2019

**MENDAKI
Policy Digest**

Yayasan
MENDAKI

MENDAKI
Policy Digest 2019

CEO's
Foreword

The MENDAKI Policy Digest serves to provide thought-provoking insights into education and socio-economic issues concerning Singapore's Malay/Muslim community. Against the backdrop of national policy discourse, the Digest gives much-needed Malay/Muslim perspectives into trends and changes that affect our students and families. We achieve that by putting together opinion articles, research papers and policy infographics which shed light on a particular policy topic impacting our community. Indeed, over the years the Digest has become the foremost reference for policy and community practitioners, academics, tertiary students and other stakeholders with an interest in the progress of the Malay/Muslim community.

The theme for the MENDAKI Policy Digest 2019 is **'Seizing the Future: Inclusive Education and the Malay/Muslim Community'**. The past year has seen several policy initiatives that help foster a more inclusive education system for our students and families. In September 2018, the Ministry of Education (MOE) announced a reduction in assessments and examinations at selected levels, moving away from a narrow focus on grades. The following month, MOE launched the inter-agency 'Uplifting Pupils in Life and Inspiring Families Task Force' (UPLIFT) committee, aimed at boosting support for underperforming students from disadvantaged families. Then, in a much welcomed move, it was announced in March 2019 that Singapore would do away with streaming students into the Express or Normal streams after their Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE).

MENDAKI welcomes these changes. In fact, we are always thinking of what more we can do to complement national efforts to support Malay/Muslim families in their education journey. Indicative of MENDAKI's upstream focus to boost the school-readiness of our children, we expanded the KelasMateMatika@CC (KMM@CC) mathematics programme to cover seven M³@Towns this year, benefitting about 1,200 parents and children. MENDAKI is also piloting empowerment programmes for Malay/Muslim ITE students. This mentoring scheme will strengthen critical life skills, and provide youths with advice on future education and professional pathways so they can seize the future. I hope the Digest will be a springboard for more ideas on how MENDAKI, the Government and non-Government agencies can improve on initiatives and engagements to uplift families and build an inclusive society.

I would like to thank all contributors – especially our external writers – for their time and effort towards making this publication a reality. Special thanks must go to Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs Mr Masagos Zulkifli for his guidance and support. Let us all synergise our efforts to make the Malay/Muslim community, a Community of Success that we can be proud of.

Rahayu Buang
Chief Executive Officer
Yayasan MENDAKI

Editor's
Note

Here at MENDAKI, we want to journey with Malay/Muslim students and families to help them achieve their aspirations. In his Hari Raya 2019 speech, Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs Mr Masagos Zulkifli laid his vision for the Malay/Muslim community and highlighted the '3Cs' that make our community, a Community of Success – Character (Keperibadian), Competence (Kemahiran) and Citizenry (Kewarganegaraan). Moving forward, we will continue to strengthen our programmes for students from pre-school to tertiary level, so they can have a holistic network of support and grow into useful members of the community.

With the theme **'Seizing the Future: Inclusive Education and the Malay/Muslim Community'**, this edition of the MENDAKI Policy Digest hopes to bring readers up to date with policy shifts in the education landscape, and explore possible ways in which the Malay/Muslim community can benefit fully from the developments. From the reduction in assessments and examinations in our schools, to the removal of streaming and the offering of more support for low-income families to help in their children's education, our education system has taken a more inclusive turn. What more can our families do, with the support of community and Government agencies, to ride on the wave of these changes?

Our contributors to MENDAKI Policy Digest 2019 attempt to respond to that question by tackling different aspects of the policy changes. The articles by Associate Professor Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim, Charleen Chiong, Siti Khadijah Setyo R S and Muhammad Hazique Salahudin underline how social structures can be both a challenge and opportunity for low-income families to level-up. Professor Yaacob Ibrahim, Associate Professor Jason Tan and Assistant Professor Intan Azura Mokhtar call upon readers to tackle the policy issue of education holistically, so as to ensure that families receive appropriate intervention. Focusing on upstream measures, Siti Afiyah Mustapha and Muhammad Farouq Osman review trends in early learning and childhood obesity respectively, and implore the community to take pre-emptive action to improve their situation as soon as possible.

I am confident that you will find the eclectic yet streamlined mix of articles useful, as we think of new ways to bring our community forward. I would like to thank our contributors for putting their heart and soul into their writing. Finally, this publication would not be a success without the valuable inputs of MENDAKI Chairman, Minister Mr Masagos Zulkifli, and MENDAKI CEO Mdm Rahayu Buang – many thanks to them for their guidance and support.

Muhammad Faisal Aman
Editor

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I

Seizing the Future:
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Enhancing Inclusivity and Support for Children with Special Needs

by Dr Intan Azura Mokhtar

Understanding children with special needs

There was a recent case of a male teenager who was filmed lying down on his back on the floor of an MRT train, playing with his mobile phone, oblivious to everything and everyone around him. As the short video circulated online, netizens started to share their opinions on the matter. Some rebuked the poor behaviour of the teenager, some alluded to poor parenting and discipline by the teenager's parents, while others shared heartless and insensitive comments that were too hurtful to even be repeated anywhere. However, it turned out that the teenager was on the autism spectrum and was a renowned individual to those in the special needs community. He is known for his impressive artistic talent in drawing portraits, and is currently studying in Singapore's Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA).

The aspiration for us, as individuals and as a people, is to be able to accept and embrace individuals with special needs readily and without discrimination, in society, our neighbourhood and our workplaces. However, the reality is that we are still encumbered by our own biases and stereotypes, and when we see behaviour or appearance that is atypical, we tend to judge and label. As we mature as a society, we need to be more caring, compassionate, inclusive, and withhold judgment before fully understanding what others experience and go through, particularly those with special or atypical needs or abilities.

What constitutes inclusivity and support

Societies in the developed world such as the United States, United Kingdom, Norway, and Sweden, have long espoused the need to be more compassionate and inclusive, especially towards those who are less privileged and those who are differently abled or have special needs. Globally, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) states that every child has the right to education, regardless of their disabilities and without discrimination. In addition, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (2006) underscores the rights of persons with disabilities, or special needs, to access lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others, and not to be excluded from mainstream education because of their disabilities or special needs. In specific countries and jurisdictions, legislation has been enacted to ensure the inclusion of and provision of support to those with special needs in mainstream schools and in society, such as the 1981 Education Act in the UK, and the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in the US.

Under such legislation, inclusivity takes on two forms – placement and learning. Placement requires that children with mild to moderate special needs are integrated in the same educational settings as children who are typically developing (Yeo, Neihart, Tang, Chong & Huan, 2011), while learning refers to the extent to which a school or community embraces children with special needs as members of the group, creating opportunities for their meaningful participation, and valuing their contribution as equals.

Advocates of inclusivity in education allude to the myriad of benefits for both students with special needs and children who are typically developing (Pappas, Papoutsi & Drigas, 2018), particularly in terms of social, emotional and academic outcomes (Katz & Mirenda, 2002). In addition, inclusivity in education helps develop cultural and moral growth in our children, where they are able to master social skills and learn personal responsibility (Bull-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016). Hence, it is important to understand that inclusivity in education is not meant to benefit only students with special needs.

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Consequently, sufficient resources are required to provide the needed support in ensuring an education system and environment that are inclusive. These resources would include (i) funding to build the required infrastructural provisions or facilities that would allow physical placement of children with special needs; (ii) funding to train teachers in special educational needs (SEN); (iii) funding to review and enhance the curriculum; and (iv)

funding for relevant services and other social support to be provided on a needs basis (e.g. provision of counsellors or nurses, provision of assistive devices).

Sufficient financial support avails the spectrum of provisions that facilitate for a more inclusive education system and environment. For instance, more than S$140 million has been allocated towards special education (SPED) schools in Budget 2019 (Ministry of Education, 2019). However, despite the substantial financial support from the Government in the form of subsidies for intervention programs, therapies or treatments, there is still a genuine need for greater financial support for parents. An Inclusive Attitudes Survey commissioned by Lien Foundation (2016), which polled 835 parents of children with special needs, found that more than 40% of them wished for more funding support from the Government. Another survey carried out by the People's Action Party (PAP) Women's Wing (2019), which polled 294 parents of children with special needs, found that the costs of treatments and therapies, is their top concern.

In addition, the Enabling Masterplans 1, 2 and 3 spearheaded by the National Council of Social Services (NCSS), a statutory board under the Ministry of Social and Family Development, have been proposed since 2011. The Enabling Masterplans (EMPs) involved leaders and advocates in the special needs community, and have laid the roadmap and framework for programmes and initiatives that will lead to greater social inclusion for individuals with disabilities and special needs (NCSS, 2019). These EMPs are meant to guide social, community and corporate groups in creating an environment that can be more inclusive towards those with special or atypical needs or abilities.

Beyond legislation and policies

Despite the need for legislation, policies and more funding support from the Government, there are several other factors that need to be in place to create a society and ecosystem that are inclusive and supportive towards children and individuals with special needs.

First, there has to be greater public awareness and public education about children and individuals with special needs. Public education campaigns, discussion fora and information sharing through the various media channels about children and individuals with special needs, have to be carried out, so that the conversations about children and individuals with special needs and the need for inclusion, will continue. These conversations are important in creating greater awareness and acceptance of creating an inclusive society for children

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and individuals of all abilities and needs. In addition, these conversations allow concerns to be discussed openly and in a mature manner, and for solutions to be co-created by the

different segments of our society, which in turn can bring about greater acceptance and inclusivity in our society.

Second, there has to be ground-up, organic initiatives by non-Government organisations or led by individuals. These are important in ensuring that we do not merely stop at our conversations about children and individuals with special needs and the need to be inclusive, or co-creating ideas to bring about a more inclusive society. We are actually taking steps to do something about it, seeing to those co-created ideas come to fruition, and making a positive difference through actions and deeds.

Third, mindsets, beliefs and culture need to change. We have to be open to discard old and outdated mindsets, beliefs or practices that are detrimental to creating a community or society that can accept, embrace and celebrate the different needs and abilities that exist in our children and among us.

In sum, it is up to us

Each of the above approaches contributes to participatory democracy that is imperative for a mature and progressive society, particularly in ensuring social inclusion. Social inclusion is defined as "the process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for people who are disadvantaged, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights" (United Nations, 2016). To achieve social inclusion, the different approaches to a participatory democracy are necessary: the design, planning and co-creation of shared spaces, increased interactivity among and empowerment of the different segments of society, and accessibility to equal opportunities. Each and every one of us has a role in ensuring our society, schools, housing estates, and workplaces remain inclusive and open to all, regardless of our needs or abilities. This work has only just begun for us, but if we continue to work and co-create together, the possibilities will be positive and are limitless.

"None of us, including me, ever do great things. But we can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful." – Mother Teresa."

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Education Policy Shifts and the Malay/Muslim Community

by Assoc Prof Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim

Introduction

At Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's National Day Rally (NDR) speech this year, PM Lee outlined how the Malay/Muslim community in Singapore has made strong progress through the years. Without the efforts and contributions of our pioneer and current generations, we would not be able to make great strides in the education, social and economic spheres. As we celebrate our community's achievements, we should also set our eyes on greater, farther milestones in the future.

In May this year, Education Minister Ong Ye Kung emphasised the importance of learning languages for life, particularly our Mother Tongue Languages. As a new generation of Singaporeans emerges, learning our mother tongues will continue to anchor us to our roots and deepen our appreciation of Singapore's multi-culturalism. It also gives us an edge, to access economic opportunities in our immediate region.

Minister Masagos Zulkifli, Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs, also recently described the distinctive characteristics of the Singaporean Malay/Muslim identity using three Cs: Citizenry, Competence, and Character. Education is an important hand that moulds each of these three Cs. This explains our community's emphasis on education. We want to ensure that education will continue to be an uplifting force for every student and we can all thrive with the country, regardless of race, religion and starting points in life.

Amidst economic uncertainties and a rapidly evolving job landscape that faces technological disruptions, how will the future of education look like and how can the Malay/Muslim community continue to ride the waves of change? Let me outline some of the recent policy shifts that we have embarked on and the opportunities that they present to all Singaporeans.

Learn for Life

In 2018, Minister Ong announced that Singapore's education system is moving into the Learn for Life phase. Learn for Life is a value, an attitude and a skill that our students need to possess. It underpins the SkillsFuture Movement. Our students need to internalise this resilience, adaptability and global outlook, such that they will embrace lifelong learning from young and continue learning even after completing their formal education.

Learn for Life shapes the key thrusts that drive some of the major policy reviews we see today. In this article, I wish to look at three key thrusts of the Learn for Life Movement: (1) Basic Purpose: Education as an Uplifting Force, (2) Structural Changes to the Education System and (3) SkillsFuture for Lifelong Learning, before I briefly examine the role that the community can play.

1. Basic Purpose: Education as an Uplifting Force

Education as an Uplifting Force
Opportunities for all at Every Stage of Life

Pre-School	Primary School	Secondary School	PSEI	Working Life

Financial assistance for lower-income families eg. KIFAS, MOE FAS, Opportunity Fund, Enhanced Bursaries			

Access to affordable high quality pre-schools	Learning support for low progress students	Enhance affordability of higher education	SkillsFuture to upgrade skills
KidSTART expansion to 5,000 more families	UPLIFT to strengthen support for disadvantaged students and families	Expanded pathways and opportunities to upgrade	

A strong start for every child

In my contribution to the 2017 MENDAKI Policy Digest, I wrote extensively about the importance and benefits of pre-school education. The Government has been investing in pre-school education to ensure that every child has access to a good start in life, regardless of family background.

For example, MOE and ECDA have improved the affordability, accessibility and quality of pre-school education. Enhanced Government subsidies for students from lower and middle income families have just been announced at this year's NDR, with low income families paying as little as $3 a month. 80% of pre-school places will be provided through high-quality, Government-supported pre-schools. This should encourage more eligible families to tap on the available subsidies and enrol their children in pre-school.

Currently, cohort enrolment for Malay children is comparable to the general population in Singapore with over 90% enrolled by age 5 and 6. I hope that more families will be able to take advantage of Government's provisions and enrol their children even earlier at age 3 into pre-school, so that they benefit from a good start.

Support for low-income students

Inclusivity is at the heart of our education system. Let me outline how the Government has stepped up support for students with greater needs.

In 2018, "Uplifting Pupils in Life and Inspiring Families Taskforce" (UPLIFT) – an inter-agency taskforce involving the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) – was convened by MOE to strengthen support for students from low-income family backgrounds, especially those who are under-performing.

As announced at Committee of Supply (COS) 2019, MOE is strengthening after-school care and support for disadvantaged students through school-based Student Care Centres (SCCs) that have been set up in every primary school and GEAR-UP – a platform for after-school engagement – in 120 secondary schools by 2020. School-based SCCs provide important support for students, especially those who need a more structured and supportive environment after school hours, while GEAR-UP seeks to develop students' socio-emotional competencies and improve their connectedness to their learning, peers, and school.

UPLIFT is also working closely with Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) and SHGs to provide community wrap-around support to disadvantaged students and families. The UPLIFT Programme Office was set up this year to strengthen coordination and facilitate school-community partnerships. MENDAKI has been a key UPLIFT partner and we are collaborating to ensure that we can tap on MENDAKI's programmes and the larger M^3 (MUIS, MESRA and MENDAKI) resources to meet the needs of the Malay/Muslim families.

Support for Students with Greater Learning Needs

For students who need more intensive support in learning, Ministry of Education (MOE) offers a suite of specialised early intervention programmes, such as the Learning Support Programme (LSP) for English and Learning Support for Mathematics (LSM) at Primary 1 and 2. The Reading Remediation Programme (RRP) is another additional literacy programme that aims to provide remedial support to weaker readers at Primary 3 and 4.

For students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), MOE has introduced specialised programmes such as the School-based Dyslexia Remediation (SDR) programme for Primary 3 and 4 students. Mainstream schools are also equipped with Teachers Trained in Special Needs and Allied Educators (Learning and Behavioural Support) to look after students with SEN, with the aim of supporting such students to become independent learners and valued members of their school community.

Since 2019, all children, including children with SEN, have been included within the Compulsory Education framework. To support the wide spectrum of learning needs of children with SEN, there is a range of educational programmes and services available

in mainstream schools and Special Education (SPED) schools. This demonstrates the Government's commitment to prepare all children to live productive and meaningful lives in our society.

Improving Access and Affordability for Higher Education

Over the years, the Government has also built a vibrant post-secondary education landscape, consisting of five Polytechnics, the Institute of Technical Education (ITE), and six Autonomous Universities (AUs). Today, more than 93% of Primary 1 Malay students progress to a post-secondary education institution, an increase from 87% a decade ago. The university cohort participation rate will be raised to 40% in 2020, providing more opportunities for students to enter our universities.

The Government is committed to ensuring the continued affordability of higher education. Today, Government subsidies for higher education are already significant for Singaporeans. Subsidies range from around 75% for AUs to more than 90% at ITE. Over and above these subsidies, Government bursaries are provided to students from lower- to middle-income families. These bursaries currently cover up to 50% of subsidised fees at AUs and up to 80% of subsidised fees at Polytechnics.

At NDR this year, PM Lee announced further enhancements to Government bursaries. From Academic Year 2020 (AY2020), bursaries for students from lower- to middle-income families will cover up to 75% of subsidised fees at AUs, and up to 95% of subsidised fees at polytechnics. This ensures that every Singaporean child has the opportunity to receive a good education, regardless of family circumstances.

Beyond affordability, the Government is also stepping up opportunities for skills upgrading. By 2030, opportunities will be provided for all ITE graduates to upgrade beyond a Nitec qualification over the course of their careers. Currently, 7 in 10 ITE Nitec graduates upgrade through various publicly-funded pathways. To provide ITE graduates with a range of upgrading opportunities according to their needs and learning profiles at different stages of their careers, MOE will expand places in work-study and full-time programmes for both fresh graduates and working adults.

2. Structural Changes to the Education System

Buttressed by the basic purpose to uplift all Singaporeans through education, we are making further structural changes to ignite the joy of learning and reform secondary school streaming.

Igniting the Joy of Learning

To allow students to develop joy in learning, MOE is moving away from an over-emphasis on academic grades. First, significant changes to Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) are being made to remove the T-score and replace with wider scoring bands from 2021 onwards. This can reduce excessive competition and stress, and prevent overly fine differentiation at a young age.

To free up more time and space in schools to strengthen holistic development, self-discovery and engaged learning starting from young, MOE has removed all weighted assessments for Primary 1 and 2 students in 2019. For the older students, MOE has also reduced the number of school-based assessments to provide more time to adjust to the key transition years in Primary 3 and 5, and Secondary 1 and 3. Instead, schools use bite-sized assessments such as topical tests and short tasks to provide a child with more opportunities to experience success, and build his/her confidence and desire to learn. Teachers also use a range of assessment strategies to support a child's learning.

One Secondary Education, Many Pathways

Back in 1979, then Deputy Prime Minister Mr Goh Keng Swee led a team to overhaul the education system, as many students were dropping out of school. As part of the team's recommendations, streaming was introduced in Singapore from the 1980s to place students into different tracks according to their academic abilities. This was a critical move: in 1965, only about 10% of students made it to post-secondary education. Today, more than 95% of Singaporean youths

" This was a critical move: in 1965, only about 10% of students made it to post-secondary education. Today, more than 95% of Singaporean youths go on to our Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs).

go on to our Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs). The education system uplifted many Singaporeans during this time, improving social mobility.

Further refinements were made to the streaming system in subsequent years to mitigate negative effects associated with labelling. In 2018, Subject-Based Banding in secondary schools, SBB(Sec) was rolled out, allowing students to take some subjects at a more demanding level. The take-up rate of SBB in Secondary Schools has been very good. In 2018, about 60% of Secondary 1 students from the N(T) course and 40% of Secondary 1 students from the N(A) course took a subject at a higher-level. Building on the success of SBB(Sec), MOE will be expanding Subject-Based Banding to its full potential, or what is known as "Full SBB", which will be piloted in about 25 schools in 2020. Full SBB will mark a significant shift in our secondary education system, from a more stream-centric structure, to a more student-centric structure, with one secondary school education for all students. All Secondary 1 students can access Full SBB by 2024.

With Full SBB, more students can take combinations of subjects at different levels, unlike today where most students take subjects at the level of their "stream". Schools will also no longer need to organise classes by streams. Classes could be organised around students' subject-specific strengths instead, bringing students from today's different streams into the same class for the same lessons. This gives us the opportunity to reshape the social environment in schools, and change students' lived experience in school by blurring the distinction between students of different streams.

Concurrently, our IHLs are also re-looking their admissions practices, to better recognise different upgrading pathways to cater to students with different learning styles. Our Polytechnics and ITE introduced the Early Admissions Exercise (EAE) from the AY2017 and AY2018 intakes respectively to admit students based on their interests and aptitudes. Currently, about 15% of students are admitted to Polytechnics and ITE via the EAE. From the AY2019 intake onwards, the Polytechnics have started to admit working adults based on their work experience through the EAE. Our AUs have also developed aptitude-based admissions practices to assess students more holistically, using interviews, entrance tests or group discussions, in addition to academic grades, to admit students. From the 2020 intake onwards, NUS and NTU will also remove O-Level grades from their University Admission Score computation for polytechnic students, so they will be assessed on their latest qualifications.

Taken together, these systemic changes will create more pathways for our children to succeed in their education.

3. SkillsFuture for Lifelong Learning

Beyond opportunities in the early and schooling years, we are also embracing lifelong learning and skills mastery to ensure that Singaporeans remain competitive in the global economy. This is why we introduced SkillsFuture, a national movement to provide Singaporeans with opportunities to develop their fullest potential throughout life, regardless of their starting points.

To support Singaporeans in accessing upskilling and reskilling opportunities, we provide course fee subsidies of up to 97% for supported continuing education and training courses at our IHLs and private training providers. Enhanced subsidies are available for targeted worker segments, such as for Singaporeans aged 40 and above. The Government has also introduced the SkillsFuture Credit scheme to empower individuals to take ownership of their learning and skills development journey. All Singaporeans aged 25 and above are given a credit of $500 that they can use to pay for skills-related courses. Complementary to this is the MySkillsFuture portal, a one-stop learning and career development web portal. The portal provides easy-to-use tools for individuals to search for suitable training programmes and access to industry information on the skills they need to remain competitive in the workforce.

