

LOCAL & STATE

Schools urged to hold back failing students

■ **Jim Goodnight, co-founder of SAS, is the speaker at the annual education summit here.**

By MORGAN JOSEY GLOVER
Staff Writer

GREENSBORO — The Guilford Education Alliance brought Jim Goodnight to the city on Wednesday to promote strong math and science programs in local schools.

But Goodnight, co-founder of the world-renowned SAS in Cary, spent much of his time imploring educators to end social promotion of third-graders who read poorly. Goodnight said the state should follow Florida in making the policy.

“Make that a firm and

fast rule and then fix the problem,” he said. “If they can’t read well at the end of the third grade, they are not going to do well.”

Goodnight, whose software company analyzes business data, was the keynote speaker at the nonprofit’s annual education summit. He is an advocate for improving the teaching of science, technology, engineering and math.

Goodnight told summit attendees that his company struggles to hire qualified statisticians from within the U.S. He believes colleges should increase their share of available science and math degrees.

“Leaders should have been able to foresee this 10 years ago,” Goodnight said. “We have failed to get the population ready in time.”

He also urged local edu-

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cators to focus on increasing graduation rates and improving reading instruction in elementary schools.

About 32 percent of students in grades three through eight don’t pass state reading tests. But the district only holds back 2 to 4 percent of those students, said Guilford County Schools Superintendent Maurice “Mo” Green. Others move forward based on the quality of their work portfolios and later receive tutoring and other services, he said.

“I’m not going to sit here

and say we’ve caught every kid up,” Green said. “Certainly there is more that we can do.”

More than 600 people registered for the summit, which the alliance hosts to highlight the district’s strengths and weaknesses. The organization released its annual Education Matters report and announced a new collaboration of education, business and community leaders called AchieveGuilford.

The group will work with local nonprofits and faith groups to implement and evaluate tutoring and other support services for local students. Learn more at www.achievegulford.org.

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FROM THE REPORT

The Education Matters report released on Wednesday provides a comprehensive overview of academics, community support and funding for Guilford County Schools.

Some figures from the report:

- The percentage of principals who served in their current position for at least three years increased from 33 percent in 2006-07 to 66 percent in 2010-11.
- The number of Parent Teacher Organizations has increased during the past five years, but membership has declined by 19 percent.
- The district has about 500 fewer business partners, but donations have doubled since 2006-07.
- More students are participating in the rigorous International Baccalaureate program, but the percentage of exams with passing scores dropped from 73.9 percent in 2008-09 to 50.1 percent in 2010-11.
- The percentage of high school graduates who need to take a remedial math or English course once they enroll at GTCC has hovered around 60 percent for the past four years.
- Guilford County Schools had 51.8 teachers for every central office administrator in 2010-11; the state average was 29.9 teachers per administrator.