

OPENING ADDRESS BY MR HENG SWEE KEAT, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, AT THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (MOE) WORK PLAN SEMINAR ON TUESDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2011, 10 A.M. AT Ngee Ann Polytechnic Convention Centre

Dear Colleagues and Friends of MOE

Introduction

1. It is a pleasure to be speaking at the Work Plan Seminar.
2. This year, there is a new political team in place at MOE. Let me first share the key areas of responsibility of my political colleagues.
3. MOS Wong¹ will be covering three main areas: polytechnic, ITE (Institute of Technical Education), private education and pre-school education.
4. SPS Hawazi² will play an important role connecting with parents, the community and grassroots advisors as the Chairman of COMPASS (COMmunity and Parents in Support of Schools) and the Joint Consultative Committee on Education.
5. SPS Sim Ann³ will also support public engagement efforts in her role as Deputy Chairman of COMPASS and will look into special education.
6. All of us will continue to pay due attention to the teaching and learning of the English Language and our Mother Tongue Languages, as well as the overall policy.

Feedback and Outreach

7. Over the last three months, the four of us have met many students, educators, staff and parents. Your thoughtful feedback at various platforms, suggestions, concerns and compliments have provided useful insights and learning points for us.
8. A few key themes emerged from the feedback. Many educators and parents asked for a greater emphasis to be placed on building the character and values of our children. Some, while welcoming the new options and flexibilities in the education system, asked for more help and support for their children to find the best pathways for themselves, pathways which played to their strengths and interests. Others were concerned that there was excessive competition and stress, and wonder if our children and even teachers are able to cope.

¹ Mr Lawrence Wong is Minister of State for Education and Defence.

² Mr Hawazi Daipi is Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Manpower.

³ Ms Sim Ann is Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Law.

9. It is heartening to learn that so many of you hold education close to your hearts, and share your views readily with us. We look forward to more constructive conversations with all.

A Good System Built on Sound Fundamentals

10. We do not have a perfect system, but it is a good system built on sound fundamentals.

11. There is a shared belief across Singapore society that education is crucial in building up individual and collective capacity, and in strengthening the cohesiveness of our nation beyond knowledge and skills. Parents, universities, and employers appreciate the rigour and strength of our system. Many parents I have met appreciate the hard work put in by our schools and teachers. Clearly, there is a high level of interest in, and support for the work we do.

12. Internationally, our reputation is high. Not least because of the good showing of our students in international benchmarking studies and competitions. But also through their interactions with our students, educators and policy-makers, many experts and policy-makers elsewhere find our system to be of a very high standard, and many of them want to collaborate with us.

13. Where we are today was not the work of one Minister, or one Principal, or one teacher, or one Director-General of Education, but a collective effort, built over successive generations. Each new improvement stood on the solid foundations laid earlier.

14. I am very grateful to all our educators, allied educators, executive and administrative staff and partners who have contributed to our success today. Your continuing good work gives us the foundation to embark on the next stage of our journey.

Key Fundamentals National Archives of Singapore

15. Over the years, we have made changes – big and small – to make our education system stronger and better. But we have never lost sight of a few key fundamentals.

16. First, we need to develop our children holistically, in all aspects – moral, cognitive, physical, social and aesthetic or what is termed in Chinese as 德智体群美.

17. Second, we need to cater to the diverse needs of Singaporeans and allow all to progress in life – not by prescribing one path for all, but to have a diversity of pathways and opportunities, regardless of background. Bridges and ladders for each, with no dead ends. How we do this, be it streaming or subject-based banding, may change as circumstances change, but our resolve is unwavering. It is always a great delight to

meet students who have gone through these different pathways and find their way to success.

18. Third, we need always to preserve rigour and high standards. We must not fall prey to taking the easy way out. In an article published in the New York Times last week, an assistant professor in the department of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania puts it perfectly, “Learning is hard. True, learning should be fun, exhilarating and gratifying – but it is also often daunting, exhausting and sometimes discouraging.” Learning takes effort and rewards determination and perseverance.

19. Fourth, in designing our policies, we also need to be efficient and effective, to deliver the best value for the public investment committed. In doing so, we need to focus on what really counts, on what will make the most difference to outcomes.

20. Fifth, good policies require thoughtful implementation and collaborative effort. Everyone needs to be onboard, each playing a complementary role.

