

**Motion 1**

**The Government Should Address and Tackle the Issue of Pressure among Students**

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## **Foreword**

Most Hong Kong students are under great pressure from schoolwork. While pressure can motivate, too much of it has the opposite effect, threatening mental health and leading to all kinds of emotional disorders. According to a survey conducted by the Hong Kong Family and Welfare Society in 2003 on the mental health of secondary school students, over 90% of the interviewees often or always suffered stress-related problems. Pressure in students deserves our attention.

Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that “the State Parties recognize the rights of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.” Therefore, we want to put forward suggestions directed at this issue to urge the Government to address and tackle the issue of pressure among students.

## **Questionnaire survey**

In September and October 2007, we conducted a questionnaire survey involving 700 subjects on the issue of student pressure. Among them, 440 were secondary and primary school students, 107 were teachers and 153 parents. Over 90% of the interviewees believed students experienced pressure from their studies.

## **Current situation**

In 2006, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University Nursing School conducted a survey on pressure targeting primary and junior secondary school students. They found that the main reason for pressure was “too much and too difficult homework”. This finding coincided with our survey results. A survey by the Hospital Authority this year showed the number of students suffering from emotional disorders risen by more than 60%. Their study suggested the problem was caused by pressure from school work. According to our study, 60% of teachers believed the school had not taken action to relieve students of their pressure and 66% of parents believed that the Government had not taken action to relieve students of their pressure.

Based on a questionnaire survey conducted by the Democratic Party in 2002, 60.6% of interviewed parents acknowledged that their children were over-pressured and that they were willing to communicate with them but they had no idea how, nor did they have sufficient time to do so. Likewise, our survey suggests that 36% of parents faced the same problem, and that 80% of parents communicate with their children for less than two hours a day. This shows a lack of exchange between parents and children.

At present, Hong Kong does not conduct regular large-scale assessments on pressure

among students. The Education Commission Report No.7 Quality School Education mentioned that student pressure was an issue worthy of exploration. In 2003, Education and Manpower Bureau had produced Assessment Program for Affective and Social Outcomes (APASO) for schools to understand students' performance and development in the affective and social domains. Yet the government has looked into students' issues, it only covers students' anxiety on studies without really evaluates students' pressure. Many other places in the world, however, assess student's pressure. For instance, in October this year, the UK government explored the state of students including student's pressure deeply through 87 focus groups discussion across sectors.

## **Suggestions**

### **Education system**

#### **1. Speeding up the implementation of the plan of small-class teaching for all primary and junior secondary schools**

The Government promised in its 2007 Policy Address that beginning September 2009 small-class teaching will be implemented stage-by-stage in subsidized schools, but not all primary schools in Hong Kong at once. This means not all students in Hong Kong will benefit from the plan straight away. According to our survey, over 50% of the student interviewees believed that tight teaching schedule is the main cause of their pressure. In a smaller class, the teacher can immediately respond to problems, get to know individual needs, and offer more advice. Lowering teacher-to-student ratio makes teaching more flexible. The teaching progress can also be adjusted to suit students' abilities so as to prevent pressures caused by failures of catching up the teaching progress.

Therefore, the Government should implement small-class teaching in all subsidized primary and junior secondary schools. The number of students per class should be reduced to 25 at primary and 30 at junior-secondary levels. Adequate subsidies should be provided to each school for equipping classrooms, purchasing teaching amenities, and training teachers.

#### **2. Adding a three-hour tutorials on homework every week in primary schools**

According to our survey, more than half of the primary students interviewed believed that heavy homework was the main cause of pressure. Offering homework tutorials may help students to finish part of their work at school. They can acquire immediate assistance from their classmates and teachers when they encounter problems. This then helps to avoid pressure caused by too much homework and by their inability to solve the problems in their homework.

Schools should delete any repetitive curriculum so as to allot three hours for homework tutorials every week from among their existing teaching hours so that the total number of class sessions is not changed. However, it is up to each individual school to decide how these

three hours are distributed. Meanwhile, the Government should require teachers not to turn these class hours into regular teaching sessions or assign extra homework to them.

### **3. Increasing university undergraduate places**

According to our survey, more than half of the secondary school students interviewed found obtaining university undergraduate admission a major cause of pressure. University places in Hong Kong every year is at 21% of student population at school. Compared to 28% in Singapore, and on average 35% among 24 countries from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Hong Kong is outshone. This shortage of university places not only fails to meet social demands, but places many students under pressure because of their anxiety over higher education opportunities. As a metropolitan city, Hong Kong should not fall behind these countries.

