



## Press Release

### **From Research Findings to Multisector Community Actions: A Review of eCitizen Education 360 Outcomes to Co-create a Better “New Normal”**

Professor Nancy Law, Deputy Director of the Centre for Information Technology in Education at the Faculty of Education (the Faculty), The University of Hong Kong (HKU), together with supporting organisations of the eCitizen Education 360 Project, held a public symposium in the afternoon of July 10, 2021 (Saturday). The research team reviewed with partner organisations in different sectors the efforts and achievements made by the community connected with the research findings released by the project, their aspirations and specific proposals for the future.

Speakers from the education sector, parent organisations, social workers, and leaders of related organisations were invited to share their observations on the changing environment and practices in schools, families, and the broader community including family and youth support services, as well as advances in educational technology. These emerging changes have contributed to the learning and well-being of students during the periods of suspension and resumption of campus-based instructions, demonstrating positive advances and new possibilities in digital learning in an age of uncertainty, along with the power of evidence-based collaborative community action. On the other hand, new challenges have also emerged that need to be addressed. The symposium closed with a list of recommendations for multisector stakeholders, policy makers and researchers for further collective actions to co-construct a better New Normal.

#### **Summary and Review of Research Findings**

The eCitizen Education 360 research team from the Faculty conducted a 360-degree research study during June and July 2020, on the online learning experiences since the first school suspension from February last year. A total of five press conferences have been held on findings and recommendations based on thematic analysis of the collected data. Professor Nancy Law summarised the findings: The study revealed that school's e-learning readiness before school suspension, especially their e-learning strategies and their e-learning coordinating team membership and functions, play a decisive role in the online learning readiness of teachers and students during the suspension period. In terms of parental support and monitoring, findings show that good parent-child relationship is the single most important supportive factor for the psycho-social and academic well-being of their children. On the other hand, parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds rely much more on schools' parenting support. The team took every release of findings as an opportunity for further collective action. The eCitizen Education 360 project has organised a range of seminars with different supporting organisations to share their experiences in their efforts to co-create a New Normal.

The afternoon panel discussion was chaired by Professor Catherine KK Chan (Professor, Academic Unit of Social Contexts and Policies of Education of the Faculty), and attended by **Mr Charles Chan Kin-hung**, Executive Director, The Boys' & Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong, **Ir Eric Chan Sze-yuen**, Chief Public Mission Officer, Hong Kong Cyberport, **Mr Victor Cheng Pat-leung**, Executive Director, Hong Kong Education City, **Mr Eugene Fong Yick-jin**, Chairman, Committee on Home-School Cooperation, **Dr Esther Ho Yuk-fan**, Chairperson, Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters and Guidance Masters, **Mr Stanley Kam**, Principal, SKH Bishop Hall Secondary School, **Ms Joanne Lau**, Headmistress, LST Leung Kau Kui Primary School (Branch) and **Dr Wan Lap-man**, Deputy Executive Director, Hong Kong Playground Association.

#### **Challenges Arising from School Suspension**

Whilst summarising the challenges of suspension and resumption of on-campus instruction, the panel members were delighted to sharing some silver linings: (1) e-learning allowed students with special education

needs (SEN) to learn more effectively through repeated reviews of learning materials; (2) the digital literacy of students, teachers and even parents improved, which are conducive to students' learning; (3) students cherish their time on campus more because of the prolonged period of school suspension; (4) a prototypical form of hybrid/blended learning is being developed; (5) schools have paid more attention to teacher professional development and have become more responsive and adaptive to the ever-changing conditions; (6) changes in the mode of learning enhanced the home-school communication; (7) new education technology platforms developed locally or elsewhere are introduced; (8) parents have gained a better understanding of their children's learning progress and needs during the period of online learning.

However, the evolving New Normal also brings new concerns. Both **Mr Charles Chan Kin-hung** and **Dr Wan Lap-man** from the social work sector concerned about students' well-being, partly from the challenges of transitioning from face-to-face instructions to online learning, and partly from drawn out confinement at home, leading to increased chances of internet addiction, cyber pitfalls and conflict with parents. All these add to the pressure they are facing. In addition, schools, teachers and parents have made tremendous efforts to meet the demands of learning new digital skills, and adapting to e-learning platforms and new modes of teaching.

