



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部教育局
Education Bureau
Government Secretariat, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

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Miss Polly Yeung
Clerk to Panel of Education
Legislative Council
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central
Hong Kong

4 February 2016

Dear Miss Yeung,

**Panel on Education
Issues related to Student Suicide**

Your letter dated 22 January 2016 refers.

Attached please find our written responses (in both Chinese and English) to issues raised in the letter of Hon Fernando Cheung dated 22 January 2016.

For further queries, please contact Ms Kitty HO at 2863 4681.

Yours sincerely,

(Mrs HONG CHAN Tsui-wah)
for Secretary for Education

Written Response to LegCo Panel on Education
Hon. Fernando Cheung's Letter dated 22 January 2016
Issues related to Student Suicide

The government is very concerned about the issue of student suicide. Besides keeping close communication and liaison with related departments (such as the Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Social Welfare Department), the Education Bureau (EDB) has a mechanism in place to identify and support students with mental health needs, including students at risk of suicidal behavior. EDB also strengthens students' positive values and resilience through school curriculum and activities, endeavours to enhance various education policies for improving students' learning motivation and encourages schools to step up their preventive measures in order to minimize student suicide. If a student suicide death case occurs, EDB has put in place a mechanism to provide immediate support for schools and to follow up the affected teachers and students.

I. Early Identification and Intervention Mechanism

Suicide is a complex behaviour with no single cause, but results from a complicated interaction of biological, psychological, cognitive and environmental factors. Suicide of an individual usually happens with warning signs. To prevent suicide, we should aim at early detection and intervention with warning signs to be timely identified, risk factors mitigated and protective factors effectively enhanced.

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 respectively who, with close communication with parents, help students with mental health needs and at risk of suicidal behaviour. At Tier-1 support, schools can identify students at risk of emotional and behavioural difficulties early through daily observations, review of student information/records, Assessment Program for Affective and Social Outcomes and student surveys, etc. so that appropriate learning and teaching adjustment as well as environmental, guidance and activity arrangements can be made accordingly. If the students show no improvements despite the above efforts, they can be referred to school guidance teachers/personnel for further assessment so that the salient factors related to the emotional and behavioural problems concerned can be identified and additional support services, such as group work on self-management, emotion management, conflict management, etc. and parent training can be provided. This is Tier-2 support. If the problems of individual students persist and warrant professional assessment or consultation services, teachers may refer them to professionals, such as school-based educational psychologists (EP), clinical psychologists, family social workers or psychiatrists for in-depth assessment, diagnosis, treatment and follow-up, including medical treatment, emotional counselling, individual support, etc., which is Tier-3 support.

II. Related Teacher Training

To enhance school personnel's awareness of students' behavioural and emotional changes, EDB provides relevant training programmes annually to teachers, which include the

Certificate Courses on Student Guidance and Discipline for primary and secondary teachers, the 120-hour thematic course entitled “Psychological Approach to Effective Strategies in Handling Students’ Challenging Behaviour”, structured training courses on supporting students with special educational needs pitched at Basic, Advanced and Thematic levels. From the 2011/12 to 2013/14 school years, EDB also collaborated with the Hospital Authority (HA), to organize several regional seminars on early psychosis for school guidance teachers/personnel. Professionals such as psychiatrists, EPs and social workers were invited to share their views on supporting students with mental health problems. In the 2013/14 and 2014/15 school years, we worked with HA again to organize territory-wide seminars on depression and anxiety disorders for primary and secondary schools to enhance teachers’ awareness of students’ mental health needs. This year, we will work with the Child & Adolescent Mental Health Community Support Project of HA in developing teaching resources on depression and anxiety disorders for teachers’ reference.

III. Professional Support

To assist schools in supporting students with mental health needs, EDB has produced an eBook on Student Suicide for Schools: Early Detection, Intervention and Postvention which has been uploaded onto the EDB website for schools’ reference and use. A guideline entitled “How Schools can Help Students with Mental Health Problems?” is also provided in the School Administration Guide to remind schools of their role in helping these students adapt themselves to school life upon their return to school after treatment, in tandem with the medical treatment and rehabilitation requirements. In addition, schools will arrange multi-disciplinary case conferences when necessary for psychiatrists, medical social workers, EPs and school personnel (including school social workers and guidance personnel) to identify appropriate support measures for the students. These include creating a caring learning environment, making accommodations on learning and teaching, adjusting class arrangements, and providing emotional counselling and peer support, etc. For students with significant adjustment difficulties, including those with severe emotional and behavioural problems induced by their mental health needs, EDB will consider providing their schools with a time-limited grant where appropriate for employing teaching assistants to help the students concerned follow classroom routines and learn effectively.

