

**FY 2011 COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY DEBATE: 1<sup>ST</sup> REPLY  
BY DR NG ENG HEN, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND SECOND  
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE ON INVESTING IN EDUCATION FOR THE  
21st CENTURY**

**Social Mobility – The Singapore Story: Past, Present and Future**

1. I thank the many MPs who have spoken passionately about education during the Budget Debate and this COS. There were many issues raised, but I would like to devote my response to a central theme – social mobility, raised today by Mrs Josephine Teo, Mdm Halimah Yacob, Mr Christopher de Souza and Miss Irene Ng and many others during the Budget Debate – because it stands at the heart of our education policies, indeed our whole of Government initiatives. My colleagues will deal with specific issues later.

Social Mobility in our Early Years – A Massive Rising Tide

2. From 1960 to 2010, Singapore’s per capita nominal GDP rose 100-fold, from US\$400 to more than US\$40,000 today. This remarkable achievement has been variously depicted. Monikers abound – “sleepy fishing village to world-class hub”, “colonial backwater to economic powerhouse”, “Third World to First”, etc.

3. But for me, “The Singapore Story” probably best captures this economic transformation. It was a massive rising tide that lifted all boats, with a reach that extended deep into the heartlands. Stagnant pools turned into thriving waterways as the tidal rise was sustained over 40-odd years.

4. As a result, social mobility occurred en masse both of Singapore compared to other countries and within the society with remarkable improvements in almost all conventional measures of living standards. We were physically transformed – not only the city landscape but its people too, literally!

5. I witnessed this profound change on our people as a young doctor. Due to better nutrition, children grew taller and heavier – height-weight charts of older cohorts became obsolete and had to be adjusted periodically. With widespread public sanitation and vaccination programmes, disease patterns changed – from infectious diseases typical of poorly developed economies to diabetes and heart diseases associated with affluent societies. Infant mortality rates, an indicator of health standards dived to one of the lowest in the world. In short, more babies lived, grew taller and bigger; adults acquired affluent diseases born of richer lifestyles even as they lived longer.

6. With rising home ownership, wealth across the belt of heartlanders increased. Families moved from kampongs and slums to HDB flats – the \$6,200 HDB flat in

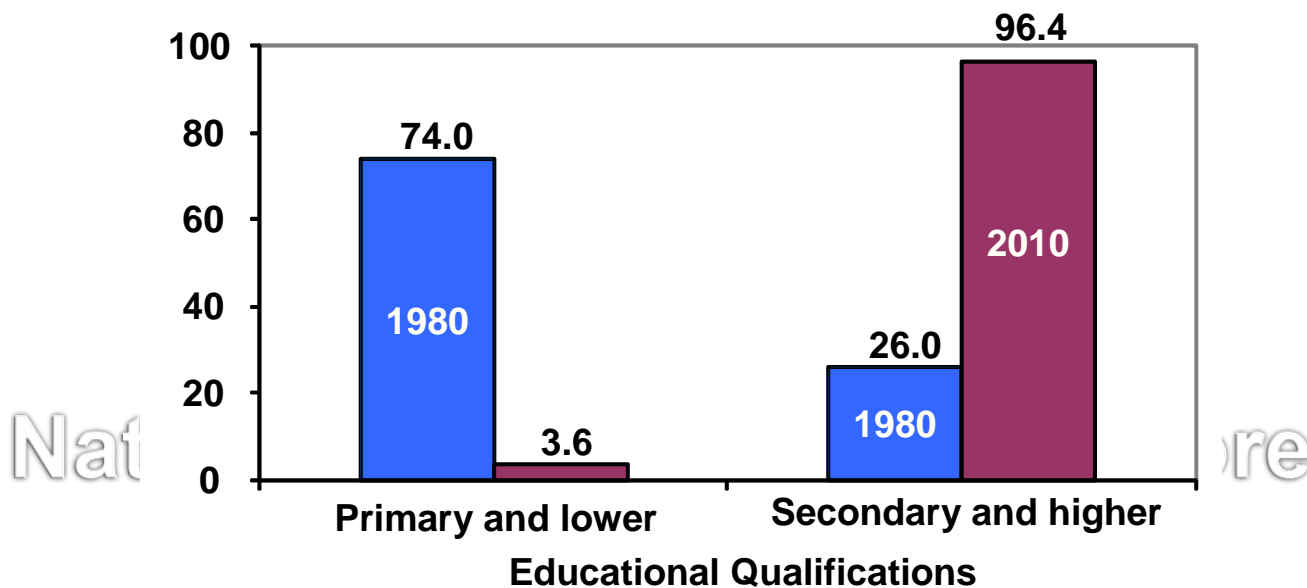
Queenstown or Toa Payoh in the 1960s. By 1990, almost 90% of households owned their homes, a dramatic increase from 30% in 1970. The homes they now owned were also bigger. The percentage of households who lived in 1- to 3- room flats fell too, from 80% in 1970 to 25% in 2010.

7. The rise in educational attainments was equally impressive. Steady jobs, better incomes, bigger homes provided a more conducive social environment for academic achievement all round. In 1980, only a quarter of those aged 25 to 39 years had completed secondary school or above. This jumped four-fold to 96% in 2010. This means that most Singaporeans born in the 70s and 80s would have attained educational qualifications of at least one if not two or more levels above those of their parents. *[Refer to Chart 1]*

Chart 1: Educational Qualifications of 25-39 year olds in 1980 versus 2010

## Significant Improvement in Educational Qualifications over a Generation

% of 25-39 yr olds



8. Many of us aged 50 or older today, born before 1960, do not need these statistics to convince us about the Singapore Story. We experienced this rising tide first-hand. My parents had six children. My first home as a young boy was a rental flat in Zion Road. We shared it as tenants with other families. It never occurred to me that I was poor then, or that it was not the norm to share abodes. It overlooked the Alexandra Canal, which was a far cry from what it is today after MEWR's ABC Waters programme. The canal flooded often, to the delight of kids living there. I can

still hear my mother's clarion warning to be careful lest we got swept away by the currents.

