



# Solidarity Report

**"When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid."**

**~ Audre Lorde**

## Fed Up with Focus!

Are you Fed Up with Focus? Your VUE staff is actively fighting to address the ongoing problems created by the implementation of Focus, and we want to give you an update on where things stand.

On Friday, the Superintendent was contacted to inform her that during the last two weeks, VUE staff has intervened on no less than 15 cases involving serious pay issues. These include:

- incorrect withholdings
- incorrect overtime payments
- non-payment for substituting
- incorrect paycheck amounts
- delayed payments
- incorrect pay stubs
- financial harm from incorrect leave balances
- incorrect pay based upon years of experience

While the district does work to investigate each situation, they often do not move with the urgency that should be expected when an individual has not received the correct pay. Additionally, the district often refers to the Focus problems as "glitches," but the reality is that these failures have real consequences for employees and their families, often times resulting in financial harm.

I have asked for a meeting to discuss these problems. Dr. Kuhn, IT Director, has offered a meeting on February 24<sup>th</sup>, however, waiting two weeks to have this conversation is not preferred. This is another reason why we are concerned that the district does not feel the same urgency employees do.

Every year, the school board members approve a payroll schedule. This creates the standard that we should be able to expect from the district. It is important that we as employees have confidence that our pay will be correct and timely. Even the smallest discrepancy can result in significant hardships.

Please continue to report any payroll issue to your member representative immediately so we can advocate for you and hold the district accountable. We are waiting for the outcome of our Level 2 Focus grievance related to the failure to provide leave according to the contract. We are preparing to take legal action on these issues if they are not corrected.

Finally, now is the time to organize around Focus. We must stand together and share our stories about the personal impact these problems have created.

We are calling for members to complete a survey to determine the extent and depth of the impact of Focus errors, and what you (VUE) are willing to do. The link to the survey is, <https://forms.gle/C8iyYjbqLMBzgxXx7>.

Please take 3 minutes to listen to VUE member Robin Bradshaw share her story during the February school board meeting (see the link below). Robin reported that after she spoke, she was contacted by the district to make sure that her pay had been corrected. This would not have happened if Robin would have remained silent.

VCS Board meeting link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O\\_B-7A\\_C4PA&t=5931s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_B-7A_C4PA&t=5931s) (Robin's comments begin at approximately, 1:38:55). THANK YOU, ROBIN!!

## In His Own Words: I. Lopez

Last week and again over the weekend, the Florida Commissioner of Education and other anti-union groups have launched an all out attack against FEA and its members, this is YOU and ME. The right to join your union or not, is protected in the Florida Constitution, and as such, it is illegal to intimidate, coerce, or attempt to sway an individual in the exercising of their rights. We received the message below from VUE member, Ivan Lopez and we felt it was so compelling, it was worth sharing. Please take a moment and read the reflection from VUE brother, Ivan Lopez.

Recently, during working hours, the Secretary of Education sent an email to teachers. This email was the work of a political operative who launched a Machiavellian and pyrrhic attack, a taunt, directly at teachers in a way that impacted the instructional day. The message is wedge politics and meant to have teachers resent their unions for wasting money in what the Secretary attempts to characterize as futile contests.

Considering the timing of the message, which was during the instructional day, assuming that there are 156,787 public school classroom teachers in Florida, with an average pay of \$54,000 (incidentally a number higher than a VCS teacher salary) and that these teachers took 5 minutes to read the email, the Secretary wasted approximately \$487,737.34 in tax payer funds intended for the instruction of their students. This amount does not calculate the many other public servants whose time should have been put to better use.



## In His Own Words, cont.

The actions of this political operative then beg the questions: which political operatives are allowed to impact taxpayer funds during the instructional day? Is that something that taxpayers want injected into the instructional day? Is there written guidance for this?

