

# Renowned Educator Ron Clark Shares Ideas With Teachers, LEFs to Help All Students Succeed

NORMAN – Ron Clark, who has gained national acclaim for his out-of-the-box teaching techniques and his ability to help at-risk students become high achievers, gave the keynote address at the 20th annual Fall Forum for Local Education Foundations on Oct. 23, engaging participants with song, dance and inspiring classroom stories.

Clark spoke to nearly 400 local education foundation leaders, educators and future teachers at the Fall Forum, which was presented by the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence. Gov. Brad Henry declared Oct. 23 as Ron Clark Day in Oklahoma to commemorate Clark's appearances at the Fall Forum as well as two appearances at the University of Central Oklahoma sponsored by the Community Educational Opportunity (CEO) program.

A teacher since 1995, Clark has taught in some of the most challenging schools in the country. He was recently named to "People Magazine's" Heroes Among Us and in 2000 received Disney's American Teacher of



Ron Clark gets animated while describing his school in Atlanta.



Education students at the University of Oklahoma visit with Ron Clark preceding his Fall Forum address. More than 100 OU education students listened to Clark's address.

the Year Award. Clark told participants that he sets high academic expectations for all of his students and taps into students' interests and pop culture to help engage them in learning.

"I look for anything those kids love – chocolate milk, rap music, double-dutch jump rope, video games – and I pull those things into the classroom to help me teach," he said. Clark sang and danced throughout his presentation, demonstrating how he uses popular music to help students learn concepts, as well as release energy so that they can better focus on learning.

While Clark's teaching techniques may be unconventional, his classroom management style is much more traditional.

Since he began teaching, Clark has developed 55 classroom rules ranging from basic manners and etiquette to

respecting others and having a positive attitude. When talk-show host Oprah Winfrey heard about Clark's rules, she recommended that he write a book about them. The book, "The Essential 55," was published in 2003 and quickly became a best seller.

Clark used the proceeds from his book, and subsequent books, to create "the school of his dreams" in inner-city Atlanta. The Ron Clark Academy is a private middle school staffed by some of the most innovative teach-

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ers in the country and incorporates a curriculum based on worldwide travel. By the time students

graduate from the school, they will have the opportunity to visit six continents, he said.

“Not only do we teach our children about the world, but we take them there to experience it,” Clark said, explaining how his school integrates lessons on history, culture, geography, economics to prepare students before their journeys. “We want our students to know about different nations, cultures and religions. If you’re going to be successful in the future in our country, you’ve got to have a global perspective.”

Speaking to the many school foundation leaders present, Clark told stories about raising funds for school projects by flooding supporters with student photos and thank-you notes. He also told how he went door-to-door throughout the crime-ridden areas



Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence Founder and Chairman David L. Boren introduces Ron Clark.

surrounding his Atlanta school and convinced residents to help support and protect the new school.

The OU College of Education co-sponsored Clark’s appearance and brought in more than 100 OU education students to hear his address. Clark cautioned students that there will be

students in their classroom who are unruly, unmotivated and not very “likeable.”

“It’s not your job as teachers to like these kids,” Clark said. “It’s your job to believe in these

kids, to educate them and to discipline them. We’ve got to help these kids believe in them-

selves. We’ve got to lift these kids up. That’s the power we have as individual teachers.”

Clark also encouraged foundation leaders and school supporters to support teachers in their communities. “We want these great, bright minds to stay in education for more than four years (the national average). In order to make that happen, they need

your support. They need to know you respect them and care about them.”

Clark’s keynote address was one of the best attended in Fall Forum history and received highest ratings from most attendees. One participant wrote, “Having Ron Clark here was amazing! He brought so much life to the room and made me want to be a better teacher.”

Following the keynote address, many participants attended sessions to discuss ways they can implement Clark’s techniques in their school communities. The sessions featured teachers who have traveled to Atlanta for professional development at Ron Clark’s school, a training ground for

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Fall Forum Participant



Ron Clark’s lively presentation had him climbing over chairs, leaping onto the stage and even sitting in one person’s lap to make a point.

educators from around the world. For more information on Clark and his school, visit [www.ronclarkacademy.com](http://www.ronclarkacademy.com)

Major sponsors of the Fall Forum appearance were American Fidelity Group; Bank of Oklahoma, N.A.; Community Educational Opportunity, hosted by the University of Central Oklahoma; Steve and Pam Holton; Inasmuch Foundation; Kirkpatrick Family Fund; OGE Energy Corp.; ONEOK, Inc.; the University of Oklahoma; and the OU College of Education.

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