

**Urge the Government to turn every Friday school day of  
primary and secondary schools into extra-curricular activity day**

**Child Councilors:**

**St. Paul's Co-educational College**

Chan Cheuk Yin Sherine  
Zhang Kang Kansy  
Kwong Sum Yee Grace  
Chan Hiu Wa Candy  
Tso Ngai Sze Marissa

**Holy Trinity College**

Wong Ka Bo Karen  
Lau Chi Yan Vivian  
Lau Yung Yung Cecilia  
Yung Ting Ting Jenny  
Leung Chung Yan April

**UNCRC – Child Ambassadors**

Ng Ki Chun David  
Kwok Sin Sze Sincere

22<sup>nd</sup> March 2003

(A translated version provided by the Centre for Translation and the BA (Hons) in Translation degree programme, Hong Kong Baptist University)

## **I. Definition**

We wish to move the motion that the Government should turn every Friday school day of primary and secondary schools into extra-curricular activity day (“ECA Day”) for all secondary and primary schools. The targets are secondary and primary school students in Hong Kong (Form 5 and 7 students are exempted).

The “Friday” in our motion does not mean every Friday throughout the year, but the Fridays on which students must go to school according to the current school calendar. If a certain Friday is a school holiday (but not a public holiday), students do not have to take part in extra-curricular activities that day. Those activities will be postponed until the following Friday.

Next we come to the definition of “ECA Day”. We propose that one school day be turned into an ECA Day. This means that, on that day, students do not have the usual classroom work, instead they participate in different kinds of extra-curricular activities according to their preferences. Students may select activities organized by their schools or other organizations. There are no restrictions on the nature of the activities. Students can also assume responsibility for scheduling their activities on the ECA Days. The timetable for the activities does not necessarily have to match the classroom timetable. Instead, each student can work out his or her timetable, depending on the activities they have chosen. The flexibility allows students to make good use of the Day to develop their talents.

The proposal gives students a high degree of autonomy. Students do not have to go to school for one day every week, but can use that day to take part in their favorite extra-curricular activities. For safety reasons, however, students should notify the schools in advance the details of the activities they intend to participate. This enables the schools to keep record of students’ whereabouts so that both the parents and the schools could contact the students easily.

## **II. Rationale**

This motion seeks to promote, through the efforts of the schools and the parents, a positive attitude towards extra-curricular activities among students. Students will be encouraged to take the initiative in joining extra-curricular activities rather than being pressurized to do so. Since students can choose the kind of extra-curricular activities they like, they may be more eager to make full use of these golden opportunities to develop their talents.

## **III. Objectives**

Because of the “spoon-feeding” tendency in the education system in Hong Kong, too much emphasis has always been put on results. The concept that “Studying is the road to success, nothing else” is deep-rooted in our minds. Growing up in this kind of environment, it is natural that children consider results more important than anything else. They are always encouraged to study hard but have not been encouraged to engage in any extra-curricular activities. Consequently, their personal development is neglected. Indeed, the imbalance between studies and participation in extra-curricular activities constitutes a great obstacle to their personal development. They study only the text books and nothing else. Very soon, they become generally ignorant of social and current affairs. Meanwhile, those who are weak in rote-memory and suffer from that in their academic results will become the victims of this education system. They are considered “rubbish” by others and made to feel inferior. Consequently, they lose interests in studying.

This motion will let students who fail to get excellent academic results have a taste of success and rebuild their confidence, and hence develop their potentials. At the same time, participating in extra-curricular activities can enhance their ability to solve problems. Though they will encounter setbacks

while taking part in the activities, they can learn from their failures and gain in willpower, and thus develop a proper sense of value and a sense of morality. They can also learn the importance of cooperation when they are collaborating with others. Dr. Ernest Luk Siu Luen, a psychiatrist, points out that while excessive extra-curricular activity will increase the burden on children, participating in extra-curricular activities one day a week will not be excessive. On the contrary, regular extra-curricular activities can encourage children to develop the habit of taking part in those activities and they will grow up healthier. However, children in Hong Kong seldom participate in extra-curricular activities which are good for them. Dr Luk further says that from the extra-curricular activities through training, participating and learning, children can gain experiences which they cannot get inside the classrooms. In the course of participation, they can, through getting along with others, know more about their strengths and weaknesses and thus discover what they really like and what they are good at.

