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Alternative to SSEE: EAG's proposal

RECENTLY the Education Action Group submitted its proposal on the replacement of the Secondary School Entrance Exam to the working party set up by the Education Department. EAG has proposed that assignment into form 1 be done according to area, linking primary schools with secondary schools in their general region. Because of the uneven distribution of schools throughout Hongkong, some areas will be of very irregular shape and some will be larger than others.

EAG considered many factors in devising this alternative to the SSEE.

Use of Academic Assessment: The group felt that academic assessment should not be used as a means for assigning students to secondary schools. The existing practice of assignment into form 1 has meant that the "better" students are assigned to the "better" schools, thus perpetuating an undesirable hierarchy of standards and prestige among secondary schools. This contributes much to the extreme competitiveness of the present SSEE and to the misery of the children taking the exam.

Fairness: All children, irrespective of their family background, will according to the White Paper enjoy a similar educational experience. EAG feels, therefore, that each secondary school should receive a mixture of students. This would tend to equalise the standards of

schools. The Education Department should at the same time enforce a minimum standard of educational expertise and facilities in all schools.

Transition: According to the 1979 White Paper goal, all children will be assured of primary 1 through form 3 education. It is imperative that parents and children be assured from the beginning of primary 1, that the transition from primary 6 to form 1 will not burden or pressure the children.

Difference of Standards and Prestige among Schools: While some differences in the standards among secondary schools are unavoidable, it is hoped that to a large degree, the differences in standards will be minimised by a non-discriminatory system of assignment of students to secondary schools. When this happens the differences in prestige among schools will also be minimised. The aim is not to lower the standard of any schools but to maintain a high overall standard of all schools.

Area: For economic reasons and in view of the traffic situation and length of time that many students spend travelling to and from school, it is desirable that children should be assigned to schools within their residential district.

There have been numerous factors which have affected parents' choice of schools.

Type of Education: With the implementation of the White Paper, all Junior Secondary Schools (forms 1-3) will have a common core curriculum with some variation from school to school. Therefore, the type of school will not be a consideration of parents in the future.

Three Years vs. Five Years Secondary Education: In the past many parents have wanted their children to enter a school offering five instead of three years secondary education with the hope that their children would have a better chance of entering form 4, irrespective of their academic results. EAG has recommended that in order for fairness, Junior Secondary forms should be completely separate from Senior Secondary forms, although they may be physically in the same premises. Forms 1-3 should be Junior Secondary 1-3 and forms 4 and 5 should be Senior Secondary 1 and 2.

Prestige of School: Many parents have wanted their children to get seats in prestigious schools. However, with equalisation of standards among schools, the "prestige" of schools will also tend to be equalised. EAG feels that prestige schools as a phenomenon should not be encouraged. These schools have been the concern mainly of the upper middle-class; the lack of concern for the majority of the children by a small percentage of parents should not be allowed to influence the overall policy of the Government.

Religion: EAG recognises that a religious atmosphere will continue in the religious schools, although as education becomes the responsibility of a secular government, schools will no longer be distinguished by religions.

Sex: In order to promote a healthy psychosocial development of children, all schools should gradually develop into co-educational schools.

Area: Other things being equal, parents would prefer that their children go to a school within their residential area. In terms of administration, this would be easy to carry out.

In summary, it appears that parents would not need to choose in this system. However, in any social system where the Government takes up a universal social responsibility like education, there may be conflicts between the wish of some individuals and the public welfare at large. Although parents would not need to choose the schools where their children would be educated, EAG feels that the welfare of the children will in no way be jeopardised in a system designed with fairness and the happiness of the children in mind. After much consideration of the various methods of assigning students into secondary school, EAG feels that its proposal provides the best alternative to the SSEE.

EDUCATION ACTION GROUP.