

Speech by Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Minister for Finance and Minister for Education, at the 10th appointment ceremony for Principals on Friday, 28 December 2007 at 2pm, Shangri-la hotel, Island Ballroom.

SUSTAINING A HIGH PERFORMANCE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Mr Gan Kim Yong,
Minister of State

Rear-Admiral Lui Tuck Yew,
Minister of State

Mr Masagos Zulkifli,
Senior Parliamentary Secretary

Mrs Tan Ching Yee,
Permanent Secretary

Miss Seah Jiak Choo,
Director-General of Education

Distinguished guests,

Principals,

Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It gives me great pleasure to join you this afternoon at the 10th Appointment Ceremony for Principals.

2. I want to first extend my warmest congratulations to the 65 Principals who will receive their appointment letters today. To the 36 amongst you who are new Principals, I commend you for embarking on this major step in your leadership journey in education. For the 29 experienced Principals who are assuming new appointments, today's ceremony is just as significant. Your new appointment is an affirmation of our confidence in your able stewardship of our schools.

3. To the 17 retiring Principals, I thank you on behalf of all of us in Education for your contributions as teachers and school leaders. Your vision, dedication and values have transformed many individuals. They will inspire many generations of school leaders to come. Retirement does not however mean stopping work altogether. As you will hear later, we have many interesting things for you to do in your "retirement".

Sustaining a High-Performing Education System

4. We have a high-performing education system. This is not our own assertion, but the conclusion from various international studies on educational achievement and the considered judgement of experts who have studied our system in depth. By now, the achievements of Singapore students in Mathematics and Science are well-documented.¹ More recently, Singapore emerged 4th among 45 education systems that participated in the 2006 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), which assessed reading literacy amongst Primary 4 students. It was an improvement from our position as 15th in PIRLS 2001. What stood us out too was that we were ranked first among education systems where pupils took their tests solely in English - and this despite the fact that the majority come from non-English speaking backgrounds. It is another statement of the strength of the Singapore system, and especially of our teachers and the curriculum we use in our schools.

5. Beyond these international assessment tests, experts concerned with the competitiveness of economies have given Singapore schools top marks. In the Global Competitiveness Report 2005/2006 published by the World Economic Forum, Singapore's education system, as well as our science and mathematics education, was ranked first among 117 countries in terms of the ability to meet the needs

of a competitive economy.

6. The McKinsey consultancy group studied what they considered to be top performing education systems in the world – Canada, Finland, Japan, Singapore and South Korea – to understand what they had in common. Their study concluded that the common formula for a high-performing education system could be summed up in three steps - begin by hiring the best teachers, develop these teachers into effective instructors and school leaders, and have these teachers deliver quality instruction to every child in the system. We have done these, and we are doing more of these, so that we sustain a high-performing education system in Singapore.

7. The key strength of the Singapore education system is our people. That is why our key strategy in education has to remain that of selecting the right people to be teachers and school leaders, and developing them throughout their careers along paths that match their interests. Quality teachers and quality school leaders are quite simply what has brought us to where we are as a leading education system, and what will take us forward.

Growing Quality Teachers

8. It seems simple enough, to hire the right people to be teachers. But a quick international scan shows many countries, including many of the developed countries, who are unable to attract good people into education and retain them.

9. In Singapore, we have been able to recruit teachers from the top 30% of each cohort. About 75% of new teachers recruited today are graduates and close to one in two of new graduate teachers have an Honours degree. Over half our teaching recruits for primary schools are graduates.

10. We have kept up the quality of teaching recruits even as we have expanded the teaching force. The teaching force has grown steadily from 24,000 in 2000 to 27,000 in 2004 and 29,000 today. We are on track to reaching our target of 30,000 teachers by 2010. It will mean an improvement in pupil-teacher ratios by some 15% by 2010 – in other words, more good, well-trained teachers in every school, with more time and space to devise and deliver the best teaching for their pupils. It is a fundamental way in which we are raising the quality of education across our schools.

11. We have also been successful in attracting teachers who have retired or resigned to re-join us as Adjunct Teachers, opening a new source of experienced teachers for our schools. Today, we have some 2,000 Adjunct Teachers in our schools.

