

More parents feel stressed over their children’s futures

Study finds that despite shifts in education system, stress has broadened into new areas

Elisha Tushara
Correspondent

More parents of primary school children in Singapore feel stressed and anxious about their children’s futures and whether they will fall behind in the long run.

Though most increasingly value holistic or broader development and see Singapore’s education system as among the best in the world, more than two-thirds of parents say it still causes their children unnecessary stress.

Compared with 2016, the proportion of parents who reported arguing with their spouses over their children’s education rose from 42.8 per cent to 59.7 per cent in 2026.

Those who reported feeling stressed rose from 73.1 per cent to 87.9 per cent.

These were the findings of the 2026 Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) study on parents’ attitudes and perceptions of Singapore’s education system, conducted from May to August.

The results build on insights from its last study on the topic in 2016.

The latest edition surveyed 1,500 parents – Singaporeans and permanent residents – between the ages of 21 and 65, who had at least one child attending a local primary school during the study period.

Mathew Mathews, principal research fellow at IPS, said the latest study was conducted after major reforms over the past decade.

These include using broader achievement bands instead of numeric T-scores for the PSLE, phasing out mid-year examinations and

implementing full subject-based banding.

Yet, he said, these changes have not translated into significantly less pressure for families.

“This is a concern... despite the fact that we do have shifts within the education system... you still see that the stress has broadened into newer areas,” said Mathews, one of three researchers involved in the study.

He was speaking at a media briefing held at the IPS building in Cluny Road on Sept 25. The other two IPS researchers were research fellow Melvin Tay and senior research fellow Teo Kay Key.

“We do notice that parents are reporting less anxiety or less stress about homework and being there to prepare the child for exams,” said Mathews, adding that these were the top concerns for parents surveyed in 2016.

Parents are now concerned that their children are not obtaining the grades they are capable of, that they may lose out in the education system in the long run and that they are not keeping up in school.

Though children spend less time on homework compared with 10 years ago – 4.3 hours a week in 2026, down from 6.46 hours in 2016 – the findings show that they now spend more time on tuition and enrichment outside school.

This corresponds to higher spending in these areas.

Parents in 2026 spent a median monthly sum of \$500 on private tuition, compared with \$242 in 2016. Similarly, spending on enrichment has risen from \$48 to \$260.

The 2016 figures have been adjusted for inflation.

Parents’ attitudes towards education

A 2026 study by the Institute of Policy Studies has found that Singapore parents increasingly value holistic development, but remain stressed about their children’s longer-term prospects. Here are some key findings.

WHY PARENTS ARE STRESSED

Factor	Year	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree + Strongly agree (%)
My children are not obtaining the grades they are capable of	2026	4.2	20.9	74.9
	2016	5.1	38	56.9
Concerned that my children may lose out in the education system in the long run	2026	5	20.1	74.9
	2016	5.5	31.6	62.9
My children are not keeping up with what is taught in school	2026	6.6	26.5	66.9
	2016	6.2	45.2	48.6
Helping my children with the many tests and examinations in school	2026	5.2	30.7	64.1
	2016	4.5	24.9	70.5
Not knowing how to assist my children with their studies because the syllabus is too challenging	2026	7.6	29.5	62.9
	2016	5.8	37.3	56.9
My children exhibit behaviour they learnt in school which I disapprove of	2026	6.6	30.4	63
	2016	10.9	50.1	39
Not having enough resources to support my children’s education aspirations	2026	5.9	31.9	62.2
A (2026): Having to help my children with schoolwork	2026 (A)	7.2	31.3	61.6
	2026 (B)	11.3	34.4	54.3
B (2026): Ferrying my children to and from school, as well as tuition and/or enrichment classes	2016*	5	28.9	66.1
My children are unable to compete with peers for entry into competitive programmes, opportunities or future schools	2026	6.9	32	61.1
My children are not getting along with classmates/peers	2026	11.2	33.8	55.1
Large amount of schoolwork and projects	2026	8.5	49.4	42
	2016	5.2	44.6	50.2

NOTE: *In 2016, options A and B were asked in one question: “Having to help child with schoolwork and ferrying him/her to and from school as well as tuition and/or enrichment classes.”
**Figures may have been rounded up or down

PARENTS SAY PSLE ESSENTIAL, BUT MORE REFORMS NEEDED

While parents want lower-stakes assessments and broader recognition of strengths, the findings show that they remain attached to familiar markers of merit and certainty.

For example, more than half of the parents said the new Primary School Leaving Examination scoring system still contributes significant stress to their children.

It also makes it harder for them to get into the school of their

choice and gauge how well they are doing against their peers, they say.

The study found that more than eight in 10 parents view the PSLE as an important milestone for children to learn how to set goals and work hard, and consider the national exam necessary to assess students fairly.

Those living in one- to three-room Housing Board flats felt the most positive about the PSLE, with only 4.6 per cent in favour of postponing it.

On the other hand, private property owners were the least support-

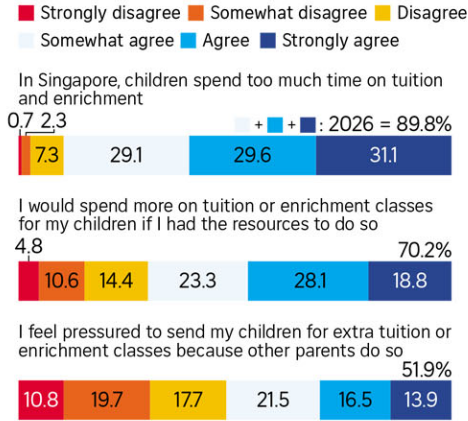
ive of the PSLE, with 20.4 per cent wanting it postponed.

Tay said this could be because smaller households with fewer financial resources may feel less able to cope with change and prepare their children for a later PSLE sitting.

The researchers said the findings reflect a wider uncertainty about the future.

Mathews said the study indicates that parental stress has shifted from immediate exam pressure to broader uncertainty about children’s longer-term educational

VIEWS ABOUT TUITION AND ENRICHMENT



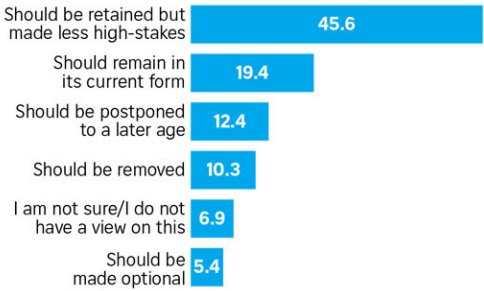
NOTE: Figures do not add up to 100% because of rounding

TUITION AND ENRICHMENT EXPENSES

Median monthly spending	2016*	2026	Increase
Tuition	\$242	\$500	+106%
Enrichment	\$48	\$260	+436%

*2016 figures have been adjusted for inflation

VIEWS ON PSLE



Source: IPS WORKING PAPERS NO. 77 (SEPTEMBER 2026): PARENTS AND SCHOOLING IN SINGAPORE
STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

prospects, especially in the ever-increasing global competition for jobs.

He added that many parents increasingly want both academic success and holistic development, and tensions arise when they perceive trade-offs between the two.

“Holistic development must not become an additional arena for competition,” he said, adding that access to developmental opportunities should not depend disproportionately on family resources.

elisha@sph.com.sg