

Opinion from a practicing school-based educational psychologist at public schools

As a practising school-based educational psychologist of public schools, I have assisted some schools on reviewing their policies related to homework and examination, as well as on enhancing students' mental health. It occurs to me that, not only students, teachers and parents also do not welcome the heavy work load of students and were stressed about them. They could tell that the students suffer, rather than benefit from excessive homework load, yet they did not know what they could do to prove that the current load is excessive. Not to mention the generally poor learning motivation of students due to overworking. It is utterly sad and painful to see that it is common that students have to attend remedial / homework support classes or private tutorial until at least 6pm, and sometimes until 7-8pm at night. Not to mention the weakened mental health and parent-child relationship due to this work load and schedule.

Despite not seeing the benefit of overly heavy homework or teaching load, teachers were often instructed to assign homework and conduct extra classes by the leadership figures in school, who believes student's academic performance will improve with increased homework and study load.

I believe the government should take up a proactive role to educate the society, especially the school leadership and sponsoring bodies, of the purpose of learning and homework (e.g. for students to complete them by themselves so as to consolidate what they learnt in school, encourage students' autonomy to learn etc.). Besides, the government should devise clear guidelines on how schools can reviewing the effectiveness of their homework and whether the study load is too heavy for the students. It really is a costly problem to oversee, as it affects not only our students' performance, but also their mental health (as reflected by the increasing number of mental illness cases among school-age, self-harm and suicide), as well as their family's coherence and the whole society's moral and trust on the government in catering for the needs of our future generations.

Ultimately, it is of pressing need that Hong Kong needs a Child welfare and protection officer who could conduct useful research on the current situation in Hong Kong, learn from overseas policies, and provide strong and evidence-based advice to the government on what should be addressed. Homework and examination stress, play time, nutrition, parenting are all important aspects that should be reviewed and enhanced in HK. Every second we leave these problems hanging, the more harm we are causing to our next and present generations. Big changes take time, I hope our government can act wisely on these matters as soon as possible before more irreversible harm and undesirable outcomes are generated.

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