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SPEECH BY DR NG ENG HEN, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AT THE MOE WORK PLAN SEMINAR 2010, ON THURSDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER 2010 AT 9.30AM AT THE Ngee ANN POLYTECHNIC CONVENTION CENTRE

Bringing out the Best in our Learners

Mr S Iswaran
Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry and Education

Ms Grace Fu
Senior Minister of State for National Development and Education

Mrs Tan Ching Yee
Permanent Secretary

Ms Yeoh Chee Yan
Second Permanent Secretary

Ms Ho Peng
Director-General of Education

Principals

Colleagues

2010 – A milestone year

1. It is a pleasure to join you again at this year's Workplan seminar.
2. Within this past year, the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) was the national highlight for young Singaporeans and created a buzz across all schools. We have been busily preparing for this inaugural event since two years ago. SPS Masagos co-chaired the Singapore Youth Sports Development Committee with MCYS. Over 100,000 students and 6800 of our teachers and MOE staff were involved in this effort over the past two years. Of the 130 athletes who participated at the YOG, 122 of them were students from across 51 Secondary Schools, Junior Colleges and Institutes of Higher Learning. All of them are winners and deserve our admiration and commendation for displaying grit, determination and sportsmanship, often against much stronger competitors.
3. The spirit displayed by participants and supporters during YOG was equally heart-warming. Apart from our athletes, 560 students bore the Olympic flame proudly, cheered on by hoards of fellow schoolmates. Around 4000 students provided spectacular displays at the YOG opening and closing ceremonies and Youth Olympic Village. Every school was involved in one way or another with

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many incorporating the YOG into lesson plans. I know that some schools had even traveled to the countries of their twinned National Olympic Committees. I was struck by the vibrancy of the learning that took place outside the classroom. Some students wished that school could always be this exciting. Their enthusiasm showed, brimmed and overflowed.

4. As a result, overseas visitors were bowled over by the culture and education programme. Foreign guests and athletes visited your schools and had rich enjoyable and engaging interactions with students there. The cultural village, in particular, was a unique window to the world, and became a natural platform for youth from all over the world to connect with each other. Members of the Olympic Council hailed the Culture and Education programme to be unique and precious to foster Olympic ideals. The Nanjing Organising Committee even sent a delegation to study the details for the next YOG. All in all, I was thrilled that the YOG provided our young students in schools, ITE, Polytechnics and Universities an opportunity to show who they are and showcase their talents and hospitality to the World. Our students have done us proud, set the bar high and left a legacy for future YOGs. Years from now, leaders and guests from other countries will still remember their positive impressions about young Singaporeans. Well done!

5. This is my third Workplan Seminar with you. It has been a busy two and a half years, with many changes to build up capacity in our system. These changes have resulted from the many ideas that principals and teachers brought up at meetings with myself, PSES and DGE. Many here will recall these meetings over coffee or lunch. At my first WPS in 2008, I announced that we would like to move to single session schools for a more enriched and balanced primary school education. The PERI Committee was set up under SMS Fu to facilitate this.

6. PERI's recommendations are proceeding well. Most schools will move to single-session by 2016 and will have upgraded facilities for better teaching and learning. Last year, we announced that 11 new schools would be built and 28 upgraded. This year, another 10 schools will be upgraded. Training of teachers to use summative and formative assessments appropriately in lower primary levels are being scaled up and will be completed by 2013.

7. On my school visits, I am impressed with the enthusiasm and eagerness to implement these changes. Principals and teachers tell me this is because we are moving in the right direction. This bodes well for the enhanced primary education our young Singaporeans will receive.

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

8. Arising from the suggestions of feedback from Principals and teachers, MOE also set up SERI. Since last year, DOS' committee on secondary education review and implementation (SERI) has been studying ways to improve secondary school education. Some of their recommendations have been already announced

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by PM during this year's National Day Rally. These include the two new specialized schools for Normal (Technical) students, the through-train programmes for Normal (Academic) students who do well in their N-level examinations, and the expansion of the integrated programme to seven more secondary schools, so that more university-bound students can benefit from an enriched educational experience.