12. Once we have recruited the right individuals, we ensure that they receive effective training, with both theoretical and practical underpinnings, at the National Institute of Education (NIE). As beginning teachers, our new teachers benefit from a structured mentoring programme led by experienced teachers. Our teachers are also provided with more opportunities for continuous professional development, as well as to innovate and experiment with new teaching ideas, throughout their careers.

13. To sustain a high performance culture in any knowledge-based profession, we also need a robust and fair system of appraisal and performance management. Teachers who have done well have to be duly recognised and rewarded, while those who need help to improve their performance should be coached by their supervisors.

14. The Enhanced Performance Management System (EPMS), which was phased from 2003, has provided very useful scaffolding for this system of performance management. But performance management is itself a key skill, and one of the most challenging aspects of leading a team. We have therefore further enhanced our training and preparation of supervisors. Modules on EPMS are now part of the milestone training programme for school middle managers.

15. We are moving along the right track. In fact the idea of performance-based pay to recognise teachers for good performance is now gaining support internationally. In the United States for example, several school districts in cities such as Denver, Dallas and Houston have introduced performance-based salary structures and performance bonuses for their teachers. The United Kingdom too also implemented a performance-related pay policy, where teachers who passed defined performance thresholds could look forward to progressing to a higher pay scale.

Growing Quality School Leaders

16. Having a broad base of quality teachers is a necessary first step. In the UK, for example, teacher recruitment has improved in recent years with improvements in pay. However, a leadership crisis looms. 40% of headships in British schools will become vacant due to retirement in the next 10 years, but there are not enough applicants.

17. During a study visit led by DGE to the UK in 2006, our study team had extensive discussions with their British counterparts on school leadership development. They found that the process of school leadership development in the UK was left very much to individual choice and, some might say, chance. A teacher who feels that he is or she is ready for Principalship would apply to attend a leadership programme, wait for a Principalship vacancy to open up somewhere, put in an application, and then wait for the notification. The British are now seeking to improve how school leaders are selected and trained.

18. Perhaps because of our smaller size and the fact that we operate a single national system, we have been able to ensure quality through a rigorous process of identifying potential leaders, nurturing them and deploying them across our schools, rotating them periodically and giving them sabbaticals to recharge and get new ideas. It is a system that sustains effective school leaders in every school, who are able to take ownership of their schools and use the autonomy they have well, learn over time and take good lessons from one school to another. It is how we raise overall standards in our schools, and ensure that high quality is not just about a few schools.

Enhancing the Education Service

19. With a solid foundation of quality teachers and school leaders, our teaching service is held in high regard in Singapore and around the world. In a public perception survey commissioned by MOE this year, members of the public ranked the teaching profession as that which contributes the most to society, above doctors and lawyers. Among tertiary students, teachers were also ranked second highest, next to doctors, and ahead of other professionals such as nurses, lawyers and engineers.

GROW 2.0 Package

20. These positive perceptions are an asset as we continue to attract and retain quality people in the teaching profession. We are doing so in an extremely tight labour market. The economy is doing very well and many sectors are crying out for talent. MOE is determined to ensure that the Education Service continues to be an attractive career choice, for fresh graduates and working people looking for a challenging career.

21. Last year, we introduced the GROW (Growth, Recognition, Opportunities and Well-Being) package. The increased career options and opportunities for personal and professional growth have benefited all teachers. Earlier this year, 5411 teachers were promoted to the new substantive grades of GEO 1A3 and 2A3 and 200 Heads of Department were promoted to the SEO 1A1 grade. Many teachers are taking advantage of the new Learning and Development scheme and the enhanced Professional Development Leave (PDL) scheme.

22. At this year's Work Plan Seminar, I mentioned that MOE had embarked on a comprehensive review of the compensation structure for the Education Service. We engaged a consulting firm, the Hay Group, to help us review the remuneration package for Education Officers. We also reached out and gathered views and suggestions from 3,500 officers across the Education Service during the review from August to November 2007.

23. Today, I am pleased to announce a new package of initiatives which we call the "GROW 2.0 Package". Like the GROW package last year, GROW 2.0 addresses teachers' professional and personal development needs holistically, covering enhancements to professional development and Growth; Recognition and pay; career Opportunities, and Well-being. We can see how the various components fit together in this GROW 2.0 "flower" diagram, designed by one of our CPDD officers, Ms Shirley Wee.

