



# Fair Pay for Special Education Assistants

"I couldn't be prouder of my fellow members. This win shows what we can accomplish when we stick together."

— Lynn Christianson, AFT #4018

Public school support staff perform work that keeps their schools running, work that is essential to the educational mission of Wisconsin's public school system.

Unfortunately, this work is too often undervalued by school district administrations, who frequently ignore pressing issues that make it hard to recruit and retain the best school staff. After five years of pay freezes, reduced take-home pay, and declining benefits, in January of 2016 members of the Eau Claire Schools Classified Staff Federation (AFT #4018) decided they'd had enough, and made plans to take their issues directly to the school board.



Gathering at the Northwoods Elementary School for a membership meeting, attendees committed to each reaching out to a set number of their fellow support staff. They talked to their coworkers during the day and made calls at night to recruit staff to attend a January 18 board meeting and send a unified message to the board and administration: **the time to act on staff compensation and benefits was now.**



On the night of the board meeting, over 40 staff lined the halls holding signs naming the many outstanding issues that the district needed to address—but especially a reclassification and pay bump for the district's special education assistants. As board members entered the building before their meeting, they encountered the staff that were being harmed by the district's inaction.

Members held up signs throughout the room as union president Lynn Christianson and member Cindy Heintz then testified about the need to show support staff they are valued by taking their compensation concerns seriously. On February 15, the board voted to reclassify the special education assistants, giving them a long-delayed raise.

"We are standing before you this evening to ask you to reclassify our special education assistants, resolving an issue that has been an elephant in the meet and confer room for years." — Lynn Christianson, AFT #4018 President