NEW JERSEY’S TEACHER OF THE YEAR MEETS PATERSON’S TEACHERS OF TOMORROW

Kimberly Dickstein Hughes, high school ELA teacher, kicks off statewide tour of schools at the district’s School of Education and Training

PATERN – A career that gives you relationships that last forever, will challenge you like no other profession, and needs you for the future of the state and the nation.

That is how 40 students heard the teaching profession described by New Jersey’s Teacher of the Year, Kimberly Dickstein Hughes. Hughes kicked off her tour of schools all over New Jersey on Wednesday by visiting the School of Education and Training (SET), the district’s academy for future educators, where she was welcomed by Superintendent of Schools Eileen F. Shafer and Principal Nicolette Thompson.

“Being in a school of education and training during your high school years is pretty amazing,” said Hughes, wearing a SET polar fleece that had been presented to her by Student Government President Zianny Suarez and Vice President Jazzmieka Wortham. “You’re learning early on about the power of teaching.”

Shafer introduced Hughes, an English Language Arts (ELA) teacher of 11 years from Haddonfield Memorial High School, by noting that Hughes has been quoted as saying that she considers a school year successful when a class of students feels more like a family.

“Her approach has been to cultivate her classes, and the culture of the entire school, with a strong sense of community,” Shafer said, “and that is something I certainly agree with.”

Hughes opened her discussion with the students by asking them to think about why they were considering a teaching career. She later explained that her reason for becoming a teacher was her own teachers. After Hughes had lost a close friend to cancer, a number of her teachers saw past her brave face, and helped her get the help she needed as she was grieving.

“They knew that I wasn’t okay,” she said. “I leaned on my teachers.”

The Rutgers University graduate admitted that launching a teaching career wasn’t easy, but she learned how to turn her vulnerabilities into strengths.

“Teaching challenges you. Education challenges you like no other profession,” she said. “But that’s a good thing. That makes you human.”
Over time, as her teaching career took root, she found that many of her students wanted to stay in touch with her over the years.

“Those relationships are forever,” Hughes said.

The conversation between Hughes and the students ran through a variety of education issues, including the plight of English Language Learners and the fact that so many Paterson students have responsibilities outside of school. They also talked about how badly teachers are needed, not only for the impact they can have on students, but on the impact they can have on their communities as well.

“Our country needs you. New Jersey needs you,” Hughes said. “You probably don’t hear that enough.”

The School of Education and Training is one of 12 career-oriented academies at Paterson Public Schools.