Mr Mario Bienvenu, Mayor of the Municipality of Curepipe
The Chairperson and Members of the Parents-Teachers’ Association of the Royal College Curepipe
Mrs Chitra Awootar, Rector
Mr. Amaresh Ramlugan, President of the Old Royals Association
Dr Dawood Owarish, Secretary of the Old Royals Association
Prof Serge Rivière, Old Royal
Representatives of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources
All the Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff of the College
Distinguished Parents
Dear Students
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning and thank you for the invitation you have extended to me to participate in your Annual Prize Giving Ceremony this year.

I feel deeply honoured and privileged to be in an institution that is one of the hallmarks of excellence in the education sector in Mauritius.

A brilliant scholar once said that “a nation is built not on great ideals but on its educational institutions”.

The history of the Royal College Curepipe (RCC) surely mirrors this beautiful statement.

Because for over 100 years now, the RCC has remained the citadel and the symbol of learning and excellence in our education system.

It is also one of the institutions that has produced the best brains in our country, in almost all fields of activities.

No wonder why it is the dream of every boy of our Republic, from all walks of life, to be educated at a such renowned secondary school.

In fact, being a student of the RCC is a passport for the future.

Dear Students

You must really be lucky and feel proud to belong to such a prestigious school.

I will therefore urge you to see to it that the RCC continues to remain that centre of excellence that has characterized its 100 year old history.
In March this year, I was honoured to participate in the launching of the Commemorative Centennial Magazine of the College published by the Old Royals Association.

This Magazine is worth reading and I strongly commend it to you all.

I have kept one in the catalogue of my recollections which I will certainly pass on to my grandchildren.

Let me again thank the President and Members of the Association for involving me with that event.

On that occasion, I said that for almost a century now, the RCC has been truthful and obligated to its objectives, one of which is and will always be the continued promotion of quality and excellence in education.

That should not however be construed as being the result of accident.

It was and is the result of hard work, character, discipline, sincere effort, dedication and commitment and leadership, and above all, the vision of doing things extraordinarily well.

As it is often said: “A school exist for the pupils, not for the teachers.”

So, if to-day, you are honoring your best performing students, that is because you have made of excellence in education a prevailing culture and attitude of your school.

As the famous Greek Philosopher, Aristotle, put it so beautifully –

“\textit{We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.}” (Unquote)

To this, I would like to add that: \textit{“Excellence is not a skill, it is also an attitude.”}

Genuinely, excellence in education is not restricted to bringing individuals up to a preconceived standard of performance to norms.

Rather, it seeks to encourage each individual to develop standards for himself, to give a clear perception of all that he might become as well as the opportunity to realize his full potential of life.

And Carol Tomlinson summarises it all when she says that \textit{“excellence in education is when we do everything that we can to make sure that they become everything that they can.”}

Glad am I to note that the RCC has always remained true to its ideals, and that can be gauged by the number of laureates that the College bags every year as well as by its pass rates, both at the SC and HSC examinations.

But then, the habit and culture of excellence that the College inculcates in the student the very first day he joins College also make all the difference.
I will therefore encourage you to continue in your pursuit of excellence because excellence is not often granted upon easier terms.

It is an act won by the dint of hard work, perseverance, and habituation.

You may have the loftiest goals, the highest ideals, the noblest dreams, but remember this, nothing works unless you do.

As Horace said:

“No man ever reached to excellence in any one art or profession without having passed through the painful process of study and preparation.” (Unquote)

This Annual Prize Giving Ceremony which is part of the school culture to reward its best students is no doubt a good initiative to perpetuate excellence through competition in our educational system.

As you move ahead into this 21st century, your school should invariably continue to keep up with an education of excellence that this Century will require.

However, I must caution you that your continued success depends imperatively on a high and acceptable standard of discipline that you display and uphold at all levels and at all times.

Because discipline remains the key to whatever you do.

May I add that another pointer of your success in life is character.

Indeed, the litmus test of a man’s character is how he takes charge of his own life.

Therefore, at your age, you also need to inculcate in yourself the values and principles of self-discipline.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Dear Students

As you know, this New Millennium is underpinned by a dramatic technological revolution powered by the needs of what is being referred to as a knowledge economy with a welter of new problems but at the same time, that unfolds exciting opportunities.

In this knowledge economy, the purpose of education is to develop and enhance the potential of our human resources and to progressively transform them to match the requirements of a knowledge society.

A 21st Century education per force also requires us to chart a new path for education that will create the necessary skills and competencies needed to maintain our competitiveness as a nation.
That will help produce a capable, flexible and creative workforce to ensure that our society continues to make fundamental advances and progress.

That will generate the scientists, technologists, engineers and managers who will create new ideas, new products, and new industries of the 21st Century.

Indeed, Mauritius, must, through its education system emerge as one of the leading knowledge society in this part of the world.

We need to equip ourselves to tap into the reservoir of our knowledge base and face the onslaught of the emerging global challenges.

In sum, the over-arching aim of our education should be to transform Mauritius into a vibrant knowledge society.

In this regard, we need to strengthen our education system, train high skilled people, and focus on innovation and productivity in order to sustain our economic growth.

And this implies preparing our students, indeed our future generations, to succeed in the global skills race that has become a central issue at present for countries across the globe.

In this 21st Century, old methods and formulas are no longer relevant.

