

CTU president denies opposing school closures

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The morning after Chicago Public Schools announced plans to close 61 schools, Chicago Teachers Union president Karen Lewis was interviewed on Chicago Public Radio. There she openly rejected opposing school closures. (See, “Chicago announces plans to shut 61 public schools”)

In response to radio show host Tony Sarabia's prompt, “So you contend that no schools should be closed in the city of Chicago,” Lewis said, “You know what, that is not even a real argument. The issue that we need to talk about is this outrageous number of schools and the fact that nothing has been done to prepare people appropriately for anything of this measure.”

In other words, Lewis is not opposed to school closings, but only wants to ensure that there is a fig leaf of “preparation” to help sell these closings to the population. Opposition to all schools closings is not a “real argument” according to the CTU leader, who has postured as an opponent of Emanuel.

In rejecting the viability of opposing school closures, Lewis lines up with the Emanuel administration in Chicago and the Obama administration nationally in the attack on public education. The CTU is in fact politically aligned with the Democratic Party, as is its parent organization, the American Federation of Teachers.

The remarks to Chicago Public Radio are an extension of the endorsement of school closures that Lewis gave to the *Chicago Tribune* during the Chicago teachers strike last September, “We understand that whole movement of closing schools and doing it aggressively,” she said.

The CTU worked to shut down the strike as quickly as possible on the terms demanded by Emanuel, paving the way for the administration to unveil its school

closing plan.

The CTU's primary aim in endorsing and expediting the school closures is to secure the position of union executives, including through extracting union dues for underpaid teachers at for-profit charter schools.

In her comments to Chicago Public Radio, Lewis complained that school closures have been mismanaged. “Last year, CPS closed seven schools... They still have not figured and wrapped their minds around the kinds of socio-emotional support that children need when their schools are closed. School closings, frankly, are a failure on the part of the people that run schools to do that right... CPS has never been able to do this right. They would mess up a one-car funeral.”

Lewis's comments made it clear that instead of opposing school closures, CTU leaders are seeking to play an advisory role to CPS as it plans and carries out the closings. “We told them that the best way to do these school closings if you have to do them, is to move children together as cohorts, to keep the adults that they know so they can make seamless transitions into these schools...

“What we've also known is that the mayor has had in his head at least 50 schools from the very beginning of this process. So having the hearings, and in the past they would bring people off the list after they looked at more things. I know of several of these schools that are not underutilized. They have autistic children. You don't pick up and move autistic children.”

That is, the CTU would prefer that instead of closing 50 schools, a few were taken off the list, which would allow the union to present the outcome as a “victory,” as it did with the defeat of the Chicago Teachers Strike.

Lewis' comments make clear once again that the CTU, far from opposing the Emanuel administration, is

actively collaborating in the attack on public education in Chicago.



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