More targeted programmes and initiatives to support the skills development of Singaporeans at different stages of their lives have also been introduced. For instance, young Singaporeans entering the workforce can benefit from work-study programmes at the IHLs at various levels, such as the Work-Study Diploma, Work-Study Post-Diploma and Work-Study Degree programmes. These programmes closely inter-connect theory and practice, through a combination of institutional learning and structured on-the-job training for individuals who prefer a more hands-on and skills-based learning. Students may

choose from a range of work-study programmes such as those in the fields of aerospace, biomedical sciences, games development, hospitality and information-communication technology (ICT), to name a few. Through work-study, students can get a head-start in their careers as they transition into the workplace.

For those who are already in the workforce, the IHLs offer a list of short, industry-relevant training courses that focus on emerging skills in fields such as data analytics, digital media and advanced manufacturing. Known as the SkillsFuture Series, this initiative aims to equip working adults with specific skills sets to meet changing job demands in emerging areas, enabling them to stay relevant and competitive for the future.

Community Partnerships for Better Outcomes
The community can play its part in ensuring that the opportunities afforded through the education system will translate into better outcomes for students and families.

One example that I am proud to share is the Lembaga Biasiswa Kenangan Maulud (Prophet Muhammad's Birthday Memorial Scholarship Fund Board, or LBKM), which has evolved from a small bursary-dispensing body into a significant bursary institution and a pillar of the Malay/Muslim community. This non-profit organisation, established in 1965, continues to fund needy students. I recently gave out the LBKM scholarships to 24 outstanding recipients. I am very happy to note the diversity of courses and programmes undertaken by the recipients.

Here in Singapore, diversity is our strength. We must not allow social stratification to divide us. Instead, we must harness our diverse strengths to take Singapore forward, and I welcome any ideas and contributions from the community to take this forward. The Government is committed to partner Singaporeans in new ways. We will also work with you to create a shared future, one where every Singaporean will have a part to play.

Conclusion

We have come a long way. Education outcomes for Malay students have improved tremendously over time. Together, the policy shifts outlined above represent important shifts that MOE is making to continue to bring out the best in every child at every stage of their learning journey.

These are exciting times. I applaud the untiring efforts by MENDAKI to support our community's efforts to uplift all students to reach their potential. It represents the spirit of the Malay/Muslim community, coming together to help each other, and reach students through their hearts, and not just their minds. As a community, let us continue to work with the Government, help each other and continue to improve our policies. Together, we will keep Singapore a society of opportunities for all.

Education Policy Announcements and Reforms in 2019: What do They Mean for the Malay/Muslim Community?

by Assoc Prof Jason Tan

The year 2019 has proven to be yet another year in which the Ministry of Education (MOE) has announced changes in education policy that will have far-reaching implications for all students. These include the reforming of the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) scoring system, the increase in financial subsidies for pre-school education and for higher education, as well as the implementation of subject-based banding in secondary schools. This commentary will outline each of these announcements before concluding with their implications for the Malay/Muslim community.

Reforming Assessment Systems

A major announcement concerns the reform of the PSLE scoring system. The new scoring system will begin in 2021 and will present the results of all students in Achievement Levels (ALs). Another key change is that students' achievement levels will reflect their own level of achievement rather than how they have performed relative to their peers. Their final PSLE score will be the sum of their four AL scores, and will determine the secondary school course to which they are posted. Compared to the current PSLE scoring system, the number of possible final scores will be considerably reduced in a bid to reduce overly fine differentiation among students and to reduce the over-emphasis on academic achievement.

At the same time, the MOE has announced details of how Foundation Level subject scores will be pegged to the corresponding Standard Level subject scores. Yet another change is the use of choice order of secondary schools during the secondary school posting exercise as a tie-breaker to differentiate between students with the same PSLE score. This new criterion is meant to encourage parents and students to give more thought to a host of non-academic factors such as school ethos and co-curricular activity offerings when selecting a secondary school.

The reform of this major national examination follows on the heels of the reduction in school-based assessments in both primary and secondary schools. In order to reduce an over-emphasis on examinations and to promote the joy of learning, there will no longer be examinations in Primary 1 and 2. There will also no longer be mid-year examinations for Primary 3 and 5, as well as for Secondary 1 and 3. As part of an effort to reduce unhealthy competition among students, report books will no longer contain information such as students' class and level ranking, mean subject grades and overall total marks.

Increasing Flexibility of Access to Education Pathways

Besides reforming school assessment policy, MOE has also continued with its policy over the past two decades of increasing flexibility of access to various education pathways.

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For example, MOE has announced that it will provide opportunities for all Institute of Technical Education (ITE) graduates to upgrade beyond a National Institute of Technical Education Certificate (Nitec) over the course of their careers. This will be done by increasing the number of places in the ITE's SkillsFuture Work-Study Diplomas and full-time Higher Nitec programmes. The polytechnics will also provide working adults with more places in their full-time diploma programmes.

Another major change to education pathways is the announcement that full subject-based banding (SBB) will be implemented in secondary schools by the year 2024. SBB will

replace streaming and will provide students with more opportunities to study subjects at a level better suited to their strengths and interests. In addition to removing the rigidity of streaming, MOE hopes that the greater flexibility of SBB will minimise the unintended consequences of labelling and stigmatisation that have accompanied streaming over the past four decades.

Improving Educational Equity

A third major policy thrust that has been announced in 2019 is that of improving educational equity and tackling the issue of educational inequalities. A prime move in this direction is the announcement of the Uplifting Pupils in Life and Inspiring Families Taskforce (UPLIFT)'s strategies to support students from disadvantaged families. The details of two of the six strategies have been announced. First, MOE will strengthen after-school support by having a Student Care Centre in every primary school by the year 2020 and will double the number of secondary schools with after-school programmes by next year. Secondly, the MOE will work with schools, other Government agencies and community partners to strengthen coordination efforts.

Another attempt to improve educational equity is the announcement of higher financial subsidies for pre-school education, which ties in with MOE's expansion of its pre-school provision. At the same time, Government bursaries for undergraduates and polytechnic diploma students will be enhanced with effect from next year.

School-Home Partnerships

Finally, MOE has announced a new set of guidelines on school-home partnerships. Among the key recommendations are that parents work with their children's schools to guide and support their children, while respecting teachers' out-of-school time. Parents are also urged to help their children develop good study habits and self-management skills.

Implications for the Malay/Muslim Community

This commentary has highlighted several major policy announcements made in 2019: reforming assessment systems, improving flexibility of access to various education pathways, improving educational equity, and fostering healthier school-home partnerships.

What do these announcements mean for the Malay/Muslim community? First, as with all other Singaporeans, Malay/Muslim parents have to make concerted efforts to keep abreast of policy changes and key trends. However, mere knowledge of these changes and trends will not be enough if parents fail to take proactive steps to act on these changes and better plan their children's educational choices and pathways. For instance, improved Government financial subsidies for pre-school education and higher education will mean little if some Malay/Muslim children continue to fall between the cracks and fail to be enrolled in pre-school education. Likewise, the inclusion of choice order of secondary schools as a tie-breaker in the secondary school admission exercise will not mean much in

reality if parents do not take the trouble to find out about various secondary schools' co-curricular activities and school ethos in the first place.

Secondly, as the Malay/Muslim community continues to grapple with the issue of gaps in educational access and educational outcomes, Malay/Muslim parents stand to benefit from the latest official efforts such as the UPLIFT committee's recommendations to improve after-school care services. Malay/Muslim parents who are socio-economically disadvantaged will need to work more closely with their children's schools in order that these efforts can bear fruit and better help and support their children's education.

Thirdly, the provision of improved financial subsidies for undergraduate studies will not help all that much if insufficient numbers of Malay/Muslim students qualify for undergraduate admission. Despite the attempts to reduce examination pressure in schools, the fact remains that students' examination grades still play a large part in determining access to various education pathways and subsequent life-chances. There is therefore a strong case to be made for Malay/Muslim parents to step up their collaboration with schools in terms of fostering healthy study habits in their children and monitoring their children's academic progress.

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Digital Revolution:
Impact on MENDAKI Education Programmes

by Prof Yaacob Ibrahim

Introduction

The rapid pace of technological innovations has paved the way for changes to take place in every facet of human existence. With growing smartphone ownership and Internet penetration, it is now possible to do many things remotely such as booking tickets, buying groceries and other items, booking appointments and many other everyday chores. Now, with developments in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Data and Video analytics, it is possible to mesh data from different sources and develop smart algorithms to identify patterns, such as risk-seeking behaviour, that can determine insurance premiums for different groups of people or deciding who will be the best candidate for a certain job. While it is understandable to automate routine processes such as those on a manufacturing line, it is an entirely different proposition to use AI and algorithms to determine an outcome such as job interviews. Algorithms are created by humans and so there is the possibility that humans feed these algorithms with data which may contain biases. Moreover, the rush towards using AI and data analytics means that there is a need for strong data protection and privacy rules, and for the ordinary citizen to have some say in the use of their personal data.

Technology and Education

In the area of education, technological innovations also abound. From using simple tablets in classrooms to remote online learning platforms, Governments and educational institutions are experimenting with a wide range of technological tools to bring better educational outcomes for students and to help teachers and educators focus on teaching instead of being bogged down with administrative chores. In Singapore, the Government is embarking on a series of changes in our education system using technology. Apart from trying to reap better outcomes for both students and teachers, the intent is also to get students ready for a world where digitalisation is pervasive. Hence the recent announcement to introduce enrichment classes on coding for all upper primary classes in Singapore.

The inevitable changes taking place in our education systems means that groups such as MENDAKI will have to change their educational programmes in tandem. The challenge is of course what to change. Clearly some curriculum changes will have to take place as new subjects such as coding are introduced into the formal school curriculum. Given MENDAKI's limited involvement in the lives of our Malay/Muslim students, perhaps MENDAKI needs to look at changes that can make the most impact in helping our students realise the educational outcomes that our Government wants to see happen.

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In this regard, it must be about the pedagogy. While it is important that MENDAKI assists Malay/Muslim students, where possible to have access to the technological tools used in their classrooms, the learning process in MENDAKI's educational programmes must be aligned to the educational outcomes desired by the Government. In other words, it is not the knowledge that matters but how our students use that knowledge critically to inform their understanding of the world around them. The key to the new economy is adaptability and the workers' readiness to learn and relearn. Industries are evolving and jobs are being redesigned constantly. The workers of tomorrow must be comfortable with digitalisation, understand how the technological solutions work for their industries and comprehend technological trends which can impact their industries. It is a tall order. However, if habits of learning and relearning, and the mental ability to critically evaluate the knowledge learnt are cultivated early in life, then the workers of tomorrow can certainly succeed.

What can MENDAKI do?

This is MENDAKI's challenge: to infuse a pedagogy that supports the outcomes outlined above into all its educational programmes. Our students can be digitally ready as part of the student outcomes for the 21st Century Competencies framework (MOE, 2018). Our families and community also have a role to play in preparing our students for the future. But for MENDAKI, whose business is education, it is imperative that it re-examines all its pedagogical approaches to help our students think critically, adapt easily and comprehend deeply all that they had learnt.

It is often assumed that with digital learning, students can learn on their own without the need for teachers or tutors. I am not convinced that this can work for all types of students. The role of the teacher or tutor remains an important ingredient in the students' learning journey. Perhaps, with digital tools available to both

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tutors and students, a balance needs to be struck between self-directed learning by the students and tutor-guided learning. The interaction between tutor and student should be enriched and enhanced with the right set of digital tools. This is where I believe it is important for MENDAKI to focus on three areas in developing a new pedagogy.

MENDAKI has had a good start by introducing digital tools in its educational programmes. Moving forward, MENDAKI has to assess whether these tools have a positive impact on the learning outcomes of the students. I would strongly urge for MENDAKI to build capabilities in research in digital learning. In this way MENDAKI can then guide our community into the digital age especially with respect to their children's education.

A second area of focus is the training of our tutors. There are two aspects here for MENDAKI's consideration. The first is the impact of digital learning on how our tutors conduct lessons and promote learning in the classrooms. The training of our tutors must take this into account where the digital tools are merely enablers to promote learning. The key is in training our tutors to use those tools to serve that end. The second is the impact on our students. Tutors need to understand how learning and comprehension can take place in a classroom where digital tools are being used. Studies have found that using digital tools does not necessarily lead to a better understanding of the materials by the users. In this regard, tutors hence play an important role to uncover barriers to learning in this new environment.

The third area concerns our students' response to digital tools in their learning journey. Students have the most to gain or lose from this exercise. Hence their feedback in how these tools enhance their learning or otherwise would be useful feedback in designing the right pedagogical approach. Students then can be guided by their tutors in a way to maximise their learning.

The process of learning, formal or informal, will be impacted by the digital revolution. Digital tools are enablers. When used correctly it can enhance learning. The challenge for MENDAKI in reinventing itself for the digital age is to find that approach where a combination of digital tools and appropriate pedagogy can help our Malay/Muslim students enhance their learning and prepare for a life of continuous learning and relearning.

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Intergenerational Perspectives:
What do Low-Income Families Think about Singapore's Education Policy?

by Charleen Chiong

Abstract

Policy-making is about people. Ultimately, policy-making must concern itself with the needs and desires of a population. Yet, it is a common critique that in many countries, the worlds of 'policymaking' and 'the people' are compartmentalised and distinct, leading to alienation and disconnection between these fields, and a form of policy-making that does not account for human experience and feeling. In this article, drawing on three rounds of interview with six low-income Malay families, I explore families' perspectives on two key facets of Singaporean education, presented as two vignettes. In my analysis of each facet, I explore how families' views could potentially shape policy discussions.

Introduction: Families and Policy – Worlds Apart?

The worlds of 'people' and 'policymaking' are often seen as distinct, compartmentalised, far apart (Shore and Wright, 2005). Policymakers are often critiqued for being out-of-touch with people's needs, and in my interviews with low-income families, I ask them what they might change if they were Minister of Education or The Principal of a school – and they laugh, and say sorry, they cannot imagine it.

Yet, in a time marked by the "global rise of populism" (Cox, 2018), and a discontent with institutional authority and its elitist leanings, perhaps some reflection and reflexivity over how far apart these worlds really are or should be, is due. Emmanuel Lee (2017) calls for the need for more 'empathetic' policy-making with the use of qualitative research to capture the dispositions, motivations and values of the public to gain a deeper insight into the human experience. In education policy research, one might trace the imperative to foreground families' perspectives more too. Generally, education policy scholars increasingly recognise that 'policy' is a process; that policy 'flows' through and is brokered by a multiplicity, or assemblage, of structures and agencies – it is not neatly implemented, but understood and mediated in different ways by different actors (Singh, Thomas, and Harris, 2013). Yet, much educational and education policy scholarship often doesn't account for families' views – although families are often the ultimate brokers and, largely, the intended ultimate target of education policy initiatives (Maithreyi and Sriprakash, 2018).

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Educational research, particularly in Singapore, has focused, valuably, on a range of formal institutional actors, such as school curricula (e.g. Deng, Gopinathan, and Lee, 2013; Ho, 2012), policy documents and patterns (e.g. Talib and Fitzgerald, 2015), the workings and cultures of schools (e.g. Koh 2014; Lim 2015). There is emerging educational research on the Singaporean middle-class (e.g. Göransson, 2015) and Chinese families (e.g. Jones, 2018), as well as on the educational experiences of low-income Malay families (Brassard, 2015). However, there remains little empirical research that explicitly links low-income Malay families' perspectives to policy emphases and patterns. Thus, in this article, I seek to understand how low-income, Malay families interact with, and think about broad patterns in Singaporean education policy – offering clues as to the aspects of policy that families appreciate, and those that families find implausible, given their circumstances.

Cris Shore and Susan Wright (2005) argue for the need to "trace policy connections between different organisational and everyday worlds, even where actors in different sites do not know each other or share a moral universe". Hence, I outline broad patterns in

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Hence, I outline broad patterns in Singapore's education policy and present a subset of interview findings from a larger project on how low-income families navigate Singapore's education policy landscape.

Singapore's education policy and present a subset of interview findings from a larger project on how low-income families navigate Singapore's education policy landscape. To collect interview data, between January and July 2017, I interviewed six self-identified Malay families – typically, a Secondary Four young person and their parent(s). I conducted three rounds of interview with each family. Rounds One and Two were semi-structured individual interviews with each participant. The first focused on families' broad imaginaries and worldviews concerning the purpose of education, and their conceptualisations of success and how they might achieve it. The second focused more specifically on families' more concrete relations with the Government and schools, and what families thought of specific policy patterns (explicated in the next section). Round Three was a focus group interview (at least one month after the second individual interview), with parent/caregiver, the young person and any siblings who wanted to join this. The focus group interview elicited further reflection on major themes, revisiting key themes from earlier interviews. While I sought to interview both parents, this was not always possible, due to factors such as linguistic barriers, divorce, and long and irregular shift hours. Altogether, I draw on 30 interviews in this article; however, in writing the two vignettes, I foreground the perspectives of one family per vignette to provide an in-depth exploration of perspectives. The views of the two families selected, in my judgment, best illustrate the most salient patterns in the responses of the six families interviewed.

The six families in the study were selected based on the following criteria for a 'low-income' family, drawing on Ern-Ser Tan's (2004) work on social class in Singapore, Annette Lareau's (2003) work on social class in the U.S., and the Singapore Department of Statistics (2016):
1) Household income: below SGD$1,100/capita/month.[1]
2) Parental occupation: typically blue-collar or at most low-level white-collar jobs. Typically working in the lowest-earning occupation categories in Singapore (Sales/Service Workers; Plant and Machine Operators/Assemblers; Cleaners; Labourers).
3) Parental education: typically secondary school qualifications at most.

I conducted thematic analysis to derive key themes that were most frequently and (in my judgment) most strongly emphasised by families. From this, for the purpose of this article, I elucidate two vignettes – short, descriptive sketches that illustrate typical characteristics of particular phenomena. I end the presentation of each vignette with reflections on how families' perspectives might help shape policy discussions.

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[1] In a Singapore Children's Society study (Tai, 2019), a 'low-income' household in Singapore is defined as one earning SGD$1000/month/capita or less.

What is crucial for readers to note, is that while some social research is fundamentally geared towards evaluating and making policy recommendations or critiquing a particular policy – a highly practical mode of inquiry – this research is more focussed on "shaping… perspectives" of those in power "in broader terms"; it is meant to "[serve] as a resource that can be used, along with others, to make practical decisions" (Hammersley, 2019). As such, the intention of the article is not to make direct, specific policy recommendations, but to: 1) provide a descriptive picture of how families interact with and think about broad education policy patterns, 2) in so doing, provide reflective points and questions that might help shape policy discussions.

Education Policy and Inequality in Singapore

While much can be said about education policy and inequality in Singapore, due to space constraints, I briefly elucidate two broad education policy patterns that deeply structure low-income families' lives.

The first is that there is growing recognition of, and attempts to reduce, enduring education inequalities in Singapore. Research such as Chang & Cai's (2011) report that the proportion of students in Singapore's elite schools with fathers as university graduates exceeds 50%; in mainstream schools, however, the proportion estimated is only 10%. Lim & Kwek (2006) find that one third of the recipients of the prestigious Public Service Commission scholarship come from households earning less than S$10,000/month; a mere 7% come from households earning less than S$2000.

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Furthermore, class-based inequality is intertwined in complex ways with ethnic-based inequality. Official MOE statistical data suggests that while there is narrowing of attainment gaps between racial groups, there continues to be sustained gaps between the attainment of Malays and their Chinese counterparts, particularly in Math and Science – both at Primary and Secondary school levels (Government of Singapore, 2017). It is difficult to close the gap, because as lower-performing racial groups improve, the higher-performing group also improves (Lee, 2007); this is because the higher-performing group constantly strategises to perpetuate its advantage (Gee, 2012).

In recent years, there has been growing emphasis on promoting greater egalitarianism. An important emphasis has been on upstream interventions – such as expanding provision of MOE-funded pre-school education and reserving one-third of places in MOE kindergarten for lower-income families. Another is the Primary Education Review and Implementation (PERI) and Secondary Education Review and Implementation (SERI) reports, published in 2009 and 2010 respectively, which have introduced different measures adopted by the

An important emphasis has been on upstream intervention – such as expanding provision of MOE-funded pre-school education and reserving one-third of places in MOE kindergarten for lower-income families.

Government (Lim, 2013). For instance, the PERI report has increased the number of Allied Educators (school counsellors, special needs educators, co-teachers), who can support students who struggle with classroom learning. It has also increased the student-teacher ratio, and increased sports, outdoor education, performing and visual arts opportunities in schools, which low-income families tend not to be able to afford (ibid). Furthermore, the UPLIFT programme, introduced in 2019, seeks to strengthen links between homes and schools, engaging families in seeking to tackle long-term absenteeism and drop-out rates, and more concerted efforts in connecting families with suitable community assistance schemes.

The second education policy emphasis lies in the Government's drive to reduce assessment and emphasise broader, flexible, higher-order thinking skills. A key justification for these recent reforms, is that as Singapore transitions into a global knowledge-based economy, within a context of rapid technological advancement and the precariousness of economic globalisation – students must be equipped with skills such as critical and creative thinking, and dispositions of resilience and enterprise. The beginnings of such emphases might be traced to over two decades ago, when then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong gave his speech in 1997, in the wake of the Asian Financial Crisis, calling for comprehensive reform of the education system under the policy framework: 'Thinking School, Learning Nation' (hereon, TSLN).

