

**For discussion  
on 7 July 2023**

## **Legislative Council Panel on Education**

### **Support for Students with Mental Health Needs**

#### **Purpose**

This paper briefs Members on the measures implemented by the Education Bureau (EDB) in primary and secondary schools to promote the mental health of students and provide support for students with mental health needs.

#### **Background**

2. EDB attaches great importance to the mental health of students, proactively providing schools with support in assisting them to enhance the mental health of students and take care of students with mental health needs. All along, we have been optimising the school curriculum as well as actively implementing various student development programmes to instill positive values in students and to enhance their resilience, in order to promote students' physical and psychological well-being and facilitate their whole-person development. EDB also works in collaboration with other Bureaux/Departments and different stakeholders to take care of students with mental health needs and provide them with support in different aspects.

3. EDB is also very concerned about the issue of student suicides and established the Committee on Prevention of Student Suicides (the Committee) in March 2016. The Committee published its findings with respect to cases of student suicides and put forward a number of proposed measures in the Final Report in November the same year. Investigation of the Committee revealed that students' suicidal behaviour was attributed to the interplay of multiple factors including mental health issues, psychological factors, family relationship and adjustment problems, peer relationship problems, adjustment to schools and academic pressure. In accordance with the recommendations in the Final Report, EDB has been working to assist schools in adopting the Whole School Approach at three levels, namely "Universal", "Selective" and

“Indicated”<sup>1</sup>, to promote mental health among students and enhance support for those with mental health needs (including those with suicidal risks).

## **Measures Promoting Mental Health of Students**

4. In recent years, EDB has actively strengthened support with respect to the mental health of students in various aspects, including promoting values education and diverse student activities, strengthening support at the school level, promoting parent education, enhancing “gatekeeper” training, providing information through different channels and promoting cross-sectoral collaboration. EDB will also provide special support in a timely manner according to the social situation, and provide immediate assistance to schools in handling cases of student suicides. For details of the measures mentioned above, please see paragraphs 5 to 23 below.

### *Promoting values education and diversified student activities*

5. EDB promotes values education and diversified activities to help students explore the meaning of life and enhance their resilience. With respect to the school curriculum, “leading a healthy lifestyle” has been adopted as one of its seven learning goals. Through values education, EDB has been working to enable students to cultivate proper values and a positive attitude towards life, and learn how to properly handle personal emotions and stress to remain positive amid adversities and challenges. Life education (including understanding the meaning of life, facing adversities and challenges in life with a positive attitude, as well as respecting and cherishing life) has been strengthened in the Values Education Curriculum Framework (Pilot Version) (2021). In addition, the Primary Education Curriculum Guide (Pilot Version) was released in September 2022. Schools are recommended to take into consideration their respective school contexts as well as students’ developmental and learning needs in taking forward whole-school curriculum planning, with a view to helping students achieve balanced physical and psychological development.

6. To support schools in promoting values education, EDB has provided diversified and practical learning and teaching resources, including “Life Event” examples, short videos, comic strips and animations. EDB also arranges relevant professional development programmes for teachers to share with schools the direction, strategies and good examples of helping students

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<sup>1</sup> Targets at the universal level are general students, teachers and parents; targets at the selective level are students at risks of mental health issues; and targets at the indicated level are students with mental health problems.

lead a healthy lifestyle. In addition, since 2019, schools have been encouraged to organise school-based learning activities around the theme “Be Grateful and Treasure What We Have, Stay Positive and Optimistic”, with a view to guiding students to show gratitude and treasure what they have, and to develop a positive attitude and face the challenges at different stages of life with courage.

