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Paying Top Dollar For 'Super Tutors'; Is It Worth It?

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Prime Minister Lee once commented that tuition has become a "minor national obsession". That's not an overstatement. With a whopping 97% of Singaporean students engaging tutors, some tutors command top dollar for their services.



If your child is having trouble coping in school and you do not have enough time to sit down and help them, it may be best to consider enlisting the help of a professional tutor. Yet with the cost of tuition rising and with literally thousands of tutors to choose from, how much should you pay for 'good' tutors?

Increasing Demand

As with any industry, tutors in very high demand can command a hefty premium. These tutors come with impressive qualifications and solid track records, and parents seem to be more than willing to pay for them.

We interviewed a law-school-graduate turned G.P. tutor, Shaun Soo, one of a new breed of 'super tutors' who earns up to \$300 an hour helping struggling 'A' level students clinch a distinction in their General Paper. Shaun himself is a Presidential Law Scholar and takes home a "sizeable five-figure salary" each month.



He tells us of how the demand for tutoring services has grown, "We get calls from parents offering double or triple our normal rates to 'squeeze' their child in." With such demand, Shaun now gives tuition classes instead of 1-to-1 tuition. But he adds, "Some parents still demand individual tuition, and are willing to pay almost the entire class fees for us to personally tutor their child."

Not Just For The As

For those willing to pay, tuition expenses are seen as an investment where the returns are not just good grades, but also critical analytic skills that stay with the student through life.

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"\$300 an hour may sound unreasonable for what is really an intelligent conversation with a student, but what we bring to the table is not easily measured in dollars and cents. Our immediate goal may be to get students their distinctions, but the critical analysis skills we impart to students stay with them long past graduation. Parents, particularly those with higher education, appreciate this value and are willing to pay for our time."

An Absolute Necessity or Just 'kiasu-ness'?

Coping with the current school syllabus alone is an uphill challenge for any student and sometimes a little external help and nudging makes things easier. Shaun feels that while it is possible for students to self-study (he himself never had any tuition during 'A' levels), the right tutor can be a life-saver for students that are unable to cope with the pace of lessons in school.

"Tuition can be especially useful in helping a student grasp the essence of a subject. The school teacher has to move at the median pace of a class and then teach only what the syllabus stipulates. We understand our students better, and if a student is willing to work hard, we can take that student up to the Ivy League."

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