

Survey Analysis: Updating Our Education System

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Executive Summary

EveryChild.SG has an open survey on its website to gather feedback on its proposals for transforming primary school education, aimed at reducing academic stress, enhancing teacher and student support, and fostering holistic development. This report analyses the over 700 responses submitted over the 2 year period from November 2022 to October 2024.

The findings indicate overwhelming support for EveryChild.SG's proposals across demographics, with particularly strong backing from parents and educators. Survey responses advocate for policies that address academic pressure, prioritize well-being, and support teachers in delivering a well-rounded education. The data and direct feedback from educators, parents, and concerned individuals highlight the need for timely and significant system updates.

Key Findings

Quantitative Insights

Based on responses from **711 participants**, the following data illustrates widespread support for the key updates proposed to the education system:

- **Demographic Breakdown of Respondents:**
 - **Singapore citizens:** 634 or **89.2%** (rest were Singapore PRs)
 - **Parents/ Guardians:** 621 or **87.3%** (representing a broad commitment to the welfare of students in the system)
 - **Teachers/ Educators:** 226 or **31.8%** (providing professional insight from within the system)
 - **Concerned individuals (not parent/ educator/ student):** 60 or 8.4%

- **Support Levels for Key Updates:**

- **Smaller Class Sizes (25 students or fewer):** An overwhelming **94.9%** (675) support this measure, with parents and educators emphasizing that smaller classes improve teacher-student interaction and individualized learning.
- **Optional PSLE and Through-Train System:** **81.0%** (576) endorse these options, with many advocating for reduced exam stress and a greater focus on holistic development.
- **More and Better-trained Support Staff** (e.g. psychologists, learning support teachers): **93.8%** (667) of respondents support more trained support staff to aid both students and teachers, highlighting the need for accessible mental health and learning support resources.

Key Messages for Policymakers

The quantitative data reflects that the proposed updates resonate deeply with those directly engaged with or affected by the education system. The high support for these initiatives emphasizes not only the acceptance but the urgency of these changes. Respondents believe that these measures will ensure a supportive and balanced environment for all students, enabling them to thrive academically and personally.

In-Depth Analysis of Open-Ended Responses

Qualitative feedback from 370 open-ended responses provides further depth to the quantitative findings, highlighting major themes, personal stories, and compelling reasons for policy shifts.

1. Stress and Burden of Exams (31.8%)

The PSLE exam is frequently cited as a source of intense stress for students and their families, with calls for reducing the high stakes associated with it. The current system's singular focus on exams limits students' learning experiences and hinders personal growth.

- **Sample Quotes:**

- *"The PSLE is not used to support a child's learning but rather as an absolute indicator of a child's academic ability, which creates a lot of stress."*
- *"The focus should be on learning, growth, and developing curiosity, not just on the exam results."*

- *"Students feel immense pressure from exams that define their academic paths, overshadowing their diverse strengths."*

Recommendation: Implement alternative assessments to reduce exam-related stress and allow students to explore their full potential. Consider piloting an optional PSLE program that allows for Through-Train options in select schools to assess the long-term impact on student well-being and educational outcomes.

2. Teacher and Student Support Needs (28.0%)

Educators and parents alike stress the importance of additional support for teachers and smaller class sizes, noting that these measures would allow teachers to provide tailored attention to each student. The need for mental health support is especially prominent, as many students experience stress from academic and social pressures.

- **Sample Quotes:**

- *"Teachers are stretched too thin, and we cannot expect them to cater to individual needs without additional support."*
- *"Smaller class sizes are essential for building rapport and tailoring materials to meet the unique needs of each class."*
- *"Students and teachers need mental health support to address stress and create a healthier learning environment."*

Recommendation: Introduce a 25-student cap per class to improve individualized support. Increase recruitment of specialized staff such as clinical psychologists, learning support specialist teachers, and teaching assistants to ensure that teachers can meet diverse student needs effectively.

3. Updating PSLE System (17.2%)

Updating the PSLE system is a prominent concern, with many respondents advocating for options that reduce stress and open pathways that recognize diverse talents. There is broad consensus that the current system's heavy academic focus does not cater to the varied strengths of each child.

