

# CONTACT

The Teachers' Digest

## GREAT MINDS THINK TOGETHER

Schools swap pointers on collaboration.

## TEAMING UP TO BEAT THE ODDS

Allied Educators strive to make a difference.

## 8 GREAT WAYS TO SPEND THE JUNE HOLIDAYS

Plan for a great break with these ideas.

# The perks of partnership

*How do teachers and stakeholders make schools more effective?*

Teacher **Esther Kuek** shares plans and ideas.

Parent **Balaji Kuppa** organises events with the school.



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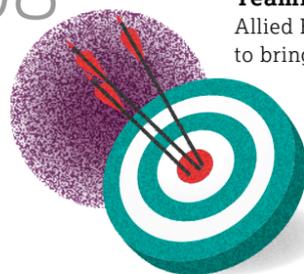
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## CONTACT

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

# THIS ISSUE...

As we pick out the best collaboration examples from schools across Singapore, we realise why "Together, Everyone Achieves More" is a phrase commonly used in team-building exercises.

Whether it's sharing ideas with other teachers ("Great minds think together"), or collaborating with industry and community partners ("Working hand in hand for good"), forming a productive partnership can happen in creative ways. Once you have a good working relationship in place, be mindful not to sabotage it. Check out "How to botch a partnership" for tips to avoid becoming a lousy collaborator.

And if you need advice on keeping your students' mums and dads on your side, you'll find our FYI guide "Win 'em over" useful. Also, don't miss a thought-provoking piece from Mr Lim Cheng Yong from Serangoon Junior College, who debunks myths about Education and Career Guidance in our "Heart to Heart" column.



We, too, look at other ministry staff who are important partners in education. In "Teaming up to beat the odds", passionate Allied Educators share how they work with teachers to spot and help students in need.

On a lighter note, plan for a smashing June break with the great ideas in our Lifestyle spread.

Happy reading!

## The *Contact* Team

## Readers' comments

What do you think of *Contact*? Share your thoughts at [contact\\_online@moe.edu.sg](mailto:contact_online@moe.edu.sg)  
Get the soft copy of the magazine at [www.moe.gov.sg/teachers-digest](http://www.moe.gov.sg/teachers-digest)



Love it's refreshing, new look! My heartiest congratulations to your team! Appreciate all your hard labour of love for education.

Mdm Victoria Loy  
Master Teacher (Art)  
Singapore Teachers  
Academy for the aRts

I just had a look at the article on the four generation teachers ("Sparking a positive chain reaction" in January), and I thought of the Teachers' Day celebrations at the Edutorium last year. It brought happy memories.

Mrs Glory Edwin Barnabas  
Teacher  
Springfield Secondary School

The layout of *Contact* is really impressive. Many of my colleagues read the articles in it faithfully.

Ms Pamela Kiew  
HOD (EL)  
Bukit View Primary School

*Contact* has indeed been evolving over the years from 'good' to 'great'! The angle on people just gets stronger and richer, and this is so right as the core of education is people-centric.

Mrs Sharon Siew  
Principal  
Riverside Primary School

Thank you very much for the fabulous calendar. My colleagues and I are going 'gaga' over them. Congratulations to the artwork team.

Mr Surendran Sathiamurthi  
Teacher  
Queenstown Primary School

I always look forward to reading *Contact*. It's a total delight from beginning to end. The revamped layout is refreshing and fabulous. The content is well thought out, relevant and useful to teachers.

Mr Daryl Koh  
Assistant Director  
Standards and Research Branch,  
Academy of Singapore Teachers

I am writing to thank you and your colleagues for the lovely *Contact* calendar. The look is fun and refreshing, and the monthly haiku serves as a good reminder.

Mdm Jennifer Tan Siew Woon  
Principal  
Fuhua Secondary School



Teachers in the E6 Cluster Partnership Support Group at a sharing session: (from left) Mr Mohammad Noh Bin Jaffri, Mr Ow Kok Meng, Ms Esther Kuek, Mdm Rosina Bakam and Mdm Siti Mariam Hashim.

# Great minds think together

Finding ways to engage parents and other stakeholders doesn't have to be a struggle when educators can exchange pointers with one another.

**Mr Ow Kok Meng** had been exploring ways to better engage parents in Pasir Ris Secondary School's outreach efforts since 2012. A year later, Mr Ow, Head Of Department for Special Projects, found his answer during the first E6 Cluster Partnership Support Group meeting.

At the meeting, he heard an idea from Mr Mohammad Noh Bin Jaffri, Subject Head for VIA (Values In Action) and Partnership at St Hilda's Primary School. Mr Noh shared that his school had started a Parent Class Representative (PCR) initiative to great success. Launched in 2009, each PCR would communicate with other parents in the class about the school's happenings.

Inspired, Mr Ow and his colleagues introduced the idea in Pasir Ris Secondary and each class had a representative selected from the school's existing Parent Support Group (PSG). The reps

would surface concerns and questions from the parents in their class to the relevant school staff through a Whatsapp chat group. The school staff would then provide the clarification and information needed.

Mdm Siti Mariam Hashim, Senior Teacher for Student Wellness at Pasir Ris Secondary, says that she has also seen more parents wanting to volunteer as PCRs.

## STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

It is crucial to have ideas that improve partnership because schools do not work in silos. "They need to collaborate with their stakeholders, namely parents and the community, for the benefit of their students," says Mrs Alice Tan, former Superintendent of the E6 cluster.

Mrs Tan, now retired from the Education Service, shares that the support group was formed in 2012. The cluster's school leaders agreed to create a common platform for teachers to exchange pointers on strengthening ties with parents and the community.

The E6 support group learns together, to better engage partners and improve learning for students. "The schools with more experience would share [how they engage parents and other stakeholders], while those with less experience [would] ask good questions," says Ms Esther Kuek, team leader of the group.

Consisting of educators heading partnership efforts in the cluster of 13 schools, the group would meet thrice a year for about two hours each time. At the first meeting in 2013, Ms Kuek was surprised to find fewer educators than expected in attendance. However, Ms Veronica Tay, advisor to the group and also the Principal of Tampines Primary, assured her that people would come for the meetings when they were ready to contribute.

Now, the teachers would try their best to attend the sharing sessions and if they could not make it, they would send their colleagues in their place, says Ms Kuek. This is because teachers see the value of such collaboration.