7. EDB has been promoting diverse activities for students to enhance their capability in facing adversities, including:

- (i) launching the “Active Students, Active People” Campaign to support schools in promoting physical activities, such as organising the “3-on-3 Basketball Exchange Demonstration”, the “Rope Skipping Fun Day” and “Dance for Health”, as well as a series of elite athlete sharing sessions. Through the inspiring stories of elite athletes, students are encouraged to develop proper values and attitudes such as perseverance and courage to accept challenges;
- (ii) organising the “Understanding Adolescent Project” in primary schools, as well as the “Enhanced Smart Teen Project” in secondary schools in collaboration with various disciplinary forces and uniformed groups and the “Pupil Ambassador Scheme”, so as to enhance students’ resilience and encourage students to rise up to challenges with self-respect, self-discipline, positivity, willingness to take up responsibility and make changes through adventure-based, team-building and problem-solving training; and
- (iii) making reference to positive psychology as the basis to implement the “WE” Positive Dynamic Scheme and the “Gratitude, Forgiveness and Happiness” Project to help students build up a positive self-image, learn how to respect life and treasure what they have.

#### *Strengthening support at the school level*

8. We have all along been encouraging schools to strengthen their communication with students and organise activities with themes of promoting harmony and anti-bullying so as to create a caring school culture. EDB has been collaborating with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to organise the Caring School Award Scheme annually to give public recognition to schools that are dedicated to implementing caring school measures. EDB is also actively promoting the “Harmonious School – Anti-bullying” Campaign, under which teaching resources and an anti-bullying charter are provided to support schools in raising students’ awareness on anti-bullying. Meanwhile, the “Peer Mediation Training Project for Peace Ambassadors” has been

implemented to equip students with peer mediation skills so that they can help resolve conflicts on campus, reduce negative emotions and enhance their positive energy. We have also launched the “Harmonious School Net Scheme” and the “Wise NET School Recognition Scheme” to facilitate sharing of information and successful experience among schools for the creation of a caring school campus.

9. With respect to guidance work of schools, comprehensive student guidance and support services are provided in primary and secondary schools through the Whole School Approach and multi-disciplinary collaboration. Professionals of different disciplines in schools (including guidance personnel, school social workers and school-based educational psychologists) work in collaboration and with concerted efforts to provide remedial, preventive and developmental guidance services for students to facilitate their healthy development. To enhance school social work service, starting from the 2018/19 school year, EDB provided more resources for public sector primary schools and primary schools under Direct Subsidy Scheme to implement the policy of “one school social worker for each school”. The Social Welfare Department (SWD), starting from the 2019/20 school year, has put in place in secondary schools the arrangement of “two school social workers for each school”. School social workers have been working closely with schools and their discipline and guidance teachers to help students with academic, social or emotional needs face their difficulties through a variety of activities and guidance services. Through close collaboration with their service providing organisations and other related district-based service units, such as Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres and Integrated Family Service Centres, school social workers help and support students in need to solve their problems by making an optimal use of community resources and providing appropriate referral services.

10. In addition, the School-based Educational Psychology Service (SBEPS) has covered all public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools since the 2016/17 school year. Starting from the same school year, EDB has also progressively provided enhanced SBEPS to public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools admitting a greater number of students with special educational needs by enhancing the educational psychologists to schools ratio to 1:4, in order to provide more comprehensive and regular case follow-up and intervention service, and to strengthen the preventive and development work of schools.

11. Starting from the 2017/18 school year, the coverage of the Learning Support Grant (LSG) provided to public sector ordinary schools by EDB

includes students with mental illness, so that schools can have additional resources to strengthen their support for these students with respect to their learning, social, emotional and behavioural needs. Schools may provide support at different levels in view of the difficulties and situation faced by individual students. For example, schools can make use of the LSG to employ additional staff to assist teachers in designing learning activities and materials and supporting students in classroom learning activities, or to procure professional support or guidance services, thereby providing behavioural or emotional intervention and social skills training to help students with mental illness adapt to school life. Schools can also make use of the LSG to provide school-based teacher training, parent education, etc., to promote joint efforts of homes and schools in taking care of their students' growth.

12. EDB is also producing a tool-kit on “Mental Health Literacy” by key stages, so as to facilitate promotion of mental health literacy in class by teachers and school personnel.