24. Let me highlight 5 key elements in this comprehensive package this afternoon. The full details will be provided separately. These 5 elements are: (a) revising teachers' pay levels to match market benchmarks and maintain the strong positioning of the teaching profession; (b) new professional development opportunities; (c) enhancements to the Senior Specialists Track; (d) measures to enhance

work-life harmony; and (e) a pilot re-employment programme for all teachers.

Keeping Pay in line with to Market Benchmarks

25. Let me first emphasise that there is no trade-off between ensuring that we pay teachers competitively and sustaining the commitment and passion for teaching that really adds quality in our schools. Competitive salaries are a necessary condition, even if they are not sufficient to ensuring a top class teaching service. That's the way it is in any contemporary knowledge-based profession. We have to ensure that pay remains competitive at every level, but we also have to work to keep the profession uniquely attractive in its development opportunities and give teachers more time and space to do what they believe works best, and to develop themselves.

26. We have also not shied away from paying Principals well, to reflect their higher levels of responsibilities and the multiplier effect they have. One of the reasons cited by some British Headmasters for the dearth of applicants to become Headmasters is the relative lack of pay differentials between Principalship and Heads of Department and Senior Teachers.

27. We will be making adjustments to the compensation structure and levels of all our Education Officers. A typical classroom teacher will see an annual pay increase of 8-12%. An outstanding teacher will see a pay rise of up to 18%. Top performers will see even sharper increases.

28. The overall increase comprises 3 components – an increase in monthly salary of up to 4%, higher performance bonus quantum, and a restructuring of the CONNECT plan.

29. We have also increased somewhat the performance-based pay differentiation among teachers, in line with good practices in other professions. Our teachers too have told us that they would like to see such differentiation. The majority of the 3,300 teachers surveyed by the Hay Group felt that their pay should be pegged to performance and that there should be a sharper differentiation in pay according to performance.

30. From 1 April 2008, MOE will introduce the new Education Scheme (2008) which uses a salary range system, with variable annual increments, instead of the current salary scale system, with fixed salary points. Officers can look forward to progressing on longer salary ranges on the new scheme. They will also enjoy merit increments which will vary with their performance, potential and market conditions.

31. In addition we will enhance the performance bonus framework under the new Scheme. Good performers can look forward to an increase of up to 1 month of performance bonus. Very good and outstanding performers can expect higher increases of up to 2.25 months.

32. Eligible Education Officers will be offered an option to convert to this new scheme. Those who convert will be eligible for a one-off salary increment of up to 4% of their monthly salaries from 1 Apr 2008.

33. As the higher performance bonuses under the new Scheme will be paid out only from Mar 2009 (for work done in 2008), we will give a one-off performance bonus top-up in March 2008, ie something over and above the current performance bonuses. This top-up quantum will be tiered by performance – 0.5 month for good performers, 1.0 month for very good performers and 1.25 months for outstanding performers.

34. Besides introducing a new Education Scheme, we will shorten the CONNECT Plan from a 40-year to a 30-year plan for new officers joining us from January 2008. The yearly deposits that would otherwise be paid out from the 30th-40th years will be incorporated into the deposits for the first 30 years. In addition, the total career deposits for CONNECT will increase by about 6%.

35. With the shortening of the CONNECT Plan and the increase in total career deposits, officers can look forward to larger CONNECT payouts every 3-5 years of service. After 10 years of service, they can draw on a CONNECT Plan quantum of \$51,000 - \$72,000, compared to \$35,000 - \$50,000 today. We have worked out a transition plan for existing teachers so that they too can look forward to early withdrawal of their deposits and higher career deposits where relevant.

36. Besides pay, the Outstanding Contribution Award (OCA) is another useful means of recognising significant contributions made by individuals and teams of staff in schools. Mdm Ho Hui Ping from

Riverside Secondary School is one of this years individual OCA recipients. Hui Ping has been recognised for her instrumental role in building up a vibrant art culture in her school and developing Riversides niche areas in dance and music. She has also brought arts to the community by partnering her school with the Northwest Community Development Council and the Woodlands Citizens Consultative Committee.

