriate use of “Flipped Classroom”, and provide teachers with professional development programmes to strengthen their knowledge and skills to use it in different subjects. In the past two school years, we have arranged 19 relevant training programmes for teachers; and for the first five months of the current school year, we have already organised 15 relevant training programmes, reflecting the growing trend of application of “Flipped Classroom” in teaching.

14. To support the rapid development of e-learning and the wide application of IT in education, the EDB has launched the One-stop Portal for Learning and Teaching Resources in 2012 (http://www.hkedcity.net/edbosp/?chg_lang=0) to provide teachers with a variety of multi-media learning and teaching resources to cater for students’ needs. To promote “Flipped Classroom”, for instance, the EDB has developed relevant video clips, lesson plans and worksheets for the topic “National Income Determination and Price Level” of Economics, and invited 18 secondary schools for try-out in the 2015/16 school year. DVDs have also been produced and will be distributed to all secondary schools in May 2016. In addition, to facilitate the implementation of “Flipped Classroom”, the Educational Television (ETV) Unit of the Curriculum Development Institute is dividing ETV programmes into segments of variable lengths for teachers’ flexible use.

Multiple Pathways

15. The Government is committed to providing flexible and diversified study pathways with multiple entry and exit points. Senior secondary school students may, in accordance with their interests, aspiration and abilities, pursue various local post-secondary programmes (including undergraduate, sub-degree and other programmes) or study overseas. In 2015, there were about 77 950 places offered by different kinds of local programmes and there were 74 000 takers of Hong Kong Diploma for Secondary Education Examination, hence there were sufficient articulation opportunities for secondary school graduates. About 46% of our young people in the relevant cohort now have access to degree-level education. Including the places in sub-degree education, about 70% of them have access to post-secondary education. In recent years, the Government has implemented a series of measures to further increase subsidised higher education opportunities, in a bid to provide school leavers with broader and more diversified articulation pathways. On full implementation of these measures, and given the declining student population, we envisage that there will be sufficient publicly-funded and self-financing first-year first-degree places for all secondary school leavers meeting minimum entrance requirements for university admission by 2016/17. Separately, the Government notes that traditional academic education is not a straightjacket that fits all young people and therefore various initiatives have been announced in recent years to strengthen the development of vocational and

professional education and training. School leavers are encouraged to pursue suitable programmes in accordance with their aspiration to acquire professional knowledge and practical skills in preparation for future employment. We will continue to promote life planning education and related guidance services to help students explore purposefully their future career and life goals according to their personal interest and potentials. Meanwhile, the government also promotes the Qualifications Framework to encourage students to pursue life-long learning through diversified pathways for continuous development.

16. The EDB will continue to review and follow up on the above measures. We will also collaborate closely with related government departments and organisations to heighten schools' awareness towards students' mental health needs, and identify as early as possible students in need of assistance to avoid tragedies. In addition, we will also relay Members' views to the Committee on Prevention of Student Suicides (the Committee). The Committee is tasked to thoroughly examine the causes of the issue and make evidence-based recommendations on appropriate preventive measures having regard to recent incidents of student suicide. The Committee has held three meetings. Apart from analyzing the student suicide cases that occurred in recent years, the Committee has also had discussions on various recommended measures, including promotion of students' mental health, enhancement of the identification, referral and support mechanism for students with mental health issues, provision of tools for identification and support, appropriate training for teachers, creation of positive learning experience, facilitation of students' adjustment during school transitions and promotion of the concept of multiple academic and career pathways. The Committee will continue to examine the issue of student suicides from different perspectives. An interim report will be submitted to the Secretary for Education in July and the final report together with recommendations will be submitted in late October.