21. Sixth, education must suit our unique context. We must always be humble and we must always learn from the best in the world. But we must not simply copy what works elsewhere, or do what is fashionable, without bearing in mind our unique culture, context and circumstances, and what we have achieved. We should have the courage and confidence to do what we think is right, and evolve our system to what is best for us.

22. Seventh, however good our system, we can always improve. We should make our changes from a position of strength. What is useful and good today may not be good for tomorrow. We need the right balance between focusing on our fundamentals and ensuring relevance for the future.

The World and Singapore in 2030

23. Education is a long-term endeavour. A child entering Primary One next year will start work around 2030. What must we do right in Education now and in the next 20 years, so that our children will have a bright future and can fulfil their aspirations?

24. We cannot foretell what the future will be, but we can look at some possible scenarios.

25. The most far-reaching global development is likely to be the shift in the centre of gravity of the world economy from the US and Europe towards Asia.

26. China and India will be significant players and will open up many opportunities for us. We have today about 12,000 to 13,000 graduates in our universities. However, Singaporeans will have to compete with the 10 million graduates and the many more skilled workers that they will be producing each year.

27. Technology will continue to create new activities and make many jobs today obsolete tomorrow. New inventions will change dramatically the way we live or work. 3D-printing for instance, as highlighted in a recent Economist article, could pave the way for rapid prototyping, and change how companies manufacture new products. Technology will create new pressure and disrupt businesses in fundamental ways.

28. Globally, there are also changes in traditional social structures, of families, lifestyles and consumption of media. Advancements in ICT, while enabling new sectors in the economy, may also fragment society in new and unpredictable ways.

29. Closer to home, our social context is changing. Singapore will be faced with an increasingly aging population.

30. Aspirations will continue to change as Singapore becomes more developed and parents become more educated. Parents will want their children to do better than themselves. More will also want a greater sense of purpose and fulfilment in life.

What Does This Mean?

31. What do these challenges mean to Singapore as a country? Let us take a look at a negative scenario.

32. I hope that our future will not look like this. But we have to recognise that we will be faced with threats and shocks that will test our resolve, our cohesiveness, and our sense of belonging in an uncertain world. To avoid such a future, Singaporeans will need to be equipped with both values and competencies.

Towards Student-Centric, Values-Driven Education

33. Fortunately, our education system has been gearing itself up to do this.

34. Over the past decade, we have created many new opportunities for every Singaporean to shine – new pathways, more options and greater flexibilities. Our children, regardless of family circumstances, are able to benefit from a wide range of enrichment activities and overseas programmes, through Edusave, the Opportunity Fund and the Trips for International Experience Fund. Bursaries for our post-secondary education institutions (PSEIs) have also been enhanced to benefit more Singaporeans from lower and middle income families. Over 90% of each cohort are now enrolled in our PSEIs.

35. In 2009, MOE launched the 21st Century Competencies Framework. These competencies are harder to teach and their outcomes even harder to measure, but we must do it. At the heart of what you know as the “Swiss Roll” is values. But just as important, are the competencies we want our children to exhibit.

36. Many of you have asked for support to be more student-centric, to see to the total development of the person rather than to build up just the academics. You also want to see a more collegial and collaborative environment among schools. And you want to know how we can bring parents and the community with us. Our schools and teachers will need time and space, to engage in the more demanding type of educating – values and 21st century competencies.

37. For this Work Plan Seminar, I want to focus on two key emphases for our next stage of development. We want to make our education system even more student-centric, and sharpen our focus in holistic education – centred on values and character development. We could call this Student-Centric, Values-Driven education. Another way of putting it, value in our learners and learning values.

38. In many areas, we will build on the good work done so far. In others, we want to reshape the conditions for our students and educators to succeed. It is not possible, within this short time, to set out all the specifics we have to do, but I hope to outline the key direction and rationale, and illustrate with some specific changes. I also hope that our educators will continue to discuss this topic and co-create this better system that we want to evolve.

Why Values at the Centre?

39. We must put values and character development at the core of our education system.

40. We need personal values to enable each of us to have the confidence and self awareness, and the grit and determination to succeed.

41. We need moral values, such as respect, responsibility, care and appreciation towards others, to guide each of us to be a socially responsible person. In particular, for our multi-racial, multi-cultural society, a sense of shared values and respect allows us to appreciate and celebrate our diversity, so that we stay cohesive and harmonious.

