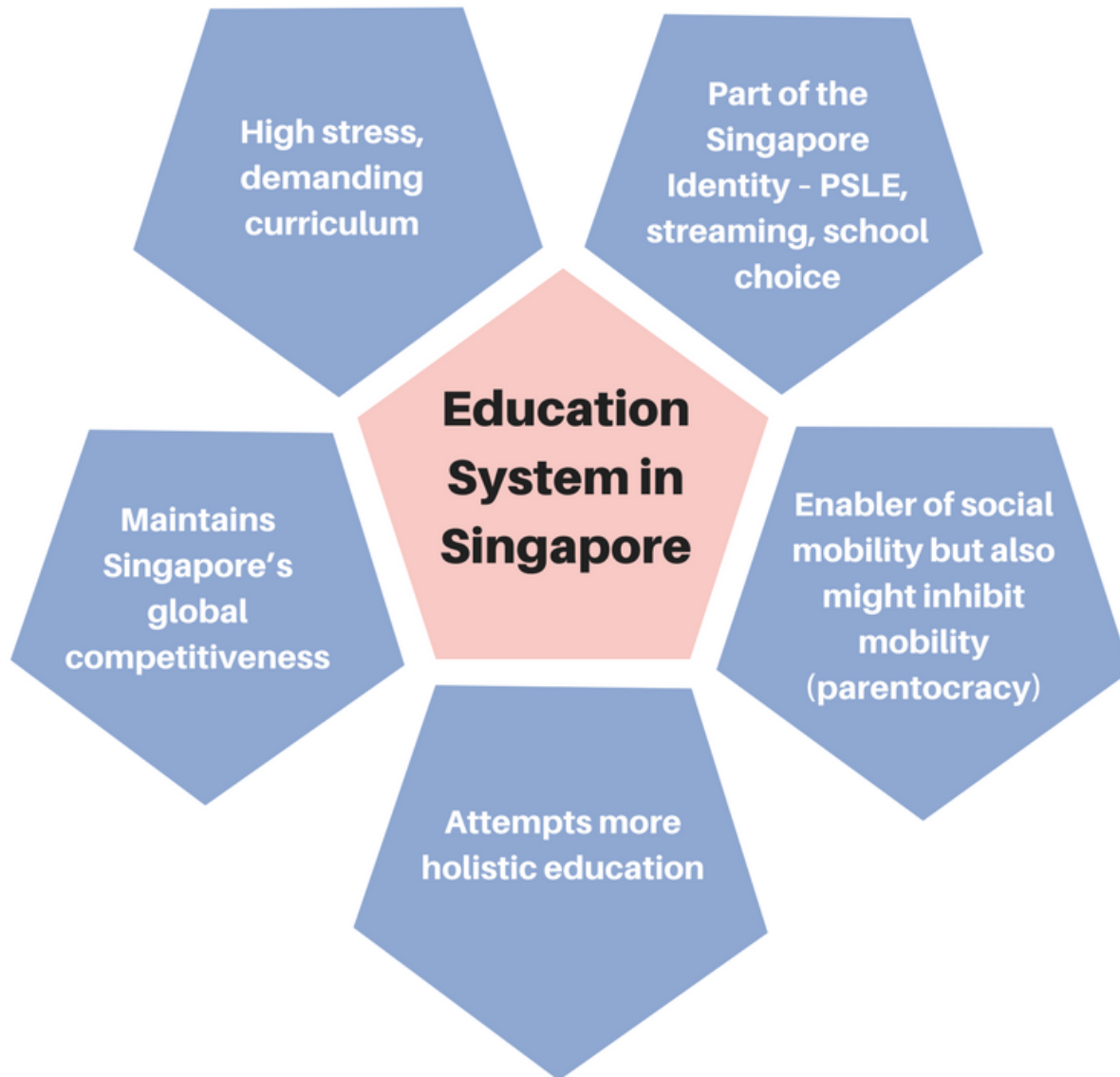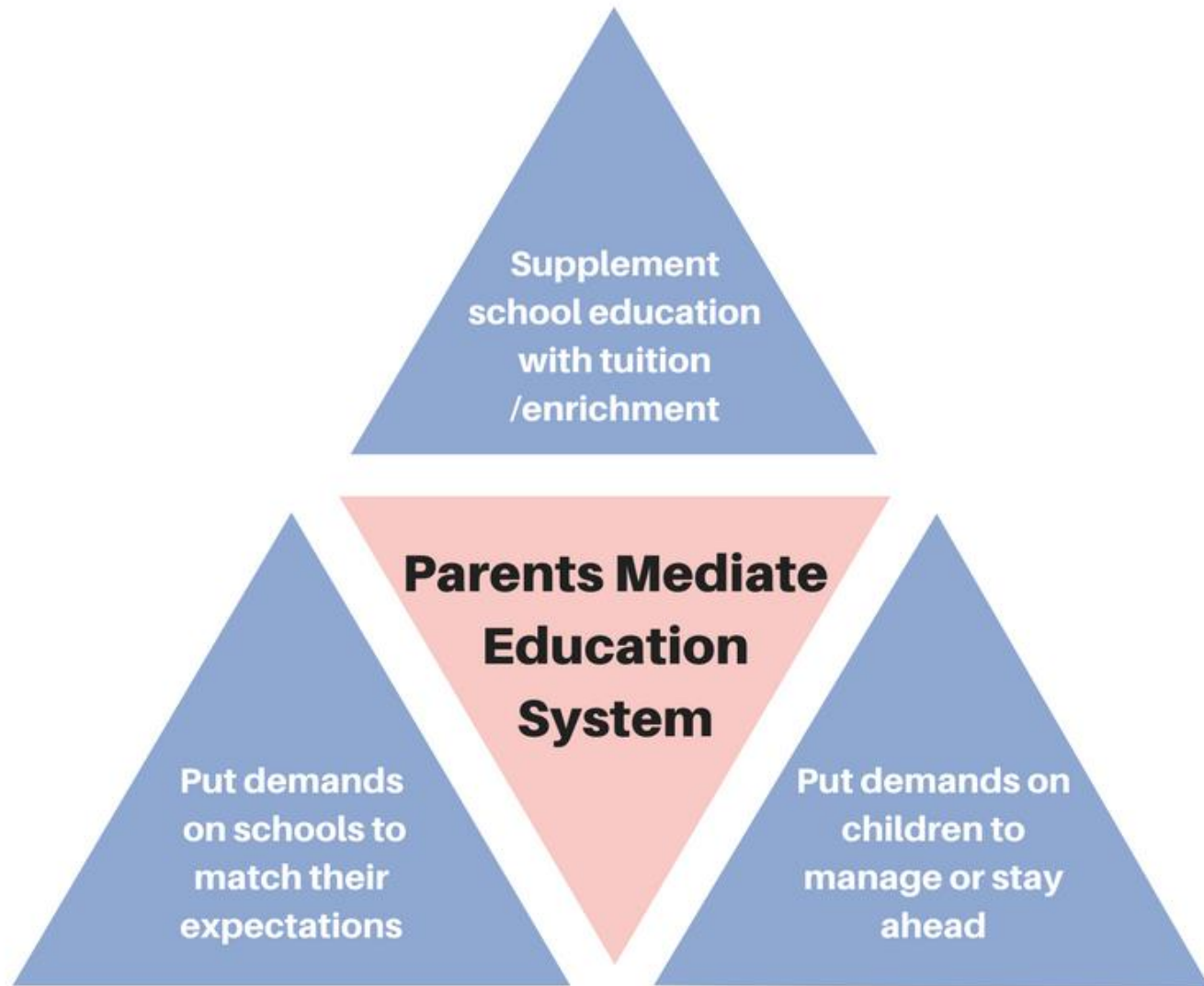# Uncovering parents' mindsets: Schools, Stress and Support

