



PRESS RELEASE

Ministry of Education
SINGAPORE

3 March 2008

Helping Students Who Are At-risk of Dropping-Out Stay in School

1. To assist students who are at-risk of dropping-out remain in school and maximise their potential, the Ministry of Education will be introducing more measures to strengthen the engagement of our students and providing more support and resources to schools.

2. The dropout rate in Singapore is now at 1.6%, and has been decreasing considerably from 5.3% in 1997 and 3.6% in 2002. The decrease has reflected improvements at all levels and amongst students of all ethnic groups.

3. The significant progress reflects the success of MOE's initiatives and our schools' relentless efforts to address the needs of students who are at-risk and help them remain in school. Some of these measures include the Learning Support Programme (LSP) for English Language and Mathematics at Primary 1 and 2, the deployment of Full Time School Counsellors to schools and the student re-admission policy for Out-of-School Youths. Please refer to [Annex A](#) for details of some of the current programmes.

4. Maintaining this low dropout rate and improving it further will require more work over time. The additional measures were proposed by the Committee on Reducing Attrition in Education, chaired by Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Education. These measures are aimed at helping more students to attain at least 10 years of education so that they can subsequently get a post-secondary education. By doing so, they will be able to maximise their potential and have the best chance of succeeding in life.

Additional Measures

5. The current measures have been effective in reducing attrition. Building on these, the additional measures are aimed at enhancing student engagement and providing more resources to schools to support children who are at-risk.

6. The measures are outlined below:

(a) **Supporting schools with additional manpower resources.**

Over the next four years, 70 schools will be provided with more manpower in the form of a second Full Time School Counsellor (FTSC) and an additional Operations Manager (OM). As of January 2008, every school has been assigned

an FTSC. While the FTSC focuses on providing the guidance and counselling needs of the students, the OM will follow-up with the students at-risk to ensure that they are participating in all aspects of school activities and are meaningfully engaged, especially in CCAs. Having an additional FTSC and OM each will help the school provide greater outreach and co-ordinate the school, home and community level support for the students.

(b) Supporting earlier intervention through identifying and monitoring students at-risk.

To facilitate teachers in identifying students at-risk earlier, MOE is enhancing screening tools for students with behavioural and emotional difficulties or who have special needs. These tools are based on the interactions and observations of teachers and school counsellors. These will help them to provide timely support to the students and to plan the best pathway for intervention, including referrals to specialists where appropriate.

A monitoring system will also be developed to help teachers track the development of individual students (e.g. holistic development of the children, learning and emotional needs). This will include alerts on early signals of students at risk of dropping out. Some of the early signals include high absenteeism rates, little or no participation in school activities or programmes and weak academic interest. These tools can help teachers design appropriate learning structures and processes for their students to improve the quality of learning.

As emphasised by Senior Parliamentary Secretary Mr Masagos Zulkifli, in his FY2008 Committee of Supply Debate speech, these additional tools “will provide useful information on individual students for teachers to facilitate the monitoring of their development even as they move from school to school and from class to class.”

(c) Strengthening student engagement.

This can be achieved through meaningful engagement in Co-Curricular Activities (CCAs), and setting appropriate aspirational goals through Education and Career Guidance.

Engagement in CCAs give students opportunities to learn skills and develop interest in a sport, uniformed group, performing arts, or a hobby. It also encourages spontaneous interactions with other students. Through these, students can build self confidence, raise their awareness of care and concern for others, and bond with the school and the community. MOE will also continue to review the structure of CCAs to allow students, including those at-risk, to be meaningfully engaged in CCAs so that they can further benefit from this aspect of life.

Education and Career Guidance (ECG) are efforts to help students develop aspirational goals and support their efforts in working toward their goals. For at-risk students who do not have clear goals, ECG will help them identify or clarify goals that are appropriate to their context. It will also help them develop concrete plans to succeed in what they have set out to do. MOE will continue to provide more resources for education and career guidance.

MOE will continue to build schools' capacity in these areas by providing training and specialist consultancy for teachers to better help their students develop social and emotional competencies.

(d) Establishing closer partnership with community groups to provide comprehensive and holistic support for students.

Community groups have the expertise to address cases that require community based intervention with the students and their parents. Schools will look into greater engagement of Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs) to work with the families of at-risk pupils. MOE will also work closely with the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to leverage on their existing programmes with some of the students at-risk. In particular, efforts will be made for greater information sharing, smoothing of referral process and tighter coordination to ensure that there is seamless and holistic support for at-risk students. As a start, information on all programmes implemented by the SHGs is being consolidated and will be disseminated to all schools.

7. MOE will set up a committee to oversee the implementation of these measures.

Background

8. The Committee on Reducing Attrition in Education was formed in October 2006 to examine how the school drop-out rate in Singapore could be reduced to 1.5% by 2011. Chaired by Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Education, it comprised Members of Parliament, MOE Advisory Council on Community and Parents in Support of Schools (COMPASS), school principals, MOE and MCYS officers.

9. Based on their study, the Committee on Reducing Attrition in Education has found that currently, the number of students who drop out of school is about 1.6% of the cohort, compared to 5.3% in 1997. Around 0.15% of the cohort drops out during primary school while another 0.45% drops out during the transition from primary school to secondary school. The remaining 1% of the cohort drops out during secondary school. About 70% of these students leave school at the upper secondary level, particularly at Secondary 3. In addition, about 90% of the secondary school dropouts are from the Normal (Academic) and Normal (Technical) streams.

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Current Programmes to Reduce Attrition

1. MOE has implemented several programmes at three different levels to address the needs of students who are at-risk of dropping out.

Strengthening Student Engagement

2. Firstly MOE has adopted several measures to engage and build the character of our students. Learning of social and emotional competencies, as well as education and career guidance help all our students develop their abilities for self regulation and resilience, and set aspirational goals for their own future. CCAs help them to develop interests and bonds with peers outside of academic pursuits. We have also implemented a revised Normal (Technical) curriculum with a more practical orientation, to better engage students in their learning. The introduction of Elective Modules and Advanced Elective Modules has also created greater engagement and enjoyment in learning for students due to the more practical hands-on approaches.

Enhanced Guidance and Support

3. Secondly, for students who are showing early signs of high risk, disengagement and failure, MOE provides tools and manpower for intensive guidance, enhanced support and remediation. Examples of current programmes include time-out programmes and Learning Support Programme for English Language and Mathematics at Primary 1 and 2. Schools are also provided with Full Time School Counsellors and Special Needs Officers.

4. "Time-out Programme" is the generic name for supervised programmes that schools carry out for their at-risk students, giving them time away from their regular classes so that they can sort out their thoughts and emotions, develop coping strategies, and build relationships with significant adults in school. The goal of such programmes is to eventually facilitate its participants in returning to normal school life. Some of the common elements of time-out programmes include a modified academic curriculum, character development activities, lifeskills lessons and guidance/ counselling sessions.

Intensive Group Remediation

5. Finally, for a small number of students, MOE and schools provide intensive group remediation strategies. These include the time-out programmes, re-admission policy for Out-of-School Youths, and NorthLight School.

6. The student re-admission policy for Out-of-School Youths allows students who have left mainstream schools to approach schools directly to seek re-admission. This policy is in line with our aim to enable every child to remain in the school system for at least 10 years. The percentage of Out-of-School Youths who have successfully applied for re-admission has steadily increased over the years, from 65% in Y2005 to 85% in Y2007. Schools also have a re-integration programme to ensure that students are successfully re-integrated into the school system after re-admission.