9. Upgrading meant moving to a three-room flat in Queenstown. This time we did not have to share and we could own it. But there were still hard times with bills unpaid and my mother had to do odd jobs, sewing and cooking at home to earn extra income. I am thankful that my parents believed in a good education for me and my siblings. That changed our lives.

10. I am also grateful that I could become a doctor after studying at the National University of Singapore. I know it was heavily subsidised as my family could never have afforded the full costs. Later, a Government scholarship allowed me to train in the United States as a cancer surgeon.

11. This unique meritocratic Singapore system – this massive rising tide lifted a boy from a three-room flat in Queenstown to top cancer centres in the US. Today, I am able to provide my children with a quality of life far better than I could ever have imagined growing up.

12. I consider myself blessed but my story is not unusual in Singapore. Many of my old friends who grew up in the same HDB neighbourhood, who took the bus to school with me, have done well too. I meet them and many Singaporeans who share similar success stories today.

13. I believe deeply that the same Singapore Story can and must be written for every new generation. I know I am not alone in this belief. Many MPs too spoke impassioned about re-writing the Singapore Story of every generation. Indeed, Singapore must always be a land of opportunity and hope for all Singaporeans.

14. Have we kept faith with our founding fathers and ensured that opportunities continue to exist for all today? How do we continue the Singapore Story for this generation and the next? What does social mobility mean today with a very different societal profile from that in the 60s and 70s? These are important questions that need to be addressed for all Singaporeans about our future.

#### Social Mobility - Still Alive Today

15. Let me assure this house that enabling social mobility will continue to be a hallmark of our education system. MOE believes that education can and should uplift individuals and families. I agree with MPs too that in doing so, we cannot aim for equality of outcomes, because students are inherently different. Neither can we stop parents who can afford it, from spending large sums on pre-school or private tuition for their children, as Mr Low Thia Kiang and Ms Joscelin Yeo pointed out. What we must ensure is that opportunities abound for all students and that no student is denied a high quality education because he or she cannot afford it.

16. How do we achieve this? As always, through good schools that students can have access to, wherever they live.

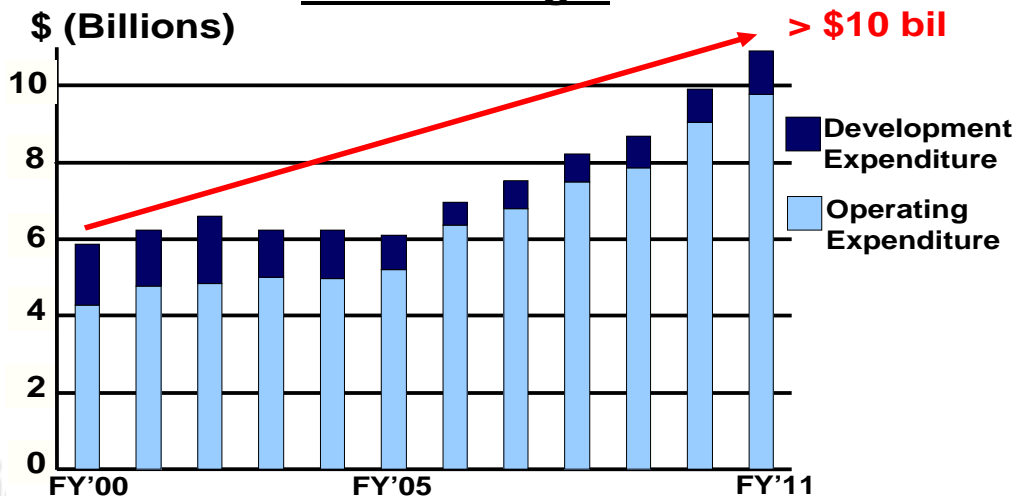
17. We must therefore resource all schools well, not just some. We must ensure that good teachers are spread out across the system, not only to the top few schools. We must ensure that all students have enrichment programmes or CCAs that develop their full potential. This is exactly what MOE has been doing, especially in the past two decades or so.

18. Firstly, we have increased our investments into education significantly over the years. Over the last decade, it rose steadily, even during economic downturns. Our budget this year is \$10.9 billion, almost double from a decade ago and 10% more than last year. *[Refer to Chart 2]*