Generally, reforms such as TSLN and 21st-Century Competencies in 2009 (hereon, 21CC) have been accompanied by changes to assessment intended to reduce academic competition, incorporating subjects that promote deep, interdisciplinary thinking and problem-solving such as Project Work and Knowledge and Inquiry, and a slew of programmes such as the Programme for Active Learning (promoting holistic development through outdoor education and performing and visual arts), the Applied Learning Programme (connecting academic learning to hands-on experience in real-life industries), the Learning for Life Programme (developing students' character and values through real-life experiences, such as outdoor activities, sports and visual arts). Recent reforms in 2019 have also attempted to reduce the salience of markers of streaming at the Secondary level, through subject-based banding (Lim, 2019). This increasing emphasis on broader competencies has also been accompanied by (a degree of) reduction in curriculum content. Minister for Education, Ong Ye Kung, claimed that, after the announcement of TSLN in 1997, the curriculum had been reduced by 30%, and by 2005, a further 20% (Ong, 2018b). Correspondingly, Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam stated that parenting must evolve with changes

in the education system. Teng (2019) argued that rather than being "helicopter parents" who "hover" over their children and obsess over academic grades, parents should adopt a more hybrid approach where children are provided with expectations and encouraged to think creatively and independently with their own interests.

Yet, the Singapore case is unique in incorporating these higher-order competencies in an 'additive' fashion to the existing curriculum, without subtracting from an already highly-saturated curriculum (Deng, Gopinathan, and Lee, 2013). Despite these policy emphases, the enduring structures and processes of the high-stakes Singapore education system implicitly create pressures on schools and families to acquire good examination results. Bach and Christensen's (2017:135) research on middle-

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class parents suggests that parents remain confused over the "fundamental split" between injunctions to relax, versus pushing children to work hard for success – and between injunctions to encourage holistic development, versus the imperative of acquiring top academic grades. They use the term 'double bind' to describe the conflicting messages sent by those in authority. How low-income families navigate these two education policy emphases is a question amenable to empirical inquiry; the next two sections discuss empirical findings in greater detail.

Vignette 1: Measuring the Weight of Academic Grades

Academic results mean a lot in Singapore, and they have only meant more over time – or so families believe. On a cool afternoon, post-rain, I sat with Juriffah and her three boys (Hafiz, Rizwan and Mahmoud) in their flat for a focus group interview. I asked them how they had seen education change over time. They agreed that it had become much harder. Juriffah stated that education was very difficult, but parents could not do anything about that – they were 'helpless' – all they could do was to encourage their children to keep studying hard. Helplessness is structured by socio-economic disadvantage, particularly within Singapore's 'parentocracy' (Ong, 2014) where wealthier parents can draw on their comparative advantages in social and cultural capital to help children move ahead. Working part-time as a hawker food centre worker, and her husband as a pest control worker, they did not have enough for private tuition; bearing the weight of responsibility for educational progress weighed on the family.

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This sentiment of increasing academic intensity was echoed across almost all the families I interviewed, parents and young people alike. Such recognition contradicts recent statements in political discourse that suggests the reduction in curriculum content to reduce stress. If the curriculum had indeed been reduced, families certainly did not detect this. Looking at a print-out of the 21st-Century Competencies Framework from the MOE website (see Appendix 1), I pointed out to the family that despite their continued strong emphasis on academic grades as crucial in Singaporean education, there were clearly other dispositions the Government saw as necessary for future success, apart from academic grades. The 21st-century competencies are meant not as a marginal 'add-on', but intended to permeate the Singapore curriculum (Tan, n.d.).

Nonetheless, the issue was not that families did not value broader competencies; often, they expressed their desire for 'education' to be more than about academic results; they valued the social, emotional and higher-order thinking competencies that formal education could develop, even if they felt this was more marginal to the purpose of education given the exigencies of their circumstances: to get good grades, so one can get good jobs.

With Juriffah's family, when the laughter and joking had subsided, Mahmoud, the youngest sibling, offered a counter-perspective, stating that his teacher told them, in a module on 'Globalisation' in Social Studies, that skills and experience were more important than their grades. That it did not matter if they did not get the best results, because to stay competitive against 'foreign' competition, one needed skills and experience too. Moreover, technical hands-on experience could be more valuable, due to increasing credential inflation and graduate unemployment. This was starkly different from the perceptions of Juriffah, who wanted Mahmoud to gain the best qualifications possible; even if he wanted to attain a Masters' or PhD, she would find ways to financially support him, she said. Yet to Mahmoud, he was beginning to feel that academic results were not as important as they used to be.

As such, there was also confusion in the plurality of messages families were receiving. On one hand, the structures and processes of Singapore's high-stakes education system signalled the centrality of academic qualifications. Families were confident that employers and wider society valorised academic grades; getting good grades was the main way Singaporeans distinguish between those who are "stupid" and "smart", as Hafiz stated. Academic grades remained central to the "normalising gaze" which "establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them" (Foucault, 1979:174).

However, there was confusion, a sense of contradiction, between this and Singaporean policy-makers saying grades were not that important. Such confusion hints at the irreconcilability of an education system that strongly rewards academic attainment (through an academically rigorous curriculum and high-stakes testing), yet tries to push the epistemic boundaries of 'merit' to putatively valorise different competencies (Deng, Gopinathan, and Lee, 2013). While these contradictions continue, low-income young people remain somewhat ambivalent about how hard they should work to acquire good grades in school or to enter Junior College (JC), particularly when the risk of failing, and the thinness of

their socio-economic safety-net in case they fail, create further discouragement to try. While the participant group in this study is small, it is striking that not even one young person interviewed (from across the academic streams) expressed any desire to attend JC.

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It seems that individual family members' constructions of aspiration are influenced by their subjective experiences of different socio-political and historical contexts. While parents experienced Singapore's rapid industrialisation phase, and could draw on anecdotes of educated relatives' and friends' rapid social mobility, the opportunity structures are different in contemporary Singapore, where there is slowing social mobility. What is required in policy discussions is a more nuanced accounting of the tension between past and present, regarding changing political-economic conditions, opportunities and constraints. Given that JC still remains the most straightforward route to financial and cultural status in Singapore (Chong, 2014), it is important that well-suited young people are encouraged to apply for JC.

At the same time, given credential inflation and graduate unemployment are emerging socio-political realities in Singapore (Teng, 2018), parents' trust in academic qualifications as key to securing social mobility must be more carefully qualified in light of changing conditions. Misplaced trust in academic qualifications can lubricate the cogwheels of an affective machinery of "cruel optimism" (Berlant, 2011:1), when conditions of inequality and precarity mean that aspirations are overly optimistic. Parents' continued fixation on the academic result can be in itself an obstacle to flourishing: "one of optimism's ordinary pleasures is to induce conventionality, that place where appetites find a shape in the predictable comforts of the good-life genres that a person or a world has seen fit to formulate" (Berlant, 2011:2). Yet, academic results alone may not provide the same conceptualisations of 'good-life' that families envision.

Overall, this analysis opens up questions that could shape policy discussions. For instance, how might the knowledge ecology at the school-to-work transition be improved, to help parents and young people understand the importance of academic qualifications (relative to hands-on skills and experience)? How might the Government and schools leverage on families' generally positive orientations towards emphasising broader, higher-order competencies, to translate policy ideals encapsulated in TSLN and 21st-Century Competencies framework into families' everyday lived experience? Finally, given

young people are those directly experiencing schooling and its disillusionments, their recommendations to reduce the fixation on academic grades is valuable, too. From my interviews, recurrent recommendations included: starting school later, giving less daily homework, reducing curriculum content and providing more space for co-curricular activities.

Vignette 2: Partnering with the School

Another major emphasis in interview findings concerned families' relationships with schools. Research conducted in European-American contexts often presents home-school relations, particularly between poor or working-class families and the state and state institutions such as public schools, as characterised by disenfranchisement, distrust, and families' rejection or ignoring of responsibilities levied by schools (Crozier, 1998; Ule, Živoder, and du Bois-Reymond, 2015). Middle-class families tend to practice greater 'interconnectedness' with teachers (Lareau, 1989); they might be critical of teachers' professional judgment (vis-à-vis low-income parents who may have less confidence in their ability to 'educate' children), but ultimately share similar expectations of the education system, speak a similar 'language', broadly share a similar cultures (pastimes, rituals, worldviews, social circles) across home and school (ibid).

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However, low-income families in Singapore conveyed a striking warmth and closeness with teachers and other school staff. This may be partly because, while the cultural worlds of families and teaching professionals may be different in certain ways, their imaginaries are unified along one crucial dimension: in their valuing of education qualifications in highly-credentialed Singaporean society (Jones, 2018). They also generally respected the Government and schools as competent in education provision (providing a highly-subsidised, globally renowned education system) and caring for the well-being of young people. As such, parents made concerted efforts to attend parent-teacher meetings and remained in frequent contact with teachers (such as through WhatsApp, phone calls and text messaging), bringing their anxieties to teachers, and seeking advice on how to help the development of their child academically (primarily), but also morally and emotionally.

Naadia's family comprises of four people: Khairul, herself, and their two sons, Yusof and Irfan. Both Khairul and Naadia have medical issues that prevent them from full-time work;

as such, they receive financial support from the Government. It's not quite enough, they say, but their hopes lie upon the education of their two boys to give the family a better future. Naadia and Khairul describe their role as nagging their children to study hard; Naadia attends parent-teacher meetings diligently (as did many mothers, including Ayu, who, despite being sick with cancer and chemotherapy's effects, visited the teachers of her children approximately once a month to ask how they were doing). Naadia explained what happens at parent-teacher meetings:

At the same time, young people enjoyed the relationship they had with particular teachers, invoking the imagery of pseudo-'family' and 'friendship'. This was key to their enjoyment of school. Not only just the teachers, but the counsellors were perceived by families to be well-trained and caring. Earlier that afternoon, Naadia revealed that her son Irfan had struggled with suicidal thoughts after being bullied. Her account illustrates a willingness to seek help from schools. In an interview with Irfan that afternoon, he identified the most important people in his life as not his father, or brother (someone he is close to, and attempts to emulate in certain ways) – but his mother and the school counsellor.

Nonetheless, close home-school relations, fuelled by care for the child's well-being can provide an important buffer against adverse experiences. This is particularly crucial, given studies such as that by the Singapore Children's Society (SCS) study, where at least half of low-income individuals claimed to experience four or more Adverse Childhood Experiences; these are defined as experiences that have significant negative effects on future well-being and health – such as being bullied, having a family member in prison or with mental illness (Tai, 2019). School staff and teachers' friendships with students can help reduce negativity, disillusionment and stress (caused by interpersonal relations, academic or financial circumstances).Yet, the closeness in interactions and shared perspectives between families and schools also seemed at times to reinforce, claustrophobically, the culturally dominant paradigm concerning the instrumental importance of academic results. This can cause academically less-inclined young people to feel trapped within a singular reality of the all-important academic grade.

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Yet, the closeness in interactions and shared perspectives between families and schools also seemed at times to reinforce, claustrophobically, the culturally dominant paradigm concerning the instrumental importance of academic results.

Generally, it seems that there are aspects of family-school relations that are commendable, promoting institutional trust, collaboration, support and the possibility for educational progress. In particular, families' valuing of the care of teachers should be an impetus to continue emphasising genuine 'care' for students and families in teacher training and professional development. However, this closeness in perspectives between families and schools can be an oppressive reality in young people's lives. It can reduce the richness

of life to the singular academic grade. It can also produce a chain of reasoning whereby it seems the Government and the schools have all already done their part well, leaving the child nowhere to turn to but to accept responsibility for their own futures. This can be unfair – notably, when structural and material disadvantages make the possibility of achievement (particularly relative to their more well-endowed middle-class peers) difficult, if not completely implausible.

Conclusion

In conclusion, one might turn to the question asked at the outset of this article: what do families think of Singapore's education policy? What this study posits is that despite their hardships, low-income families can identify and appreciate various positive aspects of Singaporean education. In particular, they deeply appreciate close, mutually respectful home-school relations. This foregrounds the importance of relationships between Government, school and family as crucial levers for collaboration, social mobility and even institutional trust in Government (especially in Singapore, where schools are seen as the benefaction of the Singapore Government). For these families, Government-school-family relations are built on families' perceptions of the competence and care of teachers and school staff. Moreover, such relationships should be two-way, allowing families' concerns and values to be heard and respectfully engaged with by schools. However, families' perspectives also suggest that academic pressure (produced by Singapore's high-stakes education system) and some confusion over what academic grades are actually worth in contemporary Singapore, cause considerable stress and confusion. In analysing policy, then, families' perspectives and stories are crucial, providing insights into their everyday lives, beliefs and values. Given that families, and especially young people, are often the focal-point of education policy, their views should be valued by policy-makers to understand the points of tension, uncertainty and disillusionment associated with particular policy discourses.

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Enhancing Educational Opportunities for Malay Students through UPLIFT

by Siti Khadijah Setyo R S

Abstract

Education is often seen as a social leveller and a driver of social mobility. However, due to various challenges that they have to face, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to underperform compared to their peers from higher-income families, resulting in an achievement gap at various levels. The achievement gap is likely to widen in the context of growing income inequality. It is thus crucial that supports are strategically put in place to level up children from disadvantaged backgrounds to have access to equal *opportunities* for success. This paper discusses the possibilities of the Uplifting Pupils in Life and Inspiring Families Taskforce (UPLIFT) initiative put forth by the Ministry of Education (MOE) to strengthen support for children from disadvantaged families, especially from the Malay/ Muslim community. This paper also highlights some points for consideration to facilitate greater support for disadvantaged students and their families.

Introduction and Context

Education is often seen as a social leveller and a driver of social mobility. Schools can offer learning experiences that a child may not be able to obtain at home, particularly if the child is living in a disadvantaged environment (Heckman, 2008). However, the reality is students from lower socio-economic status are at often at a disadvantage, and are more likely to struggle to compete, or even be on par, with their peers from privileged backgrounds.

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A meta-analysis of research on socio-economic status (SES) and academic achievement by Sirin (2005) found that SES has a correlation with achievement. This may be attributed to a myriad of factors such as the lack of access to learning resources and conducive environment at home, and parents are not equipped with the knowledge, skills and resources to be active co-educators. Research indicates that children from low-SES households and communities develop academic skills slower than children from higher SES groups (Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2009). For instance, low SES in childhood is related to poor cognitive development, language, memory, socio-emotional processing, and consequently poor income and health in adulthood.

Due to various challenges they have to face, students from lower-income background are more likely to underperform than their peers from higher-income families, resulting in an achievement gap at various levels. Ng and Senin (2018) revealed that parents' education level is a significant predictor of self-esteem. Respondents with more educated parents had higher self-esteem and are hence more likely to perform better in schools than their peers with less educated parents. The achievement gap is likely to widen in the context of growing income inequality. Per capita household income from paid work for the top 10% household was $13,581 in 2018. This was 5.4 times that of the 41st to 50th percentile of household ($2,522) and 24 times that of the lowest 10 per cent households in Singapore ($570) (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2019). The growing income inequality affects, amongst others, access to additional education-related materials and learning experiences such as tuition and enrichment classes. Children from advantageous families are more likely able to afford additional educational resources and support.

Given the socio-economic implications that a good education, and thus a good career brings, it is not surprising that many Singaporean parents invest heavily in their children's

education from young. These investments are often highly correlated to the family's SES. Better educated parents with higher incomes are likely to spend four times more in additional educational support such as private tuition for their children (Teng, 2015). Consequently, those investments give their children more opportunities to excel in their studies vis-à-vis their peers from relatively disadvantaged families. In the same vein, the prospect of academic success leads to lucrative careers for these children when they graduate from university and join the workforce. In this way, educational success in a meritocratic system contributes to a cycle of social stratification and reproduction across generations (Cheng and Dimmock, 2015). Thus, this makes social mobility for disadvantaged families challenging as low-income parents are unable to transfer adequate economic and cultural capital to their children. Children's access to educational opportunities becomes limited and eventually affects their future prospects.

To facilitate social mobility through education, it is thus important that issues of educational equity are addressed. Equity in education requires putting systems in place to ensure that every child has an equal chance for success. In order to do that, it requires understanding the unique challenges and barriers faced by individual students or by populations of students and providing additional supports to help them overcome those barriers. Educational equity does not necessarily mean that all students should obtain equal educational outcomes, but rather striving to ensure that every child has equal opportunities for success (OECD, 2018).

Uplifting Pupils in Life and Inspiring Families Taskforce (UPLIFT)

In its efforts to tackle income inequality and ensuring social mobility, the Singapore Government is committed to "building a society of opportunities for all" (Ministry of Education, 2019). Despite the availability of numerous schemes to assist disadvantaged students and their families, there is bound to be a segment of society that falls through the cracks and is struggling with real daily challenges. With that in mind, the "Uplifting Pupils in Life and Inspiring Families Taskforce" (UPLIFT) was set up by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2018 with the objective to strengthen support for students from disadvantaged families, so to enable them to reach their true potential. The Taskforce aims to "deep-dive into problems and issues faced by underperforming students from disadvantaged families… and devise practical solutions" (ibid).

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Following from in-depth discussion and engagement sessions with various stakeholders, the Taskforce identified four key issues that had to be addressed. These issues are:

i)   long term absenteeism;
ii)   lack of structured and supervised environment outside of school;
iii)   children's lack of self-confidence, motivation and resilience; and
iv)   low parental support for underperforming and disadvantaged children.

To address these four issues, the Taskforce has identified six strategic areas of focus, which are:

i)   to strengthen after-school care and support for students;
ii)   to build students' mental and emotional resilience;
iii)   to strengthen parental engagement and support;
iv)   to implement practical solutions to absenteeism;
v)   to enhance collaboration between schools and the community, and
vi)   to strengthen coordination across all the initiatives.

The initiatives are being introduced in phases and at the time of writing, MOE has announced plans for two out of the six strategies, namely efforts to strengthen after-school care and support and the set-up of the UPLIFT Programme Office (UPO) within the MOE. This paper will outline the announced initiatives and discuss some points for consideration to facilitate greater support for disadvantaged students and their families.

Strengthening after-school care and support

Apart from the standard curriculum hours, after-school hours present an opportunity for meaningful engagements with children. This is especially important for children from low-income families who, due to various circumstances such as parents' long or irregular working hours, competing childcare demands or inadequacy in parenting skills, are often left alone without supervision after school hours. Lapses or the absence of structured adult supervision after school hours have been linked to anti-social and risky behaviours (Griffin, Botvin, Scheier, Diaz & Miller, 2000), poorer school performance (Aizer, 2004; Shumow, Smith & Smith, 2009) and other harmful consequences for children (Goyette-Ewing, 2000).

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MOE will strengthen after-school care and support for disadvantaged students through the school-based student care centres (SCCs) in primary schools and after-school programmes in secondary schools. Adopting the "three E approach", the Ministry has announced that there will be an expansion in the number of school-based SCCs from 170 to all 184 primary schools by 2020, increased enrolment through concerted outreach efforts to reach out to parents whose children would benefit from attending SCCs, and enhancement in curriculum and activities through strengthened partnership between schools and SCCs' vendors.

Secondary school students will benefit from structured after-school support through the "Gear-Up" initiative. Since 2014, secondary schools have piloted after-school programmes for students who need more support and supervision (Ministry of Education, 2019). Through mentorship and guidance by school personnel and youth workers, students enrolled in after-school programmes have strengthened their socio-emotional competencies and are more connected to their learning, peers and school (ibid). MOE will expand and enhance the after-school programmes from the existing 60 secondary schools to 120 schools by 2020 through the "Gear-Up" initiative (Ang, 2019). The initiative will see schools working with community partners to provide customised support and after-school engagement, and strengthen students' social-emotional competencies and social skills.

Making schools-based SCCs accessible to all

One of the barriers to entry into SCCs is affordability. MOE has also announced that they will be working with the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) to review the affordability of SCCs for low-income families. Currently children from low-income families and are attending registered SCCs receive fee subsidies through the Student Care Fee Assistance (SCFA) scheme. Eligibility for SCFA includes a gross monthly household per capita income of $1,000 or less and participation in workforce by both parents for at least 56 hours per month. Written documentation and proof are required if either parent or legal guardian is not working for at least 56 hours per month (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2019).

Similar to the Childcare & Infant Care Subsidy, eligibility for the SCFA is tied to the employment status of the applicants. The requirement of being employed hinders parents, who may not be working or who are searching for employment, from applying for the SCFA and consequently deprive their children access to school-based SCCs.

As part of the upcoming review, the SCFA scheme should be considered to be made available to all low-income children, regardless of their parents' employment status. The intent of SCCs is to ensure that disadvantaged and underperforming children gets additional structured support after school. In the SCCs' settings, these children will benefit from homework supervision, enrichment activities that develop their socio-emotional competencies, resilience and motivation.

Another alternative to completely removing the employment criteria for SCFA scheme eligibility is to have tiered subsidies for employed and unemployed parents. This is similar to the recently enhanced Childcare & Infant Care Subsidy whereby eligible applications will receive a Basic Subsidy of $150 regardless of employment status (Early Childhood Development Agency, 2019). A higher quantum of subsidies is available for working mothers to allay the costs of full-day child care and infant care services. A similar model can be adapted for the SCFA scheme to ensure that no child is deprived access to quality structured after-school care on the basis of their parents' employment status.

Opportunities for the "Gear-Up" initiative

The "Gear-Up" initiative, announced as part of UPLIFT's efforts, will see greater collaboration between schools and community agencies in delivering customised after-school care and support for secondary school students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Research has demonstrated the benefits of structured after-school programmes, and these benefits include better academic performance and improvement in school's attendance (George, Cusick, Wasserman & Gladden, 2007), reduced juvenile crime (Goldschmidt, Huang & Chinnen, 2007), increase in self-confidence and self-esteem (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007) and closing the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their affluent peers (Lauver, 2002).

The move towards the provision of a structured and customised after-school programmes for secondary school students is a welcomed move as students, in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds, will stand to benefit. It was revealed, through MENDAKI's focus group discussions (FGDs) with youths, an area that could be strengthened is in the provision of effective education and career guidance (ECG) (Yayasan MENDAKI, 2018). Whilst ECG is embedded in the school's curriculum, it would be useful to provide additional ECG support for disadvantaged students in smaller group settings with peers and mentors. Through personalised interactions with peers and mentors, it would allow disadvantaged students to be exposed to the different career pathways, and hence insights into the necessary skills and qualifications they need to develop at secondary and post-secondary levels. Clarity on the qualifications and skills required would not only give students from low-income backgrounds adequate runway to prepare their portfolios, but could also serve as a strong motivator for them.

