

Making P1 registration easier key to making it fairer: Study

Yale-NUS study says current system is confusing and gives advantage to privileged children

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Simplifying Singapore's primary school registration system is key to making it a fairer one – especially for those with less resources, according to a recent study.

The registration process – stacked with over 180 school options and a tiered system made up of several phases – is confusing and gives an advantage to privileged children, said the Yale-NUS study.

Parents of such children, for instance, will have alumni connections to popular schools or may have the money to rent or buy a home near these schools, and change their address to increase the child's chances of getting a coveted place in the school, it added.

To increase diversity in such schools, the study said one solution can be reserving Primary 1 spots for children from low-income families, especially at the most popular schools.

And despite the stereotype of the overly competitive Singapore parent, the study said parents usually work together –



The study says the primary one registration process requires parents to be “conversant... in a series of complex calculations” to assess their options.

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instead of against each other – to navigate the enrolment system.

That is because the registration process requires parents to be “conversant... in a series of complex calculations” to assess their options.

The study, published in December last year, was based on the analysis of local media coverage of the registration exercise from 2010 to last year, as well as posts on the KiasuParents portal – run by a group of parents – between 2015 and last year.

It was conducted by Yale-NUS assistant professor of social sciences (psychology) Cheung Hoi Shan and sociology lecturer Mira Debs.

According to the study, some features of the registration exercise, such as the parent volunteer scheme, lack transparency and result in parents having too many choices.

The system, it added, favours families who have alumni ties to popular schools, and those whose parents have the time, financial resources and skills to volunteer.

To solve these problems, the study suggested reducing the number of school choices by allowing parents to make a ranked preference of a few schools – similar to the secondary school selection system.

The study also suggests introducing a consistent and transparent selection process across

schools, and reducing the number of privileged groups in the system.

“Retaining sibling and distance preference but requiring everyone else to ballot could also make the system more equitable for those without prior affiliations, or the cultural capital and economic resources to volunteer their time,” it said.

The Education Ministry is reviewing the Primary 1 registration framework to see how it can increase the number of places set aside under Phase 2C, said then Education Minister Lawrence Wong in Parliament in March this year.

Phase 2C – the fifth of seven phases in the annual registration exercise – is the open phase for those who do not enjoy any form of priority admission and is based on home-to-school distance.

This year's Primary 1 registration exercise kicks off on Wednesday next week with Phase 1, which is for children whose siblings are already in the school.

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