Mr Noh from St Hilda's Primary finds each meeting "very exciting". "Within our own school, we're constrained by our mindset. Getting together with other schools to discuss about partnership opens up new avenues for new ideas."

As each school has requirements and environments unique to themselves, educators need to adapt ideas they hear during the meetings to fit their own needs. An idea that may succeed in a particular school may not work in another, Ms Kuek says.

But the good thing about being part of the group is that a school does not have to "start from zero", says Pasir Ris Secondary's Mr Ow.

Mdm Rosina Bakam from East View Secondary School, too, has gained from these meet-ups. Taking a leaf out of Tampines Primary's book, the Senior Teacher for Tamil Language has started organising parent-child bonding sessions, such as inviting parents to play games with their children during Sports Day.



## NEVER SHY AWAY FROM CHALLENGES

The group encourages its members to share obstacles they face when executing ideas, says Ms Kuek. Speaking up invites others to share ideas on how to overcome challenges. Teachers can also seek help from each other outside of the meetings if they need further help.

Ms Kuek acknowledges that at times, teachers may find it challenging to devote more time to contribute in partnership programmes when they are already occupied with classroom duties. She herself has to juggle a few hats. As team leader of the group, she schedules and facilitates the meetings. She's also leading partnership efforts at Tampines Primary and teaching her Primary 3 Science, English and Social Studies classes.

But she's not complaining. "Although partnership work is time-consuming, the benefits reaped are plentiful and rewarding." For instance, committed PSG members have provided much needed support to teachers in recess programmes. And collaboration with external agencies, such as a healthy eating initiative with the Health Promotion Board, has enriched students' learning experiences, she says.

In time, Ms Kuek hopes that every member of the support group would be able to guide schools in other clusters in partnership. That may become a reality soon, as more teachers like Mdm Rosina see the perks of working with stakeholders.

"I strongly believe that [the] school alone will not be able to provide the best learning opportunities for our students," she says. "Hence, it is very important for educators to make time to learn from [the] partnership support group the best ways to engage our partners." 

The E6 support group learns together, to better engage partners and improve learning for students.

# Working hand in hand for good

Schools offer students real-life learning opportunities through their collaboration with community and industry partners.

About four years ago, when Mr Bernard Chew, Principal of Bowen Secondary School, visited his son with autism at his special needs school then, he saw that the children there were all having co-curricular activities (CCAs). Just like the students under his care at Bowen.

He decided there was an opportunity here to bring together two very different groups of students. His students from a mainstream secondary school could play 'buddies' with the special needs children from the Asian Women's Welfare Association (AWWA) School. And both could learn from each other.

Mr Chew felt that it was critical for his Bowen students to learn empathy by having honest, sustained and "unfiltered" interactions with people from all walks of life.

The Principal of AWWA School, Mrs Ruby Seah, also saw how the Bowen students would learn to communicate with the special needs children. Her students too would benefit from relating with their Bowen friends.

The kinks in the details were ironed out quickly and the project was incorporated into "ChANgemakers", Bowen Secondary's Learning for Life Programme (LLP).

Like Bowen, many secondary schools have started to develop their own LLP programmes since 2013. By 2017, all schools are expected to have their own unique programmes to

expose students to real life experiences that nurture their character and values. The LLP also aims to bolster the students' people and communication skills as well as leadership and teamwork.

Each school can choose a LLP in areas ranging from community work and sports, to performing and visual arts. And most are based on existing niche programmes.

## BOWEN SECONDARY: BUILDING BUDDY NETWORKS

In Bowen's case, the LLP takes the form of Community Youth Leadership. To accommodate Bowen's timetable, the AWWA School moved its CCAs to Thursday afternoons, when the Bowen students would have their Character and Citizenship Education lessons.

AWWA School staff also briefed Bowen students on the disabilities they would come across and taught them ways to interact with the special needs children. For instance, students with autism tended to cup their ears on hearing loud noises as they were very sensitive to noise. In such cases, Bowen students could bring them to somewhere quieter.

"The coordination [for the project] was not that difficult, once we both saw this as a win-win situation," says Mr Chew.



Photo from East View Secondary School

- 01 A Bowen student shares a happy moment with her AWWA buddy.
- 02 Mr Bernard Chew wants to see his students become regular volunteers for meaningful causes.
- 03 Students at Project Life, a healthcare carnival.

Bowen Secondary School has since replicated the LLP at Bright Vision Hospital, Society for the Physically Disabled and MINDS (Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore) to involve all of its Secondary 2 students. They serve for eight consecutive weeks at these places.

Many of the students have even committed to volunteering regularly with one of these organisations at their own initiative.

## EAST VIEW SECONDARY: EAGER TO SERVE

Similarly, East View Secondary School has enjoyed a win-win partnership with community partners in its LLP.

One of them is Tampines North Community Club (CC), the CC nearest to the school.

Ms Reenu Motilal, the school's Subject Head for Values In Action, contacted the CC three years ago to discuss a collaboration and found some meaningful projects they could work on together.

Essentially, Ms Reenu would make an open call for student volunteers for programmes where the CC needed help. The students would help out at events like food donation drives or home repainting services about four times a year and 70-100 students would sign up each time as "Good Samaritans" of the school's LLP.

There is a lot of give and take. The CC is mindful to avoid the examination period when it plans its activities. And the teachers and students are ready to volunteer even on weekends, where the volunteer crunch tends to be.

Last year, the East View Secondary students went beyond mere participation: they took the lead and within nine months, organised a community healthcare carnival with the CC called Project Life.

The CC provided the venue, funding and advice in event planning, but each Secondary 2 class ran a booth to educate residents on critical illnesses such as stroke and diabetes.

Ms Reenu hopes that more of her young charges will pick up such organising skills. She plans to engage the CC's Youth Executive

Committee to train the school's student leaders in this area.

She has also begun developing leadership skills in students by giving them larger roles to play in the LLP's activities; for instance, getting them to design lesson plans for the elderly on using Microsoft Excel and Facebook applications.

### BEDOK TOWN SECONDARY: NO FLIGHT OF FANCY

Some schools are also collaborating closely with industry partners to teach lessons that apply to the real world. These initiatives fall under the Applied Learning Programme (ALP) and are about developing fun, creative and engaging ways to help students to solve complex, real life problems in their field of interest.