Another opportunity to enhance engagement with students is for schools and community agencies providing the after-school programme services to include opportunities for the students themselves to assist in the planning, running and facilitation of activities. This would instil in them confidence and leadership skills, and a sense of ownership and responsibility. Leadership opportunities let students know that they are important and valued by the school. Youths tend to stay connected to after-school programmes when they have the opportunities to plan and lead activities where their voices are heard in programme decision-making.

Finally, structured after-school programmes are valuable platforms for teachers, student welfare officers (SWOs), school counsellors and other school personnel to build meaningful relationships with students. Whilst adolescents desire autonomy and time with their peers, they continue to rely on guidance from parents and other adults. School staff and youth workers from community agencies act as mentors who help youths by enhancing self-esteem and guiding them with peer relationships

> **Teens are likely to feel connected to an after-school programme and remain in it when they form meaningful relationships with staff.**

(Hirsch, Deutsch & DuBois, 2011). Teens are likely to feel connected to an after-school programme and remain in it when they form meaningful relationships with staff. Staff members show students they care when they take time to get to know them, learn about their interests, and communicate regularly with their families.

Quality engagements with students in schools

Beyond structured after-school programmes, engagement during school hours is key and needs to be strengthened. The definition of engagement usually comprises a *psychological* component and a behavioural component pertaining to participation in school activities (Willms, 2003). Engagement, in the context of schools, refers to the extent to which students identify with and value the outcomes of schooling, and participate in school activities. The psychological component emphasises that students' sense of belonging to

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school has to do with feelings of being accepted and valued by their peers, and by other school's personnel (Goodenow and Grady, 1993).

Another aspect of the psychological component concerns students perceptions of school success and whether they believe that education will benefit them in the long run (Johnson et al., 2001). The participation component of engagement is characterised by factors such as attendance, completing homework, participation in lessons, being prepared for classes and being involved in extra-curricular activities.

A poll conducted by Gallup Inc. (2013) with 500,000 students across the United States of America (USA) revealed that nearly eight in ten elementary students who participated in the poll are engaged in school and the numbers to about six in ten students by middle school. As students grow older, engagement levels fell to only four in ten students qualified as being engaged in high school.

Daily classroom practices need to be equitable. In the classroom, promoting equity is about educators choosing to embrace the unique backgrounds, identities, and experiences that their individual students bring to the table, and tailoring their teaching and instructions to suit the learning needs of the different students. This ensures that every child is given the due attention and support, and that he gradually develops a sense of belonging. It

is also important to set clear expectations for student learning and behaviour as "some students are more vulnerable to low expectations because of societal biases and stereotypes associated with their SES background and/or ethnic identity" (Krasnoff, 2016). It is thus important for educators not to perpetuate stereotypes in their daily interactions with students from disadvantaged backgrounds. A high level of school engagement is desirable as it suggests that students feel that they belong and are valued by their peers and teachers, and this will motivate them to attend and participate actively in lessons and other school-related activities. This in turn would have positive long term outcomes as students who are engaged in school are both more academically successful and more likely to avoid at-risk adolescence behaviours (Skinner & Greene, 2008).

UPLIFT Programme Office (UPO)

Due to the multi-faceted and complex nature of issues faced by underperforming students from disadvantaged backgrounds, schools may not be able to provide all of the necessary interventions and assistance. Key players such as other Government agencies and community agencies, such as the Self-Help Groups (SHGs), grassroots organisations, social service agencies (SSAs) and individual volunteers all have a part to play in addressing the challenges faced by disadvantaged students.

Through the outreach sessions held with social workers, SSAs and SWOs, Ms Indranee Rajah, Second Minister for Education, highlighted that "there is a need for better coordination among agencies so that people who need help can access relevant programmes more easily" (Abu Baker, 2019). In light of this need for greater collaboration and coordination, MOE has set up the UPLIFT Programme Office (UPO) within the Ministry itself to close the coordination gap. The UPO will be a dedicated team to support and strengthen the interface and partnership between school and community partners. The UPO will work with schools to identify disadvantaged students and map their needs to facilitate community-based outreach to families and match them to suitable community programmes and assistance available within their residential areas. The UPO will also match community agencies and volunteers to schools to help schools better leverage community assets and volunteer networks to support after-school activities or holiday programmes for disadvantaged students. Finally the UPO will be responsible in setting targets, monitoring feedback and tracking the outcomes of the various UPLIFT initiatives over time in order to establish accountability and evaluate the scalability of the various pilot programmes.

The setting up of the UPO signifies the Ministry's commitment to strengthen strategic coordination and enhance the home-school-community partnerships through the ecological approach. The ecological approach recognises that families and schools are embedded in communities, and that these settings influence each other and the development of children (Wright & Smith, 1998). It acknowledges the multi-directionality of family, school, and community relationships. Families influence schools, schools influence families, and both affect and are affected by the communities in which they reside (Conoley & Haynes, 1992).

Strengths of multi-contextual collaboration and coordination

Schools and community agencies have been working together for quite some time, and with the setting of the UPO, it is hoped that the collaboration can be enhanced, strengthened and sustained. As the "ears, hands and feet on the ground" community agencies have direct access to the lived realities of disadvantaged students and their families. This wealth of experience and knowledge allow community agencies to provide schools with a contextualised and nuanced understanding on the needs, issues and barriers faced by students and their families.

On the other hand, schools would be able to provide valuable information and data on students so as to guide community agencies in the curation of customised support programmes and services for disadvantaged children. Schools are often seen as an enduring and respected public institutions by many, and thus families may be more receptive to support and interventions involving schools.

Enhanced collaboration and coordination between community agencies and schools would allow disadvantaged students to have access to a continuity of services available within their geographical location. Coordination is important as it prevents duplication of programmes and services which can produce unnecessary costs for the Government, and lost time for the intended beneficiaries. It is hoped that with the co-creation of solutions by Government, schools and community agencies through UPLIFT initiatives, more disadvantaged students have access to equal opportunities for success.

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Opportunities for MENDAKI and other Malay/Muslim social service agencies

MOE's commitment to work closely with community agencies opens up opportunities for MENDAKI and other Malay/Muslim social services agencies (SSAs) to be more targeted in their efforts to support the educational and developmental needs of students, in particular Malay/Muslim students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Through data sharing and information by schools, MENDAKI and other Malay/Muslim SSAs can explore collaborations with MOE and other SSAs to extend their programmes and services to serve the untapped pool of potential Malay/Muslim beneficiaries. These collaborations could serve as the first step to engage and support Malay/Muslim families who have "fallen through the cracks" or who were challenging to outreach to.

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For MENDAKI, collaborations under the ambit of UPLIFT would allow for its programmes and services such as the MENDAKI Tuition Scheme (MTS) and the Education Trust Fund (ETF) to reach to more of its intended target. Engagement with parents and children through the MTS and ETF would also allow MENDAKI officers to build rapport and understand other needs the families may have, and connect them to other educational and parenting programmes such as KelasMateMatika@CC (KMM@CC), Family Excellence Circles (FECs) and mentoring opportunities. MENDAKI can also leverage on the $M^3@$ Towns networks to enhance its outreach efforts, in particular to families of Malay/Muslim students who are identified to receive additional support from community agencies.

Involvement in national initiatives such as UPLIFT would also enhance the professional capacity and credibility of MENDAKI and Malay/Muslim SSAs. Through collaboration and coordination with Government agencies and other community agencies, there will likely be opportunities for mutual sharing of information, knowledge and expertise through learning circles and roundtable discussions. The sharing of resources would enhance the overall credibility of the organisations.

Elements for effective collaboration and coordination

Managing collaboration and coordination between multiple agencies is not an easy task as many actors, interests and resources are in play and may collide when attempting to solve shared issues. Hence, it is important that at the onset of collaboration and coordination, certain parameters are set.

Firstly, it is crucial to have clear expectations and shared accountability amongst the agencies involved in the collaboration. Delineation of roles and responsibilities enhances efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery and ensure that the intended targets and outcomes are met. Clear expectations and shared accountability would also reduce the probability of conflicts as the collaboration evolves.

Secondly, a sound communication plan should be in place between involving parties. Regular meetings with all participating stakeholders should occur to ensure that they continue to build relationships and trust, develop common vocabulary and sharing of best practices. It is also important for all parties to share successes and challenges to highlight what is working and ways to overcome challenges. Should impediments arise, it is important that the collaborating parties work together to resolve them.

Thirdly, there should be clear data-sharing processes and arrangements. One key feature of an effective collaboration is the ability of partners to access data and information from each other. These data may include "sensitive data" that are not accessible outside the collaborative arrangements. Hence, it is important that clear processes and guidelines are set at the onset of collaboration to minimise delays to the collaboration.

Finally, evaluation is important to assess the effectiveness of the collaboration and the interventions rendered. The parameters and measures for evaluation should be co-developed by parties involved in the collaboration. This would ensure that all parties are clear and have co-ownership of the intended outcomes of the collaboration.

Addressing issues of educational equity and social mobility beyond UPLIFT

As discussed in the earlier part of this paper, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to underperform academically due to, amongst other factors, the lack of access to learning resources and structured parental support at home. Poor academic achievements limit career opportunities for disadvantaged children to rise up the ladder of social mobility. This generates a cycle of disadvantage for the children and their future generations to come.

How then can we provide the necessary support for children from low-income backgrounds to break away from the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage? The Government's initiative to address the issues of educational equity and social mobility through UPLIFT is no doubt a commendable one. Enhancing structured after-school support and care as well as the provision of more opportunities for collaborations between schools and community agencies are steps in the right direction. Moreover, there are other strategies and initiatives under the ambit of UPLIFT that have yet to be announced. The future seems hopeful as we await the announcements of the remaining UPLIFT's initiatives.

Beyond UPLIFT's initiatives at the primary and secondary school levels, educational equity begins with effective early childhood education and continues as students advance through their academic journey in post-secondary institutions, and eventually as they transit into their respective career pathways. In other words, students, especially those from the disadvantaged backgrounds, should be supported throughout their academic and developmental lifespan to maximise their potential.

> **Educational equity begins with effective early childhood education and continues as students advance through their academic journey in post-secondary institutions, and eventually as they transit into their respective career pathways.**

The Government acknowledges the importance of tackling issues of inequality from the early years (Tan & Chin, 2018). Comprehensive and holistic upstream initiatives, such as

KidSTART, are important to ensure that young children from low-income families are given the opportunities to have a good start in life. It is encouraging that KidSTART will be expanded to benefit another 5,000 children in the next three years (Goh, 2019). In recent years, various measures have been put in place to ensure that every child has the opportunity to access quality and affordable child care and pre-school education (Tang, 2019). Hence, the structures are in place and there are multiple opportunities available for every child, especially those from low-income families, to receive quality and affordable pre-school education. The challenge is in outreach and getting disadvantaged children to register and attend pre-school regularly. This is where concerted efforts between the Government and community agencies are needed to ensure that no child is left behind and that they get a good early start in life, which could pave the way towards a positive learning journey in the future.

Students from Primary Three onwards go through an ECG curriculum that meets students' developmental needs at different stages. In addition to exposure to ECG in schools, students have the opportunity to discover their strengths and interests through various SkillsFuture initiatives. The interactive MySkillsFuture website provides information on industries, occupations, courses and education institutions in Singapore for students to make informed career choices. Teachers, as the first touch points for students, have also been trained and equipped with basic ECG knowledge to support their students (SkillsFuture, 2019). Provision of ECG programmes continues for students as they progress to post-secondary institutions. These usually come in the form of career workshops, and career and industry talks.

Journeying through transition from adolescence to early adulthood

Both directly and indirectly, poverty can make the transition from adolescence to early adulthood difficult (Berzin, De Marco, Shaw, Unick, & Hogan, 2006). The challenge for most young adults, especially so for low-income youths, is the transition from school to work environment. Thus, it is important to strengthen after-school care and support as outlined in the earlier half of this paper. However, structured support ends once students proceed to post-secondary education. MENDAKI's conversations with youths from Junior Colleges (JCs) and Institutes of Technical Education (ITEs) revealed that "JC and ITE respondents showed little interest in approaching ECG counsellors – almost none had done so. While a majority of the JC respondents (about 85%) were aware of the presence of ECG counsellors in their schools, more than half of the ITE respondents (58%) were not aware of the existence of ECG counsellors on their campus" (Yayasan MENDAKI, 2018). While it is expected of them as young adults to be independent in their career planning, disadvantaged students may face multiple barriers in realising their career aspirations such as low social capital, low self-esteem and lack of the relevant soft skills and competencies.

Thus, it is crucial that young adults, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are given the structured education and career support as they transit into post-secondary and then into young adulthood. Initiatives such as mentoring and networking sessions would

be beneficial for youths. Future Ready initiatives by MENDAKI such as NextStop Seminar and "Future Of…" series are good platforms to engage youths on various educational and career opportunities, and at the same time connect youths to industry experts and other professionals. MENDAKI is also building its pool of volunteers, in particular young professionals who excel in their respective fields, to be mentors for ITE students. These volunteer-mentors would serve as role models and help ITE students in their educational and career journey through career advice, exposure to networking opportunities and building the youths' social capital.

Journeying with the students, at various milestones of their educational and career trajectories is important. Post-secondary students, especially those from under-privileged backgrounds, may not have access to positive role models and important social networks. They may find it more challenging to overcome the demands of planning for their careers and eventually, transitioning from school to their desired careers. Thus, opportunities such as access to mentors to journey with them and access to networking opportunities would benefit disadvantaged post-secondary students. In doing so, students would remain motivated and committed to complete their post-secondary education instead of dropping out. It is important that disadvantaged students, and their families, are supported throughout, from the early years until the early stages of their career development.

Concluding remarks

Every child, regardless of their socio-economic background, has the right to education and opportunities for success. Children from lower socio-economic status are often at a disadvantage, and are more likely to struggle to compete with their peers from more privileged backgrounds. It is thus crucial that structures are put in place to ensure educational equity and that children from disadvantaged backgrounds have access to equal opportunities for success.

Government initiatives, such as UPLIFT, are a step in the right direction to address issues of educational equity and social mobility. More resources, from both the public and people sectors, will be allocated to support the learning and development needs of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. There is also greater collaboration and strategic coordination between Government agencies and community agencies, and collaboration opens up opportunities to facilitate better service delivery on the ground.

Beyond UPLIFT's initiatives, efforts to address educational equity issues encompass the life span of a child/student, from the early years to the early stages of their career development. Initiatives such as KidSTART and SkillsFuture are good starting points in the provision of support at the various milestones. However beyond policies and programmes, the "human touch" is crucial to ensure that programmes and services reach the intended recipients. Thus community agencies, SHGs and Malay/Muslim social service agencies have a role to play in bridging national policies and initiatives to families who need them the most.

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Investing in Early Childhood Care and Education:
Developments and Opportunities in Singapore

by Siti Afiyah Mustapha

Abstract

The importance of quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) in producing long-lasting social and economic benefits for individuals and society has been well-established by multidisciplinary research. This paper discusses recent developments in Singapore's ECCE landscape, particularly, the increase in state investments to enhance the accessibility, affordability and quality of pre-schools and the sector. Engaging local and international research, this paper further deliberates on what more can be done to enrich the early development and learning experiences of socially and economically disadvantaged children, with implications on the role of community-based efforts.

Context

In his *Towards a Community of Success* address in June 2019, Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs Masagos Zulkifli set out two education targets for Singapore's Malay/Muslim community. First, the community needed to ensure that all Malay/Muslim students can, at the very least, enrol and graduate from Institutes of Higher Education (ITE). Attaining basic technical qualifications is considered the 'red line', or the minimum that would enable future skills upgrading, and facilitate better educational and career trajectories. Second, to strive to get as many students as possible to reach the 'blue line', that is the university. While the percentage of Primary 1 Malay cohort progressing to post-secondary education has significantly improved from 45.1 per cent in 1995 to 93.7 per cent in 2018 (Ministry of Education (MOE), 2019), Malays remain under-represented in the segment of university-educated individuals in Singapore (Tan, 2013). These goals can be contextualised within the Singapore Ministry of Education's (MOE) move to further consolidate earlier policies to expand education pathways for students of different abilities and promote greater inclusion in education policy (Tan, 2018). Key education reforms and policy developments include the expansion of subject-based banding in secondary schools, greater social and educational support for disadvantaged students, widening opportunities for Nitec graduates from ITE to attain a higher qualification by 2030, and changes to the admission exercises in secondary school, polytechnics, ITE and universities.

Even so, widening education access and participation cannot be the only solution to promote educational mobility or equity in the completion of tertiary education (OECD, 2018). Disparities in tertiary attainment build upon earlier disparities in learning, which stem from differences

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> **Widening education access and participation cannot be the only solution to promote educational mobility or equity in the completion of tertiary education**

in the quality of education and schooling throughout the compulsory years. Given that gaps related to socio-economic status manifest early, approaches to 'equalise learning opportunities during early childhood and adolescence' must be considered, in order to facilitate greater improvements in educational and social mobility (OECD, 2018). Several studies abroad which track children into adulthood have demonstrated that important, long-lasting social and economic benefits are associated with high-quality early childhood programmes, especially in the very early years and for disadvantaged children. This paper focuses on recent developments in Singapore's early childhood care and education (ECCE) landscape, including the increasing and accelerated state investments to improve accessibility, affordability and quality of pre-schools and the sector. It is acknowledged that advocacy for early childhood education in Singapore has evolved from meeting childcare needs to recruit female labour into the workforce in the 1980s, to the provision of quality early childhood services as an important driver in addressing long-term issues of social

inequality so that disadvantaged children can transition more effectively into primary school and higher education levels (Lipponen, Ang, & Lim, 2019). Engaging local and international research, this paper further deliberates on what more can be done to enrich the early learning experiences of socially and economically disadvantaged children, with implications on the role of community-based efforts.

The Long-Term Benefits of Investing in Quality Early Childhood Education

Several studies have demonstrated the important role of high-quality early childhood education on children's cognitive, academic and social development. Research by Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman and colleagues, found a 13 per cent annual return on investment for Governments that spend on providing comprehensive, high-quality birth-to-five early education. Neuro-scientific research by Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) established that 'virtually every aspect of early human development, from the brain's evolving circuitry to the child's capacity for empathy, is affected by the environments and experiences that are encountered in a cumulative fashion, beginning in the prenatal period and extending through the early childhood years'. Apart from cognitive developments, quality early childhood education also has significant lasting effects on school progress and social behaviour (Aos et al., 2004).

There are two influential American studies that track children into adulthood which demonstrate the lasting effects of ECE, especially for children from low-income families – the HighScope Perry Pre-school Project conducted in the 1960s and the Carolina Abecedarian (ABC) Project in the 1970s. The Perry Pre-school Project offered high-quality pre-school education to children with risk factors of failing in school. It had curriculum that emphasised active learning, an average child-teacher ratio of 6 to 1, and pupils were taught by certified public school teachers with at least a bachelor's degree. The tracked outcomes reflected that not only did more of these children graduate from high school, but also were more likely to hold a job and have higher earnings. The ABC Project provided full-time, high-quality educational intervention in a childcare setting from infancy to age 5, which focused on social, emotional, cognitive, and physical areas of development, with particular emphasis to language. The programme was found to have lasting effects on IQ, parenting practices and child attachment, resulting in higher educational attainment and more skilled employment amongst those in the treatment group. More recent evidence demonstrated that high quality ECCE contributes to better future health outcomes, prevents chronic diseases and substantially lowers healthcare costs. A more recent longitudinal study in Britain, the Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary (EPPSE) project, showed that children who attended pre-school attained better academic results at age 16, which in turn, translated to significant additional earnings over their lifetime (Taggart, et al., 2014). Institutional experiences like pre-school made a bigger impact on Mathematics than English, postulating that parents do more to build literacy skills in their children at home through activities like reading, and do not focus much on building numeracy skills (Davie, 2015).

The evidence makes a strong case for countries to invest deeply in their early childhood care and education. In 2012, the Starting Well Index on pre-school education by the Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Singapore 29th out of 45 countries in the world, a relatively low standing compared to its front-runner status in secondary and tertiary education. Since then, several initiatives have signalled a compelling state commitment in strengthening and accelerating accessibility, affordability and quality improvements in Singapore's ECCE sector. Earlier propositions to nationalise the sector were approached with prudence – in part to allow parents to exercise more choice in their children's early learning, and also to curb the downward pressures of a highly structured, academic-oriented curriculum directed towards academic readiness of pre-schoolers. The last seven years however, saw a 'growth spurt' in the sector with the Government's 'more pro-active stance' in enhancing 'investment, oversight, pre-school capacity and training' (Lipponen, Ang, & Lim, 2019). Provision of quality early education was impressed upon by President Halimah Yacob in her address to Parliament in 2018, to tackle the problem of social inequality, specifically the 'increasingly dissimilar starting points of children from different family backgrounds' (Wong, 2018).

Standards have been raised across the sector, partly due to the consolidation of hundreds of non-profit and private pre-school centres under the Anchor Operator (AOP) and Partner Operator (POP) schemes, which receive Government funding to provide quality programmes at affordable, capped fees. MOE incepted its own kindergartens in 2014, setting aside a third of places for children from lower income backgrounds to enhance accessibility and to pilot a model of best practice in the sector. By 2025, 80 per cent of pre-schoolers can expect a place in a Government-supported pre-school operated by MOE or under the AOP and POP schemes, up from just over 50 per cent today (Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA), 2019). With the expansion of childcare places in newer and high demand estates, parents would benefit from having more pre-school options nearer to their homes and support networks (Ang, 2019). Annual spending on pre-schools is projected to quadruple from $360 million in 2012 to $1.7 billion in 2022 (Prime Minister's Office (PMO) Singapore, 2017).