42. We need values of citizenship. As a young nation with a short history of independence, we must have informed, rugged and resilient citizens who can stay united to overcome crisis and adversities which we must expect to happen from time-to-time.

43. We must have men and women who are willing to step forward to risk their lives for our nation, like ex-President Nathan in the Laju incident. Strong common values and emotional attachment to our nation enable us to stay successful as one people, one nation.

44. If values provide the philosophical underpinning, character development makes these values come alive. Character development is about developing social emotional competencies, and the habits and inner disposition based on sound values to act in a

consistent way. Personal values such as grit, determination and resilience enable the individual to realise his or her potential, and develop 'performance character'. Moral values enable the individuals to develop 'moral character'.

45. These values are intertwined, and are critical to the success of the individual and the society. Hence, values and character development must form the core of our student-centric, holistic education.

46. Following the riots in Britain this summer, there was much soul searching especially among educators. Anthony Seldon, Master of Wellington College, advocated: *'the fightback needs to come on several fronts. We must unashamedly redesign our schools around building character. Robert Baden-Powell called his scout movement a "character factory"; "every school needs values" and "all schools should make volunteering and community service compulsory for all its students. It is by helping others and giving back to the community that young people learn to become responsible human beings".'* Fortunately for Singapore, our situation is better.

Why Holistic Education?

47. With values, social emotional competencies and character development at the centre, we can build other competencies – an appreciation of aesthetics, physical agility, and the higher intellectual domains of creativity, communications, information literacy, global awareness and cross-cultural skills.

48. Holistic education, including the teaching of 21st Century Competencies, is a critical change we must make to enable our students to be "ready for the future". To illustrate, an interesting development took place in August this year in the global economy. Apple, a digital company based on creativity and innovation, overtook ExxonMobil in company valuation. There can be no more powerful illustration of the increasing importance of creativity and innovation.

49. If we are able to build strong values and the right competencies, we can succeed. I hope that by 2030, Singapore will look more like this.

50. I certainly hope this looks more like our future. So how do we achieve Student-Centric, Values-Driven Education? There are three broad areas we will work on:

- a. Student-centric Education: Enabling All Students to Succeed
- b. School-based, Teacher-led Excellence: Empowering Schools and Educators to Do the Best for Each Student
- c. Working with Parents and the Community: Enhancing Partnerships

Let me speak a bit more about each area.

First Area: Student-centric Education: Enabling All Students to Succeed

51. The theme of this year's Work Plan Seminar is "Our Children. Our Purpose. Our Future." Our children must remain the focus of all we do in education.

How to Instil Values and Develop Character?

52. But how do we instil values and develop character in our students? It is not easy. As another British writer, Estelle Morris noted, "it is easy to agree about the importance of teaching citizenship and values... (but) we've struggled to develop the language to discuss. There are no GCSEs in values or a league table for citizenship".

53. But between academic achievements and values, it must not be "either/or". We should strive to achieve both. For us, we have a strong foundation and we must continue to build on it. But ultimately, this must come from the conviction and wisdom of our educators.

54. So the first thing we need to do is to re-affirm the central place of values and character development in our education system. Our school leaders and teachers must demonstrate commitment to this. For instance, periods set aside for Civics and Moral Education (CME) must not make way for remedial lessons for examinable subjects. We must set clear expectations and school leaders must uphold this.

55. Second, by creating the contexts in our classrooms and in Co-curricular Activities (CCAs), to develop values and character. Every school has its motto and values. Many of our schools have made these values alive, and have developed innovative and whole school approaches in character development. Classroom lessons can raise awareness and knowledge of values but these are not enough. Values are not just taught; they are often caught. It is experiences, especially those that are demanding and challenging, that build character and enable students to develop the feelings for and to act on their values, through real life experiences in various contexts.

56. One important context, outside of the classroom, has been CCAs. CCAs are an integral part of our education, to build character and to provide holistic education. We must reemphasise that the intent of CCAs is not to win medals per se, but to learn the value of excellence, teamwork and discipline; to be gracious in victory and resilient in defeat. To support school leaders, we will work with schools to review the current LEAPS (Leadership, Enrichment, Achievement, Participation, Service) grading framework, to give due recognition to key learning outcomes, and to re-balance the recognition from achievement to holistic and balanced participation. We should also increase our capacity to enable students to participate in recreational sports and other activities.

