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**SPEECH BY MR HENG SWEE KEAT, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, AT THE
14TH APPOINTMENT AND APPRECIATION CEREMONY FOR PRINCIPALS,
SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, 30 DECEMBER 2011**

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Minister of State, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Education

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Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Manpower

Mrs Tan Ching Yee
Permanent Secretary

Ms Ho Peng
Director-General of Education

Distinguished guests

Principals
National Archives of Singapore

Ladies and Gentlemen

Opening Remarks

1. It is my pleasure to be with all of you today at this 14th Appointment and Appreciation Ceremony for Principals. On behalf of the MOE family, let me first

extend our warmest congratulations to the 52 Principals who will receive their appointments today.

2. For 26 of you, this will be your first appointment as Principal. For these newly appointed principals, this ceremony marks a major milestone in your calling as educators, as we formally entrust you with the leadership of a school. For the incumbent principals who will be taking up appointment at a new school, this occasion is just as significant: it is a re-affirmation of our confidence and trust in your ability to lead a school. The regular rotation of experienced Principals is also a key strength of our system – to allow experienced Principals to bring their expertise and ideas to a new community and take the school to greater heights. In this way, we ensure that all our schools have a mix of experience and fresh perspectives.

3. This meaningful event today is a public acknowledgement of the responsibilities of the leadership mandate that has been given to you, both new and incumbent principals.

4. This year, we will be showing our appreciation to 12 Senior Education Officers who will be retiring. These senior educators, school leaders and senior leaders in the Ministry Headquarters have touched the lives of many - staff and students - and we would like to thank all of them for their exemplary service.

Singapore in a Changing World

5. We are living in a world with both long-term forces causing structural shifts, and with medium and short-term fluctuations creating uncertainties. The shift of the economic centre of gravity to the major emerging economies continues unabated. In the advanced economies, the latest OECD's report on the economic outlook of the world noted that the Eurozone crisis and the US debt

crisis threaten to plunge the global economy into another recession if these are not resolved decisively and quickly. At the same time, swift technological advancements are opening up new frontiers, but also making many jobs obsolete.

6. All these changes are deeply unsettling to hundreds of millions of people. In the Middle East, the desire for a better political and economic order has led to the Arab Spring. In the advanced economies, the Occupy Wall Street protests have morphed into a general protest against globalisation and businesses.

7. As a small open economy, we will be buffeted by these global changes. We also have to face our own domestic challenges, such as an ageing population. The implications are multi-faceted. Engaging older employees and providing for their lifelong employability would be crucial. The lower birth rate could also mean that our children today may bear a higher burden in supporting their parents than before.

Our Response - Student Centricity

8. We will have to discuss the impacts of these and other changes on our society and our education system in greater depth in the coming years. But what is clear is that we need to equip our young people with the deep knowledge and skills to stay relevant, and to have sound values and instincts of working together, leveraging the strengths of different members, lending each other a helping hand, celebrating our collective achievements and supporting individuals who are in greater need.

9. We in the Ministry of Education, working in partnership with parents and the community, have a key role in shaping this future together. The way forward, as we discussed at the Work Plan Seminar, is through an enhanced focus on student centricity and to emphasise the values-driven basis of what we do in Education.

10. Allow me to share three ways in which we are doing so. First, we need to affirm our children by celebrating a diversity of talents. Second, we need to develop good schools in every neighbourhood. Third, we need to nurture values-centred school leaders.

Affirming Our Children, Celebrating Many Talents

11. First, we need to nurture every Singaporean to be the best that he can be. This in turn requires us to customise better, as a school and as a system. As we seek to become even more student-centric, we must continue to identify and develop diverse peaks of excellence among our students. Our programmes should be designed differently to cater to the needs of different student segments within and across schools. We should set appropriate goals and learning objectives and not compromise the outcomes of education for short term achievement.

