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More help for less well-known schools?

Letter from Chng Hee Kok

I REFER to the report "Focus on the parents: MM" (Jan 25). It is always a pleasure and eye-opener to read the Minister Mentor's views — in this instance, his observation that background makes a difference to a child's education.

For years, one has been able to surmise this, if you look at the make-up of President's Scholars and other measures of high academic performance. The trend points to high performers coming from better homes (HDB five-room flats and private). I raised this years ago, that the playing field is going to widen and that a President's Scholar born and raised in a three-room flat is an aberration.

This problem is not easily resolved. Even MM's suggestion that those from the lower strata of society take their children to libraries, while a good idea, cannot be easily achieved. Those who are less educated have difficulty holding

down a job (or must work two jobs) and have bigger worries than taking their children to the library. More importantly, there is a lack of intellectual exchange between the parent and the child.

As MM said, the better schools attract better students, teachers and facilities. One way is to fine-tune things, such that there is incentive for good teachers to gravitate to less well-known schools and funding to improve the facilities.

At the same time, we have to maximise our national potential by focusing on the better schools. How to strike this balance? Take the analogy of a family that has two children, one more intelligent than the other. Most parents would pay more attention to the less capable one, because the capable child is better able to care for himself.

Maybe the State can adopt a similar approach. Let's say we fund top schools at \$x per student. Can we fund less capable schools at \$x-plus per student?

Has upgrading raised productivity?

Letter from Kwan Jin Yao

THE report "Can we compare local, foreign worker output?" (Jan 21) presents interesting viewpoints to a parliamentary query by Madam Ho Geok Choo on the possibility of contrasting local and foreign worker productivity.

The perspectives bring into focus two contentious issues: The relentless effort to raise productivity, as well as the influx of foreign workers and corresponding concerns.

Should we compare local and foreign worker output? This is not the most beneficial idea. Beyond the difficulties with gathering and segregating data, such a differentiation would not yield significant benefits for productivity efforts and might rouse sentiments from either camp.

Bigger questions should be asked of the Government: Whether projected productivity targets have been met, have involved workers genuinely benefited, or if the initiatives instituted have been adequately successful.

Instead of evaluating output contrasts across backgrounds, it makes sense to aggregate workers' output — individually or collectively — before and after they go for upgrading courses, so as to gauge the latter's effectiveness. Cross-sector comparisons — for manufacturing, services and construction — would give an added dimension for review. These studies would help dispel worries that productivity courses may not be yielding the desired results.

In the mood for BABY

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By Eveline Gan

"I'm at a point in my life when I think life will be more complete with kids. I love the sense of inclusiveness in a big family," said artiste Alan Tern, who has four siblings and nine nieces and nephews.

Despite their efforts to conceive, things had not gone smoothly for Alan and his artiste wife Priscelia. He tore his ligament a few months ago, while she injured her big toe. Priscelia said these minor accidents were a real mood dampener. But the crux is their different work schedules.

"I had hoped to 'wrap up' with three kids by 35, but now I'm already 32!" she said. "People have been telling us not to wait too long to have kids. But when we were younger, we never really thought much of it. When we finally got down to it, we realised that making a baby isn't as easy as we thought."

Work-life coach David Lock of Arrows with Soul said: "It is common to see parenthood delayed due to a high premium placed on career and lifestyle. Especially with work taking up a lot of our time and energy, many will default towards more comfortable, light and short-term oriented

Take the Parenthood Pledge online at www.maybebaby.sg or when the I Love Children Bus visits Tampines Telepark on Feb 15.

choices. Having children is perceived to be putting on brakes on everything else. To some, it may be too much to ask for.

"For holistic success in our work and life, we need to have clarity in our core values and life priorities. Core values act as our anchor — helping us channel our focus on the truly important things; keeping us on track through changes and distractions. Having children may seem inconvenient at a time when your career is peaking, but there are many who have made the decision to

have children and still do well in their careers."

For Alan and Priscelia, their busy schedules may be a hinderance but the pair is clear about their priorities and confident about meeting the challenges of work and parenthood.

As a show of their commitment and resolution, the couple, married in 2007, took the Parenthood Pledge on Jan 1 this year. The pledge is an initiative started in 2010 by voluntary welfare organisation I Love Children (ILC). About 400 couples have signed the pledge so far. The first 100 couples to conceive by this June will receive \$300 worth of vouchers from IKEA, a partner of ILC.

Now that they are trying for a baby, their most important priority is "to be not too stressed and ensuring we get into the mood whenever we can", Priscelia added candidly.



Having children may seem inconvenient at a time when your career is peaking, but there are many who have made the decision to have children and still do well in their careers.

Work-life coach David Lock