57. Third, we will enhance our national framework. Nationally, we have had Civics and Moral Education that built on the earlier 'Good Citizen' series. In our 21st Century Competencies framework, the R³ICH values of Respect, Resilience, Responsibility,

Integrity, Care and Harmony form the core. These are not MOE values per se, but are our shared national values. With this as the core, educators and parents can build on it to introduce others such as courage, loyalty and humility, to create distinctive ethos for their schools.

58. MOE has brought together the various initiatives in National Education (NE), Co-Curricular Activities, Civic and Moral Education under a Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) framework. Come next year, MOE will have a new CCE Branch.

59. MOE will also work with schools to co-create a new and coherent CCE curriculum, comprising a core national curriculum complemented by school-initiated programmes. MOE will develop a CCE toolkit for schools to co-create programmes that best meet the needs of their students. Schools can explore how to better infuse values education in the Mother Tongue Languages and literature lessons, and to make NE come alive. NE will remain a cornerstone of the CCE curriculum because our children must know Singapore's vulnerabilities and constraints as well as what makes Singapore tick. I am confident that school leaders will devote sufficient time to CCE, and to create authentic learning experiences for our students.

60. In short, we must make values and character development systematic and pervasive.

61. Parents, especially those with primary school children, will have noticed a change in the "report books" that their children bring home. Unlike the focus on "black and red marks" of yore, these reports – which we term as (a) Holistic Development Profiles (HDP) – now provide richer and more qualitative feedback on their children's development. This is being rolled out in primary school and will be helpful for parents to better understand their own child and work with schools to chart their child's learning journeys.

62. The components that make up student-centric, holistic education reinforce each other in complex, multi-faceted ways. But at its core, it recognises that students differ – in their strengths and abilities, in their styles of learning, and in their interests and aspirations.

63. As many of you have shared with me, for some students, we need the extra effort to work with their parents to motivate them. For others, we have to encourage them to not be too demanding on themselves. Some are exceptionally gifted in particular areas – whether it is in the mathematics or sciences or humanities, or in the arts, music or sports. Some learn best in academic settings, others through hands-on experiences. Some have special needs in our mainstream schools, as when they have dyslexia or ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), some have to be in special schools that cater to their needs better. Some students blossom early, others are late developers.

64. But every student has one or more areas of specific comparative strengths and interests. These are peaks within the individual that can be developed. Many of you

have shared with me your joy as educators, when you succeed in finding the spark and connecting with the student. We rejoice each time our students succeed, whether it is in achieving excellence on the world stage, be it in debates or in the Olympiads; or in overcoming adverse circumstances and finding success, like Lee Chuan Jie and Teo Zi Wei. Both were recipients of the Lee Hsien Loong Award for Special Achievement – given to one outstanding student each from Northlight School and Assumption Pathway School.

65. Our education system has recognised diverse and complex needs, and evolved multiple pathways for success. Hence, the next crucial step in our education journey is to promote student-centric education not just at the system level, but to empower our schools and teachers to deliver this.

66. This can be done – many schools have been customising their programmes to meet the needs of their students. For example, at Northbrooks Secondary, the SOAR (Special Pull-Out and Academic Recovery) programme reaches out to at-risk students who have learning difficulties. Through authentic learning experiences such as motorcycle repair, these students gain greater motivation and confidence. They also acquire desirable values and relevant skills.

2nd Area: School-based, Teacher-led Excellence: Empowering Schools and Enabling Educators

67. Let me touch on the second area of empowering schools and enabling educators.

68. Schools are the centre of action in our education system. We achieve the right outcome when our schools do it right. We must therefore empower our schools and enable our teachers.

69. As a system, we should not have “neighbourhood schools” almost as an apology. Instead, we must strive to ensure that all schools – in every neighbourhood – are good schools.

National Archives of Singapore

What is a Good School?

70. But what is a good school? A good school is not one which produces straight As or top honours per se; a good school is not merely ‘good’ relative to others. Rather, it is one that caters to the needs of its students well. Given the diversity of students, there cannot be a single ruler to measure success.

71. A good school needs to know who their students are at the point of entry, studies their needs and strengths; states what it would like them to become when they leave the school; then exercise diligence and imagination to get there. A good school creates a positive experience for each student – allowing him to acquire the basics, but more importantly, making him a confident and lifelong learner. It provides a supportive and

appreciative environment for teachers to experience the joy in impacting lives. A good school is student-centric and allows teachers to do their best for every child.