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Dominant Discourse on Singapore's Education

# Dominant Discourse on Singapore Parents and Education

Supplement school education with tuition /enrichment

Parents Mediate Education System

Put demands on schools to match their expectations

**Put demands on children to manage or stay ahead**

Survey on parental perceptions of education

- In 2016, IPS conducted a survey examining parental perceptions of primary school education
- Household survey using DOS framework
- Drop-off pick up methodology, achieved 68% response rate
- 1,500 Singapore resident parents who had children in practically every Singapore primary schools
- The survey aimed to uncover parents' worldviews across a myriad of facets such as stress, outcomes of education and the holistic vs. academic aspects of education
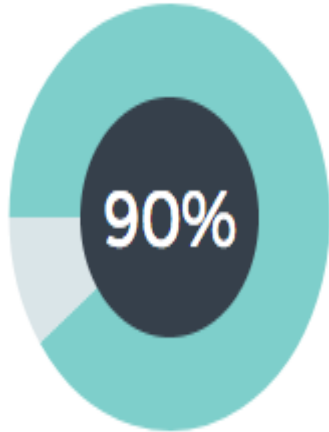
90% Of respondents say that primary schools in Singapore provide a high quality education
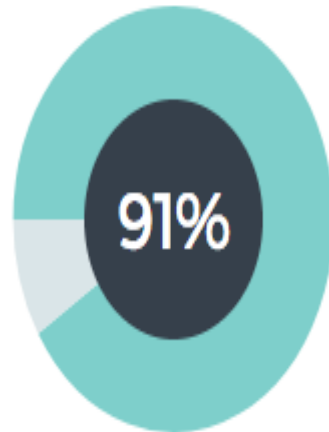
91% Of respondents say that Singapore's education is among the best in the world
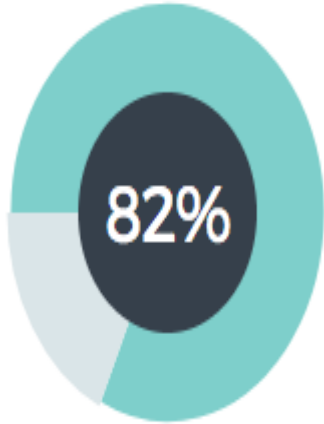
82% Of respondents say that the school their child is in is considered a good school
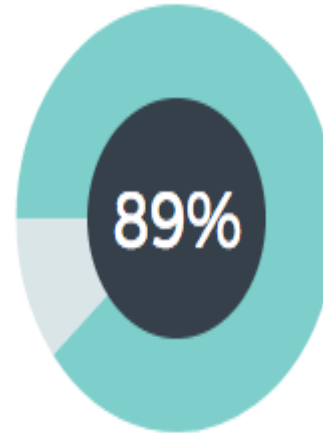
89% Of respondents say that school has good facilities

91% Of respondents say that teachers care for their students' socio-emotional development
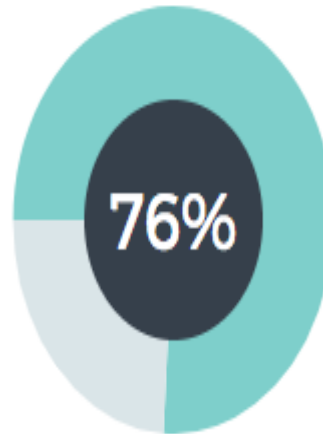
76% Of respondents say that schools provide a competitive environment

Creating a Typology of Parents

- K –means Cluster analysis used to analyse dataset to classify parents into different types
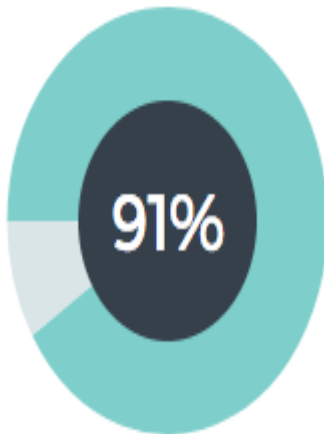- The three clusters are NOT perfect representation of all parents
- Features associated with each cluster are probabilities