Several enhancements to means-tested childcare and kindergarten subsidies were made this year to improve the affordability of pre-school education. In March 2019, childcare subsidies were extended in terms of quantum and duration for mothers who were seeking employment or were full-time caregivers to their younger children, to grant them greater peace of mind in securing a job or in caring for their children (ECDA, 2019). From 2020, the monthly income ceiling for additional subsidies will be raised from $7,500 to $12,000, potentially supporting another 30,000 households (PMO, 2019). Given that the monthly median household income in Singapore was $9,293 in 2018 (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2018), the increase stood to especially benefit middle-income families who enrol their children in Government-supported pre-schools. In the medium term, full-day monthly

pre-school fees would be reduced to about $300 to mirror the cost of primary school inclusive of after-school student care fees (PMO, 2019). With the maximum subsidies, families in the lowest household income tier (i.e. $3,000 and below) pay as little as $3 for full-day childcare and $1 for kindergarten services by an Anchor Operator pre-school today (ECDA, 2019). As at 2018, the total number of Singaporean children enrolled in childcare receiving additional subsidies has increased by more than 30 per cent since 2016, with about 5 per cent receiving the maximum subsidy (Lipponen, Ang, & Lim, 2019). To lower administrative barriers, a new enhanced centre management system was also introduced to streamline and reduce application process and time spent by families (ECDA, 2019).

In addition to enhanced funding, research suggests that inclusion in universal programmes that entail well-planned pedagogies, low child-staff ratios and specialist staff may be the most effective approach for children with special needs from socio-economically disadvantaged families (Lipponen, Ang, & Lim, 2019). As pre-school capacity expands, new legislation has been introduced to raise the quality of pre-schools. There are now more centres certified by ECDA under the Singapore Pre-school Accreditation Framework (SPARK) and the Early Childhood Development Centres Act was passed to regulate kindergartens and child care centres under the same framework, to ensure higher and more consistent standards across the sector. The National Institute of Early Childhood Development (NIEC), expanded continuing professional development opportunities and leadership development programmes were introduced to attract and retain quality ECCE professionals.

However, solely improving access and participation to quality schools do not necessarily inoculate children, particularly disadvantaged ones, from persisting environmental deficits, detrimental role models and learning impediments. Protective factors such as high quality teaching, evidence-based programming and effective policies in subsequent schools, are needed to build educational resilience and sustain headway made in pre-school (Howe & Covell, 2013). In Singapore, initiatives to support vulnerable children with weak family circumstances include immunisation, health checks, Development Support Programme, and the Focused Language Assistance in Reading (FLAiR), which supports language and literacy development in pre-schools. To reap the benefits of early education, ECDA has been partnering community agencies to outreach and facilitate enrolment of children in pre-school early, as well as achieve regular pre-school attendance. Building on these efforts, pilot ecosystems of support for early childhood development such as the Government-led KidSTART, and Circle of Care by Care Corner have been scaled up to proactively identify more low-income and vulnerable children aged six and below, provide them with early access to health, learning and developmental support, and monitor their progress during their early years. Specific to community-

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Protective factors such as high quality teaching, evidence-based programming and effective policies in subsequent schools are needed to build educational resilience and sustain headway made in pre-school.

based efforts, M[3] – a collaboration between key Malay/Muslim institutions in Singapore, MENDAKI, MUIS and MESRA – has identified marriage, parenting and early childhood development as one of three salient community challenges to tackle[1]. Its principle follows that strong families understand that education is key to social mobility and building their family assets. Besides leveraging on existing national programmes, it also offers culturally-sensitive, evidenced-informed interventions such as pre-marriage support and parent-child programmes targeting specific segments of the community. While it may be too early to assess the impact of some of these initiatives, it is important that they continue to be closely monitored and collectively evaluated. Over and above these focus areas, several others can be considered.

a. Strengthen health and social support for at-risk expectant mothers and their families

Parental circumstances are crucial in children's growth and development, and studies have argued that maternal factors are the strongest predictor of negative outcomes for children (Olson, Ceballo, & Park, 2002; Cabrera, Fagan, Wight, & Schadler, 2011). Findings from Singapore's largest and most comprehensive birth cohort study, Growing Up in Singapore Towards Healthy Outcomes (GUSTO), point to the higher likelihood that women with symptoms of possible depression – not just those with depression – will have babies with neurodevelopmental disorders like anxiety, depressive or disruptive behaviour disorders (Choo, 2018). The study also demonstrated a strong link between pre-academic performance of four-year-olds and their performance in the early primary school years. Another critical health statistic is that up to one in five women in Singapore are at risk of Gestational Diabetes Mellitus (GDM) (SingHealth, 2018). Children born from affected pregnancies places them at a higher risk of experiencing birth trauma and a lack of glucose in the bloodstream, which can result in long-term negative health effects. Despite the risks, about 90 to 95 per cent of women with GDM do not undergo regular check-ups after delivery to monitor their diabetes condition (SingHealth, 2018).

Two notable local programmes that target maternal health in low-income and vulnerable families are the Kids Integrated Development Service 0-3 (KIDS 0-3) and KidSTART. KIDS 0-3 provides expectant mothers with pre- and post-natal care, in addition to teaching them how to care for and interact with the child, including proper nutrition, lifestyle adjustments, breast-feeding, and providing stimulating environment for early childhood learning (KK Women's and Children's Hospital, 2018). Since July 2016, KIDS 0-3 has received funding from ECDA to extend its home visitation programme to more families under the KidSTART. To encourage early health screening and improve access to early intervention, existing pre-marriage support structures or marriage preparation programmes can be leveraged to build awareness amongst couples – especially at-risk, vulnerable, or hard to reach segments – on parental health and family healthcare. Psychosocial support such as financial assistance, employment and mental health

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[1]The other two focus areas are (i) empowering and mentoring youth, and (ii) supporting those who are left behind because of drugs or social problems. Outreach, impact and the 'last-mile' service delivery in these areas are to be strengthened.

services should be enhanced to alleviate stressors on expectant low-income mothers and their families. Integrating health services and screening seamlessly into early care and pre-school provision on wider scale may also serve to increase

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Psychosocial support such as financial assistance, employment and mental health services should be enhanced to alleviate stressors on expectant low-income mothers and their families.

public education and outreach, in addition to bridging the physical and psychological barriers that families at risk may have towards seeking professional help.

b. Continue investing in parents' capability to promote their children's early development and employ rigorous evaluation research to update strategies

Beyond quality pre-school programmes, research is also consistent that child outcomes are related to their home learning environment and experiences. Structured programmes targeting parenting skills, such as the evidence-based Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) and Signposts, have been deemed effective in helping parents handle their children better and lowering parenting stress. To equip more parents with skills to strengthen their relationships with their children, ten social service agencies in Singapore were appointed as one-stop regional centres – or Parenting Support Providers (PSP) – for Government-funded parenting support programmes (Goh, 2019). While evidence continues to build from current approaches, new, innovative approaches to family engagement and parenting should continue to be developed and updated alongside latest research on children's learning in schools, and grounded in the local context.

One major study is the Singapore Kindergarten Impact Project (SKIP), Singapore's first national evaluation of pre-school quality. In addition to evaluating structural and process factors in pre-school classrooms, the project is collecting information relating to the home environment to examine the impact of pre-school and home factors on children's learning and developmental outcomes. Early insights from SKIP suggest the importance of balancing the focus on academic content and executive functioning with the development of other competencies such as motor skills and self-regulation (Nurturing Early Learners, 2018). For example, it found that better fine motor skills are related to better cognitive and socio-emotional self-regulation, which in turn, are related to better math, reading, and writing skills. Better gross motor skills are related to better cognitive self-regulation, which in turn, is related to better early math skills. The development of these skills demands individualised focus along with academic material. Self-regulation skills such as paying attention, remembering directions and avoiding disruptive behaviours can also be practised through daily interactions, and parents have a crucial role to play in setting strong routines (Montroy & Bowles, 2017). Such insights bear implications for parenting and the cultivation of a meaningful home learning environment, in addition to teaching and learning in pre-school. Some parents may focus on 'hothousing' their children – a poll by The Straits Times and research firm Nexus Link

in 2015 showed that nearly four in 10 parents sent their pre-school children to tuition (Davie, 2015; Mathews & Lim, 2017). In contrast, parents who 'struggle financially, with health issues, disability or marital disruptions', will face challenges in engendering a conducive environment for effective childhood development (Mathews & Lim, 2017). Parenting practices should also be examined alongside support to build and maintain stability of the household. Additionally, families' cultural capital – their knowledge, skills, attitudes and other cultural resources (Bourdieu, 1986) – is an important influence on the development of successful home-school connections. In such partnerships, it is essential to also help parents to look ahead to issues that their children may face during the primary school years and beyond.

c. Bridge the language gap early

Narrowing the language gap for disadvantaged children is another critical area to advance efforts in, in order to help them adapt to schooling better. Low progress students in Singapore tend to have a non-English speaking home background, and learn English as a foreign or second language (Wang, Teng, & Tan, 2014). A noteworthy study known as 'The 30 Million Word Gap' found that 86 to 98 per cent of the words used by each child by the age of three were derived from their parents' vocabularies (Hart & Risley, 2003). By the age of four, a child from a high-income family would have experienced 30 million more words spoken in their presence, as compared with a child from a family on welfare. Better-off children also heard more words of praise. This gap increases as the years go by, resulting in slower growth for children who are socio-economically disadvantaged and accelerated growth for those from more privileged backgrounds. Findings from SKIP also revealed that while cognitive ability plays a bigger

> **By the age of four, a child from a high-income family would have experienced 30 million more words spoken in their presence, as compared with a child from a family on welfare.**

role in English language proficiency and differences between individual children, home environment and exposure heavily influence how early children learn their mother tongue and grasp vocabulary (Teng, 2019). Besides reading books or listening to audio, children need to actively use the language to become more confident in it, rather than being passive learners. Initiatives to level up pre-schoolers with weak foundations in language and literacy include a three-year pilot programme which trains teachers on the Abecedarian Approach (AA) in selected pre-schools to focus on language development and quality one-to-one interactions between a child and an adult to stimulate development. FLAiR is also offered to K2 children in pre-school centres run by Anchor Operators and MOE Kindergartens to help children, especially those who come from a background or a family that does not have English as a common language at home, to build a strong foundation in English and narrow the reading gap with their peers. While FLAiR is increasingly being extended to non-profit pre-school centres, access to such programmes should be expanded on a national scale to ensure that these children receive the additional support,

regardless of the pre-school they attend. A more constructive strategy is to intervene even before the child commences pre-school or kindergarten, and to invite support from community members to identify such children and work with their families.

d. Empower low-income families to build financial capability

Specific to pre-school costs, a recent poll by the People's Action Party (PAP) Women's Wing in Singapore found that parents spend between 6 and 15 per cent of household income on pre-school-related out-of-pocket expenses (Ng, 2019). Even after subsidies, pre-school fees can remain costly for young families, with the latest median monthly childcare fee in the first quarter of this year at $856. This cost may increase when 330 childcare centres raise their fees for full-day childcare next year (Co, 2019). While the disbursement of Government transfers, rebates and subsidies supplements household income and helps low-income households cope with their expenditure, family circumstances may render these ineffective given the high cost of living in Singapore (Lim & Oh, 2019). The Household Expenditure Survey in Singapore revealed that the monthly household expenditure of $2,570 for the bottom 20 per cent of households nationally exceeded their income of $2,230 by about $330 on average in 2017/18 (Department of Statistics, 2019). This was the only income group whose income, which includes regular Government transfers such as Workfare Income Supplement (WIS) and GST Vouchers, was lower than their expenditure. To promote financial stability in the long run, low-income families should be supported in coping with their immediate needs so that they can upskill and be gainfully employed to secure a better income and support their children in education. The enhanced childcare subsidy, especially in the form of the Additional Subsidies, would allow for more mothers to search for employment without the added stress of managing their childcare needs. Access to stable employment would then allow mothers to benefit from the full childcare subsidies that are available. Additionally, more efforts can be directed towards partnering low-income families to improve their financial capabilities. For some families, the foremost barrier to being more financially capable is not the lack of aspiration but the lack of information. One example is the Singapore Financial Capability and Asset Building training programme, piloted in 2018 by the National University of Singapore (NUS) in partnership with Citi Foundation. The programme sought to equip social workers with skills to move beyond helping families cope within their means or balance needs and wants, to guide them on household financial matters such as managing cash, budgets, credit, debt and savings as well as achieving financial well-being and security (NUS, 2019).

Another potential area of support is to boost education savings for low-income families with school-going children. A study of low-income Malay/Muslim families by MENDAKI (2015) showed that respondent parents have high education aspirations for their children's education. However, these families might lack the funds to attain these goals due to the lack of financial investments from young, which may lead them to struggle with increasing education costs. Low-income parents with many children have difficulties in deciding how to distribute money into their children's Child Development

Account (CDA), losing out from leveraging on the savings and co-matching incentive in the CDA (Han & Chia, 2012). Having to consistently attend to present needs perpetuates their long-term adverse behaviour to savings for education. Schemes akin to the POSB Matched Savings Programme, which is open to primary school students who either receive financial assistance from the Ministry of Education (MOE) or are beneficiaries of the Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund, can be introduced at the upstream levels for families with young children at the bottom tier of subsidies. There is potential to explore additional sources of 'seed funding' for low-income children so that they are able to afford learning opportunities in and out of classrooms.

e. Adopt multidisciplinary approaches and build evidence in the Malay/ Muslim community's early learning sector

Given the complexity of issues children from socio-economically disadvantaged families face, stand-alone vertical programmes and interventions might no longer be equitable or effective in improving the early development of children. There is a need to foster strong collaboration between Government, academics and implementation partners to strengthen local evidence of what works and how. This includes developing more national and community learning platforms and form communities of practice to enable peer learning and exchange of experience. In Singapore, there has also been a call for more 'walls between pre-schools and fields like health, social service and early intervention' to be broken down, and more early childhood educators to be equipped to support children who face learning and developmental challenges given their circumstance (Lipponen, Ang, & Lim, 2019). Taking cue from multidisciplinary approaches, MENDAKI has partnered with A*STAR's Singapore Institute for Clinical Sciences (SICS) to integrate its school ready programmes with research on school readiness, mothers' mental health and its impact on parenting (Goh, 2019). Equally important however is the need to look into translational research to ensure that findings and feedback are successfully deployed and acted upon by relevant stakeholders. Malay/Muslim organisations, education, social service and related sectors should also look collaboratively for translation projects to streamline resources, expand expertise, achieve more focused outreach and intervention, as well as scalability. Correspondingly, coordinated mechanisms for monitoring, reporting, as well as multi-stakeholder engagement, must be implemented not only between national agencies, but also participating community organisations. The shared benefit of pooling data enables coordinated touchpoints and comprehensive engagement of families as the child progresses from one education stage to another.

Conclusion

In discussing recent developments in Singapore's ECCE landscape, this paper further deliberates on what more can be done to enrich the early development and learning experiences of socio-economically disadvantaged children, including the role of community-based efforts. Importantly, investment in these children must be 'accompanied by deep adjustments' to steer education away from the narrow focus on academics, from

continuing practices of 'sorting and hierarchising' them, and from 'unequal rewards' for individuals with varied strengths (Teo, 2018). Ultimately, any strategy in the early years and pre-school must be aligned and sustained with effective education in formal schooling through to adulthood, to produce long-term benefits for economy and society.

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Healthy Students Make Effective Learners:
Tackling Obesity Among the Young in Singapore

by Muhammad Farouq Osman

Abstract

The prevalence of childhood obesity involving children aged below 18, has increased in Singapore over the years. If not tackled early, obesity during childhood can extend into adult life with all its attendant health problems, impinging upon the nation's health infrastructure. International studies have also demonstrated that childhood obesity is associated with poor academic performance and reduced overall well-being, by affecting memory power, self-esteem and peer relationships, among others. What more can be done by the Government – beyond school programmes – to prevent children from becoming obese, and to help families manage this condition? This paper proposes four recommendations: conduct extensive public campaigns to combat childhood obesity; impose price, behavioural and advertisement controls on unhealthy food and drinks; implement integrated efforts to journey with low-income and minority families; and provide more support for social and medical research on childhood obesity.

Childhood obesity in Singapore

Childhood obesity, defined as "excessive fat accumulation which presents a risk to health" (Deurenberg-Yap and Goh, 2009: 11) in those under 18, is fast becoming a serious problem in Singapore. At its most basic, obesity results from an energy imbalance over time, when the number of calories consumed from food and drinks – especially those high in fat, sugar and salt – exceeds the number of calories expended for daily physical activities.

> **In 1976, only 1.4% of Primary One pupils (aged six) were obese – that figure increased to 12.7% by 2006**

In 1976, only 1.4% of Primary One pupils (aged six) were obese – that figure increased to 12.7% by 2006 (Teo, 2014). More recent figures show that overall, 13% of all Singapore schoolchildren were obese in 2017, up from 11% in 2011 (Lee, 2018).

Obese children face a variety of challenges, physically, mentally and socio-emotionally. Paediatric experts point out that excess weight early in life can "kickstart puberty at an earlier age", and that those children might not be emotionally prepared "to cope with earlier puberty changes" (Gan, 2013). Such socio-emotional issues can no doubt impact a child's long-term development and growth. International studies across different cultures and countries have demonstrated that childhood obesity is associated with poor academic performance, by affecting memory power, self-esteem and peer relationships, among others (Wu et al, 2017; Taras and Potts-Datema, 2005; Wang and Veugelers, 2008; Zeller et al, 2008). In turn, working memory has been shown to be an important predictor of reading comprehension (Best et al, 2011) and math scores (Bull et al, 2008). Mitigating childhood obesity thus should be an important part of any national strategy to secure children's overall well-being, including boosting academic performance.

> **International studies across different cultures and countries have demonstrated that childhood obesity is associated with poor academic performance, by affecting memory power, self-esteem and peer relationships, among others**

If not tackled early, obesity during childhood can extend into adult life, with all its attendant health problems such as diabetes, heart attack, stroke and kidney failure. Indeed, figures from a 2017 Health Promotion Board (HPB) study illustrate that 70% of Singapore children who are obese at age seven tend to remain so as they grow into adulthood (Lai, 2017). Obesity, however, does not only present challenges to individual health, it also impinges upon Singapore's health infrastructure in a significant way: in 2016, the estimated cost of obesity in Singapore was S$2.77 billion, or about 14% of total healthcare spending (Lai, 2017). It is clear indeed that tackling childhood obesity can help mitigate social costs

associated with poor education and health later in life. What more can be done by the Government to prevent children from becoming obese, and to help families manage this condition? This paper aims to answer those questions, and propose recommendations.

Combating obesity in Singapore

In 2016, the Ministry of Health (MOH) launched a 'war on diabetes', which is a national strategy to promote good eating and lifestyle habits to children, as well as encourage early screening and sound disease management (Philomin, 2016). Recognising that obesity is a significant risk factor for diabetes, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in his National Day Rally 2017 speech urged Singaporeans to "eat less and eat healthily" including cutting down on soft drinks, and to "get more exercise" (Prime Minister's Office, 2017). Mr Lee highlighted that Singapore has one of the developed world's highest rates of diabetes, second only to the United States: one in nine of all Singaporeans have diabetes (Prime Minister's Office, 2017). However, the situation is more significant for older Singaporeans:

the rate is 30% for those who are above 60 years of age (Prime Minister's Office, 2017). There are also differences in obesity prevalence among the ethnic groups, with Malays having the highest proportion of obese people at 24% (Ministry of Health, 2010). In contrast, the figure is 16.9% for Chinese, and 7.9% for Indians (Ministry of Health, 2010).

The Government has taken decisive steps to deal with obesity and diabetes, focusing its efforts on different target groups and several stakeholders. For example, the Government persuaded the beverage industry players – including Coca-Cola, Nestle and PepsiCo – to "reduce the amount of sugar" in their "packaged sugar sweetened beverages" sold in Singapore to a maximum content of "12% by 2020", potentially reducing sugar consumption from such beverages by "about 300,000 kg per year" (Ministry of Health, 2017). In 2019, the Government announced that it will introduce "mandatory front-of-pack nutrition labels" for beverages high in sugar content, and a ban on advertisements for the least healthy of those beverage products (Ministry of Health, 2019).

Specifically targeting school-going children and youth, the Government set up the NurtureSG task force in 2016 to make recommendations on improving the health of younger Singaporeans (Lee, 2018). The following year, MOH and the Ministry of Education (MOE) announced the expansion of the Healthy Meals in Schools programme, mandating all school canteen stall operators to serve healthier food such as those mixed

with brown rice and wholemeal (Yuen, 2017). Previously, only selected schools participated in the programme, which required cooks and vendors to be trained by "nutritionists and chefs on healthy cooking methods" and which could result in students paying more for their healthier meals (Yuen, 2017). Furthermore, MOE has the Holistic Health Framework in place for all students, which emphasises their "total well-being" encompassing "physical, mental and social health" and "not just measures of weight and fitness" (Ministry of Education, 2018). The framework replaced the Trim and Fit Programme (TAF) in 2007 amid concerns about "stigma faced by (obese) students" (Foo et al, 2013: 108). In TAF, obese students from primary to tertiary levels were identified and made to participate in "special physical activity" trainings in school, and subject to "messages on healthier dietary choices" (Foo et al, 2013: 108).

Social determinants of health

Any Government policy aimed at disease control and management – including that for childhood obesity – would do well to consider the significant part played by the social determinants of health. These factors include social circumstances such as "living and work situations, neighbourhood characteristics and poverty", "socio-economic status", "racial discrimination" and economic, political and religious contexts that impinge upon "the health of individuals, groups and communities" (Cockerham et al, 2017). For example, findings from a study on British civil servants demonstrated that Whitehall employees with "the highest occupational rank had the lowest percentage of deaths", with the likelihood of mortality from cardiovascular disease increasing "the lower an individual's position" in the hierarchy, due to differences in exposure to stress, among others (Marmot et al, 1984 quoted in Cockerham et al, 2017). This was despite the fact that all the jobs were hazard-free and white collar, with free health care provided.

Accordingly, in order for interventions mitigating childhood obesity to be effective, relevant policies and programmes should recognise social determinants as the "fundamental causes of health afflictions" (Cockerham et al, 2017). Beyond a focus on lifestyle changes and individual responsibility like managing weight and fitness levels, there is a need to acknowledge the role different social environments such as the home, school, mass media and market play in influencing a child's energy input and output. In other words, to deal with the rising childhood obesity rate effectively, an integrated systems approach over children's

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Beyond a focus on lifestyle changes and individual responsibility like managing weight and fitness levels, there is a need to acknowledge the role different social environments such as the home, school, mass media and market play in influencing a child's energy input and output.