Every secondary school will have the ALP in two years' time, and each school can select a programme that best caters to their students' strengths, needs and interests.

As part of its ALP, Bedok Town Secondary has been working with STEM Inc – a new unit under the Science Centre Singapore – since January last year to plan lessons and industrial visits for its Aeronautics ALP.

As part of the partnership, STEM Inc sent a specialist to work with Bedok Town's teachers on customising a lesson package and sourcing for teaching materials for students.

Now, all the school's Secondary 1 and 2 students get to study the STEM-in-Aeronautics (SiA) Modules. They learn fundamental Aeronautics theories and apply concepts in Science, Mathematics and Design and Technology, by designing, building and flying their own planes. The students are guided by two teachers and a STEM Educator.

The teachers have noticed that their students are better able to focus in SiA classes and they work hard to get their model airplane to land properly for their project, says Mrs Wong Puay Kheng, Vice-principal of Bedok Town Secondary.

Students enjoy the learning process so much that some have decided to pursue their interest in aviation. Eleven students have joined the school's Aeronautics and Robotics Club, says Mrs Wong.

### REFINING PLANS, RESOLVING DIFFERENCES

The schools have gleaned invaluable lessons in the process of forging collaborations.

Mrs Wong says it's important for schools to constantly communicate with their partners when designing programmes suitable for students.

Case in point: the first lesson package that STEM Inc had prepared for the school was too difficult for students. It took months of going back and forth between the STEM Inc's staff member and Bedok Town's teachers before they could finalise the modules.

**In the process of working with industry partners, teachers have to be creative in overcoming challenges as well.**



Photo from Bedok Town Secondary School

Now, the teachers and the STEM Educator meet weekly to review the SiA lessons. Working closely with STEM Inc has helped Mr Desmond Tan, Head of Department, Mathematics, in his professional growth.

"I've learnt how Mathematics and Physics concepts are used in aeronautical applications, and this has allowed me to better guide students to relate concepts to real-life applications," he says.

Bowen Secondary's Mr Chew, too, stresses the need to build understanding between parties.

A staff at Bright Vision Hospital had initially told Bowen students not to ask the elderly patients personal questions during their visit. She was afraid the students would "open wounds they wouldn't know how to close", explains Mr Chew.

To allay the hospital's concern, Mr Chew asked its liaison personnel out for breakfast. There, he explained the need for authentic interaction between his students and the elderly patients, so the teenagers could learn to empathise better with others. He hoped the students would find the experience so meaningful that they would become lifelong volunteers.

This cleared the air and by the next session the students were able to talk about personal matters with the patients. Before the visit, Bowen Secondary teachers had also briefed the students on engaging the patients sensitively. For example, if a patient responded emotionally after being asked a personal question, students would change the topic to something less sensitive.

### SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES

At Bedok Town Secondary, it was frustrating for Mrs Wong initially when her requests to take her students on an industrial visit were rejected by aviation companies.

Finally, through a networking session organised by STEM Inc last year, the school met the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS). On learning that the CAAS organises student visits to aviation organisations, the school quickly grabbed the chance to collaborate with it. As a result, it was able

to bring its Secondary 3 students to tour jet engine manufacturer GE Aviation last year.

In the process of working with industry partners, teachers have to be creative in overcoming challenges as well.

"It can be hard to bring students to these premises [of aviation companies] because of security protocols," Mrs Wong says. "But we've learnt that if we can't bring our students there, we can invite the companies over to the school instead."

And that was what Bedok Town Secondary did. In March this year, the CAAS brought its mobile bus to the school to create interest in the aviation field.

This year, the school is securing job shadowing opportunities in aviation companies for its Secondary 3 Express students. It also wants to organise overseas industrial visits for them to enhance their portfolios. This will be useful should they wish to pursue Aeronautics courses in post-secondary institutions.

Ultimately, partnerships have to benefit both sides in order to succeed.

Mr Chew shares that the students from Bowen Secondary and AWWA School greet and chat with each other even outside school, as they are sited in the same vicinity. Mrs Seah adds that AWWA students "always look forward to [Bowen students'] presence especially during CCA days."

Mr Chew says: "When our partners see students making an impact, they will want to commit the time and effort to help us with our programmes too." 



Photo from East View Secondary School

- 04 An East View Secondary School student interacts with an elderly resident at a carnival.
- 05 Students from Bedok Town Secondary design their own model planes during a SiA lesson.
- 06 A Secondary 3 student from Bedok Town Secondary in a simulator.

05

04



Photo from Bedok Town Secondary School

06



**SLEEP AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE**

You may gain points with parents and supervisors when they know you've been working late on designing solid lesson plans or marking assignments. But studies have shown that a lack of sleep over the long term affects one's ability to retain memory, think creatively and keep negative emotions in check. Sounds familiar? Try hitting the sack earlier.

[bit.ly/sleepmore1](http://bit.ly/sleepmore1), [bit.ly/sleepmore2](http://bit.ly/sleepmore2), [bit.ly/sleepmore3](http://bit.ly/sleepmore3)



**TAKE YOURSELF WAY TOO SERIOUSLY**

When conflict arises or problems appear, seeing the humour in the situation can defuse the tension. Optimistic people tend to come up with better ideas and solutions too. So the next time a project hits a roadblock, find something to laugh at while your team search for solutions together.

[bit.ly/laughatwork](http://bit.ly/laughatwork)

# How to botch a partnership

Contact takes a tongue-in-cheek look at different ways to sabotage a collaboration. Try them at your own risk!

**BE OVERLY PROFESSIONAL**

It's important to get the job done, but there's no need to be cold about it. Send a quick message to ask about a partner's wellbeing when you know he's ill, or use smiley faces in your emails to parents. These seemingly small but friendly gestures can go a long way in building strong working relationships.

[bit.ly/nicegestures](http://bit.ly/nicegestures)



**BE AFRAID TO ROCK THE BOAT**

If a work process has been plagued by problems for the longest time, or resources are being depleted without yielding any real benefit, it's time to flag the issues respectfully. If you feel bad about being a critic, just remember - you're a responsible team player who wants to make things better.