Perceived importance of results achievement features of schools	Perceived importance of process development features of schools
Pervasiveness of Stress	Ideals of parental involvement to ensure child is adequately supported through primary school
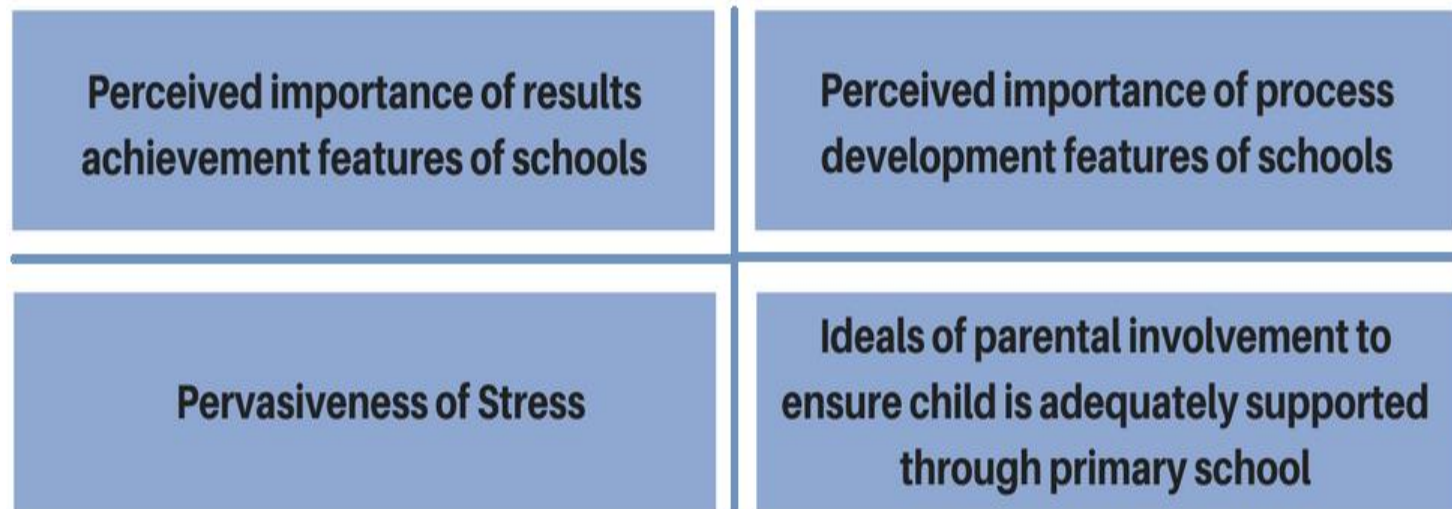
3 Types of Singaporean Parents