Education Bureau
June 2016

(Translation)

Special meeting of the Panel on Education on 21 March 2016
Motion moved under agenda item “Issues related to student suicide”
by Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun

A motion on “Returning a happy childhood to students” moved by me at the Council meeting of 5 November 2014 urging the Government to face up to the pressure on students and introduce measures to resolve the problem was unanimously passed. The Education Bureau (“EDB”) subsequently provided a progress report on the motion in February 2015, but the report did not adequately and fully follow up the suggestions made by me and by other Members. It is evident from the recent spate of student suicidal cases that the EDB is duty bound to take actions to ease the problem but little progress has been made in reviewing the education system and alleviating the pressure on students. This Panel urges the authorities to follow up the motion on “Returning a happy childhood to students” and the views expressed by all the Members who spoke on the motion; face up to the harm done by the education system to students; include a review of the education system into the matters to be dealt with by the relevant committee; and expeditiously embark on a study covering the following areas:

- (1) to formulate a set of happiness assessment indicators for students so as to gauge, through focus groups, students’ levels of satisfaction towards school life, learning and their relationship with families and peers, while the EDB and individual schools are required to follow up such assessment results;
- (2) to conduct a comprehensive survey, on a territory-wide basis, on the amount of homework in primary and secondary schools as well as the relationship between the amount of homework and the pressure on students, so as to ensure that schools allocate time slot(s) during lesson time for students to complete their homework at school;
- (3) to study the changes in the psychological quality of university students in coping with pressure before and after the implementation of the new senior secondary academic structure;

- (4) to expeditiously respond to the measures proposed in the motion on “Returning a happy childhood to students”, including devising comprehensive and sustainable education programmes for parents and teachers so as to enable them to impart positive energy to students; to widely promote “flipped classroom” and other innovative pedagogies; and to provide diversified pathways to students to reduce the examination pressure on them.

Panel on Education of the Legislative Council
Motion moved under Agenda Item I “Issues related to student suicide”
by Hon Fernando Cheung at the special meeting on 21 March 2016
and passed at the meeting on 22 March 2016

A motion moved by Hon Fernando Cheung under the agenda item “Issues related to student suicide” at the special meeting of the Panel on Education on 21 March 2016 was passed at the meeting on 22 March 2016 (wording of the motion at Annex). All along, the Education Bureau (EDB) has attached great importance to cultivating students’ positive value and enhancing their capacity in facing adversity. Apart from enhancement of curriculum, the EDB has also implemented various measures with a view to reducing students’ pressure arising from learning and articulation, so that they can learn happily and unleash their potential. Our response to the recommendations made in the motion is set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

School Retreat Day

2. The EDB has been urging schools to adopt the Whole School Approach, which enables them to understand their students’ individual needs and provide appropriate support through daily classroom learning and teaching, Class Teacher Periods/Personal Growth Education, daily observations on students’ behaviour and performance, etc. As always, schools have been designing and arranging a variety of learning and teaching activities/counselling sessions in a professional and effective manner to cater for the personal growth and learning needs of students. For activities beyond the classroom, they should have clear learning targets and underpin the holistic development of students in order to achieve effective and sustainable learning outcomes.

3. For example, schools will make arrangements for S2 to S5 students to join the Smart Teen Challenge Camps co-organised by the EDB and various disciplinary forces every year. At the camps, students will receive systematic disciplinary, physical and team-building training to enhance their self-discipline, self-confidence, team spirit and resilience. These camps are not one-off events. Before the camps, schools will get students prepared through briefing sessions, personal development classes and physical training. After the camps, schools will organise debriefing sessions to deepen the learning experience students have acquired through the activities, so that they are able to consolidate and reinforce their positive thinking. In addition, training is provided for teachers-in-charge to help them acquire the necessary professional knowledge as well as guidance and counselling skills so that they can better perform their role as facilitators of learning.

4. When considering whether to implement a particular large-scale activity that involves a large number of students such as School Retreat Day, schools shall adhere to the principles stated in paragraph 2 above and undertake professional and comprehensive planning. In light of actual circumstances, including the diversity of students, degree of participation of stakeholders, expected learning targets and the need to adjust the number of active school days, schools will make a school-based decision that delivers the best results in promoting students' personal growth and effective learning. We encourage school sponsoring bodies and schools to hold more professional discussions and sharing sessions on such kind of student learning mode as School Retreat Day and to plan suitable learning and professional development activities according to their school-based circumstances, including learners' diversity. Initially, the school sector has responded positively to the concept of School Retreat Day, and considered that this initiative could tie in with schools' existing guidance work. It has also pointed out that and some schools now organize similar activities, and emphasized that appropriate activities should be planned by schools according to their school-based circumstances.