[bit.ly/rockboat1](http://bit.ly/rockboat1), [bit.ly/rockboat2](http://bit.ly/rockboat2)

**DEMAND PERFECTION**

Do you get very affected after receiving criticisms from a parent? Or feel discouraged when your new lesson plan didn't receive positive feedback? You may be a perfectionist. Studies have shown that perfectionism can lead to emotional distress, and even self-harm. Instead of gunning for perfection, aim to do better each time.

[bit.ly/badperfect1](http://bit.ly/badperfect1), [bit.ly/badperfect2](http://bit.ly/badperfect2)

THAT'S... NICE.



100%, ONLY 100%



## WIN 'EM OVER

The smart teacher's guide to working with parents.

### I'M ON YOUR SIDE

Don't wait till the next parent-teacher meeting to build rapport with the mums and dads of your charges. Start now with these tips.



**RECORD THE POSITIVES**

Keep track of what students have done right or improved in, and share their progress with parents. This way, they won't see communication from you as always negative. Also, if there's a problem in the future, they would be more willing to listen to you.



**ASK FOR INPUT**

Invite parents to share more about their child. This shows that you treat them as partners - always a good way to earn their trust. You could ask them to complete a fill-in-the-blank letter about their child's strengths, weaknesses, hobbies, and what they want their child to accomplish.



**KEEP COMMUNICATING**

Add brief comments about the students' progress on their homework for their parents' review. Try using a hardcopy diary to inform parents about their child's learning or behaviour daily (or weekly). Give parents space on the pages to respond to your updates, to encourage dialogue.



**SET BOUNDARIES**

Draw the line on being available 24/7 - even the most committed educators need a break! Let parents know the hours you are available. Avoid starting a group chat with them if you can't respond swiftly to the barrage of messages. You know how it is with these chats!

Read more: [bit.ly/engage\\_parents](http://bit.ly/engage_parents), [bit.ly/2waydiary](http://bit.ly/2waydiary)

“Nothing beats the feeling of a parent coming to you and saying he is glad that the child is in good hands. I keep parents informed of school/class events by sending them photos of their children in action through email and compiling the photos into a slideshow at the Meet-the-Parents session.”

- Jacob Tan, teacher, Commonwealth Secondary School



# THE ART OF TACT

Highlighting a student's issues to his mum or dad is often a delicate balancing act. Here are some ideas on how to be honest yet sensitive while doing so.

## #disclaimer

These suggestions are neither exhaustive nor compulsory. They're not one-size-fits-all solutions too. Apply them only if they are relevant to your students.

### SCENARIO 01

The disruptive student who doesn't pay attention during lessons.



Your child is very active in class and likes talking to his classmates. It would be very helpful for him to participate constructively in classroom discussions and learn to listen more.

### SCENARIO 02

The student who often gives excuses for why he has not been doing his homework.



Eh..... My pet dog chewed up my worksheets! #excuses



Hi Mr and Mrs Tan, I haven't received your child's assignments in a while. Could he be facing some difficulties? Is there anything I can help him with?

### SCENARIO 03

The student who is in a relationship with a schoolmate.



Your child seems a little distracted in class recently and has been seen spending a lot of time with another classmate. I'm not sure if you are aware of it?



Do you have more ideas on how you would handle other tricky situations? Share them with us at [contact\\_online@moe.edu.sg!](mailto:contact_online@moe.edu.sg)

## BRIDGING SCHOOLS AND HOMES

How educators from other countries engage parents

### EMPOWER THEM

Danish parents have a strong say in the school's aims and policy directions. For one, school governing boards consist mainly of parents and are always headed by one. An education act also guarantees parents the right to be updated on their child's academic, social and personal development at least twice a year.

[bit.ly/empowerparents](http://bit.ly/empowerparents)

### CONNECT OVER CAKE AND COFFEE

In Germany, parents can socialise with teachers or other mums and dads in "parent cafés". The relaxed and informal school-based sessions invite parents to participate beyond the traditional "parent chambers" or "advisory boards". Activities – typically held weekly or monthly – are customised to their needs and wants.

[bit.ly/parentcafe](http://bit.ly/parentcafe)



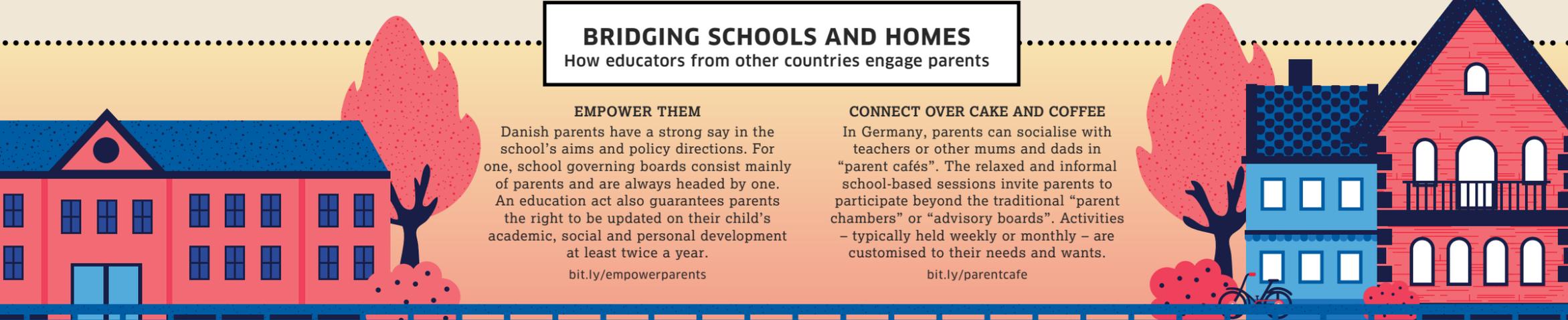
### DOs

- Be objective when updating parents about their children – stick to describing their behaviour.
- 21st Century Competencies? ALP? Explain teaching jargon and acronyms in simple English instead.
- Let parents know the best method and time to reach you should they have concerns.



### DON'Ts

- Make judgment calls about the student's attitude.
- Prescribe solutions unless the parent asks for help.
- Wait till a scheduled meeting to flag a problem the student has been having for a long time.



“Always remember that your student is not your child, but your duty of care towards him can help to steer him in the right direction.”