IV. Cross-sector Collaboration

EDB has been working closely with HA to review and discuss ways to strengthen the existing notification, referral and support mechanism to ensure effective cross-disciplinary collaboration and communication. We have already reached a consensus with the seven district centres of the Early Assessment Service for Young People under HA, in which schools can call the respective district service centres direct for expert advice and support, including assessment, thematic seminars/workshops and ongoing treatment services. To enhance the procedures of referring students to the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Services of HA for psychiatric assessment, schools and EPs will obtain parental consent for making the referral and psychiatric assessment, as well as parental consent for HA to pass the psychiatric report to the school or EP for follow-up actions after the psychiatric assessment so as to ensure appropriate and timely treatment and support services provided to students with mental derangement.

V. The Curriculum and other Guidance and Support Services

Strengthening students' positive values and resilience

All along, EDB attaches great importance to strengthening students' ability to cope with adversity and enhancing their respect for life. The content of life education, such as "understand life", "cherish life", "respect life" and "explore life", has already been incorporated into different learning themes under the comprehensive school curriculum. For example, topics on "respect and value life" have been included in General Studies at primary level while 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. In Liberal Studies at senior secondary level, students are helped to understand their personal strengths and weaknesses, and learn how to manage stress and frustration and how to make decisions under the pressure of challenges for a positive and meaningful life.

To facilitate the implementation of life education at schools, EDB has developed online resources on its website and provided schools with diversified and practical learning materials, including Life Event Exemplars based on students' daily life experiences. In the recent two years, EDB has been helping primary and secondary schools in planning life education programmes through organizing learning communities, with a view to assisting schools in formulating overall life education curriculum as needed and facilitating teachers' acquisition of the teaching strategies and skills necessary for effective implementation of life education, which aims at helping students develop positive values and attitudes and enhance their resilience.

In parallel with the curriculum, EDB has also organized diversified guidance and discipline programmes, such as the "Understanding Adolescent Project" for primary school students, the "Enhanced Smart Teen Project" in collaboration with disciplinary forces and uniform groups and "Pupil Ambassador: Active, Bright and Caring" for secondary school students, etc. to enhance students' resilience, and cultivate their sense of dignity, self-discipline, responsibility and courage to make changes and take on challenges. In recent years, EDB has also launched pilot projects based on positive psychology concepts, like the "Gratitude, Forgiveness and Happiness" Project and the "Positive Dynamics Scheme", to help students develop a positive self-image and learn how to respect and cherish life. Moreover, we have been promoting a caring and harmonious school culture, strengthening the relationship between teachers and students and enhancing peer support as well as preventing any form of bullying so that students can enjoy their learning and school life.

Enhancing education policies to improve students' learning motivation

We understand that academic performance and further studies may induce certain pressure on some students. Over the past decade or so, the curriculum reform has been underpinned by a student-centered approach, and schools have been given clear guidelines that, in the best interest of students, they should flexibly adjust and formulate their school-based curriculum as well as teaching and assessment strategies to cater for students' learning diversity so as to improve their learning motivation. We will continue to promote life planning education and related guidance services to help students explore their future career and life goals according to their interest and potentials. On the other hand, to provide

more diversified study pathways, the government has been adopting a two-pronged approach to promote the parallel development of both publicly-funded and self-financing institutions. Apart from increasing the number of degree and sub-degree programmes, the government also develops the Diploma Yi Jin Programme and vocational education courses as well as expands the study pathways to the Mainland and overseas. Meanwhile, the government also promotes the Qualifications Framework to encourage students to pursue life-long learning through diversified pathways for continuous development.

In the areas of school curriculum, guidance, career and life planning and education policies, EDB has endeavored to equip teachers/guidance personnel through various means such as teacher training courses, sharing activities, learning and teaching resources, etc., with an aim to providing students with appropriate support.

Enhancing home-school cooperation and parent-child communication

To enhance parents' parenting and parent-child communication skills, parent-teacher associations (PTA) serve as a bridge between parents and teachers to foster their communication and understanding for the benefits of students. EDB has been providing financial support to PTAs for organization of home-school co-operation and parent education activities on topics covering students' positive values and life styles, home-school cooperation and parenting skills. We also encourage parents to discuss with schools the specific needs of their children so that appropriate support will be offered according to individual student's needs.

VI. Immediate Support and Follow-up for Student Suicide Incidents

If a student suicide death case occurs, the school head should report to the respective Regional Education Office of EDB, no matter it happens in the school or not, to facilitate timely arrangement of professional staff for on-site support. EDB also has guidelines to remind schools that they should promptly activate its Crisis Management Team to assess the impact of this suicidal case, formulate a crisis management plan and take appropriate measures in response to this incident so as to provide appropriate intervention and support services to teachers, students and parents affected.

Education Bureau
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