

A voice of wisdom

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Sometimes it takes a celebrity voice to get through to students.

That voice came from former Minnesota Vikings defensive tackle and current Minnesota Supreme Court Justice Alan Page when he addressed a full auditorium of students Wednesday at Austin High School.

The 15-year NFL veteran was at an event sponsored by Austin's Human Rights Commission to talk and answer questions about the importance of getting an education.

Wearing his trademark bow tie, Page preached the age-old message of the importance of education for students, because they are our future.

"Who would you like to decide your future?" Page said, posing the question to the students. Most hands in the room went up.

"When you're prepared, you're in the position to make choices," Page said.

Page described his background, growing up in Canton, Ohio, going to school and playing football at University of Notre Dame, going to law school while playing professional football.

His parents stressed the importance of a good education, but, he said, he made the "serious mistake" of not working hard.

"I also didn't learn how to learn," Page said. "That's a skill that nobody can ever take away from you."

The other strong point Page emphasized was to "be the best you can be" in anything you do. That doesn't mean you should compare yourself and your success to others. Only you can push yourself to reach your potential within your limits.

Growing up in the 1950s, when discrimination and segregation were much more prevalent than today, Page learned how necessary it is for people to start seeing each other as individuals, regardless of color or even gender, he said.

"We are a lot better than we were when I was in high school," Page said. "We've come a long way from that, but we've still got a long way to go."

He started the Page Education Foundation to help close the gap, at least on the education front. By giving people of color a leg up, they can in turn go back to their communities and help younger students, just like Page has done.

"This was my opportunity to reach back and help others," Page said. "Our goal is to do no less than to change the future."

"We're just trying to do the best we can to level the playing field."

Despite his strong messages about working hard in school and being the best you can be at whatever you

choose to do, plus his work as a Supreme Court Justice, students still wanted to ask about one thing during the question-and-answer session: football.

A few questions were targeted toward the educational topics, but lots of students were interested in his playing days and the current NFL lockout involving disputes between the players union and owners.

Page didn't seem to mind the students' football-related questions.

"Even from my football background, there are lessons to be learned," Page said.