– Valerie Wang, teacher, Yishun Primary School



# MORE THAN WORDS

Nonverbal cues can be louder than what you say.  
Follow these pointers to boost your credibility in the eyes of others.

## YOUR VOICE



Speaking in a low pitch is a proven way to command more respect and appear composed. But don't overdo it or you may sound unnatural!



Talking with variation in pitch and volume makes the speaker seem more credible and intelligent.



Fast speakers are generally seen as more energetic, knowledgeable and convincing. Try this the next time you sense a parent doubting your opinion or ability!

Read more on voice: [bit.ly/lowpitch](http://bit.ly/lowpitch)

## YOUR BODY LANGUAGE



Moving a little closer to the person you're speaking to shows that you are highly engaged in the conversation.



Flash those pearly whites when appropriate to appear more welcoming, and acknowledge parents' comments with nods.



Look parents in the eye to build rapport. To appear friendly and open to feedback, relax your shoulders and hold your arms loosely.

Read more on body language: [bit.ly/ptc\\_tips](http://bit.ly/ptc_tips)

## YOUR ATTIRE

AVOID THAT leopard print top



Keep flashy clothing for your weekend pursuits. Stick with a professional outfit that you feel confident wearing.



Dark-coloured clothing can make you appear more professional. Or try green, which conveys approachability and dependability.



Red could be seen as hostile or aggressive, while yellow could make you look weak and unprofessional.

Read more on attire: [bit.ly/colour\\_psych](http://bit.ly/colour_psych)

# What's your stress buster?



★★ Best entry ★★

**Ms Siti Ramziyani Ramdzan**  
Teacher  
Bartley Secondary School

I dedicate Saturday afternoons to 'me' time. I plan what I want to do at the beginning of the week so that I will look forward to that activity. It provides motivation to get through the week. I catch up on my novels, hang out with friends over coffee or simply spend quality time at home with my loved ones. No work-related matters allowed!

**Ms Farizah Md Satar**  
Teacher  
St. Hilda's Secondary School

The pressure can be really overwhelming, especially when there is so much work due around the same time. I take my mind off work by watching YouTube videos or checking my Instagram account. Online 'window shopping' is a great stress reliever as well. I would go to a few websites and check out their new products. When I go home, I focus on my two very young daughters. We read books, sing nursery rhymes and play catch.

**Ms Tan Hui Xian**  
Teacher  
Kong Hwa School

Food usually brings comfort and alleviates some of the stress. At school, we share chocolates and home-made goodies, and even blend fruit smoothies for a healthier treat! Sometimes, we burn off those calories by jumping on the i-bounce (mini-trampoline). We also occasionally organise Zumba workouts to shake out all the stress and laugh our worries away.

## Next Issue

### BEST BOUNCE BACK MOMENT

Life's full of ups and downs, so it's important to stand up after we've stumbled. Share with us how you picked yourself up again after a setback!

Please send your submission to [contact\\_online@moe.edu.sg](mailto:contact_online@moe.edu.sg) by 4 May 2015. Submissions should be no more than 150 words, and these may be edited for length. Please include your name, designation, school and contact number. The best sharing will be published in the July 2015 issue.

# Teaming up to beat the odds

From counselling students to using creative learning activities, Allied Educators (AEDs) partner teachers to unlock the unique potential of each child.



**Mr Ganapathi Saravanakannan**  
Kent Ridge Secondary School

## STORY OF THEIR LIVES

For Mr Ganapathi Saravanakannan, or Mr Kannan as he is known in school, being a confidante and a trusted listening ear is all in a day's work.

Before he became an AED (Counselling) seven years ago, Mr Kannan was an engineer who volunteered at the Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home. It was there that he became more aware of the various social problems that youths faced and he wanted to help them through counselling. "Behind each of them is a story of resilience that deserves to be applauded," the 45-year-old says.

Once, there was a student who failed to come for class even after repeated phone calls from the teacher. On visiting the student's home, Mr Kannan discovered that he had been working part-time to provide for his family after his single mother got injured. Mr Kannan thus worked with the teachers and other volunteers to raise enough funds to help the boy return to school.

Mr Kannan is now Lead School Counsellor at Kent Ridge Secondary School. Apart from counselling at-risk students – and sometimes their parents – he mentors 60 counsellors from other schools in his cluster through monthly meetings.

At Kent Ridge Secondary, Mr Kannan works with the school leaders to plan and implement a school-wide counselling system that trains teachers to counsel students directly. He and other counsellors conduct workshops for teachers on topics such as strategies in supporting students with anxiety issues.

When teachers think a student needs help, they can approach Mr Kannan and share their observations, before coming up with an appropriate intervention.

Mr Kannan also catches up with teachers regularly to understand how they are doing and what support they may need. Everyone needs a listening ear, he says.

"We may inadvertently be drawn into the emotional battles that our students face, [so] it is important to look after ourselves."



**Mr Muhammad Dahlan**  
Endeavour Primary School

## ALL HANDS ON DECK

When teachers at Endeavour Primary School spot students who might have special educational needs, they will notify Mr Muhammad Dahlan, an AED for Learning and Behavioural Support. Mr Muhammad will then sit through lessons with these students to assess their needs.

Together with the teachers, the 32-year-old would design a customised intervention plan that caters to both the student and the teachers. For instance, to support students who find it difficult to pay attention in class, he usually suggests that teachers give them movement breaks by getting the class to clap a few times after they finish a certain number of questions. If teachers are uncomfortable with this, he offers alternatives like getting the students to erase the whiteboard.

Apart from helping the School-based Dyslexia Remediation Programme, he engages therapists to assist students with more specific disabilities, such as speech or motor-coordination challenges.

Mr Muhammad, who has been an AED for six years, ropes in other students, too, to help their counterparts in need. When a student with dyslexia suffered extremely low self-esteem due to her persistently lower grades, Mr Muhammad arranged for her classmates to spend time reading with her.

"Hopefully, when [the students] grow up, they will also be able to help future colleagues with similar difficulties," he says.

Mr Muhammad speaks from experience. While working in Starbucks years ago, he once supervised a barista who had dyslexia. Every day, Mr Muhammad patiently went through YouTube videos on making coffee and operating the coffee machine to coach his colleague.

