

Teachers' Day

Call for pre-school teachers to get day off



Ms Intan cares for infants like 16-month-olds Anna Aisha Khairul Anuar (left) and Wong Min En at My First Skool in Woodlands, which already closes on Teachers' Day. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

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Childcare centres can close for an additional half-day, on top of the 5 1/2 days now

[Priscilla Goy](#)

Give all pre-school educators a day off on Teachers' Day, so they get more respect and recognition.

That call was made yesterday by Minister for Social and Family Development Tan Chuan-Jin, even as new moves to help more people join the pre-school sector and develop their careers were announced.

While there have been other efforts to appreciate teachers, Mr Tan said: "I think there is more we can and should do to acknowledge our teachers for the important and hard work they do."

Speaking at the Early Childhood Conference held at Suntec Singapore and attended by over 1,500 educators, Mr Tan said the day off on Teachers' Day "is long overdue".

Kindergartens, which follow the primary school calendar, give teachers the day off on Teachers' Day. But it is up to childcare operators to decide if they want to close on Teachers' Day, which falls on the first Friday in September.

IMPORTANT SIGNAL

I believe this is an important signal. Many of you teachers are parents yourselves and I hope this will give you more time to spend with your own children. I also urge employers to exercise some flexibility to allow parents with pre-schoolers to take leave or time-off on Teachers' Day.

MR TAN CHUAN-JIN, Minister for Social and Family Development.

SHOW OF APPRECIATION

The day off on Teachers' Day gives a signal that teachers are appreciated.

MS INTAN ISMAIL, who cares for infants at a centre.

A 365-DAY AFFAIR

It's just like how we don't appreciate mothers only on Mother's Day.

PRINCIPAL OF A CHILDCARE CENTRE IN SEMBAWANG, saying that what is more important are ongoing efforts to appreciate teachers.

Many childcare centres already do so, but to support more centres to follow suit, the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) will from next year let them close for an additional half-day, on top of the five and a half days currently.

"I believe this is an important signal," said Mr Tan. "Many of you teachers are parents yourselves and I hope this will give you more time to spend with your own children. I also urge employers to exercise some flexibility to allow parents with pre-schoolers to take leave or time off on Teachers' Day."

Many educators and parents welcomed Mr Tan's call.

Ms Wendy Tan, 50, principal of MacPherson Sheng Hong Childcare Centre, said: "We give our teachers the day off on Teachers' Day, but with this announcement, I think childcare teachers are affirmed of their role, commitment and passion."

Ms Intan Ismail, 36, who cares for infants at a My First Skool centre which closes on Teachers' Day, said: "The day off... gives a signal that teachers are appreciated."

More than nine in 10 of the 1,000 parents polled by ECDA in March had also "strongly supported" closing centres that day.

"It is a small recognition of the efforts of pre-school teachers," said MP for Ang Mo Kio GRC Ang Hin Kee, executive secretary of the Education Services Union which represents pre-school teachers. "We welcome it nonetheless," he said.

One principal of a childcare centre in Sembawang, who did not want to be named, said what is more important are ongoing

efforts to appreciate teachers. "It's just like how we don't appreciate mothers only on Mother's Day."

The move to let centres close for an extra half-day is part of several initiatives in a new manpower plan for the sector unveiled yesterday. With this plan, the Government hopes to attract 4,000 more educators by 2020, up from 16,000 today.

This comes at a time when the sector has been expanding, with 1,700 pre-schools last year, up from 1,200 in 2008. The sector is expected to grow further, due to rising demand for pre-school services.

To give people more opportunities to join the sector and develop their careers, two new skills-focused initiatives were launched.

One is the Skills Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education - the second of about 30 that will be rolled out for different sectors over the next few years as part of the SkillsFuture movement.

It is a structured guide to help educators chart their career progression, spelling out career pathways and the skills required for job roles.

Also, admission criteria for training courses will be more flexible. An educator with prior learning and working experience could still be admitted, even if he does not have the required qualifications.

These alternative admission criteria will be piloted at two training institutes from April next year.

ECDA said quality will not be compromised as there are still requirements for people who enter these courses via alternative ways - candidates must have relevant work experience and go through an interview. Selected candidates will also need to pass pre-requisite modules.

Ms Intan, who has worked at the centre for six years, stands to benefit from the more flexible criteria. She has N-level qualifications, but not the required O-level qualifications for a course to train people in working with older children.

She said: "I didn't think of pursuing certain courses because I didn't meet the criteria.

"I'm glad my prior work experience would be recognised in future as that allows me to advance further in my career."

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