Chart 2: Increase in Expenditure on Education over the Past Decade

## Significant Increase in Investment in Education over Past Decade

### MOE's Budget



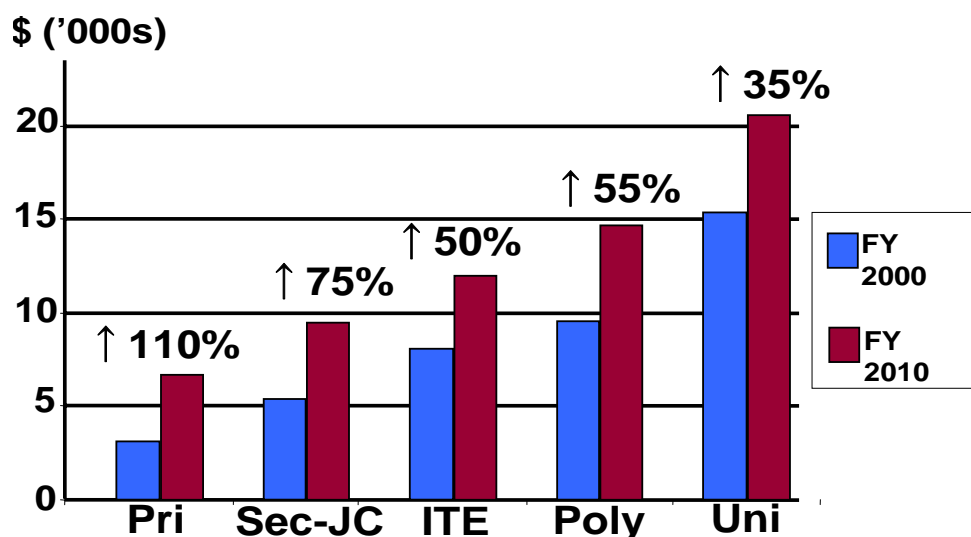
19. More importantly, the increase in spending has benefited all students and not only a select few. We deliver a consistently high standard of education across all our schools, ITE, polytechnics and universities.

20. Over the last 10 years, annual recurrent funding per student in primary schools saw the largest increase – up 110% (or more than doubling) to almost \$7,000 in 2010. In the same period, funding for secondary schools and JCs grew almost 75%. All our schools receive equal per-capita base funding from the Ministry. *[Refer to Chart 3]*

21. Spending on ITE, polytechnic and university students has also risen.

Chart 3: Increase in Government Funding per Student over the Past Decade

## Higher Per Capita Spending For All – With More for Primary & Secondary



22. The scale of increases in funding per student in primary and secondary schools has allowed us to increase significantly the number and quality of teachers, and start more programmes to meet specific needs of children.

23. Over the last decade, MOE invested some \$25 billion to nurture a first-class, highly educated and well-trained teaching service – this is five times more than the \$4.8 billion that MOE invested in upgrading the facilities of 125 primary schools and 75 secondary schools over the same period. This is as it should be, because good teachers make the bigger difference.

24. Compared to 10 years ago, each school today has on average 30 – 50% more staff – at least 20 more teachers on average and new allied educators and support staff. As a result, the pupil-teacher ratio has improved from 26:1 to 19:1 - nearly 30% better in our primary schools and 16% better at the secondary and JC levels. Mr Chiam See Tong would be glad to know that MOE maintains the quality of teachers across all our schools. We deploy our teachers based on the level and subject they teach, and the needs of the school's students. Every school has its fair share of experienced and qualified teachers.

25. Almost all primary schools have at least one in three teachers with more than 10 years of experience, and at least half of the teachers in each primary school are graduates. At the secondary level, every school has more than eight in 10 teachers who are graduates. We have teachers who are scholars or award holders in all our secondary schools and JCs.

26. We have also expanded the range of programmes, in particular those catering to slower learners. These include: the Learning Support Programmes for both English and Mathematics at primary schools; the offer of Elective Modules that appeal to the learning styles of Normal (Academic) and Normal (Technical) students; and the establishment of Northlight School and the Assumption Pathway School to help students who fail PSLE and have difficulties handling the mainstream curriculum.

27. These investments have indeed translated to better educational outcomes. Today we have almost 100% participation rate of Singaporeans in our primary schools. Close to 99% of each cohort complete 10 years of primary and secondary school – one of the highest completion rates globally. This builds a strong foundation for progression to our ITE, polytechnics and/or universities. As a result, 50% more students now progress to our universities, 40% more to our polytechnics and 30% more to ITE when compared to a decade ago.

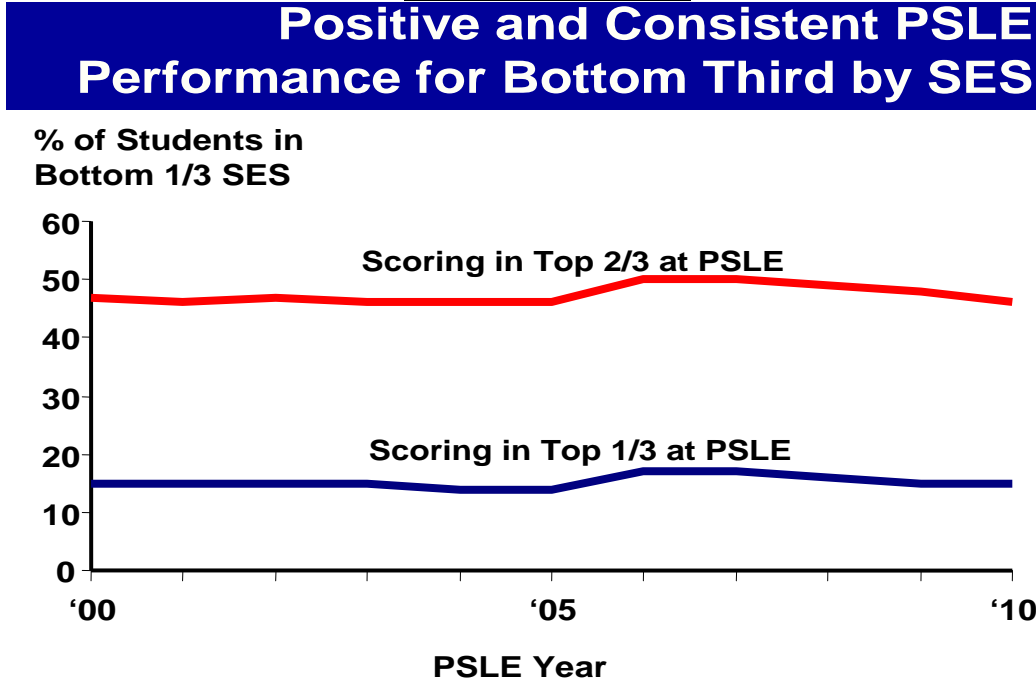
28. Our education system creates opportunities for all our students. Regardless of which school they are in or what background they come from, our students are able to learn at their own pace, and develop in areas they are passionate about and can excel in, and achieve their maximum potential. Customisation and differentiation of educational pathways are key reasons for our robust and responsive education system.

