

**SPEECH BY MR. BAEY YAM KENG, SENIOR
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF CULTURE,
COMMUNITY AND YOUTH & MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT
AT THE SCHOOL OF THE ARTS AWARDS DAY
ON 16 MAY 2019**

Mrs Mary Seah
Principal, School of the Arts, SOTA

Chairman and Board Members of SOTA

Teachers and staff

Parents and students

Distinguished guests

1. A good afternoon to you all. I am very happy to join you this afternoon to celebrate the achievements of all awardees and graduates. You have made us all very proud with your accomplishments! Special thanks to all parents who have been so supportive of your child's education in SOTA, as well as the Principal, staff and partners of SOTA, for your dedication and passion in nurturing future creative leaders of our nation. Thank you very much!

SOTA's Review Recommendations & Progress

2. Last year, we celebrated SOTA's 10th anniversary. The 10-year Review resulted in recommendations to strengthen SOTA's

commitment to nurture future-ready citizens. Some of the key recommendations include continued excellence in the arts and academics; providing access and opportunities for arts education; and creating deeper and more sustained partnerships with the community.

Achieving Artistic Excellence that Inspires

3. Guided by its refreshed vision and mission, SOTA is providing students with a space in which ideas are encouraged, where different viewpoints are expressed, and experimentation is considered part of the learning process. This had made a positive impact on cohorts of SOTA students, who continue to create and inspire others even after graduation.

4. SOTA graduates are contributing in many ways to Singapore, not least by starting to make their mark on the arts scene. For example, SOTA graduates Audrey Teong, Alysha Chandra and Shirin Keshvani not only directed and wrote, but also performed in the play “(Singapore) Girls”, as part of The Substation’s theatrical programme in October last year. Produced by veteran actress Tan Kheng Hua, the programme also saw SOTA graduates Andre Chong and Lim Zeharn directing the finale film. I hope that these achievements of your seniors will motivate you to strive for excellence in all that you do.

Creating Access for Arts Education and Connecting with the Community

5. Besides being creative and artistic learners, SOTA graduates are also making a positive impact on communities in Singapore. I am heartened to learn that the school's community service programmes have encouraged students to use their artistic talents and apply their school learning in service of the wider community.

6. Take for example, Allison Tan, this year's Valedictorian and Dance alumna. Allison created "guiDance" (spelt with a capital D for "Dance"), a programme which provided opportunities for children from low-income families to learn different genres of dance. Allison and her Dance peers conducted weekly dance lessons for children with Beyond Social Services and have made a positive impact on the lives of these kids.

7. SOTA has increased the number of Arts Development Award (ADA) recipients from 23 to 51 students this year. This award provides funding to artistically talented primary 4 to 6 students from low-income families to participate in visual arts, theatre and dance enrichment programmes. I am happy to know that the initiative has been successful in providing opportunities

for exposure to arts education. The older SOTA student mentors will also inspire recipients to pursue their interests in the arts.

8. SOTA has also been reaching out to primary schools through programmes such as competitions and interactive showcases. In its second edition this year, the SOTA Primary 6 Art Competition for example, reached out to more than 140 primary schools and received over 600 entries this year. The top 50 finalists were invited to attend an arts workshop by SOTA Visual Arts teachers.

9. More recently, SOTA partnered with the National Institute of Education to restage 'Smartbutt', an interactive play written by award-winning playwright Jean Tay. This initiative is part of SOTA's enhanced outreach efforts to make arts more accessible to primary school students, and a broader vision for SOTA students to learn about the elements of staging a performance for young audience. Performed by the Year 6 theatre students and alumni at the Nanyang Playhouse, the shows were a huge success, attended by more than 250 students from 19 primary schools!

10. These are all meaningful efforts to reach out to the community and to make the arts more accessible to all. Such initiatives add value to the students' education beyond school, and help our young generation grow as future leaders.

Meaningful Partnerships That Provide Authentic Learning Opportunities

11. SOTA has been actively expanding partnerships with local arts groups and institutions to provide more authentic learning opportunities for students. SOTA's partnership with Checkpoint Theatre, for example, enables students to learn from accomplished arts practitioners, as well as understand the workings of the industry. Under the two-year partnership, SOTA students will have the opportunity to participate in an internship programme with the company. A few of them will also be cast in the production together with professional actors. This is definitely a wonderful learning opportunity!

12. In another collaboration with National Archives of Singapore on the Community Oral History Project, senior citizens share their life stories with a group of SOTA Visual Arts and Theatre students. This project, which culminates in the creation of memory boxes and a theatre performance, promotes inter-generation bonding and appreciation for our shared heritage. I wish them success in their final showcase taking place at the International Council on Archives International Symposium next month.

Conclusion

13. SOTA's good work to "nurture creative citizens for the future" requires support from many partners. I would like to express my appreciation, our appreciation, to the school's sponsors and supporters, in particular, to the Ngee Ann Kongsi and Temasek Foundation for their generosity in funding scholarships and bursaries for SOTA students.

14. Combined with the passion and dedication from its faculty and management, commitment from students and parents, and continued support from the government, SOTA is well-placed to achieve its vision and mission, and develop our next generation of artistic and creative learners.

15. In closing, I would like to share a quote by famous French author, Remy de Gourmont - "Art is the flower of life and, as seed, it gives back life". So, like Art, your time in SOTA has given you ample opportunities to hone your artistic talents, and develop into caring and all-rounded individuals. It is therefore my hope, our hope, that you will give back to the society in the years ahead. Congratulations to you once again, I wish all of you the very best in your future endeavours!

Thank you.