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Time for conversation on broader role of tuition

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I read of the growing trend of "super tutors" in Singapore with great concern ("Super tutors in demand/Each of them earns at least \$1m a year"; Monday).

The exorbitant fees charged by such tutors effectively render these services inaccessible to students from low-income and lower-middle-income families who also require extra help in their studies. This disparity in support may undermine the principle of meritocracy.

The prospect of earning high incomes from expensive tutoring may cause an exodus of talented teachers from the national school system, depriving the wider student community of the effective teaching that they provide.

Our society also needs to have a conversation about the broader role that tuition is playing in our education system.

With the tuition industry worth more than a billion dollars annually, it is clear that most parents believe that tuition is an integral aspect of their children's academic journey.

The competitiveness that our students are facing has become so fierce that parents are enrolling even their pre-school children in tuition classes. Some students are also being enrolled in classes a few years ahead of their level in school.

It is understandable that increasingly well-educated parents want their children to have the best shot at a successful academic journey, leading to a good future.

However, such dogged focus on tuition places tremendous pressure on our children and poses risks to their mental and physical well-being. It also damages a child's joy of learning and produces students who ace tests but lack a holistic educational experience.

Singaporeans are rightly proud to enjoy an education system which has good resources, is staffed by highly trained teachers and ranks high internationally.

But we must also ensure that the system doesn't overwhelm those it seeks to mould, and undermine our founding principle of meritocracy.

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