



POKFULAM ROAD
HONG KONG
CHINA

中國香港
薄扶林道

THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
Faculty of Education
香港大學教育學院

Tel: (852) 3917 6044 (Faculty Office)
Tel: (852) 3917 2544 (Programme Office)
Tel: (852) 3917 8254 (Office of Research)
Fax: (852) 2517 0075
Email: edfac@hku.hk

Press Release

HKU Study Finds Cumulative Impact of Recurring School Suspensions under the New Normal from 2020 to 2022 – Positive Action Insights for Students, Parents, Schools and Community

The first batch of findings from eCitizen Education 360 (2022) Project are released today (November 3, 2022). The project is led by Principal Investigator, Dr Cheng Yong Tan, and Co-Investigators, Professor Nancy Law and Professor Catherine K.K. Chan, from the Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong (HKU). The D. H. Chen Foundation is the Growth Partner and Funder for this Project, which is designed to provide a comprehensive picture on how students, parents, schools, and teachers adapt in the New Normal after multiple waves of school suspensions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Project is built on the eCitizen Education 360 (2020) conducted in 2020, and it aims to identify the cumulative impact on learning and well-being outcomes of students since then.

Data collection was conducted from July to early September 2022, involving a total of 51 schools (20 primary schools and 31 secondary schools). Over 8,000 students, 3,000 parents, 800 teachers, and 200 school leaders took part in the Project.

As compared to 2020, results in 2022 show that (1) primary and secondary students experienced more online learning activities and had more confidence in online learning. However, secondary school students had less positive online learning and well-being outcomes than primary students (e.g. self-efficacy, self-regulation strategies, cyberbullying experiences), and were much less likely to seek help from adults; (2) parents were most concerned about the impact on their children's learning due to school suspensions; and they increased their interactions and involvement with their children's teachers and schools in 2022; Furthermore, parents of secondary students were less involved in their children's learning and had lower parenting self-efficacy; and; (3) school leaders and teachers reported more e-learning practices in 2022; were most concerned about the impact of prolonged suspensions on students' academic standards; and found strategies to provide professional development and other facilitative mechanisms for the enhancement of e-learning, a collaborative school culture and community support, were the most important in helping schools to cope with the challenges in the New Normal.

Moving forward, based on the above research findings, the team recommends the following for different stakeholders under the New Normal:

- **For students:** Providing support services to enhance student learning, cyber wellness and socioemotional wellbeing is necessary. Particular attention should be paid to the support to secondary students. There is also a need to conduct further research to investigate the cumulative impact of school suspensions on students' academic outcomes.
- **For parents:** There is a need for parenting services and support, particularly on digital parenting to support their children's learning and wellbeing. Special attention should be given to parental education and support for parents of secondary students as they are less engaged in both home-based and school-based involvement, and the findings also show that secondary students are less well-adjusted, in terms of digital wellness, than primary students.

- **For schools:** School strategies to provide online learning and teaching support to students and teachers, and to enhance communication with parents have brought positive outcomes. More efforts should be given to the provision of professional learning opportunities and to foster a collaborative culture among teachers of effective online, blended, and hybrid teaching and learning to support student-centered learning and wellbeing. Efforts should also be made to leverage community resources and support for school development.
- **For the concerned communities and policy makers:** The strategies and efforts of school leaders and teachers to provide online learning and teaching support to students, and to enhance communication with parents have brought positive outcomes, which should be applauded and recognised. Community partners' support have shown to have positively contributed to schools' adaptations under the New Normal. Such efforts should be continued and strengthened.

Dr Esther Ho Yuk-fan, Chairperson of Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters and Guidance Masters, believed that the data on students' wellbeing is consistent with their observations, and hoped that researchers could conduct more in-depth research on cyberbullying, especially in bystander contexts.

Mr Charles Chan Kin-hung, Executive Director of The Boys' & Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong said that cyberbullying and peer relationships are inextricably linked and deserve wide community attention. He highlighted the importance of cultivating students' awareness to stop bullying in the first place and reduce the secondary harm. Meanwhile, we should encourage bystanders to take actions to intervene, stop and report cyberbullying incidents. In addition to mastering appropriate individual responses, we need to work together at the societal level to create a caring environment of love and respect that has zero tolerance for cyberbullying.