37. The current OCA amount given to each school ranges from \$3,000 to \$10,000 a year, depending on the schools staff strength. We want to encourage schools to recognise more good officers like Hui Ping. From next year onwards, we will allocate \$3,000 more to each school to reward up to three individuals for their significant contributions. The cap of \$10,000 for each schools OCA fund will also be lifted.

New Professional Development Opportunities

38. MOE is committed to investing in providing our teachers with opportunities to learn and grow as professionals throughout their careers. There are various schemes including the Enhanced PDL to support this. Many of our officers are making good use of these schemes to realise their aspirations and bring added value to their teaching.

39. Mdm Catherine Yeo, a teacher at Commonwealth Secondary School, used her Enhanced PDL to spend six weeks in Germany studying how schools there taught environmental science. Impressed by the strong commitment of German schools to environmental education, Catherine is now working with teachers in her school to develop an environmental science module for Secondary 1 students.

40. Mr Hisham Spono, HOD for Physical Education at Fengshan Primary School, used his PDL to complete a Masters in Educational Management from the University of Western Australia. Applying the principles of teacher leadership that he learnt during his course, Hisham has empowered his PE teachers to organise and lead initiatives such as a training workshop for PE teachers in East Zone.

41. Currently, about 8% of our teachers possess a Masters degree or a PhD. To help our Education Officers realise their aspirations to grow and upgrade themselves academically, we will enhance the existing financial support schemes and study leave schemes. We have developed five Professional Development Packages designed to suit the different needs and aspirations of Education Officers. (These packages range from study loans, reimbursement of course fees, new study grants to full sponsorship for postgraduate studies. The key enhancements include (i) a higher study loan quantum of \$6,000 a year for local full-time studies, an increase from \$4,500 today, (ii) a higher reimbursement rate of 80% for course fees for part-time Masters degrees capped at \$6,000, compared to the current 50% capped at \$3,000, (iii) a new study grant scheme with annual grants of \$9,000 - \$12,000 a year for promising teachers to pursue full-time undergraduate and postgraduate studies and (iv) scholarship awards for postgraduate studies for both teaching and curriculum-related subjects.)

42. In addition, we will provide up to 5 more teacher posts to each cluster to better support schools with officers going for full-time postgraduate studies. It will, of course, not be possible for all our officers to pursue further studies or other professional development activities at the same time. We will have to space this out, so that we strike a balance between the immediate operational needs of schools and the longer-term benefits from having teachers who have gained further training. The additional teacher posts for each cluster will provide a boost to schools ability to allow their good teachers opportunities to pursue postgraduate studies.

43. As we support our graduate teachers to pursue postgraduate studies, we remain committed to supporting our non-graduate officers to upgrade themselves academically. Today, teachers who have successfully completed one of the Ministrys approved degree courses can be considered for emplacement on the graduate salary scale if they meet the criteria for emplacement. We will now expand the list of undergraduate degrees that can be considered for emplacement on the graduate salary scale to include all current part-time on-campus undergraduate degrees offered by the National University of Singapore, the Nanyang Technological University and the SIM University.

Enhancements to the Senior Specialists Track

44. We made several enhancements to the teaching and leadership tracks in the 2006 GROW package. We want to now focus our efforts on the Senior Specialist (SST) track to ensure that we develop individuals with deep knowledge and expertise within MOE. Our SSTs play an important role in supporting our teachers and school leaders with their deep knowledge and skills in areas like curriculum

and instructional design, educational psychology, educational testing, measurement and research. More importantly, our SSTs bring the leading research in the field to bear on our education policies and school practices. This nexus of cutting-edge research and clear policies will keep us on the global high-performing track, always innovating and thinking about how best to do things even better.

45. Let me cite three examples of the value our SSTs bring to Singapore education. Dr Kho Teck Hong is a Level 3 Principal Curriculum Specialist in Mathematics. He can be credited for putting Singapore's mathematics education on the world map. Dr Kho developed the Model Method for mathematics problem solving and led the Primary Mathematics project team in developing high quality teaching materials and textbooks. The Singapore Model Method is highly regarded around the world and the textbooks produced by the team continue to make inroads overseas.

