

LCQ9: Student Activities Support Fund

Following is a question by the Hon Tony Tse and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (May 8):

The Government established in early 2019 a \$2.5 billion Student Activities Support Fund (the Fund) to support primary and secondary students with financial needs to participate in school-organised or recognised out-of-classroom life-wide learning activities, so as to foster their whole-person development. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the annual and cumulative (i) amounts of revenue and expenditure of and (ii) numbers of school and student beneficiaries as well as activities organised (together with the types and natures of the activities) under the Fund since its establishment;

(2) whether there are schools which have never or scarcely applied for subsidy under the Fund; if so, whether the authorities know the reasons for that, and whether assistance has been provided to such schools to ensure that all students with financial needs are given the opportunity to participate in life-wide learning activities;

(3) as it is reported that situations such as low birth rate, decline in the number of school-age children and the addiction of many students to online activities arise in Hong Kong, whether the authorities will encourage schools to make use of the subsidy granted under the Fund to organise more life-wide learning activities conducted in groups and physical settings;

(4) whether the authorities have received complaints on or identified problems in the operation of the Fund since its establishment; if so, of the follow-up actions; and

(5) whether the authorities have assessed if the operation of the Fund since its establishment can achieve its intended objectives; whether a comprehensive review of the overall operation of the Fund will be conducted in the light of the experience gained in the operation of the Fund, feedback of stakeholders, development of society, changes in students' needs, etc.?

Reply:

President,

The Education Bureau (EDB) has been providing resources for schools to organise a wide range of learning activities and schools may deploy such resources flexibly to support student learning and offer after-school student activities to foster students' whole-person development. Starting from the 2019/20 school year, the EDB has been providing a recurrent Life-wide

Learning Grant (LWL Grant) with an annual provision of about \$900 million to support public sector and Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools in taking forward life-wide learning based on the present foundation. The LWL Grant aims to help students develop lifelong learning capabilities and foster their whole-person development through the knowledge, skills and positive values and attitudes acquired in experiential learning. At the same time, the Government set up the Student Activities Support Fund (SAS Fund) in 2018-19 with an allocation of \$2.5 billion, and the investment return of the SAS Fund has been used to provide the Student Activities Support Grant (SAS Grant) for public sector and DSS schools to support students with financial needs to participate in out-of-classroom life-wide learning activities organised or recognised by schools. While the SAS Grant is supplementary in nature, schools should make good use of the LWL Grant and the SAS Grant, having regard to their own development contexts and students' needs.

Our consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Tony Tse is as follows:

(1) and (2) The SAS Grant has been available for schools' application since the 2019/20 school year. The amount to be disbursed to a school is calculated based on the number of students of the school in receipt of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) or the full-grant under the School Textbook Assistance Scheme (STAS full-grant) in that school year (based on the number in December of the school year). The rate for each primary student is \$350 and that for each secondary student is \$650. Noting that some families may be in need of support but are not in receipt of the CSSA or STAS full-grant for various reasons, so besides providing support for students receiving the CSSA or STAS full-grant, schools are given the flexibility to, at their discretion, deploy up to 25 per cent of the total provision of the SAS Grant for the school year to support students who are identified as needy according to the school-based criteria (e.g. students receiving the STAS half-grant) to participate in out-of-classroom experiential learning activities. Since the 2019/20 school year, nearly 95 per cent of schools have applied for the SAS Grant. For the schools which have not submitted any application, the main reason is that their numbers of students with financial needs are relatively small and they have flexibly deployed the LWL Grant and other resources to support student learning.

From the 2019/20 to 2023/24 school years, the incomes and expenditures of the SAS Fund, the numbers of beneficiary schools and the numbers of students are set out in the table below:

School year	Income (\$ million)	Expenditure (\$ million)	Number of beneficiary schools	Number of students
2019/20	86	37#	942	160 930
2020/21	111	32#	935#	165 090
2021/22	136	45#	928#	161 540

2022/23 (Provisional figures)	116	46#	929#	151 720
2023/24 (Estimate)	102	72	932	140 570

* The numbers of students are rounded to the nearest ten. The figures show the numbers of students in receipt of either the CSSA or STAS full-grant in the beneficiary primary and secondary schools, which are used for calculating the provision of the SAS Grant.

Due to the epidemic, life-wide learning activities were generally reduced during the suspension of face-to-face classes. Consequently, the usage rates of the SAS Grant were lower than expected and the numbers of school applications were also slightly affected.

(3) to (5) Schools are required to formulate school-based criteria according to the learning needs of their students. They have to ensure that the SAS Grant is deployed in a fair and impartial manner to support students with financial needs to participate in out-of-classroom learning activities, including visits, training, competitions, exploration and exchange activities, and procurement of necessary materials, uniforms or equipment for participation in life-wide learning activities, with a view to enriching intellectual development, values education, community service, physical and aesthetic development, and career-related experiences for students. The EDB has uploaded relevant guidelines, together with examples of life-wide learning activities of different areas and themes, to its website (www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/curriculum-area/life-wide-learning/index.html) for the reference of schools.

Under the principle of school-based management, schools should evaluate the utilisation of the SAS Grant (including the number, area and expenditure of the activities) on a regular basis, and include the report on the use of the SAS Grant in the School Report of the respective school year for endorsement by the School Management Committee/Incorporated Management Committee before uploading such report to the school website. The EDB does not keep statistics on the total number, type or nature of activities related to the SAS Grant.

The EDB learns about schools' utilisation of the SAS Grant through daily contacts (including school visits) and provides professional advice in a timely manner. The EDB will continue to seek the views of the school sector and review schools' utilisation of grants in supporting students with financial needs to participate in life-wide learning activities, so as to ensure that schools have sufficient resources and that resources are used properly to enable all students to gain life-wide learning experiences. The SAS Fund has been operating smoothly since its launch in 2019, and is able to meet the expenditure of the SAS Grant with its investment return. So far, the EDB has not received any complaints. On the whole, schools have flexibly deployed the SAS Grant, the LWL Grant and other resources to support all students, regardless of their socio-economic status, to participate in diversified life-wide learning activities, including those in group and face-

to-face mode.