The main objective of this motion is to provide a conducive environment for students' participation in extra-curricular activities instead of forcing them to do so. With the increase in resources and the diversification of activities, students can choose their favorite activity without pressure so that they can learn from the activities. Students can also have a more balanced, diversified personal development and gain a sense of satisfaction from aspects other than studying. Their confidence will grow and they can handle human relationships and non-academic affairs better. While they learn to develop their talents, their vision is broadened and their understanding of different social issues also deepens.

Another objective of this motion is to let the public understand the importance of extra-curricular activities and therefore change students' attitude that "you take office only when you can get on top of your studies". Hong Kong's economy is now transforming itself into a knowledge-based economy and life-long learning is advocated by people from all sectors. We hope that the implementation of this motion can help to develop students' interests and encourage them to be inquisitive and receptive to new things and ideas. This would help them adapt to the changing environment more easily and become better prepared for the future. Children are the leaders of tomorrow's society. We hope that children can have a better personal development and become the pillars of our society so that the international status of Hong Kong can be maintained.

#### **IV. An Overview of the Extra-curricular Activities Organized by Schools in Hong Kong**

Organizing diversified extra-curricular activities requires enormous funds and resources. Currently, schools in Hong Kong receive operating expenses block grants from the Education and Manpower Bureau ("EMB") and they are free to decide the amount to be spent on individual aspect. Thus, schools normally would deduct the general expenditure from the budget first and then allocate a small portion of the balance for the organization of extra-curricular activities. Since there is no other channel for the schools to apply for extra funding, they can only organize a few extra-curricular activities and these are also limited in diversity. This is particularly true of the situation in primary schools. Some students from low-income families pointed out that they did take part in activities at school, but most of them did not do so voluntarily. They said that activities organized by their schools were not enough, neither in quantity nor variety. It shows that students nowadays are not able to choose and take part in activities they like.

Besides, the subsidies provided by the EMB to enable children from poor families to participate in extra-curricular activities are not adequate. If these students want to take part in extra-curricular activities, very often their parents have to pay the fees themselves, and this may become an unbearable burden on them. Students from low-income families have, however, said that they agreed with this motion and supported it. Due to financial constraints, most of them hope to receive some subsidies from the Government, so that they could participate in extra-curricular activities for free, or pay no more than HK\$100 per month. Given the present economic downturn in Hong Kong, parents tend to

cut down on family expenditure by reducing the number of times their children could take part in extra-curricular activities. Consequently, many students from poor families are not able to enjoy the fun brought about by participating in school activities.

Many educators agree that extra-curricular activities do help foster students' physical and psychological development. Although there is a shortage of resources, many schools still try their best to organize activities for their students. For instance, St. Paul's Co-Educational College is now introducing a new policy, whereby students can have one free afternoon every month to participate in the various kinds of extra-curricular activities organized by the school.

Mr. Leung Wai Ming, Principal of San Wui Commercial Society School, also encourages children in his school to do more extra-curricular activities. Apart from organizing a wide range of activities, his school subsidizes children from poor families to participate in these activities. He pointed out that because of the school's budget constraints, many children could not participate in activities they liked. He said that the subsidies the school provides to the children were drawn from alumni donations.

Although some schools try their best to provide extra-curricular activities for their students, the variety of activities is limited because the schools have very limited resources. This shows that the existing education system does not have a well-developed policy to ensure that each and every student can participate in activities which will do them good physically and mentally. Therefore, it is necessary now for the Government to improve the conditions for children to participate in extra-curricular activities.

We have also interviewed students from local international schools about their participation in extra-curricular activities. We have found that international schools attach great importance to extra-curricular activities. Most of the students from the international schools have at least half a day per week take part in extra-curricular activities. In international schools, students are free to set up student societies of all kinds as long as they get approval from their teachers or from the school. And all student societies are fully supported by the school.

