February 3rd, 2024

To the Durham Board of Education:

The Durham Association of Educators, all Durham Schools staff, students, parents, and the Durham community have been watching and waiting this week for the Board of Education to respond to our union's demands for how to fix the classified pay debacle. Classified staff members are some of the lowest paid in our district, they were given new market-rate salaries last October, and now, the district has pulled the rug out from under 1,300 dedicated educators and support staff - erasing years of their work experience and thereby cutting their pay.

These workers made life altering decisions based on those raises that they cannot undo. Some upgraded their apartments or cars or childcare. Some quit second and third jobs. Now, they worry if they will be able to pay their bills and feed their families when they get their February paycheck in a few short weeks. Without a resolution immediately, our schools and students risk losing even more essential staff members in the midst of a staffing crisis the district has been suffering for years.

This is why DAE members have been demanding that the Board restore everyone's years of experience, commit to no pay cuts, and pass a Meet and Confer policy. On Friday, the Board did take the first step towards a Meet and Confer policy by voting to schedule a work session with us. We look forward to the discussion and the Board passing a policy that codifies transparency, collaboration, and respect for employee agency and voice. However, the Board did not take action on the other two demands, and classified workers remain uncertain of their futures.

This morning, the DAE Organizing Committee—member leaders from across DPS—comprised of hundreds of DPS staff representing thousands of certified and classified employees, met and diligently compared their assessments of last night's School Board meeting, reviewed progress thus far, and debated how to move forward. It was union workplace democracy in action. Ultimately, the committee voted to conduct a Day of Protest this Monday to express the urgency to act and keep classified staff whole. The committee also voted to clarify what educators need from Board members at Thursday's Board meeting:

1) Restore steps and commit to no pay cuts for February paychecks
2) Public explanation of why January checks did not look like people expected
3) Schedule a Meet and Confer work session with DAE for the week of February 12th

District employees have lost trust in the DPS administration, and remain frustrated by the lack of transparency with the district's finances. What DPS can afford to pay its employees going forward remains a mystery. It was evident during Friday's Board meeting that the majority of the Board agrees. On Thursday, the Board has a chance to lead and to start rebuilding trust by taking these three steps.

The protests in prior weeks, this week, and any in weeks to come are a call for your leadership to act in concert with what educators need. And as the events of the past three weeks have shown, the majority of the Durham community stands with its public school staff, and with our students. It is our hope that another day of protest demonstrates the urgency to act—to retain the best and most dedicated staff our kids deserve—and to stand with us.

Respectfully,

The Durham Association of Educators