

SED's "Letter to Hong Kong" on class resumption (English only)

Following is the "Letter to Hong Kong" by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, on class resumption broadcast on Radio Television Hong Kong Radio 3 this morning (May 24):

Good morning students.

The COVID-19 pandemic is unlike anything our generation has ever experienced. Closed borders, lockdowns, social distancing and wearing of masks have all become an everyday matter. Life is no longer the same and everyone is trying very hard to cope. Our education sector is no exception. In order to avoid foreseeable mass infection and large-scale outbreak, it is deemed necessary to suspend classes of all forms, which has lasted for the longest duration possibly except for wartime, and you have been staying home since.

The Education Bureau and school administrations have soon concurred in undertaking the "suspending class without suspending learning" principle, allowing learning to continue from home through available technological means. Principals and teachers have worked unceasingly to achieve this goal and I know that you, and your family have tried your best to overcome difficulties in studying at home while upkeeping motivation.

With the concerted effort to fight COVID-19, every member of our community has diligently taken precautions and stepped up personal hygiene measures. As one of the world's most crowded cities, Hong Kong ranks among the lowest number of confirmed cases. In recent weeks, we see signs of easing in the epidemic. Prudent assessment on the pandemic development by health experts, and continuous communications with school representatives, have given us confidence to allow classes to resume in a gradual and orderly manner after almost four months of suspension. Secondary Three to Secondary Five students will return to school on May 27, Primary Four to Secondary Two on June 8, and Kindergarten Three to Primary Three on June 15. International schools have a different school setting, as well as learning and teaching arrangements, and are hence allowed to tailor their class resumption timetable as long as the necessary preventive measures are met.

Schools have made good use of the class suspension period, and additional resources, including the anti-epidemic subsidies and support grants from the Education Bureau, to prepare for the long-awaited class resumption. I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to all school personnel for their superior efforts in fulfilling their preparation work according to the "Guidelines to Schools on Class Resumption". In short, schools will operate on a half-day basis so as to avoid risk of students having meals together in close proximity with their masks taken off. There will be frequent and regular cleaning and disinfection in all school areas, good

indoor ventilation will be maintained, non-essential gathering of students and extra-curricular activities are to be avoided, and school assemblies are to be conducted using the public announcement system.

As part of the daily routine, students' body temperature and health condition are checked, and masks are to be worn by everyone in the school area at all times. Classroom setting will be modified to single-row sitting, thus maximising personal space to ensure a proper physical distance. There will be special consideration for lessons such as music and physical education as well. For example, playing of wind instruments will be avoided to reduce the risk of spreading droplets; individual or group physical activities without contact, such as stretching, aerobics and jogging are more advisable.

While I can understand that you are all eager to see your fellow classmates and teachers again, I appeal to you to play your part as a good citizen in guarding against the return of COVID-19 to the community. Check your body temperature daily. And if you are not feeling well or have any symptoms, seek medical consultation immediately. This is an important step to protect yourself and care for others.

Please also observe good personal hygiene practice, wash your hands frequently and properly, avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth. Keep a reasonable distance from others and avoid going to crowded places. Last but not least, you should maintain a healthy lifestyle with a balanced diet, regular exercise and good rest – you will for sure have a stronger immune system to guard yourself against diseases.

Without a doubt, the pandemic has brought severe impact to Hong Kong as well as the rest of the world. To see it through rose-coloured glasses, we can take this opportunity to better prepare ourselves for the future. As Nobel laureate Albert Einstein has said, "The only source of knowledge is experience." I am sure that you have learnt a lot more than textbook knowledge over these past few months, such as resilience and a sense of responsibility, as well as self-discipline and self-directed learning. These are all valuable and essential qualities in a good person.

While we are all looking forward to the first day of class resumption, let's not forget that it is through immense and collaborative effort from many members of the community that enables you the chance to return to school. It may bring about a new reflection, that things should not be taken for granted, and we should always remain thankful and cherish what we have with gratitude. Treasure your lesson time, learning opportunities and the company of fellow classmates and teachers. Be kind and nice to everyone around you, especially those who have walked an extra mile for you.

Our world is moving at a very fast pace and it's ever-changing with uncertainties. I trust that you have all become stronger during this fight against the pandemic and you are now more ready for the new challenge that lies ahead. As we all know, COVID-19 may not disappear very soon. We must all continue to stay vigilant. The Education Bureau will continue to monitor the

situation and work closely with school. We hope for the best and prepare for the worst. Should new developments arise that affect our plan for orderly class resumption, we will keep you posted.

See you all at school!