72. Most of our schools take in students with diverse profiles and needs. For some students, the goals may look deceptively simple – to ensure regular attendance, good discipline, application of effort, handing-in of homework on time. But it is these seemingly simple things that teach the students the value of hard work, the joy of seeing small successes and the importance of setting a goal to work towards.

73. For some, it may be to create opportunities they would otherwise not enjoy, like a speech and drama programme, or music lessons.

- I recently met several students at Naval Base Secondary School, whose eyes sparkled when they explained how their art works were inspired by their trip to art museums abroad.
- In Griffiths Primary School, the 54-member cub scouts learned to serve others through job week and donation drives. They also learned the importance of teamwork through difficult tasks during field trips and learning journeys, under the leadership of their passionate teacher, Mr Zaidy.
- Students in the dance programme in Assumption English School not only honed their dancing skills but also developed leadership abilities. Many of them want to pursue their passion in dance after graduation.

How do we Empower Schools and Enable Educators?

74. How do we empower our schools to deliver values-driven, student-centric education? For a start, we will look at four areas, to align the way we measure, recognise and support our schools and teachers.

75. First, we will change the way we recognise a good school, by simplifying and aligning the School Excellence Model and the Masterplan of Awards.

76. The School Excellence Model (SEM), introduced in 1998 together with the Masterplan of Awards (MoA) was intended to instil the culture, capacity and motivation in all schools to strive for continuous improvement. This replaced the earlier school inspectorate system.

77. The key innovation is to let schools take ownership of outcomes and to use a combination of benchmarking and competition among schools to drive excellence. And we have succeeded in the original intent of raising standards – over the past decade, there has been significant improvement in standards across the board. Schools have been able to identify and share best practices with one another.

78. The SEM is comprehensive, but is deemed to have generated much administrative work for the schools. Building on the streamlining in 2009, we will streamline further to reduce the work needed by up to a third. The School Appraisal Branch (SAB) will brief you on the details and I commend the SAB for this work.

79. The MoA has also been helpful in providing a structured way for schools to do better. Indeed, over the years it has built up a culture of excellence and innovation across our schools. Later this morning, many schools will be receiving various awards under the MoA and I congratulate our schools for your well-deserved achievements.

80. We must now build on this culture of excellence, to better support our schools to achieve holistic outcomes. We will review the MoA with the intention of better supporting our schools to be student-centric, to innovate and to achieve holistic student outcomes. The new recognition structure will focus on recognising good practices that lead to desired outcomes of education. By making the structure 'flatter' and less hierarchical, schools will have greater flexibility to innovate and meet the needs of their students better in the next lap of excellence. I will also like to encourage schools to form more collaborative partnerships to pursue excellence as a team, so that more schools, if not all schools, can achieve excellence.

81. Arising from feedback and our own analysis, we have four ideas on what changes we should be making to the MoA:

- First, re-look at how we position the pinnacle awards. Today, we have both the School Distinction Award and the School Excellence Award. Is there scope to rationalise these awards?
- Second, to remove the Sustained Achievement Awards (SAA). While achievements in the different domains, be it academic value added or CCAs will continue to be recognised, the removal of the SAA will free up resources to allow schools to pursue achievements over a broader range of activities, in line with student-centric, holistic education.
- Third, to continue to encourage schools to focus on the right outcomes using sound processes, we need to recognise schools with good practices and best practices in areas of importance in schools, like holistic student development and professional development for our educators.
- Fourth, award assessment will be conducted during the SEM external validation – which means schools no longer have to apply for awards. This will reduce the workload of school and teachers in applying for awards.

82. To allow schools to adapt to the new recognition structure, the current recognition system will continue in its current form till 2013. MOE will continue its dialogue with schools before finalising the details of the changes.

83. I believe that these changes will allow schools to take greater ownership, and give schools the flexibility to meet the needs of their students. Let me share one example. In 2006, Northlight School (NLS) decided to adopt the SEM because it found many features useful even though it could choose other quality assurance frameworks. The first batch of teachers joined NLS in 2006, and will reach full secondment in 2012. In Jun 2010, even though the school was not due for external validation, the teachers took the initiative to request for MOE SAB to conduct an external validation (EV) for NLS! The teachers felt that it would be their gift to the school.

