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SPEECH BY MR MOHAMAD MAIDIN PACKER MOHD, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (EDUCATION) AT THE  
FELLOWSHIP OF MUSLIM STUDENTS ASSOCIATION (FMSA) OPEN HOUSE ON 24 APRIL 1999 AT 2.00  
PM AT MADRASAH AL JUNIED AL ISLAMI AH

President, Fellowship of Muslim Students Association,

  
Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls.

Good afternoon.

I am very happy to be here at the FMSA Open House. The FMSA has a variety of educational, welfare and spiritual development programmes and activities for students and youths in Singapore. I understand that the FMSA is exploring other avenues to assist schools to enrich their students to be wholesome in their character and development. This is a step in the right direction.

There is no doubt that parents must play a great part in the character development of their children and since students spend half of their time in school, teachers too can influence how the students develop mentally, physically and spiritually. Parents, school principals and teachers are committed to developing our youths into well-rounded citizens. Towards this end, our schools aim to provide our children with a balanced and well-rounded education to prepare them for the challenges of the next century. There is no running away from the fact that academic excellence is important. However, this is only one component of our children's education. Another equally important component is how we nurture and develop our children with healthy habits, positive attitudes and life-skills. Among the long list of life-skills would be good leadership qualities, graciousness, ability to adapt to new environments and ability to work in teams. The list goes on.

Life-skills cannot be taught effectively as a subject in the classroom. The skills have to be "caught"; there must be hands-on experience outside the classroom which bring meaning to what is taught in class. That is the role of extra-curricular activities (ECAs) in schools. ECA is an integral part of our education system and aims to teach our children skills to last a life-time. It also aims to inculcate in them correct values and desirable social attitudes as well as provide opportunities for healthy recreation.

I am sure you will agree that students will benefit from ECA participation. When students participate actively in ECAs, whether it is a sport, a choir, a uniformed group, a club or even in activities organised by outside organisations like FMSA, they have to interact and develop a spirit of working together with others. This will teach them good human relationship skills. In their ECAs, students will also have to learn to give and take, to lead and be led. This will develop qualities of tolerance and understanding. For many, leadership qualities, self-esteem, independence and confidence will also be developed among the many student leaders of the various activities.

Sports and games and uniformed groups instil discipline, confidence, team-work, esprit-de-corps and group loyalty. Students who are in national competitions feel a great sense of bonding, regardless of race, language or religion. Such ECAs certainly have a part to play in nation building. Music, dance, art and drama are ECAs which encourage our students to appreciate the arts and thus move towards a more gracious society. They learn to enjoy the finer things in life. I am glad to see that our students have stepped up efforts in community service in various areas, volunteering their services to the underprivileged, the handicapped, the aged, as well as to "green" projects and many more to do their part to make the world a better place for the less fortunate and for all of us. This will imbue our students with social values which teach them to be more caring, concerned and compassionate. We hope that many will carry on with their service to community even after they leave school and be part of a growing number of civic-minded Singaporeans.

With all these and many other benefits of ECA, the Ministry of Education and the schools spare no effort in promoting ECA. It is compulsory for every secondary school pupil to take part in one core ECA. Pupils who wish to take part in another ECA may do so from a list of optional activities. To cater to the varied interests and abilities of the pupils, schools offer a wide range of activities.

As parents, mentors and teachers, we have to constantly remind our children to balance their time between their studies and their ECAs and also to find time to be

mmpm19990424d

with their family and friends. This will truly provide our students with a balanced and well-rounded education, preparing them well with attributes and skills to face their future in the adult world.

I wish you all the best in your Open House and I am sure the participants are looking forward to the talks, and the exhibition maze. I look forward to the dialogue with the MLS teachers after this.

Thank you.

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