



November 16, 2020

***Durham Association of Educators***  
***[www.daenc.com](http://www.daenc.com) / <https://www.facebook.com/DAEUnion>***  
***DPS Frontline Workers Deserve \$15/hour:***  
***DAE Calls on County Commission for Supplemental Funding***

Durham Public School classified staff are the very last group of public employees in Durham County who do not earn at least \$15/hour. This is an economic and racial injustice, and DAE calls on the County Commission to take immediate action to correct this injustice through a supplemental budget allocation for Durham Public Schools. Based on the conversation at the [County Commission meeting this past Monday](#), November 9th, DAE believes it is time for the Commission to honor the commitment it made back in June when Commissioners Howerton, Hill, and Reckhow indicated a willingness to revisit the \$15 wage for DPS staff if our budget situation improved.

On Monday, Nov. 9th, County Manager Wendell Davis stated that while there remains uncertainty, “our budget is projected to grow by about \$9 million,” not including CARES act funding. The Manager indicated that “financially, we are in a pretty good place.” Meanwhile, Budget and Finance General Manager Claudia Hager reported that sales tax has come in “higher than expected.” ***This is great news for Durham County, and it should mean great news for our frontline workers within Durham Public Schools.*** Most of these workers are Black and Latinx, many are women, and each is a vital member of our school community working as custodians, bus drivers, child nutrition workers, community education staff, and instructional assistants to keep our students safe and healthy, and help them thrive.

Back in June, Commissioner Carter made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Jacobs, to use money from fund balance in order to “fight back against institutionalized racism by taking concrete action and making the necessary investments to improve the lives of people of color, like these classified workers.” That motion failed as Manager Wendell Davis and Commissioners Hill, Howerton, and Reckhow urged caution and fiscal restraint due to the many uncertainties related to the COVID-19 pandemic and a projected reduction in sales tax revenue. Yet, despite that budget uncertainty, at the same time that Davis and the Commission denied a living wage to DPS workers, the County Manager authorized hazard pay for County staff that is now projected to cost the County substantially more than a \$15 minimum wage would have cost.

DAE supports all frontline County workers earning hazard pay. DPS classified staff **are** frontline County workers, and don’t even earn an equitable base wage, much less hazard pay. We are thrilled at the idea that the County has enough revenue to provide hazard pay, and we strongly urge the County include in its supplemental budget allocation for DPS enough funds to offer (in addition to the \$15 minimum wage) hazard pay funds for the any frontline DPS staff who may be asked to return to in-person instruction at the height of the pandemic.

Budgets are moral documents. As Commissioner Jacobs said in June, “this is how we address institutional racism - by investing in the people in our community...by making this a budget priority.” Commissioner Howerton in June also emphasized her support for school workers, and Commissioner Hill spoke this past Monday about how difficult it was for him not to support the \$15 budget request at the time.

We trust that each and every one of our County Commissioners knows that raising all frontline workers’ wages to a minimum of \$15 per hour is the right thing, and wants to do it. Given that we are hearing a more optimistic tone from our budget department and Manager, now is the time to act -- this can and should be done even before our new Commission takes the oath of office in December.