"Once [my colleague] saw someone giving him a chance [to learn], he became highly driven and improved [his performance] tremendously," Mr Muhammad shares. That same colleague, who felt Mr Muhammad resembled an AED his younger brother with dyslexia had received help

from in school, later encouraged Mr Muhammad to become an AED too.

While he may not always see eye to eye with teachers and parents, Mr Muhammad views this as an opportunity to grow and partner with them to best support the students. "Ultimately, we work towards a common objective that puts the child's interest at heart," he says.



**Mrs Jeanette Wee**  
Anderson Primary School

## KNOW THY CHILD

As an AED for Teaching and Learning at Anderson Primary School, Mrs Jeanette Wee assists teachers in class by facilitating hands-on activities and smaller group tutorials for students who learn slower. Often, she comes up with creative ideas to reach out to

different children.

Mrs Wee, who is in her 40s, once had a student who struggled to keep up with his classmates in speech and writing. "After a casual chat, I learnt that his ambition was to be a fireman, so we started to build word webs out of terms associated with 'fire'. That got him interested in learning," she says.

In her six years as an AED, Mrs Wee has worked with teachers to identify and develop appropriate learning activities for students, including those with complex conditions like mild autism or selective mutism. They respond better to targeted guidance that suits their pace of learning, she adds.

To identify the best approach for each child, Mrs Wee builds rapport with them individually through "mini conferences" held twice every week in the morning before class. She also updates teachers regularly on each student's progress.

Caring for her active 10-year-old daughter had helped Mrs Wee discover her passion for helping children. Her experiences as a parent volunteer at her child's school have also enabled her to empathise with teachers and fellow parents in her role as AED.

She shares: "How I guide the children is [how] I hope my daughter would be taught." 📌

**"Ultimately, we work towards a common objective that puts the child's interest at heart."**

# Care for your students' future now



But first, let's set the record straight on what Education and Career Guidance (ECG) involves, says Mr Lim Cheng Yong, HOD of Character and Citizenship at Serangoon Junior College.

## DEAR COLLEAGUES,

**"We need to keep ourselves updated in these areas, so that we can better help them to make informed education and career choices."**

I once had a group of unmotivated, defiant repeat students infamously known as "Superheroes" in the school. I worked with them and one of the boys, John\*, did well enough to enrol in an IT course at a polytechnic. I was very happy that John was able to progress to a post-secondary educational institution. But my happiness didn't last long. When I met John at an MRT station recently, he told me he had dropped out of school to sell handphones because he didn't like what he was studying. My heart sank.

John had chosen to study IT because his brother told him he would make money working in the industry. Unfortunately, his brother didn't know him well enough to guide him properly. There was a clear mismatch between John's chosen polytechnic course and his enterprising nature. He is now running his own handphone shop.

Looking back, I realised I had assumed my duty was only to help my students do well in their studies. Little did I know that students also require guidance and reliable information sources on education and career options. As I become more aware of what ECG entails, I find it necessary to debunk some myths about it.

### MYTH 1 ECG APPLIES ONLY TO STUDENTS JUST BEFORE THEY GRADUATE.

This is not true. ECG aims to help students answer three essential questions: "Who am I? Where am I going? How do I get there?" This means students need time and space to discover their interests, strengths, skills, work values and personality – all of which will affect their career choices. They can develop self-awareness of these areas through their CCAs, learning journeys, work attachments and the subjects they study. As ECG is developmental, it can start

as early as Primary 3. Hence, every educator – not just those of graduating students – should be aware of ECG.

### MYTH 2 ACADEMICALLY-STRONG STUDENTS DO NOT NEED CAREER GUIDANCE.

My colleague, who scored well at A-levels, studied engineering in her first year of university because her brother said she would earn good money. But she had no interest in the subject and her performance was mediocre. She quit her course soon after, intending to switch to accountancy. In the meantime, she gave tuition and discovered her passion for teaching. This led her to apply for a Public Service Commission teaching scholarship to study Mathematics and, eventually, she became a teacher.

### MYTH 3 LEARNING ENDS ONCE THE STUDENT GRADUATES.

Due to expectations for a highly skilled and diversified workforce today, more specialised and cross-disciplinary skills are required. Continually upgrading one's skills and knowledge as well as honing one's ability to adapt to new jobs have become necessary. Teachers ought to be aware of courses outside the formal education system that students can attend to develop their skill sets further after they start working.

Many of us have been educators all our lives and as students, we progressed through the formal education system predictably. As a result, we may not be aware of the rapid changes and diversity in the education system and working world today. Hence, guiding our students can be a real challenge. We need to keep ourselves updated in these areas, so that we can better help them to make informed education and career choices. 

\*not his real name

# A blueprint for a better Singapore

The new SkillsFuture Council is launching a slew of nationwide initiatives to strengthen our economy and build a more inclusive society. Here's what it plans to do.



## SkillsFuture

A national movement to enable every Singaporean to do better in life, no matter where our starting points are.



AIM 01

Help individuals to make well-informed choices in education, training and careers

People are able to make choices based on their strengths, interests and the opportunities available.



AIM 02

Develop an integrated, high-quality system of education and training that responds to constantly evolving industry needs

People can make choices that leverage on their strengths and help them stay relevant, so that they can create their own path to success.



AIM 03

Promote employer recognition and career development based on skills and mastery

People's worth is not defined just by their academic qualifications. Attitude, deep skills, knowledge and experience matter if they want to perform and excel.



AIM 04

Foster a culture that supports and celebrates lifelong learning

People learn at every stage, in every way, and embrace opportunities to learn, unlearn and relearn new knowledge and skills.



Expose individuals to a wide range of occupations and industries, and inform them on the changing needs of the labour market



Ensure a robust and broad-based education for the young

Offer continuous learning options



Collaborate with employers to give their staff opportunities to grow in skills



Introduce practical ways to cultivate the habit of learning throughout life

## KEY INITIATIVES FOR STUDENTS



Deploy trained Education and Career Guidance Counsellors to schools, polytechnics and ITE colleges



Extend the Young Talent Programme to polytechnic and ITE students in quarter three of 2015 – this means more overseas market immersion opportunities for them



Roll out enhanced internships to two-thirds of polytechnic courses and half of ITE courses over the next two years

PLAY A PART

You can start motivating your students to work towards their dream careers with [ecareers.sg](http://ecareers.sg):

- A career exploration and planning website for Primary 5 to post-secondary students
- It provides career assessment tools, tips and information to expose students to further education or career options that suit them

FIND OUT MORE

There are other initiatives. Check out these links:

- [www.skillsfuture.sg](http://www.skillsfuture.sg)
- [www.facebook.com/skillsfuturesg](https://www.facebook.com/skillsfuturesg)
- [twitter.com/skillsfuturesg](https://twitter.com/skillsfuturesg)

# 8 Great ways to spend the June holidays

Who needs another generic beach holiday? From glassblowing to volcano hiking, use the mid-year vacay to try something unique and soak up a new experience. Then come back and share it with your students!

