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Spence Addresses Goals for School System

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For the first time since beginning his role as new Moore County Schools superintendent, Dr. Aaron Spence held his first school community speech.

Spence has spent the last several months canvassing the school systems and meeting with students to learn more about the system's operations. Wednesday night, Spence addressed teachers, parents and community members about the challenges Moore County Schools is facing.

Following the Pinecrest PTSA meeting, Spence took the microphone and began with "what's important" as pictures of his six children flashed across his PowerPoint presentation.

"My children keep me in line with what's important," Spence said. He began by reassuring the audience that the "attack" on education they've been hearing about isn't true. The nation is not falling behind in education but instead continuing at the same rate of performance.

"We're doing a good job in Moore County," Spence said. In the last few years, MCS has seen a declining dropout rate and decrease in discipline issues. The school system continues to outperform the national average in SAT scores.

Which is not to say that the schools don't have challenges, Spence added. He is concerned about the achievement gap between the highest- and lowest-performing students.



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"I'm not interested in pointing fingers. I'm interested in solutions. And we will fix the gap in Moore County," Spence said. He promised that closing the learning gap doesn't mean bringing every child down to a standard, but pushing all students to perform at a higher level.

"If you know what your kids don't know, you can fix it. But our problem is, we don't know what our kids don't know," Spence said.

He is hoping to implement a data warehouse so teachers can track students' progress between grade levels. He also wants to tackle literacy. His slides illustrated that a child in poverty, held back at least once and not reading on grade level by third grade, has just a 10 percent chance of graduating.

"We have a moral obligation to address this," Spence said.

Pinecrest English teacher Ann Peterson was very interested in Spence's attention to the literacy problem. "After listening to him, I always feel I should go home and read a new way to engage students," Peterson said. "I'm really excited he's here. So we'll see."

Spence also addressed the need to expand the use of technology in the schools. He views technology as an opportunity for teachers to further engage the "digital natives."

"Our students can't live without technology," he said. "They're junkies. We have to engage students where they are."

Spence admits that he is also very plugged into the digital world and tweets constantly.

Moore County schools are wireless, and many have Smart Boards in classrooms. Spence views this as a good start, but envisions a future with iPads and more technologically engaged learning.

"I'm not trying to replace teachers with technology," he said. "I'm trying to replace chalkboards."

The last challenge he spoke on was career and college readiness. Spence wants to increase the number of AP classes in the high schools and increase the number of students taking them.

"We need to get kids into the most challenging curriculum they can handle," Spence said.

After his presentation, he took questions from the audience. One concern presented was the start times in the high schools.

"We recognize this is a problem and we are working on it. But it cannot impact the budget," Spence explained.

English teacher Lorna Martin was impressed as she left the speech. "I really like his enthusiasm," she said. "He really hit the nail on the head of what we need to work on."

In the next three years, Spence is looking for a smaller achievement gap, shrinking the number of underachieving students, and more rigorous coursework for students.

Senior Auden Laurence is heavily involved in Pinecrest's student government and is excited by Spence's proposed changes.

"He has a good idea of what needs to be fixed, and I am impressed by his vision of the future," Laurence said.

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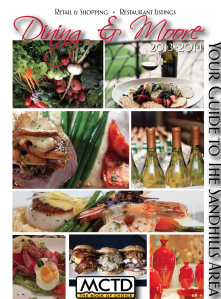
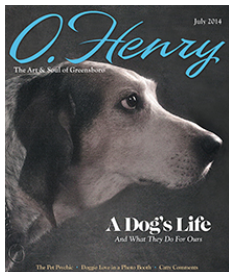
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