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life course should be employed, recognising the social determinants of health over and above "assigning causation solely to biological anomalies" (Cockerham et al, 2017). The question is, to what extent are existing policies reflective of this holistic, social approach to disease management?

Beyond school health and fitness programmes

The Government's main policy tools to mitigate childhood obesity lie in its school programmes such as MOE's Holistic Health Framework, and the Healthy Meals in Schools scheme. While these initiatives are commendable, their effectiveness is contingent upon the success of the Government's other efforts, beyond the school environment, to tackle childhood obesity. For example, a randomised controlled trial was conducted to determine the effectiveness of a "childhood obesity prevention programme delivered through (UK primary) schools", which included "healthy eating and physical activity" (Adab et al, 2018: 1). It found "no statistically significant effect on BMI z score" or "on preventing childhood obesity" (Adab et al, 2018: 1). Similarly, in Singapore, it was found that students actually gained weight during long school holidays, when they were outside the purview of school health and fitness programmes (Khalik, 2016).

> **Similarly, in Singapore, it was found that students actually gained weight during long school holidays, when they were outside the purview of school health and fitness programmes**

One policy outside the school system which can be implemented to encourage a healthy diet in children and the general populace is through controls on the price promotions of unhealthy food and drinks – those high in fat, sugar and salt. Such products are a major contributor to obesity in Singapore children. Apart from an MOH directive to ban advertisements of beverages high in sugar content and to institute labelling of these products, there are no controls on the price promotions of drinks with high sugar content in Singapore. Price promotions have been shown to "encourage consumers to buy and spend more on a particular type of product than normal" (UK House of Commons, 2015: 15), meaning that parents would be inclined to buy and spend more on cheaper, unhealthy products for their children. Such price promotions include "a temporary price reduction", bulk purchasing and free offers (UK House of Commons,

> **Price promotions have been shown to "encourage consumers to buy and spend more on a particular type of product than normal"**

2015: 16). Furthermore, while Singapore has banned advertisements of beverages high in sugar content, there has yet to be a similar restriction on fast food advertisements.

Combating childhood obesity effectively also requires targeted efforts on at-risk groups. In Singapore, official data and studies have shown that low-income and ethnic minority Singaporeans are more predisposed to obesity and diabetes (Foo et al, 2013: 111; Prime Minister's Office, 2017). Indeed, Prime Minister Lee acknowledged that "among the Malays, five in 10 have diabetes; and among the Indians, six in 10 have diabetes," (Prime Minister's Office, 2017) for those aged 60 and above. In comparison, the prevalence of diabetes in the majority Chinese community is only 2.5 in 10 (Prime Minister's Office, 2017). These figures have not gone unnoticed by the Government. At the 2019 Committee of Supply Debate, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Home Affairs Amrin Amin spoke about some of the Government's initiatives to engage the Malay community on leading a healthy lifestyle. For example, HPB ran the *'Kita dah cukup manis!'* (You are sweet enough!) and *'Korang OK!'* (Are you OK!) campaigns to emphasise the importance of exercise and consuming less sugar in food and drinks (Ministry of Health, 2019; Abdul Rahim, 2019).

> **"**
>
> **HPB ran the 'Kita dah cukup manis!' (You are sweet enough!) and 'Korang OK!' (Are you OK!) campaigns to emphasise the importance of exercise and consuming less sugar in food and drinks**

HPB also partnered more than 1,100 *halal* food establishments under its Healthier Dining Programme, which recognises eateries offering food with healthier ingredients (Ministry of Health, 2019; Isa, 2018).

The student population at the vocational Institute of Technical Education (ITE) also yielded similar obesity trends. Overrepresented by Malay students (Chong, 2016: 21), the institute saw an increase in the rate of obese students from "18% in 2005 to 23% in 2009", while the national rate of obesity in mainstream schools remained stable at about 10% from 2000 to 2009 (Foo et al, 2013: 112). While the Government is beginning to outreach to the Malay and Indian communities, as well as low-income families on the healthy lifestyle message (Ministry of Health, 2019), more needs to be done to journey with these groups via upstream measures to prevent their children becoming obese, or to help them manage obesity.

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Policy recommendations

The Singapore Government has been forward-looking in implementing policies to combat obesity in children and the general populace. However, existing policies can be further strengthened and streamlined to prevent more young Singaporeans from becoming obese, and to help children already obese manage their condition. As shown above, school-based obesity programmes can be made more effective if they are complemented by other initiatives outside the school system that address obesity risks throughout a child's life course. This paper proposes the following policy recommendations to mitigate childhood obesity:

Public Campaign to Combat Childhood Obesity

While HPB runs engagement efforts to educate expectant mothers and parents on raising healthy children as part of an early preventive strategy (Health Promotion Board, 2012), there is no full-fledged public campaign to combat childhood obesity. Such a campaign, through the use of health infographics, catch phrases and messages by prominent personalities can help communicate to prospective parents the importance of nurturing healthy children – and inform them on how exactly to do it – even before conception. A concerted anti-childhood obesity campaign can include the dissemination of healthy eating and physical activity guidance for children to "prospective and expectant parents" (Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, 2017). Such guidance can also be issued through health professionals who provide specific advice like promoting breastfeeding, since breast milk is known to encourage the "regulation of food intake" in a child (World Health Organisation, 2014).

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Price, Behavioural and Advertisement Controls on Unhealthy Food and Drinks

Restrictions should be imposed on price promotions, product placements and advertisements for unhealthy food and drinks – those high in fat, sugar and salt – that contribute to obesity among our children. Restrictions on price promotions for beverages high in sugar content should be instituted because they induce parents to buy and feed their children more of such products. Behavioural techniques, which influence the "choice architecture" (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008) of parents can also be employed to limit the visibility of unhealthy products on supermarket shelves, and encourage parents to buy healthy alternatives instead. Finally, while

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Singapore's ban on advertisements for beverages high in sugar content is a commendable step, the same regulation should be extended to fast food products. Taken together, these steps aim to combat childhood obesity more effectively by influencing the behaviour of adult parents, recognising that children "do not have freedom of choice" (Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, 2017).

Integrated Efforts to Journey with Low-income and Minority Families to Combat Childhood Obesity

MOH has been reaching out to the Malay and Indian communities, as well as low-income families on the healthy lifestyle message (Ministry of Health, 2019). However, beyond communicating to such families with relevant tips on healthy eating and exercise, there is a need to journey with them even before they become parents so that later, they can influence their children with healthy habits right from the start. Early intervention efforts to prevent childhood obesity in low-income families can be integrated with existing early education programmes such as KidSTART, and similar programmes run by community organisations and family service centres. Social workers and healthcare professionals can play an important role as befrienders to these families, and provide personalised advice on juggling work and family responsibilities with healthy nutrient intake and exercise. Low-income families on ComCare assistance can also be given vouchers to purchase healthy food in supermarkets, which sometimes can be more expensive compared to less healthy, processed food (Cheng, 2019).

> **Early intervention efforts to prevent childhood obesity in low-income families can be integrated with existing early education programmes such as KidSTART, and similar programmes run by community organisations and family service centres.**

More Support for Social and Medical Research on Childhood Obesity

As a long-term strategy, the Government should allocate more funding to support research efforts in our educational and healthcare institutions to combat childhood obesity in Singapore's Asian context. Indeed, findings from childhood obesity studies in other societies and cultures might not be immediately applicable to Singapore's context, and there might be specific cultural factors influencing calorie intake by Singapore children. For example, plump children are not typically regarded as a health issue by many parents in Singapore; they are seen instead as "a sign of good health" (Teo, 2014). Research can help to identify more of such misconceptions informed by culture and other social determinants, and propose solutions. More research should also be done on at-risk groups in Singapore like the minorities and low-income groups. For example, a longitudinal study can be conducted on Malay families to better understand the interplay between childhood obesity, educational performance and overall well-being.

Conclusion

Together, the above four policy options can be implemented to complement the existing school health and fitness programmes in combating childhood obesity. The proposals provide a holistic ecosystem of interventions extending over and above the school environment, covering a child's life course from conception to adolescence. The policy mix acknowledges social determinants as the fundamental causes of diseases, and aims to prevent the onset of obesity from before conception. Indeed, prevention is better than cure. When implemented together with the ongoing school programmes, the set of policies will guide parents towards making the right choices for their child's health, and give more support to at-risk groups like low-income families to prevent and/or deal with childhood obesity. This is especially crucial for the Malay community, whose obesity rate is the highest among the ethnic groups (Ministry of Health, 2010).

Childhood obesity can negatively impact overall well-being and educational performance by affecting memory power, self-esteem and peer relationships, among others. It is also associated with social costs linked to poor education and health later in life. In this regard, Government anti-childhood obesity measures need to work hand-in-hand with national policies to tackle inequality and promote social mobility, so as to remove the risk factors that predispose families to the interlinked issues of ill health and poverty, among others.

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The Potential of Collaborative Partnerships:
Takeaways for M³

by Muhammad Hazique Salahudin

Abstract

Collaborative partnerships have increasingly been deployed as a strategy by Governments globally in the design, planning and delivery of social services. It is perceived to bring about better outcomes for the end-user and the Government, through benefits from better-informed programme design, increased outreach and delivery efficiencies. The launch of social service offices in the heartlands to coordinate community care efforts, the SG Cares initiative to promote volunteerism and coordinate volunteer resources, and the M³ (MENDAKI, MESRA and MUIS) movement to accelerate Malay/Muslim community upliftment represent some of the recent efforts at collaborative partnerships in Singapore. Considering the increase in the usage of this strategy, an examination into what it takes for the strategy to succeed – and if the local context is conducive for it – is a necessity to improve the policy. With a focus on M³, this paper seeks to uncover and understand the necessary conditions for collaborations in the social service sector to work.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a strong push by the Government for the non-Governmental sector to collaborate deeper and integrate more in delivering services. Within the social service sector, efforts to get agencies players to break silos, cooperate in common goals and leverage on each other's strengths to impact communities deeper have emerged at different levels. The establishment of satellite Social Service Offices (SSOs) by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) sought to structurally coordinate the resources of local Social Service Agencies (SSAs). The introduction of the SG Cares movement by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) aims to tackle manpower issues within the social service sector by promoting volunteerism and pushing for strategic partnerships amongst the public, private and people players (Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, 2019). The setting up of the M³ movement by the Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs seeks to attain positive outcomes and nurture 3Cs (Character, Citizenry and Competency) for the Malay/Muslim community through collaborations amongst Malay/Muslim Organisations (MMOs). These are laudable and ambitious goals. The underlying thinking behind collaborative partnerships is to resource the ground experts, help identify shared goals, encourage them to work on shared goals together and get better impact. The ideas are seemingly simple and executable yet, do they work?

> " The underlying thinking behind collaborative partnerships is to resource the ground experts, help identify shared goals, encourage them to work on shared goals together and get better impact. The ideas are seemingly simple and executable yet, do they work?

While anecdotal critique is commonly heard, citing perceived impossibility or other, this strategy cannot simply be dismissed. The social service sector in Singapore is set to face challenging circumstances that will affect the population significantly in time to come. For example, an ageing population makes resourcing increasingly difficult as there is competition for a shrinking pool of resources to support the causes that each agency champions. As such, consolidation and maximisation is urgently vital, proving that the Government's strategy to encourage collaborations most timely. Hence, it is why an examination of the strengths and gaps of collaborative governance is necessary.

In this exploratory paper, I will broadly analyse how the success of a collaborative partnership strategy for the delivery of social services could be facilitated. Success in this paper is defined as the delivery of the desired programmatic and organisational outcomes of the agencies involved in the collaborative process. I will first provide a background of social service management in Singapore and explain the evolution of the collaborative process for the social service sector in Singapore. Following which, the benefits of collaboration as seen in its application across the world will be laid out and discussed. Factors crucial to successes will be extracted and finally related to the M³ context. It will be argued that collaboration can work, but that trust, alignment of understanding and motivations, interdependence and facilitative leadership are vital for success.

Social Service Management in Singapore

The current strategy in managing the social needs of Singaporeans could be said to be a result of decades of experimentation. Singapore's social service sector has been historically comprised of the Government which provides the primary services, and the non-Governmental organisations players which provide secondary services and this arrangement remains today (Maisharah, 2008). What has changed is the level of involvement by both parties that varies over time. In the immediate post-independence era, Singapore's model of governance was developmental as the Government was heavily involved in social service provision (Haque, 2009). In the late 1980s, Singapore adopted the "New Public Management" model that had gained popularity across the Western Governments (2009, p. 251). Privatisation of state enterprises and a more laissez faire approach towards services occurred as it was thought that competition and independence could bring about better outcomes. In recent years, the Government has reverted to increase social spending and became more involved in the provision of services again (Tay, 2015).

Collaborative Governance and Lead-Organisations Facilitating Outcomes

Collaborative partnerships between the public and people sectors form the structure of social service in Singapore. More specifically, the sector is characterised by a management style that combines both the *Collaborative Governance* and the *Lead-Organisation models*. Ansell and Gash (2007, p. 544) defined collaborative governance as an "arrangement where one or more public agencies engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programmes or assets". The Singapore Government today engages

> **More specifically, the sector is characterised by a management style that combines both the Collaborative Governance and the Lead-Organisation models.**

many partners in the non-Governmental sector to deliver the necessary services to the public. This is done not only to attain the direct outcomes for the public but often, come with the dual aim of facilitating inter-organisational collaborations. Organisations will "share existing resources, authority and rewards" through "multiple mechanisms such as integrating staff, joint planning or joint budgeting" (Selden, Sowa, & Sandfort, 2006)

The Government's catalytic role thus encourages intra-sectorial partnerships that could develop greater self-sufficiency within the sector as agencies leverage on each other's strength and resources. Meanwhile, the lead-organisation model is employed as the Government provides resources towards the stronger actor(s) within the sector to spearhead and encourage the formation of partnerships wherever possible (Salahudin, 2018; Chen & Graddy, 2010).

Hypothetically, the application of these strategies could be influenced by (but not limited to) the need to improve efficiency by maximising the pre-existing resources. A mixture of

practical constraints, such as tightening resources due to an ageing population, and the higher trend of social spending to mitigate citizens' expectations form a confluence of expectations which the Government should fulfil. Having sectorial experts to collaborate and lead, instead of competing or overlapping to attain efficiency should not be an issue to be tackled by newly-incepted Government agencies. For instance, the National Council of Social Services (NCSS) serves as an umbrella body to 450 social service agencies that advocates for the social service sector. The Agency for

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Integrated Care leads the relevant community care providers to ensure the coordinated provision of geriatric care services. In the Malay/Muslim community, Yayasan MENDAKI (the Council for the Development of Singapore Malay/Muslim Community) champions for community progress through the M^3 framework and its role as an umbrella body for MMOs. Within each of these sectors, collaborations between the Government and non-Governmental agencies are evident[1].

The Potential of Collaborative Partnerships

Public administration and non-profit management research have shown that the collaborative governance and lead-organisation models can attain improved service delivery and successful outcomes. First, the end-user enjoys better outcomes with better-designed and more informed programmes and services that are better coordinated in delivery. For example, Singapore has experimented with setting up a multi-agency public service office in the town of Tampines which benefits residents though better access to essential services (Wong & Tan , 2016). Singapore also plans to improve the coordination of social services amongst frontline civil servants from various agencies by equipping them with skills to identify citizens' needs better and conduct the appropriate action (Tan, 2019). The end-user stands to benefit from collaborations with improved last mile service delivery.

Second, organisations experience greater efficiencies with improved shared networks and resources. Jointly developed programmes would be more robust in nature while collaborative back-end processes can enhance institutional capacity (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Chen & Graddy, 2010). Selden, Sowa, & Sandfort (2006) demonstrated this by looking at the impact of non-profit collaboration in the early childcare and education sector. The "demonstrable impact on management processes and outcomes" encompassed overall improvements in the experiences of involved staff, and the quality of services and programmes offered to the clients. Some of the more significant value-adds recorded were better working conditions for teachers and frontline staff, as well as more positive perception of school-readiness by parents in collaborative programmes.

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[1]For the purposes of this paper and to contextualise to the local context, Government agencies are defined as Ministries and statutory boards. Non-Government agencies include fully independent non-Governmental and non-profit organisations, as well as those that are linked to but partially/wholly independent in their structure and operations from the Government.

However, one must tread cautiously as the success of collaborative governance requires the fulfilment of certain conditions pertaining to organisational processes and programme planning (Thomson, Perry, & Miller, 2014; Chen & Graddy, 2010; Ansell & Gash, 2007; Chen & Graddy, 2006). Process here refers to back-end factors that could directly and indirectly affect outcomes – often in a subconscious manner. For example, subtle differences in organisational cultures of two participating agencies may result in diverging expectations that could hinder the attainment of outcomes. Programme planning on the other hand, are often factors that are front-end and purposeful by design. Collaborating agencies setting up a new joint-product would need to develop a common mission aims, terms of reference, operational procedures and performance indicators together from the start. For example, the Uplifting Pupils in Life and Inspiring Families Task force (UPLIFT), led by Singapore's education ministry partners the MSF, Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) and relevant community partners, had been set up with the common aim of strengthening "support for under-performing students from disadvantaged families". UPLIFT would be planning multi-agency solutions to tackle the shared concerns of long-term absenteeism and high drop-out rates within segments of the Singaporean student population (Chia, 2018). Alignment of process and programme conditions are thus imperative for the success of this networked mode of operation.

Conditions for Successful Collaboration

In their examination of the management and governance process, Ansell and Gash (2007) considered time, trust and interdependence to be indispensable to the success of a collaborative relationship. Chen and Graddy (2010; 2006), in examining the lead-organisation model, further emphasised several additional factors: the motivation of parties entering into a collaborative relationship, the degree of integration of the decision-making mechanisms and the depth of involvement of the Government or funding agency. We can therefore summarise that the success of collaborative relationships are contingent on (1) inter-organisational relationship history, (2) alignment of understanding and motivations, (3) interdependence in the collaborative process, and (4) the leadership of the Government agency.

Inter-organisational relationship history considers both time and trust (Ansell & Gash, 2007). Trust is especially important as it is the bedrock of any working relationship and its erosion or development dictates the success or failure of the endeavour. In inter-organisational relationship building, the conditions at the outset of collaboration are crucial parameters in deciding whether collaborative relationships are possible. The context is determined by power relations, incentives to collaborate and actual past history. Perceived imbalanced power relations may evoke suspicions towards the more compelling actor, eroding trust to hinder collaboration. The extent of autonomy and choices affects the collaboration, whether mandated by a Government agency or voluntary, matters. A top-down approach or mandatory collaboration typically creates dissent and reduces chances of success, especially if there is still space for an organisation to individually pursue its aims outside the collaboration. Finally, the historical background of the organisations and previous working relationships, whether cooperative or antagonistic, would also determine current trust and thus, the potential outcomes of the collaboration.

Next, a *shared understanding* (Ansell & Gash, 2007) and *alignment of motivations* (Chen & Graddy, 2010) help keep involved parties to be on the same level. Partners in a collaborative relationship need to develop a shared understanding on "what they can collectively achieve together", but importantly begin with an "agreement on a definition of the problem". This ensures that all parties are aligned when developing and implementing strategies downstream. This is also true for the alignment of motivations, but shared motivation should not be conflated with shared purpose. Two agencies may have the same mission, but the reasons behind entering a partnership can differ. An organisation may enter a partnership to attain resources they do not have, while the other wishes to attain associational advantages such as borrowed reputational capital from a more recognised partner. As such, there is a need for the Government agency to ensure that the lead-organisation and partners selected for a particular mission, share the same vision which is compatible in its motivations and expectations.

Interdependence amongst agencies has the potential to build trust amongst organisations and improve outcomes (Thomson, Perry, & Miller, 2014; Ansell & Gash, 2007). The more integrated the administrative and decision-making processes of a collaborative project are, the more functional the collaboration becomes. Not only is trust built amongst members of the organisation, but efficiencies are reaped as the overlaps are avoided and existing strengths leveraged. This improves the chances of attaining better outcomes. Hence, prospects of successful collaboration would be improved with interdependency already present, or be cultivated on if it was absent before.

Finally, *facilitative leadership* is critical in "bringing parties to the table and for steering them through the rough patches of the collaborative process" and in playing the role of an "honest broker" (Ansell & Gash, 2007, pp. 554-555). In addition to being an intermediary whenever imbalances are present, leadership is also crucial in "setting and maintaining ground rules, building trust, facilitating dialogue and exploring mutual gains". In the context of this paper, this role should be undertaken by the Government agency that

initiated the collaboration. The agency would possess the strategic outlook, the clearest idea of the desired end-outcomes and broadest knowledge on what needs to be mobilised. The lead-organisation would thus need to advocate in the network of community agencies in its ecosystem, proactively facilitating the collaborative movements towards a broad direction together.

Lessons for M³: Moving towards Success

The M³ initiative was conceptualised in 2018 for MENDAKI, MUIS[2] and MESRA[3] to collaborate and leverage on one other's expertise and networks to bring about a community of success (Agost, 2018). M³ is a unit coordinated by MCCY tasked to look into uplifting the Malay/Muslim community. MENDAKI, MUIS and MESRA are agencies that are best positioned within the ecosystem of organisations looking into Malay/Muslim issues. Over a year, M³ has established three focus areas that would be championed by an agency. The areas are marriage, parenthood and early childhood education (championed by MENDAKI and MUIS); vulnerable individuals and families (championed by MENDAKI and MUIS) and; youth mentoring and empowerment (championed by MENDAKI) (M³, 2019). The championing agencies are assigned the responsibility to develop strategies and programmes by tapping into its community networks such as the other Malay/Muslim Organisations. The Lead-Organisation model is implemented for each focus area, the difference being the lead-organisation (Salahudin, 2018):

M³ Networked Model
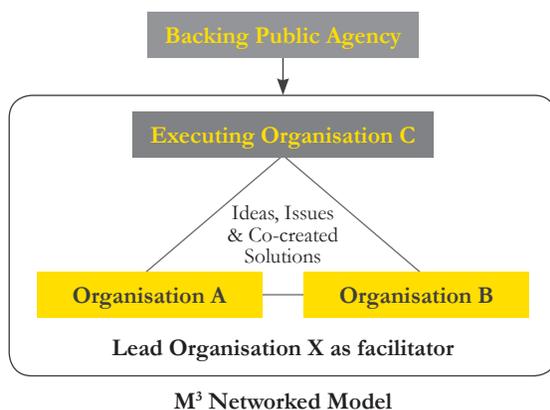
Figure 1

At this juncture, these are still early days for M³ to be evaluated in its entirety. What can be done however, is to see if the characteristics of the M³ initiatives have met the conditions laid out earlier through collaborative partnerships.