84. Their motivation was not to obtain a high SEM score, but to bring the school forward together, codifying their best practices and identifying areas for further development. I am impressed by the spirit of NLS' teachers, and their spirit towards the EV process. This is indeed the right way to use the SEM, as the basic tool to drive the journey to excellence in all our schools.

85. The second change is to make schools themselves models of 21st Century Competencies in creativity, innovation and collaboration. I envisage networks of schools as centres of innovation in delivering student-centric education.

86. I am encouraged that schools are already coming together to find solutions to common issues, especially at the cluster and zonal level.

- In 2008, St Hilda's Secondary, Temasek Secondary and Xinmin Secondary, who had similar student profiles, saw a common challenge in imparting thinking skills. They came together and implemented a thinking skills curriculum over a larger student base. Today, all three schools have continued with the programme and are now looking at further collaboration and sharing. We want to encourage more of such efforts.

87. Besides the advantage of pooling resources, the value of having different schools coming together to develop solutions to common problems, is that the solution is likely to be more robust and more likely to be applicable in different school environments.

88. Going forward, MOE will identify areas of focus and encourage schools to collectively innovate to address these challenges and to diffuse innovation across the system. For such collaborative innovations, we will provide funding as well as training and consultancy for schools. More details will be made known in due course.

89. Third, we will continue to strongly support our teachers in their journey of professional-led excellence. Teachers are at the forefront of student-centric education. We cannot teach our children values and 21st Century Competencies without our own teachers believing in them and being role models. I am also very happy to note that the teaching profession has, in the past year, come together to define its own vision (Lead, Care, Inspire), and the Teachers' Creed. I commend DGE Ho Peng for her leadership.

90. Many of our teachers have exemplified the spirit of lifelong learning and embarked on various paths in deepening professional capabilities. At a recent dialogue with some Master Teachers, I met two such teachers – Mdm Fadilah Bte Isnin, and Mdm Ng Tai Cheen who are Malay and Chinese Language teachers respectively, both pursuing their PhDs. They were motivated by their passion to go deeper in their respective areas and continuously improve themselves. This is highly commendable.

91. Other teachers are deepening professional capabilities through sharing and reflection, in our newly launched Academy of Singapore Teachers, ELIS (English Language Institute of Singapore), PESTA (Physical Education and Sport Teacher

Academy) and STaR (the Singapore Teachers' Academy for the Arts). Many schools have also set up Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) so that teachers can learn from each other. NIE too conducts preparatory courses for our pre-service educators and milestone courses for our in-service educators.

92. Our teachers are working hard, and need to continually hone the craft of pedagogy – asking the right questions in class, practising differentiated teaching and setting appropriate assessment. To make time for our teachers to understand each student and to develop new competencies in our teachers, we must cut out activities that are not core to delivering student-centric education. School leaders have mentioned to me that events in schools have become more elaborate, and committees have proliferated with each new initiative. I support school leaders in their efforts to review these.

93. Our success has come about through the good work of our teachers, but they have been ably assisted by our Allied Educators (AEDs) and Executive and Administrative Staff (EAS). AEDs are relatively new additions to our system, but play crucial roles in supporting the learning of our students. EAS help to make policies, plan and develop infrastructure, recruit and develop talents and make resources available to our schools. I commend the work of our AEDs and EAS.

94. Fourth, to support schools, MOE HQ will look at the structure and profile of the School Team. Teachers need time with their students so that they better understand each child and can give them good feedback and educational guidance. Schools need support to better partner parents and the community. More leadership capacity and depth of expertise will be required for schools to undertake the complex task of customising their programmes for their students. This will not be a simple or straightforward task of adding more teachers or administrative staff. We will study these areas carefully and explore possible approaches. I expect we will prototype some of these changes in selected schools within the next year.

3rd Area: Working with Parents and the Community: Enhancing Partnerships

95. Let me move on to the third area of working with parents and the community.

96. Parents play a critical role in the education of our children. To succeed, we must partner with parents and the community. We will need community support to allow students to take part in meaningful activities and to learn useful life-skills.

97. Such a partnership is even more important as we focus on values and holistic education, because these objectives cannot be achieved by schools alone. Many teachable moments occur in activities outside the classroom environment; outside schools. And values need to be augmented and reinforced by the community and parents. As Mr. Winston Hodge, the Principal of ACS (I) pointed out recently, a child will need to move beyond moral literacy (knowing right from wrong) to developing a moral identity (having the courage and commitment to act on it). For this to happen,

parents together with teachers play an instrumental role in being moral mentors to our young.