	New School	Old School	Loving Lion
	34% of Respondents	29% of Respondents	30% of Respondents
Housing Type	High	Low	Medium-High
Education Level	High	Low	Medium-High
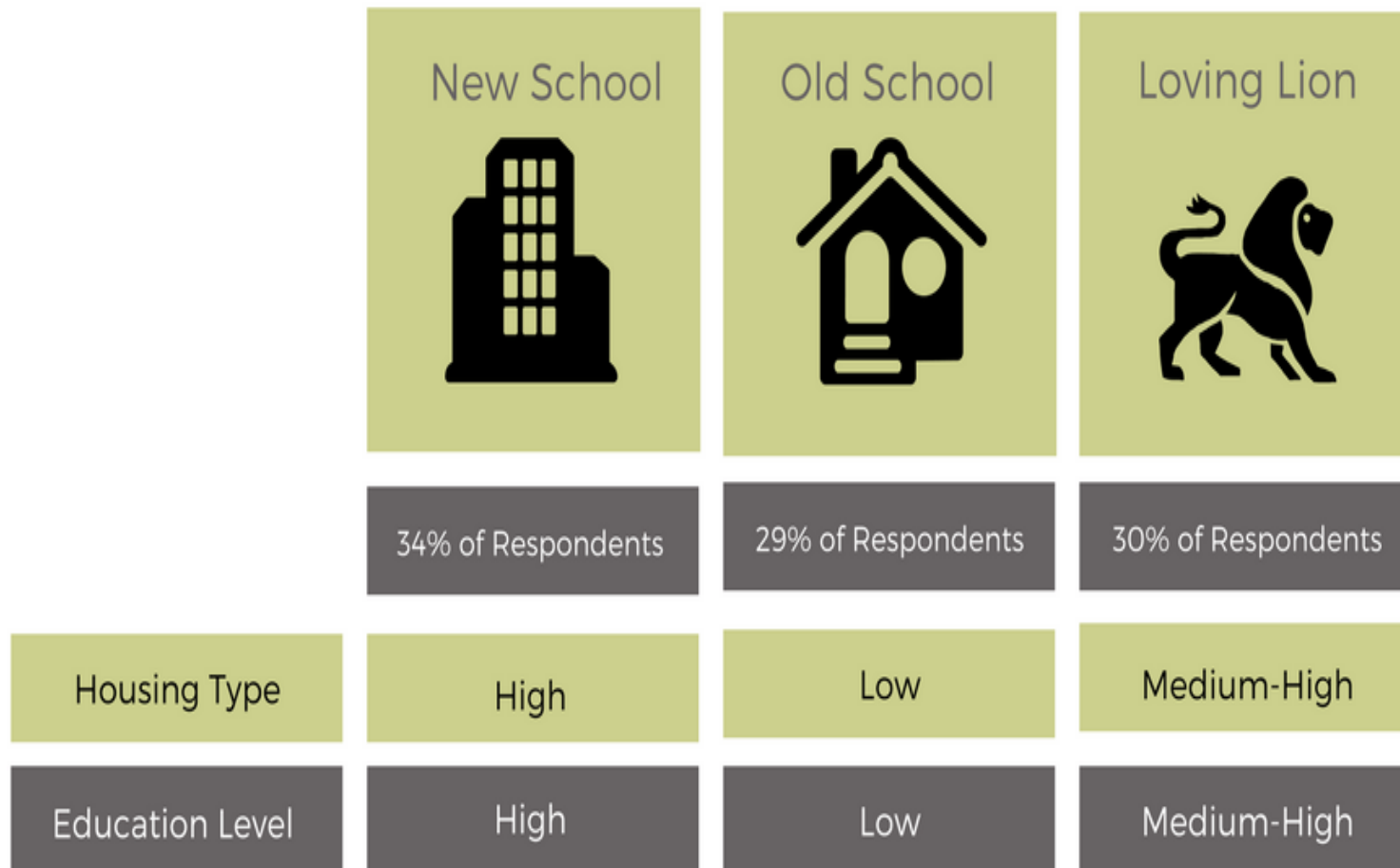
Defining Cluster Characteristics

	New-school parents	Old-school parents	Loving Lion parents
Importance of results-achievement features of school	Low	Medium	High
Importance of process-development features of school	High	Low	High
Pervasiveness of stress	Medium	Medium	High
Ideals of Parental Involvement	Low	High	High

Key Questions Parents Ask

- What I should do for my child?
- What I expect the system (school/government) to do for my child?
- What is causing me stress?

Depending on the type of parent, views may differ

WHAT I SHOULD DO FOR MY CHILD?

Ideals of Parental involvement

	Important (Somewhat Important /Important)		
To adequately support their children through primary education, parents should:	New-school parents	Old-school parents	Loving Lion parents
Find ways to provide enrichment programs which the school doesn't provide	6.1% (43.1%)	40.6% (75.9%)	49.5% (80.9%)
Ensure their child has minimum stress	34.4% (85.9%)	72.4% (97.5%)	69.2% (96.7%)
Ensure their child has all the resource to excel	37.5% (89.4%)	75.1% (98.8%)	84.8% (99.7%)
Ensure their child has adequate assistance with homework at home	28.3% (91.2%)	71.5% (99.4%)	77.4% (99.4%)
Ensure that they keep in touch with what the school and teachers are doing for their children	39.1% (93.7%)	77.6% (99.7%)	85.9% (99.3%)