**If you stay in Singapore**



## 1 Be A Barista

If you're a coffee connoisseur, level up and go for a barista course. Social enterprise Bettr Barista offers workshops for both the hobbyist and the professional barista aspirant. The Home Barista Basics course is best if you just want a taster (\$193 for three hours).

▶ [www.betrbarista.com](http://www.betrbarista.com)

## 2 Be a Farmer For a Day

Go back to your roots - literally - by tending to farm plots and harvesting fruit and vegetables. These are some rustic activities you can expect if you sign up with non-profit organisation Ground Up Initiative's (GUI) Balik Kampung programme, which encourages people to "connect" with the land. There is no charge.

▶ [bit.ly/beafarmer](http://bit.ly/beafarmer)



Background photo from GUI

## 4 Take a Glassblowing Class

If you favour a unique combination of ancient artform, dexterous handwork and a lick of danger (this, after all, involves fire), Art Glass Solutions offers an introductory class (prices start from \$180 for four two-hour sessions).

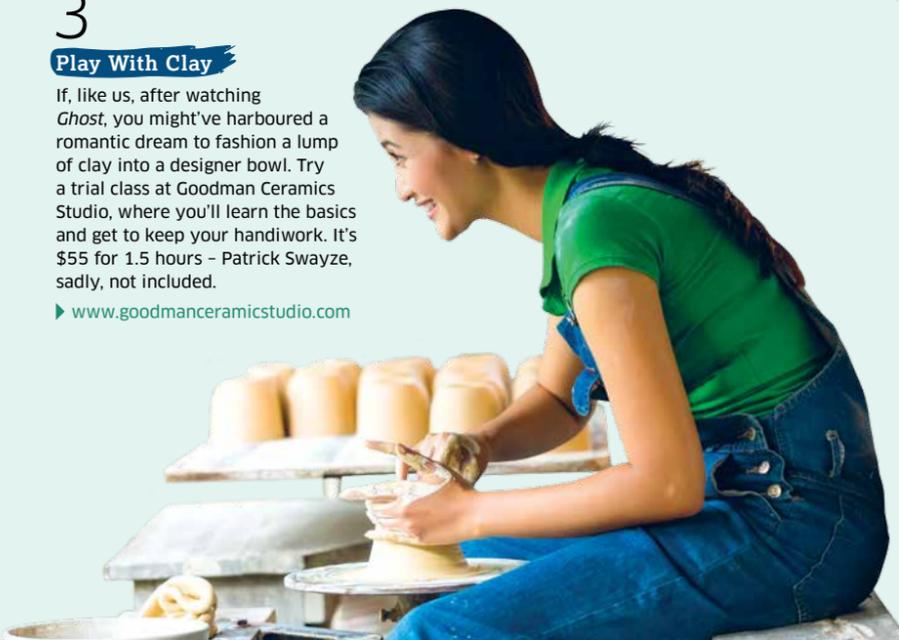
▶ [www.artglassolutions.com](http://www.artglassolutions.com)



## 3 Play With Clay

If, like us, after watching *Ghost*, you might've harboured a romantic dream to fashion a lump of clay into a designer bowl. Try a trial class at Goodman Ceramics Studio, where you'll learn the basics and get to keep your handiwork. It's \$55 for 1.5 hours - Patrick Swayze, sadly, not included.

▶ [www.goodmanceramicstudio.com](http://www.goodmanceramicstudio.com)



**If you want to travel**

## 5 Climb a Volcano

Only for the brave... and those in search of street cred. Mount Mayon in the Philippines, is an active volcano that can be climbed during peaceful spells. Sign up with local tour companies that offer hiking packages with mountain guides.

▶ [www.e-philippines.com.ph](http://www.e-philippines.com.ph)  
Their prices start from P3,600 (about \$110) per person, for a group of 10.



## 6 Stargaze in a Dark Place

Imagine a place so dark, that you could view over 7,000 stars and planets in the sky with your naked eye. The Galloway Forest Park in Scotland is a designated 'Dark Sky Park'; a place so devoid of artificial light that it offers world-class stargazing opportunities. Entry is free.

▶ [www.gallowayforestpark.com](http://www.gallowayforestpark.com)



## 7 RSVP For a Secret Supper

If "celebrity restaurants" turn you off, you may like peer-to-peer dining experiences. Websites like [www.eatwith.com](http://www.eatwith.com), [www.mealsharing.com](http://www.mealsharing.com) and [www.cookening.com](http://www.cookening.com) connect adventurous diners with enthusiastic home cooks around the world who can host you in their abodes for a meal.



## 8 Go On a Reading Retreat

Picture this: You, in the countryside, with nothing but a good book. Corte Eremo ([www.corteeremo.com](http://www.corteeremo.com)) in Italy offers reading retreats for bibliophiles. Located in a farmhouse within the grounds of an 18th-century villa, it's the perfect setting to browse through the association's extensive collection of books. Email them for rates.

▶ [bit.ly/readretreat](http://bit.ly/readretreat) for more retreat options





# Marching to a happy tune

Mr Herald Khoo from Bowen Secondary gives *Contact* the inside scoop on preparing the combined schools display band performance for Youth Celebrate!, an SG50 event.

“When you enjoy that piece of work, it’s no longer work – it becomes a passion!”



As a student in the late 1970s, Mr Herald Khoo spent hours in the hot sun practising his percussion instrument as part of his school’s display band. From there, he learnt teamwork, perseverance and resilience. More than 35 years later, the Subject Head, Aesthetics and Band Director at Bowen is pleased that his students are picking up these same life skills.