Homework and assessment policies

5. The EDB strives to remove drills and unnecessary pressure on students. Regarding homework and assessments, we issued a circular on "Guidelines on Homework and Tests in Schools – No Drilling, Effective Learning" to primary and secondary schools in October 2015 to reiterate that meaningful homework should be designed to extend and consolidate student learning. It is the quality rather than the quantity of homework that counts. There should not be an over-reliance on pen-and-paper tests and related drills. Homework which focuses on mechanical drills will inevitably lead to students' loss of interest and motivation in learning. We encourage schools to formulate appropriate homework and assessment policies and conduct regular reviews on such according to the needs, abilities and interests of students in consultation with relevant stakeholders (including parents). This is to ensure that the policies are capable of facilitating student learning and alleviating unnecessary pressure on students.

New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary

6. Furthermore, with the introduction of the New Academic Structure (NAS) from the 2009/10 school year, students who have completed three years of junior education and another three years of secondary education only need to sit for one public examination (i.e. the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination), as compared with two selective public examinations under the old system. This means that the pressure felt by students in coping with public examinations has already been reduced. Other than the four core subjects, the NAS offers 20 elective subjects and over 30 Applied Learning courses, providing multiple pathways in academic, vocational and professional areas for students with

diverse interests and aspirations and paving the way for future achievements. The NAS allows students to take their preferred subjects and programmes based on their interests and abilities, thereby stimulating their learning motivation at the same time.

7. On the recommendations of curriculum, schools in Hong Kong always implement a wide range of Life-wide Learning activities as well as Other Learning Experiences (OLE) activities in senior secondary classes, in order to promote students' whole-person development. These experiences enable students to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes which they may not be able to learn in classroom setting in this knowledge-based society with advanced information and communication technology. Also, these experiences enhance the all-round development of students, including subject learning and personal social skills, and facilitate the acquisition of lifelong learning capabilities.

8. During the NAS Review, the EDB commissioned higher education institutions to study the impacts of OLE on students. It was found that students generally liked OLE and perceived OLE to be beneficial to their personal development. The longitudinal studies showed that with greater preferences for or participation in OLE, students may display remarkable improvements in the eight categories of social and affective outcomes, including self-concept, goals of life, interpersonal relationship and learning competency. As revealed by recent studies, almost all teachers agreed that schools were able to provide student-focused OLE, and most students agreed that they could choose OLE activities they liked.

9. The EDB, Curriculum Development Council, and Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority jointly conducted the NAS Review from 2012 to 2015 to enhance the implementation of the senior secondary curriculum and assessment. After extensive consultation with different stakeholders, including schools, parents and other members of the community, a range of recommendations as well as support measures were implemented by stages. These include increasing the flexibility of lesson time to enable schools and teachers to better deploy lesson time to suit the needs of their students and the school contexts; trimming, streamlining or updating curriculum contents to reduce student and teacher workload; clarifying the breadth and depth of subject curricula to help students and teachers better understand curriculum contents and requirements; streamlining the School-based Assessment (SBA) in most subjects and suspending SBA in ten subjects to reduce student workload; and maintaining the whole-school curriculum framework as well as public examination grading mechanism to provide a stable environment for teachers to focus on teaching and provide pastoral care for their students. These measures aimed to release more space for students and teachers to improve learning and teaching, including the implementation of values education, and have delivered positive results, as

indicated by school surveys which informed that the workload for both students and teachers had been effectively reduced.

10. Future review of the school curriculum and assessment will be conducted on a regular basis following the natural curriculum development cycle of each subject and curriculum area. At present, a review of the curricula of the eight Key Learning Areas in primary and secondary education is being conducted to keep abreast of the changing needs of students and society, and is expected to be completed by 2016.