Parental Roles

	Strongly Agree (Strongly Agree/Agree)			
Agreement with the role of parents in their children's primary education	Total	New-school parents	Old-school parents	Loving Lion parents
Parents should discipline their kids if they do not perform well in exams	68.2%	7.7% (51.8%)	19.2% (76.2%)	33.0% (77.9%)
It is a parent's duty to ensure that his/her child performs well in school	87.6%	17.5% (79.2%)	28.6% (92.4%)	47.3% (92.4%)
Parents should restrict their children's leisure time so that they can concentrate on their academic work	52.8%	6.3% (47.6%)	8.4% (58.4%)	15.2% (54.1%)
Parents should emphasize providing a happy learning environment rather than good grades	94.3%	49.3% (96.5%)	33.8% (93.2%)	56.7% (93.4%)

Parenting Style

Strongly Agree (Strongly Agree/Agree)				
Strongly Agree/Agree	Total	New-school parents	Old-school parents	Loving Lion parents
I feel the need to point out my child's past behavioral problems to make sure that he/she will not do it again	92.5%	30.3% (89.9%)	26.5% (93.8%)	49.6% (94.1%)
I yell when I disapprove of my child's behavior	41.0%	1.8% (36.0%)	4.3% (42.7%)	6.2% (44.7%)
I use criticism to make my child improve his/her behavior	35.0%	2.2% (30.1%)	4.1% (37.1%)	10.0% (38.5%)

Time on Education Outside School

Hours/week	Mean (Median)		
	New-school parents	Old-school parents	Loving Lion parents
Time child spends on homework	6.5 (5.0)	6.1 (5.0)	6.9 (5.0)
Time child spends on tuition	2.9 (2.0)	2.9 (2.0)	3.8 (3.0)
Time child spends on enrichment classes	1.5 (1.0)	1.0 (0)	1.6 (1.0)
Time child spends being coached by parents/family members/relatives	4.1 (3.0)	4.0 (3.0)	5.3 (4.0)

Spending on Tuition and Enrichment

$/month	Mean (Median)		
	New-school parents	Old-school parents	Loving Lion parents
Money spent on tuition	297.58 (200.00)	235.58 (180.00)	353.13 (280.00)
Money spent on enrichment classes	131.92 (50.00)	71.86 (0)	126.56 (17.50)

WHAT I EXPECT THE SYSTEM TO DO FOR MY CHILD?

Outcomes of Schooling (achievements)

You will know your child has received a good primary education if…	Very Important/Essential			
	Total	New-school parents	Old-school parents	Loving Lion parents
Achievement outcomes				
Awards for CCA	21.7%	**10.9%**	20.0%	34.2%
Good PSLE scores	48.2%	**27.9%**	50.0%	69.0%
Good academic foundation for secondary school	65.0%	**56.7%**	55.1%	83.0%

Outcomes of Schooling (holistic)

	Very Important/Essential			
	Total	New-school parents	Old-school parents	Loving Lion parents
Holistic outcomes				
Self-discipline for learning	75.5%	75.7%	**59.8%**	90.4%
Good character	80.6%	84.9%	**60.5%**	95.4%
Good social skills	73.7%	73.2%	**57.1%**	89.7%
Leadership skills	59.1%	52.0%	**47.0%**	79.3%
Passion for learning	78.9%	83.9%	**58.4%**	93.2%

Perceived Importance of Results-Achievement Features of Schools

Important/Very Important/Essential feature of good school	New-school parents	Old-school parents	Loving Lion parents
Lots of homework	**9.3%**	23.2%	38.3%
Competitive environment	**42.7%**	65.7%	80.5%

Perceived Importance of Process-Development Features of Schools

Very Important/Essential	New-school parents	Old-school parents	Loving Lion parents
Emphasis on character and values	76.0%	**35.0%**	92.3%
Caters to individual students' needs, interests and strengths	67.3%	**30.8%**	90.8%
Teachers who care for the students' social-emotional development	81.1%	**47.5%**	95.6%