The email showed that the secretary takes a stance against teachers, which is poor leadership. In the military as a leader (at one point I supervised 150 troops in 4 groups and through 4 supervisors.) when I spoke to the troops over which I was accountable, I spoke in positive terms. If there were discrepancies, rather than framing these in a negative light in an address to all (Your shoes look horrible!), I would frame it as task direction (when I meet with you, I want to see clean and shiny shoes). I would then meet with my subordinate supervisors and direct them to correct discrepancies privately.

When I reached out to Administration at Pine Ridge High school for guidance on this communication, administration replied that they had no guidance.

Volusia County Schools saw this communication as a constructive use of my instructional time. I wonder if the superintendent or school board could provide some clarity on this email. I have the following questions. What does VCS envision as an implementation of this communication from the Secretary? How should I assimilate this as a teacher? What is the overall goal? What are we trying to accomplish? How do I implement this in my classroom and what does that look like?

I am part of the Union, not apart from it. For me it is hard to reconcile the following:  
The hostile tone and posturing the State of Florida and Volusia County Schools take against the Union and by extension teachers, and my desire to remain a public servant.

It seems to me that this is a pyrrhic stance since there is a shortage of teachers in Florida with thousands of unfilled positions. The secretary's plan worked: I am completely demotivated and no longer wish to be a teacher ever. I have already charted my course past May 2026.

We want to thank Mr. Lopez for his honesty and for sharing what many of us are feeling. When individuals like the Commissioner of Education spew rhetoric that is meant to discourage, divide, and demoralize educators, we must look beyond the words to find the real intent. The Commissioner wants our union to crumble, however, we know that our unified strength is greater than any individual's attempt to hurt us.

Public education needs us. Our students need us. And we know that when we unite, we are unstoppable. In this moment, we must lean in, and double down on our efforts to GROW our union. To BUILD lasting power through increased membership. The way to push back against these attacks, is to dig in and talk to new educators, support staff, trades and service workers about how our unity builds a better life and protects our profession. Now is the time to be ALL IN and to fight back against those who seek to deter us from our mission to keep our public schools strong. Solidarity!



## Membership = Power!

VUE membership numbers continue to increase! This is the result of YOUR hard work and desire to take back our district.

Growing our membership is the way to increase our collective power in every workplace fight. Every new member strengthens our voice, expands our leverage, and makes it harder for the district to ignore the voices of the people doing the work in VCS. The path to real, sustainable change starts with exceeding our membership goals. Our current density levels for each unit are, instructional - 53%, support - 28%, TSPs - 11%. Remember, we must meet 60% in each unit to avoid the reoccurring PERC election requirement.

We must continue to have conversations with our colleagues. Be sure to speak with the new and newish co-workers in your grade level, department, or area. The sooner they join our VUE family, the better.

To share the link to join VUE, click [HERE](#). The QR code to access the membership portal is below. If you need assistance, please do not hesitate to reach out!

Membership QR Code:



## VUE's Black History Month Contest

A graphic with a yellow background. At the top, there are three stylized portraits of African American individuals: a man on the left, a woman with glasses in the center, and a woman with a headwrap on the right. Below the portraits, the text reads "Commemorating 100 Years of Excellence" in large blue letters, "A Black History Contest Sponsored by Volusia United Educators" in smaller blue letters, and "2026" in red. Below this, there is a list of criteria for the contest, and at the bottom, contact information for Dr. Lekita Howard.

This year's Black History Contest is focused on the contributions of African American contributions made over the last 100 years. As we reflect on these contributions we want to highlight their impact on our lives. This contest is open to all Volusia County students. Students are eligible to win a \$50 gift card. Two (2) winners will be awarded at each level. The categories are Essay and Visual Arts. Each submission must meet the following criteria:

- All submissions must be an original essay (typed) or original art work
- Typed entries are limited to 500 words
- All submissions must be received by Friday February 28, 2026
- Theme: "Commemorating 100 Years of Excellence"
- Winners will be announced March 3, 2026
- Please include student name, school, grade, and teacher's name.

•All submissions go to Dr. Lekita Howard 1381 Educators Rd. Daytona Beach 32124 or [lekita.howard@floridaea.org](mailto:lekita.howard@floridaea.org)

