**My name is Alexis Hayden and I am a twenty-two year veteran of Lorain City Schools. I am here today to offer a unique perspective on an Academic Distress Commission and a CEO running our school system. I say that I offer a unique perspective as I am the grievance chair for the teacher’s union. I have held this position since the fall of 2015. Since then, I have had on average approximately 6-7 grievances per year. That averages out to approximately 18-21 over a three year time span. This year alone, there have been 52 grievances. What does this show us? It shows a total disregard for teachers.**

**But, I’m not here to talk about those numbers. I’m here to talk about what those numbers have done to teachers and how it directly affected students. First and foremost, I received countless calls over the course of the year. Some resulted in grievances, some did not. The calls that did not often left me worried and disheartened. The teachers needed someone to talk to because they were in such a state of frustration or often times, at their breaking point. Some were at the point that they were heading to the emergency room for fear of having nervous breakdowns. Many were ready to take FMLA to get away from the stress of the fear; the fear of retaliation, the culture of fear that was created. Teachers resigned mid-year due to feeling like there was no support. Over the course of the year, I heard the words hostile working environment. Prior to this year, no one had called to ask how to handle this. Why did this happen? Because of the culture of fear that was created by the CEO, that was ultimately allowed by the Academic Distress Commission.**

**This culture of fear, in turn, directly affects what happens in the classroom. Teachers cannot give their best to their students. And, when teachers cannot give their best to their students because of this environment that was created, the students suffer. And, the students can thank the same individuals who are blaming local politicians for this mess—the CEO and some of the ADC. When teachers are constantly looking over their shoulders because instructional rounds are occurring eleven times a day in one classroom or an administrator is standing outside of their room doing a round through a window. Teachers have found sticky notes with directives left for them on their lesson plans, instead of being asked to have professional discussions. Teachers were afraid to take sick days because when they returned, they were met with letters stating they were being reprimanded for absences. Those same teachers had letters from medical professionals stating that they were under their care. In addition, teachers were walked out of their classrooms with no warning and had to wait to have meetings to discuss why they were out and to find out if they would be returning. A staff member received a letter at the end of a class period stating they needed to have a disciplinary hearing in the People Office over an email that was sent out. Staffs have been threatened with litigation if they were to file grievances. And, finally, teachers were non-renewed without warning on the last day of classes and the last teacher day. Again, this was created by a culture of fear by some administrators that fear has been allowed to grow continually worse because the CEO and some ADC members have allowed it to. What does this show? It shows a direct contradiction to a quote in a Teach for America article dated June 11, 2018. That quote stated, “We have a Herculean task in showing our teachers how much we care about them, how much we value their work, and how much we want to support them. The most important thing we can do is to give power to our teachers and leaders to do right by kids.”**

**When teachers have all this to contend with, it shows in the classroom and we cannot give our best to the individuals that matter the most—our students. They are the reason that we get up every day and go to work. They are the reason that we spend sleepless nights worrying about how we are going to reach them or if they have everything they need. They are the reason that at two in the morning when sirens are racing north on Leavitt Road that those of us who live near there hope that our kids are okay. They are the reason we buy food to keep in our classrooms or give up food before games because an athlete is hungry after school. But, what people fail to realize is that the students care about us, just like we care about them. They have seen the stress and have felt it with us. They have seen teachers quit midyear, from elementary classrooms to the high school. In some instances, those teachers were replaced by substitutes, if they were lucky. At one elementary school, students did not receive art grades for the fourth quarter because there was not a teacher. Who failed the students there? That teacher was not replaced by the district. I ask you, who runs the district? Is that truly having the best interest of our students?**

**When teachers have to contend with stress and the notion of “what is going to happen today” and “am I going to lose my job,” it is difficult to put all your effort into doing the best for your students. However, Lorain teachers did just that. But, our students noticed what was going on. From fifth grade classrooms where students worried we were not going to come back after the election in November to student-athletes who were beside themselves that all of their teachers were told they had to reapply for their jobs. We have seen students get up and speak on behalf of their teachers at Board of Education and Academic Distress Meetings; all of which had the same theme. But yet the students’ integrity and their motives for speaking out have been called into question. Things must change because our district is falling apart. We need to listen closely to the children, as they are often the most observant in all of this. Listen closely to who they said must go. They are the ones who are truly on the front lines—do the right thing. Make the changes in the right places. Take away the students’ fears. Put students first. Time is of the essence.**