46. Dr Sharifah Mariam Aljunied is a Level 2 Senior Educational Psychologist who has made significant contributions to raising the quality of education for children with special needs. She developed the Theory of Mind Battery Test that has enabled educational psychologists to diagnose more accurately children with autism in mainstream schools. She was also involved in the formulation of MOE's initiatives to raise the quality of education for children with disabilities.

47. Ms Thoo Mei Lan is a Level 2 Senior Reading Specialist and a former Principal of Hillgrove Secondary School. Mei Lan decided to switch to the specialist track after seeing many Secondary 1 pupils not being able to read and write good English. Mei Lan now oversees the Learning Support Programme (LSP) for Primary 1 and 2 pupils with weak oral English language and literacy skills. She led a 2-year research study that piloted an enhanced LSP. The study found that there was a 25% increase in the number of LSP pupils achieving reading age and passing their English exams. The enhanced LSP has since been rolled out to all primary schools this year.

48. We need to continue attracting and developing the best officers for the SST track. Ho Peng led a cross-divisional SST Review Committee this year, to study how we can better identify, develop, renew, deploy and manage the careers of our SSTs. Her committee consulted extensively with SSTs and also learnt how leading private sector organisations developed and managed their specialists. We have accepted the committee's comprehensive set of recommendations. Let me briefly share some of the key changes that we will be making.

49. First, we want to grow the SST family to meet the greater demands of our evolving educational landscape. We need more SSTs to develop robust, leading edge educational research that can help schools cater to the learning needs of each child while stretching each child's potential at the same time. We will therefore provide more opportunities for good teachers to become SSTs by increasing the number of SST posts in MOE from the current 168 to 310.

50. Second, we will re-designate our SSTs to better recognise their professional status. We also envisage a Chief Specialist, a new SST Level 5 position, who will lead the SST family to greater excellence.

51. Third, we will provide more support for SSTs to engage in research work. \$1.5 million will be set aside annually as research funding, which can be used to employ research assistants and purchase of materials. We will also allow SSTs to devote 20% of their time to research-related work, such as presentation of papers and interacting with the best researchers at international conferences, attachments to clusters to conduct school-based action research and completion of Doctoral research.

52. Fourth, to build capacity within the SST track, we will introduce a Milestone Training Programme for SSTs who demonstrate the potential to assume at least an SST Level 3 position. We will also facilitate more SSTs to undertake research stints at NIE to foster a closer link between NIE, MOE HQ and schools.

Enhancing Work-Life Harmony

53. I have outlined a number of initiatives to enhance the quality of our Education Service. These initiatives will, of course, not be effective without a conducive and nurturing working environment in every school. We have to give more importance to programmes like OLive (Opportunities for Lives to Ignited with Vitality and Exuberance) to help teachers achieve better work-life harmony. There is room for us to do more.

54. We will enhance our no-pay leave policies to make it easier for officers to look after their young children and to accompany their spouse overseas. Besides allowing both male and female officers to

apply for no-pay childcare leave, we will also raise the qualifying age limit from the child's 3rd birthday to the 4th birthday. We will also allow teachers to take up to 4 years of no-pay leave to accompany their spouse overseas for work or studies, an increase from the current cap of 3 years.

55. We recognise that teachers who have been away on no-pay leave can find it challenging to keep up with the rapid changes in our schools. To ease their transition back into the school environment, we will provide a refresher course to all teachers who return to work after two or more years of no-pay leave.

56. Next, we will allow more officers to take up the Part-Time Teaching Scheme (PTTS). The PTTS is currently open to classroom teachers with children under 12 years and those aged 55 years or above. From next year onwards, key personnel in schools - Heads of Department, Subject Heads, Level Heads and Senior Teachers - can also qualify for the PTTS.

57. We have been giving schools top-ups to their manpower grants so that they can engage additional resources to cover the unfilled portions of their posts held by part-time teachers. With the expansion of the PTTS, we will provide more support to schools by allocating up to 5 more teacher posts to each school cluster. Schools can make use of these additional teacher posts in addition to the manpower grant top-ups that they currently receive. In total, each cluster will receive up to 10 more teacher posts to better support schools with teachers pursuing full-time postgraduate studies or on part-time teaching.

