

Early childhood education study 'good and timely'

By **MELODY ZACCHEUS**

A RECENT study by the Lien Foundation on pre-school education provides useful input for the Government's efforts to fine-tune its policies and programmes.

That is according to Minister of State for Education Lawrence Wong, who was speaking at an early childhood education conference yesterday.

His comments are the first from a minister on the hard-hitting findings and recommendations of the study commissioned by the Singapore philanthropic organisation.

The study, which placed Singapore 29 out of 45 countries on a "starting well" index, was released by the Economic Intelligence Unit three weeks ago.

Singapore did not fare well in three areas – availability, affordability and quality of pre-school services.

The Lien Foundation followed the study up by consolidating and presenting recommendations for improvement from a panel of 27 local pre-school education experts.

The panel called for pre-school education to be provided free to all children nationwide.

Other suggestions included establishing a national pay scale for pre-school teachers and designating one lead ministry to

regulate and develop the sector.

"I have read the report – it is a good and timely study, and it will provide useful inputs in our efforts to further fine-tune our policies and programmes for the pre-school sector," Mr Wong said in his opening remarks to the 13th annual conference of the Pacific Early Childhood Education Research Association (Pecera) held at the National Institute of Education.

In his speech, Mr Wong acknowledged the importance of pre-school education.

"This is the period when children inquire, explore and discover the world around them," he said. "This is also when they develop learning dispositions that remain with them throughout their lives."

Mr Wong said considerable progress in pre-school education had been made here.

Apart from raising the minimum academic and professional qualifications of pre-school teachers, the Ministry of Education provides a curriculum framework and resources to help teachers design effective lessons for children.

Pecera's mission is to disseminate and support research in early childhood education within the Pacific area. About 500 participants from 16 countries have signed up for its three-day conference.

✉ melodyz@sph.com.sg