

Top teacher speaks to high school students at NSU

By CATHY SPAULDING/Phoenix Staff Writer | Posted: Wednesday, March 4, 2015 12:45 am

TAHLEQUAH — America's top teacher, Sean McComb, recalls two teachers who turned his life around.

McComb, the 2015 National Teacher of the Year, used those teachers to motivate high school students at Northeastern State University's Celebration of Teaching, held Tuesday in Tahlequah. McComb teaches high school English at Baltimore's Patapsco High School and Center for the Arts. The National Teacher of the Year is chosen by the Council of Chief State School Officers.

In his speech — more of a pep talk — McComb said the best things teachers can do is help students raise their expectations. He said two teachers helped him raise his expectations.

"I was about ready to give up," he said, recalling that a tumultuous childhood with an alcoholic mother made him apathetic about life.

Then, a TV production teacher enabled him to find a refuge and a passion, McComb said.

"I would stay at school until 8 p.m. working with him about things I was passionate about," McComb said. "I can be filled with his love for what he did. School started to be a sanctuary."

McComb said his Advanced Placement English teacher also motivated him toward higher expectations.

"He said, 'Don't tell me you'll do your best.' He said, 'every day, work harder than the day before,'" McComb recalled.

The teacher told audience members to give each other celebratory high fives.

"The brain at a positive mode is 31 percent more productive," he said.

Tahlequah High School junior Gracie Medellin said she found motivation in McComb's talk. She said she could relate to the teacher's rough background.



Sean McComb speaks at NSU Celebration of Teaching

Baltimore high school English teacher Sean McComb, the 2015 National Teacher of the Year, encourages students to become top teachers Tuesday during the Celebration of Teaching at Northeastern State University.

It didn't take much to inspire Medellin to teach.

"I love interacting with people," she said. "I feel teaching is on the top of careers for me."

Students from Tahlequah, Westville, Pryor, Tulsa Washington and Tulsa Edison attended the Celebration.

Dr. Debbie Landry, dean of the NSU College of Education, said threats of bad weather kept other schools from sending students.

"We hope to interest these high school students into the profession of teaching," Landry said, adding that NSU has held the Celebration for 15 years.

She acknowledged the need for teachers is growing "across the board."

She said nearly every certification category is on the shortage list at the Oklahoma Department of Education.

"There is a statewide shortage of teachers," Landry said. "We want to attract the best and brightest to teaching."

A panel of top Oklahoma teachers answered audience questions about their professions. Oklahoma 2015 Teacher of the Year Jason Proctor, who teaches advanced math at Tahlequah High, led the panel.

Muskogee's 2015 Teacher of the Year, Diane Walker, said a main challenge she faces as a teacher is "trying to be everything you need to be for the 144 students who are in my class on a daily basis."

Walker, who teaches history at Muskogee High School, said she is challenged "to meet all their needs, academically, socially, emotionally and to be there. Making sure I am engaging them."

The Celebration of Teaching also included workshops in teaching techniques.

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