By the Rev. Kimberly Hjytt

D

oing these candid, often painful, interviews that even- tually led to her being named superintendent of the Duval County Public Schools, Nuna Greene made a strong statement in support of arts education, especially in educating the whole child. While acknowledged the challenges of short-term adjustments may be necessary given the Duval district's $262 million short-fall, she noted that as superintendent of Manatee County schools, she began investing in the arts once that school system reached a fund balance over 3 percent. That is encouraging because as Duval's new superintendent, Greene will find a community eager for investment in this arts — and a community blessed with educators and community partners eager to collaborate. Our children deserve all that we can offer them. They need our elected officials, city engineers, transportation officials, the state level, to adequately invest in public schools and give public-school superintendent like Greene the same kind of facility given to charter schools. They need everyone aware of all levels of our district to work on the lower-income students who regularly participate in the arts have a 95 percent graduation rate, compared to only 70 percent among their peers. They need business lead- ers who embrace the fact that arts education creates tomorrow’s leaders because it empowers stu- dents to analyses, problem- solve and innovate. If we really want to equip students for the jobs of tomorrow, we must give educational leaders such tools to help us enable their districts to cultivate creative thinking among students.

Responding to a question about the growing school choice movement, Greene pointed out that in Manatee County she was able to bring students back into the dis- trict; Greene said she worked with principals to make their schools more attractive options for students — and then actively engaged those students once they enrolled in the public schools. If Greene wants to attract and engage students in Duval County, there is no better way than through the arts.

The Rev. Kimberly Hjytt is president and CEO of the Cathedral Arts Project in Jacksonville.

Greene can make an impact by supporting arts education.