

Alum returns with hope for the next generation

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Meria Carstarphen, left, superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools, spends one-on-one time with potential future educators during her visit to the Tulane uptown campus on Tuesday (Nov. 11). (Photo by Guillermo Cabrera-Rojo)

In New Orleans, many believe that the public education system is irreparably broken. Meria Carstarphen, however, sees a future full of hope. A proud member of the Newcomb College class of 1992, Carstarphen is a stand-out in the field of education, and she was appointed superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools last summer.

She returned to her academic roots at Tulane University on Tuesday (Nov. 11) to speak to the next generation of educators on the uptown campus.

In true teacher fashion, Carstarphen began the afternoon lecture with an interactive activity designed to drive home the devastating reality of dropout rates in America.

She discarded the stereotypical charter vs. traditional school debate, instead focusing on recreating public schools as a viable option for communities.

“Looking forward to 2014, the data is getting better in the urban settings, but it's a far cry from where it needs to be,” she explained, noting that the system is especially hard on special needs, impoverished and minority students.

“If there was a driver that took me into leadership in education, it was my experience as a teacher,” said Carstarphen, who also holds degrees from Auburn and Harvard universities. Seeing the cracks in the system's foundation, she strove to turn the focus away from high-stakes testing and politics in favor of a pioneer focus on social and emotional learning.

To reach the point where zip codes no longer determine a child's future, Carstarphen believes that we must teach children academic, career and decision-making skills. Even more important, however, is the need for hope.

“You may never know the impact you have,” she said. Yet, a single act of support could be all it takes to change a child's life for the better.

Carstarphen's lecture was sponsored by the [Dean's Colloquium series](#) of Newcomb-Tulane College in conjunction with the [Tulane Reading Project](#).

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