Study pathways

11. The Government is committed to providing flexible and diversified study pathways with multiple entry and exit points. Senior secondary students may, with regard to their interests, aspiration and abilities, pursue various local post-secondary programmes (including undergraduate, sub-degree and other programmes) or study overseas. In 2015, about 77 950 places were offered by different kinds of local programmes, while there were 74 000 takers of Hong Kong Diploma for Secondary Education Examination. Hence there were sufficient articulation opportunities for secondary school graduates.

12. About 46% of our young people in the relevant cohort now have access to degree-level education. Taking sub-degree education together, about 70% of them have access to post-secondary education. In recent years, the Government has implemented a series of measures to further increase subsidised higher education opportunities, in a bid to provide secondary school graduates with broader and more diversified articulation pathways. On full implementation of these measures, and given the declining student population, we envisage that there will be sufficient publicly-funded and self-financing first-year first-degree places for all secondary school graduates meeting minimum entrance requirements for university admission by the 2016/17 academic year.

13. The Government is aware that traditional academic education is not a straightjacket that fits all young people. Various initiatives were therefore announced in recent years to strengthen the development of vocational and professional education and training. School leavers are encouraged to pursue suitable programmes with regard to their aspiration to acquire professional knowledge and practical skills that prepare them for future employment.

Professional support

14. Under the Whole School Approach, all staff will collaborate with professional staff (including guidance personnel, school social workers, school-based educational psychologists, etc.) to provide remedial, preventive and

developmental guidance services for the healthy development of all students. In order to enhance the professional support for primary schools, since the 2012/13 school year, the EDB has provided additional Student Guidance Service Grant to public sector primary schools. For secondary schools, school social worker service is provided by the Social Welfare Department (SWD). Since the 2000/01 school year, the SWD has implemented the policy of “one school social worker for each secondary school” with the assistance of non-government organisations (NGOs). To step up anti-drug work on campus and strengthen related counselling services, starting from the 2011/12 school year, the SWD has increased the manpower of school social workers by 20%.

15. In addition, the Government has been making continuous efforts to enhance school-based psychology service for schools. The School-based Educational Psychology Service (SBEPS) will cover all public sector primary and secondary schools in the 2016/17 school year. The Government will further enhance the SBEPS by progressively improving the ratio of educational psychologist to school to 1:4 for public sector schools with a large number of students with special educational needs from the 2016/17 school year. The EDB will continue to keep in view the overall service needs of schools as well as the supply of educational psychologists.

16. Under school-based management, schools are encouraged to deploy resources flexibly and make use of funding provided by the EDB to increase manpower for guidance personnel if necessary. We will continue to collect views to enhance guidance services through school visits and other channels, and increase the related resources according to needs.

17. With regard to teacher-to-class ratio, currently, the teacher-to-class ratios for public sector secondary schools are 1.7 and 2 teachers per junior secondary (S1 to S3) class and senior secondary (S4 to S6) class respectively. As for primary schools, the teacher-to-class ratio is 1.5 teachers per whole-day class.

18. Apart from providing teaching manpower for public sector primary and secondary schools according to the teacher-to-class ratio, we also provide additional regular teachers for implementing various specific programmes, e.g. curriculum leaders and teachers for specialised teaching in primary schools, English teachers for supporting secondary schools using Chinese as the medium of instruction and additional graduate teachers for supporting academically low achievers, as well as Native-speaking English teachers in primary and secondary schools. In addition, we provide various cash grants, e.g. Capacity Enhancement Grant and Learning Support Grant, for schools to employ additional teaching and/or ancillary staff flexibly. The cash grants which are mostly recurrent in nature facilitate schools' flexible deployment of teaching resources to cater for their future development and students' learning needs.

19. Over the past years, the number of students in each class has been adjusted in response to the changing circumstances. To address the decline of S1 student population, we have reduced the number of students allocated to each S1 class from 38 in the 2008/09 school year to 34 in the 2010/11 school year, which means a reduction of about 10%, and adopted the district/school-based approach to student allocation from the 2013/14 school year. In the 2015/16 school year, only 30 students were allocated to each S1 class for most of the secondary schools. As for primary schools, small class teaching has been implemented progressively at P1 starting from the 2009/10 school year. Schools maintaining 30 students per class are provided with additional Assistant Primary Master/Mistress posts to facilitate the implementation of school-based measures to enhance the effectiveness of teaching.

