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Panel on Education

Meeting on 22 March 2016

**Updated background brief on issues related to the implementation of
Territory-wide System Assessment**

Purpose

This paper summarizes the major views and concerns expressed by Members on the implementation of Territory-wide System Assessment ("TSA") at recent meetings of the Panel on Education ("the Panel") and further to the background brief on the subject issued in November 2015 [LC Paper No. CB(4)266/15-16(02)].

Consideration at the Panel

2. The Panel held a prolonged meeting consisting of four sessions on 29 November 2015 and received views from 81 deputations/individuals. Issues related to TSA were revisited at the Panel meeting held on 11 January 2016. The major views and concerns expressed at these meetings are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Concerns about excessive drilling

3. Many members and deputations expressed grave concern that the implementation of TSA had led to the development of a drilling culture in schools, resulting in tremendous pressure on students, parents and teachers. Excessive drilling had deprived students, in particular primary school students, of leisure time and had adversely affected their physical and mental well-being. They urged the Administration to take effective actions to curb excessive drilling in order that students could learn happily. They also pointed out that some schools had arranged enrichment classes after school, which was another form of drilling in disguise. The usefulness of the TSA data on students' attainment was questionable if they were the result of intensive drilling.

4. The Administration stressed that TSA was a low-stake assessment to gauge students' attainment of basic competency ("BC") in Chinese Language, English Language and Mathematics at the end of the three key learning stages. BC was part of the curriculum incorporated in daily learning activities and internal assessment in schools. Hence, there was hardly any need for schools to change their teaching and assessment methods, nor to drill students for TSA. The Administration opposed any form of intensive drilling by schools to prepare students for TSA, and stated that drilling had never been part of the intended arrangements for implementing TSA. The Education Bureau ("EDB") had issued guidelines to schools in late October 2015 requesting them to formulate an appropriate school-based homework and assessment policy. In mid December 2015, it also issued a letter to schools reminding them not to adopt drilling practices. According to EDB, some schools had reduced supplementary exercises and after-school classes for TSA. It also assured the Panel that if existing and new measures could not stop schools from carrying out excessive drilling, or if it became clear that TSA could no longer achieve its intended objective, the Administration would consider more significant adjustment to TSA.

The suspension, continuation or abolition of TSA

5. Some members and deputations queried the need to implement TSA when schools were able to assess the performance of their students through day-to-day teaching and learning activities and school examinations and tests. While TSA might have worthy objectives, its implementation had become problem-prone and resulted in immense pressure on schools and students. According to some school principals, officers from EDB had made reference to the school level reports of TSA and exerted pressure on schools to improve their students' performance. There was concern that TSA was used as one of the measures to evaluate the performance of schools when considering the allocation of resources.

6. As explained by the Administration, it was necessary to put in place TSA so that students' attainment of BC could be gauged at the end of the three key learning stages (i.e. Primary ("P")3, P6 and Secondary 3). The effective use of TSA data in school level reports would enable schools and teachers to identify students' strengths and weaknesses and devise appropriate learning and teaching strategies to improve students' learning effectiveness before they progressed to the next higher level. Otherwise, students' weaknesses in performance, if any, would not be known until results of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination were available. According to EDB, TSA data was not used for ranking or classifying schools, nor was it an index for imposing measures on schools to cease operation.

7. On the way forward for TSA, some members and deputations urged for immediate abolition of P3 TSA, as scheduling TSA at P3 and P6 levels would be too frequent for primary students. There was also a view that TSA at all levels should be abolished in the long run, as teaching and learning had become TSA-oriented. Some deputations indicated that if the Administration failed to address their concerns, they might consider boycotting TSA.

8. Some other members considered that pending the outcome of the review conducted by the Coordinating Committee on Basic Competency Assessment and Assessment Literacy ("the Coordinating Committee") established under EDB in 2014, it was pre-mature to conclude that TSA should be abolished altogether. However, the implementation arrangements could be improved, such as by drawing a sample of students to participate in TSA, administering TSA in alternate years, not disclosing TSA results to schools and school sponsoring bodies ("SSBs") to avoid unnecessary comparison among schools, and maintaining the anonymity of candidates and schools etc.

9. Many members and deputations shared the view that the forthcoming P3 TSA scheduled in May 2016 should be suspended so as to allow more time for the Coordinating Committee to conduct its review and complete examination of relevant issues. At the meeting on 11 January 2016, the Panel passed a motion (wording at **Appendix I**) moved by Hon IP Kin-yuen urging the Administration to, amongst others, respond genuinely to the aspirations of the community by suspending P3 TSA.

10. The Administration took note of the views and concerns raised by the Panel and deputations, and advised that any changes, including the abolition or suspension of TSA, would require very careful consideration because of their far-reaching implications. It assured members that the Coordinating Committee had not presumed any position and would maintain an open-minded attitude in considering various implementation proposals. As advised by the Administration in January 2016, the Coordinating Committee had agreed not to rush to a conclusion on any single recommendation (including the suspension of P3 TSA in 2016) but would announce the recommendations of its review by early February 2016. Regarding concerns about the arrangements in the longer-term, the Administration reiterated its stance that it would be prudent to make reference to the Coordinating Committee's professional views prior to making a decision on the way forward.

