

Closing Address by Second Minister David Neo

Building Confidence in Many Paths to Success

A rapidly changing world



Technology is transforming how we live, learn and work.



Our children need qualities that are deeply human

Empathy · Judgement · Ethical Decision-Making · Curiosity · Ability to Work with Others

Parents increasingly want their children to have a broader, more holistic education.



Yet, parental stress has increased.

Families are investing more time and money in



Tuition



Enrichment

IPS Findings:



~9 in 10

agreed that children
spend too much time
on tuition and
enrichment



7 in 10

would spend more on
tuition or enrichment
classes if they had the
resources



~1 in 2

felt pressured because
other parents are
doing so

When academic achievement becomes the safest currency, other valuable aspects of holistic development can be crowded out



Less time to explore interests



Excessive stress can dull children's love for learning

Perceived stakes of educational choices

Do well in
exam



“Good”
school



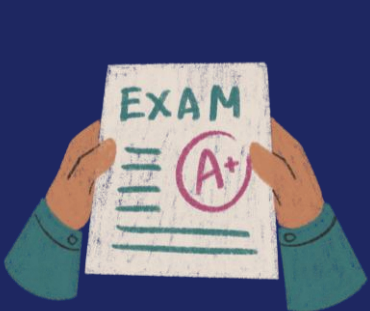
“Good”
university
course



“Good” job



“Good” life



Narrow Definition of “Good”



Academic achievement in
particular subjects



Employment in particular
fields

What we want for our children



Strength of
character



Sense of purpose



Confidence to
contribute

Broadened definition of success



More diverse and porous pathways



Helping students navigate these pathways based on their strengths, interests and aspirations



We cannot end the education “arms race” by making changes to the education system alone



Education
System



Economy



Society

Encouragingly, we are seeing signs of change beyond schools

Gradual shift in mindsets



More employers are looking beyond academic credentials



Increasing recognition that no school or degree can equip us with everything for working life



We must keep learning and growing throughout life

**A system that gives
parents confidence to
place less emphasis on
achievement and
more on holistic
development**



Steps we have taken



Over the years

Expanded
aptitude-based
admissions

Strengthened
applied and work-
study pathways



EDUCATION CONVERSATIONS

Next phase,

EDUCATION CONVERSATIONS

1

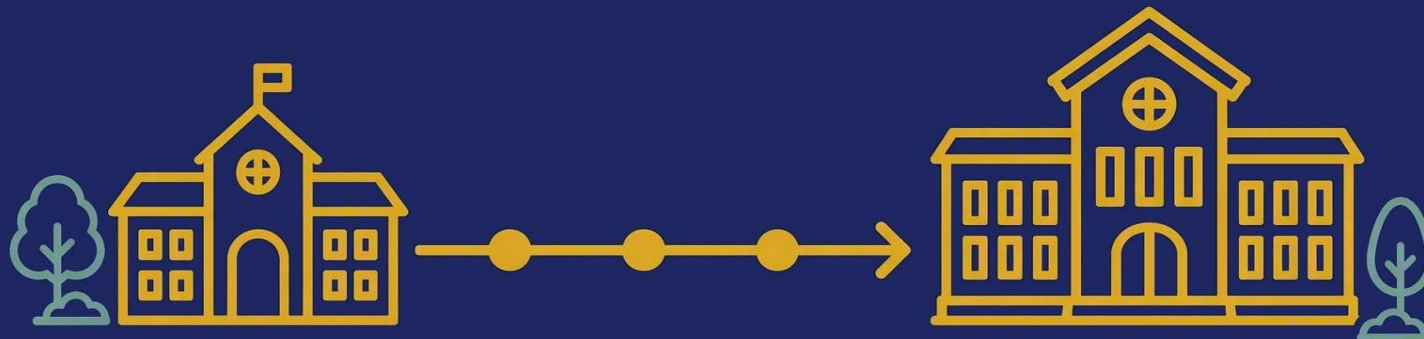
parts of the system
that most fuel the
“arms race”

2

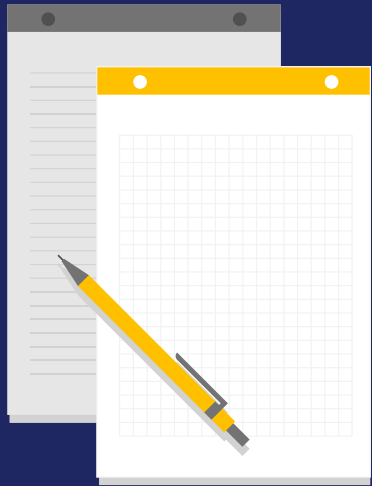
thoughtful changes to
give children more room
to grow

3

transition from primary
to secondary schools



Three topics that came up frequently in our conversations...



