

# Public Comments for School Board Meetings

#757

I would like to provide: \*

Written Public Comments

My public comments are related to: \*

General Public Comments

Topic \*

Collective Bargaining

Full Name \*

Gabriel Elias

What is your relationship to ACPS? \*

Staff Member

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Teacher working conditions are student learning conditions. Nobody knows what is needed more than the folks in the building. Every time a teacher leaves the classroom, the school environment suffers. Differentiation is replaced with survival instinct. Small victories are replaced with anxious defeats.

I love it here. After 15 years as a teacher here, I plan to join the Education Association of Alexandria. I was never interested in the EAA before. When I started my career here years ago, I asked around: "What is this union for anyway? I thought Virginia didn't have unions." The answer was often: "Yeah - but if you get in trouble with a student or administrator, they pay for your lawyer." So the answer was to keep my head down and save on dues.

It even bothered me a little when I saw EAA leaders invited to barbeques or political events: They were invited to the picnic, but did they have an equal place at the table when it mattered? It reminded me of when well-meaning folks ask me to get "some IA kids" for an event so it seems inclusive or diverse. What's in it for them? Where is the voice? The agency?

During the 2010s, teachers felt trapped in a massive, expanding top-down bureaucratic decisions, inexorable and capricious. Wave after wave of new initiatives, SOL revisions, accreditation warnings, step freezes, and multi-tiered behavioral systems came "down the pike" and never left. We were sometimes asked: What works? What doesn't? But our

answers went on a giant post it note at professional developments, often never to be revisited.

In the mid-2010s, apparently, times were improving. I even watched the Superintendent of Alexandria City Public Schools sing to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in front of a packed audience of teachers. The country tired of No Child Left Behind and the economy went gangbusters... but school districts repeated the same patterns with the same results. They didn't listen to teachers.

We often don't value or respect teachers. We try to do everything better but we don't stop to consider who will be carrying out the plans. There is a problem baked into the system: Teachers have no collective voice or bargaining power. Without power, there is no reason to buy in.

Listen to teachers! Teachers get the kids to graduation, then we celebrate. The kids love us, so it's all worth it. There is so much we want to improve: our salaries, our autonomy, our class sizes, our duties, and our students' chances at success in an indifferent and unequal society.

The Education Association of Alexandria wants an equal place at the bargaining table and we need to give it to them. We need to respect and nurture this organization for our children, our teachers, and our future.

Everyone reading this knows we have unique demographics and inequalities: We won't be able to solve this overnight.

There will be sacrifices: from leaders, central office staff, community members, administrators, teachers, and parents. We cannot ask for any more sacrifices from teachers without giving their representatives equal bargaining power. It is not just about salary: It is about conditions. Teacher conditions are student conditions.

We cannot prioritize the advice of an out-of-town law firm over the folks who care for our kids every day. Who is capable of bringing equity and social justice to long-ignored populations better than our staff. Listen to our staff: They know! Don't patronize them with fine print, loopholes, and self-serving clauses.

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A strong, dynamic, and vibrant Education Association of Alexandria is good for the city. If we are truly all in this together, then let's move forward as equal partners. In the end, it is the only way we can survive this current and most difficult era of public education in the city we love.

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