9. Beyond the specific changes announced at National Day Rally, SERI has also taken a more broad based approach to provide the right environment in secondary schools to help students manage their transition from adolescence into young adults who are confident, motivated and responsible.

Strengthening Teacher-Student Relationships

10. DOS will provide more details later but in line with every school moment as a potential teachable moment, SERI also recommended that we re-tune our system to strengthen the rapport between teacher and students. They will propose ideas to help teachers understand their students better, to discover their strengths as well as weaknesses. This is worth doing and educationally sound, as strong teacher-student relationships have a lasting positive impact on students long after they leave school.

11. Take for example, Mrs Tay Yen Ping, a mathematics teacher from Gan Eng Seng School. Her philosophy is that besides teaching her students to count, she also wants to teach them "what counts". Since 2005, she has been meeting students in her form class one on one for breakfast before school, to get to know each better by understanding their challenges and family circumstances. Today, these students who have left school still keep in touch with her.

12. Another example is that of a student who dropped out of school, and ended up in Boys Home. During that difficult period, one of his teachers visited him, and patiently continued to counsel him to mend his ways. While he did not complete secondary education, he eventually turned over a new leaf and is now waiting to enter National Service. Each year, he remembers to wish his teacher Happy Teachers' Day and addresses her as "Godma".

Citizenship and Character Education

13. Both PERI and SERI's recommendations on providing the right environment to cultivate the student are consistent with our overall desire to provide a values-based education. As articulated in the Curriculum 2015 review, we aim to nurture students who are confident, self-directed learners, concerned citizens and active contributors through Citizenship and Character Education (CCE). To facilitate this central focus as a key desired outcome, we will form a dedicated CCE unit within MOE to coordinate and synergise efforts across various domains such as National Education, Social-Emotional Learning, Civics and Moral Education. At the school

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level, Principals will continue to be the key leader to drive efforts in this area. Within HQ, an internal committee to oversee these efforts will be chaired by DGE.

14. We are placing this initiative as a core deliverable because only right values can shape positive character and committed citizenship in “moulding the future of our nation.” But we also need to have lively and rich teaching sessions that can engage students. We will give more time for schools to do this - four periods or two hours each week, but schools will need to be creative and inventive to find the right platforms and methods to achieve the right learning outcomes. I hope younger teachers, being more in sync with today’s youth and how they communicate, can play a greater role here.

TEACHERS AS LEARNERS, TEACHERS AS LEADERS

15. These new initiatives will require more resources as well as professional competence among teachers, and indeed more teachers have been added. Over the past 10 years, our teaching force has grown by around 30%, from 24,000 teachers in 2000 to over 31,000 today. Since 2004, each school received an average of 10 more teachers. The proportion of graduates in the teaching force has also increased from 55% to 79% today. Among our graduate teachers, 42% hold honours qualifications and above.

16. This increase in quality and numbers is producing virtuous effects. Around 50 professional learning communities (“PLCs”) have sprouted up. Another 138 schools have started the PLC journey this year, and the remaining schools next year.

17. We will continue to provide opportunities for professional upgrading. This year, 68 officers have been offered the MOE Postgraduate Scholarship, and another 736 officers will pursue further studies using various Professional Development Packages. We envisage that by 2020, almost all of our teachers will be graduates, while a fifth could have Master’s and PhD qualifications, up from the current 10%.

18. Going forward, we will grow the teaching force further to 33,000 trained education officers by 2015. Schools can look forward to having more teachers. For a start, a typical school at the Primary, Secondary and Junior College levels will receive at least 2 to 4 more teachers respectively by 2015. Beyond the standard provisions, schools will also be given additional manpower to support professional development and work-life measures, as some teachers may go on maternity leave or opt for part-time teaching. More teachers will also be provided in tandem with the roll-out of new programmes and initiatives. Our primary and secondary schools have found the Adjunct Teacher provisions useful. Based on feedback from our junior colleges that they would welcome similar resources, MOE will extend this provision to junior colleges so that JCs too, can tap on experienced, former teachers.

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19. Apart from teachers, MOE will also increase the number of key personnel¹ posts to equip schools with a strong middle-management team, and provide more career progression opportunities for teachers. On average, schools will see an increase of about 3 to 6 Key Personnel posts at the primary, secondary and junior college levels.