98. I am heartened to see many parents coming forward to help. Many of them play a role in parent support groups, or are members of schools SMCs (School Management Committees) or SACs (School Advisory Committees). I thank all of them for their strong support.

99. I encourage schools too to reach out to parents. MOE has been rolling out many initiatives to improve our education system. It is important that we reach out to parents so that they understand these changes and work together with us.

100. Some teachers have told me about demanding parents who make unreasonable demands. It is understandable that parents want the best for their child. Reaching out to parents will not always be easy, but our schools should see this as an investment to create a long term, collaborative partnership. We also need to establish a good understanding of the rules of engagement between schools and parents.

101. The basis of a strong partnership must be mutual respect and a shared understanding that all of us want to educate our children well, not just to give in to what he wants at all times, but to fit him out for life as a member of the community with needs and also responsibilities.

102. As Minister, I give my full support to our school leaders and teachers who do the right things.

103. In 1998, COMPASS was set up in recognition of school-parent-community partnership. Going forward, MOE and COMPASS will reach out to more stakeholders. In the coming months, we will continue to engage the public on the broad directions our system must take and why.

Examinations and Stress

104. Let me now turn to an issue on the minds of many parents and teachers – the issue of examinations and stress. This is a complex issue, not amenable to quick fixes.

105. Examinations do provide an objective benchmark to gauge a student's performance. Research studies have also demonstrated that testing is not merely a passive mechanism for measuring knowledge, but actually helps students to learn.

106. That said, many people are concerned with excessive competition, stress and academic overload. I agree we need to strike a good balance – like a violin string – with sufficient tension to make music, but not too loose or too tight.

107. One source of worry is competition for places at university. While we will not be able, nor should we attempt, to create university places for 100% of our students, we

are reviewing how we can better cater to the aspirations and talents of Singaporeans. MOS Lawrence Wong and his Committee to Review University Education Pathways beyond 2015 will take several months to study this carefully.

108. In July, I visited a few systems similar to Singapore – high-performing, but high stress as well. These systems have tried various ways to reduce stress but not always successfully. We should study their experiences thoughtfully, to glean useful lessons for ourselves.

109. We should also look at our own innovations for inspiration. For example, we have implemented subject-based banding in primary schools for two cohorts of students. We should see how the benefits from this can be applied in other parts of the system.

110. In the meantime, there is something all schools should do. All schools should establish a policy on homework, and uphold it. In line with our emphasis on student-centric education, every school should study the needs of its students and define how much homework students should be assigned at the different levels. In this way, the school, its students and their parents will have clearer expectations on this issue.

Conclusion

111. Allow me to conclude, it has been an exhilarating journey, getting here. We have gone through difficult times together, as a nation, and as an education system.

112. When I opened the MOE Heritage Centre 3 weeks ago, I was struck by the tenacity and resourcefulness of the pioneers. We had so little in the early days of nationhood and yet our educators soldiered on, improvising as they went along. They nurtured a whole generation of Singaporeans who built the progress we see around us.

113. Our education system has come a long way. In each phase, we have taken our challenges and opportunities in our strides and reshaped our education system. I believe we are approaching the cusp of another such journey. The groundwork has been laid, and we know where we want to go.

114. We need to bring up a younger generation of Singaporeans who are firmly anchored in values, caring towards family and fellow Singaporeans, and deeply rooted in our nation. Our education system must create opportunities for all so that each child can fulfil his or her potential. It must also nurture Singapore citizens of good character, so that everyone has the moral resolve to withstand an uncertain future, but also a strong sense of responsibility to contribute to the success of Singapore and the well-being of fellow Singaporeans. We must be able to face difficulties and seize opportunities together as one people. This is the only way to “future proof” Singapore and Singaporeans.

115. Today, we start off on a higher base, and can draw on more resources and talent. In the video we saw earlier, we watched how Siti, a student from a humble background grew to be a confident young lady when she found her passion in dance.

116. Her example gives us great confidence that by working together – school leaders, teachers, allied educators, EAS, parents and partners – we will be able to help our children reach for the stars.

117. Thank you, and have a fruitful Work Plan Seminar.

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