

Letter of Support for the Durham Association of Educators' Campaign for Union Recognition in Durham, North Carolina

Dec. 19th, 2024

To the Board of Education of Durham, North Carolina:

We are labor union leaders who have been watching, with excitement and hope, the historic organizing of the Durham Association of Educators and the North Carolina Association of Educators over the last year and half. This type of growth and momentum is a result of immense seriousness and dedication. It brings public school workers something we desperately need to stay in the profession, and it brings all workers something we desperately need to continue to civically engage: HOPE. This growth is connected to a positive vision for the public schools our students deserve - a vision that we share, and that is under unprecedented threat in this country.

The natural step for a union that achieves majority reach across the workers it seeks to organize, and that takes seriously its responsibility to represent its base of both members and nonmembers through a formal, credible process, is to campaign for "union recognition." Understandably, as DAE operates in a state that has made Collective Bargaining Agreements illegal for public sector employees, they are campaigning for a Meet & Confer policy that would establish a formal process for *organized worker voice*.

We understand that North Carolina is a Southern state in which Collective Bargaining Agreements are not legal for public sector workers. Many of us live and work in similar conditions! However, there is truly no such thing as a "non-union state." Everywhere in this country, we as workers still have the right to organize ourselves into labor unions, and in *almost all* legal contexts, Durham Public Schools would be legally required to collectively bargain with a majority union like DAE. In the few places where collective bargaining agreements are banned in the public sector, Meet & Confer is a legal alternative that allows unions to meet with management to advocate for better working conditions. Those of us who have dedicated our lives to fighting for investment in public education, workers' rights and the public good, are *watching Durham right now*. We hope to be buoyed and inspired in these dark times by a historic victory for public school workers' rights in the South.

It has come to our attention that instead of adopting a Meet & Confer policy, where the union would be recognized as the Employee Representative Organization and have meetings with a management team (who have decision making power over employees' daily working lives), Durham Public Schools administrators are proposing an advisory committee where management would handpick individual workers (including non-union members) to meet with the superintendent. These individual workers could be appointed by the current or future Superintendent(s) for any reason. They would have been chosen by management, not elected via a worker-run democratic organizing structure that would ensure that they substantively represent, and are accountable to, their fellow workers. It has also come to our attention that

Durham Public Schools administrators claim that this practice would be welcomed by most, if not all, unions. We are profoundly disturbed by such a claim.

Any Meet & Confer, consultation, *or* bargaining process by definition involves workers democratically electing their own representatives, from their own ranks, and engaging with management via the accountability structures that exist within their independent worker organization. Nowhere in the country allows management to handpick individuals who have not been democratically elected by their colleagues to participate in formal negotiations or consultations with an employee representative organization (ERO). We do not understand why Durham leaders believe they should create a different structure than the one used for formal labor-management consultations throughout the history of the labor movement. We do not think the Superintendent's proposed structure is more "progressive" or "inclusive" than the practice that constitutes proper union recognition everywhere else.

We'd like to make one thing crystal clear: We, and we believe any other serious labor leader in this country, would instantly recognize such a practice as undermining democratic worker organization, promoting favoritism, undermining the credibility of the Meet & Confer process, and potentially extremely divisive - pitting workers against one another. Whether intentionally so or not, this is instantly recognizable to us as union-busting and *we would not agree to it in policy or in practice*. Instead, we urge the Durham Board of Education to adopt a real Meet & Confer policy that recognizes workers' right to unionize and to engage in traditional labor-management collaboration as a democratic, independent worker organization.

