

Heng: Intangibles count too

BY JACQUELINE WOO

INSTEAD of chasing for that last point in an examination, education should be a lifelong pursuit of learning, said Education Minister Heng Swee Keat.

Pointing out that the notion of “education equals grades” is counterproductive to a student’s learning journey, Mr Heng said academic ability is not the only path to success.

Parents should also focus on the “intangibles”: aspects such as character development and socio-emotional learning that can “carry a child through life”.

“Our domain of learning must go beyond that of academics...towards developing a whole person, and not just a part of a person,” he told some 300 parents at The Straits Times’ inaugural Education Forum yesterday.

This is why the Education Minister is sticking to his guns on not



LIFE SKILLS: Parents should also focus on aspects such as character development and socio-emotional learning, says Mr Heng.

naming the top scorers of national examinations like the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE).

Citing his own experience in interacting with people during his 27-year career in the public service, Mr Heng noted that he has seen many “outstanding” individu-

als attain success in life even without much academic achievements.

He said: “It is our responsibility as parents and an education system to bring out the best in every child.

“We must help every child succeed in life – not just in their schools or careers, but also in their own lives, so they can go on to lead happy, meaningful and fulfilling lives.”

The decision not to name top scorers was one of the topics that forum participants raised during a dialogue session held at the Singapore Management University. Other topics included the relevance of streaming and home schooling.

Mr Heng’s call to parents to change their mindset comes amid his ministry’s efforts to shift the focus from academic results to the holistic development of students.

For instance, all secondary schools under the Direct School Admission scheme are required to assess students based on their character, resilience and leadership qualities.

But it is still important to set the right academic foundation for children, said Mr Heng.

Hence, the PSLE cannot be abolished as it remains an important local and international benchmark for what 12-year-olds can achieve.

Instead, the move to use letter grades in lieu of precise T-scores, which was announced last year, is a way to “plan for the next stage of a student’s learning journey”, he said.

Experts who were present at the forum yesterday dished out tips on motivating children to learn and setting aside time to build their relationships with their parents.

For parent Jimmy Chua, 42, who has a 14-year-old son, Mr Heng’s words helped to provide a “clearer picture” of the ministry’s direction.

“It’s good not to focus so much on grades,” he added, noting that his son can better learn and grow at his own pace.

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