#### *Promoting parent education*

13. In regard to enhancing parenting skills and improving parent-child communication, EDB has been striving to promote home-school co-operation and parent education. The Committee on Home-School Co-operation has been organising parent activities and seminars to help parents understand their children's growth and development needs, identify their emotional problems early and enhance their positive thinking. EDB has been running the territory-wide Positive Parent Campaign since 2020 to promote parent education through extensive and diversified channels, with a view to fostering positive thinking among parents to help children grow up happily.

14. To enable parents to learn the necessary knowledge and skills for nurturing their children in a more systematic manner, EDB commissioned a post-secondary institution to develop the Curriculum Framework on Parent Education (Kindergarten) and the Curriculum Framework on Parent Education (Primary School), which were introduced in September 2021 and December 2022 respectively. One of the core strands of the curriculum frameworks is the promotion of healthy, happy and balanced development of children (including whole-person development and mental health). EDB has started to develop the curriculum framework for parents of secondary school students. In the 2022/23 school year, EDB commissioned a post-secondary institution to organise parent education courses and develop e-learning resources with reference to the curriculum frameworks for parents of kindergarten and primary school students, facilitating their adoption of positive parenting approaches and a healthy lifestyle, and enhancing their awareness and understanding of the

resilience and mental health of their children. To continue supporting schools in promoting parent education, EDB will also commission a post-secondary institution or a non-profit making organisation to develop resource packages with reference to the curriculum frameworks in phases.

### *Enhancing “gatekeeper” training*

15. At the “Selective” level, EDB is committed to providing “gatekeeper” training for teachers, parents and students to enable early identification of students with mental health needs and suicidal risks. On teacher training, EDB provided primary and secondary teachers with the “Professional Development Programme for Mental Health”, comprising 18 hours of elementary training and 30 hours of in-depth training from the 2017/18 to 2020/21 school years. Starting from the 2021/22 school year, the programme has been enhanced further to become a 60-hour thematic training course targeting students with mental illness and the number of training places has increased from 200 to 320 in the 2022/23 school year. In addition, EDB has implemented enhanced measures in a timely manner, including disseminating two sets of presentation slides and reference materials to all school-based educational psychologists in Hong Kong respectively in April 2021 and April 2022 to help them conduct school-based professional development activities for teachers based on the schools’ needs. EDB also conducts relevant thematic seminars for school personnel from time to time and organises for them workshops on crisis management on a regular basis. Also, basic “gatekeeper” training is provided for newly-joined teachers to enhance their ability to identify and support students with warning signs of suicide.

16. For parents, EDB has been organising “Positive Vibe @Home Thematic Online Workshops on Parent Gatekeeper Training” on a regular basis since the 2020/21 school year, inviting clinical psychologists to provide “gatekeeper” training for parents of primary and secondary students in Hong Kong. The number of workshops has increased from four in the 2020/21 school year to 16 in the 2022/23 school year. In the 2022/23 school year, EDB rolled out additional thematic “gatekeeper” online workshops for parents on four topics, namely strengthening children’s adaptability, supporting children in dealing with study pressure, enhancing children’s resilience, and skills in supporting children with mental health needs. The corresponding videos were uploaded onto the “Mental Health @ School” website for easy browsing of parents. We also produce useful tips, factsheets and pamphlets for reference of parents, including pamphlets giving a brief introduction on various types of mental illness (such as depression and anxiety disorder) and the “Safeguard Children’s Mental Health – Prevent Youth Suicide” factsheet for parents. Such materials have been uploaded onto the “Mental Health @ School”

website, with a view to helping parents early identify and support students with mental health needs.

17. For students, EDB has commissioned an NGO to launch the “Peer Power – Student Gatekeeper Training Programme” since the 2019/20 school year, which aims to provide training to students to become “Peer Leaders”, enhance their knowledge about mental health and skills in managing their own stress and emotions, equip them to identify and address the needs of their peers, and promote positive coping and help-seeking culture in schools. The number of participating schools has increased from six in the 2019/20 school year to 40 in the 2022/23 school year.