29. Has it worked to ensure social mobility? Gratifyingly, our data affirm that the Singapore Story continues for this generation. Students of all socio-economic backgrounds have been able to achieve good outcomes. Let me provide specific information.

30. Take for example the PSLE. The top 5% of PSLE students consistently come not only from a few schools with rich parents. Every year, they come from 95% of primary schools and across all socio-economic backgrounds. Every primary school in the country has at least ten students who had scored in the top one-third of the PSLE cohort. Coupled with merit-based entry into secondary schools, these results mean that every student has a good chance of success regardless of which primary school they attend, provided he or she is willing to work hard.

31. When we look specifically at students who start from lower socio-economic backgrounds, the picture is equally heartening. About half of the students who are from the bottom one-third by socio-economic background score within the top two-thirds of their PSLE cohort. One in six from this group scores within the top one-third. More importantly, these figures have remained stable over the past decade. *[Refer to Chart 4]*

Chart 4: % of Students in the Bottom-Third by SES Scoring in the Top-Third and Top Two-Thirds at PSLE

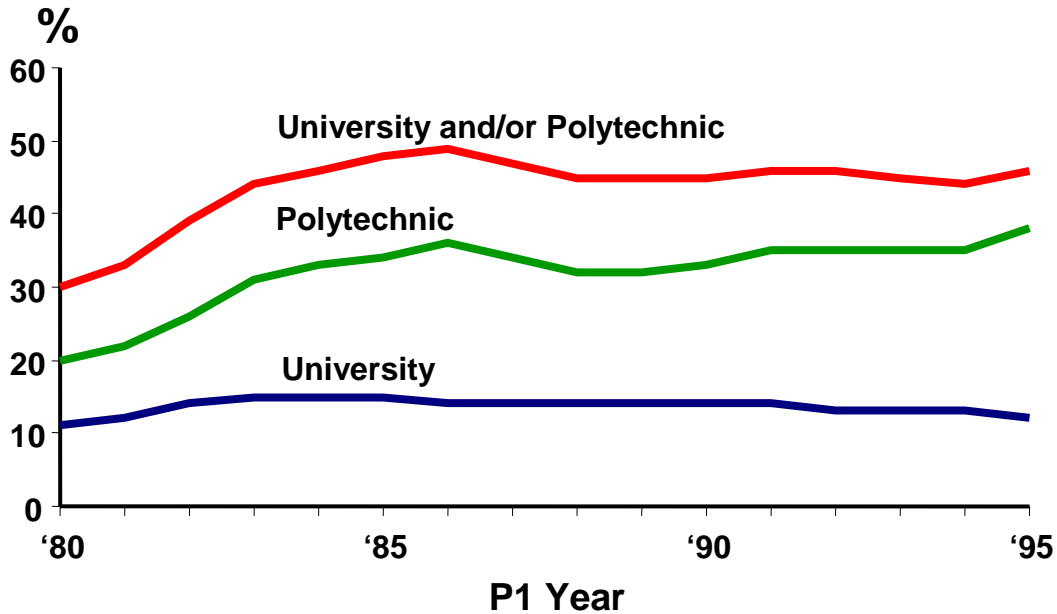


32. If we look at those who lived in 1- to 3-room HDB flats at Primary 1 (P1), we find that one in five of these students score in the top-third in the PSLE and the same proportion (one in five) score within the top 30% of every O- and A-Level cohort. Almost half eventually progress to our universities and polytechnics. More importantly, these outcomes have remained unchanged over the past decade, despite fewer Singaporean households now living in 1- to 3-room flats. Let me emphasise this. In the 1980s, almost 60% of our P1 students lived in 1- to 3-room flats. This had fallen to 30% by 1995 and yet half of them still progressed to our polytechnics and universities today. Those who lived in 1- to 3-room flats only made up 15% of the 2005 P1 cohort who took their PSLE in 2010 and yet the proportion doing well has held steady. [Refer to Chart 5]

National Archives of Singapore

Chart 5: % of P1 students who lived in 1- to 3-room HDB flats and subsequently progressed to tertiary education

## Almost Half in 1- to 3-Room HDB Flats Progress to Unis/Polys



### Positive International Accolades

33. International experts have also analysed our progress and provided a sound basis for comparisons with other countries.

34. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which conducts the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), has constructed an Economic, Social and Cultural Status (ESCS) index to measure the socio-economic background of students. OECD found that across the education systems participating in PISA, there was a general positive relationship – the higher the ESCS, the higher the PISA scores. In all countries, Singapore included, students from better socio-economic backgrounds do better academically.

35. But, they then found that in some education systems, among them Singapore, China, Korea and Finland, a larger proportion of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds were able to perform better than predicted. OECD called them “resilient students”, students who excelled despite having come from less favourable circumstances. We were ranked 5<sup>th</sup> out of 65 countries for the proportion of resilient students. Almost one in two of our students were resilient, compared to one in three in the OECD. The PISA average was 26% - or one in four.