Pilot Re-employment Programme

58. A high-performing system also values the experience of its experienced officers. Many of our retired teachers on the Adjunct Teachers (AJT) Programme continue to pass on valuable know how and tacit knowledge to younger teachers. One such example is Mdm Tan Lee Cheng from Temasek Secondary School who has been teaching for 43 years. She mentors younger Chinese Language teachers and contributes to the East Zone Centre of Excellence for Chinese Language, while covering administrative duties as Head of Department for Mother Tongue Languages. We also continue to tap on the experience of retired Principals for the selection of new teachers and various projects.

59. In line with the Government's move to introduce legislation in 2012 to facilitate re-employment of older workers beyond the retirement age of 62 years to 65 years in the first instance, MOE will pilot a re-employment programme over the next two years. We will offer all Education Officers above 62 years, who are physically fit and have good performance, re-employment as contract adjunct teachers up to the age of 65 from June 2008.

60. Besides employment as adjunct teachers, key personnel in schools and officers holding equivalent positions in HQ may also be offered to continue in their existing jobs, depending on the needs of their schools and HQ units. In addition, we will continue to offer retiring school leaders and senior HQ officers work on a project or contract basis.

61. Finally, we will put in place a systematic process under the OLIVE Platinum programme to help our teachers plan early for their retirement. This programme will provide pre-retirement seminars and advice, a comprehensive listing of jobs and assignments for officers to consider, and help facilitate their move into new jobs where possible. It will be driven by Mrs Angela Ow, who is herself retiring in a few days time and will undertake this task amongst several others at MOE HQ and NIE. Angela will be a role model for OLIVE Platinum.

62. We will learn useful lessons from this 2-year pilot and review the re-employment framework for Education Officers in 2010 and make any adjustments if necessary. This will allow us to roll out the final plan, in tandem with the implementation of the Civil Service-wide re-employment in 2010.

In Summary

63. Our teachers are simply the most important asset we have. Their commitment to excellence, their caring eye and the passion they put into nurturing their students are what allows us to provide the best possible education to every young Singaporean. The GROW 2.0 Package affirms the good work of our teachers and our commitment to building a first class teaching service. MOE will commit an additional \$380 million a year to implement this package of initiatives.

Shared Values at the Core of School Leadership

64. Even as we focus our efforts on raising the quality of the Education Service, we must continue to identify and develop good Principals to steer our schools in the evolving education landscape. The 3-L Framework – Lead, Learn and Leverage – is a useful model to guide our leadership development efforts. As leaders in education, our Principals must lead the way in continual learning. Mrs Rathi Parimalan, Principal of Bendemeer Secondary, is a good example of how Education Officers can extend their learning beyond the realm of education. I am pleased that Rathi will be the first Education Officer to pursue a Masters degree in Public Management at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. Our Principals also need to leverage on the many tools like the GROW 2.0 package to lead their teachers.

65. To be effective school leaders, we have entrusted our Principals with considerable autonomy to lead schools with their own unique strengths and achievements. But as the educational landscape becomes increasingly diverse, greater demands will be placed on Principals. To meet this challenge, our Principals must be anchored on a shared set of leadership values.

66. It is for this reason that the next phase of school leadership development will focus on “heartware” by strengthening the values within the fraternity of Principals. To support this development of values-based leadership, I am pleased to launch the “Philosophy for Educational Leadership in Singapore” document. Entitled “Anchored in Values and Purpose”, this Philosophy document is the result of extensive consultation with Principals, senior officers and academics, as well as research into international and local best practices.

67. The Philosophy represents the shared values and principles of our school leaders. You will find this philosophy to be a familiar one, as many of our school leaders already embody its values and principles.

68. Our retiring Principals have set good examples of leaders putting these values and principles into practice. Mrs Lu Kheng Lui, who will be retiring after 41 years of service and after 7 years as Principal of Loyang Secondary, stands out as a leader driven by the belief that her students must have a well rounded education. Today, her school is known for nurturing students who are confident, creative and effective communicators.

