

Relax, PSLE doesn't define a child's destiny

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CRITICS of the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) say the exam filters pupils more finely than the O and A levels, and the fact that no one knows how the T-score is calculated makes parents feel even more nervous over the uncertainty of their children's results.

These critics advocate a letter grading system instead. However, it is untrue that the T-score grading system is a more competitive approach. Although the point-by-point scrutiny makes it seem so, secondary schools admit students from a wide range of about 15 to 20 points for each stream.

Applying to a pre-university or tertiary institution is more competitive than applying to a secondary school.

Parents also believe wrongly that their children will perform to a top school's required standard, that is, they will fare better in an elite school than in a neighbourhood school, and thereby have a better shot at success.

The truth is, at every level of education, it is the child's hard work that will guarantee success and not the school.

I sat the PSLE at Compassvale Primary School in 2004. There was no national fuss then over the exam, and pupils and parents did not complain about "impossible maths questions" as routinely as they do now.

Subsequently I enrolled in Xinmin Secondary School without Direct School Admission. It was not a sought-after top-tier school but I never regretted studying in a neighbourhood school. Neither did it deter me from working hard and qualifying for Nanyang Junior College on academic merit.

I am now serving my national service and am looking forward to entering Singapore Management University next year.

Parents and students must realise that major exams are not, to quote Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, the be-all and end-all. How well their children fare in the PSLE will not define their destiny.

Should their children not get into their desired secondary schools, they can still work hard to have another shot at success during the O levels.