The great variety of extra-curricular activities available in international schools thus enables students to learn a wide range of knowledge and skills. Besides, because students can choose to take part in activities they like, learning becomes fun and they take a more active part in it and are able to acquire more knowledge and skills. Some students from international schools say that although the pressure involved in planning activities is greater than studying, they gain a greater sense of satisfaction and success from it than from their routine study. Besides, they can also broaden their social circles and horizons, as well as deepen their understanding of society through participating in extra-curricular activities, and this will provide them with a channel through which to they can improve their self-esteem and obtain self-enlightenment.

Compared with the international schools, local schools have to face more constraints when handling extra-curricular activities. Students in local schools have fewer opportunities to plan and take part in activities. And due to the "spoon-feeding method of teaching" employed for years by local schools, their students lag behind students in international schools, both in critical thinking and in breadth of knowledge. The discrepancies of ability become even more obvious when they enter university. Students from international schools can adapt to new environments easily because they do not rely on reciting by memory but would often study an issue from different angles. By contrast, students from local schools need more time to adapt to the challenges of their university curriculum. As a result, their competitiveness is indirectly reduced.

We hope this motion, if passed, can provide more space and opportunities for students from local schools to participate in different kinds of extra-curricular activities.

## V. An Overview of Hong Kong Children's Participation in Extra-curricular Activities

The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, and the Hong Kong Institute of Education Alumni Association have joined together to conduct a "Survey of How School Children Spend their Leisure Time in Hong Kong (2002)". 37 primary and 30 secondary schools were surveyed by means of a questionnaire, and 2,160 valid questionnaires were collected.

According to the survey, apart from spending two hours on homework and one hour on dinner, school children spend all the rest of their leisure time after school on watching television until 11 p.m. Their main activities on Saturdays and Sundays are playing computer games, surfing on the internet, sleeping or watching television.

The average time school children spend on extra-curricular activities at school is one to two hours per week (40.6%). This shows that they do not spend much time on these activities. Most of their time is spent on daily life and study, including going to school, doing homework and taking tutorial lessons. Of these, attending tutorial lessons on homework takes up the longest time. In fact, the proportion of their leisure time spent on taking tutorial lessons has soared from 19% in 1989 to 48.7% in 2002. The average time spent on this is 4 hours and 47 minutes per week, but for some school children it could be as much as 7 hours and 40 minutes. This situation indeed calls for serious attention.

The survey also reveals that lack of interest is the main reason why children do not participate in extra-curricular activities. Other reasons include lack of time, lack of suitable time, or lack of company. It is noteworthy that in 2002, there was a sharp increase in the number of school children who did not participate in school activities either because the charges were too expensive (from 9.79% in 1989 to 24.2% in 2002), or because there was no time or no suitable time (from 35.4% in 1989 to 46% in 2002).

The results of the survey and the analysis presented above may lead us to pay attention to the following problems:

- There is an increasingly greater variety of after-school home activities, but they are basically static activities  
Children mostly stay at home to watch television (20.1%), and the problem of children playing computer games or surfing on the internet at home is also becoming increasingly serious (14.2%).
- Children now spend more time on after-school tutorial lessons than before  
47.1% of school children take tutorial lessons after school. The average time they spend on this is 4 hours 47 minutes per week and the median is 3 hours.
- There is too much pressure from studies  
In order to cope with the pressure from the heavy burden of homework and examination, many children spend more and more of their time on studying, thus reducing the time and opportunity they have for participating in extra-curricular activities.
- There has been a change in the reasons why children do not participate in extra-curricular activities  
By 2002, more and more children were not able to participate in extra-curricular activities either because the charges were too high, or because there was no time or no suitable time.

(Source: *Survey of How School Children Spend their Leisure Time in Hong Kong (2002)*, The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, and the Hong Kong Institute of Education Alumni Association)

In addition, in 2003, we have successfully interviewed 709 students from various districts in Hong Kong via community centers and the internet, including 451 from secondary schools and 258 from primary schools. The interviews were aimed at finding out the views of students towards extra-curricular activities.

The study shows that nearly 90% of the students say they like to participate in extra-curricular activities, and that they think extra-curricular activities are beneficial to them. An analysis of the above study shows that students have certain expectations on extra-curricular activities. However, only 70% of the students say they participate in extra-curricular activities regularly, which reveals a difference from the number of students who say they like extra-curricular activities and think they are beneficial to them. What are the reasons why these 20% of the students give up their interest and not participate in extra-curricular activities?

