

Culture may account for higher scores by Asians

Why do students in Far Eastern countries, such as Japan and Taiwan, consistently score higher than their American counterparts on achievement tests?

Cultural differences are a primary factor, according to Farmington Hills resident Paul Tai, professor of political science and director of the Asian Studies Program at the University of Detroit.

Tai directed a recent survey that compared the attitudes and behavior of Michigan residents and Taiwanese citizens concerning education.

Results showed that 46 percent of the respondents in Taiwan spent at least five hours weekly helping their children with homework. That figure compares to 17 percent for Michigan residents who responded.

"Parents in the progressive Asian countries place a great deal of emphasis on the importance of education from the time a child enters school," Tai said. "In general, they also devote more time than do

American parents to helping their children with homework."

THE SURVEY also found that 74 percent of the Michigan residents held jobs while in high school, while only 36 percent of Taiwan students were employed during the high school years.

"The assumption made at the onset of the survey was that children coming from families with a strong devotion to education will tend to focus on their studies and to minimize distractions from outside jobs," Tai said. "The survey results seem to bear this out."

"My intention was not to draw conclusions about which behavior pattern is the more desirable," he said. "Rather it was to provide more concrete data than are currently available concerning cultural differences that are known to exist."

TAI NOTED that teachers in Taiwan demand more homework

than do American educators and that working after school instead of studying is frowned upon by most parents in the Taiwanese culture.

"In that country's culture, most people would consider the student who works after school to be shirking his educational duties," the U-D professor said.

Reflective of their commitment to education as a pathway to success, 73 percent of the Taiwan citizens in the survey indicated that they would be willing to pay for 100 percent of their children's college education. The figure for Michigan residents was 26 percent.

The survey was conducted among 456 Detroit and Flint residents and 1,015 citizens of Taipei, Taiwan. It also asked questions about the level of savings, with results indicating that personal savings rates in Taiwan are more than twice those of Michigan families.

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