### **Expectation and Vision of the New Normal**

The emergence of the New Normal not only poses challenges to the education sector, but also affects many sectors in the community. This study highlights the importance of **engaging all citizens in the co-construction of a New Normal**. **Professor Nancy Law** mentioned in her summary, "With the support of school leaders, teachers, parents and non-profit organisations (NGOs), students are already advancing on the co-constructed path carved out by the New Normal. The whole society should seize the opportunity to work further on jointly building a better New Normal." Panellists **Principal Joanne Lau** and **Principal Stanley Kam** added that much more could be done at the school level, such as sustaining the established and effective forms of online teaching and learning, creating more space for teacher professional development, more proactive use of learning management systems (LMSs) to enhance the quality of learning and teaching, and encouraging teachers to share e-learning resources.

The role of parents is equally pivotal in this New Normal. **Mr Eugene Fong Yick-jin**, who has been active in home-school cooperation, fully understands the challenges parents are facing during the pandemic. Parents used to entrust their children's education to schools; but after a sustained period of home-based learning, they have a better appreciation of the importance of home-school communication. We have to better equip parents for carrying out different parenting roles, and work with schools to promote the well-being of parents and children.

**Dr Esther Ho Yuk-fan**, who is also the convener of the Jockey Club Project Well-being, highlighted the importance of the eCitizen Education 360 project to the education community, "I hope that in the future, the education sector could use an evidence-based approach to inform forward-looking decisions making, instead of gut feelings or emotions." She added that a key element of digital citizenship is digital well-being, which can be summarised by three guiding principles: "connectedness, motivation and resilience, and future-orientation."

**Ir Eric Chan Sze-yuen** of Hong Kong Cyberport is committed to promoting educational technology development that meets the actual needs of schools. In his work, he came to realise the many challenges in matching educational technology (EdTech) start-ups and schools. He wishes that there can be platforms for EdTech start-ups to interact with schools to tailor products for individual learning needs, particularly the needs of students with SEN. **Mr Victor Cheng Pat-leung**, Executive Director, Hong Kong Education City, said, "Hong Kong has a unique environment: every student has access to a tablet for taking lessons. Therefore, I encourage the industry and academia to take part in developing a reasonable, mutually beneficial business model."

Professor Law and all panellists urged parents to make good use of this summer vacation to consolidate the experience of learning at home and to work with schools to prepare for the new school year. This is especially

important for students transitioning from kindergarten to primary level, or from primary to secondary level, to be assisted in their move to a new stage of schooling under the New Normal.

### **Specific Actions and Policy Recommendations**

Based on the achieved advances, emerging challenges and opportunities in the past year and a half, the research team and collaborating partners put forward the following action and policy recommendations for different stakeholder groups:

#### **For Schools and Teachers**

Schools and teachers should prioritise students' learning motivation rather than coverage of the curriculum. In optimising e-learning, teachers from different subjects and departments should work together to promote e-learning and online teaching, instead of relying solely on the IT coordination team. Schools should also set up a unified digital platform for online and blended learning to reduce the burdens of adaptation faced by students, teachers, and parents. It is recommended that schools actively explore technical solutions with EdTech startups to jointly create comprehensive smart schools that support innovative interactive pedagogical models with appropriate integration of digital technology. Further, schools should include e-learning and associated school-based innovation-focused professional development as core strategic components in any curriculum/ pedagogical development plans to address the schools' major development concerns.

#### **For Parents/Parent-teacher Associations/Home-school Cooperation Committee**

Maintaining a good parent-child relationship establish based on care and understanding are the corner stones of effective parenting. Schools can take advantage of the summer vacation to hold activities for parents and children, and to reach out to parents who seldom contact schools. This would strengthen parent-child and home-school relationships, and nurture district-based mutually supportive home-school networks. Home-school organisations can organise more seminars or sharing sessions for parents, as well as recommend software and/or digital games that parents and children can engage in together to promote parent-child relationship.

Information literacy is equally important to parents. Home-school organisations can introduce parents, particularly those with SEN children, to digital platforms/software and how these can be used to support learning. This would provide parents with a better understanding and the necessary knowledge and skills to assist their children in adapting to the New Normal. The team recommends the compilation of an implementation checklist for parents to follow more easily.

