

Inaugural Speech

**Remarks by Dr. Park Soon-ae,
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education
At her Inaugural Ceremony
On July 5, 2022**

Fellow Koreans,
Colleagues at the Ministry of Education,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, I stand before you with a heart filled with a strong sense of responsibility as the first deputy prime minister and minister of education of the Yoon Suk-yeol government.

I feel the heavy burden of responsibility for I know all too well the great concerns you must have as well as expectations.

Having said that, based on the extensive experience I have passionately accumulated in the field of education and public administration throughout my career,

I'll put my best effort to ensure that the education will live up to your expectations to present a hopeful future that we can all cherish.

Fellow Koreans,

In every moment of crisis and transformation, Korea has sown the seed of hope thanks to the hard work and passion of the Korean people, and now we have miraculously turned ourselves from fast-followers to first-movers.

A clear example is Korea's industrialization and democratization in our proud history.

Not only that, during the past two years of COVID pandemic, the crisis has been

overcome by the strong commitment and endeavor of the Korean people, and now we're poised to take a big leap forward into the post-COVID future.

Behind such miraculous growth and development lies education that has always turned crisis into an opportunity.

After all, it was "people" that served as the driving force for the national and societal development, and because our education system was in place to cultivate each and every one of our students into talent, we were able to build a miracle that we'd never imagined before.

Fellow Koreans and colleagues,

We are at a critical juncture where we are now entering into an era of great transition, and the importance of education and talent is hitting close to home.

As minister of education, I'm ready to take bold steps toward cultivating key talent of the future by reforming our education as the new government's agenda.

In particular, we'll build a creative education system to enable students to grow into diverse talent driven by autonomy, while education serving as a stepping stone for national development and ensure that the values of autonomy, creativity and equality are upheld.

At the center of such education reform stands our children, and the process will always embrace schools and students altogether.

It is my belief that one of the most important responsibilities of the government is to level the playing field by giving equal educational opportunity for all.

To this end, educational gaps should be resolved to leave no child behind. To sever

the vicious cycle of unequal opportunity and socioeconomic inequality, all students should be embraced with compassion by all in the education community.

Regardless of economic circumstances, it should be the government's responsibility to ensure all students benefit from early childhood education all the way to higher education, which should also include childcare, whereas government-funded scholarship should also be expanded to lift the burden of tuition.

Moreover, we'll expand providing customized support for disadvantaged students by embracing them compassionately, including students with disabilities, students from multicultural families, North Korean defectors and drop-out students.

In addition, education reform will be conducted vigorously from the very foundational level of education to make early childhood, primary and secondary education more robust.

To this end, school education system will be adjusted to respect diversity and autonomy.

Matching student's aptitudes and skills, they'll be encouraged to choose their own career and educational path and be offered diverse educational opportunities.

As different schools have different needs and strengths, they will be given greater autonomy to provide customized education to their students, matching students' diverse needs.

Also, we'll make the national curriculum and education system to reflect future needs so that students can solve problems with their initiative and find solutions on their own in response to various social changes.

Basic knowledge will be taught methodically to help them become future talent, based on which they will be further supported to exert their full potential such as creativity, problem-solving ability and initiative.

In particular, the public education system will provide digital education, software computing and AI educational opportunities to equip all students with digital literacy skills required in the future.

Fellow Koreans and colleagues,

Higher education institutions are not only the cradle of human talent, but also where educational reform should begin because they are the epicenter of national and regional development.

As the challenge of the declining student population is hitting close to home than ever before, the survival of not only higher education institutions but also educational reform efforts will all depend on the paradigm shift of higher education.

In this sense, we'll fully support higher education institutions to innovate and grow autonomously so that they can focus on cultivating talent that the society needs by actively tapping into their own strengths and advantages while constantly evolving themselves.

First, from academic operation and management to finance and evaluation, today's systems and regulations will be revised to safeguard flexibility and autonomy of higher education institutions.

In addition, we'll keep discussing places where regulations should be eased with the institutions to unfetter the higher education sector that has long been shackled by regulation to achieve growth and development.

Next, we'll establish a governance system of cooperation and co-existence between higher education institutions and local communities, so that they can serve as the pivot of national growth by encouraging the development of higher education institutions and regions.

At the end of the day, the key to solving the crisis that the higher education

institutions and local communities face is "education" and "talent".

It's important that we create a sustainable ecosystem of local communities, through which talent they need are cultivated to lead regional growth. To this end, municipalities and universities should be given leeway to devise their own plan for future development. It will all begin by opening "the era of local universities."

At the same time, the role and responsibility of education will be broadened to help build the capacities of all citizens in a sustainable way.

Across the board, jobs are disappearing due to digitalization and automation, and new jobs require us to work differently from how we worked in the past.

On top of that, with the acceleration of low fertility trend and population aging, the need for building new skills is also growing to enable adults to thrive in future societies.

In response to such societal changes, now our perspectives should be broadened gear the formal education system toward lifelong education system.

To do so, we'll expand the government's investment in lifelong learning to allow all citizens to access education throughout their life cycle, whenever, wherever they want.

Lifelong learning will not only be supported financially but also by tapping into diverse human and material resources as part of our multifaceted approach.

Fellow Koreans,

Lastly, as deputy prime minister, I'll ensure that social systems give you hope in our future journey.

In order to solve the problems that are becoming ever more complex by the day, we

need robust social systems in place to buttress our foundation, which can only be achieved when relevant ministries work together by breaking down the silo.

As deputy prime minister, I'll muster the commitment of all relevant ministries to discuss what we can do to improve your life by devising better systems and policies.

Fellow Koreans,
colleagues at the Ministry of Education,

I want to ask you to support the new government as it takes its first steps forward to reform education and society.

We'll do our best to bring about positive changes in education and society in ways that you can actually feel them.

And to my colleagues at the Ministry of Education,

I want to remind you that educational reform and innovation actually starts with you.

I want you to commit to bringing hope and trust to the Korean people, and ensuring our education can become more accessible to all children.

I myself will stand beside you and support you. Thank you.