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Subsidies for self-financed students top Lam package

Some 39,000 secondary school graduates would receive subsidies for tertiary education and the number of teachers would increase by more than 3,000 under the education package of Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor.

Lam yesterday revealed details of her plan to use HK\$3.6 billion out of an extra recurrent funding of HK\$5 billion for education.

Under her proposal, all students meeting the minimum requirement for subsidized university education while pursuing full-time self-financing undergraduate programs would get a HK\$30,000 annual subsidy from next school year.

Students who take undergraduate programs in the mainland would get an annual subsidy of HK\$5,000. Lam said this would require HK\$1.19 billion each year.

Another policy would be increasing the teacher-to-class ratio for primary and secondary schools by 0.1, so that the ratio in primary schools would be 1 to 1.6, secondary school lower levels would be 1 to 1.8 and secondary school upper levels would be 1 to 2.1.

It would result to an additional permanent teacher posts of 2,350, costing the government HK\$1.49 billion. "A school with 30 classes would have three teachers more," Lam said. "The government strongly hopes that contract teachers and redundant teachers would fill these posts."

Other measures included providing a recurrent cash grant to strengthen staff support in information technology for schools, which would cost HK\$328 million and provide about 1,000 extra IT posts.

An extension of the special educational needs coordinator trial plan to all schools in the next three years and additional teaching and health staff in special schools would cost HK\$603 million and lead to an additional 869 teacher posts.

Hang Seng Management College provost Gilbert Fong Chee-fun welcomed the measures, saying they would boost competitiveness of self-financing tertiary degree providers against University Grants Committee-funded universities.

Legislator Ip Kin-yuen, representing the education functional constituency, said while he welcomed the extra funding, the increase of the teacher-to-class ratio of 0.1 was insufficient.

"The government should do more, and the ratio should increase by 0.2 or 0.3, and we demand the government to provide us with a schedule when they can meet this target," he said.

New Secretary for Education Kevin Yeung Yun-hung said: "We have to balance the different needs within the education sector. If we spend more on the class-to-teacher ratio, what does that mean to other parts of the education sector?" Yeung said subsidizing students would ensure both self-financing and UGC-funded tertiary education develop healthily.

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