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Dear Heads and Teachers of Secondary Schools,

***Concerted Efforts to Set a New Milestone for Education***

As the summer holidays end, a new school year kicks off. I believe, after a good summer break, you are now ready for a fresh start. May I take this opportunity to wish you every success and good health in the year ahead.

The improvement in the overall performance of our students in the 2006 Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination bears testimony to your hard work over the years in promoting a new teaching culture and managing student diversity. Your efforts have been fully recognized, and deserve public acclamation.

With widespread support from the community, the new senior secondary (NSS) academic structure will be introduced from the 2009/10 school year. Students attending Secondary 1 this September will be the first cohort of students pursuing the NSS curriculum. In the next six years, you will be writing a new chapter in the development of our education system. The Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) pledges full support in your endeavour to accomplish such an important task.

The core value of the NSS academic structure lies in “differentiated teaching to cater for student diversity”. We aim to provide senior secondary classes with a comprehensive and well-balanced curriculum, including different combinations of electives, to enable students to choose subjects that can stimulate their interests and teaching methods that can motivate them to learn. We want every student to experience success and develop their potentials to the full.

We believe that a steady development and a stable working environment for our schools and teachers are fundamental to the successful implementation of the NSS academic structure. To this end, we have announced our plan to improve the class-teacher ratio in NSS classes and provide additional resources to relieve teachers' workload. Early this year, I also promised that more than 700 permanent teaching posts would be created in the next three years to look after the academically low achievers. Hence, there is going to be an increase, rather than a reduction, in the total number of teaching posts.

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In 2011/12, when Secondary 7 and Secondary 6 students of the old and new systems co-exist, we anticipate that there will be a shortfall in teacher supply, estimated to be around 1 200 teachers. By then, we may need to consider extending the service of the retiring teachers or employing additional teachers to meet the demand. Thereafter, we will review and adjust the standard class size of secondary schools.

We also appreciate that the student population in primary schools has been declining in recent years and will eventually affect student enrolment and the class structure of some of the secondary schools. As such, we have devised a range of measures to help schools maintain a more stable class structure. Please refer to the Education and Manpower Bureau Circular Memorandum No 146/2006 of 8 August 2006 for details.

Notwithstanding the impact of the declining student population on some of our schools, we expect that the overall demand and supply of teachers will remain stable as a result of natural wastage, including retirement and resignation of teachers, in the next six years. We will naturally do our best to support and retain good teachers. You may have noticed that we have publicly complimented a school for its excellent performance as validated by a special review. We hope that, in so doing, we can change any negative perception of the school among parents. This is a good example of building mutual trust and cooperation between EMB and schools.

Let's work together, with one heart and one mind, to set a new milestone for our education system, to do all we can for the benefits of our students and to build a better future for Hong Kong!

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arthur K C Li'. The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial 'A' and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

( Arthur K C Li )  
Secretary for Education and Manpower