Among those who are willing to participate in extra-curricular activities, 33% and 17% of the secondary and primary school students respectively express that they do not have enough time to study and also to participate in extra-curricular activities. Of these, the secondary school group seems to have a much more serious problem. Besides, about 30% of the students say that their schools do not provide the kind of extra-curricular activities they like. This is quite a high percentage. Therefore, it can be seen that many students do hope to participate in extra-curricular activities, but they cannot do so because of the question of individual ability and the nature of the activities.

Finally, nearly 90% of the students support the idea of turning Friday, now an ordinary school day, into an ECA Day. This indicates that most of the students also support the implementation of this motion.

To sum up the findings of the two surveys above, we can conclude that extra-curricular activities contribute greatly to the physical and psychological development of children, and are generally popular with students, but due to the various reasons mentioned above, they are not able to take an active part in these activities.

## **VI. The Opinions of Parents and Teachers on this Motion**

With regard to the opinions of parents and teachers, according to the results of the “Study on the Health of Children” we conducted in 2003, around 60% of the parents and 80% of the teachers surveyed think that the physical and psychological health of children in Hong Kong is not entirely satisfactory, and that the situation requires serious attention. Why do both parents and teachers have of such an opinion? What has caused such a situation? Too much pressure from school work? Or lack of venues and facilities for children to relax?

According to the survey, about 95% of the teachers and 90% of the parents think that it is the pressure from school work that will affect the physical and psychological development of children. 95% of the teachers and 85% of the parents agree that students in Hong Kong suffer the pressure of a heavy workload. Such a heavy workload will produce adverse effects on both the physical and psychological development of children. About 85% of the parents and almost all the teachers agree that it is more important for children to have a sound physical and psychological development than mere good academic results. They believe that good academic results do not represent a healthy development.

For children to have a healthy physical and psychological development, there are many different factors to consider. Of these various factors, the importance of extra-curricular activities is emphasized by nearly 95% of the teachers and all the parents surveyed, and they all encourage children to participate more in extra-curricular activities that are physically and psychologically beneficial to them. Therefore, in order to ensure that children can grow up healthily, we must enable them to have more

time to participate in these activities. By taking part in extra-curricular activities, they can put aside their heavy workload temporarily and relax their strained nerves. Moreover, their workload will be lightened and they can truly appreciate the benefits of extra-curricular activities.

## **VII. Coordination between the Government, Schools and Teachers**

### **1. The Government's role**

We suggest the Government set up the Primary and Secondary Schools' ECAs Bureau to coordinate all extra-curricular activities in primary and secondary schools. This bureau will be responsible for building up a data bank of the details of extra-curricular activities organized by voluntary organizations and schools. The data will be updated on a regular basis and will be open to schools and voluntary organizations. Such information should help them arrange extra-curricular activities for students on Friday. All activities must be recognized by the Bureau.

The EMB is currently providing funding for extra-curricular activities in primary and secondary schools. The new bureau shall take over this function and provide subsidies to schools and voluntary organizations so that they can offer a wide range of extra-curricular activities to primary and secondary school students on Fridays. The Bureau would also provide grants for students with financial difficulties.

### **2. Schools' role**

Schools can choose to provide activities for their students on their own, or in conjunction with voluntary organizations in order to allow a wide range of activities. The form of cooperation with voluntary organizations should be decided by the schools themselves. Schools should try their best to provide venues and facilities to voluntary organizations for extra-curricular activities if such a request is made. Schools can also choose not to organize any extra-curricular activity at all, but they must be supportive of their students' participation in the extra-curricular activities they are interested in.

### **3. Teachers' role**

Teachers still have to attend school on Friday, the ECA Day. The school will, depending on its needs, assign duties to the teachers. If a school opts to organize its own extra-curricular activities, the teachers will be there to help with the organization. Otherwise, they can use the day for preparation of class material. If a teacher is interested in organizing extra-curricular activities that are not provided by the school, s/he can work as volunteer to assist voluntary organizations to organize those activities, in which s/he will not need to be present at school on Fridays.

