

Most parents happy with Singapore school system: study

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FOR MANY years, the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) has been criticised for subjecting 12-year-olds to pressure too early.

Some MPs have called for the major exam to be scrapped as it encourages the mentality that good grades are essential to securing a good future.

Yet more than one in two parents here feel that high-stakes exams, such as the PSLE, should not be postponed to a later age, according to a study by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS).

The study, released today, polled 1,500 Singaporeans and permanent residents who have children across 184 primary schools. Parents were asked about their perceptions of primary schools, possible policy changes and the future of the education landscape.

Broadly, the results indicate that the vast majority of parents are generally pleased with the education system's structure, processes and outcomes, said Dr Mathew Mathews, who led the study.

But the IPS senior research fellow also flagged contradictions. While most think every school is a good school and acknowledge the importance of a values-based education, many still put weight on academic results, he told The New Paper.

The study shows that 70.8 per cent of the parents surveyed cited helping children with tests and exams in school as a cause of stress or anxiety. And for high-stakes exams, such as the PSLE, 57.5 per cent of them felt they should not be postponed.

Close to three in four parents also saw high PSLE scores as an achievement-centred indicator of a good school.

While about half of the parents agreed that employers would prefer those who have skills for the job rather than paper qualifications, most still believe that university qualifications would be more important than joining the workforce and acquiring skills through schemes like SkillsFuture.

MP for Jalan Besar GRC Denise Phua, who chairs the Government Parliamentary Committee for Education, told TNP that while she is heartened by parents placing more emphasis on character building and other aspects of a more holistic education, she noted that they are still overly stressed over their children's academic results.

"This means more work needs to be done: doing more at the systemic level to remove the excess stress caused by high-stakes exams and changing the ingrained mindset of parents that exam results are the only passport to a good life."

Reiterating her call in previous parliamentary debates to scrap the PSLE, Ms Phua suggested a 10-year school career option instead - one that does not sacrifice academic rigour and uses subject-based banding so each student learns at his own pace.

She also asked for help for employers to hire and pay people based on non-academic criteria. She said: "In a disruptive future economy, the ability to quickly learn and relearn is more valid than one's past academic record."

Cheered

The Ministry of Education told TNP it was heartened by the study and said: "Over the years, we have taken steps to move away from an overemphasis on academic results, such as not naming the top PSLE scorers and doing away with school rankings.

"Last year, we announced changes to the PSLE scoring system, as another step to move away from an overemphasis on academic results.

"We are hopeful that with the support and partnership of parents, such efforts will contribute to the balanced and well-rounded development of our children."