



Bruce Rivers, (LEFT) Executive Director of Community Living Toronto chaired the session with Dr. Chris Spence of the TDSB

Dr. Chris Spence speaks out in support of inclusive education - ‘Learning for all’ needs to be top priority, says Toronto District School Board’s director of education

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TORONTO - Including all students in the education system needs to be the top priority for school boards everywhere, says Dr. Chris Spence, director of education for the Toronto District School Board.

This was Spence’s message to attendees at a recent Community Living Ontario conference, where he detailed to parents, educators and Community Living representatives the progress being made towards inclusive education. He also offered suggestions to stakeholders about how to enhance inclusive education.

Spence underscored the notion that “learning for all” needs to be the top priority within a school board, adding that this principle is the foundation at the Toronto District School Board, the largest school board in Canada, representing nearly 600 schools and 250,000 students.

“Learning for all means ‘all’ — not some of the students some of the time, but all of the students all of the time,” Spence told attendees at a Feb. 25 presentation during From Rhetoric to Reality: A Conference on Inclusive Education.

Spence, who spoke highly of the importance of inclusive education, also underscored the value of working together to continue the push for enhanced inclusive education through the social justice movement.

To make this work, Spence says everyone involved with educational systems must have passion for making schools more inclusive and stopping the “cycles of oppression” that come from not having fully inclusive schools.

“We do that through pressure and support,” he said.

“The pressure is raising the bar, in terms of expectations that we are going to work with parents. The support is making sure that all staff and all leaders feel that they’re wrapped in support, so that they can bring some of this vision to fruition.”

At the Toronto District School Board, Spence told attendees that to continue to foster inclusive education there is a focus on building capacity to make the system as inclusive as possible and by having “courageous conversations” with teachers and school administrators to promote inclusive education, as well as by reaching out to parents and the community.

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