Assessment items of TSA

11. According to some deputations, the assessment items of TSA had become increasingly difficult and tricky. Some members concurred that the level of difficulty and the type of assessment items had far exceeded the

intended objective of gauging students' attainment in BC. There was a view that the difficult nature of the TSA items had led to excessive drilling by schools.

12. As advised by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority ("HKEAA"), the assessment items of TSA were developed by teachers in accordance with curriculum documents, including curriculum guides and BC documents. HKEAA had set up a Moderation Committee for each subject at each level for moderation and endorsement of assessment items. After the release of TSA results, HKEAA would arrange meetings of the TSA Paper Review Focus Group for each subject and each level to review the assessment content, level of difficulty, types of items etc. In addition, to safeguard against attempts to answer TSA questions recklessly, HKEAA could make use of certain statistical tools to ensure the reliability of the TSA results.

13. On criticisms that TSA items were exceedingly difficult, HKEAA cautioned that there had been confusion between the assessment items of TSA and those from supplementary exercises. Some so-called TSA items widely circulated or publicized were actually supplementary exercise items instead of TSA items. In this regard, some members considered it necessary for HKEAA to improve communication and provide more information so as to clear public misunderstanding.

14. Some members sought information on the regulation, if any, of the supplementary exercises for TSA available in the market. As advised by EDB, unlike textbooks, these supplementary exercises were not required to be submitted to EDB for review. EDB considered that it was not necessary to purchase supplementary exercises on TSA for practice purposes as teachers and students could avail themselves of the past TSA papers published by HKEAA on its website.

Issues related to the Coordinating Committee

15. Given the key role of the Coordinating Committee in the review on TSA, some members were concerned whether its membership could gain recognition by stakeholders. The Administration was urged to co-opt additional members holding different views to the Coordinating Committee and its working groups. To address members' concerns, the Administration advised that new members representing parents and School Councils had been appointed to the Coordinating Committee. Representatives from SSBs had been invited to join the working group tasked to review the reporting and administration arrangements of TSA.

16. As the Coordinating Committee was tasked to complete its review within some three months, members enquired about the scope of the review and whether there was sufficient time for the Coordinating Committee to complete its work. The Administration informed the Panel that the Coordinating Committee had been tasked to review the design, objective and operation of TSA. Priority had been given to examining the arrangements for the upcoming P3 TSA in 2016.

Communication with stakeholders

17. Some deputations had submitted to the Panel that officers from EDB had made reference to the school level reports of TSA and exerted pressure on schools to improve their students' performance. According to EDB, the officers from EDB and the schools were engaged in a professional exchange of views on ways to improve teaching and learning. The Administration would strengthen communication with schools and SSBs with a view to clarifying any misunderstanding about the operation and intent of TSA.

18. Noting that some parents had been denied access to a parent seminar organized by EDB in late November 2015, some members expressed concern whether EDB had been collecting views selectively and channeling partial views to the Coordinating Committee for reviewing TSA. The Administration explained that due to the capacity of the venue, prior registration was required for admission to this seminar. The Administration assured members that it was prepared to listen to stakeholders holding different views, without the slightest intention to manipulate or screen public opinions.

19. Questions had been raised as to whether the Administration would conduct another round of consultation after the Coordinating Committee had put forward its views. According to the Administration, it would consider the matter after receipt of the Coordinating Committee's views in due course.

Latest position

20. The Coordinating Committee submitted the report on the review of TSA to EDB on 4 February 2016. One of its recommendations was the launch of a Tryout Study at P3 level in 2016. EDB has accepted the report of the Coordinating Committee and will brief the Panel on the subject at the meeting to be held on 22 March 2016.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
16 March 2016

**教育事務委員會
Panel on Education**

**在 2016 年 1 月 11 日會議上
就議程項目"全港性系統評估的暫緩和存廢的有關事宜"通過的議案
Motion passed under the agenda item "Issues related to the suspension,
continuation or abolition of the Territory-wide System Assessment"
at the meeting on 11 January 2016**

議案措辭

本委員會促請政府當局切實回應社會訴求，暫緩小學三年級全港性系統性評估，邀請持不同意見的家長群組、校長代表、教師代表和學者加入基本能力評估及評估素養統籌委員會，以取得各界的信任，達致各方面都同意的全港系統性評估檢討方案。

(葉建源議員動議)

Wording of the Motion

(Translation)

That this Panel urges the Administration to respond genuinely to the aspirations of the community by suspending the Primary 3 Territory-wide System Assessment ("TSA"), and to invite parent groups, representatives of school principals, representatives of teachers and academics holding different views to join the Coordinating Committee on Basic Competency Assessment and Assessment Literacy, so as to gain the trust of various sectors and reach an option agreed by all parties following the TSA review.

(Moved by Hon IP Kin-yuen)

List of relevant papers

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	29.11.2015 (Item I)	Agenda CB(4)266/15-16(01) CB(4)308/15-16(01) CB(4)391/15-16(01)
	11.1.2016 (Item IV)	Agenda CB(4)435/15-16(01) CB(4)579/15-16(01) CB(4)580/15-16(01) CB(4)587/15-16(01) CB(4)670/15-16(01)

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