

Record 12.91m students sit for *gaokao*

Yang Meiping
and Zhang Chaoyan

More than 50,000 high school students began their college entrance examination at over 100 sites citywide on Wednesday.

The annual college entrance examination, or *gaokao*, is one of the most important exams in China. This year, a record 12.91 million students have applied for the exam nationwide, up 980,000 from 2022, according to Ministry of Education figures.

In Shanghai, students, parents and teachers got up early to ensure they could arrive at the examination sites in time and make a good start for the three-day exam.

The exam began at 9am and students were required to arrive 15 minutes earlier.

At the exam site at Xinzhuang High School in Minhang District, most students arrived between 7:30am and 8:30am. Teachers and

parents checked their bags to make sure they had brought all necessary items such as the exam attendance docket, and no banned items were there, such as phones, digital watches or other items that could be used for cheating.

One student was almost late after his parents' car got stuck in a traffic jam. He got out and started to run to the exam site but quickly tired.

Fortunately, the mother of another student in the same school saw him and drove him to the site on her moped, dropping him off at the site at 8:42am, three minutes before the deadline.

Some parents and teachers dressed up to express their best wishes for the exam-takers. Many wore red clothes as red is an auspicious color which Chinese people believe brings good luck.

Several mothers wore cheongsam, or *qipao* (旗袍), as the first Chinese character is the same as in the auspicious

idiom *qi kai de sheng* (旗开得胜), which means to win from the very beginning.

Some also brought sunflowers as their Chinese name *xiang ri kui* (向日葵) includes a character with the same pronunciation as a word in another auspicious idiom *yi ju duo kui* (一举夺魁), which means to win the championship or a top title at one stroke.

Wu Xiaohui, the mother of a *gaokao* sitter, said she got up at 5:30am to prepare breakfast for her daughter and dressed for the occasion.

"We had *zongzi* (粽子), a traditional Chinese rice-pudding, and *dingshenggao* (定胜糕), a rice cake whose name means 'sure to win', as the two combined sounds like *gaozhong* (高中), meaning to come first in the exam."

Wu said her *qipao* was custom-made and she also wore earrings shaped as four-leaved clovers as the Chinese name of the plant is *xingyuncao* (幸

Teachers dressed in red hold signboards with auspicious words to express their best wishes for students appearing for the *gaokao*.

— Yang Meiping



Traffic police were on hand to ensure smooth traffic as well as students' safety.

— Dong Jun

运草), literally meaning lucky grass. Four-leaved clovers are also considered lucky in Western culture.

The family even ate McDonald's McMuffins for breakfast as their Chinese name is *maimanfen* (麦满分), or "full mark." They booked Pizza Hut for lunch as the Chinese name *bishengke* (必胜客) sounds like "surefire to win."

At Shanghai Qibao High School, another test site in Minhang, the school gate was crowded with a bustling stream of people. Teachers and parents, many wearing red clothing, kept their children company before they headed for the *gaokao* venue, and sent them on their way with best wishes.

A line of teachers, dressed in red, stood along the student walkway that led to the examination site and waved goodbye to the students with heart-warming cheers of "*jia you*" (加油) and blessings.

They were the Chinese group teachers from Minhang Foreign Language School Middle School Affiliated to SISU. The group leader, Li Huan,

wearing a red shirt with the Chinese characters "*quan li yi fu*" (全力以赴), which means "go all out," and "*jin bang ti ming*" (金榜题名), meaning succeed in the *gaokao*, expressed her sincere wishes and confidence in her students.

"It has been a school tradition to wear red clothes and cheer on our students on this day every year," Li said. "It carries our best wishes for them to be admitted to their ideal colleges. We are always their strongest backers."

Many families remained at the school gate after seeing their children off, looking at them as they walked toward the main building.

A mother surnamed Wei, wearing a red T-shirt with a "tick" emblem and the words "All Right" on the front, said that it demonstrated her best wishes to her daughter to answer the test questions correctly.

The exam concludes today in Shanghai. The first test is Chinese, to be followed by maths, written English, and English listening and speaking tests.



Students wait outside the examination site at Shanghai Qibao High School on Wednesday. This year, a record 12.91 million students have applied for the annual college entrance examination, or *gaokao*, nationwide. — Dong Jun