This year, Mr Khoo is coordinating a combined performance consisting of more than 400 students from six different schools for the Youth Celebrate! festival on 26 July at the Singapore Sports Hub. Youth Celebrate! will feature talented youths in the arts, sports and uniformed groups.

The different schools involved in the item, besides Bowen, are Tanjong Katong Secondary, Ping Yi Secondary, Deyi Secondary, Yuying Secondary and Bukit Panjang Government High School.

Mr Khoo has been busy coordinating practice schedules and motivating students to give their best. Having over 400 students execute the display band choreography with precision is no mean feat, says the teacher, who is working with a team of American choreographers. Fortunately, they have the help of technology to map out the routines.

“The [choreographers would feed] information into a computer software and from there, we developed coordinates which we printed out [to guide the students’ movements],” explains Mr Khoo.

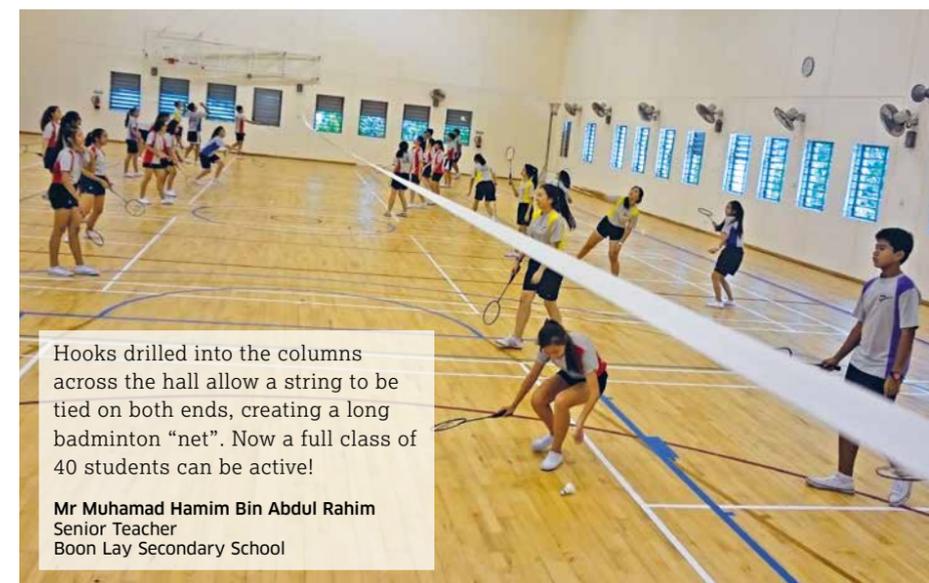
So far, they have had more than 10 practice sessions since November 2014, with many more to go. Despite having to be on his feet for long hours during practice, the 50-year-old wouldn’t trade this experience for anything.

“When you enjoy that piece of work, it’s no longer work – it becomes a passion!”



Winning entries this issue

## Share your DIY ideas



Hooks drilled into the columns across the hall allow a string to be tied on both ends, creating a long badminton “net”. Now a full class of 40 students can be active!

Mr Muhamad Hamim Bin Abdul Rahim  
Senior Teacher  
Boon Lay Secondary School



Paper-cutting card crafts bring cheer to colleagues on their special hatch-days. It is always nice to know someone cares.

Ms Tan Hui Xian  
Teacher  
Kong Hwa School



Using materials from Daiso to organise the desk. Stationery within reach at all times!

Mdm Lim Chieh Yeng  
Teacher  
Yishun Junior College

Thank you for sharing photos of your creative DIY ideas!  
Each published photo wins a \$30 voucher!



NEXT ISSUE

### WHO'S YOUR BEST FRIEND AT WORK?

Want to honour that supportive colleague or funny co-worker who cheers you on and brightens your day? Take a picture with your awesome buddy at work and send it to us!

01. The competition is only open to staff of Ministry of Education (MOE) Singapore.
02. Each participant is allowed only one entry. The photo entry must be original and unpublished. The staff must be the original author and sole owner of his/her photo entry.
03. The photo should be in high resolution, JPEG format.
04. Submit the photo with your full name, institution, designation, email and contact number, failing which the entry will be rendered void.
05. Provide a caption (max 25 words), explaining what the photo is about and how it reflects the theme. Captions may be edited for length, flow and clarity.
06. Send both photo and caption to [contact\\_online@moe.edu.sg](mailto:contact_online@moe.edu.sg) by 4 May 2015.
07. The photo entry will be judged based on relevance to theme, creativity and originality. The judges' decision is final.
08. Three winners will each receive an attractive prize. *Contact* reserves the right to change or replace the prize with another of equal or greater value should the featured prize become unavailable.
09. Prizes are not exchangeable for cash.
10. All winners will be notified by email. Prizes not collected within two weeks will be forfeited.
11. The copyright of all entries shall remain with the photographer. However, *Contact* reserves the right to use and modify the selected entry as well as other suitable ones, with full acknowledgement to the copyright owners, for future use.

**GUESS & WIN!**

# How much do you know about our **education heritage?**

Find out with our SG50 quiz! This issue, we feature two school artefacts used in the past. The first three readers who correctly guess what the items are win an attractive prize each!



These two items are science equipment commonly used in the lab.

**THINK YOU HAVE  
THE ANSWER?**

Send it to  
[contact\\_online@moe.edu.sg](mailto:contact_online@moe.edu.sg)  
by 4 May 2015.



The answer to last issue's quiz:

**CYCLOSTYLE**

**Congratulations to  
these lucky winners!**

**Ms Lee Boon Gek**  
Computer Graphics Designer,  
Media Design & Technologies for  
Learning Branch

**Ms Indurani Sekaran Krishnan**  
Corporate Support Officer,  
Learning Partnership in Educational  
Technology Branch

**Mrs Toh Yoke Fan**  
Senior Teacher (Chemistry),  
Catholic Junior College

## **Morning 'Cher: Our Schools, Our Teachers, Our Stories**

MOE will be paying tribute to our pioneer educators and celebrating the Ministry's journey over the past 50 years through our public exhibition titled "Morning 'Cher: Our Schools, Our Teachers, Our Stories". The exhibition will head out into the heartlands in the north, south, east and west over four weekends (Friday to Sunday) between July to August 2015. Look out for more details at [moe.gov.sg/sg50](http://moe.gov.sg/sg50).

