

International study shows Hong Kong students' outstanding performance in mathematics and science

â€‹The results of the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2023 were announced today (December 4). A spokesman for the Education Bureau (EDB) said that the overall performance of Hong Kong students far exceeded the international average, showcasing their outstanding achievements.

TIMSS 2023, under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, is conducted every four years with the aim of studying students' performance in mathematics and science at Grade 4 (equivalent to Primary Four (P4) in Hong Kong) and Grade 8 (equivalent to Secondary Two (S2) in Hong Kong). More than 60 countries or regions participated in the study.

The spokesman said, "Hong Kong students maintained a consistently high level of performance in mathematics. Their overall result was outstanding. Our P4 students ranked fourth with a score of 594, which significantly surpassed the international average of 503. Our S2 students maintained the fifth place with a score of 575, notably exceeding the international average of 478. Meanwhile, the proportions of P4 and S2 students reaching the advanced level of the international benchmark in mathematics were 38 per cent and 32 per cent respectively, well above the international median of 7 per cent in the two grade levels."

Significant progress was seen among Hong Kong students in science, with P4 and S2 students showing a marked rise from 15th and 17th in the previous cycle to ninth and eighth in this cycle, scoring 545 and 528 respectively, significantly surpassing the international average of 494 and 478. Their proportions achieving the advanced level of the international benchmark in science were 17 per cent and 14 per cent respectively, exceeding the international median of 7 per cent and 6 per cent.

The spokesman said, "Hong Kong students' outstanding performance in mathematics and science affirmed the teaching effectiveness of schools and teachers, as well as learning outcomes of students. To align with the national direction of 'invigorating the country through science and education', the EDB has been stepping up efforts to promote STEAM (science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics) education for all, for fun and for diversity to facilitate schools' creation of an atmosphere conducive to the learning of science, innovation and technology, enhance students' knowledge and skills in STEAM-related areas, and strengthen students' scientific investigation and problem-solving skills. In tandem, through continuously optimising the curriculum, strengthening teacher training in collaboration with various partners, organising STEAM learning activities

beyond the classroom, as well as offering resource support for schools, the EDB nurtures students' interest and capabilities in learning science and technology from an early age, and enables students to develop their potential in innovation to foster future innovation and technology talent for our country and Hong Kong.

"The EDB will conduct an in-depth study of the results of TIMSS 2023 and continue to collaborate closely with different stakeholders to jointly and vigorously review the current learning and teaching measures, nurture students' interests, and strengthen learning and teaching effectiveness in order to enhance Hong Kong students' international competitiveness," the spokesman added.

The background information and key statistics of TIMSS 2023 are in the Annex.

S for S to visit Shanghai and Hangzhou

The Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, will leave Hong Kong tomorrow (December 5) for a four-day visit to Shanghai and Hangzhou.

While in Shanghai, Mr Tang will meet leaders of the Shanghai Municipal Public Security Bureau and visit the Hongqiao Border Control Point and Shanghai Customs College. In the afternoon on December 7, he will depart for Hangzhou, where he will meet and exchange views with leaders of the Zhejiang Provincial Public Security Department.

Mr Tang will return to Hong Kong on the evening of December 8. During his absence, the Under Secretary for Security, Mr Michael Cheuk, will be the Acting Secretary for Security.

Special Mortgage Scheme for Uncompleted Residential Properties

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) today (December 4) issued guidelines to banks on the introduction of a one-off special scheme that allows for a relaxation of the supervisory requirements on the maximum loan-to-value (LTV) ratio and debt servicing ratio (DSR) limit for property

mortgage loans. The special scheme aims to provide flexibility for banks to assist homebuyers who bought uncompleted residential properties during 2021 to 2023 using stage payment plans to complete their property transactions.

Official residential property prices fell by over 25 per cent from their peak three years ago. Some stage payment homebuyers of uncompleted residential properties may find the property valuation at the time of mortgage application to be lower than the purchase price, and hence face difficulty in securing extra funds for the down payment. Meanwhile, some banks have expressed to the HKMA their willingness to help these homebuyers in genuine hardship if the associated risk is manageable.

