

Don't Stigmatise Academic Successes

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FOLLOWING the Ministry of Education's decision to discontinue the practice of naming top students in the national examinations, one wonders if this cosmetic move has yielded significant changes or improvements in attitudes ("The going got tough, but they got the As"; last Saturday).

Even if the move is meant to be purely symbolic, it has been a half-hearted endeavour to broaden the definitions of success, and by extension reduce the purported disproportionate emphasis on grades and results per se.

Vis-a-vis sporting and artistic achievements, for instance, I find it strange that we have no issue celebrating the successes of athletes and artists who have excelled in their respective fields, but are uncomfortable with naming top scorers. Is the act of naming top students detrimental?

Obtaining remarkable results from gruelling exams is no mean feat, and the learning journeys of these top students can inspire many others.

The message has to be consistent. If the ministry is insistent that every school is a good school, and that trumpeting one's accolades is a bad thing, then the ban has to be widened. The ministry should stop schools from plastering their fences and walls with banners boasting percentages, statistics, prizes and awards.

Schools should not be trumpeting the number of distinctions obtained by their students, performances in each subject, or the admittance rates to colleges.

But we know how ludicrous that sounds, because some form of positive recognition spurs and empowers. Most rational parents are cognisant that while grades are important, these do not dictate who their children are.

Tests are but barometers of our own performance, for us to constructively identify our strengths and weaknesses.

We celebrate the top scorers and schools because their hard work has paid off, and public affirmation can be beneficial. At the same time, they are strong reminders for us to remain humble, to stay grounded, and to recognise that there is so much more to learn and aspire towards. The knowledge that someone is better than us can drive our work ethic.

If parents do place undue pressure on their children to top the rankings consistently, then it is pedantic mindsets that need to change, not the system. We should not stigmatise academic successes.

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