12. Among our schools, there are many examples where we have customised programmes to meet the learning needs of students. I will cite two examples. At Park View Primary, the school recognised their students' strong interest in sports and implemented a 'Sports for All Programme' where all students would have experienced at least 8 to 10 different sports over 6 years of schooling. In addition to programmes for maximum participation in sports activities, the school also has a framework to identify and further develop students who have shown a higher aptitude in the various sports. Students are given the opportunity to learn at different intensity, whether in simply enjoying a sport or in stretching their ability to excel in the sport.

13. At St Andrew's Secondary, teachers wanted the Normal (Technical) students to develop a greater sense of purpose and engagement in their learning

and school activities. The teachers re-conceptualised the curriculum and school programmes and took special care to consider the students' needs, interests, suggestions and feedback. In the classroom, curriculum was customized to include elective modules like Sports & Fitness and Food & Beverage. Outside the classroom, the students were able to choose from a wide range of opportunities to engage in sports, music, performing arts and special interest clubs. The efforts of the school have borne fruit, with improvements in the students' attendance, motivation and academic performance.

14. At the systemic level, new pathways and options have been created in the past 5 years, catering to students of different learning styles and needs. The underlying philosophy is to make many pathways, bridges and ladders available to our students, at different points in time, with no dead ends.

15. Over the next two years, we will be putting in place two more enhancements. Starting from the Secondary 4 Normal (Academic) cohort of 2012, we will have a new through-train programme to the polytechnics, via the Polytechnic Foundation Programme.

16. MOE will also start new specialised schools that cater to the distinctive needs of our Normal (Technical) students. In doing so, we are building on the initial success of two earlier innovations - the creation of Northlight and Assumption Pathway Schools and the set-up of three N (T) Mark II Schools to cater to the needs of students who better benefit from practice-oriented skills and approaches.

17. The two new specialised schools to be set up in 2013 and 2014 will provide an additional option for N (T) students to benefit from a more customised learning environment. The schools will create a customised curriculum, adopt appropriate teaching pedagogies, and recruit committed teachers with the right skills and attitudes. The customised programmes include a more practice-

oriented and industry-focused curriculum which will prepare students for further studies at ITE or other skills training organizations.

18. There will also be emphasis on physical education and aesthetics, as well as special programmes to cater to the students' social-emotional needs and to equip them with the necessary life skills for future employability.

19. The first specialised school for N (T) students is located in Jurong East and it will start taking in students in 2013. Mr Frederick Yeo has taken up the mettle to set up and lead the new school as its first Principal. Plans for the second school, to be located in Woodlands, are underway, and it will receive its first students in 2014.

20. The schools will work in close partnership with ITE and industry partners to develop their curriculum and programmes and provide opportunities for attachments and internships. Each school will be governed by a Board of Directors, whose members come from a diverse cross-section of industries and the community to ensure a greater contact network for industry partnership with the schools.

21. Having a diversity of options is a good first step. We will need to work harder, in partnership with parents, to help our students learn more about themselves, to make informed choices about their next steps. For example, should my child who has completed secondary education go to a junior college or a polytechnic? Should my child who has completed Secondary 4 in the Normal (Academic) course choose the ITE pathway, or go on to do the 'O' levels? There is no one "better" pathway; it depends on the child's interests, learning style and probable career aspirations. To help parents better understand the options available in education, MOE seeks to provide the necessary support through the COMMunity and PArEnts in Support of Schools (COMPASS), whose role is to

advise MOE on ways to strengthen and promote home-school-community collaborations.

Good Schools in Every Neighbourhood

22. Second, we want to ensure that we have good schools in every neighbourhood. A good school is one which adds value, in a holistic manner, to the students who pass through its doors. A good school is one which is concerned not just with preparing their students for the next examinations, but wants to know what happens to their students long after that. For example, Bedok South Secondary School strives to keep in touch with her former students through various means, including using social media. The school shares stories of their alumni to inspire their current students. Ms Vivien Yeong graduated from Bedok South in 2009 and went on to pursue her A-levels. Vivien felt that Bedok South had provided her many development opportunities like leadership training, science research and overseas learning journey. Vivien is appreciative of what the school had done for her and readily agreed to return to the school next year to help support the learning of the school's graduating class. Another alumna is Dr Patricia Wong. She graduated from Bedok South in the late 1980s and had moved on to specialize in sports science. She has maintained strong links and has stayed passionate about the school's continued progress and development. In 2000, she spearheaded the formation of the school's alumni and is now serving in the School Advisory Committee. Indeed the impact that schools make on their students go way beyond their schooling years.