## **VIII. Details of the Motion**

### **1. The reasons why the arrangement suggested in the motion needs to be carried out for the whole day on Fridays**

1.1 If extra-curricular activities are only carried out on Friday afternoons, the students will be tired from having to deal with both school work and the activities in one day. This way the students will not reap the full benefits of the extra-curricular activities.

1.2 At present most schools in Hong Kong run whole-day classes and designate Saturday as a school holiday. If Saturday is used for extra-curricular activities, there will be one day less for students weekly rest, and this will indirectly increase their work pressure. This point is shown in the survey.

1.3 If the ECA Day is held on Friday, the students can rest on the following two days namely Saturday and Sunday. Their academic performance on ordinary school days will not be affected by their lack of rest.

## 2. Arrangement for Primary One Students

To allow Primary One students to understand the working of the arrangement suggested in the motion and to familiarize themselves with the various types of extra-curricular activities, the schools should arrange for all Primary One students to try out all these activities on every Friday. The form teachers of Primary One classes shall be present to take care of the students, and also to observe their progress. At the end of the school year and in the school reports, the form teachers will offer suggestions for parents on the types of extra-curricular activities they should choose for their children. These suggestions will be offered according to the students' personality, keenness on the various activities and their preference. For students from Primary 2 to Primary 6, the school will not arrange for them this kind of introductory activity. Instead, the arrangement of extra-curricular activities for them will be the same as that for secondary students.

## 3. Award Scheme

To encourage keen participation in extra-curricular activities by students, a special award scheme will be set up. Details of the scheme are as follows: students are required to take part in extra-curricular activities for four hours on each ECA Day. The monthly minimum requirement will be four hours times the number of ECA Days in that particular month. For example, if there are three ECA Days in that month, the minimum requirement would be 12 hours. A certificate will be issued as an award to students who can meet the requirement for 12 successive months. No penalty will be levied on students who fail to meet it .

If a student feels unwell on an ECA Day, a letter from parents or a doctor's certificate should be submitted and the monthly minimum requirement will be adjusted.

## 4. Holiday Arrangements

The effect of having a weekly ECA Day in the curriculum can be minimized by reducing the existing number of school holidays.

It is suggested that a minimum of 25 days of school holidays should be reallocated so that students will not be hindered in their learning. Summer vacation will be reduced from the original 45 days to 25 days. Individual schools will decide which long holiday, such as Christmas holidays or Lunar New Year holidays, they want to reduce in order to make up for the other five school days.

## 5. Subsidies

We propose that subsidies should be provided to students with financial difficulties so as to alleviate their financial burden and to allow them to participate in extra-curricular activities.

### 5.1 Transportation Allowance

Transportation allowance will be available to Primary and Secondary students who participate in extra-curricular activities. Applicants should have a family income not exceeding \$25,000 per month. There should be a distance of more than a 15-minute-walk between the applicants' homes and the activity venues, or they need public transportation to reach the venues. Families with a total income of less than \$15,000 will receive full allowance, while families with an income between \$15,001 and \$25,000 will receive half the allowance.

### 5.2 Subsidy for Extra-curricular Activities

A subsidy will be given to Primary and Secondary students for their extra-curricular activities. The monthly income of the applicants' families should not exceed \$25,000. The first child of a family can receive a maximum of \$2,000 in subsidy every year, the second child \$1,500 and the third and subsequent children \$800 each.

| Subsidy for extra-curricular activities | The highest permissible amount per year (\$) |
|---|--|
| First child                             | 2,000  |
| Second child                            | 1,500  |
| Third child                             | 800  |
| Fourth child                            | 800  |
| Fifth child                             | 800  |

Families applying for the above two types of subsidies will undergo income test. Eligible students can request an application form from the school authorities at the beginning of the school year. Parents should return the completed form to school and the school authorities will collect the forms for further processing. After an application is approved, the amount of subsidies for the whole year will be transferred into the bank account listed by the applicant on the application form.

