

Appendix I

Major Discussions at the Professional Forum on Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA) and Children's Right

The Territory-wide System Assessment (“TSA”) is a territory-wide test administered by the Education Bureau in Hong Kong for assessing students’ performances in Chinese Language, English Language and Mathematics. Its objective is to provide schools with data on students’ strengths and weaknesses in specific competencies to enhance their learning and teaching plan, and to help the Government develop education policies.

Starting since 2004, schools receiving government subsidies are required to participate in TSA for their Primary 3, Primary 6 and Secondary 3 students. TSA results are intended to provide an overview of how students in each school perform against the territory-wide basic competency standards and not for comparison among schools or among students. However, the TSA for Primary 3 students is currently facing orchestrated wrath of concerned parents and teachers. They complained that schools are putting excessive emphasis on the test and unjustifiable drilling on students starting from Primary 1 which has imposed undue stress and discouraged creative learning for the young developing brains. Criticism has been put on bureau officials and school operation bodies using the results to push schools for improvements and remedial actions so drilling on students is inevitable. In the public hearing on the TSA in Legislative Council panel on 29 November 2015, two Primary 3 students testified on the deprivation of rest, play and exercise time resulted from the demanding TSA homework and drilling. Many parents reported that their children perceiving no hope in life and some even required psychiatric treatment for their mental stress.

In view of this critical challenge on child health, a Professional Forum on TSA was organised by the Hong Kong Paediatric Society and the Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation (HKPF), which are the professional bodies for child health in Hong Kong, at Queen Elizabeth Hospital on 12 January 2016. The Forum was chaired by Dr. Chan Chok-Wan, the board Chairman of HKPF and was well attended by paediatricians and other child health professionals. The keynote speakers included Professor HAU Kit Tai, Department of Educational Psychology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong who reviewed on “**Issues, International Practices and Solution**”, Ms Doreen HO Mei Yee, Convenor for the TSA Concern Group speaking on “**Parents’ Perspective on TSA**”, and the Honourable Mr. IP Kin Yuen, Legislative councillors for the Education constituency speaking on “**Legislative Councillor’s Perspective on TSA**”. Representative from Education Bureau (ED) was invited but could not attend due to prior engagement. The main conclusions and suggestions of the Forum were as follows:

Children's Rights

1. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ("UNCRC") affirms the global advocacy of respecting children and protecting their rights. The treaty recognizes the basic human rights of all children (0 – 18 years) at all places and all times: the right to survive, to develop to full potential, to be protected from harmful influence and abuse and to participate equally in family, school and the society. Hong Kong, as a member to this convention since 1994, is obligated to observe such rights.
2. Children and young people should have a voice in matters which affect them, their best interests be given primary consideration and highest regard.

Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA) for Hong Kong Students

3. TSA is just an assessment tool for the overall intellectual ability of Hong Kong students serving as an evaluation reference for future education policy.
4. The current criticism on stress created from excessive drilling is mainly due to misuse of TSA results on resource implications by Education Bureau (EB) and school operation bodies and lack of trust and understandings among various stakeholders.
5. Education Bureau should be fully accountable for the implementation of education policies in Hong Kong. TSA results should only be used by EB for overall education planning rather than disclosing to schools or school operation bodies with unnecessary stress.
6. Education for young children should cultivate a positive attitude towards learning and good living habits in a stimulating and happy environment. The current teaching curriculum is very TSA orientated and intensive TSA drilling ostensibly imposes unnecessary and undue stress to young children especially those with special education needs (SEN) and is incongruent with the UNCRC and aforementioned Policy recommendations.
7. A focused survey should be conducted on the TSA affected students, their parents and teachers, to assess the impact of the test and its associated drills. Data collected will help the planning for the best courses of action for administering the contended test.
8. The appropriateness for TSA assessment at Primary 3 should be critically reviewed based on the developmental needs and core learning values at this young age. Before a well thought out consensus on a revised format can be implemented, TSA for Primary 3 students should be suspended.

Children's Education Needs

9. As identified in the "***Proposal on Child Health Policy for Hong Kong***" developed by The Hong Kong Paediatric Society, The Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation and concerned child healthcare professionals in Sep 2015, the key concerns on education in Hong Kong include:
 - Over-emphasis on academic performance or personal achievement
 - Lack of life skill training in the school curriculum
 - Unrealistic parental expectations leading to unnecessary mental stresses and physical

morbidities in children

10. Recommendations on Approach to Education

- Children should have the right to learn at their own pace, to play, to rest, to enjoy life and to develop their own potential according to their interest
- A healthy social norm on appropriate education to children should be developed that gives due respect to each individual's unique potential and ability
- Holistic education should cover life-skills and ethics in addition to academic knowledge
- Age-specific and developmentally appropriate education should be designed to meet individual's needs and potential

Child Health of Hong Kong

11. Children's health is measured by the extent in which children are able or enabled to:

- Develop and realize their potential,
- Satisfy their needs, and
- Develop the capacities that allow them to interact successfully with their biological, physical and social environments.

12. Apart from physical health, child health should include education, social and mental wellbeing. Parents and guardians should be made more aware of the importance of balanced health and development for children and put into the belief into daily practice.

13. It is crucial to enhance intersectoral and transdisciplinary collaboration in psychosocial, education, vocational issues and health behaviours to assist students, their parents and schools to deal with issues arising from individual needs and the unnecessary pressures.

The Hong Kong Paediatric Society and the Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation are committed in the past, at present, and will continue to be the protagonist advocate for child health in Hong Kong. We are championing the set-up of a Children's Commission to guard children's rights in policy making and implementation of the proposed Child Health Policy for integrating efforts and policies of all child health related bureaus, such as Food and Health Bureau, Social Welfare Bureau, Education Bureau and Environmental Bureau. A Child Health Policy and a Children's Commission will be a much needed beacon of light to guide visionary planning and lead coordinated implementation of policies on consequential child health issues and education policies.