36. These figures are not mere numbers but translate to hope for many students in real life here. For example, of NorthLight School's first cohort who graduated in 2009, 14% did not stay on to complete their education. But this was a sharp drop from the 60% dropout rate at the old Geylang Serai Vocational Training Centre (GSVTC) which Northlight had replaced. For the 86% who did graduate from Northlight, 32% had already exceeded both their parents in terms of educational qualifications! 71% passed all their modules and obtained an ITE skills certificate, and 31% went on to ITE.

### What Social Mobility is Not

37. What of the future? Can we ensure the Singapore Story for the next generation? Here, I want to caution what social mobility should not be about. It cannot be about neglecting those with abilities, just because they come from middle income homes or are rich. It cannot mean holding back those who are able, so that others can catch up. This will be detrimental to the whole society. We can and must provide opportunities to all, and develop all students to their full potential. Second, ensuring social mobility, as MPs have said, cannot mean equal outcomes, because students are inherently different. Third, while we seek to provide opportunities to all, no education system can replace the vital role that families and caregivers provide for an enriched learning environment.

38. Here, we must dispel the notion that only rich parents can provide the right environment for their children to succeed. Recently you must have read of the twins who were top students in the A-Levels from Hwa Chong Institution (HCI). Their parents, one a security guard, the other a cleaner, took home modest salaries, but they were stout-hearted and determined in wanting to provide the right, not necessarily the most expensive, environment for their kids. As their mother, Mdm Soh, said in Mandarin: "we've always been quite poor, so I saved on things like buying new clothes. But when it comes to things like nutritious food or things for their studies, we try to make sure they have it." They succeeded. How many richer Singaporeans dare to say that they would have provided a better environment for these twins? Resources are important but are poor substitutes for love, devotion and sacrifice. All of us during our house-to-house visits witness countless families in HDB flats who provide an excellent home environment for their children to succeed.

39. Finally, social mobility cannot mean a diminution of individual effort. Opportunities can and will be provided but it is finally the individual who determines his or her own success. He or she decides if opportunities are to be squandered or seized.

## Social Mobility for the Next Generation – Creating the Next Tide

40. What is our strategy for the way forward? How would we measure social mobility, especially since we are now at a higher base? 44% of those aged 25-39 today have university education and their children are unlikely to climb that much higher.

41. There are also fewer Singaporeans who now live in 1- to 3-room HDB flats. That is why we seem to be seeing less of them in top secondary schools, polytechnics and universities.

42. To enable and measure social mobility, we must not confine ourselves only to narrow academic domains or specific groups. First and foremost, we must believe and focus on moving the whole of Singapore up. Yes, we are at a higher plane, but if we become complacent or descend into hubris thinking that we have arrived, others will by-pass all of us. Our educational system in this 21<sup>st</sup> century must expand to encompass the full limits of our people. We must always aspire to develop the richness of diverse talents within all Singaporeans. We must nurture creativity, innovativeness and entrepreneurship. Spheres of arts, sports, drama, dance, science, literature must thrive. Our strategy must again be to lift the tide for all Singaporeans. The poor will need extra help, but we must not become myopic in neglecting the whole of Singapore. That would indeed be short-sighted.

43. To achieve this uplift for all Singaporeans, this renaissance, we must again focus on teachers as key agents of enabling mobility. We will continue to build or upgrade more schools and expand our programmes to develop diverse talents. We will increase our subsidies for the lower- and middle-income, so that good education is affordable for all.

### **Teachers – Our Most Important Asset**

*For all your wishing, find good teachers*

# National Archives of Singapore

44. We have more than 31,000 teachers today, up from 24,000 in 2000. 80% of them are graduates, up from 55% in 2000. Teachers with postgraduate degrees have also more than doubled from 4% to 10%. Impressive increases, but we still need more and with greater expertise. We are expanding our teaching force to 33,000 by 2015 so that students in schools benefit from more customised learning. We are moving towards recruiting only graduates as our teachers. These include mid-career teachers. Mr Chiam See Tong can be assured that we set the same high quality bar for recruitment, regardless of whether our teachers are mid-career or fresh graduate applicants.

45. We are making strides in promoting a teacher-led culture of professional development, so that all our teachers will constantly upgrade themselves to deliver an education that equips our children for the new challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

46. Mrs Josephine Teo and Ms Denise Phua asked how MOE intends to expand our teaching force while maintaining quality. Today we recruit only about 14% out of some 18,000 applicants every year. We will continue to ensure stringent selection standards. We want teaching to be a choice career. We envision teachers staying for many decades, building up their expertise and nurturing many cohorts of children. To get these passionate teachers, we must offer attractive prospects. MOE has formulated a “TEACH” framework to attract, develop and retain good teachers – ‘T’ for Teacher Professionalism, ‘E’ for Engagement, ‘A’ for Aspirations, ‘C’ for Career and ‘H’ for Harmony between work and life.

47. Core to TEACH is Teacher Professionalism, anchored on the Ethos of the Teaching Profession. The Ethos is a ground-up effort by teachers to articulate the values and beliefs of their profession, so as to guide and inspire future generations of teachers.

48. We also continue to invest heavily in teacher professional development. The newly established Academy of Singapore Teachers will foster a teacher-led culture of professional excellence. Through its network of professional learning communities, it will focus on raising the quality of instructional expertise across all schools and classrooms in Singapore.

49. Deep professional expertise can have profound leavening effects for the entire system. “Singapore Maths” today is a brand name, and used by many countries. There were many teachers who were responsible for this. Dr Kho Tek Hong is one of them. He was Project Director of the Primary Mathematics Project team that was set up in the early 80s to help teachers teach better Maths. It was his team that introduced the Model Method which has helped many cohorts of primary school children solve simple word problems and understand simple algebraic ideas.

