

A New Academy

Principals have a lot on their plates these days, what with greater autonomy in the use in resources and having to reach out to various stakeholders. With the launch of the new Academy of Principals, school leaders now have additional support to further their professional development.

THE ACADEMY of Principals was launched at the Academy of Law at City Hall on Friday, 11 January 2002.

The Academy is a professional association committed to meeting the needs of senior educators in Singapore for continuous professional growth and development.

One of the aims of the Academy is to raise the professional standing of principals through its activities and programmes which would, in turn, enhance principals' effectiveness in managing their schools.

"The job of a principal today is definitely more challenging than before," said Education Minister Teo Chee Hean, who launched the Academy. "To do your job well, principals have to be proactive in furthering your own professional development. Effective principals have to build strong networks with fellow principals to share ideas and knowledge. The Academy will provide a forum for such professional discussion and sharing to take place."

Uniting the profession

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**Education Minister
Teo Chee Hean**

The Academy was formed from an amalgamation of three existing associations — the Association of Principals of Primary Schools, the Singapore Secondary School Principals' Association, and the Singapore Educational Administration Society. Said Mrs Belinda Charles, President of the Academy's Protem Committee, "It is a groundbreaking and visionary union, not just an amalgamation of three associations."

This pooling of existing resources to form one professional body, said RAdm Teo, is a significant development for principals as a profession. "Having one professional body for all principals recognises the common professional competencies of principals across different levels of the school system, and provides opportunities for interactions among professional leaders in different types of schools."

The Academy will enhance the professional status of school leaders by providing a variety of professionally enriching opportunities for school leaders to share ideas, debate problems and issues, listen to both local and overseas experts, and voice their views on policy initiatives. It will also promote excellence in leadership by awarding prestigious fellowships to those who demonstrate excellence in practice or service.

Membership in the Academy will be drawn from the ranks of principals, former principals who have continued in the leadership track, and senior professional staff from the National Institute of Education (NIE). Vice principals and retired principals are also welcome to apply as associate members.

Establishing links

Through the excellent work of its predecessors, the Academy has already established strong links with principals' centres in other countries including Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong and the United States. Leveraging on this international network, the Academy plans to arrange meetings with visiting overseas educational leaders.



Mrs Belinda Charles addressing the audience.

Members will also be encouraged to undertake study tours to other countries. These initiatives will provide Academy members with a truly global perspective of school leadership.

The Academy also plans to work closely with the NIE to meet the needs of senior educators in Singapore for continuous professional development. In fact, two representatives from NIE sit on the Protem Committee. NIE will provide accreditation for NIE certification, awards and postgraduate qualifications. In addition, areas of concern in schools will be addressed when members of the Academy team up with NIE academics to work on finding quality solutions.

Members will also find their needs being met on a more personal and practical level. Said Mrs Lim Chye Tin, Principal of St Andrew's Junior College and a member of the Protem Committee, "Training and development is only one small aspect. We also hope to provide mentorship to principals who feel the need. This will be entirely voluntary. For example, if a new principal has a problem, he may feel more comfortable sharing with someone from the fraternity who can share how it was resolved in another school. A lot of this has been going on on a very ad hoc, informal basis, but we thought we could have a body where this could be done."

Looking to the future

One of the first activities that members of the Academy can look forward to is a "dining" session. Stemming from a rich historical tradition in the ancient Inns of Court in London, a dining is an opportunity for members to interact as they sup. For this year, arrangements have been made with the Academy of Law to hold four dinings at their exclusive restaurant located in the historic City Hall building, with a splendid view of the Padang.

At every dining, there will be an after-dinner speaker. Two of the four speakers for this year are from Canada, and they will elaborate on their experiences as senior educators. Explained Mrs Lim, "Principals are very busy people. But we think the principals need this renewal from time to time. So if we could facilitate such a fellowship, that would be another way to help rejuvenate them somewhat. That's why we're having it at dinnertime."

The Academy will also soon have a professionally designed executive facility, conveniently located at Grange Road, where members will have access to an excellent library. A website has also been set up to enable leaders to keep in touch, even when they cannot meet face-to-face, while its publications will be of direct interest to school leaders.

To find out more about the Academy, log on to www.academyofprincipals.edu.sg 



RAdm Teo being introduced to the plans for the new facility at Grange Road.



Principals discussing more ideas for the Academy.

"Leadership is not something that you learn once and for all. It is an ever-evolving pattern of skills, talents, and ideas that grow and change as you do."

Sheila Murray Bethel