

SED's opening remarks at media session (English translation)

Following is the English translation of the opening remarks by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, at a media session at the Central Government Offices today (August 3):

In view of the development of the COVID-19 epidemic, the Education Bureau (EDB) has earlier announced that schools would not resume classes earlier than August 17. Today, I would like to announce the latest arrangements for class commencement for schools.

It is anticipated that the epidemic will continue for some time, and may straddle the whole summer vacation. Many schools and parents hope that students could resume learning after the holidays. In view of this, the EDB has decided that schools, including international schools and kindergartens that generally commence schooling in August as well as primary, secondary and special schools that commence in September, may commence the new school year in accordance with their originally scheduled dates. That said, in view of the severity of the epidemic, all face-to-face classes and on-campus activities will have to be suspended until further notice, and schools may switch to other modes, including online learning, to let students study at home. The aforementioned arrangements are also applicable to schools offering non-formal curriculum, including tutorial schools.

Although students will not return to schools for lessons for the time being, after the commencement of the new school year, schools should remain open to accommodate students who have to go back to school because of a lack of care at home. Schools should ensure adequate staffing to look after these students, and to handle schools' basic and essential administrative affairs as well as parents' enquiries.

As a matter of fact, schools have accumulated considerable experience in helping students learn at home during the past few months of class suspension. We trust that schools should be able to facilitate home learning via different modes in the new school year. The EDB will continue to provide the necessary assistance to schools.

As for the support for underprivileged students to learn online, the EDB has issued a letter to schools today to reiterate that in view of the epidemic, the Community Care Fund assistance project has, starting from March, made flexible arrangements to accept all public sector primary and secondary schools that implement e-learning to apply for purchasing mobile computer devices for eligible students. I hope that schools can plan ahead and apply for funding from the Fund for needy primary and secondary school students as early as possible. I hereby appeal to schools to lend mobile computer devices to students for use at home, while awaiting approval for their application. In addition, the Government also provides Internet access

subsidies to help needy students of eligible families to make use of basic Internet services provided by fixed or mobile telecommunications service operators in the market. As for individual needy students who are unable to obtain appropriate Internet services due to the constraints of their living environment, the EDB will discuss with schools on the flexible use of different subsidies to purchase mobile data cards and portable Wi-Fi routers (also known as "Wi-Fi eggs"), and lend them to the needy students for e-learning at home. The EDB will make reference to the information provided by the schools, such as the utilisation of different subsidies, to formulate relevant support measures.

I would also like to emphasise that e-learning is not the only means for learning at home, in particular for young kindergarten students. Simple worksheets or reading tasks could be more effective, and can at the same time protect the eyes of young children. The EDB has issued the Reference Principles on Supporting Students' Home Learning with E-learning Modes During Class Suspension on March 31, as well as a letter to kindergartens on May 11, with a view to setting out the principles and strategies of supporting children's learning at home for school stakeholders' reference.

Some teachers and school staff may return to school to prepare for their online classes or perform other related duties. Schools should suitably and appropriately arrange their manpower based on the principle of avoiding large gatherings. Staff returning to the school campus should maintain appropriate social distance among one another and put in place all the necessary anti-epidemic preventive measures.

The EDB will continue to closely monitor the development of the epidemic, take into account professional advice from health experts and maintain close liaison with the school sector. When the epidemic subsides, we will announce the dates and the arrangements for class resumption as soon as possible.

I would like to once again thank all schools, parents and students for their efforts made over the past few months. They have been flexible, adaptive and agile in coping with the changing situation of the epidemic. The epidemic situation may still be unstable in the future. The EDB will continue to closely collaborate with various sectors to fight the epidemic and make the most appropriate learning arrangements for students.

I would also like to take this opportunity to urge parents and students to stay healthy during our fight against the epidemic, maintain a healthy lifestyle, and stay at home as far as possible. If going out is unavoidable, please be reminded to put in place all the anti-epidemic protective measures, such as wearing masks and maintaining social distance. To succeed in the fight against the epidemic, we need the concerted efforts of all sectors of the community. We must work together, fulfil our own responsibilities, and strictly observe anti-epidemic discipline. With these efforts we will soon put an end to the epidemic. People can then resume their normal lives and students can return to school campuses for learning early.

Thank you.