After balancing various considerations, the HKMA considers that a one-off special scheme can be introduced to assist stage payment homebuyers who bought uncompleted residential properties during the peak of the property market, while continuing to ensure the proper risk management of banks' property mortgage lending business. Under this special scheme, banks may provide mortgage loans with a maximum LTV ratio of 80 per cent to eligible homebuyers and the DSR limit is adjusted to 60 per cent.

The special scheme covers uncompleted residential properties for self-occupation where the provisional sale and purchase agreements were signed during the period from January 1, 2021 to December 31, 2023 and the buyers had opted for stage payment plans, and the date of the mortgage application of the relevant property is today or subsequently. Furthermore, the property valuation at the time of mortgage application should be lower than the purchase price.

As the mortgage terms offered by each bank may differ, eligible applicants who have any needs or questions are advised to enquire with banks that are offering such special scheme as soon as possible.

On many past occasions, the HKMA has reminded prospective buyers of uncompleted residential properties to be mindful of the risk of failing to complete the property transaction if they opt for stage payment plans. The above-mentioned special scheme is a one-off exceptional arrangement for stage payment homebuyers who bought uncompleted properties during the property market peak in recent years and have difficulty in securing extra funds for the down payment. Banks are still required to conduct their property mortgage business prudently.

The HKMA would once again like to remind prospective buyers wishing to opt for stage payment plans that, if the market value of the uncompleted residential property falls below the purchase price, banks will use the property valuation at the time of mortgage application to calculate the mortgage loan amount. As a result, the loan amount approved by the bank may be lower than originally planned and buyers must bear the related risks if they are unable to secure extra funds for the down payment. The public should carefully assess their own affordability and prudently manage the financial risks involved when making property purchase decisions and selecting the payment plan.

LCQ6: Promoting Shenzhen-Hong Kong marine economy

Following is a question by Professor the Hon William Wong and a reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (December 4):

Question:

This year's Policy Address has proposed to continue to take forward the Blueprint for the Sustainable Development of Agriculture and Fisheries, which includes the development of deep sea mariculture at Wong Chuk Kok Hoi and Mirs Bay new fish culture zones and the promotion of leisure farming and fisheries. There is also a plan for the Mirs Bay/Yan Chau Tong Eco-recreation/tourism Circle in the Northern Metropolis. Besides, the Shenzhen Ocean Development Plan (2023-2035) published by Shenzhen last year has proposed coordination between Shenzhen and Hong Kong on the protection and utilisation of natural resources around Mirs Bay sea areas, islands, etc. There are views that great opportunities are present for Shenzhen-Hong Kong co-operation in promoting the marine economy in Mirs Bay, alongside the potential for building a blue granary there. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has discussed with the Shenzhen Municipal Government co-management and co-operation on marine ecology conservation, modernised aquaculture and scientific research, etc. in relation to fishery development in Mirs Bay; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will engage in discussion with the Shenzhen Municipal Government on the development of Mirs Bay into a blue granary;

(2) regarding the establishment of the Mirs Bay/Yan Chau Tong Eco-recreation/tourism Circle, of the progress of co-operation between the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government and the Shenzhen Municipal Government on tourism, bioindustries, marine industries, etc.; and

(3) whether it has promoted mutual co-operation among industries, scientific research institutions and higher education institutions in Shenzhen and Hong Kong in areas such as basic marine scientific research and higher education; if so, of the details; if not, how the Government will foster such co-operation?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau, the Innovation,

Technology and Industry Bureau, and the Education Bureau, my reply to the question of Professor the Hon William Wong is as follows:

(1) The Government has been working closely with Shenzhen on the conservation of the marine ecology of Mirs Bay and the development of the new fish culture zone in the area, with a view to creating synergy between the development in Hong Kong and Shenzhen.