23. Consultations are on-going with school leaders on how we can better leverage on the spirit of the School Excellence Model for every school to strive to be a good school. Underpinning the School Excellence Model (SEM) is the belief that schools are continuously seeking improvement. Today, schools exist in a complex environment. Rather than operate as single entities, schools could

collaborate with each other as they innovate and improve. Schools should also actively and constantly seek collaborations with both educational and community partners to enhance and enrich students' learning in and beyond the school environment.

Innovative Collaborations Among Schools

24. When schools form collaborative partnerships with one another, more schools, if not all schools, can achieve excellence. The North Zone Junior College Consortium is one example. Created in 2006, the Principals of Anderson JC, Innova JC, Serangoon JC and Yishun JC came together with the aim of providing graduating secondary school students, their teachers and their parents, with information on JC education. Each JC provided information not just on its own school but also on the offerings in the other North Zone JCs. They synchronised their JC Open Houses to ensure that all students got to know the curricula and programmes across the four JCs. The collaboration has since developed into a mutual learning and benchmarking platform amongst the four JC Principals where they lead their teams to share their strengths with each other.

25. It is therefore important that we foster a collegial culture of learning and collaboration where schools can tap on one another's expertise and harness good ideas. This will lead to a proliferation of good practices throughout the entire school system and facilitate "system excellence" in addition to individual "school excellence".

26. The element of collaboration will be given greater focus in the revised SEM and the criteria for Best Practice Award or School Distinction Award will also reflect the expectations of schools to actively engage in collegial sharing and collaboration.

Values-Centred Educational Leadership is Key

27. For schools to become more student-centric, values-centred school leadership is key. School leadership determines whether carefully conceived policies with good intent are implemented with fidelity and effectiveness. For example, time set aside for citizenship and character education can “disappear” if school leaders and educators use the time for more remedial lessons. Such practices reveal the beliefs and values of school leaders and educators.

28. I am heartened to know of schools which, far from taking away time, have given Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) its due time and weight. Every morning at Ping Yi Secondary, the school population would partake in a ‘Values for Breakfast’ programme where values-based stories or personal experiences are shared and the learning is reinforced through the day by both teachers and students. The school has also dedicated an additional hour every fortnight in their curriculum for form teachers to spend time with their students and engage in deeper discussion on values-based issues that can be related to news events, current affairs or other observations by the students. Such quality time spent together has not only enhanced the student-teacher relationship but has also provided a more authentic and engaging way to learn about life and society, and to inculcate deep values that would guide students through their lives.

29. Another school, Zhenghua Secondary, has developed an outdoor education programme for all her students to experience self-discovery, develop responsibility and resilience and understand the value of teamwork. Incorporating Orienteering, Rockclimbing and Challenge Ropes courses, students learn that with determination, they could master their fears and overcome great obstacles. Students also learn to look beyond their own personal achievements to be involved in supporting their peers and to care and be responsible for others. The students are introduced to the school’s outdoor

education programme right from Secondary One at the Sec 1 Orientation camp where they learn the importance of living and working harmoniously and how to take on the role of leading as well as serving others. Many useful lessons on life and values are imparted.

30. In the last few years, we have redoubled our efforts in the nurturing of school leaders. In 2007, we launched the “Philosophy for Educational Leadership in Singapore” document to support the development of values-based leadership. This Philosophy continues to guide our school leaders and reminds them to be “Anchored on Values and Purpose”.