#### *Providing information through different channels*

18. In the 2020/21 school year, EDB launched the new one-stop “Mental Health@School” website ([mentalhealth.edb.gov.hk/en/index.html](http://mentalhealth.edb.gov.hk/en/index.html)) to disseminate and update a wide range of information about improving the mental health of students to facilitate the selection of suitable resources and strategies (e.g. e-posters and pamphlets) by schools and the public in taking care of the mental health of students via different approaches. In parallel, diversified information on student mental health is disseminated to schools and parents through different channels such as the “Smart Parent Net” website ([www.parent.edu.hk/en/home](http://www.parent.edu.hk/en/home)) and social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram pages and YouTube channel, showing care for the mental health of students in various forms.

19. Separately, EDB set up the new “Mental Health@School” Teacher Professional Network in January 2023. All primary and secondary schools have already assigned a teacher to serve as a bridge between the school and EDB in promoting student mental health. Through organising regular sharing seminars and sharing of latest information and relevant resources, EDB facilitates teachers to promote student mental health in schools.

#### *Promoting cross-sectoral collaboration*

20. As indicated in relevant international and local studies, suicide is a complicated issue caused by the interplay of multiple factors, including family problems, peer relationships as well as mental health problems. To address the issue, collaboration among the education sector, the medical and healthcare sector and organisations that provide family services is required. The Health Bureau, together with the Hospital Authority (HA), EDB and SWD, has launched the Student Mental Health Support Scheme (the Scheme) since the 2016/17 school year. Through the collaborative mode of different

professional disciplines of medicine, education and social work, a multi-disciplinary team comprising a psychiatric nurse from HA, a designated teacher and a school social worker is formed in each participating school. The team works closely with the psychiatric team of HA, the school-based educational psychologist, relevant teachers and social workers from relevant social services units to provide in the school support services for students with mental health needs at the “Indicated” level. With parents’ consent, the Scheme will provide the students concerned with support services including holistic and comprehensive assessment (on aspects of education, social welfare and medical and healthcare), and care plans designed and implemented with comprehensive assessment reviewed by the multi-disciplinary team to provide timely multi-disciplinary intervention service to meet the specific needs of the students. The number of participating schools has increased from 90 in the 2019/20 school year to 210 in the 2022/23 school year. The Health Bureau is working with HA, EDB and SWD to review the existing mode of service of the Scheme, with a view to making it more sustainable and targeted for the timely provision of appropriate support services to students with mental health needs in schools.

21. Apart from the Student Mental Health Support Scheme, EDB, through the platform of the Advisory Committee on Mental Health, works with the Health Bureau, the Labour and Welfare Bureau, the Department of Health (DH), SWD, HA, NGOs and other stakeholders in the community to provide cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral services to students with mental health needs through enhanced collaboration and co-operation. EDB also takes forward the “Health Promoting School Programme” together with the DH and works in collaboration with the Youth Development Commission to help nurture positive thinking and proper values amongst young people.

### *Special support*

22. In response to social needs and unexpected situations, EDB will provide timely special support for schools and parents to help students face various challenges such as:

- (i) tackling the epidemic: During the epidemic, EDB provided schools with the “Guidelines on Conducting Physical Activities for the Prevention of COVID-19” to support the learning and teaching of physical activities online. EDB has also collaborated with different stakeholders to develop a variety of learning and teaching resources, such as inviting elite athletes to demonstrate home fitness activities through videos clips, producing new demonstration slides on physical fitness and the Physical Activity Logbook, and launching the “Virtual Basketball Shooting



Contest” and the “Vitality Fitness Walking/Running Challenges”, with a view to encouraging students to maintain a moderate amount of physical activities to improve their physical and psychological well-being;

