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## Teacher, former student earn doctorate degrees together

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Cheryl Holloway's eyes began to well Sunday when she thought back to seeing Tiamesha Walker, her former first-grade student, participating in their doctoral classes at St. John Fisher College.

"There were times in class that I couldn't concentrate when she would participate because I thought about the days that she sat right here," Holloway said, pointing to her lap.

"I was just so proud, so I would lose my concentration every now and then when she would have something to say."

On Sunday afternoon, Holloway, 62, and Walker, 32, both received their doctorates in education from the college after two years of study. They had every class together and always sat next to each other.

The two first shared a classroom at School 2 in Rochester in 1981, when Walker was a first-grade student and Holloway was her teacher.

"She was a very balanced teacher," Walker recalled before the commencement ceremony. "She gave you the right amount of love and discipline."

Walker stayed in touch with Holloway over the years, and her former teacher was a big influence later when Walker decided to enter teaching herself. Walker worked previously as a substitute in the city and is now the director of training and volunteer coordinating for the Center for Dispute Settlement, a Rochester-based dispute-resolution center.

When Walker decided to enroll for doctoral classes at the college in 2006 to pursue her dream of becoming a college professor, she ran into none other than her former first-grade teacher.

Walker said that having one another in class helped the two old friends get through their difficult coursework.

"This was a very vigorous program for both of us," Walker said.

"There were just times we needed to talk, there were times we needed to hug each other, there were times we needed to just share."

Holloway, now the chief of schools for the Rochester School District, said that receiving her Ed.D. was a lifelong goal, but attaining it was made all the more sweet by having her former student there with her.

"It's the ultimate reward of a teacher that they would see their children come this far," she said.

"I've had two dreams come true: one, to see one of my children do this well, and, two, to get the doctorate for myself."

Now that they no longer have class together, both Holloway and Walker said they intend to find ways to continue to stay in touch.

In a few months, Walker will be getting married, and Holloway plans to be there to see it.

"I'm going to be right there cheering her on," Holloway said, "to see that part of her life, too."