Major recommendations in final report by
Committee on Prevention of Student Suicides

The Committee on Prevention of Student Suicides (the Committee) has analysed 71 cases of local primary, secondary and post-secondary student suicides in the past three academic years. Data revealed that multiple factors interacted and contributed to students' suicidal behaviour including mental health issues, psychological concern, family/peer relationship problems, family/school adjustment problems and academic stress. Most of them had displayed early signs of suicidal behaviour and some involved mental health problems. These findings were comparable to global research findings presented by the World Health Organization in 2014. In this regard, the Committee has made various student-centred recommendations in the final report through three levels of support, namely, "Universal", "Selective" and "Indicated" levels, and different strategies to establish multiple safety-net layers to cater for the diverse needs of students.

(1) Enhance early identification, improve mental health and foster help-seeking behaviour

The report suggests that schools, families and various sectors should enhance collaboration by creating a nurturing culture on campus, strengthen the school-based "Healthy School Policy" and value education, enhance teachers, parents and students' understanding and awareness of mental health, and encourage students to seek help when necessary.

In order to help students transition to a new learning environment, the report suggests that the Education Bureau (EDB) strengthen the current mechanism for the transfer of student information between schools and encourage schools to put emphasis on students' psycho-social adaptation and accommodation in their bridging programmes conducted for Secondary 1 and Secondary 4 students. Post-secondary institutions should be encouraged to consider assisting new students to adapt to their new environment and also schedule a period of time for relief during an academic term, so that students would have the space to rest and reflect.

The report also recommends that the EDB provide gatekeeper training for teachers, peers, university personnel and parents, and further enhance screening tools

and guidelines to assist the identification of at-risk students. The Government should also enhance the referral arrangement of high-risk students to the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Service of the Hospital Authority (HA). In addition, the report recommends that the Government consider the regularisation and enhancement of the Student Mental Health Support Scheme established by the Food and Health Bureau in collaboration with the EDB, the HA and the Social Welfare Department (SWD), in order to ensure that needy students can receive early mental health support services. Post-secondary institutions should also ensure that students identified to have mental health problems would receive timely psychiatric and psychological services.

(2) Enhance parent education and family support, improve parent-child relationships, enhance family functioning

The report suggests that the SWD should systematically co-ordinate the planning and delivery of family life and parent education, so that the Government and NGO's can cater for the needs of families of different strata. Parent education should encourage parents to have realistic expectations on their children, strengthen parent-child relationships and foster the healthy development of students. The EDB should organise more sharing for schools on successful experience in facilitating communication between youth and parents.

In addition to providing parents with gatekeeper training, the report suggests that the Maternal and Child Health Centres of the Department of Health should further promote their parenting education programmes on positive parenting skills to parents. The SWD should also further promote the intensive counselling and support services for families in crisis provided by the Integrated Family Services Centres, Integrated Services Centres and Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness to encourage needy families to seek help.

(3) Advocate media professionalism and make good use of social media to support students

Young people often communicate with others via social media. The report recommends that the Government utilise the social media in organising and propagating activities on mental health promotion. Organisations such as the Hong Kong Jockey Club Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention (CSRP) of the University of Hong Kong can continue to encourage media professionals to engage in appropriate and ethical practices in their reporting of suicide incidents. The report also

points out the need to educate young people on social media etiquette to prevent the occurrence of cyberstalking or bullying, and how to respond to suicide reporting on the social media. In addition, the report states that cyber-based outreach services should be supported. The CSRP could also line up with social media platforms in collaboration with related professionals to continue developing online suicide prevention tools.

(4) Strengthen life planning education, provide multiple articulation pathways

It is recommended that the EDB continue to promote life planning education, propagate alternative pathways and the Qualification Framework and support students in their exploration of multiple pathways, so that they can be better prepared for the future.

Members understand that there is no substantial direct link between student suicides and the education system. Nevertheless, they recommend that the EDB consider reviewing relevant domains in the education system as well as duly supporting and addressing the developmental and diverse needs of students and young people. The report also mentions the issue of resources, and suggests the provision of additional resources for schools for the promotion of mental health and wellbeing. Post-secondary institutions can also consider re-allocating existing resources so that the Committee's recommendations to prevent student suicides can be implemented effectively in a more comprehensive manner.