69. We also want school leaders that inspire others towards a shared vision. Mrs Ng-Gan Lay Choo, another retiring Principal who has spent her past 5 years as Principal of Yishun Junior College (YJC), is a fine example of this. She led a team that was focused on a common objective - ensuring quality learning and development for all YJC-ians. Under her leadership, YJC has 4 years of academic value-added achievements and produces students with strength of character.

70. The Philosophy also calls for our schools leaders to be committed to growing others in their fraternity. We can learn much from Principals like Mrs Lim Chye Tin, the retiring Principal of St Andrews Junior College after 6 years at the helm, who is mentoring a first year Principal, Ms Ranjit Kaur Dhaliwal, Principal of Fuchun Secondary.

Strengthening the Fraternity of Principals

71. Much of what good Principals know and practise is tacit, from years of doing the job and learning from each experience. Cognitive scientists call this a recognitional model of proficiency, where experts can draw from previous experiences to recognise possible actions to take in a given situation. Our successful Principals have relied on not gut feel alone, and certainly not on book knowledge, but also a set of principles that have been developed and learned through collective experience.

72. New Principals, no matter how well educated and how well trained during the Leaders in Education Programme (LEP), will rarely achieve the same instinctive feel for doing their jobs as more experienced Principals. But we can certainly shorten the runway and help them take flight with confidence as leaders in education.

73. We can do so by leveraging on the tacit knowledge and expertise of our school leaders and building communities of practice that encourage transfer of this knowledge. This too is our strength in Singapore - the way we inject new leaders with fresh approaches into schools, help them learn from those with experience, get ideas flowing in both directions as established leaders themselves gain from mentoring new leaders, and raise the quality of school leadership across the system as we do so.

74. The mentoring scheme for newly-appointed Principals which was launched last year by the Academy of Principal (APS) and MOE is serving this purpose well. Drawing from our rich pool of highly experienced Principals as mentors, this scheme has provided 11 new Principals with a useful resource

and sounding board as they embark on their own journey of school leadership.

75. Through this mentoring scheme, first-year Principal Mr Martin Tan of Anderson Primary has learnt the power of asking good questions, which he has applied in developing his own staff. In turn, I understand Martins mentor, Mr Lak Pati Singh of St Patricks School, plans to apply his mentoring skills to his management team. Another first-year Principal, Mr Koh Chong Mong of Kent Ridge Secondary, said this of his mentoring experience with Mrs Yeo Chin Nam of Henderson Secondary School: "my mentors expertise and experience plus her generosity in sharing are factors that allowed me to gain the tacit knowledge that, otherwise, would not be accessible."

76. The APS is well positioned to facilitate this transfer of values and tacit knowledge among our Principals. Going forward, APS will continue to develop itself as a high level resource for Principals and schools. It will expand its range of seminars and talks, and offer coaching and consultancy services for Principals. APS will also appoint an Academy Dean to oversee the leadership development needs of Principals.

77. MOE will continue to support APS with enhanced funding and specialised expertise. This will enable APS to conduct useful programmes that meet the needs of our Principals. I encourage our school leaders to join APS and be part of this professional fraternity that supports the quality work being carried out in schools.

The Human Element

78. We should never lose sight of the fact that Education is a people business. We can adopt management practices to good effect. But more importantly, we need to get down to the human element. How do our teachers motivate our learners, infect them with their own passion and love for a subject, a sport or an art form? How do our school leaders support our teachers and help them see the potential in each child and to encourage young people struggling to test boundaries. How do we encourage others in the team to work hard but also take breaks, refresh themselves and keep a balance in their lives? How do we come together as a fraternity to help one another grow, to share in triumphs and help each other get over the inevitable setbacks?

79. GROW and GROW 2.0 will provide some of the answers, but not all. In the end, we need each individual in the Education Service to look within himself or herself, to find the reason for taking on the role of an educator.

80. I am confident that we have the basics in place, and the right people in position to take our schools and education system forward for many years to come. Together, we will continue on this journey of excellence and create an even brighter future for Singapore.

¹In the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2003, our 4th and 8th graders (equivalent to Primary 4 and Secondary 2) were ranked first in Science and Mathematics among 49 countries.