Support for school leaders to lead and manage change

31. This year, the Leaders in Education Programme was reviewed and refreshed to ensure its relevance to the new roles and expectations of principalship. Not only was dedicated time set aside for participants to engage in strategic dialogues with Senior Management of MOE, participants also visited a front-line SAF unit and had a closed-door dialogue with a high-level senior MINDEF official. These sessions served to equip our future Principals with a feel for the challenges to the survival and success of Singapore.

32. Going forward, we will further support our school leaders in leading and managing change. Next year, we will organize a National Perspectives Forum with national leaders, so that our school leaders will have the opportunity to engage in discussions about national challenges and opportunities. Such forums will become regular events in our school leaders’ calendars.

Building Vibrant School Communities

33. School leaders seek to inspire all towards a shared vision by engaging the hearts and mind of the staff they lead and move them in tandem with the heartbeat of the school. When staff are engaged, they see a strong connectedness to their purpose and have clarity on their role in nurturing the students under their charge. When each school has a strong and cohesive school team who find personal meaning, satisfaction and motivation in their work, the entire school system will be strong.

34. While we continue to build trust and respect within the school, we must not forget our stakeholders in the community, especially the parents of our students. Given the changing demographics of more educated parents and fewer children per family, parents are placing greater attention on their children's education. Parents and other stakeholders are eager to contribute and be more involved. I encourage all school leaders to proactively approach and garner the support from parents and the community as they also play an important role in the education of our young.

A Short Tribute to Retiring Principals

35. Our education system today is strong and effective because of the dedication of our school leaders who are able to adapt to the changing demands of the time. Among the twelve Senior Education Officers who will be retiring this year is Mrs Yu Sing Tong.

36. During Mrs Yu's 41 years of dedicated service in the teaching profession, she has touched the lives of countless people. I understand Mrs Yu was among the first pioneers of a position which is known today as Cluster Superintendent.

She moved from the Superintendent position to become Deputy Director Schools North and finally Zonal Director.

37. In guiding and leading school principals, Mrs Yu has influenced them through her clarity of vision on school excellence, her deep knowledge of schools, her ability to motivate and galvanise, and her indomitable will to help schools succeed.

38. As leaders, we often lead in different ways that stem from our beliefs and this is what makes each leader unique. Mrs Yu is a visionary change agent who through the years has kept in pace with the changing education landscape. She has always been on the lookout for new possibilities and educational goals, all the while striving to adapt, adopt and innovate. Mrs Yu's ability to be nimble and responsive was especially evident in her management of health-related matters in schools during the 2003 SARS crisis and 2009 H1N1 flu pandemic. Mrs Yu has been a leader for school leaders, a coach, a mentor and an inspirational influence for many who have worked with her.

39. Mdm Jenny Law will be retiring after 41 years of service. During this period, she was Principal for 26 and half years. Since leading Bukit View Primary School in Dec 2002, she has transformed it from a school with declining enrolment and at risk of being closed in the 1990s, to one that is very popular and vibrant in the neighbourhood today.

40. Believing firmly that every child can learn and achieve, she has led her staff to adopt a whole-school approach to providing a well-balanced and holistic education for students. The school has mounted several innovative and bold prototypes to implement the recommendations of the Primary Education Review and Implementation (PERI) Committee. In 2007, the school was awarded the Programme for School Excellence (PSE) in recognition of its achievements in its niche area of Aesthetics.

41. Mrs Yu Sing Tong and Mdm Jenny Law are two outstanding examples of educational leadership. While time does not permit me to share the contributions of all retiring school leaders, I believe each and every one of the retiring officers will bring along with them the memories and friendship of the lives they have touched and enriched over the years. Allow me to once again thank the retiring officers, who have impacted the lives of many in their roles as teachers, leaders and friends. Please join me in showing our appreciation to them.

Concluding Remarks

42. Finally, let me congratulate all Principals appointed today. I look forward to your contributions in the years ahead. Stay the course well so that all Singapore children will be well prepared for the future.

43. Thank you.

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