- (ii) getting prepared for the new school year: To help schools get prepared for the 2022/23 school year, EDB conducted territory-wide webinars for primary and secondary schools and provided online resources for parents before the commencement of the school year. At the same time, EDB produced “Start the Day Full of Energy” cheer-up cards for students and recommended a range of class-based, grade-based or whole-school activities to schools in order to strengthen students’ sense of connectedness with schools, teachers and peers. In addition, EDB collaborated with the Hong Kong Jockey Club Online Youth Emotional Support Platform “Open Up” to set up a 24-hour online chat platform via telephone, social media and other messaging tools, with a view to supporting students with emotional distress;
- (iii) coping with examination stress: To support students in coping with examination stress, EDB launched a designated webpage entitled “Resources for Coping with Exam Stress” in November 2022 to provide relevant resources and share evidence-based strategies for combating stress. EDB also collaborated with the Hong Kong Jockey Club under its project “LevelMind@JC” to provide useful information for students through social media and conduct stress management workshops, so as to support students in coping with examination stress. A territory-wide webinar was held in April 2023 to provide teachers with information on student mental health and introduce related services provided by government departments and NGOs. EDB also launched the “Self-care Promotes Well-being” e-posters in May 2023 to help students face challenges with a positive attitude;
- (iv) adapting to whole-day face-to-face classes: To facilitate students’ gradual adjustment in learning and social life due to the resumption of whole-day face-to-face classes, EDB launched the designated webpage entitled “Resuming Vibrant Life@School” in January 2023 and conducted webinars so as to help students resume their normal learning and social life as early as possible. EDB has released on the webpage a variety of practical resources such as resource packs, useful tips for parents and videos to help enhance students’ adaptability;

- (v) adapting to the arrangement upon lifting of the mandatory mask-wearing requirement: EDB relayed the advice of experts to schools and parents in February 2023, enabling them to help students adapt to the mask-wearing arrangement upon lifting of the mandatory mask-wearing requirement by the Government; and
- (vi) responding to sudden tragic incidents: Immediately following the concert accident occurred in July last year and the recent tragic incident happened in Diamond Hill, EDB provided useful resources to draw the attention of schools and parents to the emotional conditions of students and to assist them in addressing students' mental health needs.

*Following up on student suicide cases actively*

23. EDB has been requiring primary and secondary schools to report suspected fatal suicide cases of students, so that we can keep in view the situation and provide appropriate professional support to the schools concerned in a timely manner. The numbers of suspected fatal suicide cases of students<sup>2</sup> reported to EDB by schools in the past three years (i.e. 2020 to 2022) are 21, 25 and 25 respectively. The slight increase is probably due to the influence of the epidemic. EDB has implemented a wide range of measures to actively enhance the support for students' mental health and help them adjust to school life following the resumption of normalcy. If a fatal suicide case involving students occurs, irrespective of whether it happens within the school campus or not, the school concerned is required to report to EDB, so that professional staff can be arranged immediately to provide on-site support for the school. The school should activate its Crisis Management Team at once in accordance with EDB's guidelines to assess the impact of suicide case, and formulate a crisis management plan and make necessary arrangements with due regard to the circumstances of the case to provide appropriate intervention and support services to the affected teachers, students and parents. EDB will closely monitor the situation in order to adjust or enhance the measures to promote students' mental health.

24. EDB will continue to work with various stakeholders for more comprehensive efforts to promote student mental health and prevent student suicide, to create a support network and to foster an accepting and caring culture. With the concerted efforts, we hope to strengthen students'

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<sup>2</sup> As the nature and number of fatal suicide cases cannot be confirmed until the legal proceedings of the Coroner's Court have completed and EDB has not asked the Court for the related information, we are unable to provide officially verified figures on students' fatal suicide cases.

adaptability and resilience, improve their physical and psychological well-being to embrace the challenges of personal growth, as well as enhance the mental health literacy of parents, teachers and students, thereby increasing the understanding of and support for students with mental health needs.

### **Advice Sought**

25. Members are invited to note the content of this paper and give views.

**Education Bureau  
June 2023**