For the conservation of marine ecology, Hong Kong and Shenzhen have maintained communication and co-operation through the Mirs Bay and Deep Bay (Shenzhen Bay) Areas Environmental Management Special Panel that is jointly established by the Environmental Protection Department and the Ecology Environment Bureau of Shenzhen Municipality. The collaboration focuses on protecting the water environment of Mirs Bay and achieving the goals for sustainable development through communication and co-operation on the provision of sewage collection system and enhancement of sewage treatment facilities. With the concerted efforts of both governments, the water quality of Mirs Bay has been good. This is crucial for the conservation of marine ecology, particularly for hard corals in the northeastern waters of Hong Kong, including Kat O, Yan Chau Tong, Lai Chi Wo, and Tung Ping Chau.

To promote deep sea mariculture, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has designated a new fish culture zone at Mirs Bay with an area of approximately 400 hectares, encouraging fishermen to use steel truss cages or other types of deep-sea cages at the new fish culture zone, in order to increase mariculture production and value by adopting a modernised mode of operation. Meanwhile, the AFCD has maintained a close working relationship with Shenzhen Municipality and trade organisations in fisheries development through regular communication and visits with, for instance, the Ocean Development Bureau of Shenzhen Municipality, Hong Kong and Macao Floating Fishermen Business Office as well as Hong Kong and Macao Floating Fishermen Association of the Shenzhen Municipality, and actively promoting technical exchanges and communications between fishermen in Hong Kong and Shenzhen through organising various training courses or visits.

Hong Kong and Shenzhen also collaborate to enhance aquatic biodiversity and fisheries resources. For instance, for "National Fish Releasing Day" next year, Hong Kong and Shenzhen are planning to conduct a joint-restocking activity at the neighboring waters in Mirs Bay. We will continue to deepen our co-operation with Shenzhen in relation to the conservation of aquatic biodiversity and fisheries resources.

In addition, the AFCD worked with Shenzhen Institute of Guangdong Ocean University to explore technical collaborations on aquaculture technology and conducted reciprocal visits and exchanges. The AFCD, Hong Kong Fishermen Consortium and trade representatives made a visit to Shenzhen Institute of Guangdong Ocean University in January 2024 and conducted discussion sessions on topics including breeding and trading of marine life and marine ranches. They also visited the breeding base of the Institute and the Mirs Bay National Marine Ranch Workstation to explore the direction of future co-operation.

(2) In respect of tourism, through the Working Group for Sha Tau Kok Co-operation Zone jointly established by the Hong Kong and Shenzhen governments under the Task Force for Collaboration on the Northern Metropolis Development Strategy, the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau has indicated that, under the principles of complementarity and mutual benefits, it will work together with the Shenzhen side to promote cultural tourism co-operation in Sha Tau Kok based on the principles of "low density, high quality" and through enriching its historical and cultural elements, thereby fostering the tourism development in Sha Tau Kok.

Leveraging the opportunities brought by the designation of Robin's Nest Country Park in March this year as the 25th country park in Hong Kong by the Environment and Ecology Bureau, the AFCD and the Municipal Planning and Natural Resources Bureau of Shenzhen have signed the Cooperative Framework Agreement for the Enhancement of Wutong Mountain (Shenzhen) – Robin's Nest (Hong Kong) Ecological Corridor, to cooperatively strengthen the protection of natural habitats with high ecological values at the boundary of two places. Besides, the Countryside Conservation Office will promote new in-depth eco-tour experience by integrating culture characteristics of countryside villages, which includes the organisation of island hopping tour(s) under the theme of "Sound-Sight-Taste" at Kuk Po in Sha Tau Kok early next year to enhance public awareness of nature conservation, facilitate urban-rural symbiosis and generate economic benefits.

(3) The Government attaches great importance to scientific research exchanges and has been enhancing Hong Kong's innovation and technology ecosystem for different technology areas (including marine technology) through a number of measures in terms of funding, support for start-ups, infrastructure and talents.

As indicated by the Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau, there are 16 State Key Laboratories (SKL) in Hong Kong, one of which is SKL of Marine Pollution. The Laboratory is committed to collaborating with scientific research teams in the Mainland and other regions to conduct innovative research, particularly in the areas of pollution monitoring and control, environmental risk assessment, ecosystem response to stressors and ecological restoration, and to contribute to the protection and management of the marine environment and generate positive societal impact. The Innovation and Technology Commission also provides funding through the Technology Start-up Support Scheme for Universities (TSSSU) to six designated universities to support their teams in starting technology businesses and commercialising their research and development (R&D) results. Some of the TSSSU-funded start-ups engage in R&D projects on marine technology and undertake part of the R&D activities in the Mainland. In addition, the public R&D Centres will continue to drive technological development in different areas (including marine technology) through interactions with the Mainland, especially the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area.

