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SPEECH BY MR LAWRENCE WONG, MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, AT THE 55TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER OF TANJONG KATONG SECONDARY SCHOOL, ON FRIDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 2011, AT 7.50PM AT THE GRAND HYATT HOTEL, GRAND BALLROOM

Mr Chia Chor Meng

Chairman, School Advisory Committee

Mr James Sim

Immediate Past Chairman, Senior Advisor to School Advisory Committee

Mr Lee Kai Hung

President, TK Alumni

Mr Lee Yan Kheng

Principal, Tanjong Katong Secondary School

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

National Archives of Singapore

Introduction

1. I am very happy to be here this evening for the 55th Anniversary Dinner of Tanjong Katong Secondary School. It's great to be back at a TK event, and to see so many familiar faces here.

2. This anniversary event carries extra significance for me, because TK is my alma mater. I spent 4 wonderful years in TK (then called Tanjong Katong Secondary Technical School or TK Tech) from 1985 to 1988. I have many fond memories of my time in school. We had good teachers who inspired us to work hard and do our best in our studies. I remember the Principal and Vice-Principal then – Mr Tan Thiam Hock and Mr Tng Hia Seng, and I am very glad to see that Mr Tng's son, Clarence, has carried on the fine family tradition to be a teacher at TK! We enjoyed good facilities, including a huge soccer field next to the school, a computer room, and a well-stocked air-conditioned library. We also had a diverse mix of students – we came from all walks of life, different races and religions, but most of us grew up and lived in the neighbourhood. So our school experience was not just about the content and knowledge picked up in the classroom. It was also about the opportunities for all of us, as students, to bond and play together – whether it is soccer during recess, concerts and plays during school events, or the many student-led activities outside of school.

Making Every Neighbourhood School a Good School

3. Schools are the centre of action in our education system. And our goal is to ensure that every neighbourhood school is a good school. Over the years, we have put in place measures and schemes to drive excellence and high standards across our schools. For example, we provided Opportunity Funds to all schools, with neighbourhood schools getting double the standard amount, so that they can level up enrichment opportunities for their students.

4. Going forward, MOE will continue to allocate more resources to all schools, so that every school is able to meet the diverse needs of its students, and provide even more opportunities for them to discover their strengths and succeed in life.

5. TK is a fine example of how a neighbourhood school can excel and provide high-quality and holistic education. When TK was first established in 1956, many people regarded it as a Trade school for boys who were considered less academically-inclined. But over the years, TK persevered in raising its educational standard and changing the public image of the school. Today, TK is a school of choice for many students and parents, with its well-rounded approach towards academic rigor, co-curricular activities, as well as citizenship and character development. The school has done well not just in academic standing but also in the arts and sports. For example, the TK Band and TK Choir are held in high regard and are amongst the best school bands and choirs in Singapore. Through these efforts, TK has provided its students with a head-start for the future – they will be ready not just for post-secondary education but also for an ever-changing workplace.

6. In today's connected and globalised world, the rewards for countries and individuals that can raise their educational achievement levels will be bigger than ever. But it is also important to know what we mean by education achievements. It cannot be measured simply by how well one does in standardized exams. Education is about the whole person – we aim to produce better citizens, not just better test-takers. So our focus must be about holistic education, to ensure that our children are equipped with competencies and skills to meet the challenges of the future. This means that they must be able to think critically, tackle complex tasks, and work collaboratively with teams. More importantly, they must be firmly anchored in sound character and values, with the self-confidence and determination to act on their convictions, the resilience and will to overcome adversity, and the integrity to stand by what they believe in.

7. This is why MOE is undertaking a systematic move towards a values-driven, student-centric education. This is not just a slogan; it is a fundamental tenet underlying our whole approach towards education. To achieve this goal,

we will need the cooperation of all stakeholders, school leaders, teachers, parents and the community.

Engaging Parents and the Community

8. While our schools play a major role in moulding young minds, they cannot achieve this without the support of parents and the community. The home is the child's first school and the parent or caregiver is the child's first teacher. Parents are the ones who inculcate character and values in their children from a young age. When a child starts schooling, parents and teachers need to work hand in hand to reinforce the values taught, both at home and in school. Members of the community, including those who live in the vicinity of the school are important influencers in our students' lives too, for they must model the values that we wish to instill in our young. All must contribute and work as one, so that our students receive the same unified message.

9. In this regard, I am glad that TK has been working hard to engage its stakeholders – parents, alumni, School Advisory Committee (SAC) members and various community partners – through school functions, networking events, as well as open and regular dialogues. TK has also been active in initiating and supporting community projects, like the Project Serve flagship programme, to reach out to residents in need.

10. This evening, it gives me great pleasure to launch two awards that are a result of this close partnership between TK and its stakeholders. The first is the Yang Wah Kiang Design and Technology (D & T) Award. Mr Yang is a TK alumni and a committed member of the school SAC. His distinguished career as an entrepreneur is well-known. His company, Nanyang Optical, is one of the largest optical retail chains in Singapore, and developed the first ever eco-frame made from nearly 100% recycled materials. Mr Yang has a passion for design and innovation, and volunteered this award to motivate TK students to strive for

excellence in D & T. The award recognises a secondary four student who demonstrates ingenuity and innovation in D & T. The inaugural recipient of the award is Xavier Lum Lup Sun. My heartiest congratulations to Xavier.

11. The second award is the Samuel Robinson Character Development Award. Mr Robinson is a familiar figure to all who have passed through the gates of TK. He is now 79 years old, but still looks hale and hearty, and serves as an adjunct teacher and alumni liaison. As the longest-serving teacher in TK, his name has become synonymous with TK itself. With 52 years of his life dedicated in service to TK, Mr Robinson is a role model for all to emulate. He epitomises the values of the school through his daily actions and is a firm believer of character development in education. The award which would be given out each year, starting from 2012, will be presented to the student who demonstrates and lives out the school values.

12. From next year onwards, I understand that Mr Robinson intends to scale back his workload, and may go to school on a part-time basis. Mr Robinson, let me take this opportunity to wish you good health and best wishes in all your future endeavours. Please join me in a round of applause to show our deepest appreciation and gratitude to Mr Robinson.

Conclusion

13. In closing, let me congratulate TK for providing 55 years of solid education to its students. With the continued strong support of the SAC, the alumni and parents, coupled with the leadership of your principal, and enthusiasm and dedication of the TK teaching staff, and the passion of your students, I am confident that TK will keep breaking new ground in providing a holistic and values-driven education for the benefit of every child. TK is already a good school. Let's make it a great one. I wish you all the very best in this exciting journey of excellence.