Therefore, the Government should raise university undergraduate places to at least 30% of the population of university admission age. It should also support the development of specialized institutions of higher learning to alleviate the strong demand for university admissions.

## **Schools**

### **1. Training teachers to alleviate students' pressure**

Our survey finds over 80% of teachers without sufficient communication with students due to lack of time and heavy workload. We suggest that the Government allocate more funds to help schools hire more teaching assistants to help teachers in coping with administrative duties. We also suggest that the Government should strengthen teachers' training in the current Continuing Professional Development of Teachers courses to help students in reducing pressure. Such training should be designated a core area of study. During the training, it would be sound to invite professionals such as clinical psychologists to give guidance to teachers in order to enable teachers to assist students on dealing with pressure more effectively.

### **2. Teaching students to relieve their pressure**

The Government should set up a scheme and ask schools to provide a certain number of hours of pressure relief training for students every year, to be done in class. Such training can be seminars or activities chaired by professionals who will introduce to students ways to help them dealing with pressure positively and on their own. Also, the Government should provide resources for schools to organize activities of this kind. We hope by better understanding where pressure comes from and how it can be reduced, students can learn to face and relieve themselves of their pressure.

## **Homes**

### **1. Education at home**

The Government should, through the school, organize seminars and workshops for parents on ‘Improving Family Communication’, by encouraging parents to spend more time with their children and improve the quality of communication between family members. The quality of communication refers how parents can understand their children’s needs and problems through communicating with their children, so that they can spot symptoms of pressure among their children at an early stage. Parents must learn the techniques of communicating with their children. For example, they will learn to put themselves into their children’s shoes to understand what is in their minds. On the other hand, the Government should teach parents ways to cope with pressure, and to discourage them from venting negative emotions onto their children for that will affect communication.

In addition, we suggest that the Government should encourage ‘Appreciation Education’ at home. According to Professor Wong Po-Choi, Chairperson of the Committee on Home-School Co-operation, appreciation education refers to encouragement and appreciation given to children, including respect for their unique characters and dignity. In this way, when children face pressure, they can get support from their parents and confront their pressure positively.

### **2. Improvement on social facilities to enhance relationship among family members**

The Government should organize more family activities in communities and schools, and encourage Parent-Teacher Associations to organize regular family tours and site-visits to increase family time. The Government should also provide more support including recreation for family occasions, for example promoting family activities organized by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, and leisure facilities currently available so that parents may arrange family time with their children after work. By spending more time with their children, the parents better understand their children and learn more about their needs. This way they will be able to help relieving children of their pressure.

## **Pressure Assessment**

Many educators in Hong Kong, including educational psychologist Mr. Wong Yue Kwan, have suggested we should assess pressure among students in Hong Kong. We believe the Government should conduct comprehensive pressure assessments on students and formulate solutions by identifying various culprits and treating all schools individually. Such assessments can be conducted in two parts. First, the Government should carry out a large-scale pressure assessment every five years involving all schools in Hong Kong. Using individual interviews and questionnaires, the Government can find out where students’ pressure comes from, and obtain a clear picture about the situation. This will then help them

make decisions and improve on the existing policies. Secondly, the Government should make it compulsory for all schools in Hong Kong to conduct a pressure assessment every year. In this exercise they should identify students who are over-pressured and then take follow-up measures. In addition, a special pressure assessment exercise should be conducted during educational reforms, so that they can learn how policy changes create pressure in students.

### **Conclusion**

The fast changing Hong Kong society imposes great pressure on students. We hope this motion can help create for them a better environment for development. Our proposal is divided into four parts, namely: the education system, schools, homes and pressure assessments of students. Our suggestions include the implementation of small-class teaching in all primary and junior secondary schools, the addition of a 3-hour homework tutorial every week for primary school students, increasing university places, training teachers on student pressure alleviation, teaching students ways of reducing pressure, carrying out family education, improving community facilities to enhance relationship among family members, and conducting pressure assessments of all Hong Kong students every five years.

Children are future leaders of our society. Before they can become leaders, they need to be equipped and prepared to face the challenges in the society. This proposal is aimed at solving one of the biggest problems currently faced by students – too much pressure. Only when we eliminate pressure will these future leaders be able to enjoy better education and childhood, and a glorious future.

I, on behalf of the 19 Child Councilors of my group, move the motion “The government should address and tackle the issue of pressure among students” be passed.

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