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[2] MUIS stands for Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (Islamic Religious Council of Singapore)
[3] MESRA is the PA Malay Activity Executive Committees Council for the MAECs

In considering *inter-organisational relationship history*, the M³ agencies have had long histories of cooperation whilst serving the community through their own capacities and organisations. For example, the Chief Executive Officers of MENDAKI and MUIS sit in each other's Board of Directors. This reflects the deep ties that exist between the agencies and implied shared interest in ensuring the success of each other. Additionally, these agencies have a history of joint projects such as the placement of MENDAKI satellite centres in certain mosques (Abdullah, 2018) and the offering of the MENDAKI Tuition Scheme at the Madrasahs (Yayasan MENDAKI, 2019). With M³, the three agencies would begin to develop deeper symbiotic relationships as they embark on collaborative projects. For M³ to successfully achieve its shared outcomes, it cannot merely depend on organic synergy. Each M³ agency has comparative advantages in its domain and must proactively lead with a "positive strategy of empowerment" to level up the other two in their expertise area as well (Ansell & Gash, 2007, p. 552). Through this, the capabilities of all partners would be built as inter-organisational transfer of knowledge occurs. For example, Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs Masagos Zulkifli in his 2018 Hari Raya Speech on M³ mentioned that MESRA should not be satisfied just promoting an understanding of Islam and Malay culture to non-Malay/Muslims. The Minister alluded to the importance of MESRA involving MUIS' mosque activists in its work, suggesting that it could be a bridge between the mosque activists and the People's Association (PA) grassroots network (Agost, 2018). This would strengthen MESRA's value proposition as it would now be facilitating two-way conversations compared to one before. Concurrently, it also levels up mosque activists' understanding and capabilities on inter-racial and religious matters. There is potential for success. The outlook is indeed positive as the agencies are meaningfully building upon their strong relationships to organise joint programmes under the M³ banner. Other examples include the KelasMateMatika@CC and the M³ Post Budget/National Day Rally Dialogues (M³, 2019). With M³, the relationship is set to only deepen.

In terms of *shared understanding and alignment of mission*, the M³ agencies are well-positioned as all of their individual organisational missions seek to develop a Malay/Muslim community characterised by excellence. MENDAKI advocates for educational excellence, MUIS for religious excellence and MESRA for cultural excellence (MUIS, 2019; Yayasan MENDAKI, 2018; People's Association, 2017). M³'s mission taps on the common denominator of community excellence and this provides a coherent rallying call for the organisations. Shared understanding had also been established early on at the onset of M³, that these three agencies have been chosen by the Government due to their strengths in their respective domains (Agost, 2018). Teething issues inevitably would occur as the joint projects are being planned – this is only to be expected as the organisations navigate their positions as new structures are set up. However, with shared understanding and mission being aligned, such issues should be mitigated in due course. Facilitative leadership within the agencies and by the Government would also ease the process and encourage successes. M³ sees the Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs Masagos Zulkifli actively guiding the agencies while the Prime Minister has sight of its progress through updates being reported at the Parliamentary Committee of Supply Debates and the National Day Rally as well.

Finally, in considering *interdependency*, it is worth noting that M^3 encourages greater integration of joint decision-making and operations. This would mean that new structures for joint projects have to be created. Even though the agencies are not starting from scratch, the creation of the mechanisms of interdependency would have its fair share of challenges as different styles of planning, working and decision-making converge. The process, while not easy, is vital for the deepening of ties and building of trust – collaborative governance is after all by nature iterative (Ansell & Gash, 2007). Combined with facilitative leadership, ties and trust will deepen from the effort, and positive outcomes could be achieved.

Conclusion

To conclude, this paper has sought to understand the conditions necessary for successful collaborative partnerships in the social service sector, and establish if M^3 could work. The paper first established the context in which the social service sector has evolved in Singapore, and how M^3 had emerged. In the process, it was explained why collaborative partnerships are crucial for Singapore's social service sector. The theoretical underpinnings of collaborative partnerships in Singapore – defined by collaborative governance, inter-organisational relationships and the lead-organisation models – were then conceptualised. Finally, the conditions necessary for successful collaborations were explained and related to M^3 to assess if successes could be attained.

It could be said that the M^3 initiative shows much promise in realising in what it sought out to do. The relationships amongst the M^3 agencies contain the ingredients crucial for success – conducive inter-organisational history and levels of trust, aligned motivations, interdependence and facilitative leadership. That said, these are early days and it would be premature to provide a definitive evaluation. The collaborative governance and lead-organisation models, while not totally new, require many changes within each agency due to the scale of its implementation. The agencies are hence understandably still finding their footing as they figure out how they fit, the best ways they could contribute and how their modus operandi should be in M^3. Collaborative governance is after all an iterative process and it will therefore take some time to get there. With more initiatives being rolled out, the experiences could only serve as learning points for the agencies on how their planning and operations could be improved to increase their chances of success.

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Collaborative governance is after all an iterative process and it will therefore take some time to get there.

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Section

II

**General Scan of Key
National Policies &
Initiatives in Singapore**

Education

A. EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE & EDUCATION

1 **Good and Affordable Pre-School for All Singaporeans**

a. More and better pre-schools

Better designed pre-schools at new HDB void deck centres, with some space for activities

Pre-schools placements doubled to

180,000

50% » 80%

of children to have a place in Government-supported pre-schools over time

b. New Criteria by MOE Kindergartens

Top priority for Singaporean children from lower-income households living within

1km *of an MOE Kindergarten*

1/3

of spaces allocated for children from lower-income household

2nd priority for children with siblings from K1 to P6 in MOE Kindergartens or co-located primary schools

c. Expansion to KidSTART Pilot

From **1,000** *To* **5,000**

children from lower-income families over the next 3 years

d. Enhanced Subsidies for Greater Affordability

Monthly Household income ceiling for means-tested subsidies

$12,000 *a month*

Potentially benefitting

30,000 *more families*

Pre-school fees for low-income families as low as

$3/month

2 Making Pre-Schools More Inclusive

a. Enhancing early intervention services

- MSF workgroup to **better integrate children** with learning needs into pre-schools
- By end of 2020, all early intervention services will be **transferred from MSF's Disability Office to ECDA**
- ECDA to have better oversight of developmental needs of all children under seven, given that more early intervention is being delivered through pre-schools

b. Changes to Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIC) framework (to take effect from April 2019)

S$60m, *up from* **S$45m** *currently*

Annual investment from MSF

New early intervention programmes

EIPIC for Babies & Children under 2 Years

Development Support Plus (DS Plus)
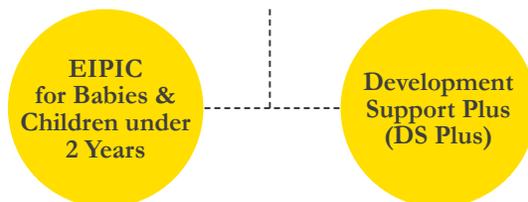
Out-of-pocket expenses for early intervention services to be lowered between

30% - 70%

for most income groups

Monthly fees for Singaporean Children (after subsidies)	Before April 2019	After April 2019
	$5 - $780	$5 - $430

To benefit at least **4,500 children yearly**

B. PRIMARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

1 **Remaking Secondary School Pathways**

From 2020, Full Subject-Based Banding (Full SBB) will be progressively adopted by secondary schools. Changes to take place in 3 steps:

**Step 1
2020 – 2024**

With Subject-Based Banding (SBB), students today can study English Language, Mother Tongue Languages, Mathematics and Science at a more demanding level from lower secondary. MOE will pilot Full SBB by:

- Enabling students with strengths to study **Humanities** at a more demanding level from Secondary 2
- Reconstituting **mixed form classes** as more students take subjects at different levels
- **28 schools** will pilot full SBB, with more schools progressively adopting Full SBB

**Step 2
2024 – 2027**

One secondary education, many subject bands

- From 2024, Secondary 1 students* will be able to offer subjects at three levels: **G1/G2/G3 (G stands for General)**, mapped from today's N(T), N(A) and Express standards respectively. Students can take a range of G1/G2/G3 subjects based on their abilities
- When they reach Secondary 4 in 2027*, students will sit for a **common national examination** (replacing the GCE N- and O-Level examinations); and receive a **new national certification** with subjects at G1, G2, or G3 levels
- Express/ N(A)/N(T) labels will be removed to give all our students the experience of "One secondary education, many subject bands"

Applies to 2019 Primary 2 students onwards.

**Step 3
2028**

Post-secondary pathways

- With the new national certification, students will have **more opportunities** to progress to post-secondary courses that match their strengths and interests
- Students will continue to be **posted to secondary schools using three PSLE scoring bands** so that they start with subjects at levels suitable to their pace of learning. Thereafter, to a level suited to their level of ability

2   Uplifting Pupils in Life and Inspiring Families Taskforce (UPLIFT)

UPLIFT to focus on 6 strategies:

1. Strengthen after-school care and support for students
2. Build students' mental and emotional resilience
3. Strengthen parental engagement and support
4. Implement practical solutions to absenteeism
5. Enhance collaboration between schools and the community
6. Strengthen coordination across these initiatives

MOE will

- facilitate enrolment of disadvantaged students into Student Care Centres (SCCs)
- work with MSF to review the affordability of SCCs for low-income families

Scale up

GEAR UP **Programme**

Student support programmes in

120 Schools *by 2020*

from existing 60 secondary schools

- set up an internal UPLIFT Programme Office to:

  > map out needs of students to facilitate outreach and matching to suitable programmes.

  > help schools match their students' needs to community and volunteer networks

  > track feedback and outcomes to evaluate the effectiveness of our interventions

- support MSF's efforts to tighten coordination among Social Service Offices (SSOs), Family Service Centres (FSCs), schools, other community organisations and Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs) to help students with complex cases

3   Compulsory Coding Enrichment

From 2020, all upper primary students (Primary 4 to 6) will attend **compulsory coding enrichment classes called Code for Fun** – a 10-hour programme conducted by MOE and the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA)

4   Launch of Revised Mother Tongue Curriculum to Boost National Identity

- Launch of revised curriculum in secondary schools in 2021
- A support programme providing differentiated instruction in mother tongue subjects will be introduced to Primary 3 pupils in all schools in 2021 and extended to Primary 4 pupils in 2022

C. POST-SECONDARY & TERTIARY EDUCATION

1 Updates on Higher Education Transformation

- All Nitec graduates from ITE will have the chance to **attain a higher qualification** by 2030
- To support them, more places in a range of programmes, such as ITE's SkillsFuture Work-Study Diplomas and full-time Higher Nitec courses will be provided

Higher NITEC
860 *more students anually*

Work-study Diploma Courses
580 *more students annually*

10 *more ITE Work-Learn Technical Diplomas in 2019*

POLYTECHNICS

290 *more places for working adults*

Benefits
1,700 **more students**
by 2030
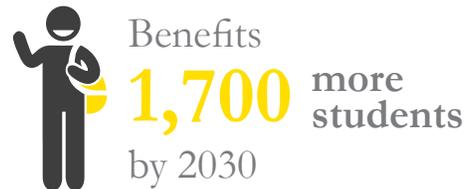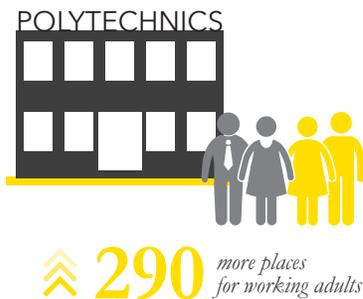
- From **2020** onwards, a new **"through-train" programme** will allow polytechnic students to not just get a place in a local university, but to graduate from university up to a year earlier than their peers and be assured of a job
- For a start, **Temasek Polytechnic (TP)** has tied up with the **Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS)** and the **Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT)** to offer this new pathway in April 2020 for 40 students in the **building services and mechatronics sectors**
- **$72 million fund** to support an enhanced **iBuildSG Scholarship and Sponsorship** programme for those seeking **academic qualifications** on a full-time undergraduate, diploma or Institute of Technical Education (ITE) track
- Enterprises that qualify for the enhanced **Productivity Solutions Grant (PSG)** can apply for an additional training grant via a **PSG (SkillsFuture Training Subsidy)**
- Support for private providers to strengthen options for learning and requirements to be streamlined to reduce compliance and regulatory costs

2 Making Tertiary Education More Affordable

a. Lower tertiary fees for new and existing students

- Higher bursaries for students from lower- and middle-income families from Academic Year 2020

Polytechnics	Autonomous Universities
From 2020, bursaries will cover up to **95%** of the fees	From 2020, bursaries will cover up to **75%** of the fees

Polytechnics

Current — Up to **80%** Bursary

From 2020 — Up to **95%** Bursary

Autonomous Universities

Current — Up to **50%** Bursary

From 2020 — Up to **75%** Bursary
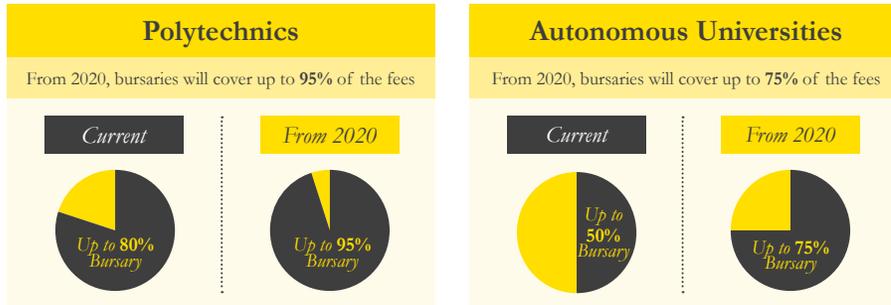
> Bursary enhancements for publicly-funded diploma and degree programmes in ITE, NAFA and LASALLE

SIT   SUSS

Annual fees for full-time general degree programmes lowered from $8,000 to

$7,500
from 2020

b. Lower medical school fees

- Enhanced Government and University bursaries for **medical and dentistry** students from low-income families.
- They will pay at **most $5,000 a year**.

c. Encourage donations for bursaries

- Government will match donations to encourage the alumni and community to contribute
  > **Up to 1.5 times** for older universities
  > **Up to 3 times** for newer universities

Economy, Employability & CPF

A. ECONOMY

1 ## Agri-Food Innovation Park (AFIP)

- Established as a pilot cluster to **catalyse innovation in the agri-tech ecosystem**, by bringing together high-tech urban indoor farming and associated R&D activities
- To be located within the Greater Sungei Kadut area, forming part of a larger **Northern Agri-Tech and Food Corridor** with food-related industries

2 ## Enterprise Development Grant (EDG)

- A holistic grant scheme providing customised **support to Singapore enterprises for their growth and transformation**
- Provides enterprises with **up to 70% funding** to undertake projects to strengthen their business capabilities, improve operational efficiencies and internationalise

3 ## Enterprise Financing Scheme (EFS)

- Aims to help participating financial institutions (PFIs) and enterprises **navigate various financing schemes**
- Provides comprehensive support for enterprises' financing requirements across different stages of growth, for both **domestic and overseas** activities

4 ## Global Ready Talent Programme (GRTP)

- Aims to **build a pipeline of talent** to support Singapore enterprises with their **overseas expansion**, by exposing young Singaporeans to internships and overseas work opportunities
- Helps to overcome enterprises' challenge in finding the right talent to manage their overseas operation

5 ## Productivity Solutions Grant (PSG)

- Introduced in 2018 to assist businesses in their transformation journey
- Provides **support for the adoption of IT solutions and equipment** that have been selected by the respective industries' lead agencies, in alignment with the Industry Transformation Maps (ITMs)

6 ## Scale-up SG

- A new structured growth partnership programme to **groom future global champions** by helping aspiring, high-growth companies **scale rapidly and become leaders in their fields**
- Enterprise Singapore will implement the programme, in collaboration with public and private sector partners

B. EMPLOYABILITY AND CPF

1 ## Supporting Jobseekers in New Growth Areas

- New **Professional Conversion Programmes (PCPs)** launched in areas like Embedded Software and Prefabrication, Physiotherapy and Air Transport
- New **Skills Frameworks** launched in areas like Social Service, Data Protection, Construction, Finance and Workplace Safety and Health

- **Enhanced Career Trial** to include part-time jobs to benefit jobseekers who may have care-giving responsibilities
- About 30,000 job seekers found work in 2018 through the **Adapt and Grow initiative**, designed to help Singaporeans affected by the economic slowdown and restructuring
- Under the new **Service Industry Transformation Programme (SITP)**, service-sector companies can now get more help to transform their businesses as they adapt to changing manpower needs and consumer demands

2 Supporting Businesses' Manpower Needs

- New **employer features** through **MyCareersFuture.sg job portal**
- Features include viewing job applicants sorted by job fit and recommending suitable talent

3 Building Progressive Workplaces

- Increase **Work-Life Grant** budget to a total of $100 million and extend application period up till June 2022
- Facilitate **integration of Persons with Special Needs** into the workforce
- Tripartite Alliance for Fair & Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) as a resource centre for managing workplace harassment

4 Maintaining Effectiveness of Dependency Ratio Ceiling Controls in View of Rising Local Wages

- Local Qualifying Salary **threshold**, which determines the number of locals that count towards a firm's quota to hire S Pass and Work Permit holders, **raised from $1,200 to $1,300** from 1 July 2019

Salary threshold increased to

≫ $1,300

5 Strengthening Support for Self-Employed Persons (SEPs)

- Help SEPs **mitigate loss of income** due to **prolonged illness or injury**
- Raise awareness of **taxi and private hire drivers** on importance of having prolonged medical leave insurance coverage
- Help SEPs **save more regularly for healthcare and retirement needs** through a 'contribute-as-you-earn' (CAYE) model

6 Supporting Older Workers who Wish to Continue Working

Year	2019	2022	by 2030
Retirement Age	62	63	67
Re-employment Age	67	68	70

7 Increase in CPF Contributions for Older Workers

- CPF contributions for workers above 55 will be raised gradually, starting in 2021
- Eventually, CPF rates will taper down after the age of 60, and level off after 70
- **No changes** to CPF withdrawal policies

Family, Social Development & Housing

A. FAMILY & SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Policy/Initiative	Specifics
Appointment of Social Service Agencies as Parenting Support Providers (PSP)	• **10 Parenting Support Providers (PSPs)** appointed by MSF to help equip all parents with parenting skills in a more holistic manner • New PSP model is based on the 10 Social Service Office (SSO) regional clusters • The 10 PSPs are **one-stop service providers** that will work closely with schools in their allocated regions to deliver **evidence-based parenting programmes** to more parents. PSPs also provide **follow-on counselling support** to parents who need it • This model facilitates **closer partnerships with schools** and **better outreach to parents** so that more parents are able to access and benefit from parenting programmes. PSPs currently offer two evidence-based programmes – **Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) and Signposts**

S/N	Regional Cluster Social	Service Agencies appointed as PSPs
1	Ang Mo Kio / Yishun	AMKFSC Community Services
2	Bedok / Geylang Serai	Morning Star Community Services
3	Boon Lay / Taman Jurong	THK Moral Charities
4	Bukit Batok / Bukit Panjang / Choa Chu Kang	Fei Yue Community Services
5	Bukit Merah / Kreta Ayer	Montfort Care
6	Clementi / Jurong East / Queenstown	Lakeside Family Services
7	Hougang / Sengkang / Serangoon	Methodist Welfare Services
8	Jalan Besar / Toa Payoh	TOUCH Community Services
9	Pasir Ris / Punggol / Tampines	Methodist Welfare Services
10	Sembawang / Woodlands	Care Corner Singapore

Policy/Initiative	Specifics
Launch of Community Link (ComLink) Initiative	• Provide more targeted support for families, especially those with children, staying in rental flats

Marsiling

Kembangan-Chai Chee   *Pilot in four sites*   Jalan Kukoh

Boon Lay

• Local implementation workgroups for each of the four sites, **led by SSOs** and involving the grassroots, to engage families and the local community to better understand their aspirations and needs, plan for services at the programme spaces, and coordinate complex cases

Policy/Initiative	Specifics
Localised Community Network (LCN) Pilot	• Brings together relevant partners to coordinate the support required to help **children/youths with complex families or at-risk behaviours,** such as chronic absenteeism • **Complement UPLIFT's** efforts to provide more holistic and coordinated support for students who exhibit long-term absenteeism or emerging attendance issues • Facilitate **data sharing** between relevant Government agencies, to have a better understanding of the challenging family circumstances that children/youths may face

Increase in Comcare Cash Assistance

ComCare Long Term Assistance (LTA)

Example based on Household Type		Current Rate	Increased Rate
One-person		$500/month	$600/month
Four-person		$1,450/month	$1,750/month

ComCare Short-to-Medium-Term Assistance (SMTA)
• If the family's assistance is renewed after 1 July 2019 and their household circumstances remain unchanged, or if they need more help, the family can expect an increase in the cash assistance

Enhancing Child Care Subsidy Support for Non-Working Mothers

With effect from March 2019

Child Care Subsidy for	Basic Subsidy
Non-working mothers	$150/month
Working Mothers	$300/month

• On a case-by-case basis, ECDA provides higher subsidies to non-working mothers, under Special Approval
• To better support job-seeking mothers and mothers of pre-school children who are caring full-time for a younger child, ECDA will extend Additional Subsidies to them and lengthen the duration for which these mothers may receive more subsidies for child care

Support	Basic Subsidy	Additional Subsidy
Child care services	$300	Up to $440
Infant care services	$600	Up to $540

> Duration of support increased **from three months to six months** for job-seeking mothers
> Mothers who require child care services for older child/children, while caring full-time for the younger child aged 24 months and below will receive support **until the younger child turns 24 months**, up from the current 18 months

