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Karen Pence visits Indiana Parenting Institute



Indiana first lady Karen Pence speaks Wednesday to a group at Gary's Indiana Parenting Institute. Pence has a background in education.

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By Michelle L. Quinn Post-Tribune correspondent April 24, 2013 9:18PM

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GARY — Her inclination might be to stay away from discussing policy because she's not an elected official, but Indiana first lady Karen Pence has a mission.

Pence, who made an appearance at Indiana Parenting Institute on Wednesday morning, wants to bring attention to all the good things that are happening in all the state's schools. She stopped by Indiana Parenting Institute at the request of founder and Executive Director Laura Smith-Wynn to chat with parents about her vision for state education.

Whatever she ends up doing — as she tours more schools around the state, she'll flesh out her plans — she intends on highlighting the positive. So far, the common denominator among all the schools is the lesson of good citizenship.

And she deemed Indiana Parenting Institute the perfect example for it.

"Children learn to be good citizens from their parents," Pence told the packed room. "(Indiana Parenting Institute) is a place where, if I don't have something figured out, I have other people to help me be accountable.

"There's nothing wrong with (parents) saying, 'I'm struggling,' because kids are going through so much."

Pence, herself a teacher for 25 years, always hopes that when schools invite her to visit, they allow her to see the real school. Usually, that's not the case.

"I know that when I'm sitting in a second-grade birthday party, if they're not wild, my first question is, 'Why aren't they wild?' " she said. "It feels like they're hiding something."

Kendra Johnson, a single mother who has six children and five grandchildren, asked the first lady about her ideas for showing how parents can be involved. Pence lauded her for being a leader in her own right and said each state has different needs.

Desire' Ross, who attended the visit with daughter Celina Por, a junior at Roosevelt High School, praised Indiana Parenting Institute for allowing her to feel like she has a voice at Roosevelt and agreed Pence should show up at other schools.

"She should come more often or send someone," Ross said. "And she should just show up, because (school administrations) won't show her everything (if they know in advance)."

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