Since yesterday Aaron Spence is Moore County's new superintendent of schools. That's when the 40-year-old graduate of the University of Virginia and a PH.D took the oath of office before heading out on a tour of the 22-campus system. Spence replaces Susan Purser, who succeeded Pat Russo in 2004. Spence's starting salary with benefits will be $165,000.00 He will oversee a school system of 12,500 pupils, much smaller than the 130-campus school system in Houston, where he last worked as Chief High School Officer. Spence is being asked to improve a school syste4m which has seen better days, judging by this year's S-A-T scores. For example, on the test's critical reading and math portion, the county averaged a score 23 points lower than a year ago. Still, Moore County's scores in reading and math were higher than the national average. On the test's writing portion , Moore scored 481, down 13 points, but above the national and state average. Like his predecessor, Spence will find himself confronted with budget problems. In order to meet a cash shortage this school year, Purser cut eight-point-two million dollars from the system's budget. Then, in order to save money, Purser took the unpopular step of ordering the closing of Academy Heights Elementary School and the consolidation of the county's year-round program in Southern Pines. The school board has confidence that Spence is the man for the job. Board Chairman Kathy Farren says that of 25 highly qualified candidates, "Doctor Spence stood out from the very beginning."