

WhyItMatters

Effective leaders for pre-schools



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If it takes a village to raise a child, it seems it takes several renowned experts to raise effective pre-school principals, too.

A new programme to develop 150 of them was launched by the Lien Foundation on Wednesday.

It is promising not just for the \$2.7 million pumped into it, but also for the partners the foundation roped in. They include the Seed Institute and Wheelock College, which are renowned pre-school training institutes here and in the United States respectively.

The programme is based on a behavioural skills model developed by global human resources consultancy Korn Ferry Hay Group, after interviews with about 50 pre-school leaders. The Sequoia Group, which trains senior civil servants and corporate leaders, will hold a workshop too.

Many of the nine pre-school leaders who will mentor the principals selected are well-known veterans. They include Dr Geraldine Teo-Zuzarte, head of professional practices at NTUC First Campus; and Dr Jacqueline Chung, senior principal at St James' Church Kindergarten.

When principals attend the programme, titled Principal Matters, their teachers and children could also benefit because, well, the leadership role of the principal matters. Overseas research shows that school leadership accounts for 25 per cent of a school's impact on students' learning, second only to teaching (33 per cent).

The effect of teaching soon fades though, once the children have a different teacher, unless subsequent ones are equally effective. So, it is all the more important to have effective principals who can better recruit and retain teachers.

As more pre-schools open and teachers step up earlier to become principals, it is vital to help them in their job. While it is important to set up more centres, fill the job vacancies and train teachers in the latest pedagogical approaches, the positive impact will be short-lived if leaders can't retain teachers and make unwise decisions. So, it is a welcome move that experts have come together to support leaders and care for those who care for our children.

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