

Duval superintendent returns to former school to kick off new year

By Tessa Duvall

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As she looked over the first-grade class seated on the floor in front of her, Diana Greene closed a book called “First Day Jitters.”

“Everyone’s nervous on the first day,” said Greene.

Even her, she told the kids.

Greene began her teaching career in 1985 at Baldwin’s Mamie Agnes Jones Elementary School as a Chapter I teacher who provided interventions for students who needed the support.

On Monday, she returned to the school for another first: her first day of school as the new superintendent of Duval County Public Schools.

About 128,000 Duval County kids returned to 196 schools across the county Monday. Greene scheduled visits to three of those schools: Jones, followed by Northwestern Middle School and Terry Parker High School.

A banner reading “Welcome home Dr. Greene” greeted her just inside Jones’ entryway, and another long-time teacher had pulled out yearbooks from the 1980s where Greene recognized several familiar faces.

“It’s an emotion that happens to very few people in a lifetime, to start somewhere and come back and be the president, CEO, superintendent,” Greene said. “It’s just phenomenal. It’s because of the team of people who have been with me throughout my life.”

Greene recalled one teacher in particular, Ms. Hunt, who taught her to set high expectations for students and watch them rise to the occasion.

“To see her picture today, was just an emotion that I wasn’t expecting to feel,” Greene said, “but one that touched my heart to know that I’ve come, as they say, a long way, baby.”

Greene said her three goals for the year are to become an “A” school district, safety and security, and financial solvency.

“Those three areas are my main focus,” she said.

While at Terry Parker High School, Greene took a few minutes to meet privately with a senior, Serenity Hill, who was a part of a panel of students who met with potential superintendent candidates during the district’s search process. Hill, who was on the panel because of her participation in a school leadership initiative, previously told Greene about some concerns at her school that could be broadly considered school safety issues, like fighting on campus.

At that panel, Greene saw Hill’s passion for her school and told her that if she got the school district’s top job, Terry Parker would be the first high school she visited. Greene held true to her word.

“That she’s here, that’s good enough. I couldn’t tell you what the last superintendent looked like,” Hill said. “The fact that she’s actually taken the time out of her day to actually visit some of the schools, that’s showing that not only does she take initiative, but she understands that students are people.”

“You’re able to personalize the job. Usually when I say superintendent, I’m thinking of the job. But now, I know Dr. Greene.”

Hill said she hopes to see improvements at her school in areas like fewer students skipping class, less cursing and bullying, and overall improvement in behavioral issues. These are the kinds of things, she said, that slow down the school day for everyone. They’re the same problems that Hill said she didn’t shrink away from telling Greene about in their discussion during the panel months before.

“That was not be being bold or upfront or me saying that I hate my school, because I love my school,” Hill said. “It was just me making sure she understood. When I said those things, her demeanor didn’t change. ... She was ready to put things into play before she even had the job.”

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