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Class, let's talk politics

Have political education in schools, so students can make wise decisions

Letter from Kwan Jin Yao

I READ with tremendous interest the comments made by Education Minister Ng Eng Hen in the report "Ng: Competition is good for politics in Singapore" (April 12).

With the changing global climate and evolving sentiment on the ground in Singapore, it seems inevitable that with the passing of each General Election, political parties — especially from the Opposition — would be enthusiastic to work the ground and begin to connect with the electorate.

The enhanced competition highlighted brings about viable benefits not just in terms of keeping the incumbent party on its toes year after year, but also generating new initiatives or ideas to improve existing schemes and programmes.

While Dr Ng might be right to contend that the Government has not been "short of ideas", the increased diversity in terms of perspectives during the parliamentary processes could enhance the breadth and

depth of policies and proposals even after the elections.

After all, while politics primarily revolves around parliamentary debates and rolling out feasible policies, it is fundamentally about making lives better for all Singaporeans. I am confident that all political parties here are premised strongly on the latter.

If the administration does echo Dr Ng's sentiments on the benefits brought about by political competition, it would be a wonderful option to increase the level of political education in schools.

While basic exposure to politics is provided for tertiary students in the three local colleges — through ministerial forums and informal dialogues with politicians on both sides — it would be constructive to provide students in institutes of higher learning with fundamental lessons and discussions on politics.

Innovative lessons can be incorporated in terms of the sharing of varying political

systems — historically and currently — as well as an assortment of political ideologies.

As a student, I cringed when my counterparts knew nothing about the left and right on the political spectrum, and more than happy to lead their own lives and go with the flow.

Political education would not only rid individuals of their apathy and lethargy, but also root students with a greater sense of belonging. The advent of the Internet has made the flow of information inevitable, so why not give it a more tangible form in institutions?

An education in politics, in the school context, would allow students to read more and comprehend the policies proposed or enacted by the different political parties.

The enhanced sensibilities and intellect would empower them to make wise decisions — whether they are in the public sector or not — in the future. In this sense, political education does go a long, long way.

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