- **Sample Quotes:**

- *"An optional PSLE would give schools more flexibility in catering to students with diverse needs."*
- *"The current system, focusing on academic rigor, doesn't reflect each child's unique abilities."*
- *"Education should allow students to grow as well-rounded individuals beyond exams."*

Recommendation: Provide alternative, flexible pathways by piloting an optional PSLE in selected schools. This initiative could allow for a broader focus on skill development and encourage a more diverse set of strengths in students.

4. Culture and Broader Educational Goals (12.5%)

Respondents emphasize that updates to the education system should reflect Singaporean cultural values, fostering not only academic skills but also social and emotional development. There is strong support for learning models that focus on adaptability, creativity, and cultural pride.

- **Sample Quotes:**

- *"Education should not just be about academics; it should shape students into well-rounded individuals ready for life's challenges."*
- *"We need a cultural shift to embrace creativity and curiosity, similar to Finland's education model."*
- *"Education is intertwined with national culture; fostering creativity in a structured environment will lead to true progress."*

Recommendation: Align curriculum content with cultural and social values, promoting creativity, adaptability, and social responsibility. This approach will help students develop the skills needed to navigate an evolving world confidently.

5. Holistic Development and Learning Environment (10.5%)

Many respondents stress the importance of play-based and experiential learning approaches to foster curiosity, creativity, and social-emotional skills. These comments underscore the belief that students should enjoy a balanced, less pressurized educational experience, especially in the early years.

- **Sample Quotes:**

- *"Our system is too focused on academics; we should allow children to learn through play and exploration."*
- *"We need to create a learning environment that encourages curiosity and lifelong learning."*

Recommendation: Encourage play-based learning and experiential education to cultivate curiosity and intrinsic motivation. Establish frameworks for early childhood and primary education that prioritize holistic development over academic rigor.

Educator and Ex-Educator Perspectives

Feedback from educators and ex-educators reveals specific concerns about classroom demands, the need for holistic student development, and the critical importance of teacher support. Below are the primary themes expressed by educators, along with recommendations tailored to their insights.

1. **Teacher and Student Support Needs (34.9%)**
 - Educators advocated for smaller class sizes and additional support staff, noting that these resources are critical for creating an inclusive, responsive educational environment.
2. **Stress and Burden of Exams (31.8%)**
 - Many educators argued that exams like the PSLE place excessive pressure on students, suggesting a shift to assessments that focus on diverse strengths and foster growth.
3. **Holistic Development and Learning Environment (17.5%)**
 - Educators highlighted the need for play-based and experiential learning to cultivate curiosity and reduce early academic pressure.
4. **Culture and Broader Educational Goals (15.9%)**
 - Educators advocated for curriculum changes that align with societal values, helping students become adaptable, lifelong learners.

Recommendations Summary

1. **Reduce Class Sizes:** Cap class sizes at 25 to allow for individualized support, improving student outcomes and teacher-student relationships.
2. **Optional PSLE and Through-Train Options:** Pilot an optional PSLE to provide flexible pathways for diverse talents, reducing exam-related stress and allowing for more holistic student assessment.
3. **Increase Specialized Staff:** Invest in recruiting and training specialized staff (e.g. psychologists, learning support educators) to relieve teacher workloads and provide targeted support for students.
4. **Promote Holistic Development:** Implement frameworks for play-based and experiential learning in early education to foster curiosity, creativity, and well-being.
5. **Align with Cultural Values:** Integrate Singaporean cultural values within the curriculum, fostering social responsibility, adaptability, and a love for learning.

Conclusion

Survey data and qualitative feedback underscore a clear public demand for updates to the education system that address academic stress, support teachers, and emphasize holistic development. By implementing these recommendations, policymakers can create an education system that nurtures well-rounded individuals, ready to thrive in an evolving world, while preserving their well-being and love for learning.

**Methodological note: Initial qualitative coding and text generation were assisted by AI tools (ChatGPT-4o), with human review for validation and interpretation.*