Principal Joanne Lau from LST Leung Kau Kui Primary School (Branch) mentioned that the current topic of cyberbullying is indeed important. Parents should be educated to differentiate between playful acts and bullying acts that affect their children. At the same time, the stipulation by the "Health Protection Measures for Schools" issued by Education Bureau (EDB) on "face-to-back" setting and facing one direction teaching arrangement have restricted interactions among students during classroom teaching and extracurricular activities. This could be more explicitly relaxed as these are adversely affecting the development of students' communication and collaboration skills.

Principal Fong Chi Heng HHCKLA Buddhist Chan Shi Wan Primary School said it has been three years since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and many external social welfare organisations, colleges and universities and even some business circles have enthusiastically joined in and become her school's partners, allowing everyone to share resources, and truly take from the society and use it for the society. Throughout the pandemic, the EDB has also supported her school to bring different stakeholders together. Despite the ruthlessness of the pandemic, she hopes that during these special times, students and parents can feel the love and concern in our society.

Project Team

Principal Investigator

- Dr Cheng Yong Tan, Associate Professor, Academic Unit of Social Contexts and Policy of Education (SCAPE), Faculty of Education, HKU

Co-Investigators

- Professor Nancy Law, Professor, Academic Unit of Teacher Education and Learning Leadership (TELL), Faculty of Education, HKU
- Professor Catherine K.K. Chan, Academic Unit of SCAPE, Faculty of Education, HKU
- Dr Min Lan, Lecturer, College of Teacher Education, Zhejiang Normal University

- Dr Qianqian Pan, Research Scientist, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University
- Dr Sisi Tao, Post-doctoral Fellow, Centre for Information Technology in Education (CITE), Faculty of Education, HKU

Post-doctoral Fellow

- Dr Qianru Liang, Post-doctoral Fellow, CITE, Faculty of Education, HKU

Project Manager

- Miss Sophie Wenhui Li, CITE, Faculty of Education, HKU

Research Assistant

- Miss Cassie Yimeng Li, CITE, Faculty of Education, HKU

About eCitizen Education 360 (2022): An extension of the Learning and Assessment for Digital Citizenship Project

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019, face-to-face lessons in classrooms have been supplanted by long periods of home-based online lessons in Hong Kong schools. During this challenging period of time, many schools, families, and students have struggled to cope with this New Normal of teaching and learning. Understandably, there are widespread concerns in Hong Kong society that student learning and wellbeing may have been adversely affected. It is therefore imperative to take stock of the impact of the New Normal on students' learning and wellbeing.

Building on the strengths of the eCitizen Education 360 Project (2020) which has yielded valuable findings and practicable actions for stakeholders, this project, eCitizen Education 360 (2022), is underpinned by the understanding that teaching and learning opportunities and outcomes during (and after) the fifth wave of school suspension are continuously influenced by a comprehensive range of factors (or enablers) at the school, teacher, parent, and student levels. By gathering information about students' digital learning, wellbeing and relevant self-evaluation data available in schools, we aim to provide a comprehensive picture of students' learning and socioemotional wellbeing after multiple waves of school suspension and to support different stakeholder communities including policy-makers in developing evidence-based action plans that build capacity and resilience to support student learning in the New Normal.

For more details of the "eCitizen Education 360 (2022)" Project and the report, please visit <https://www.ecitizen.hk/360>. For more details of the "eCitizen Education 360 (2020)" Project, please visit <https://www.ecitizen.hk/360/e360-2020>. 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>.

For media enquiries, please contact Ms Emily Cheung, Senior Manager (Development and Communications), Faculty of Education, HKU (Tel: 3917 4270 / Email: emchy@hku.hk), or Miss Sophie Li, Project Manager, "eCitizen Education 360 (2022)" Project, Faculty of Education, HKU (Tel: 3917 4759 / Email: dcitizen@hku.hk).

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