Policy/Initiative	Specifics
Supporting Marriage and Parenthood	**Removal of age limit for women to undergo In-Vitro Fertilisation (IVF)**

Age limit of women undergoing assisted reproduction technology (ART) procedures, inc. IVF treatments	2019	From 1 Jan 2020
	45 years old	No age limit

Cap on number of IVF cycles	2019	From 1 Jan 2020
Women aged 40 and below	10 cycles	No cap
Women above 40	5 cycles	No cap

Enhanced Government funding for ART procedures
- Currently, co-funding for up to six ART cycles is only available for women aged below 40 at the start of the ART cycle
- From 2020, up to two of the six co-funded ART cycles can be carried out at age 40 or later, as long as the couple had attempted assisted reproduction or intra-uterine insemination (IUI) procedures before age 40

Extending Foreign Domestic Worker Levy Concession to More Caregiving Arrangements		

	Current	**Extended Arrangement (After 1 Sept 2019)**
Caregivwing Arrangements	If FDW is caring for an **immediate** family member, in the same household	If FDW is caring for a member of their **extended** family or friend, in the same household

B. HOUSEHOLD & HOUSING

Policy/Initiative	Specifics
Five-Year Medisave Top-Ups	• MediSave **top-up of $100/year for the next five years** for Singaporeans aged 50 and above in 2019 who do not receive Pioneer Generation or Merdeka Generation packages
Service and Conservancy Charges (S&CC) Rebate	• Eligible Singaporean households living in HDB flats will receive rebates **to offset between 1.5 and 3.5 months** of S&CC charges • Benefit about **930,000 HDB** households

HDB Flat Type	FY2019 S&CC Rebate (No. of months)				
	Apr 2019	**Jul 2019**	**Oct 2019**	**Jan 2020**	**Total in FY2019**
1 and 2-room	1	1	1	0.5	3.5
3 and 4-room	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	2.5
5-room	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	2
Executive/Multi-Gen	0.5	0.5	0.5	-	1.5

- **Exception:** Households with a member owning or has interest in a private property, or has rented out the whole flat, are not eligible for S&CC rebates

(sidebar) DEFRAYING COST OF LIVING

Policy/Initiative	Specifics
Bicentennial Bonus Benefits	• $1.1 billion Bicentennial Bonus to commemorate Singapore's Bicentennial and to support individuals who need help. Some of the benefits were distributed over past few months

DEFRAYING COST OF LIVING

Type of Bicentennial Bonus Benefit	Beneficiaries	Criteria		
GST Voucher (GSTV) – Bicentennial Payment	1.4 million adults aged 21 and above in 2019	Assessable Income of up to $28,000 for Year of Assessment 2018	Annual Value of Home as at 31 Dec 2018	
			Up to $13,000	$13,001 - $21,000
		GSTV – Cash (Bicentennial Payment)	$300	$150

• Individuals who own more than one property are not eligible for GSTV or the GSTV-Cash (Bicentennial Payment)

CPF Top-Up	300,000 individuals	Age in 2019	Combined CPF Ordinary and Special Account or Retirement Account Balance as at 31 Dec 2018	
			Up to $30,000	$30,001 - $60,000
		50 to 54	$500	$300
		55 to 64	$1,000	$600

Eligibility criteria:
(1) Assessable income of year of assessment 2018 is not more than $28,000
(2) Annual Value of home as at 31 Dec 2018 is not more than $21,000
(3) Does not own more than one property

Workfare Bicentennial Bonus (Workfare Income Supplement)	400,000 workers who qualify for the Workfare Income Supplement (WIS)	• Recipients of the WIS will receive an additional 10% of the total annual payment for work done in 2018 or a minimum payment of $100, to help them with their daily expenses • Persons with disabilities below age 35 in 2018 and meet the WIS eligibility criteria will also receive between $100 and $150 based on work done 2018

Top-Ups to Edusave Accounts and Post-Secondary Education Accounts (PSEA)	570,000 Singaporean students age 7 to 20	Age in 2019	Account	Annual Value of Home as at 31 Dec 2018	
				Up to $13,000	More than $13,000
		7 to 16	Edusave	$150	
		17 to 20	PSEA	$500	$250

Policy/Initiative	Specifics

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2" style="writing-mode:vertical">DEFRAYING COST OF LIVING</td><td>Bicentennial Bonus Benefits</td><td colspan="3">

Type of Bicentennial Bonus Benefit	Beneficiaries	Criteria
Personal Income Tax (PIT) Rebate	All tax resident individuals – granted for the Year of Assessment 2019	All tax resident individuals received the rebate of 50% (of tax payable, up to $200 per taxpayer) for their income earned in 2018

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HOUSING GRANTS

Fresh Start Support Programme (FSSP)

- **Fresh Start Housing Scheme** was launched in 2016 to help rental families with young children who are second-timers to buy a home of their own
- Set up of **Fresh Start Support Programme (FSSP)** to help Fresh Start families stay on track in their journey to home ownership
- Flexibility to join Fresh Start and book a BTO flat will be given to families who do not fit the criteria, but demonstrate good potential and motivation

Enhancements to Step-Up CPF Housing Grant

- **Step-Up CPF Housing Grant (SUHG)** of $15,000 was introduced in 2013 to help lower-income families living in subsidised 2-room flats in non-mature estates to buy 3-room new flats in non-mature estates

Coverage of the SUHG to include
3-room resale flats
in non-mature estates

- Grant will also be extended to second-timer families living in public rental flats who intend to buy 2-room or 3-room, new or resale flats in non-mature estates
- Revisions to take effect from the May 2019 sales exercise

Enhanced CPF Housing Grant (EHG)

- EHG to **replace** the existing Additional CPF Housing Grant (AHG) and Special CPF Housing Grant (SHG)
- Applicable to both buyers of new and resale flats, not restricted to flat type and location

Eligibility	EHG
First-timer families *(if the flat can cover the married couple to age of 95)*	**Up to $80,000**
First-timer singles	**Up to $40,000**

Monthly household income ceiling	Currently	Revised
Families	**$12,000**	**$14,000**
Singles	**$6,000**	**$7,000**

Policy/Initiative	Specifics		

HOUSING GRANTS

Lease Buyback Scheme (LBS)

LBS to be extended to all HDB flat types	Currently	From 1 January 2019
Seniors who own	4-room or smaller flat types	All, including 5-room and larger flat types

- As at November 2018, about **34,000 households** can benefit from this extension, bringing the total to about 130,000 eligible households

URBAN TRANSFORMATION PROJECTS

Coastal Defences for Low-Lying Areas

- **Second pump house** to be built at the opposite end of Marina Barrage to drain water from the Marina Reservoir into the sea during heavy rainfall and high tide
- Exploration of alternatives for East Coast: building a **seawall** further out to sea to create a polder and thus more reclaimed land, or reclaim a series of offshore islands from Marina East to Changi, connecting them with barrages to create a second freshwater reservoir

Building the Greater Southern Waterfront

- **The Greater Southern Waterfront**, which extends from Pasir Panjang to Marina East, will be transformed into a new major gateway and location for urban living along Singapore's southern coast
- Development will take place in phases, starting with the former Pasir Panjang Power District, Keppel Club and Mount Faber in the **next 5 to 10 years**

Elderly & Health

A. ELDERLY & HEALTH

| Policy/Initiative	Specifics
Merdeka Generation Package (MGP)	• One-time **$100 top-up** to PAssion Silver cards • MediSave **top-up of $200/year for five years** from 2019 to 2023 (on top of GST Voucher enjoyed by seniors 65 years and above) • Additional subsidies for outpatient care for life • **Special CHAS subsidies** for common illnesses, chronic conditions, dental procedures • **25% off subsidised bills** at polyclinics and public Specialist Outpatient Clinics • Additional MediShield Life premium subsidies

Age on Next Birthday (at policy renewal)	Additional subsidy for the Merdeka Generation	Total Subsidy
60 to 75	5% of annual premiums ($31.50 to $48.75)	$31.50 to $390
76 and above	10% of annual premiums ($113 to $153)	$113 to $918

• Additional participation incentive of $1500 for MG seniors who join CareShield Life when it becomes available for existing cohorts in 2021
• From 1 November 2019, eligible MG seniors will pay **only $2** for recommended diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, cervical and colorectal cancer screenings under the national **Screen for Life programme**. This covers the screenings plus one follow-up as needed

Community of Care and Contribution
• MediSave top-up of $100/year for five years in 2019-2023 for Singaporeans who are 50 and above in 2019, and not receiving the MGP/Pioneer Generation Package (PGP)
• Government pensioners who draw lower pensions will have their Singapore allowance and monthly pension ceiling increased by $20/month each, to $320 and $1250 respectively

Enhancing Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS)	From 1 November 2019 onwards, MOH will make the following enhancements to CHAS: • Extend CHAS to all Singaporeans with chronic conditions

| CHAS Tier	Updates
Blue	Increase in complex chronic subsidies of up to $20 annually
Orange	Introduce subsidies for common illnesses of up to $10 per visit
Green (NEW)	For household with Per Capita Household Income >$1,800

Policy/Initiative	Specifics

Extension on Medishield Life Coverage

From 1 April 2019:

Coverage	Updates
Pregnancy and Delivery	• Extended coverage to **in-patient treatment for serious pregnancy and delivery-related complications,** up to the prevailing in-patient and surgical claim limits • Provides more assurance to expectant parents who may face large hospitalisation bills
Autologous Bone Marrow Transplant	• Extended MediShield Life coverage to **patients who continue treatments** (including post-transplant monitoring) in outpatient setting at approved hospitals • Up to a claim limit of $6,000 per treatment • Helps to shorten in-patient stay by up to 3 weeks • In-patient treatments continue to be claimable under the existing in-patient claim limits

Strengthening Primary Care: Expansion of Polyclinic Network

30 to 32
polyclinics by 2030

📍 New clinics by 2023
📍 New clinics by 2025

Sembawang
Khatib
Bukit Panjang
Tengah
Serangoon
Tampines North
Kallang
Eunos

• More new polyclinics (locations to be finalised) to be completed by 2030.

• Redevelopment of
Ang Mo Kio, Yishun, Pasir Ris
polyclinics to meet anticipated demands

Policy/Initiative	Specifics
Strengthening Primary Care: Expansion of Primary Care Networks	• Patients receive care through a multi-disciplinary team of doctors, nurses and primary care coordinators for more holistic management of their chronic conditions **10** Primary Care Networks comprising more than **450** GP clinics Serve **>70,000** patients with chronic diseases • More than 40% of Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) GP clinics are now networked through PCNs
Strengthening Primary Care: Expansion of Community Nursing Teams	• Expansion **from 18 to 29 geographical areas** around Singapore by 2020 • MOH to partner more Senior Activity Centres (SACs) so that more seniors can benefit from access to community nursing services

Communities of Care for Seniors: Caregiver Support Action Plan	Together with partner agencies, MOH will embark on enhancing five areas
	
	Care navigation
	Financial support
	Workplace support
	Caregiver respite services
	Caregiver empowerment and training
	
	• Action Plan includes:
	  a. **Night respite service pilot** with selected nursing home providers to support caregivers of seniors with dementia and who experience behavioural and sleep issues at night
	  b. **Home-based custodial care respite service pilot** which offers assistance such as showering, dressing and feeding for cancer patients receiving home palliative care
	  c. **Agency for Integrated Care** to pilot a pre-enrolment system with a number of senior care centres and nursing homes from the first quarter of 2019 to ensure that caregivers can access respite services in a shorter period of time
	  d. **New $200 monthly Home Caregiving Grant (HCG)** to defray the costs of home and community-based long-term caregiving of individuals with permanent moderate disability (i.e. require some assistance with at least three Activities of Daily Living), regardless of age
	  e. **HCG to replace the existing Foreign Domestic Worker (FDW) Grant** – caregivers will have more flexibility to use the grant to defray caregiving expenses, such as the cost of hiring a foreign domestic worker

Policy/Initiative	Specifics
Communities of Care for Seniors: Moments of Life App (Active Ageing)	• Expand the existing **Moments of Life app** to support seniors in active ageing • In future, MG seniors can directly benefit from this app which can be used to **access personalised information**, including active ageing programmes near their home and Government benefits such as the MG Package and GSTV Voucher Scheme • App will be piloted in late 2019 and will complement Silver Generation Ambassadors' face-to-face outreach to MG seniors • Over time, MOH will **progressively expand the app** to benefit Pioneer Generation and other seniors aged 60 and above

Healthcare Services Bill	• MOH will replace the Private Hospitals and Medical Clinics Act (PHMCA) with the **Healthcare Services (HCS) Bill**. The HCS Bill will:
	  a. Enhance regulatory clarity to the types of healthcare services regulated;
	  b. Strengthen governance of the licensees providing the healthcare services;
	  c. Provide necessary safeguards to patient safety and welfare; and
	  d. Ensure proper continuity of care and accountability
	• The Bill will be enacted in the first half of 2019, and implemented it in three phases, starting from April 2020

Revised Income Criteria for Healthcare Subsidy and Assistance Schemes	• MOH has reviewed the income criteria for means-tested healthcare subsidy and assistance schemes Monthly PCHI criteria for each subsidy tier will be raised with increases ranging from **$100 to 300** **>365,000** Singapore residents to benefit from higher subsidies
Extension of Subsidies for All Vaccinations	• **Extension of subsidies** for all vaccinations under the National Childhood Immunisation Schedule (NCIS) and Childhood Developmental Screenings **Subsidies** will be made available at all CHAS General Practitioner clinics and polyclinics before end 2020

Policy/Initiative	Specifics
School-Based HPV Vaccination	• **Fully subsidised HPV vaccination** is offered from April 2019 as part of the national school-based health programme • All **female students in the current and future Secondary 1 cohorts** attending national schools (including Government-funded Special Education schools), Privately-Funded Schools and full-time Madrasahs can opt in to the programme • All other female Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents who are in the current and future Secondary 1 age-equivalent cohorts, including those studying in Private Education Institutions, are eligible to receive fully subsidised HPV vaccination at **Health Promotion Board (HPB)-appointed clinics**
Extension of Screen for Life (SFL) to Gestational Diabetes	• From June 2019, **subsidised screening** under the SFL programme will be **extended to women with a history of gestational diabetes** so as to improve screening rates and facilitate early detection and management of diabetes
Banning Advertisements of Beverages with High Sugar Content	• Singapore will be the first country in the world to ban advertisements of packaged drinks with very high sugar content • Mandatory for drinks with medium-to-high sugar content to carry a label on the front of the pack to signal that they are unhealthy
Ban on Partially Hydrogenated Oils	• In 2013, Singapore introduced legislation to limit the amount of trans fat content in fats and oils sold in Singapore to 2% • To build on this, MOH plans to ban Partially Hydrogenated Oils (PHO) and **eliminate artificial trans-fat from Singaporeans' diet**
Tightening Tobacco Control	(see table below)

Minimum Legal Age for sale, purchase, use and possession of tobacco products	From 1 January 2019	From 2021
	19	21

• Standardised packaging with enlarged graphic health warnings for all tobacco products will be introduced in 2020

Community, Culture & Youth

A. VOLUNTEERISM, ARTS, CULTURE & HERITAGE

SG Cares

1 Establishment of Volunteer Centres

- First VC has been set up in **Jurong East**, under the Loving Heart Multi Service Centre (Yuhua) and the second will be in **Bedok**
- Following pilots in Bedok and Jurong East in 2018, MCCY will be partnering community groups to establish **7 Volunteer Centres** for volunteer matching, deployment and training in the towns by end of 2019
- Aims to **build volunteer management capabilities**, broker sustained partnerships amongst volunteering groups and work with service providers to meet their needs for volunteers

2 Growing Corporate Volunteerism

National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre (NVPC)

- The **Company of Good (COG) Programme** was launched in 2016
- An **account management service** will be rolled out in late 2019 to identify areas of growth and strategic corporate partners with the relevant resources, networks, expertise and client base
- Aims to also help companies **align business objectives** and **vision** for giving

National Council of Social Services (NCSS)

- A new **AI-enabled Social Broker "CARA" (Caring and Resourceful Assistant)** is being developed to improve the user experience in matching corporates to social service agencies offering regular volunteer opportunities through the SG Cares app, giving.sg and Social Service Agencies' website

3 Enhancement of Business and IPC Partnership Scheme (BIPS)

- Claim process will be simplified
- Option to claim tax deductions on wages based on a fixed man-hour rate will be provided
- Step up efforts to proactively engage businesses, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and IPCs on BIPS

Introduced in 2016, BIPS enables businesses to enjoy
250% tax

4 Development of Volunteer.sg

- Launch of **Volunteer.sg** – a **one-stop portal** to make volunteering with public agencies a better experience and encourage more sustained volunteerism
- Enables volunteers to **plan and manage their volunteering journeys from start to end**, easily discover volunteering opportunities and co-create and propose projects for causes they are passionate about
- Since its soft-launch in November 2018, **6 public agencies** are using the portal to manage about **22,300 (unique count) volunteers**

5 Growing Senior Volunteerism

- MCCY is working with community partners such as RSVP Singapore and the Centre for Seniors (CFS) to encourage seniors to volunteer by engaging older employees at the workplace
- MCCY to work with RSVP Singapore to scale up **"Retire with a Purpose" (RWAP)** - a structured volunteerism programme first launched in 2017 to encourage companies to champion active ageing
- As at end-2018, 400 corporate volunteers had participated in 20 volunteering activities reaching out to over 1,000 beneficiaries
- The programme targets to involve 10 to 20 more organisations by end-2019

Arts, Culture & Heritage

6 Arts and Culture Strategic Review (ACSR)

- Since the implementation of the ACSR recommendations in 2012, the Government has worked closely with partners in the public, private, and people sectors – especially the arts and culture community - to enhance accessibility and develop audiences
- The Population Survey on the Arts 2017 showed upward trends in attendance of 54% up from 40% in 2013, and participation of 22% up from 13% in 2013

	Record highs in 2017	
Singapore Cultural Statistics 2018	Attendance at non-ticketed arts and culture events	**>11m**
	Visitorship to national museums and heritage institutions	**>5.4m**
	Number of performing arts activities	**>9,500**

7 Hawker Culture UNESCO Nomination

- The National Heritage Board (NHB), National Environment Agency (NEA) and Federation of Merchants Association (FMAS) jointly submitted the nomination dossier to UNESCO in March 2019

## 8 Enhancing Accessibility and Inclusivity to Heritage Offerings

- NHB to roll out an accessibility audit of NHB museums and institutions in 2019
- Aims to take stock of the existing facilities and services that are already in place, and identify areas of improvement across different aspects of access (e.g. infrastructure, exhibitions and programmes)

B. YOUTH, COMMUNITY & SPORTS

1 **Youth Corps Partnership with IHLs to Provide Community Service Training for Youth Leaders**

- Youth Corps Singapore (YCS) will establish a partnership with the Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) to provide training for IHL community service leaders and members
- Aims to **sustain and grow the social participation and volunteerism of youths** when they enter IHLs and the workforce
- Youths will go through a camp, where they will meet like-minded and passionate people, and receive community leadership and skills-based training

Starting in 2019

Polytechnics

ITE

Selected Autonomous Universities

Partnership with YCS

Expansion in near future

All Autonomous Universities

Selected Private Education Institutes
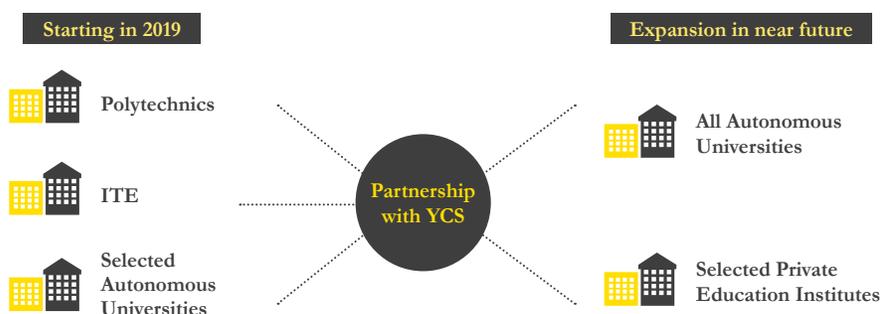
Community

2 **Crisis Preparedness Accreditation Scheme**

- Launch of an **SGSecure Community Network (SGCN)** Crisis Preparedness Accreditation Scheme for Religious Organisations (ROs)
- Aims to make Singapore society more resilient to crisis by strengthening ROs' awareness of emergency preparedness, **support ROs in developing crisis response plans** and provide training for RO members in crisis response skills
- Scheme is a follow-up effort in preparing places of worship to be crisis ready

3 **Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Act 2019**

- Bill was passed by Parliament on 15 January 2019
- Aims to **tackle behaviours that promote or facilitate drug use**, better protect children and increase support for drug abusers

4   Active Health Programme

- Launched by SportSG in July 2017 to encourage Singaporeans to take ownership of their health and well-being
- To date, **more than 10,000 individuals** have been on-boarded through assessments and workshops

In 2019

2 **more Active Health Sport-in-Precinct (SIP) programmes** in Bukit Batok and Taman Jurong, in addition to the SIP facility in Jurong Spring

2nd **Active Health space** launched in Admiralty Medical Centre

5   ActiveSG Academies and Clubs

- Two more ActiveSG Academies and Clubs – in **Canoeing and Gymnastics** – to be introduced in 2019
- Provides structured programmes for members to learn and develop skills in the sport

ActiveSG

18 Academies & Clubs

45,000 participants since its launch in 2016

6   New and Improved Sporting Spaces under the Sports Facilities Master Plan

2 **new Play Fields** Jurong Town & Yan Kit

2 **new SIP facilities** Bukit Batok & Taman Jurong

52 **new indoor sports halls**

32 **new free-to-play school fields**

under the Dual-Use Scheme

7   Support for High Performance Sports (HPS)

- **$3 million set aside in 2019** to provide extended campaign support of up to two years, for **Team Singapore athletes** preparing for major games
- Strengthens the support given to our games-bound athletes and encourages them to start early on a full training load in preparation for upcoming major games

$70m *currently invested annually in the*

HPS system,

working with key stakeholders such as Singapore National Oylmpic Council, Singapore National Paralympic Council and the National Sports Associations

Section

II

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