#### 6. Promotion

According to the report *Study on the Use of Leisure among Hong Kong Students (2002)*, around half of the parents (51%) interviewed encourage their children to participate in extra-curricular activities, while the remaining 49% do not. The data indicates that the more educated the parents are, the more supportive they would be of their children's participation in extra-curricular activities. The majority of grassroots parents are opposed to it lest their children's academic performance should be affected. In view of the situation, the Bureau should try to promote these activities among the parents. It should organize seminars to help the parents understand the objectives of this motion so as to gain their support for turning Friday into a multi-dimensional ECA Day.

The importance of extra-curricular activities must be impressed upon the general public through promotion and consultation. This point cannot be over-emphasized. Therefore, in the first three years after the policy's implementation, the Bureau shall promote the scheme in the electronic and broadcasting media. Furthermore, the Bureau will provide an enquiry hotline to enable the public to access the latest news and learn about the newest developments of the scheme.

#### 7. Arrangements for Children with Special Educational Needs

According to Article 23 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, "States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in condition which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance, and facilitate the child's active participation in the community". Therefore, we wish to make sure that even children with disabilities should benefit from this motion. To make sure that, when these children participate in activities, their physical disabilities could not hamper their movement or lead to communication problems with others, we suggest making some special arrangements for them. The schools will help students with special educational needs to acquire details of various extra-curricular activities, and the students can then decide which activities to join. If necessary, the Bureau will request the activities organizers to arrange special classes for them. These classes will be equipped with equipment specifically suited for the disabled. The curriculum of the classes will be identical to the classes of the normal children. The parents of these children with special educational needs can choose whether their children should be accompanied by family members or helpers to take care of them in class. These children may also choose to join the ordinary classes and learn how to get along with other children.

Children with special educational needs are also a part of society. Despite their physical disabilities, they should be encouraged to develop their potential through participating in activities. This will prepare them to integrate better in society in the future. Nevertheless, children who have violent tendencies and those who are emotionally disturbed will need approval from their parents, doctors or psychiatrists before they participate in activities with other children.

## **IX. Conclusion**

Apart from acquiring knowledge of various kinds, our children also need to explore their own interests and potential, and to undergo training and development. This will help them define their goals and aspirations in life. Such an ideal, however, cannot be achieved solely by attending classes in school. Children today do not have enough time and money to participate in extra-curricular activities suitable for them. As a result, they are not able to achieve a balanced, all-round development. Therefore, we suggest the Government should turn Friday, now an ordinary school day, into an ECA Day so that children will have better opportunities to participate in various kinds of extra-curricular activities.

In conclusion, we suggest that the Government should provide funding to schools and organizations to organize extra-curricular activities of a greater variety and higher quality. Schools should also be encouraged to set up their own panels to coordinate and design extra-curricular activities. The aim is to enable every child to take part in activities s/he likes, in order to explore his/her own strength and to achieve all-round physical and mental development.

We believe that children will treasure these valuable opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities. We trust they will make full use of this chance to develop their interests and strengths, instead of wasting their time at home watching television, playing video games or surfing the internet. Our society focuses too much on academic achievements and allows little room for children to fully develop their potential. It is for this very reason that we hope this motion will allow children's potential to be fully actualized.

We, students from St. Paul's Co-educational College, Holy Trinity College and two Child Ambassadors, move the motion **"Urge the Government to turn every Friday school day of primary and secondary schools into an extra-curricular activity day"** be passed.

## **References:**

"Survey of How School Children Spend their Leisure Time in Hong Kong (2002)", The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, and the Hong Kong Institute of Education Alumni Association

The website of Education and Manpower Bureau: <http://cd.emb.gov.hk/default.asp> (Last update: 22/1/2002)

Reply from the Student Financial Assistance Agency of the Education and Manpower Bureau

## **Acknowledgements:**

Dr. Ernest Luk Siu Luen, Child Psychiatrist

Mr Poon Chun Kau, Principal, St Paul's Co-Educational College

Mr. Leung Wai Ming, Principal of San Wui Commercial Society School

Mr Anton Nam-sing Wan, Play Development Manager, Playright Children's Play Association

Ms Maggie Wai-fung Poon, Public Relations & Communications Officer, Playright Children's Play Association

Student Financial Assistance Agency of the Education and Manpower Bureau

All school principals, teachers, students and parents who helped to complete the questionnaires

All students who gave us the opportunities to be interviewed

