

# Parents spend extra to give kids an edge

China's extracurricular education sector for primary school students has developed rapidly, especially in large cities. Piano, painting, chess, skating and other lessons have sprung up in major shopping districts. Expensive summer camps claiming to broaden children's horizons are also popular. Spending on children's education is rising each year.

A survey of Shanghai early education (up to age 6) conducted by the Shanghai Association for Quality found that the parents of 60 percent of children under age 6 had steered them into extracurricular classes. For children between 4 and 6, the proportion exceeded 70 percent.

On average, each child attends two classes for around two hours a week. Average annual family spending on extracurricular classes was 17,832 yuan (\$2,700).

Chen Chen learned that most of the children in her son's kindergarten attend several classes carefully arranged by their parents. "If the children are interested and the parents can afford it, no harm is done," she said.

Born in the 1980s, Chen is a typical parent with a higher education and above-average disposable income. She spends more freely on the next generation's early education than her thrifty parents did.

She grew up in China's exam-oriented system and hopes her children will have more opportunities to cultivate their interests and broaden their horizons.

"Our next generation is facing increasingly harsh and unknown competition. We are prone to anxiety and not likely to adopt a laissez faire approach to raise children," she said.

International market research company Nielsen found that people born in the 1980s are the biggest consumers in China. As most of them are married, spending on family occupies a large share of their outlay – children's education in particular, which accounts for 55 percent.

However, growth in spending on children's education also piles pressure on parents, especially those like Chen, who has two children.

"We have to double the education spending, which means we have to tighten other family spending. So I think twice before enrolling my son in extracurricular classes, which typically cost more than 10,000 yuan a year," Chen says.

Some parents on social media lament that they are not raising children but "cash burners".

According to Liu Chenglian, a family education expert, some parents spend

whatever it takes to give their kids an edge, but sometimes they just blindly follow a trend and overschedule their children.