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### Educational Inequality in the World's Top Educational System, Hong Kong

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” by Nelson Mandela. Education is believed to be the only way out of poverty, inequality and discrimination. What if inequality exists in education itself?

Before we move on to this topic, we must understand the differences between various types of schools in Hong Kong. The types of schools include public local schools, Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools, private schools and international schools. The major difference between them is that DSS schools, private schools and international schools have more independence regarding admissions and are able to operate with greater autonomy compared with public local schools. As they can charge steep tuition fees to obtain extra resources, it enhances the quality of their teaching. However, the exorbitant fee needed in exchange for good-quality education means that students from a humble family background stand a smaller chance of getting into prestigious schools than students from a privileged background. As the saying goes, “Knowledge changes fate.” but it is difficult for grassroots students to climb up the social ladder since their chance of receiving good-quality education is limited. The reduction of social mobility has them trapped in a vicious cycle as they only get poorer, widening the gap between the rich and the poor.

The government claims the problem can be relieved with the introduction of fee remission. To ensure students could attend DSS schools without financial obstacles, DSS schools must provide parents in need with tuition reduction or scholarship programs. For example, the Diocesan Girls' School scholarship, which is awarded to academically outstanding students, can total up to 100% to 150% of the annual school fees charged. It is believed that with this great deal of remission, a hand can be given to the grassroots.

Scholarship is, of course, undeniably one of the effective ways in relieving grassroots students' financial burden as well as an incentive to encourage them to keep the good work, by rewarding their diligence. However, scholarships are only provided for the top students, to become which requires a lot of prerequisites. Not only you have to be intellectually talented, self-disciplined or hard-working, it also depends very much on your family background. In

order to have such high achievements, you need enough financial resources to enroll in additional classes after school or born to well-educated intellectual parents who can introduce you to good resources and discuss academic topics with you. But for grassroots students, all these are far-fetched. They lack financial resources for them to attend tutorial classes. Their parents are mostly low-income workers with relatively low education levels. Therefore, the top students who get scholarships are mostly from a wealthy family, instead of students from a humble family who really needs it. The nature of scholarship has further reinforced inequality between the rich and the poor, making the problem even worse.

Instead of providing scholarships, raising the application threshold of DSS schools can also be one of the alternative ways to ease the problem. DSS schools would continue to receive full subsidy from the government until its fee level reaches  $2\frac{1}{3}$  of the DSS unit subsidy rate, encouraging schools to turn into DSS schools and receive a higher income. The rise of the application threshold has saved more resources for other public local schools, giving students opportunities to receive additional support services or facilities without paying high school fees in DSS schools. At the same time, DSS schools need to lower the school fees if they want to get government subsidies, resulting in an affordable tuition fee which helps relieve the financial burden of poor students. In this way, not only the rich students stand the chance to receive quality education, but such educational opportunities also become accessible to poor students.

The inequality in education has been a long-existed problem for centuries. Educational opportunities should be something that are based on students' ability rather than their family background. An American educator, Claire Fagin once said, "Knowledge will bring you the opportunity to make a difference." Doesn't everyone deserve the opportunity to make a difference through education?