John Dewey, a great American Philosopher who has authored several articles on education has said, and I quote:

“If we are teaching the children to-day what we were taught yesterday, then we are robbing them of to-morrow.” (Unquote)

These words are pregnant with meanings for all the stakeholders in our education sector.

That's why it is imperative that we develop a fresh approach to education where excellence and quality become the central pillars of the system.

Future education goals should incorporate meaningful and realistic learning objectives.

We have also learnt that in order for education to support social, economic and development outcomes in the 21st Century, higher levels of learning will be needed – the kind of competencies and higher order thinking skills that are achieved only through quality secondary education.

We have to be mindful of the fact that unlike in previous generations, there are few good employment opportunities left for poorly educated young people.

Countries that understand this shift and manage to run their education systems preparing all of their young people for this future will win the global economic race.

More importantly, they will have fewer human casualties left behind.
A better educated workforce means productivity gains and greater innovation, and these have a strong impact on the future well being of society.

A 21st Century education is indeed the bedrock of success and prosperity.

It is the engine, not simply the input of growth and development.

I have a feeling that many problems in our schools can be resolved provided all the stakeholders share a common vision, demonstrate leadership qualities and have the will and commitment.

John Gardner has said: “All too often, we are giving our young people cut flowers when we should be teaching them to grow their own plants.”

Therefore, every aspect of our education system starting from the pre-primary up to the tertiary levels, should be aligned to prepare our students with the necessary skills they need to compete and thrive in a rapidly evolving and technology-driven international landscape.

Many countries have understood this, and are undertaking efforts to reform their education, both quantitatively and qualitatively so as to stay relevant in this highly globalized world.

To-day, no country can afford to test the quality of its education without benchmarking it with international norms.

And here, I believe that Mauritius should join the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

The OECD supports the emerging consensus that post-2015 education goals should retain a focus on access and equity while emphasizing the quality of learning from early childhood through primary and secondary education.

PISA, as you know, provides regular and reliable data on the knowledge and skills and the performance of the education systems in member countries.

PISA also provides the most comprehensive and rigorous international assessment of learning outcomes in education, particularly, in maths, reading and science.

It should be noted that out of the 74 members, 40 are from non OECD countries which also provides a means for the latter countries to measure progress towards national and international education goals.

Ladies and Gentlemen

We must make high standards in every school, not only in RCC, the birthright of every child of our Republic.

That can be done with good school discipline and the partnership of teachers and parents.

Quality education is an important foundation for success in life.
Our goal is to help our students become truly global citizens.

The big question therefore is: how do we structure our schools so they can meet the needs of our students in this Century?

In an excellent paper, titled “Education in the 21st Century”, a well-known educationist, suggests and I quote “that schools in the 21st Century should be laced with a project-based curriculum for life aimed at engaging students in addressing real-world problems, issues important to humanity, and questions that matter”.

He argues that that “is a dramatic departure from the factory-model education of the past. It is abandonment, finally, of text book-driven, teacher-centered, paper and pencil schooling. It means a new way of understanding the concept of “knowledge”, a new definition of the “educated person”, a new way of designing and delivering the curriculum required.”

He goes on to offer some new definitions for “schools”, “teachers” and “learners” that are appropriate for the 21st Century.

For example, he says, schools will go from “buildings” to “nerve centres”, with walls that are porous and transparent, connecting teachers, students and the community to the wealth of knowledge that exists in the world.

The teacher, he adds, “will take on the role of an orchestrator of learning and help students turn information into knowledge, and knowledge into wisdom.”

Concerning the learner, the author says; “In the past a learner was a young person who went to school, spent a specified amount of time in certain classes, received passing grades and graduated.”

“To-day, we must see learners in a new context:

First – we must maintain student interest by helping them see how what they are learning prepares them for life in the real world.

Second – we must instill curiosity, which is fundamental to lifelong learning.

Third – we must be flexible in how we teach.

Fourth – we must excite learners to become even more resourceful so that they will continue to learn outside the formal school day.”

Ladies and Gentlemen

Teachers and Students

According to Thomas Friedman, the world is now “flat”.

There are no boundaries.

This means that our world has been transformed into a global village, and will continue to change at ever-increasing rates.
It is therefore crucial that we prepare our students to navigate in this 21st Century with 21st Century tools, skills and literacies.

In other words, there should be a complete paradigm shift in our educational system, that is more and more linked to technology.

Because technology is the key to creating productive employment in an increasingly competitive market-place.

*Ladies and Gentlemen*

*Teachers and Students*

Our education system would be much more effective if we can revamp it in such a way that by the time they leave school, every boy and girl would know how much they do not know, and be imbued with a life long desire to know more.

That’s why in my view, excellence in our education is imperative.

And I am tempted again to quote what Robert Townsend said once:

(Quote)

“If you don’t do it with excellence, don’t do it at all! Because if it’s not excellent, it won’t be profitable or fun, and if you are not in business for fun or profit, what the hell are you doing there?”

(Quote)

“Live as if you were to die to-morrow. Learn as if you are to live forever.”

(Unquote)

These are words of wisdom that should henceforth guide all of you, students and teachers alike, in your educational journey.

With these words, I would like to thank you again for your invitation this morning.

I congratulate all the Prize Winners this year.

I wish you good luck in your endeavor.

God bless you all!

I thank you for your attention.