On education, the Education Bureau has indicated that the University Grants Committee-funded universities have all along been able to flexibly

offer different programmes and conduct researches having regard to their roles and positioning as well as market demands. These universities have offered marine science-related programmes in recent years to nurture more marine science and research talents. In addition, the Government endeavours to drive, facilitate and encourage higher education co-operation between Hong Kong and the Mainland, especially on scientific research collaborations, with a view to complementing each other's advantages and proactively leveraging Hong Kong's function as an international innovation and technology centre.

Thank you.

[Launching ceremony of Territory-wide Inter-school National Security Knowledge Challenge 2024/25 held today \(with photos\)](#)

To enhance students' understanding of the Constitution, the Basic Law, the Hong Kong National Security Law (NSL) and the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance (SNSO), as well as other relevant aspects of national security, the Department of Justice (DoJ), the Security Bureau (SB), the Education Bureau (EDB) and the Hong Kong Shine Tak Foundation have once again jointly organised the Territory-wide Inter-school National Security Knowledge Challenge this academic year. A launching ceremony was held today (December 4), Constitution Day, while the finals will be held on April 15, National Security Education Day, next year, with a view to further promoting messages of national security to achieve a broader and deeper coverage.

The Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, said in a video speech that with the completion of the local legislation for Article 23 of the Basic Law, the newly enacted SNSO has achieved compatibility and complementarity with the NSL, together forming a comprehensive legal system and enforcement mechanism for safeguarding national security. He expressed his expectation that through participating in the Challenge, students could gain a deeper and correct understanding of the Constitution and the Basic Law and strengthen their knowledge of the holistic view of national security, the NSL and the SNSO, thereby enhancing their awareness of upholding civic responsibility and obligation in safeguarding national security.

Officiating at the ceremony, the Secretary for Justice, Mr Paul Lam, SC, said that safeguarding national security is a legal responsibility and that it is the duty of all Hong Kong citizens to respect and abide by national security laws. He said he is glad to see that young and energetic students are eager to pursue knowledge of national security and hopes they can stay

enthusiastic, keep learning and contribute their efforts to building a safe and stable city. The DoJ will continue supporting the rule of law education to rally efforts to safeguard national security.

Also officiating at the ceremony, the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, said that the Security Bureau attaches great importance to national security education for young people. New elements have been included in this year's Challenge, such as expanding the knowledge content to cover the SNSO, setting up an English section for non-Chinese speaking secondary school students for the first time, and arranging for final competitions to be held at a shopping mall to bring the message of national security to the community. In the coming year, the Security Bureau will continue to enhance publicity and promotion of national security education to cultivate the concept of "security brings prosperity" in the community.

Addressing the ceremony, the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, said she believes that the competition could enhance students' understanding of the rule of law and national affairs as well as their awareness and sense of responsibility in safeguarding national security while reinforcing their sense of patriotism, belonging to and pride towards the country. She also expressed her gratitude to the schools for their active support for students to participate in the competition, showing the importance the schools have attached to the promotion of national security education.

The Challenge is conducted in the form of a quiz. In addition to primary school and secondary school sections, an English section was set up for the first time for non-Chinese speaking secondary school students. The Challenge has attracted a total of more than 126 000 primary and secondary students from 610 schools to participate in the competitions – an increase of over 20 per cent in participants compared to last year. After fierce competitions, nine schools advanced to the finals. They will compete for the crown on National Security Education Day on April 15 next year.

Highlights of the launching ceremony and the Challenge will be broadcast at 10.30pm on Sundays starting from December 8 until April 20 next year on the programme "Our Home Our Country" on HOY Infotainment. The programme also includes a series of national security animations featuring "Andy and Security Bear" produced by the Security Bureau, along with other national security knowledge presented by "Andy and Security Bear" to deepen public understanding of national security concepts.