50. That seeding and leavening continues today. Take Dr Elizabeth Pang for example. Having obtained her PhD in Educational Linguistics from Stanford, she returned to lead a team of fellow curriculum specialists in developing STELLAR, or Strategies for English Language Learning and Reading. Started as a pilot programme in 2006, all primary schools have now adopted STELLAR. It has changed the way our students learn English – they no longer do so just through textbooks, but also through drama and music lessons. STELLAR is raising standards for English especially of students in neighbourhood schools.

51. Today, about 500 teachers each year are pursuing their postgraduate studies, mostly through part-time studies. Another 200 non-graduate teachers obtain undergraduate degrees each year.

52. We recognise that there are opportunity costs to their upgrading. The new TEACH package will therefore give teachers pursuing part-time Master's degrees the option to take up part-time teaching so that they can better balance their teaching and learning loads. We will also introduce a cash award upon the completion of their part-time Master's degrees, to recognise their efforts. We will offer more scholarships as well as a new postgraduate award for full-time postgraduate studies.

53. Non-graduate teachers will also have a wider range of upgrading avenues. New full-time Advanced Diploma courses will be developed by NIE. We will also offer a new award for in-service teachers to pursue full-time undergraduate studies.

54. We will also provide more flexibility and additional resources to schools to allow their teachers to go for further studies or fulfil other social roles as parent or caregiver. As 70% of our teachers are female, with more than half of them married with young children or of child-bearing age, these flexible work arrangements will allow them to raise a family. When teachers can opt for part-time or no-pay leave instead of resigning from service, MOE is able to keep more of its good teachers.

### **Affordable Education for All**

55. We will increase subsidies for students from lower- and middle-income households substantially. Let me emphasise that these are not one-off measures but recurrent subsidies. This is in keeping with our pledge that no Singaporean should be denied an education because he or she cannot afford it.

#### MOE Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS), Edusave top-ups, Opportunity Fund, Trips for International Experience (TIE) Fund

56. Primary and secondary schools are already heavily subsidised but we will provide extra funding to help needy students. In addition to MOE's Financial Assistance Scheme, the one-off top-ups of between \$10,000 - \$15,000 in Budget 2011 to the School Advisory Committees' and School Management Committees' Funds will allow more targeted aid to students who still need more assistance.

57. Earlier this year, I announced that MOE will make a one-off top-up of \$130 to the Edusave accounts of all primary and secondary Singaporean students. This is on top of MOE's one-off injection of \$100 million in Edusave Grants to all schools to purchase additional IT equipment. These extra resources will pay for enrichment activities that can broaden the experiences of our students.

58. Beyond the Edusave schemes, MOE has made funding available through the Opportunity Fund and the Trips for International Experience Fund. Needy pupils can receive further help through the Opportunity Fund to offset the cost of enrichment programmes and additional learning resources. If schools feel that certain overseas trips add to the development of students, these funds can also be used to help these

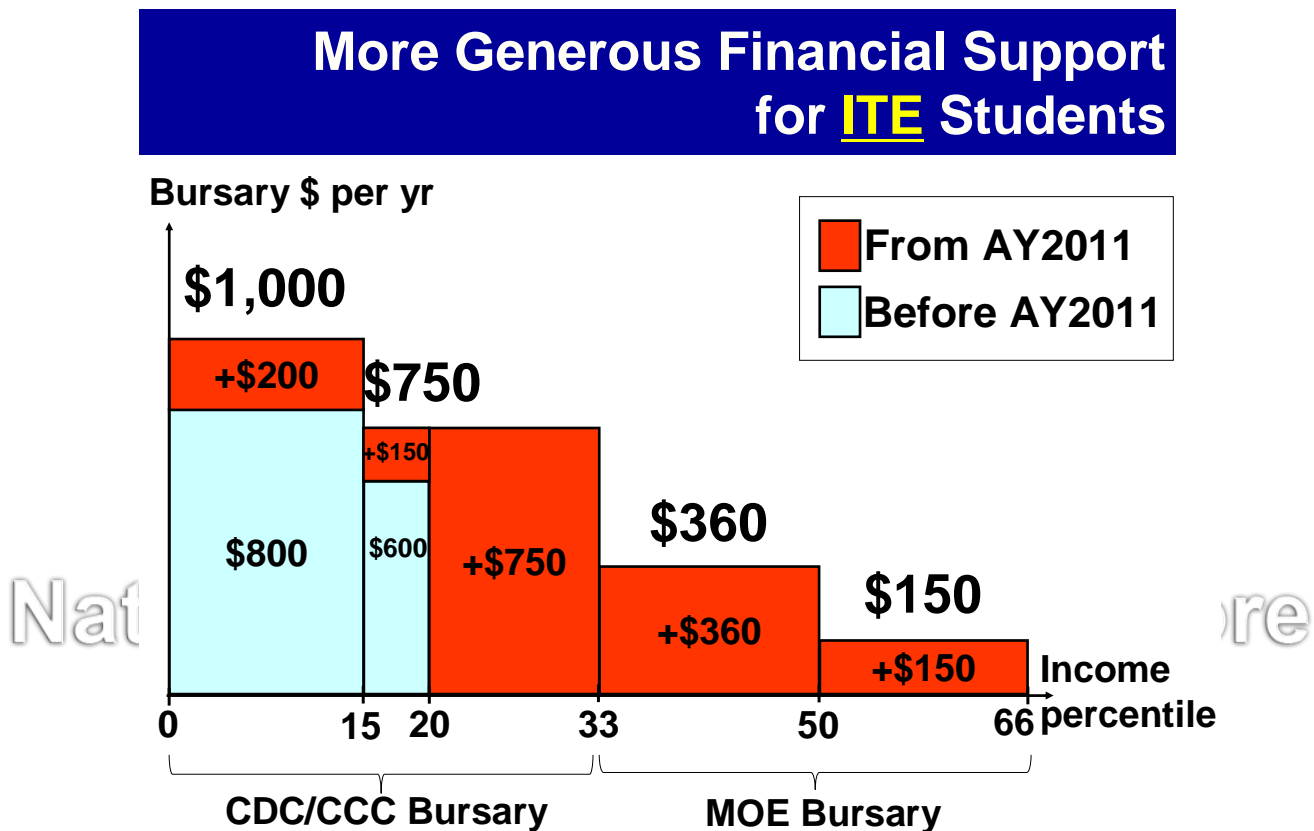
students embark on overseas learning programmes to expand their horizons beyond Singapore.

