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Hearings first step to firing educators

9 accused Atlanta educators to go before tribunals next week

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Atlanta Public Schools next week will hold the first in a series of hearings necessary to fire educators accused of cheating, the district confirmed Thursday.

After months of delay and millions spent in payroll and legal expenses, nine educators suspected of some of the most egregious of the school system's widespread test cheating are scheduled to go before a tribunal.

For the school district, it's a chance to bring resolution to a case that has dragged on for months and cost taxpayers millions. For educators, it's the first chance to tell their side of the story since a damning 400-plus-page state investigation was released in July.

"Like any person accused . . . they are anxious," said Gerald Griggs, who represents six educators named in the report. "But they are confident in the evidence we have, that they will be heard and truth will come out."

Last week, the district sent certified letters to 11 educators notifying them of the district's intent to fire them. Known as "charge letters," the documents obtained Thursday by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution detail the allegations and list the potential witnesses who will be called to testify.

For example, Tremelia Donaldson, a former Gideons Elementary teacher, is accused of lying to special investigators and admitting to altering test answers. Witnesses to be called in her case include GBI agents, special investigators and other employees at the school.

"Your actions and inactions brought embarrassment, suspicion, scorn and disrepute upon APS," the letter states.

When reached by the AJC, Donaldson refused to comment. Her hearing is scheduled for March 26.

Two of the 11 educators who received charge letters chose to quit rather than go through with the hearing, according to the district. About 70 educators of the approximately 180 named in the state investigation have resigned or retired since July — 12 of those since late February, when the district warned educators it would start firing proceedings.