20. Our teachers are partnered by a core team of Allied Educators, who support our teachers in the areas of teaching and learning, special needs and school counselling. MOE has tripled the pool of Allied Educators, from 574 officers in January last year to 1,847 officers today. We are on track to grow the pool of Allied Educators to around 2,800 by 2015.

21. The establishment of the Academy of Singapore Teachers, which was launched recently, our language institutes, as well as the Physical Education and Sports Teacher Academy (PESTA) and Singapore Teachers' Academy for the aRTs (STAR), are new engines for professional development and key enablers for achieving the vision that the fraternity has set for itself.

More peaks of excellence in PE, Art and Music

22. These added pathways and capacity of our people will help us better nurture different talents in academic domains as well as sports, music and art. We are doing more to enhance Art, Music and Physical Education. New Art and Music teachers will be trained for single-subject specialization, and existing ones will also move in this direction. For PE, the curriculum time will be increased across the primary and secondary levels.

23. For sports, we have set up six new Junior Sports Academies to nurture young sporting talents, bringing the total to 18 Junior Sports Academies offering 11 different sports. Three Youth Sports Academies have been established.

24. For Art and Music, 17 schools today house Art and Music Elective Programmes (AEP and MEP), and produced close to 6000 graduates since the 1980s, some of whom are leaders in their fields now. In view of these positive developments, MOE has decided to extend the AEP to Bukit Panjang Government High School and the MEP to Catholic High School from 2011. Both have a strong supporting culture and programmes in place to deliver the AEP and MEP well.

25. We will also start Enhanced Art Programmes (EAP) in CHIJ Katong Convent and St. Andrew's Secondary School and the Enhanced Music Programme (EMP) in Chung Cheng High School (Main).

¹ Head of Department (HOD), Subject Head (SH) and Level Head (LH).

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ALIGNMENT BETWEEN HOLISTIC EDUCATION AND SCHOOL RECOGNITION

26. There is another crucial piece that needs review, in order to align and rebalance the education system towards more holistic outcomes. I am referring specifically to school recognition under the Masterplan of Awards (MoA). This is an important piece and MOE is currently looking into this but the MoA will be refined to appropriately acknowledge schools for their efforts to nurture all students, and not only if some excel.

27. What do these changes in pathways and people add up to? Today's theme – "Bringing out the Best in our learners" - sums it up. We aim to help every student discover what makes him special and for him to believe that his special gift can enrich the lives of others.

28. Will we succeed, and for every child? We are doing much and can produce a litany of changes that have added more people and pathways to our educational system. But we must be careful not to confuse effort with outcome, or process with delivery. Just because we added all the right ingredients doesn't mean the soup will be great.

29. Will all that we have done ensure that each child will discover his gift and what makes him special? That we have a strong education system increases our chance of success. But whether in weak or strong systems, there is one critical ingredient that is crucially needed – the anointing touch of that special teacher, the one who stirs the pot – that makes it all come together for the child in front of him. For example, Lee Jun Wei, valedictorian at this year's ITE graduation ceremony which I attended, credits not only his ITE lecturers, but also singled out Mr Tan Yaw Jin, his former Chinese Language Teacher at Peirce Secondary School for being his beacon of inspiration during his school experience, because Mr Tan often went beyond the call of duty, expending energy and time, to encourage Jun Wei to believe in himself, discover his strengths, and strive for his goals. Jun Wei qualified for polytechnic but decided to enroll in ITE's Nitec in Aerospace Technology given his deep interest in the subject, and went on to top his cohort. He is now pursuing a Diploma in Aeronautical Engineering at Singapore Polytechnic, and plans to attend university. Our teachers play critical roles as beacons of inspiration for all their students, and in discovering the unpolished diamond within each of them.

30. We have embarked on changes that can move our educational system from good to great over the next decade. If we are diligent and persistent, I am optimistic that we will succeed. But your personal journey from being some student's good teacher to a great teacher occurs every day. I wish all of you a fruitful workplan seminar.

31. Thank you.