CDC/CCC Bursaries for ITE, Polytechnics and University

59. We will also substantively enhance existing bursaries to help more students from both lower- and middle-income families cope with the cost of post-secondary education. The Minister for Finance had already announced the increase in bursaries for university and polytechnic students.

60. I am happy to announce that we will further expand the bursaries support for ITE students. [Refer to Chart 6]

Chart 6: Enhanced Government-Funded Bursaries for ITE Expanded to the Bottom 66% of Households



61. With these increases, students from the lowest tier will receive \$1,000 a year. The extra amount received will help these students with other costs related to their ITE education. On top of this change, we will now extend bursaries to include households up to the 66<sup>th</sup> percentile – students from two-thirds of all households will now receive bursaries.

62. In summary, bursary support will now be extended to all students in our post-secondary educational institutions who are in the bottom two-thirds of households by per capita household income. Bursary quantum has also been increased. For students from the bottom one-third of households, this means that those in the ITE will have their education costs entirely covered, while those enrolled in the polytechnic and undergraduate courses will have their education costs covered by as much as 97% and 85% respectively. All in all, the enhanced bursary scheme will benefit students from both lower- and middle-income households. It will cost MOE up to an extra \$134 million per year.

### Enhancing Opportunities for our Students

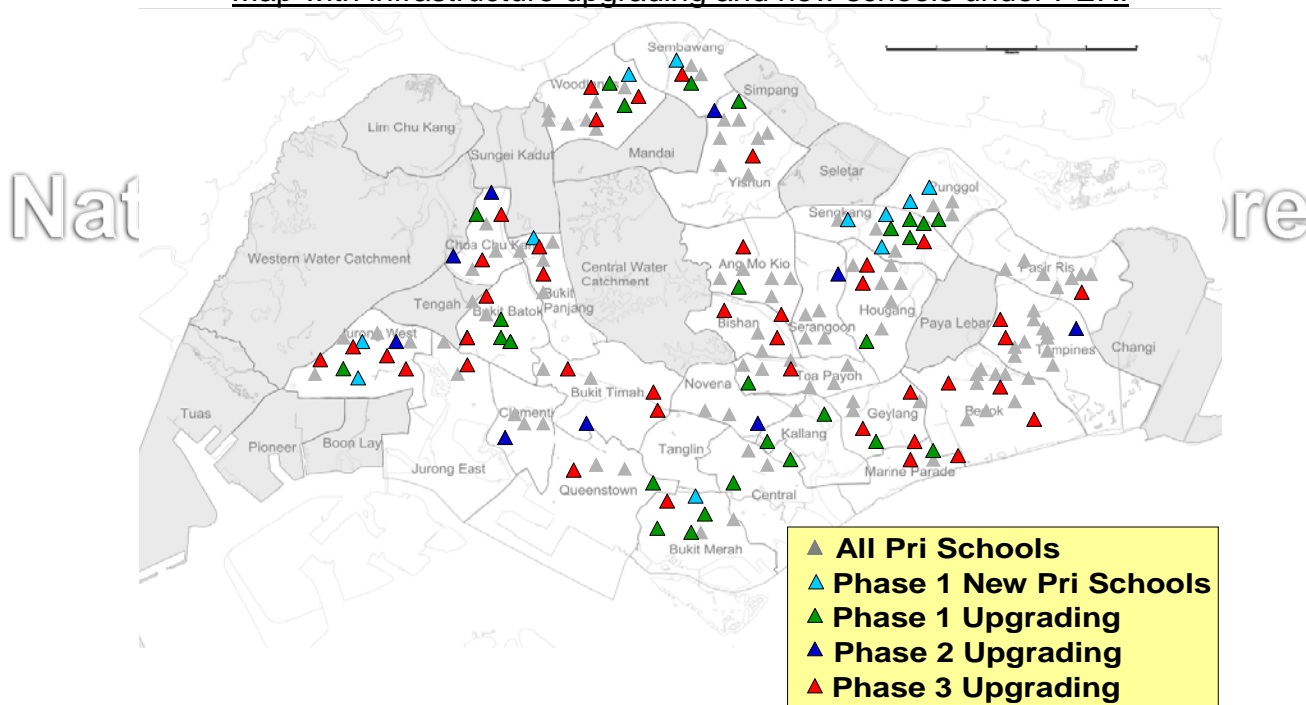
63. The expansion in the capabilities of our teachers will allow us to expand the offerings within our education landscape to offer a more holistic education and create new pathways to cater to varying aspirations and abilities.

#### More Pathways and Better Schools

64. We will continue to upgrade and build better schools across the island with the latest facilities and equipment, including sports halls, art studios and music rooms.