Curriculum Emphasis

More importance should be accorded to	New-school parents	Old-school parents	Loving Lion parents
Respect for authority	39.1%	57.3%	66.2%
English Language	48.5%	70.8%	72.5%
Mathematics	34.2%	61.3%	62.0%
Singapore's history	23.1%	33.3%	38.2%
Traditional family values	53.7%	55.5%	71.3%
Current Affairs	39.8%	29.5%	46.8%

Future Prospects for Child

Strongly Agree/Agree	New-school parents	Old-school parents	Loving Lion parents
Doing a degree full time at a university will help secure better job opportunities compared to doing a part-time degree at the same university while working full-time	**58.7%**	68.1%	70.1%
Going overseas for a university education will help secure better job options for my child compared to studying at local universities	**28.3%**	35.8%	39.8%

Desired Policy changes

	Strongly Agree (Strongly Agree/Agree)		
	New-school parents	Old-school parents	Loving Lion parents
Postpone high-stake examinations like PSLE	15.0% (42.8%)	8.9% (38.0%)	23.2% (46.2%)
Standardize learning materials in all primary schools	28.3% (82.5%)	18.6% (87.6%)	45.2% (87.7%)
Give more emphasis to non-academic aspects of education such as character	43.4% (92.9%)	19.9% (88.1%)	41.6% (94.5%)
Reduce amount of homework in primary school	20.2% (68.9%)	13.3% (66.7%)	28.2% (68.7%)
Make the primary school curriculum more manageable	30.5% (92.1%)	19.5% (93.6%)	43.0% (96.1%)
Reduce primary school class sizes so that each child gets more educational support in school	39.5% (86.7%)	26.1% (85.5%)	54.0% (90.1%)

WHAT IS STRESSING ME OUT AS A PARENT?

Pervasiveness of Stress

Strongly Agree/Agree	New-school parents	Old-school parents	Loving Lion parents
Helping child with many tests and examinations	64.2%	66.2%	**82.8%**
Not knowing how to assist child because syllabus is too challenging	50.3%	58.2%	**68.5%**
Concerned that their child may lose out in the education system in the long run	54.8%	63.5%	**73.8%**
Having to help child with school work while ferrying him to and from school/tuition/enrichment	56.7%	67.9%	**75.8%**

Incidence of Stress

Monthly/Weekly	New-school parents	Old-school parents	Loving Lion parents
Your child exhibited signs of anxiety over school/homework	24.2%	25.7%	33.8%
Your child had to sacrifice sleep to finish their homework	18.0%	15.3%	25.9%
Your child told you s(he) was not happy with teachers	9.0%	7.2%	13.1%
You and your spouse argued over the education of your child	3.6%	8.0%	14.1%
You had to discipline your child because of schoolwork	32.6%	32.8%	42.9%
You felt stressed about your child's education	23.0%	25.0%	41.8%

CONCLUSIONS

Differences between clusters of parents

- Parents differ in worldviews – across what they expect of themselves, their children and schools.

- Ultimately ALL parents want to emphasise a happy environment rather than a focus on good grades – however how this is implemented may differ substantially

- Loving Lions want the most for their children – they have high expectations of what parents and the school system should do. Inevitably they are the most stressed.

- Old School parents have fairly similar results aspirations as Loving Lions but are not as clued in to newer directions of education such as the emphasis on character and values / passion for learning (which are crucial for their future well-being). They also have lesser means to support their results-aspirations.

- New school parents espouse values that are in step with de-emphasising academic pressures and instead focus on the holistic development of the child. Nonetheless they do have the resources to take care of their children's academic needs.

- We should consider how policies and new directions in education affect different groups of parents.

- Some groups are likely to push the trend (and perhaps be rewarded) - Loving Lions.

- They will embrace new demands of education but keep the old demands intact as well. They probably juggle well but in reality they keep up the perpetual stress in the system. They should not be the yardstick of parenting.

- We should also consider which group of parents need more support so that their children can better benefit from education.

- Old School parents need to be engaged on what are the crucial features of the future education/work landscape so that they can adjust their expectations.

- They also need more resources if the other group of parents set the trends.