#### **For Policymakers – School Digital Literacy Policy**

A digital literacy curriculum standard that incorporates international digital literacy development trends and Hong Kong information technology policies should be established to help teachers and students effectively address cyberbullying and other cyber risks, cultivate appropriate attitudes in the use of the internet, and enhance learning motivation. There should also be clear digital literacy standards, and pedagogical practice guidelines (such as hybrid and blended learning) for teachers. In addition, policymakers should consider providing teachers with professional development courses on information literacy/e-learning, delivered through different modes (online, offline, blended) of instructions, or increasing the number of professional development days in school calendars to help teachers meet the required standards.

There should be policies to support academia in the establishment of learning communities that promote innovative pedagogy and assessment and cultivate 21<sup>st</sup> century digital competence in students in conjunction with the implementation of e-learning. Further, special attention needs to be given to students with special education needs and students with socio-emotional learning needs in the policy formulation process to reduce possible digital divide.

#### **For Policymakers – Innovation and Technology Policies**

It is recommended to establish a series of measures to cope with educational development under the New Normal. For example, new legislation is needed to protect young people from frequently occurring online fraudulent activities. Standards for EdTech products (e.g. AI programmes giving instructions to students) should be set to ensure transparency and to protect students from being dominated by such products. Policy

support for a model of innovation that connects the innovation and technology community, schools, educational research organisations, and academics to co-evolve interconnected innovative education solutions comprising technology, curriculum, teaching and learning methods, assessment and feedback will contribute much to advancing student learning. In addition to cross-sector collaboration in co-development, which includes the launch of pilot schemes for the educational solutions and their evaluation, this innovation model should also include the establishment of product evaluation standards. Mechanisms should be in place to ensure that students and teachers involved in the pilot schemes understand how the effectiveness of these products can be evaluated. At the same time, the innovation and technology community should understand and undertake the ethical standards and responsibilities involved in these pilot schemes.

### **For Researchers/Academics**

In order to achieve a better New Normal, sustainable and targeted research is required to monitor and guide different development strategies with data. An evidence-based approach is the foundation for better collaboration.

### **About “eCitizen Education 360”**

The prolonged period of fight against COVID-19 and school suspension has posed huge challenges to every member of the education community. The tremendous effort of schools in sustaining learning online has not only overcome limits presented by social distancing but inspire a new chapter of educational transformation as schools resume. The project is a comprehensive 360-degree survey study with widespread support from academia, parents, professionals and community organisations. By gathering information about the experiences and needs of primary and secondary schools during the periods of school suspension and resumption, we aim to enhance our comprehensive capacities to act as a community to improve the education opportunities, digital competence and well-being of students. These would also enable them to cope with various aspects of life in the fast-changing world in which digital technology plays a pervasive role.

The first five issues of research findings were released on July 20, August 25, November 3, 2020, January 19 and March 30, 2021.

For more details of the “e-Citizen Education 360” Project and the report, please visit <https://ecitizen.hk/360>. To view the e-version of this press release, download related photos, presentation file and further reference materials, please visit <http://web.edu.hku.hk/press>.

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July 23, 2021



“eCitizen Education 360” Project held a public symposium on July 10, 2021. Speakers were invited to share their experience and views, and make recommendations. Speakers and guests (from left to right) include:

**Ms Joanne Lau**, Headmistress, LST Leung Kau Kui Primary School (Branch); **Mr Stanley Kam**, Principal, SKH Bishop Hall Secondary School; **Mr Eugene Fong Yick-jin**, Chairman, Committee on Home-School Cooperation; **Professor Catherine KK Chan**, Academic Unit of Social Contexts and Policies of Education, Faculty of Education, HKU; **Professor Nancy Law**, Deputy Director, Centre for Information Technology in Education in the Faculty of Education, HKU; **Ir Eric Chan Sze-yuen**, Chief Public Mission Officer, Hong Kong Cyberport; **Mr Charles Chan Kin-hung**, Executive Director, The Boys’ & Girls’ Clubs Association of Hong Kong; **Dr Wan Lap-man**, Deputy Executive Director, Hong Kong Playground Association; and **Dr Esther Ho Yuk-fan**, Chairperson, Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters and Guidance Masters.