65. To help move all primary schools to single session, 11 new schools will be built – these are expected to commence in 2013 or 2014; and 37 schools will be upgraded by 2014 under Phases 1 and 2. *[Refer to Map]*

Map with infrastructure upgrading and new schools under PERI



66. I am pleased to announce today that we will **embark on Phase 3, starting in Nov 2012. In this phase, 40 more schools will be upgraded. Taken together with Phases 1 and 2, our total investments are estimated at \$1.1 billion over the next 7 years.** The upgraded schools will be equipped with newer and better facilities that enable primary school teachers to deliver the programmes recommended by the Primary Education Review and Implementation Committee.

### Holistic Education

#### *Art & Music*

67. More emphasis will also be placed on Art and Music education to complement our Science and Mathematics education in drawing out the creativity in our children through visual and aural means. They also nurture our children's deeper appreciation for the Aesthetics.

#### *Character and Citizenship Education through Physical Education, CCAs, Sports*

68. We will also place more emphasis to develop civic literacy and global awareness through character and citizenship education. Mr Liang Eng Hwa and Irene Ng would be happy to know that MOE will place even stronger emphasis on character development and the teaching of life skills going forward.

69. We agree with Ms Joscelin Yeo and Mdm Cynthia Phua that school-wide sports participation can contribute to character development, and the health and fitness of all our students. Going forward, we will step up opportunities for participation by more students by organising more intra-school and recreational inter-school sports competitions.

### **Investments in Post-Secondary Educational Institutes (PSEI)**

70. We are also doing more for the post-secondary institutions. Our efforts to revamp the ITE will be completed soon. ITE College East has been operational since 2005, while ITE College West has been operational since 2010. ITE College Central will be ready in 2013.

71. We are expanding the polytechnics' capacity by 20% over the next 5 years. We are also providing more university places. The Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) will increase its intake this year to 1,000 students. And with Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD) coming online in 2012, we are on track to achieve a cohort participation rate of 30% by 2015.

## Enhancing CET Landscape by Leveraging on Polytechnics and ITEs

72. As part of the Government's overall effort in upgrading our workers, MOE will step up the role of our PSEs in delivering CET. This will tap on our polytechnics and ITE's close industry linkages.

73. **We will grow the current CET training capacity by 60%. We will also raise subsidies for Advanced Diploma and Specialist Diploma programmes from 70% to 85%, bringing down fees significantly. MOE will also increase fee subsidies for part-time undergraduate programmes at UniSIM and public universities to 55% of published fees.** SMS Iswaran will provide further details on this issue.

## Support for Pre-School and Special Needs Children

74. We will also do more for pre-schools. MOE has invested \$150 million in the pre-school sector over the last 5 years. We have seen good results so far. **We plan to invest another \$290 million over the next five years – double the amount compared to the last five years** – to continue to uplift the quality of the pre-school sector. MOS Masagos will provide the details.

75. Ms Denise Phua asked that we do more for special needs students. As announced, MOE in partnership with the National Council of Social Service (NCSS), will introduce a Special Education (SPED) Financial Assistance Scheme to pupils from lower-income families in the SPED schools, to subsidise their school fees, uniforms, textbooks and examination fees.

76. **To provide more customised support for students with high needs in the SPED schools, I am pleased to announce that MOE will work with the NCSS to increase resources for these schools through a new High Needs Grant from April 2011. Up to \$2.3 million per year will be set aside for schools to hire additional teacher's aides to support this group of students.** SMS Fu will provide more details on our efforts with SPED schools and students.

## Funding for Language Promotion Committees

77. As announced, we will do more for the teaching and learning of mother tongue languages (MTLs).

78. I have earlier announced that MOE will set aside up to \$45 million for schools and the MTL Learning Promotion Committees over the next five years to support their efforts. Mrs Josephine Teo asked for more details.



79. Around \$29 million will be disbursed through our schools to support their programmes, for example school-based MTL Fortnights, held in collaboration with community organisations and key stakeholders such as parents and alumni. On top of this, a combined total of up to \$16.6 million will directly support each of the three MTL Learning Promotion Committees. This represents a 20% increase in funding available to each of the three Committees. SMS Fu will provide more details.

## **Conclusion**

80. Chairman, these array of efforts aim to improve the entire educational landscape. We are doing more for students in lower-income households but our strategy to uplift Singapore through education must be focused on providing opportunities to all Singaporeans of diverse needs, talents and abilities. We are realistic that the extent of social mobility experienced in the past cannot be repeated in the future. Singapore has the highest per capita GDP in Asia today, surpassing Japan to take the top spot last year. But it would be sad if increasing affluence results in smaller dreams for Singapore and Singaporeans. We must not lose the vibrancy and resolve of our founding generations. We must and can aim higher for everyone. In doing so, we must provide more resources to the poor to ensure that no one is denied access to education because of financial difficulties. Each child should have the opportunity to be the best that he or she can be.

81. Will we succeed? I am optimistic because the Singapore Story continues to surface today across our island. Mr Hong Siang Huat is relief teaching in RI after completing his NS. He comes from a single parent family and his mother used to be a factory worker. He did very well in his PSLE. At first, he was not sure if his mother could afford the fees at RI, but RI offered him a scholarship. During his 6 years in RI then RJC, he did well academically and was vice-captain of the RI hockey team. Later this year, he will leave for Warwick University on an MOE Teaching Scholarship to study psychology. If all goes well, he will be in our classrooms, teaching the next generation of Singaporeans, a living example of social mobility and a firm believer in helping his students live out their dreams.

82. In this new decade, we will continue to ensure that Singapore Education remains at the forefront of excellence, so that our children will be prepared for the challenges of the next decade. More importantly, we will continue to ensure that education is the best way to level up all Singaporeans. The Singapore Story lives on.

83. Thank you.