

Visiting educator tells leaders: Don't fire at each other

By [Elizabeth Cook](#)

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Dr. Willard Daggett's warning that students need different preparation for the future had teachers buzzing after Wednesday's Education Summit.

And it provoked more questions from community leaders who met with Daggett after the talk.

"He was awesome and challenging," said teacher Helen Kichefski, as the audience filed out of Keppel Auditorium.

Kichefski, who teaches English for speakers of other languages at Enochville and Bostian elementary schools, said it's scary to think about the challenges facing today's students.

"I think about my second language students," she said. "What chance do they have to compete?"

Deanna Byrd, who teaches social studies at Carson High School, said she hopes Daggett inspired change. "We need to get on board together. I teach high school; I know they need change."

Michelle Munga, a fourth-grade teacher at Isenberg Elementary, liked Daggett's strong message.

"I think that if those people who are in charge of making decisions and giving teachers technology ... to compete would be able to do that," Daggett's visit was worth it.

Two Catawba College students preparing for teaching careers said the talk gave them both second thoughts and inspiration.

"I feel a lot of pressure," said Savanna Farris, a junior. "We are the next teachers. I feel basically, it's on us. ... This makes me want to be better qualified."

Jennifer Board worked for five years after college but found herself gravitating toward teaching, and Daggett just reinforced that. "I want to create well-rounded citizens," she said.

Gretchen Forrest, who recently retired from the exceptional children's program at Salisbury High School, said Daggett had put a challenging task before educators, but technology can't do everything. She said teachers encounter too much disrespect and lack of discipline and too little parental involvement.

Asked about that at a question-and-answer session afterward, Daggett said he understood the teacher's frustrations. He said the answer lies in rigor, relevance and relationships — teaching challenging material, making it relevant to students and developing relationships with them and their families.

The students who cause discipline problems are disengaged, he said. Schools have always had disobedient students, he said, but now there are more because young people have more distractions.

As for parent involvement, he said, "the parents that you need to get to would be the least likely to show up tonight."

Many of them, he said, had bad experiences at school as youths. "You've got to go to those parents on their turf, in their language. ... You've got to stop thinking they're going to come to us."

Daggett urged community leaders to send a delegation to a conference in Orlando, Fla., that will focus on 75 schools which have had extraordinary success. They could bring back good ideas, he said.

Partners for Education, the group that sponsored the summit, will follow with a communitywide discussion April 10 that Jeff Smith, chair of the group, invited the public to attend.

The organization paid Daggett \$10,000 for his visit.

Smith said he was most encouraged by Daggett's closing remarks at the session with school officials, county commissioners and other local leaders. Daggett advised that when they circled the wagons to address education, they should not fire inward at each other.

"I hope we can move forward with that," Smith said.