Signed,

1. Emerson Hoffzales, President, Lawrence Education Association, Kansas
2. Earl Bradley Durham Chapter Elected Representative, Union of Southern Service Workers, Durham, NC
3. Nashon Blount, Durham Chapter Elected Representative, Union of Southern Service Workers, Durham, NC
4. Aharon Segal, Executive Board, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local Union 553, Durham, NC
5. Alejandra Lopez, President, San Antonio Alliance, Texas
6. Elizabeth Marable, President, United Education Association of Memphis & Shelby County, Tennessee
7. Michael Amadeo Maes, President, Pueblo Education Association, Colorado
8. Jim Byrne, President, Tucson Education Association, Arizona
9. Marisol García, President, Arizona Education Association, Arizona
10. Rob Gould, President, Denver Classroom Teachers Association, Colorado
11. Linnea Reed-Ellis, President, Aurora Education Association, Colorado
12. Leslie Blatteau, President, New Haven Federation of Teachers, Local 933, Connecticut
13. Deb Gesualdo, President, Malden Education Association, Massachusetts
14. Erik Berg, President, Boston Teachers Union, Massachusetts
15. Jessica Tang, President, AFT-Massachusetts

16. Susan Saluru, President, New Britain Federation of Teachers, Connecticut
17. Kristen Malloy-Scanlon, President, West Haven Federation of Teachers and School Nurses Local 1547, Connecticut
18. Lauren Mancini-Averitt, President, Meriden Federation of Teachers, Connecticut
19. Leah VanDassor, President, Saint Paul Federation of Educators, Local 28, Minnesota
20. Stacy Davis Gates, President, Chicago Teachers Union, Illinois
21. Camie Niland-Poirier, Windham Federation of Teachers Local 1577, Connecticut
22. Dr. Donna L. Christy, Prince George's County Education Association, Maryland
23. Mary Yordon, President, Norwalk Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 1723, AFL-CIO, Connecticut
24. Catina Taylor, ESP (Classified Staff) Chapter President, MFT59, Minneapolis, Minnesota
25. Marcia Howard, Teacher Chapter President, MFT59, Minneapolis, Minnesota
26. John Coneglio, President, Columbus Education Association, Ohio
27. Vonda McDaniel, President, Nashville/Middle Tennessee Central Labor Council, Tennessee
28. Dr. Paula Pendergrass, President, Metropolitan Nashville Education Association, Tennessee
29. Anne Langendorfer, President, United Campus Workers Southeast, Tennessee
30. Carol Gale, President, Hartford Federation of Teachers, Connecticut
31. Mathew Hough, President, Ansonia Federation of Teachers (AFT-CT Local 1012), Connecticut
32. Dave Foley, President, SEIU 509, Massachusetts
33. Nikki Woodward, Vice President, Maryland State Education Association
34. Melissa Dirks, President, Frederick County Teachers Association Maryland
35. Paul Lemle, President, Maryland State Education Association
36. Paul Angelucci, President, State Vocational Federation of Teachers local 4200A, Connecticut
37. Jim Haverkamp, President, Duke Adjunct Faculty Union Local 26 SEIU Southern Region Workers United
38. Julian Liber, Co-chair Duke Graduate Student Union Local 27 SEIU Southern Region Workers United
39. Madeleine Collier, Co-chair Duke Graduate Student Union Local 27 SEIU Southern Region Workers United
40. Clay Capra, Co-chair Duke Graduate Student Union Local 27 SEIU Southern Region Workers United
41. Jessica Rubio, President, Piedmont Providers Union Southern Region Workers United
42. David Stein, President, Montgomery County (Maryland) Education Association
43. Kate Dias, President, Connecticut Education Association
44. Angela Bonilla, President, Portland Association of Teachers
45. Angie Powers, President, Olathe NEA Kansas
46. Celeste M Jordan, President, Carroll County Education Association (MD)
47. Amy Farrior, Marlborough Education Association President (Marlborough, CT)
48. Ashley Hawkins, President, Charlotte-Metrolina Labor Council, North Carolina

49. Dr. Angela Neuroth, President of NEA Topeka, Kansas
50. Alisha Chavez, Vice President, Portland Association of Teachers, Oregon
51. Tony Salm, President, Woodburn Education Association, Oregon
52. Nick Banks, President, Trumbull Education Association, Connecticut
53. Kristen Bacon, Co-President, Columbia Teachers Association