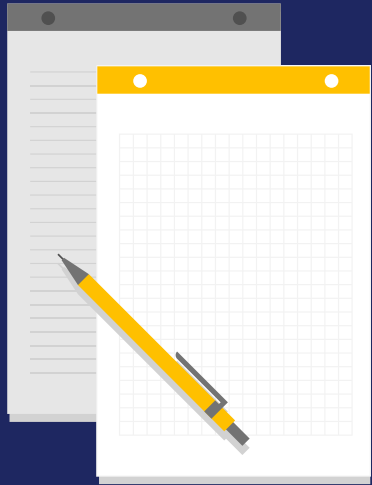
PSLE



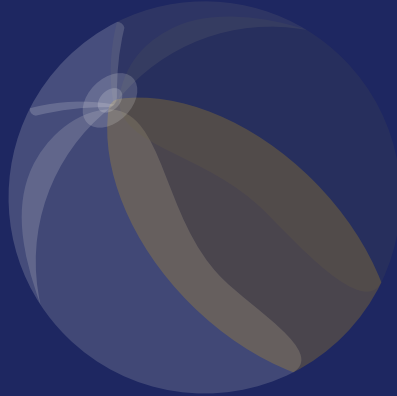
DSA



Strengthening
Our Schools



PSLE



PSLE



Assessing a child's understanding of the primary school curriculum



Providing a basis for secondary school placements



Matching our students to the appropriate subject levels in secondary school

Not all contribute equally to pressure

More than eight in ten parents see PSLE as an important milestone for children to learn to set goals and work hard

Similar proportion valued having a national examination as a fair assessment and in preparing children for secondary school



What drives much of the pressure?



PSLE results used for secondary school posting



PSLE scores determine access to preferred schools



Parents understandably feel they cannot afford to ease off

We heard many suggestions...

**Remove PSLE,
postpone it or
make it optional**

**Make the scoring
bands broader at the
top**

**Change the way
students are posted to
secondary schools**

**Strengthening more
schools**

Each idea addresses a legitimate concern. But, each may also create new pressures.

If secondary school posting were no longer based mainly on PSLE results, what should replace it?

Balloting

- Increases uncertainty and anxiety

Proximity

- Worsens social mixing by clustering students by where they live

Through-train model

- Shifts competition to Primary 1 admission
- Reduces students' ability to choose secondary school that suits interests and needs
- Which primary schools should be linked to the more sought-after secondary schools?

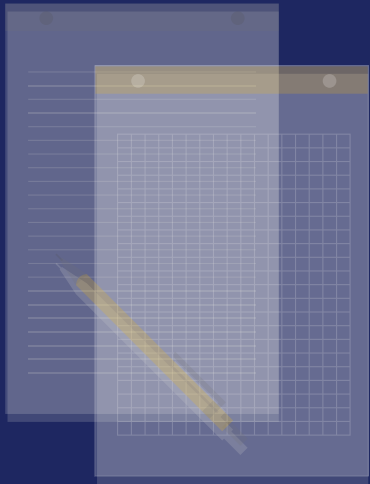
For every proposal, we should ask

How will it
give children
more room to
learn, explore
and grow?

How will it
preserve
fairness and
maintain
high
standards?

How will it
help
families
focus more
on school's
fit?

Where
might it
displace the
competition
and stress
to?



DSA

DSA was introduced to recognise students'



talents



aptitude



potential

beyond examination results

But parents and students also told us about a difficult tension



DSA has become a second front in the “arms race”



Children may prepare for the PSLE while also building a DSA portfolio



A genuine interest becomes an admissions strategy



Better-resourced families can afford specialised training that others cannot

A diversity of ideas

DSA should be scaled back
or even abolished

DSA should be expanded
to assess students more
holistically

Distribute DSA places or
talent areas more widely
across schools

Focus more on recognising
aptitude and interest

How can DSA recognise different strengths credibly, without turning every interest into an admissions strategy?

If we...

narrow DSA too sharply...

may send the message that examination performance is the only form of merit that counts

broaden without care...

may create more areas in which families feel compelled to invest to compete

place greater emphasis on aptitude...

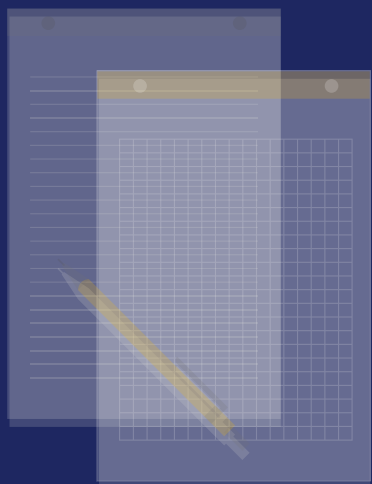
assessment could be more subjective, and hence seen as unfair

remove it entirely...

pressures may return to PSLE and send the wrong signal



**The goal is not simply more or less DSA.
It is to reconnect talent recognition with genuine development.**



**Strengthening
Our Schools**



Every school has committed educators, a distinctive culture and areas of strength.



Schools serving more disadvantaged students also receive additional manpower and funding.

We want parents to trust that schools across the system can help children thrive, and to choose more by fit than reputation

How can schools work more closely with one another and with community partners to benefit more students?

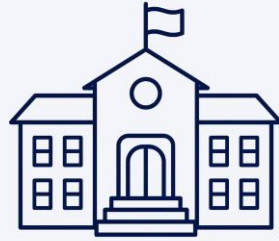
How can we make the strengths of schools across the system better known?

How do we help parents look beyond prestige and popularity to ask whether a school is the right fit for their child?

In conclusion...



Parents already value holistic development. Our task is to give them greater confidence to act on those values.



We must build on strengths of our education system, so families can give children room to grow without fearing they will lose out.



Education changes alone cannot lower the stakes entirely. Lasting change depends on employers, institutions and society.

EDUCATION CONVERSATIONS