20. With the implementation of a number of measures, the overall student-to-teacher ratios in public sector secondary and primary schools have been improved significantly in the past few years, dropping from 18.0:1 and 18.4:1 in the 2005/06 school year to 12.4:1 and 14.1:1 in the 2015/16 school year (revised estimate) respectively. The unit costs for a subsidised secondary school place and a subsidised primary school place have increased from \$33,334 and \$24,640 in the 2005-06 financial year to \$66,440 and \$52,850 in the 2015-16 financial year respectively. From the perspective of prioritisation in the use of resources, we have to exercise prudence when considering the need to further increase teaching staff resources.

Inter-departmental coordination mechanism

21. The Government is very concerned about the issue of student suicide. The EDB has been maintaining close communication and liaison with the departments concerned (such as the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) and the Food and Health Bureau (FHB)). Each with its specific functions, these government departments collaborate to promote and implement mental health policies and measures under their professional portfolios, so as to support students with mental health needs, including those with suicidal risk. For example, in order to promote students' awareness of mental health, the EDB has joined the LWB-led cross-sector/cross-departmental annual public education programme of Mental Health Month since 2012, which covers the Fit Mental Wellness Promotion Project that we co-organise for primary and secondary schools. Activities include thematic training for teachers, creativity competitions among young people, open "Like" activity for selected works on the webpage, etc. Regular communication mechanisms are in place for government departments to jointly tackle relatively complicated issues that require cross-departmental collaboration. The EDB also maintains liaison with school councils, NGOs, parent groups, etc. with a view to strengthening communication and co-operation.

22. The EDB will continue to review and follow up on the above measures, and formulate effective support measures in collaboration with related government departments and organizations, including LWB, FHB and NGOs, to enhance the mental health of students and prevent tragedies. In addition, we will also relay Members' views to the Committee on Prevention of Student Suicides (the Committee). The Committee is tasked to thoroughly examine the causes of the issue and make evidence-based recommendations on appropriate preventive measures having regard to recent incidents of student suicide. The Committee has held three meetings. Apart from analyzing the student suicide cases that occurred in recent years, the Committee has also had discussions on various recommended measures, including promotion of students' mental health, enhancement of the identification, referral and support mechanism for students with mental health issues, provision of tools for identification and support, appropriate training for teachers, creation of positive learning experience, facilitation of students' adjustment during school transitions and promotion of the concept of multiple academic and career pathways. The Committee will continue to examine the issue of student suicides from different perspectives. An interim report will be submitted to the Secretary for Education in July and the final report together with recommendations will be submitted in late October.

Education Bureau
June 2016

(Translation)

Special meeting of the Panel on Education on 21 March 2016
Motion moved under agenda item “Issues related to student suicide”
by Hon Fernando Cheung

This Panel expresses deep grief at the spate of student suicidal cases that have occurred in the current academic year. We consider that these suicidal cases, instead of simply caused by one single factor or personal factors, were related to various policy and institutional issues. This Panel urges the Administration to introduce “School Retreat Day” in schools across the territory so as to create room for listening to students’ voices and needs, strengthening the relationship among students, teachers and parents, as well as enhancing and realizing the concept of life education. Meanwhile, the Administration must support education workers and provide them with sufficient time to take a rest and consolidate their work experiences; reduce and discontinue unnecessary homework, drilling and examinations across the board; and offer more choices of curriculum and school activities for students and parents.

This Panel also urges the Education Bureau, the Labour and Welfare Bureau, the Food and Health Bureau to establish an inter-departmental coordination mechanism to promote and implement the mental health policy and support measures; deploy additional professional manpower, including teaching, counselling and medical staff; introduce overall improvements to the ratio of class to teachers and the ratio of class to school-based professionals, so as to release learning and teaching capacity to facilitate the provision of support to students. This Panel also proposes that the Government should review how pressure on students has changed subsequent to the implementation of the new senior secondary curriculum and the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination, and that the Government should increase the number of subsidized university places in the long run to alleviate the competition pressure on students.